THE FORCE OF A FRAME: NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES AND THE GOTHIC NOVEL

by

CLAYTON CARLYLE TARR

(Under the Direction of Richard Menke)

ABSTRACT

This study examines frame narratives from the late eighteenth century through the late Victorian period. Studies of the Gothic have either neglected framing devices or dismissed them as conventions that establish structures of narrative. This project, however, reads them as formally destabilizing. While frame narratives appear to provide structure—limits, boundaries, borders—they far more frequently disturb narrative cohesiveness. Starting with Ann Radcliffe’s revolutionary approach, which situated the frame narrative within the fiction itself rather than outside as paratext, novelists used form to intensify the Gothic effect. In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, for example, Walton’s letters enclose Victor’s central narrative, but when the creature authoritatively appears in both sections of the frame, the comforting narrative boundary between character and reader ruptures. The study proceeds with chapters on Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, Charles Robert Maturin, and James Hogg. In addition, it interrogates how several nineteenth-century writers reimagine the Gothic frame, first through chapters on the Brontës and Dickens, and finally through Joseph Conrad and Henry James. “The Force of a Frame” excavates, for the first time, the rich relations between frame and form to develop a new understanding of the narrative dynamics and aesthetic vibrancy of the Gothic novel. Far from tangential, the Gothic novel in fact provides a foundation for aesthetic realism. Perhaps it is not
the comfortable realism we expect, that which directs us towards claims of objectivity, but it is a realism based on human experience, the often disturbing, sometimes horrifying reality of perspective, untruth, and doubt.

INDEX WORDS: Novel, Gothic, Realism, Framing devices, Narrative, Aesthetics, Print culture
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For my parents.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lacan’s fundamental thesis is that a minimum of “idealization,” of the interposition of fantasmatic frame by means of which the subject assumes a distance vis-à-vis the Real, is constitutive of our sense of reality—“reality” occurs insofar as it is not (it does not come) “too close.”

—Slavoj Žižek, The Abyss of Freedom

But let the frame of things disjoint.
—Shakespeare, Macbeth

In Edgar Allan Poe’s haunting poem, “The Raven” (1845), a speaker sequesters himself in a chamber to grieve for his lost love Lenore. Poe expresses the features of the poem’s “locale” in “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846): “a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention.”

Without borders the textual canvas would spread indefinitely and become too varied and unruly to elicit the desired environmental effect. Poe’s frame metaphor comes with complications. The speaker is effectively interred in the chamber, and eventually his psyche becomes buried beneath the raven’s oppressive shadow. Although the speaker is trapped, the frame of his melancholic chamber can be penetrated from the outside. Mistaking the raven’s sound for a knocking guest, the speaker opens his chamber door to a silent and blind abyss—a gateway to cathartic forgetting and death that the speaker refuses to pass through. But when the speaker finally opens the window, the raven bursts in to perch permanently at the point of escape and to mock the

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speaker’s melancholy with his monotonous and loaded “nevermore.” The raven enters the picture of the poem, the “circumscription of space,” from outside the frame, the world of reality and remembering, to remind the speaker never to forget. Because the chamber acts as a threshold between reality and art, its force is always twofold: simultaneously imprisoning and exposing the speaker, who is doomed to a purgatory of grief.

As Poe suggests, frames possess a powerful aesthetic force that draws in and rejects, confines and protects, interrupts and concludes, complicates and defines. While the frame of Poe’s chamber shelters the speaker, it also permits access from haunting memories and ominous figures outside. What “concentrates the attention” is ultimately permeable and deconstructing. However, Poe’s conception of framing echoes an established formal mode, for narrative frames became a dynamic staple of the Gothic long before Poe articulated their force. Ann Radcliffe’s novels, for example, thrive on the fear motivated from being trapped yet vulnerable. The Gothic both permits and fosters formal and thematic experimentation. It is the mode where all things unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and controversial come to reside. As Peter Garrett argues, the Gothic is where “fiction reflects on its forms and effects, foregrounds its status as a fiction, makes us sense the forces of writing and reading that work through and between narratives.”

Yet the genre’s formal modes are an area scholars have left largely ignored. The ease with which thematic Gothic conventions can be identified has always been ground for satire. A 1797 essay, “Terrorist Novel Writing,” provides a “recipe” for the familiar trappings, and concludes, “Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before

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going to bed.”

These ingredients are only themes, however, and the sole formal instruction is the vessel in which they are to be mixed. During her succinct outline of Gothic conventions, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarks: “You know something about the novel’s form: it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories.” Sedgwick’s rather timid qualifiers “likely” and “perhaps” do not do justice to the formal dynamism of Gothic novels, which in fact employ these qualities without exception.

Despite appearing as part of Sedgwick’s updated recipe for the Gothic, frame narratives are not conventional. They are transformative and dynamic sites for formal innovation. Frame narratives are integral elements of the history of fiction. They appear in all modes—poetry, prose, and drama; and they cover all genres, from epic to sonnet, from philosophical tracts to political satires, from high theater to closet fragment. But it is the Gothic novel, the most open site for formal experimentation, where the frame narrative prospered. Examining the narrative force of frames demonstrates not only that the Gothic novel is a highly dynamic hybrid of several eighteenth-century genres, but also that it was engaged and revitalized throughout the nineteenth century. This study develops a history of Gothic frame narratives beginning in the late eighteenth

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5 The recipe: “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 the neck, with her throat cut. / Assassins and desperadoes, quant. suff. / Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least (Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797, vol. 1 [London: James Ridgeway, 1802], 229).
7 Modern studies of the Gothic often begin with Sedgwick’s The Coherence of Gothic Conventions (1980), which is a project of “assimilating” Gothic thematic elements (5). Robert Miles takes issue with Sedgwick: “We should not understand Gothic as a set of prose conventions, however flexible, but as a discursive site crossing the genres” (Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy [London: Routledge, 1993], 176). Jacqueline Howard also argues for a move away from studying Gothic conventions: “problems arise with such ahistorical and homogenizing approaches, as they impose a ‘monologic’ structure or closure—that is, a single ‘authoritative’ reading which disallows a text’s semantic richness and suppresses alternative ways of speaking” (Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994], 14).
century in the wake of formal experiments with the burgeoning novel; Gothic frame narratives were then seemingly buried under the weight of high Victorian realism, only to be recalled to life by such authors as James and Conrad. Thus frame narratives prove vital to understanding and evaluating the long and diverse Gothic tradition, as they establish a foundation for the energetic architecture of the Gothic imagination.

The Gothic mode thrives on the uncertainty of structures: of text, of language, of history, of identity. In his essay “Force and Signification,” Derrida attacks the “conceptualization of totality” that is the hallmark of structuralist theory, and argues that it resembles the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art. A city no long inhabited, not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture. . . . Structure is perceived through the incidence of menace, at the moment when imminent danger concentrates our vision on the keystone of an institution, the stone which encapsulates both the possibility and the fragility of its existence.

The structuralist conception of “totality” is like an abandoned city after a nuclear fallout. The framework of the city is still standing, but it is empty of life. Specters of what was impart an uncanny energy that suggests the fragility of all structure; the keystone of any support is vital to its strength and yet always ready to give way.

Gothic novelists use frame narratives to establish textual architecture, but it is never more than a cracking façade, a house of cards poised to topple. While frame narratives appear to provide structure—limits, boundaries, borders—they far more frequently disturb narrative

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8 The frame narrative did not disappear in the Victorian period, but rather was adapted by the genres of sensation and science fiction. The frame narrative also became a part of Victorian story collections: Collins’s *After Dark* (1856), Dickens’s *The Haunted House* (1859), and Gaskell’s *Round the Sofa* (1859).

cohesiveness. The Gothic frustrates, destabilizes, and wars with rude form. By breaking the frame and acting like a literary luddite, the structure of the novel fragments itself and comes to ruins; it is up to the memory either to piece it back together imaginatively, or to forget it entirely in favor of the more pressing and seemingly impressive main narrative. When the frame is left unresolved, or when characters from the main narrative invade the terminal frame, the result is a disturbing destruction of narrative unity; it is the Gothic playfully tearing down the paper walls of propriety, of art, of form—and, even more significant, of reality. If levels of narrative are so easily transgressed and elided, where does fiction end and reality begin? Where are the boundaries between romance and realism? The frame narrative, rather than divide the space between art and life, in fact mediates, blurs, and synthesizes.

Frame narratives from their inception in the text exist in a distinct temporal, if not spatial and thematic, world from the central narrative. As the borders of narrative move in like a Chinese box—from extradiegetic (narrator) to diegetic (story) to hypodiegetic (story within a story)—the terminal frame shocks us back into the world outside the central narrative.\(^\text{10}\) This effect is even more disturbing during moments of metalepsis, when diegetic characters appear in the world of the frame narrative and rupture geographic and temporal boundaries.\(^\text{11}\) Elaine Freedgood notes that “narrative frames . . . frame us rigidly. Diegetic space is claustrophobic—ontologically and narratively. We want sometimes to be on the outside looking in, or on the

\(^{10}\) Roland Barthes argues: “there is no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of levels or strata. To understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also to recognize in it a number of ‘strata,’ to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative (or listen to it) is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from one level to the next” (“An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” *New Literary History* 6.2 [1975]: 243).  

\(^{11}\) Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (*Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990], 234-235). I follow Debra Malina in changing Genette’s “metadiegetic” to “hypodiegetic” to avoid confusion.
outside looking out.” Debra Malina observes that metalepsis “has the power to endow subjects with greater or lesser degrees of ‘reality’—in effect, to promote them into subjectivity and demote them from it.” These moments of metalepsis Freedgood calls a “breakdown of frames.” This transformation has profound consequences in the Gothic novel. When villains and creatures from the central narrative appear in the frame, they enter the space of the narrative closer to the reality of the author and reader. “The most troubling thing about metalepsis,” Gérard Genette observes, is that the “extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative.” When characters transcend their status as fictional figures, they become disturbingly subjective, more real, and potentially dangerous to the shrinking authority of the narrator and reader.

Although the opening frame of a frame narrative appears as the first part of the text’s fiction, possessing the “pride of place in the book,” as Katie Trumpener observes, it loses the power of memory as the central narrative reaches forward in narrative importance. Mieke Bal argues, “When the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually forget the fabula of the primary narrative.” For example, although Robert Walton’s letters both introduce and conclude Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831), they paradoxically become enveloped by and disappear under the weight of Victor’s first-person narration to the point that adaptations routinely excise the frame from the story. In addition, few casual readers remember Lockwood or Nelly in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, but they are

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15 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 236
17 Mieke Bal, *Narratology* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997), 57. Bal defines a fabula as a “series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (5).
instead haunted by Heathcliff and Catherine—the tragic subjects of the novel who never narrate.
The opposite may occur as well: *Arabian Nights*, for example, perhaps as a result of the sheer number of its hypodiegetic stories, is best remembered through the frame of Scheherazade’s storytelling life-pulse under the knife of mass-murdering Shahryar.\(^\text{18}\) In these cases, the text relies on a dynamic between the boundaries of narrative, on one hand competing for narrative prominence in terms formal and narratological, while on the other acting in symbiosis, working together to construct thematic elements that resonate through each narrative part.

The Gothic novel is fundamentally an experiment with frames—those conceptual, psychological, and formal—that may simultaneously foster truth and fiction, imprisonment and escape, claustrophobia and protection, and finality and fragmentation. Although frame narratives almost always introduce, often these frames are left open and remain unresolved or complicated by aborted or alternate endings. Erving Goffman notes, “Closing brackets seems to perform less work, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is probably much easier on the whole to terminate the influence of a frame than to establish it.”\(^\text{19}\) Werner Wolf reads missing end-frames as a means “to avoid anti-climactic effects.”\(^\text{20}\) When the terminal frame is abandoned, the narrative ruptures. The ambiguity with which Gothic novels begin and, especially, conclude—motivated by the unstable properties of frames—is central to the lasting unease they inspire. The equivocal fates of many Gothic villains who appear in terminal frames frustrate attempts at closure. We never see the creature in *Frankenstein* consume himself in flames, and the eponymous antagonist in

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\(^{18}\) The tales “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” and “Aladdin and the Lamp” have perhaps more cultural capital than the frame. We might also look at examples when frames are added to texts. Cary Fukunaga’s film adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (2011), for example, adds a frame so that Jane is the storyteller of her life; it is an interesting aesthetic move to reimagine Charlotte Brontë’s novel as a frame narrative, given the fact that she appears explicitly to have avoided the device her sisters used so productively. Film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*, however, are notorious for discarding the frame and ignoring the novel’s next generation of children, Cathy, Linton, and Hareton.


\(^{20}\) Werner Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, eds. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 188.
Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* only appears to have thrown himself from a precipice. Terminal frames in Gothic novels rarely terminate anything. The frame is thus permeable for villains who are allowed to escape both diegetic and extradiegetic narratives by refusing to die in a conclusive manner. Even Emily Brontë’s Heathcliff is rumored to be roaming the moors as a ghost when *Wuthering Heights* concludes.

Framing devices have often been considered a means of distancing author from text. “Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes,” Foucault observes, “the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence.”21 The author, Foucault continues, is a “certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses.”22 In a sense, the author is a frame through which we experience a text. More recently, George Haggerty has worked with the “various framing devices that bring us close to the Gothic experience by distancing us from it.”23 Yet again, this demonstrates the conflicting properties of frames; what should create separation in fact provide access. Indeed, the figures in the frames who introduce central narratives often reveal authors more than they conceal them, and at the very least they almost always act as doubles for characters inside. This effect is nowhere more evident than in James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), which features in its terminal frame not only a letter Hogg actually sent to *Blackwood’s*, but also “James Hogg,” a deceptive and elusive character. Perhaps the most dramatic moment of metalepsis occurs when the figure of the author appears inside the text—a narrative technique that echoes *Don Quixote* and gestures forward to modernist and, especially,

post-modernist literature.\textsuperscript{24} If we consider Barthes’s argument that to assign a text an author “is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing,” the myriad voices that narrative frames introduce, rather than providing boundaries, instead open the text up to explorations of narrative truth and authenticity.\textsuperscript{25} Narrative frames host a complex heteroglossia—what Bakhtin defines as the interplaying discourse of intentions between character and author—where the voice of a character is mediated by storytellers and editors while simultaneously reflecting the intentions of the nebulous author.

This study often investigates frames that appear \textit{around} the narrative through those \textit{in} the narrative, and it is significant that contemporary authors and critics employed the aesthetic rhetoric of framing to describe these narrative devices. The earliest published critical use of narrative frames occurs in John Colin Dunlop’s widely read 1814 text \textit{The History of Fiction}. In an analysis of Boccaccio’s \textit{The Decameron}, Dunlop argues: “the frame . . . is superior to the eastern fables, which, in this respect, Boccaccio appears to have imitated.”\textsuperscript{26} Dunlop continues on this track: “If the frame in which Boccaccio has set his Decameron be compared with that in which the Canterbury Tales have been enclosed by Chaucer, who certainly imitated the Italian novelist, it will be found that the time chosen by Boccaccio is infinitely preferable to that adopted by the English poet.”\textsuperscript{27} By adding Chaucer to the list of influence, Dunlop creates the first history of the frame narrative and gives Eastern tales precedent in having initiated a formal model that was borrowed and adapted by Western writers. Dunlop concedes that frames may be

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{24} See, for example, James Joyce’s \textit{Ulysses}, Jorge Luis Borges’s short stories, and David Foster Wallace’s \textit{The Pale King}.
\bibitem{26} John Colin Dunlop, \textit{The History of Fiction: Being a Critical Account of the Most Celebrated Prose Works of Fiction from the Earliest Greek Romances to the Novels of the Present Age} (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1814), 200.
\bibitem{27} Dunlop, \textit{The History of Fiction}, 203.
\end{thebibliography}
used to produce different effects. While in *The Decameron* the party “discourse in tranquillity and retirement,” subdued, confined, and controlled, “the frame of Chaucer afforded a much greater opportunity of displaying a variety of striking and dramatic characters, and thence of introducing characteristic tales.”

Other critics followed Dunlop in tracing a history of frame narratives. In 1825, Thomas Roscoe contends,

> The idea of thus enclosing his Tales in a frame-work, so as to give a kind of unity to the whole, though it had not yet been adopted by any author, either in France or Italy . . . was by no means the invention of Boccaccio. In the East, the great fountain from which the fictions of modern Europe were at that time derived, the plan was well known.

And in 1847, Thomas Wright observes, “The idea of thus joining together a number of stories by means of a connecting narrative, or frame, appears to have originated in the East; but long before the time of Chaucer it had been made popular in Europe.”

Dunlop’s critical engagement with narrative framing through the language of pictorial and architectural terminology appears concomitantly with the device becoming a frequent and expected part of the Gothic novel. Although Dunlop chooses to use this critical tool to examine older texts (what is perhaps an intentional distancing from the Gothic), the timing suggests that he borrowed the vocabulary from Gothic novels—and most likely those of Radcliffe, who was concerned with the intersections between narrative form and aesthetic theory that the frame revealed. By the time that Wright and Roscoe were employing similar language, the frame narrative had become

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28 Ibid.
inextricable from the Gothic tradition, and reviewers were quick to point out when novels featured framing devices.\textsuperscript{31}

This project often engages theoretical approaches to the concept of framing, and deconstructionist models are especially germane to the paradoxically destabilizing properties of frames.\textsuperscript{32} In \textit{The Truth in Painting}, Derrida examines Kant’s \textit{Critique of Judgment}, which provides the terms for aesthetic discourse and sets the parameters for the study of objective beauty. Kant saw the parergon, a concept or object that frames the ergon, the work or idea, as an ornament to the intrinsic art. Derrida contends, “A parergon comes against, beside. . . . [B]ut it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside.”\textsuperscript{33} Simultaneously part of the work and the environment (milieu) outside the work, the parergon blends into both: “With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then, gradually, into the general text.”\textsuperscript{34} It is a “hybrid of outside and inside.”\textsuperscript{35} And it is not supplemental, but rather complementary: “What constitutes them as \textit{parerga} is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it

\textsuperscript{31} In 1827, for example, a reviewer for the \textit{London Magazine} points out that Scott’s new volumes of \textit{The Chronicles of Canongate} are “embedded in a very elaborate framework, after the manner of the Tales of My Landlord” (19 [1827]: 414).

\textsuperscript{32} In the last half of the twentieth century, frames began to be employed as abstract devices to explore cognitive development and perception. Goffman conceives of frames as conceptual strategies for the “organization of experience” (\textit{Frame Analysis}, 11). The structure of the frame provides boundaries on which individual contexts are understood. For Goffman, the primary framework “render[s] what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (21). More recently, Jim A. Kuypers has explored frames as strategies of rhetoric that “define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies” (“Framing Analysis,” in \textit{The Art of Rhetorical Fiction}, ed. Jim A Kuypers [Boston: Pearson, 2005], 187). Adapting elements of Goffman’s analysis, Kuypers argues: “Frames are so powerful because they induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways, essentially making some aspects of our multidimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects” (186). In both senses, conceptual or physical, frames serve the same purpose: determining a frame of reference affects perception and makes the unruly manageable, the disparate comparable, and the infinite conceivable.


\textsuperscript{34} Derrida, \textit{The Truth in Painting}, 61.

\textsuperscript{35} Derrida, \textit{The Truth in Painting}, 63.
is the internal structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the ergon.”36 Two things are of importance here when Derrida’s theory is applied to frame narratives. First, if frames occupy a space that is part of both the central, fictional narrative and of the outside, real world, then the frame narrative is closer to the world of authors and readers not only in terms of its primary and terminal positions in the text, but also because it merges into that world, uniting reality and fiction prior to the appearance of the totally fictional ergon. Second, because frame narratives also fill a void left by the central narrative, they are not an appendage—that is, as long as they are “beautiful” and not an “adornment” that is meant only to attract—but instead a critical piece necessary to complete the text’s puzzle.37 Derrida warns, however, that when the frame “fits badly,” when, for example, something nonlogical encloses something logical—the misstep of which he accuses Kant—there is “violence.”38 Derrida’s theory of the parergon resembles Poe’s conception of the power of the frame, the twofold force it exerts on inside and outside, character and reader, fiction and reality.39 It also articulates the Gothic project of frames that may “fit badly,” or in some sense subvert rather than support the central narrative.

Other critics have followed Derrida’s example to interrogate the volatile nature of frames. Brian Richardson nicely summarizes Derrida’s perspective: “frames in fact are inherently unstable. They invite their own deconstruction because they appear so definitive yet are obviously partially arbitrary and capable of being reconstructed or placed themselves within a larger, different frame.”40 Frames can always be reframed; what appears to be a limit can mark

36 Derrida, The Truth in Painting, 59.
37 Derrida, The Truth in Painting, 62-64.
38 Derrida, The Truth in Painting, 69.
39 As Martin Heidegger argues, “Force is reflected in itself, driven back to itself, so much so that force as such pushes toward the outside, toward externalization. . . . Force is being-for-itself and being-for-another” (Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly [Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994], 115).
40 Brian Richardson, Introduction to “Narrative Frames and Embeddings,” in Narrative Dynamics, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State UP, 2002), 330.
yet another diegetic layer that is itself framed, sometimes even by the embedded text. In Hogg’s *Confessions*, for example, the outside frame of the Editor’s Narrative is framed not only within by details from the Sinner’s manuscript, but also on the outside by Hogg’s real letter to *Blackwood’s*. John Frow also works with the dynamic properties of frames. On one hand, the frame narrative “reinforces the difference” between inside and outside, but on the other it also “eases the reader into the fictive world, sparing him the abruptness of a sudden passage.”

Frame narratives in Gothic novels do not necessarily “ease” readers in, but routinely they prepare readers for the uneasy journey with thematic- and character-level doubles, which function as uncanny harbingers for what occurs and appears inside. Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) readies its audience for the novel’s central villain, Schedoni, by introducing equally ominous Italian characters in its terse and crucial frame. Jeffrey Williams contends that the frame might in some way displace the central narrative. Frames “represent the construction of a discrete and whole narrative act, a narrative of narrative performance. Thus, to invert the colloquial expectation of a frame, rather than being superadded to the narrative proper and external or extraneous, one might claim that a frame forms a coherent narrative proposition on its own terms in relation to which the embedded narrative takes the position of an indirect object.”

The frames to Scott’s *The Black Dwarf* (1816) and Radcliffe’s *Gaston de Blondeville* (1826) dominate the central story, making it more like an embedded tale rather than a fully realized diegetic narrative. Williams argues that the “apposition” of frames to the text “lays bare the illusion of fiction.”

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43 Williams, *Theory and the Novel*, 102. Williams provides a useful definition of frame narratives: “the relatively complete depiction of a discrete narrative scene, placing the narrative in time and circumstance separate from the time and / or circumstance of the embedded narrative; the casting of a narrative circle, of ‘narrative men’ and women characters, whose primary action is the delivery and / or reception of narrative; the recounting of a narrative cause, proffering a causal network for the narrative, both in the sense of its attribution and in the efficient cause of
sense, instead of introducing the central narrative, frames rupture the reality effect, performing what Derrida would call violence on the ergon. In exposing the central text as fiction, frame narratives make a claim for realism. Since Gothic frame narratives are always inside the fictional territory of the novel, however, the realism claim challenges conceptions of what is authentic and what is fiction. If the frame is exposed immediately as a fiction, despite its assertions of truth, the authority of paratextual elements that appear outside also becomes uncertain.

Without question, Werner Wolf has the greatest critical investment in frame narratives. For Wolf, frames are “integral parts of the respective verbal representations which are located on a logically higher (diegetic) level. As narratives (or at least narrative fragments) they in addition partake in the narrative nature of the entire artifact.” Thus frames are not ornaments to be ignored, but rather are vital components of the entire fictionality of the text. As with other critics, Wolf reads frames as having dual properties: they “authenticate the embedded stories” and simultaneously “increase both the emotional and the illusionist involvement of the readers.”

Perhaps Wolf’s greatest contribution rests in arguing against paratexts (using Genette’s terminology) as frame narratives. Paratexts appear in extradiegetic space and violate the requirement of being intradiegetic. Wolf contends that frame narratives “unfold influencing devices more easily and naturally” than paratexts. Still, they can be similar to frame narratives, which, Wolf argues, could be considered as “an extradiegetic level that has been ‘inflated’ to the

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46 Genette defines paratexts as “those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader” (Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997], 1).
dimension of (parts of) a story.” Wolf’s logic fails to consider when the boundaries between paratext and frame narrative are blurred, a familiar mode of the Gothic. Often, as in Shelley’s “Introduction” to *The Last Man* (1826), the frame narrative is labeled as a paratext, and is certainly substantial enough to be considered part of the novel’s diegetic narrative. Thus Wolf’s argument relies on narrative quantification. Because frame narratives should be shorter than the enclosed main narrative, a text like *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus’s first-person account takes up only three central books, does not fit the definition.

In her book *Narratology* (1985), Mieke Bal argues that once embedded texts meet the “criteria for narrativity” they can be considered as narrative texts. Thus *The Odyssey*, countering Wolf’s definition, could be considered a frame narrative because Odysseus’s story satisfies the requirements to stand as an autonomous narrative. Frame narratives function in two ways for Bal: they can explain the main narrative, or they can determine it. In the latter, the frame becomes a “part of the narrative’s poetics, and needs to be understood for the narrative to be fully appreciated.” Bal’s assertion is important to this study because it gives credence to the role frame narratives play in determining the meaning of the text. It makes crucial what may appear superfluous. To use Barthes’ words on the structure of narrative, “everything has a meaning, or nothing has.” To ignore Walton’s frame in *Frankenstein* is to miss crucial elements that characterize both Victor and the creature. Bal also makes note of frames that “resemble” the main text; in this case, the frame serves as a “mirror text” (which Bal prefers to *mise en abyme*), which creates a series of doubles—character, setting, theme—that both

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48 Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” 182.
reinforce and complicate, itself an apt definition of the frame.\textsuperscript{52} In the Gothic novel especially, these doubles make the boundary between frame and framed narratives permeable; we reach back and forth between the narratives as we are reminded of uncanny similarities: Walton is much like Victor, and Victor like the creature, and so on until the terminal frame doubles Walton and the creature. Bal argues that when the “structure of narrative levels becomes more than a mere story-telling device,” it serves as a crucial element in the reception of the text.\textsuperscript{53} For Bal, when frame narratives function as developed narratives themselves, and not merely as a means for disseminating the central story, they deserve attention in the fiction as a whole. Bal discredits the role of storytelling frames in regarding them as inessential to the central narrative. Yet, if the frame’s storyteller functions as an introductory double for similar storytellers in the novel, and if his authority is questionable or rendered apocryphal, his role bears far more importance to the thematic core of the novel than Bal chooses to admit.

Scholarship on narrative frames is rich and productive, from cognitive models to narrative theory.\textsuperscript{54} Yet there are no studies of frame narratives devoted to the Gothic, despite the

\textsuperscript{52} Bal, Narratology, 57-58. In his 1964 text, Der Doppelroman. Eine literatursystematische studie über duplikative erzählstrukturen (A systematic study of duplicative literary narrative structures), Frank C. Maatje explores the relationship between the frame narrative and the text that is framed.

\textsuperscript{53} Bal, Narratology, 57.

\textsuperscript{54} Bernard Duyfhuizen reads the interplay of narrations in a text through transmission, in which “we enter a dynamic and transformatory process of text production, a process that resembles the narrative of transmission that occurs in each of our individual existences” (Narratives of Transmission [Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1992], 19). A paratextual or embedded “document,” Duyfhuizen argues, “seeks to capture and control the discourse of the other [narrative], to channel and make transmissible the narrative of the narrating subject’s own existence” (20). Peter Brook agrees, arguing that the frequency of frame narratives in the nineteenth century reveals a “deep anxiety about the possibility of transmission” (Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative [Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1992], 28). And in an effort to find a more suitable metaphor for narrative embedding than the “problematic and confusing” frame, Eric Bertalatsky argues for gutters, the space between images (e.g. comic books) where “interpretation is enacted” (“Lost in the Gutter: Within and Between Frames in Narrative and Narrative Theory,” Narrative 17.2 [2009]: 162-163). See also Garrett Stewart’s definition of frames as “transparent ‘windows’ rather than material ‘frames,’” which is the “special digital sense of their layering and unpeeling on screen, or, in microprocessing lingo, the ‘stacking and popping’” (Novel Violence: A Narratology of Victorian Fiction [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009], 93).
genre’s wealth of scholarship. Mary Ann Caws’s *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction* (1985) “concerns techniques of bordering” that make certain passages stand out “for our own arrest: visual, gestural, verbal, and conceptual.” Caws’s project engages most with novels, but her focus rests on the borders of specific passages of import, rather than on frame narratives. In her section on *The Castle of Otranto*, Elizabeth MacAndrew writes, “Such complex structures show how these works are to be read. They are variations of a technique for establishing the sense of a fiction that cannot be taken at face value, so that the reader will indeed apprehend the closed world as the isolated world of the self” (119). Fiona Robertson examines Walter Scott’s many frame narratives and offers an excellent explanation for the Gothic’s persistent use of the device: “instances of early Gothic usages of frames and authenticating interventions by editors and narrators suggest that Gothic was developing a complex and self-conscious relationship to its historical materials, and to different types and levels of authority within its narrative schema.”

The Gothic novel is a site for experimentation, one that invites and revises formal and thematic devices from several genres. Examining frame narratives in Gothic novels demonstrates that the genre is in conversation not only with its immediate eighteenth-century predecessors, but also with an even more expansive literally tradition.

Frame narratives have existed at least since *The Odyssey*. Odysseus’s first-person account occupies Books 9-12. Finally freed from Calypso, Odysseus washes ashore at Scherie, where, after remaining anonymous for a time, he decides to relate his adventures. The extradiegetic

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55 Edith Birkhead’s *The Tale of Terror* (1921) explores the “growth of supernatural fiction” through chapters on Radcliffe, Godwin, and Scott, to name only a few ([New York: E. P. Dutton, 1921], v). Although Birkhead’s goal is sometimes quantity over analysis, the authors, genres, and themes she labels Gothic remain influential. Haggerty’s *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* seeks “to uncover various ways in which Gothic writers expand the significance of their work through the manipulation of formal effects” ([University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989], 1).
narrator returns after the flashback stories to conclude with Odysseus’s return home and his disguised slaughter of Penelope’s suitors. English frame narratives began to appear surprisingly early: both *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Wanderer* (ca. tenth century, if not older) feature framing devices, and the seventh-century monk Bede frames *Caedmon’s Hymn* with editorial prose. Other English frame narratives that appeared up to the eighteenth century are many and varied, ranging from *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Taming of the Shrew* to *A Tale of a Tub*. Continental European frame narratives are found most notably in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (c.1351) and Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615).

The frame narrative’s most prominent development and most persistent use occurred in the East, perhaps starting with the eighth-century text *Panchatantra*, and then spread into Medieval Europe because of the device’s “loose structure and its general flexibility,” Katherine S. Gittes observes. The most notable Eastern frame narrative appears in *One Thousand and

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58 In one sense, Odysseus’s first-person narration functions as a series of hypodiegetic tales within the diegetic narration, but we may also consider his narrative as the diegetic center of the poem. Thus, the narrative that bookends his account serves as an introductory and terminal extradiegetic frame.

59 The framing prelogue of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* is itself framed: a narrator describes the occasion and then introduces each member of the group traveling from Southwark to Canterbury. The narrative returns after the introductions to set the group on their way. The frame to Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* remains controversial. The play begins with a scene in which a nobleman tricks a drunken Christopher Sly into thinking he is a lord. The central play serves as a distraction for Sly, especially so that a male page, disguised as his “wife,” will not have to sleep with him. Although Sly’s frame does not return in *The Taming of the Shrew*, another quarto that was published in 1594 called *The Taming of a Shrew* has Sly return in a terminal frame. Alexander Pope chose for his edition to conclude in this manner, and many critics have used it as a justification of or distancing from the uncomfortable end at Katherina’s “taming.” Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) links political digressions with an allegorical tale of three brothers. *The Decameron* concerns a group of ten people, referred to as the *Brigata*, who have fled to a countryside villa in Italy to escape the Black Death. To pass the time, each day the members of the group tell a story (referred to as novels; ten for ten days; 100 in total). As with *Arabian Nights*, death is intimately connected with storytelling.

60 After finishing Part I of *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes was forced to write a preface to Part II to declare a continuation penned by Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda as a forgery. The second preface, John H. Pearson writes, “both mediates between and enleagues the real world and the world of the novel. Preface and novel collaborate rather than remain utterly distinct; the two texts unite as a compound esthetic structure that signals the individual powers and rights of authorship” (“The Politics of Framing in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Mosaic* 23.1 [1990]: 15).

One Nights, which was translated anonymously into English in 1707 under the title Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. This was an enormously popular text, read and beloved by several of the novelists in this study. Tzvetan Todorov argues that the “dizzying” structure of the Arabian Nights demonstrates an “articulation of the most essential property of all narrative. For the embedding narrative is the narrative of a narrative.”62 Each tale in the Arabian Nights must give birth to a new tale; without narrative there is only death.63 The continued influence of Eastern form on the West should not be understated. William Beckford’s Vathek (1782) effectively introduces the East to the Gothic novel, and its complicated and contentious publication history, which pitted Beckford’s original French against an unauthorized English edition by Samuel Henley, speaks to Gothic manipulations of authorial identity.

The Gothic novel is also influenced by energetic eighteenth-century debates over authorship and authority, which were most often located in paratextual materials, rather than narrative frames. The paratext, Genette argues, “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition, but of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public . . . at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.”64 Janine Barchas observes: “The extra-narrative pages of graphic design that frame so many eighteenth-century novels . . . reflect and refract deep tension in the

62 Tzvetan Todorov, “Narrative-Men,” in The Poetics of Prose, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977), 72. Boris Andreevich Uspenskii provides a reductive account of frames in both painting and literature. In the former, the frame belongs to the space of the “external observer,” and the moment at which “we enter the imaginary space, we leave the frame behind” (A Poetics of Composition, trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig [Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1973], 143). For Uspenskii, a frame narrator in literature who opens or closes a text is “completely superfluous,” and the introduction of a second person (i.e. reader) functions “to establish the position of a perceiver—to create an abstract subject from whose point of view the described events acquire a specific meaning” (147).

63 As Foucault writes, “the work holds out a mirror . . . where it appears like a miniature of itself and preceding itself, since it tells its own story as one among the many wonders of the past, among so many other nights (“Language to Infinity,” in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977], 58).

64 Genette, Paratexts, 2.
eighteenth century between appearances and reality, form and content, between generic assertions to authority and genuine truth claims.” In this sense, paratexts act very much like narrative frames, but while the former make claims for authenticity, the latter are always located in fictional narrative spaces. The Gothic novel often plays with these distinctions in labeling its narrative frames as paratexts. Even Walton’s framing letters in Frankenstein echo a tradition of paratexual exchanges that open eighteenth-century novels (if not the epistolary form itself). In so doing, Gothic novelists undermine the authority that these earlier novels attempted to claim, whether it was to act under the guise of editors and publishers or to report the discovery and unmediated transcription of an ancient manuscript.

Both Daniel Defoe’s and Samuel Richardson’s novels feature complex editorial personas that appear in paratexts. But it is Henry Fielding who most significantly elaborated on the authenticity device by blurring the lines between paratext and frame narrative. Joseph Andrews (1742) features a pioneering frame narrative, as his “biographer” appears throughout the novel, framing the story with commentary, rather than appearing only in paratexts. As the title-page indicates, the novel is “Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don

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66 The preface to Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719) is written by an “Editor”; Moll Flanders (1721) begins with a similar, though longer and more detailed, editorial preface; and Roxana (1724) continues Defoe’s paratextual claims of authenticity: “the foundation of This is laid in Truth of Fact; and so the Work is not a Story, but a History” (ed. John Mullan [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998], 1). This preface, however, adds another figure, the “Relator,” whose work may fail in “dressing up the Story in worse Cloaths than the Lady” (1). In A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), Defoe continues to claim authenticity through a narrator named H. F. (perhaps a reference to Defoe’s uncle, Henry Foe), but the “journal” is a mixture of fact and fiction. Richardson’s Pamela (1740) follows Defoe’s strategy by employing a preface by an editor. In a 1741 Letter to Aaron Hill, Richardson writes of the preface that he had “the umbrage of the editor’s character to screen myself behind” (Selected Letters, ed. John Carroll [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964], 42). Clarissa (1748) similarly includes a preface by an editor, and the novel ends in an anonymous postscript, which Leah Price points out is written by an “author” rather than “editor.” That the novel ends with a postscript summation in prose, “draws attention,” Price argues, “to the novel’s eleventh-hour repudiation of the epistolary mode” (The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel [Cambridge: Cambridge P, 2010], 27). Barchas points out the “paratextual frames of lists” that surround Sir Charles Grandison (1753), which is a “fiction sandwiched between reference texts” (Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel, 184).
"Quixote," so it is no surprise that Fielding disrupts narrative boundaries throughout. In the preface, Fielding provides his famous definition, “comic Epic-Poem in Prose.” But as Fielding later teaches us, by writing the preface to the second edition of Sarah Fielding’s *David Simple* (1744), prefatory remarks are not necessarily the property of the novelist. By beginning *Joseph Andrews* with yet another kind of preface, he proves that they can be inauthentic, elusive, and vital elements of the fictionality of the novel. Comments from the “biographer” of the novel occupy the entirety of chapter 1. In them, the speaker satirizes *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740) and Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and importantly reveals that the rest of the text is an “authentic History.” Three of the novel’s four volumes begin with a chapter from the biographer. Book II begins with one of the “Mysteries or Secrets” of authors in which they bulk up their texts with divisions into books and chapters: “understood as so much Buckram, Stays, and Stay-tape in A Taylor’s Bill, serving only to make up the Sum Total, commonly found at the Bottom of our first Page, and of his last.” Evoking a metaphor of a tailor, who stitches the text together and takes measures to make it remain whole, is particularly significant to later writers from Maturin and Hogg to Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot.

*Joseph Andrews* neither closes with a terminal frame, nor are there remarks from the biographer to conclude the novel’s books. The biographer instead introduces each book, thereby providing the foundation on which the narrative rests. The speaker argues, however, that the text’s divisions are in fact more like an “Inn or Resting-Place, where he may stop and take a

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67 Embedded tales from characters such as Lenora and Mr. Wilson flourish throughout. As J. Paul Hunter points out, *Tom Jones* is even more concerned with embedded tales. The story of the Man on the Hill is “near both the spatial and artistic centers of *Tom Jones*” (“Response as Reformation: *Tristram Shandy* and the Art of Interruption,” *Novel* 4 [1971]: 634).
Glass, or any other Refreshment, as it pleases him.”

Thus, Fielding’s biographer plays host, standing at the threshold of the inn to introduce potential patrons. Fielding would continue this metaphor in *Tom Jones* (1749), observing in chapter 1 that “it hath been usual, with the honest and well-meaning Host, to provide a Bill of Fare, which all Persons may peruse at their first Entrance into the House.”

Without these points of rest, Fielding writes in *Joseph Andrews*, the text “resembles the Opening of Wilds or Seas, which tires the Eye and fatigues the Spirit when entered upon.” Divisions establish limits on the scope of the novel that are necessary to its effect. The biographer’s remarks anticipate late eighteenth-century ideas of the picturesque—particularly relevant to Radcliffe (as described in chapter 2)—where providing a frame creates aesthetic unity of expression. Most important, that Book IV appears without the biographer’s introductory commentary suggests that the fiction has usurped the authority of its framework. It is effectively the death of the biographer under the weight of history, or perhaps even more pertinently fiction finding the guise of truth finally unnecessary. When Fielding allows his title character to be a fiction, he renders the entire Andrews family apocryphal—yet another explicit challenge to Richardson’s true history project.

Despite Fielding’s innovation that took paratextual figures and inserted them within the space of the main text, the first Gothic novelists adhered to locating authenticity claims in paratexts that were not part of the fiction. The preface to the first edition of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) reports that the manuscript was “found in the library of an ancient

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71 Ibid.
72 Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, vol. 1, ed. Fredson Bowers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 31. We might rethink Fielding’s metaphor through J. Hillis Miller’s deconstructionist conception of hosts and parasites. Miller asks, among other things, whether a citation in a text is a parasite or if the text that surrounds it feeds of the host: “May [the parasite] not itself be the uncanny alien which is so close that it cannot be seen as strange, host in the sense of enemy rather than host in the sense of open-handed dispenser of hospitality?” (“The Critic as Host,” in *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, ed. Julian Wolfreys [Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005], 18). This is particularly relevant not only to studies of frame narratives and how they supplement, challenge, or undermine the main text, but especially to readings of Walter Scott, whose frame characters act as hosts who transcribe the tales of passersby (see chapter 3).
catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529.”

The title-page indicates that the text was translated by “William Marshall, Gent.” from the Italian of “Onuphrio Muralto.” The great success of James Macpherson’s “Ossian” poems in the two years prior to Otranto may have pushed Walpole to employ a similar device when crafting Otranto. E. J. Clery speculates on the “conflicting pressures” in the eighteenth century that led to fraudulently presenting texts as antiquities: “on the one hand a growing enthusiasm for the superstitious fancies of the past; and on the other, a sense that this kind of imaginative freedom was forbidden, or simply impossible, for writers of the enlightened present.”

Although Walpole speculated correctly that Ossian was a fake—and would famously do so again when appealed to for advice by Chatterton in 1769—his own “translation” fooled at least some, The Monthly Review included (vol. 32, 1764). The Critical Review was a little more discerning: “Such is the character of this work given us by its judicious translator; but whether he speaks seriously or ironically, we neither know nor care.” That the reviewer does not “care” whether the work is an ancient manuscript or a modern invention suggests an indifference to the novel’s claims of truth and instead an attention to its thematic novelties. Less than four months later, Walpole published a second edition in which he revealed himself as author through a new preface. Of his guise as translator rather than author, Walpole admits, “diffidence of his own

74 Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, ed. E. J. Clery (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 5. James Watt argues that the “elevation of Walpole’s work to the status of an origin has served to grant an illusory stability to a body of fiction which is distinctly heterogeneous” (Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832 [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999], 1).
76 “The Castle of Otranto, a Story,” The Critical Review 19 (1785): 51. The reviewer surmises that the castle is a “modern fabric” because paintings were not put in panels during the time the text reports to be from (51).
77 In fact, the reviewer may be more interested in the novel’s other unique elements. Georg Lukács asserts that “history” in Otranto “is treated as mere costumery: it is only the curiosities and oddities of the milieu that matter, not an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch” (The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell [London: Peregrine, 1969], 15).
abilities, and the novelty of the attempt, were his sole inducements to assume that disguise.”  

The second preface renders the first spurious and makes what was quasi-textual fiction into paratextual truth. The anxiety of creating a novel that was entirely a fiction, the mode that later Gothic novels in fact introduced, prompted Walpole to abandon the found manuscript device in favor of unmasking himself and the project in a second preface.

Walpole’s experiment did not deter others from attempting to pose Gothic antiquity as authentic, however. Clara Reeve’s *The Champion of Virtue* (1777) follows Otranto’s second edition by being a “Gothic Story,” but it is translated by an “Editor,” whose “friend . . . was in possession of a manuscript in the old English language.”  

The novel does not begin with a preface, but instead with an “Address to the Reader,” in which the editor rehashes Otranto’s second preface, and then outlines the novel’s defects. It is here that the editor recalls coming into possession of a manuscript that is devoid of the absurdities and inconsistencies that plague Otranto. The editor’s first words in the preface are particularly intriguing: “Reader, before you enter the history before you, permit the author to hold a short conference with you.”  

Reeve suggests here that her preface will function as a threshold, a frame which readers must pass through before proceeding to the art inside. One year later, Reeve changed the title to *The Old English Baron* and included a new preface in which she admitted authorship. The new preface reveals the novel to be the “literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto.”  

While Reeve’s second preface is ostensibly the same as the first, she removes any reference to the manuscript, details the genesis of the first edition, and reveals her motivations for bringing forth a corrected second edition. Reeve was not able to maintain the fiction of a found manuscript—which echoes

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80 Reeve, *The Champion of Virtue*, i.
Walpole’s dramatic changes to his second preface—and she chose instead to advertise her project as a revision, yet still a part of an incipient genre.

Although both Walpole and Reeve quickly admitted authorship in second editions, the paratextual found manuscript trope was not yet dead. In the “Advertisement” to The Recess (1783-85), Sophia Lee writes: “Not being permitted to publish the means which enriched me with the manuscript from whence the following tale is extracted, its simplicity alone can authenticate it.” Lee claims that the manuscript hails from the “reign of Elizabeth,” and the novel concerns fictional twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots. The Gentlemen’s Magazine praised the incidents in the novel, but with a caveat: “we cannot entirely approve the custom of interweaving fictitious incident with historic truth.” Although Lee relies in part on the authentic manuscript device that Walpole initiated in the first edition of Otranto, her text suggests a distancing from the model. Lee refuses to reveal the source of the novel, and because she uses such a familiar historical backdrop, the mixing of history with fiction renders the device itself a fiction. Since Lee’s novel revises established history, in other words, her paratextual claims retrospectively lose their authority.

In his second preface to Otranto, Walpole famously declares that his goal was “to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern.” Anticipating the parameters she later lays out in The Progress of Romance (1785), Reeve made the blending more explicit: the “ancient romance” and the “modern Novel.” Lee’s project, on the other hand, appears to be a blending of history and fiction—a more relevant precursor to Walter Scott’s agenda, which I

83 Ibid.
86 Reeve, The Champion of Virtue, ii.
I would like, however, to suggest other sources that later Gothic novels borrowed and revised. The Gothic novel finds its thematic resources most saliently in the novels of Walpole, Reeve, and Lee (historical setting, supernatural agency, castle-protagonist, and dynamic of confinement and flight, to name only a few). Yet these pioneering texts of the Gothic were not frame narratives. In terms of form, the later Gothic novel is most indebted to the complex experiments in narrative framing that are found in eighteenth-century novels of sensibility. For it is in this energetic venue that writers first employed the frame narrative in the same manner as the Gothic novels that followed. Moreover, novels of sensibility engaged these frames to challenge the hegemony of realism, an essential objective of the Gothic project.

Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) is arguably an ancestor of the novel of sensibility. In the novel, echoing Scheherazade’s quandary in *Arabian Nights*, Sterne equates storytelling with living. Perhaps taking up the words of Defoe’s editor in *Moll Flanders* (“no Body can write their own Life to the full end of it, unless they can write it after they are dead”), Sterne planned to write the novel until he died, and indeed he did die shortly after completing volume IX. This fact has led critics to speculate that the novel remained unfinished, a point challenged by Wayne Booth. Part of the tendency to read the novel as incomplete no doubt
stems from its structural irregularity. The plot—when there is one to be grasped—is digressive, elusive, and appears to be lacking formal unity. As with Gothic novels, the “fragments or episodes that constitute [Tristram’s] story,” John Mullan observes, “leave us, like the book’s end, in midair.” The novel is built upon frames, not only conceptual ones that appear through a narratorial frame of reference, but also physical, structural, and thematic. The novel begins with Tristram wishing that his parents had put more thought into the circumstances of his conception. At the productive moment, his mother asks whether his father has wound the clock, which establishes a “foundation . . . for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind.” Because the clock has not been wound, time becomes an arbitrary construct in the novel, and Tristram can diverge from the unity of chronology at his leisure. Because Tristram asks sensitive readers to “Shut the door” upon this scene of conception and to take up the next chapter that begins at his birth, the familiar autobiographical birth-narrative begins not with chapter 1, but instead with chapter 5. The previous four chapters provide a frame that details not only Tristram’s physical conception, but also the conception of the text as a series of misunderstandings and poorly planned events that define the fate of real lives.

Few authors are more invested than Sterne in the framing of the textual page. The blacked-out (front and back) page that follows Yorick’s death in volume I creates a chasm, an impenetrable void of imagination and an unavoidable pause in narration that is more shocking and effective than Fielding’s use of textual divisions. Volume III contains a marbled page (again, front and back), which Tristram writes is the “motly emblem of my work.” Sterne’s project is

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94 Sterne, Tristram Shandy, vol. 1, 268. Tristram Shandy requires reading and, as a result, knowledge to unlock the mysteries of its blacked-out and marbled pages. In the meticulously crafted and colored marbled pages, individual to
fully realized in volume VI when he provides a blank page for readers to draw their own conception of widow Waldman. This is truly the frame of *Tristram Shandy*: the blank page, like Locke’s *tabula rasa*, represents innocence without the threat of textual experience. The “glass in the human breast” cannot be realized, so the biographer “must go some other way to work.” Thus does the novel move backwards against itself, reversing conceptions of linear time.

Whereas Tristram is conceived, born, and threatened time and again by experience (his accidental circumcision at a window frame comes to mind), on a epistemological level the novel moves from blackness, death after life’s oppressive experience, to the colorful joy of middling, bubbling, marbling knowledge, and finally to the blankness and framelessness of birth.

Tristram’s (and Sterne’s) means for staying alive may not in fact be through writing, but rather through not reading, not writing, not learning. *Tristram Shandy* is not only a project of memorializing a life, but also a fantasy of forgetting, a struggle between posterity and oblivion. Sterne’s equating of storytelling and life is particularly relevant to the Gothic novel, not to mention his manipulations of chronology, use of fragmented narratives, and rejection of finality.

Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771) perhaps marks both the apex and the end of the novel of sensibility. The novel begins with an “Introduction” in which a narrator, out hunting with a curate, happens upon an old building, adjacent to which a young woman sits reading. The curate tells the narrator of a man named Harley who used to live there, and explains that he is in possession of Harley’s fragmented and nearly illegible manuscript, some of which he has used
for gun-wadding. “I would never find the author in one strain for two chapters together,” the curate contends, “and I don’t believe there’s a single syllogism from beginning to end.” The narrator trades another manuscript for Harley’s “bundle of little episodes, put together without art” and becomes editor of the work. Near the text’s conclusion the editor breaks in to explain that he has omitted some passages: “from the want of those parts which I have been unable to procure: to such as may have expected the intricacies of a novel.” The fragmented manuscript becomes a whole because of the fictional editor’s framework. The frame makes a readable unity what was scraps; it makes Harley whole. Mackenzie describes his intention with the novel: “[F]or I would have it as different from the Entanglement of a Novel as can be.” The formal device of Harley’s fragmented, found manuscript, occasioned in a desolate and ghostly setting, and then made whole by the framing editor, clearly influences not only the Gothic novel (Shelley’s Frankenstein) but also the quasi-fictional theoretical tract (Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus).

Juliet Shields observes that, while that novel’s “fragmentation frustrates any facile sympathetic identification with Harley,” its “frame narratives implicate readers in Harley’s solipsism.” The introduction to The Man of Feeling, rather than presenting itself as a paratext, is instead a

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97 Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, 49.
99 Mackenzie was clearly influenced by Fielding’s A Journey from this World to the Next (1742), which begins with an introduction where an editor explains how he came across the manuscript, used to bundle a bunch of pens: “He produced about one hundred pages, acquainting me that he had saved no more; but that the book was originally a huge folio, had been left in his garret by a gentleman who lodged there, and who had left him no other satisfaction for nine months’ lodging. He proceeded to inform me that the manuscript had been hawked about (as he phrased it) among all the booksellers, who refused to meddle; some alleged that they could not read, others that they could not understand it” (Miscellanies, vol. 2, ed. Hugh Amory [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993], 3-4). That the editor shows the manuscript to Parson Adams not only renders the introduction immediately a fiction, but it also continues the “true history” Fielding established shortly before in Joseph Andrews.
significant part of the fiction, which satirizes the found manuscript device, and demonstrates the influence the novel of sensibility had on the equally experimental Gothic novel.

Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) is possibly the first fully framed novel. It is also an early example of a textual policy of antiquarian preservation that makes the editor the artist, the architect for preserving a life. Adapting the mode of previous eighteenth-century novels, Goethe permits his editor to be an active part of the story. It is the editor, rather than Werther, who composes the novel’s tragic dénouement. Before Werther’s first letter appears, the editor writes in a preface:

> I have carefully gathered together, and present to you here, everything I could discover about poor Werther’s story. You will thank me for doing so, I’m sure. His mind and character can’t but win your admiration and love, his destiny your tears.

> And you, good soul, who feels the same urge as he, take comfort from his sufferings and let this book be your friend if, due to fate or personal responsibility, you can find no closer one.  

The editor later interrupts Werther’s letters to his brother Wilhelm with the break, “The Editor to the Reader”: “I wish that we had so many documents by his own hand about our friend’s memorable last days that I did not need to interrupt the sequence of his letters by a connecting narrative.” The editor finishes the novel by way of letter fragments (he will “pay attention to even the slightest fragment from his pen”) and interviews with persons who know the story. As with Tristram Shandy (if not Sterne, himself), Werther fades and dies when his epistles, the

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104 Ibid.
story of his life, are replaced by the editor’s prose; his final letter in fact is an undelivered suicide note. Jeffrey Williams argues, “the frame offers not simply a curtain call but provides the telos of Werther’s story . . . thus continuing the plot to a different end, lending it a far more melodramatic arc.”¹⁰⁵ That Werther shoots himself at his writing desk further equates writing with life. But once his emotions overwhelm his writing, pen becomes gun; Werther’s life is now death; his last message to Lotte his dead body; his text now the blood that oozes from his head. The editor knows Werther’s end and must compile the rest of the story. Yet Werther’s history is fragmented and incomplete without an editorial frame. The editor dominates the life. His words begin and end the story, which is not Werther’s life as much as it is an editor’s version of it. The powerful authority of Goethe’s editor over the text anticipates similar Gothic tropes: in *Frankenstein*, Victor is the editor of not only his own story, but also the creature’s; and in the frame of Radcliffe’s *Gaston de Blondeville*, Willoughton’s editorial agency over the ancient manuscript is continually undermined.

Suffused with as much pathos as Goethe’s *Werther*, Bernardin de St. Pierre’s *Paul and Virginia* (1787) is a late example of a closed frame narrative that influenced Gothic novelists. The novel opens with an unnamed male narrator writing about a favorite destination on the island of Mauritius. “One day,” he records, in a trope familiar to readers of both Wordsworth and Gothic novels, “when I was seated at the foot of the cottages, and contemplating their ruins, a man, advanced in years, passed near the spot.”¹⁰⁶ The narrator inquires about the previous owners of the cottage, and the old man begins the story of Paul and Virginia, a tragic tale of nature corrupted by art, which results in the shipwreck death of Virginia followed shortly by

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Theory and the Novel*, 123. The frame narrative in *Werther* is what Williams calls a “bracketing frame,” which “integrates more fully with the embedded narrative, imparting the final cause of the narrative and thus determining it teleology” (123).

Paul’s death from grief. The novel concludes with a return to the frame: “Ending with these words, the good old man retired, bathed in tears; and my own, too, had flowed more than once during this melancholy recital.” But the storyteller lives; so too does the editor, removed from the tragic events, but able to experience them through the story. The frame for *Paul and Virginia* thus simultaneously works to draw readers into the reality of the contemporary narrator, who is geographically closer to the events, and yet to distance them from the chronology of the tragedy. The frame settings and characters in Gothic novels function similarly: what appears distant and foreign is in fact uncannily familiar.

The Gothic borrowed the formal device of the frame narrative from the novel of sensibility, a genre that shares with its darker sibling an insistence at countering the formal and thematic tropes of realism. The nineteenth-century realist novel, George Levine argues, “belongs, almost provincially, to a ‘middling’ condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures.” The Gothic embraces these castaways and retains them on reserve for later modernist and postmodernist writers to borrow and revitalize. If realism is a “middling” genre, as Levine argues, it is not surprising that the Gothic, with its attention to frames, thrives at the borders. An amalgamation of features from several eighteenth-century genres, the Gothic novel is a storehouse for unstable generic energies that were abandoned or denied by novels claiming more accurately to represent the world. We might trace this evidence no further than Jane Austen.

Frame narratives were already spectacularly employed by Radcliffe, but Austen denied their

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109 Elizabeth Napier argues that the Gothic novel “remains essentially a genre of imbalance, because its authors finally neither ascribed convincingly to either extreme nor found a middle way between them” (*The Failure of Gothic* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986], 5).
formal force, choosing instead a style we now consider an unimpeachable adherence to real life. Where Austen’s politics are coded into a precise and measured technical method, the Gothic novel boldly displays the issues of form and authorship that the eighteenth-century novel more openly professed. The realist novel, starting with Austen and continuing throughout the nineteenth-century with George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Thomas Hardy, repressed, if not actively suppressed, themes and forms considered indelicate, unnatural, impossible, and untenable.

Gothic novelists gave these themes a venue, but to say they did so initially to counter the realist agenda would be potentially anachronistic. Like Victor Frankenstein gathering materials to form his creature, the Gothic novel raided parts of earlier eighteenth-century genres to form a new species—a form attributed to Walpole but actually brought to life by Radcliffe. The Gothic novel, to borrow Levine’s claim about realism, “exists as a process.” And the genre’s rather stunning development coincides with the evolution of its framing devices. Since the Gothic has such a history, however, novelists after Radcliffe were forced to confront the critical hegemony of realism, especially as the nineteenth century wore on. Where realism denies and maintains, the Gothic accepts and challenges. In fact, the Gothic may teach us more about the variety of human experience and the multiplicity of subjective identity than realism ever could realize. Most significantly, the Gothic novel routinely opposes the conception of narrative omniscience—that keystone of nineteenth-century realism—choosing instead to employ the perspectives of multiple figures, blurring the lines between character, narrator, and author. The frame narrative, at least in its early stages, was a means to introduce the main story, but as the Gothic novel developed, framing devices began to be used to challenge narrative authority. There is, after all, no more

supernatural or unrealistic feature of the novel than omniscience. Rather than place total narrative authority in the hands of an impossible figure, Gothic novels demonstrate that multiple, unstable, and conflicting perspectives are an inextricable reality of the real world. Frame narratives permit such experimentation; as we move inward through layers of narrative voices in a Gothic novel, we encounter different views on the same events. In *Frankenstein*, to use perhaps the most famous example, Walton records Victor’s story (itself edited by Victor), which embeds the creature’s tale; and the creature embeds Safie’s history into his own tale. What is left in Gothic texts that move from frame to frame is an undermining of all narrative authority. There can be no omniscience, no objective voice in a world so simultaneously ephemeral and multidimensional.

This study examines Gothic frame narratives from approximately 1790 to 1900. It ultimately demonstrates that the Gothic is neither a challenge to nor a reaction against realism, but rather *is* realism.\(^{111}\) The Gothic is the realism of a diverse world with innumerable voices that react, judge, and imagine differently. It is a realism of such stuff as dreams are made on—or rather nightmares. It is a realism that attempts to articulate both the sublime vastness of nature and the debilitating claustrophobia of cloisters and prisons. It is a realism of joy and fear, hope and despondency, those excesses that define the real world. Thus the Gothic is as fundamental to the history of the novel as nineteenth-century realism, a genre that I hope to show routinely borrows from the Gothic rather than dismissing it altogether. Gothic frame narratives are the most salient formal feature that binds these often disparate and unique literary expressions

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because they are so open for experimentation; where the recipe’s thematic ingredients become bland with overuse, the frame narrative marks the Gothic’s continuing reach into new territories.

Chapter 2 of this study focuses on Ann Radcliffe, whose *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) marks a turning point in the formal history of Gothic literature. Radcliffe locates her frame narrative—what has been deemed the “familiar” convention of the found manuscript—in the space of the text’s fiction and not in prefatory or introductory paratexts. By rendering the frame narrative part of the fictional world, Radcliffe experiments with making the frame part of the aesthetic architecture of the novel. This method, I argue, not only distances the inauthenticity of the found manuscript, but also demonstrates Radcliffe’s attention to the aesthetics of the picturesque. Achieving a picturesque view requires fashioning borders and limits for natural views; Radcliffe’s frame narratives function to envelop the text, to place sublime environments and themes in a picturesque frame. Windows, arches, and doors act as portals through which characters traverse aesthetic spaces. When Radcliffe leaves the frame narrative open, however, as is the case in *The Italian* (1797), the central narrative assumes the authority of the opening frame, and the text escapes its boundaries to become the unruly, impressive, and infinite sublime. In *Gaston de Blondeville* (1826), which remained unpublished during her lifetime, Radcliffe parodied the found manuscript by crafting in her most elaborate frame a series of inauthentic sources—not only a manuscript, but also an enthusiastic antiquarian editor.

In chapter 3, I investigate Walter Scott’s obsession with framing devices. Most notably, Scott surrounded his texts with lengthy introductions and meticulous notes for his *Magnum Opus* editions. But frame narratives were already integral components of his first editions, and I especially focus on his most Gothic enterprise, *Tales of My Landlord*. By placing his frame narratives in the fictional space of the novel, Scott follows Radcliffe’s innovation. Yet Scott’s
relationship with the Gothic is uneven. His attempt to distance himself from these supposedly less-respectable texts manifested itself in an absorbing of the Gothic within the historical romance. Frame narratives serve to wrap his Gothic tales and themes in levels of historical narrative, thus rendering them more fictional and distancing them from the author. Late in his career, just before he turned to framing his novels in intricate autobiographical and contextual histories, Scott seems to have come to terms with his Gothic—at a time, interestingly enough, when he finally revealed himself as author—unabashedly publishing Gothic tales for consumption in literary annuals.

Chapter 4 focuses on Mary Shelley and begins with an analysis of *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831)—perhaps the most famous frame narrative in literature—as a commentary on the politics of editing. I also trace Shelley’s reading prior to the genesis of the novel to explain her interest in the formal device of frames. The chapter proceeds with analyses of Shelley’s abandoned frame narrative for *Mathilda*, titled *The Fields of Fancy*, and the apocalyptic frame to *The Last Man* (1826). Although *Mathilda*, which remained unpublished until the mid nineteenth century, appears to be frameless, it is in fact a series of framed stories that signal the residual effect of *The Fields of Fancy*. The frame narrative for *The Last Man* is a stunning achievement and shows an author at the height of her powers. It complicates conceptions of history and authenticity, and, because the opening frame never returns, Shelley leaves us with a perplexing understanding of what we have read and how we have read it. Shelley’s frame narratives highlight her questioning of the editorial process and the authority of writing. When a text is put through the editorial and publishing gauntlet, it can become a monstrous force—a creature that haunts its creator, an author who destroys herself, a plague that wipes out a species.
Chapter 5 examines Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), which is nothing if not a joint effort between an erratic Maturin and his steady publisher Constable. The outside frame concerns the inheritance of John Melmoth, whose dying uncle is in possession of a manuscript and a portrait of Melmoth the Wanderer, a mysterious figure who has been alive for 150 years. The narrative spirals into stories that introduce new stories, which are always connected by Melmoth’s attempts to pass off his semi-immortality onto desperate victims. Maturin not only builds upon the formal power of frames to complicate the plot, but also interrogates the power and limits of omniscient narration. Melmoth travels supernaturally, simultaneously appearing in multiple stories, and, although he is known to exist, no one has seen him—except, that is, the characters whom he manipulates throughout. His death marks the conclusion of the story; narrative cannot proceed without its narrator.

In Chapter 6, I focus on James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Hogg’s identity was multifaceted: on one hand self-fashioned in the persona of the Ettrick Shepherd, and on the other unauthorized among the pages of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Thus the conflicting identities of the novel’s central sinner, Robert Wringhim, have often been read autobiographically as a representation of Hogg’s personal struggles. Yet Hogg questions identity in *Confessions* through an experiment with narrative; the novel, as contemporary reviewers noted, ends with the beginning, a dense return to the Editor’s narrative that frames Robert’s memoir, where we are confronted not only with a real letter Hogg sent to *Blackwood’s*, but also with Hogg himself as a character. Most important, however, is Robert’s appearance in the terminal frame. He breaks the frame of the novel, a force anticipated in his earlier Luddite struggles with a weaver’s loom. Unlike the active textual invaders in
Frankenstein and Melmoth, moreover, this villain enters the frame as a preserved corpse in a bog, a phenomenon that allows for the similar preservation of his manuscript.

Chapter 7 marks a turning point in this study as I consider the shifting role of the frame narrative in the Victorian period. The Brontës were the first to breathe new life into frames by imaginatively incorporating them into the complex narrative system of the multi-plot novel. In Wuthering Heights (1847), Emily Brontë echoes several of the themes of her Gothic predecessors: Lockwood as framing storyteller, Nelly’s history of the families as an embedded tale, and a mysterious and dominating central figure. The several frames give the novel a claustrophobic feel, as narrative voice buries narrative voice, but these structures break down when the subject enters the world of the narrator. Brontë inverts the formula by locating the encounter in the opening frame, where Lockwood encounters Heathcliff, ruling his roost in full despotism. Even though Heathcliff is dead when Lockwood returns in the closing pages, his ghost is said to haunt the moors. In Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848), Gilbert Markham frames his story, which appears in a long letter to his friend and brother-in-law, and Helen Graham’s mysterious history is revealed through the embedded text of her diary. Although the novel confronts similar controversial issues of addiction, abuse, and adultery as Wuthering Heights, its narrative frames seemingly function to bury malignance rather than to highlight its forceful escape. At stake in both novels is an anxiety over biological heredity. At the center, or womb, of the nested narrative, a monster is born, who transports the abuses of its parents from the comfort of the central narrative to the terminal frame. The Gothic becomes steeped in issues of reproduction, transmission, and the fear of propagation.

Chapter 8 argues that two of Charles Dickens’s most Gothic novels feature complex frame narratives. The Old Curiosity Shop (1840–41) begins with Master Humphrey’s first-person
account of a nighttime encounter with Nell Trent, who leads him back to the titular shop. Humphrey quickly absconds, however, to let the characters “speak and act for themselves.” A third-person narrator finishes the novel, replete as it is with Gothic themes. But this is only the first of the many frames that surround the novel, as it is embedded within the fictional world of Master Humphrey’s Clock, Dickens’s short-lived periodical. Humphrey’s confession that he has been a part of the novel’s action renders its first half dubious, if not wholly imaginary, and warrants questions concerning blame for Nell’s famous demise. Bleak House (1852–53) houses Dickens’s most experimental and complex narrative structure. And it is, fundamentally, a frame narrative. Esther Summerson’s first-person story appears alongside an omniscient third-person narration. The complexity of Dickens’s project comes in the dynamics of framer and framed. Esther’s voice is past-tense, but comes from the future; the narrator’s is present-tense and of unidentified temporal origins. The narrative dialectic synthesizes at the level of the novel. But neither voice can subsist without the other; they build on each other until Esther’s world concludes with a dramatic dash. Bleak House demonstrates a realism that is rooted not only in Gothic themes, but also in Gothic forms, an unsettling conception of what is subject and what is object, what is fact and what is fiction.

This project concludes with a coda on Henry James and Joseph Conrad, both of whom borrowed directly from early Gothic frame narratives to re-imagine them with powerful results in the Gothic novella. James’s The Turn of the Screw (1898) begins immediately after the title page with a group telling ghost stories. An unnamed narrator records sundry pleadings that Douglas, one member of the group, retrieve a manuscript tale, long ago locked away. The story, told in first person by a governess, begins at chapter 1. The frame world does not return, however, as the

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lla concludes with Miles, the boy whom the governess was sent to care for, dead in her
arms. The ghost-figure of Peter Quint had appeared to the governess outside the window frame,
but what Miles saw when he opened his eyes remains ambiguous. The turn of the screw—the
effect of making a child a victim, and then turning it again to make two children the victims—
stops and binds and strips away the narrative layer of the frame world, never to return. In
Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow tells his story to a group aboard a boat. Unlike *The
Turn of the Screw*, the novella closes back aboard the boat with a profound image, as the
waterway “seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.”\(^{113}\) This return to frame is even
more ominous than the frame failing to return. The world of the narrator, the world closest to the
reader, has been infiltrated by the central horror; or even more disturbing, perhaps the frame
world was the true Gothic darkness all along.

Each of these authors is indebted to Radcliffe, who pioneered the Gothic frame narrative,
borrowing thematic content from her Gothic predecessors and formal models from the novel of
sensibility. In other words, Radcliffe’s novels unite disparate genres to form a new species of
fiction that was spectacularly successful despite critical backlash; that was highly influential on
experimental genres that flourished in the nineteenth-century; and that survives in other forms
even today.\(^{114}\) For Radcliffe, the frame was an aesthetic object that could affect the central
narrative on multiple levels. She was the first Gothic novelist to experiment with the ambiguity
of closure, which became, in such later novels as *Frankenstein* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, one

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\(^{114}\) Foucault muses on Radcliffe’s influence in the nineteenth-century: “Ann Radcliffe’s texts opened the way for a
certain number of resemblances and analogies which have their model or principle in her work. The latter contains
characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be reused by others. In other words, to say that
Ann Radcliffe founded the Gothic horror novel means that in the nineteenth-century Gothic novel one will find, as
in Ann Radcliffe’s works, the theme of 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’
(“What Is an Author?” 114).
of the main sources of horror. Radcliffe was so invested in the force of frames that her framing devices became increasingly complex throughout her career; indeed, by her last novel, the posthumous *Gaston de Blondeville*, the frame dominates the central action and is the most dynamic place to analyze the novel. Radcliffe’s novels provided fodder for criticism, satiated as they are with all the ingredients for the Gothic recipe, but it is her formal innovations with frame narratives that demonstrate her unmatched literary imagination.
CHAPTER 2

“A FRAME OF UNCOMMON SIZE”: ANN RADCLIFFE’S AESTHETIC THRESHOLDS

“Yes, my dear Catherine, it is so indeed; your penetration has not deceived you.
—Oh! that arch eye of yours!—It sees through every thing.”
—Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*¹

‘Have you never looked through an archway . . . and seen the landscape beyond as bright as a lost paradise? That is because there is a frame to the picture . . . You are cut off from something and allowed to look at something. When will people understand that the world is a window and not a blank infinity; a window in a wall of infinite nothing? When I wear this hood I carry my window with me. I say to myself—this is the world that Francis of Assisi saw and loved because it was limited. The hood has the very shape of a Gothic window.’
—G. K. Chesterton, *The Return of Don Quixote*²

Over the course of her short but prolific career, Ann Radcliffe legitimized the Gothic novel by making the incipient thematic elements she borrowed from Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Sophia Lee both accepted and expected. Of these elements, the “found manuscript” is perhaps most prominent.³ The story is a familiar one. A traveler comes across an ancient manuscript, which he edits and presents to readers as authentic. Before Radcliffe, these narratives most often masqueraded themselves as truth in the novel’s prefatory materials. Unlike most of her contemporaries, however, Radcliffe never wrote a preface.⁴ It is thus a mistake to lump Radcliffe together indiscriminately with early promoters of the “found manuscript.” Rather, Radcliffe’s brilliant formal innovations on the device made it the Gothic convention that endured well into the nineteenth century. Radcliffe’s frame narratives always involve English travelers who are provided access to buried (sometimes literally so) histories of the ancient

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² G. K. Chesterton, *The Return of Don Quixote* (Cornwall, UK: House of Stratus, 2008), 120.
⁴ Even Radcliffe’s *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* has no preface, but instead an untitled letter explaining the text’s dual authorship with her husband.
structures they have come to survey. But Radcliffe never writes under the guise of an editor, biographer, or translator. Instead, her frame narratives exist tenuously between the worlds of fiction and reality. In this sense, Radcliffe’s frames become a part of the principle art. They function, then, not merely as boundaries, but also as thresholds between the central narrative and the novel’s readers, as portals of access between representation and reality that blur the borders between the two abstract terms.

For Radcliffe, narrative framing intersects with aesthetics through the language of the sublime and picturesque, categories that appear to exist in opposition, but in fact synthesize in a dialectic that is fundamentally Gothic. Whether architectural (as windows and arches) or formal (as framing devices), frames provide boundaries for the limitlessness of nature and art. But Radcliffe engages this picturesque technology only to challenge it through the powerful force of the sublime.\(^5\) The dynamic between confinement and liberty defines Radcliffe’s novels, and both states provide their own Gothic terrors: locked rooms, narrow halls, and uninhabitable wings are always measured against mammoth mountain ranges, vast valleys, and boundless waters. Yet Radcliffe articulates the fallacy of such categorizations, aesthetic or otherwise, and suggests that fabricated oppositions in fact rely on one another to exist, that boundaries are permeable and impossible to maintain. Frames in Radcliffe’s novels interrogate and confront the slippery definitions of established binaries to demonstrate the instability of truth. To challenge the

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\(^5\) Any eighteenth-century study of the sublime responds to Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke defines the sublime: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (*The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, ed. T. O Mcloughlin and James T. Boulton [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997], 216). In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant writes, “The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality: so that the beautiful seems to be taken as the presentation of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, but the sublime as that of a similar concept of reason. Thus the satisfaction is connected in the first case with the representation of quality, but in this case with that of quantity” (ed. Paul Guyer [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000], 128).
authority of truth over fiction, the hegemony of realism over romance, becomes through
Radcliffe’s pen a Gothic enterprise, and she was the first novelist to engage frames to meet these
ends. Radcliffe was so invested in the power of narrative frames that they become increasingly
complex and significant with each of her novels, and thus the most enticing, exciting, and
memorable part of her fiction is located in the frame.⁶ The found manuscript device, more than a
convention to be ignored or even ridiculed, occasions the dynamic between frame and framed
that complicates the very terms of such categories. Through the freedom of Gothic forms and
themes, Radcliffe experiments with narrative through the economy of aesthetic discourse.

Beginning in her own lifetime, many critics have positioned Radcliffe’s novels alongside
eighteenth-century aesthetics.⁷ It became routine in contemporary reviews to describe her novels
as textual canvases that adapted landscapes painted by Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, and
Gaspard Poussin.⁸ Walter Scott argues that Radcliffe “knew how to paint Italian scenery, which
she could only have seen in the pictures of Claude or Poussin.”⁹ There are, Scott continues,
“descriptive passages” in Radcliffe, which “approach more nearly to the style of Salvator

⁶ Radcliffe’s first published text, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789), has no narrative frame, but by Gaston
de Blondeville, her last novel, the frame dominates the central text.
⁷ See Lynn Epstein, “Mrs. Radcliffe’s Landscapes: The Influence of Three Landscape Painters on Her Nature
Nature’s Other Natures: Landscape in Women’s Writings, 1770-1830,” Women’s Studies 21 (1992): 143-62. For
more recent examples, see Jane Lewis, “‘No Colour of Language’: Radcliffe’s Aesthetic Unbound, Eighteenth-
Century Studies 39.3 (Spring 2006): 377-390; Ada Sharpe, “Orphan, Embroiderer, Insect, Queen: The ‘Elegant and
Ingenious’ Art of Being Ellena in Radcliffe’s The Italian (1796),” European Romantic Review 23.2 (2012): 123-
140; Teri Doerksen, “Framing the Narrative: Illustration and Pictorial Prose in Burney and Radcliffe,” in Book
Illustration in the Long Eighteenth Century: Reconfiguring the Visual Periphery of the Text, ed. Christina Ionescu
and the Nationalization of Taste in Ann Radcliffe’s Continental Landscapes,” European Romantic Review 21.1
(2010): 3-28; and Alice Labourg, “Exhibiting Awful Forms: Mountains and the Pictorial Framing of the Gothic
in Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho,” in Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-Speaking
⁸ Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), and Gaspard Duguet
(Poussin) (1615-1675). Duguet was Poussin’s pupil and brother-in-law.
⁹ Walter Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” in The Novels of Mrs Ann Radcliffe (Edinburgh: Ballantyne,
1824), xiv.
Thus do Radcliffe’s landscapes cover the spectrum between the sublime (Rosa) and the beautiful (Lorrain). Unfortunately, excluding the remarks on landscapes and architecture that appear in her *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*, very little outside Radcliffe’s novels survives that demonstrates her specific interest in aesthetics. Thomas Talfourd, author of the memoir that prefaces Radcliffe’s 1826 posthumous works, cites her journal entry from 1805:

> In a shaded corner, near the chimney, a most exquisite Claude, an evening view, perhaps over the Campagna of Rome. The sight of this picture imparted much of the luxurious repose and satisfaction, which we derive from contemplating the finest scenes of nature. Here was the poet, as well as the painter, touching the imagination, and making you see more than the picture contained. You saw the real light of the sun, you breathed the air of the country, you felt all the circumstances of a luxurious climate on the most serene and beautiful landscape; and the mind thus softened, you almost fancied you heard Italian music in the air.¹¹

Lorrain’s landscape awakens in Radcliffe somatic sensations triggered by the imagination that transcend not only the natural scene, but, more important, the painting itself. For Radcliffe, Lorrain’s skill allows the audience’s imagination to create a personal animated narrative out of a static scene. Scott found Radcliffe possessed this same skill, observing that she had the “eye of a painter, with the spirit of a poet.”¹² Her pictorial descriptions, then, not only paint a scene and

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¹⁰ Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” xv.
¹¹ Thomas Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” in *Gaston de Blondeville, or The Court of Henry III. Keeping Festival in Ardenne, a Romance. St. Alban’s Abbey, a metrical tale; with some poetical pieces. To which is prefixed a memoir of the author, with extracts from her journals*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey, 1826), 42.
¹² Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” vi. Radcliffe’s attention to the language of painting has continued to captivate modern critics. E. J. Clery observes that Rosa’s and Lorrain’s paintings “were dramatic tableaux in search of a narrative, and this is what Radcliffe so successfully supplied” (Introduction to Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998], xii). Alison Milbank sees Radcliffe’s landscape descriptions in *A Sicilian Romance* as
invest it with a potential dynamism, but also blend the poet with the painter, the novel with aesthetic discourse.

In 1819, William Hazlitt argued that Radcliffe’s word paintings fall somewhere between the sublime and beautiful: “Her descriptions of scenery, indeed, are vague and wordy to the last degree; they are neither like Salvator nor Claude, nor nature nor art.” In refusing Radcliffe a categorization, Hazlitt points to Radcliffe’s attention to the picturesque, that amorphous aesthetic category that insists, in David Marshall’s words, on an “uncanny wavering between art and artifice, between reality and representation.” Hazlitt was not the first to point out Radcliffe’s relation to the picturesque. In an essay on *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*, The Critical Review notes that Radcliffe’s “language . . . is in some respects peculiar and unfamiliar, but it is the language that has been formed by all writers who have made picturesque description a study.” William Gilpin defines the picturesque as “objects . . . capable of being *illustrated in painting*” and (like Radcliffe’s “peculiar” language) as “that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture.” In a response to Gilpin’s work, Uvedale Price redefines the picturesque as a category that “appears to hold a station between beauty and sublimity,” but is “more frequently, and more happily blended with them both.” In combining the aesthetic categories of

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17 Uvedale Price, *Essay on the Picturesque* (London: J. Robinson, 1796), 82. In the *Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, Louisa’s family is from “one of those delightful vallies of the Swiss cantons, in which the beautiful and the sublime are so happily united” ([Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995], 61). In Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*, Imlac defines the scope of a poet’s view: “Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little” (*The Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000], 352). Richard Payne Knight entered the debate on the picturesque to refute the definitions of his “friend”
the beautiful and sublime, the picturesque demonstrates that oppositions find harmony within a controlled view.

Locating the picturesque relies on the operation of frames. Marshall observes that the picturesque “represents a point of view that frames the world and turns nature into a series of living tableaux.” And David Punter argues: “The Picturesque frames roughness and variety; the Sublime has to do with being overwhelmed, surprised, being taken out of one’s frame by a scene which, in a parallel way, threatens its boundaries as well as our own.” To frame nature in the language of painting was not only a metaphorical experience, but also a literal practice. Some practitioners of the picturesque carried with them Claude Glass, a framed, tinted mirror that reflected a view of nature that was supposed to resemble a Lorrain painting. With this “knick-knack,” Malcolm Andrews notes, the picturesque traveler “converts Nature’s unmanageable bounty into a frameable possession.” The device affected a viewer’s perspective by closing off space. Another device through which the eager consumer could experience the picturesque was the viewing “Station,” a prescribed topographical point at which the best view of a landscape is presented. The station creates a fixed scene out of dynamic nature and renders the active rambler a static observer. In *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Austen parodies the practice of searching out a geographical station to view the picturesque. The Tilneys scrutinized the “country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste.”

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picturesque, however, Catherine has trouble coming to terms with rejecting nature. For
refashioning nature into painting relies on forcing limits onto what is limitless. Austen points out
the paradox of the picturesque: a practitioner creates art out of nature, but it is necessarily a
limited enterprise that actually restricts the eager imagination.\footnote{For more on this paradox, see Marshall’s \textit{The Frame of Art}, chapter 1, “The Problem of the Picturesque.”} The station at which the Tilneys
view Bath forces the actors to be stationary and occasions an insipid dialogue, which includes
Radcliffe, historical writing, and a “lecture on the picturesque.”\footnote{Austen, \textit{Northanger Abbey}, 125.} A more shrewd Elizabeth in
\textit{Pride and Prejudice} (1813) understands when she is not part of the picture, letting Darcy and
two others walk together on a narrow path, because the “picturesque would be spoilt by

Radcliffe’s novels routinely speak the language of the picturesque, and she employs
framed architectural and environmental structures not only to establish views of the picturesque,
but also to introduce supernatural figures. Windows and archways act most overtly as thresholds
through which Radcliffe presents Gothic effects, which is not surprising, given that they are
perhaps the most distinctive elements of Gothic architecture. Radcliffe acknowledges the fact
that windows and arches often withstand the test of time to remain intact amongst piles of ruins.
During a visit to Kenilworth, the setting for \textit{Gaston de Blondeville} (1826), she records: “This
was once the great hall, or banqueting-room. Its three beautiful pointed window-frames are there
still; and the arch of a Gothic door, most elegantly twined with vine-leaves, all now hung and
clustered with the richest drapery of ivy.”\footnote{Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 37.} When windows and arches survive in ruins, they
create natural viewing stations for the picturesque and serve as connective temporal portals: one
may see and experience the same scene through a surviving frame as previous viewers did in a time when the edifice was still standing.

For Radcliffe, windows create domestic picturesque views of outside nature. In *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Madame la Motte selects a room with a “large Gothic window, that descended almost to the floor, admitting a prospect of the lawn, and the picturesque scenery of the surrounding woods.” And Adeline stares through her “chamber window” at a sunset, which “threw a fiery gleam athwart the woods, and upon some scattered fragments of the ruins, which she could not gaze upon with indifference” (152). Radcliffe’s castles repeatedly present various, but cooperative, views of nature. Elizabeth Bohls argues that windows in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) represent the novel’s “schizophrenic division into picturesque dream and sublime nightmare.” This is in part because Radcliffe, like any thoughtful late eighteenth-century architect, positions windows in the text that afford carefully managed views of nature’s diverse panorama. The castle in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) borders the sea on one side and looks out into an expanse of woods on the other, an effect mirrored in Julia’s study: “one of its windows looked upon the sea, beyond which was faintly seen, skirting the horizon, the dark rocky coast of Calabria; the other opened towards a part of the castle, and afforded a prospect of

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26 This is no more apparent than in Emily’s window-view at Castle Udolpho: “From her casement she looked out upon the wild grandeur of the scene, closed nearly on all sides by alpine steeps, whose tops, peeping over each other, faded from the eye in misty hues, while the promontories below were dark with woods, that swept down to their base, and stretched along the narrow vallies. The rich pomp of these woods was particularly delightful to Emily; and she viewed with astonishment the fortifications of the castle spreading along a vast extent of rock, and now partly in decay, the grandeur of the ramparts below, and the towers and battlements and various features of the fabric above. From these her sight wandered over the cliffs and woods into the valley, along which foamed a broad and rapid stream, seen falling among the crags of an opposite mountain, now flashing in the sun-beams, and now shadowed by over-arching pines, till it was entirely concealed by their thick foliage. Again it burst from beneath this darkness in one broad sheet of foam, and fell thundering into the vale. Nearer, towards the west, opened the mountain-vista, which Emily had viewed with such sublime emotion, on her approach to the castle: a thin dusky vapour, that rose from the valley, overspread its features with a sweet obscurity” (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998], 241-242; hereafter cited parenthetically).


the neighbouring woods” (6). Radcliffe’s description of a viewing pavilion in The Mysteries of Udolpho perfectly summarizes the way that windows function, like Claude Glass, to turn nature into art by making the limitless and unruly framed and obedient:

One window opened upon a romantic glade, where the eye roved among the woody recesses, and the scene was bounded only by a lengthened pomp of groves; from another, the woods receding disclosed the distant summits of the Pyrenees; a third fronted an avenue, beyond which the grey towers of Chateau-le-Blanc, and a picturesque part of its ruin were seen partially among the foliage; while a fourth gave, between the trees, a glimpse of the green pastures and villages, that diversify the banks of the Aude. The Mediterranean, with the bold cliffs, that overlooked its shores, were the grand objects of a fifth window, and the others gave, in different points of view, the wild scenery of the woods.29

The pavilion acts as a natural art gallery; each window presents a carefully managed, framed view of a picturesque scene. Radcliffe’s readers participate in the view and experience a visual cornucopia; scene after scene flits before the eye like a magic lantern, from woods to mountains, castle ruins, pastures, and promontories. The pavilion windows frame these distinct views, which

29 Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, 482. A similar pavilion appears in A Sicilian Romance: “From this spot the eye had an almost boundless range of sea and land. It commanded the straits of Messina, with the opposite shores of Calabria, and a great extent of the wild and picturesque scenery of Sicily. Mount Etna, crowned with eternal snows, and shooting from among the clouds, formed a grand and sublime picture in the background of the scene” (6). In Udolpho, Radcliffe obsesses over similar multifaceted domestic views. The novel opens: “On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vine, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenees, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east, the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay” (1).
would prove too vast to capture effectively without them, and make a comforting picturesque out of the potentially boundless sublime of the diverse scenes.

Windows possess a dual purpose for Radcliffe of both immersion and division. While they offer enticing views, they also never fail to remind the viewer that she is not part of the scene. For Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, “The window becomes an ambivalent icon,” Bohls observes: “the view outside is a source of strength, but the frame itself, set in the castle’s thick walls, reminds her she is a prisoner.”30 This is true as well of Julia in *A Sicilian Romance*. Kept confined by the marchioness, Julia pines for freedom at windows and imagines scenes she fears she will never see. Yet these same windows also serve as the passages to freedom, both literal and figurative. Julia reveals the means for her escape: “windows of which being low and near to the terrace, suited our purpose” (106).31 By making the natural world into an artistic scene, windows dramatize an imaginative world that offers a welcome alternative to domestic confinement. By literally escaping through windows, Radcliffe’s heroines enter the world of the picture and become figures in the framed canvas. Through the looking glass, in a sense, they proceed into their imaginative dreamscapes, which they always negotiate with more skill and imagination than those in pursuit.32

However, the very permeability of windows also permits domestic views from the outside, making them simultaneously therapeutic and unnerving. The Duke, wandering about the labyrinthine countryside in *A Sicilian Romance*, “look[ed] through the window, [and] observed a

30 Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*, 226. A similar insistence on the duality of windows occurs in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* when Osbert is “conveyed from the tower into a more centrical part of the castle, to an apartment spacious but gloomy, whose gothic windows partly excluding light, threw a solemnity around, which chilled the heart almost to horror” (49).
31 In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Annette cries, “how am I to get out, unless I jump through the window? But that I should not mind so much, if the casements here were not all so high” (389).
32 Milbank argues that Radcliffe determines the fate of characters in *A Sicilian Romance* through their ability to interpret the pictorial frames of reference that the series of landscapes provide (Introduction to *A Sicilian Romance*, xviii).
man and woman in the habit of peasants seated at their supper” (81). Stalking Ellena’s apartment in *The Italian* (1797), Vivaldi gains “full view of her and the apartment” through a window.33 Radcliffe prevents this view later, however. Looking to spy on a domestic scene, Paulo angrily vociferates, “‘if there was another window! What foolish people to build a cottage with no window near the door! . . . Well! if ever I build a cottage, there shall be a window near—’” (154). Paulo’s frustration speaks to a gendered dynamic pertaining to how windows can and should be used. Whereas Radcliffe’s heroines look out and treat the scene as a means for literal and emotional escape, the men use windows to spy for malicious purposes. The most striking example of this gendered division occurs in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. When Emily hears strange music from outside her window, her imagination takes hold as she pictures the player to be her lost love Valancourt. Radcliffe keeps both her characters and readers in the dark until she reveals the musician to be Du Pont, a disappointing reality, which suggests that the imaginative picture of the outside world is illusory and potentially dangerous when viewed through the cloistered and suppressed space of the real castle. This dynamic also speaks to Kate Ferguson Ellis’s reading of the Gothic home as an unsafe environment that both houses innocent women and prevents the passage of lascivious men.34 Emily’s focus is outward and ideal—Du Pont’s inward and uncomfortably real.

Whereas windows frame one-sided picturesque views and require domestic detention to create a contrast with outdoor beauty, the arch functions as an open frame, a gateway that can be passed through and viewed without confinement from both sides. While windows provide an visual means for accessing natural views from domestic spaces, arches allow physical bodies to pass from one aesthetic realm to another; thus a character may disturb boundaries by traversing

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through the arch-frame from a space of representation into reality. A traveler may also invert these categories, as his passage through the arch makes what was the picturesque scene his reality, and vice versa. Arches thus prove to be even more disturbing points of access than windows; while the latter appears to provide shelter, the former invites penetration and transportation.

Radcliffe expresses her interest in arches in her journal entry describing a trip to Blenheim Palace: “The triumphal arch, at that entrance, has too much the air of a merely handsome gateway.” For Radcliffe, the arch should be acknowledged for its significance in the framing of structure and scene as a centerpiece rather than an ornament. This argument recalls Derrida’s conception of the parergon, the frame which, instead of being considered an appendage, is a critical component to the art. Unlike a rectangular doorway, for example, the arch is predicated on its artistry that relies on a keystone to support its structure. As with windows, furthermore, arches act like Claude-Glass and frame picturesque views. Radcliffe writes in *A Sicilian Romance*, “An arch of singular magnificence remained almost entire, beyond which appeared wild cliffs retiring in grand perspective” (125). Even natural objects can act as framing archways: in *The Romance of the Forest*, Louis observes an “obscure recess, over-arched with high trees, whose interwoven branches secluded the direct rays of the sun, and admitted only a sort of solemn twilight” (73). A conversation between enemies in *The Italian* illuminates how Radcliffe conceived of arches as frames. Schedoni calls an arch a “‘striking relique of antiquity,’” and Vivaldi replies:

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35 Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 39.
36 Radcliffe experiments with environmental gateways early in her career. When Osbert meets Alleyn in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, a climactic early moment in the novel, it is because, “presented with only the bold outlines of uncultivated nature, rocks pile on rocks, cataracts and vast moors unmarked by the foot of traveler, he lost the path which he had himself made” (5-6). Osbert then stumbles upon Alleyn in “most beautifully romantic spot he had ever seen. It was a valley almost surrounded by a barrier of wild rocks, whose base was shaded with thick woods of pine and fir” (6).
‘that arch suspended between two rocks, the one overtopped by the towers of the fortress, the other shadowed with pine and broad oak, has a fine effect. But a picture of it would want human figures. Now either the grotesque shapes of banditti lurking within the ruin, as if ready to start out upon the traveller, or a friar rolled up in his black garments, just stealing forth from under the shade of the arch, and looking like some supernatural messenger of evil, would finish the piece.’ (49-50)

Vivaldi reveals himself not only to be student of the picturesque, but also the Gothic. It is a moment of Romantic irony as Vivaldi explains Radcliffe’s Gothic while being himself a part of it. He desires figures to populate the scene: banditti (ubiquitous threats in Radcliffe’s novels) or a mysterious monk in black—the very man, Schedoni, to whom he is speaking. Vivaldi uses the language of the picturesque in hopes of gaining information; he puts Schedoni into his picture in hopes of containing and manipulating the villain. His attempt proves unsuccessful, however, as Vivaldi must instead enter into Schedoni’s frame, and become part of the dark art of the Inquisition, to foil his antithesis.

As much as archways frame the picturesque, they also serve to house Gothic views, as supernatural figures materialize and disappear under their parameters. In the opening chapters of *The Italian*, when Vivaldi “emerge[s] from the dark arch of a ruin” (12), he encounters the mysterious figure who has been stalking him; the figure quickly disappears, and Vivaldi “did not perceive any person issue from the arch into the highway” (20). Schedoni, the supernatural intrigue of the novel, appears and disappears through arches, invading the world of Vivaldi and Ellena only to vanish into the inscrutable darkness of the Inquisition. Although Vivaldi follows Schedoni into the depths of mystery, he is time and again foiled by his nemesis. In the dungeons
of the Inquisition, however, questions are rather surprisingly resolved rather than complicated. The more Vivaldi presses into the secret world, the more information he learns. In a sense, Vivaldi must use the archway to access answers to Schedoni’s mysterious art; he becomes an actor in the covert negotiations of the Inquisition where he routinely (and literally) lifts the veil on its secrets.

By Gaston de Blondeville, the arch acts as a portal for viewing the dead. An eccentric antiquary contends that the ghost of Elizabeth “stood in the arch some time with a very stern look; but I never rightly understood what became of her.” As with the ghost in the central narrative of the novel, famous for being the only supernatural element that Radcliffe fails to explain away, the ghost of the frame is provided no resolution. It is even more pertinent than the main narrative ghost because it more prominently involves a figure of English history. Since the ghost is referred to in the frame that exists closer to the reality of the reader, it is in some ways more substantial, more real. In fact, Simpson deems the Elizabeth ghost story “a true history” (12), equating its authenticity to the main narrative’s “Trew Chronique.” The archway through which Elizabeth’s ghost materializes provides a structural and temporal link between the introductory frame and the central manuscript; if Elizabeth haunts the grounds, then so too may the figures of Radcliffe’s historical tale appear to visitors of the ruins. The arch is the frame through which these narrative worlds meet; it is an architectural object that represents the framing of the novel’s form.

Radcliffe’s interest in the aesthetics of framing reveals itself most forcibly in the formal composition of her novels. Since The Mysteries of Udolpho prominently showcases Radcliffe’s engagement with late-eighteenth-century aesthetics, it is prudent to begin there to examine how she uses a frame—in this case thematic and geographic—to surround the sublime landscape of

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The novel is a frame narrative writ large. By building a framework of Emily’s life in the opening and terminal sections of the novel, Radcliffe exerts a force on the central portion that makes Castle Udolpho even more imprisoning and claustrophobic. In his “Memoir,” Talfourd writes, “No exertion of the faculties appears more enviable than that of forming the outline of a great tale, like ‘The Mysteries of Udolpho;’ bringing out into distinctness all the hints and dim pictures, which have long floated in the mind.” Talfourd suggests that reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is like looking at nature through the mirror of Claude Glass, obscure yet distinct, boundless yet framed.

Although Emily’s imprisonment at Castle Udolpho by the power-hungry Montoni proves the most cited and celebrated portion of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, it occupies but the central third of the novel, and is surrounded by lengthy accounts of Emily’s adventures outside Montoni’s grasp. Thus the Gothic castle is framed by open spaces of travel and flight, making its confines even more disturbingly claustrophobic. Terry Castle urges readers not to divide the novel into “two ontologically distinct realms,” but rather to see in the “frame-world” examples of the displaced supernatural. Although Gothic themes saturate the text throughout, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is still presented as a frame, its labyrinthine castle “framed at either end,” Bohls

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38 Rictor Norton examines Radcliffe’s relation to aesthetics and observes that her “scenes are ‘framed’ by windows, arches or overhanging trees, and their ‘perspective’ is called to our attention” (Mistress of Udolpho [London: Leicester UP, 1999], 76). Francesca Orestano argues that the “most powerful connection” between the picturesque and Radcliffe’s novels is “[o]n the one hand in the primacy of the eye, in its entirely sensuous relationship with surfaces, on the other in the ‘imperfect writing’ that translates those inscriptions, those signifiers, into a verbal text not syntactically chained to them, but discursively infected by the gatherings of the eye as metonymically contagious” (“Picturesque, a Transformation: William Gilpin’s Aesthetics and Ann Radcliffe’s Visual Imagination,” *Textus* 18 [2005]: 56).


40 Talfourd’s words mirror Willoughton’s assessment of a Miltonic line in “On the Supernatural in Poetry”: “his image imparts more of terror than of horror; for it is not distinctly pictured forth, but is seen in glimpses through obscuring shades, the great outlines only appearing, which excite the imagination to complete the rest” (Ann Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” *New Monthly Magazine* 1 [1826]: 150).

observes, “by hundreds of pages of picturesque travelogue.” In his *Observations of the River Wye* (1782), William Gilpin contends that “when we introduce a scene on canvas; when the eye is to be confined within the frame of a picture . . . the aids of art become more important; and we want the castle or abbey, to give consequence to the scene.” To add just this interest to her picturesque scene, Radcliffe introduces the sublime Castle Udolpho.

Emily is initially excited to retreat to the castle, hoping there to avoid the unwanted attentions of Count Morano. The party depart on their voyage, and the castle eventually comes into view. “‘There,’” Montoni ominously declares, “‘is Udolpho’” (226). Emily surveys the scene: “‘Silent lonely and sublime,’” the castle “‘seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary region’” (227). The appearance of Castle Udolpho in the text is truly startling; as it comes at exactly thirty-three percent of the way through the novel, Radcliffe appears carefully to have planned its place in the narrative. Furthermore, Emily is finally able to pass through the “‘dreadful gates’” (451) and escape the castle at sixty-seven percent of the novel, almost exactly two-thirds through. Thus, remarkably, Emily’s confinement at the castle is framed equally on both sides, which makes the central portion appear even more like a sublime painting. The opening and terminal frames to the scenes at the castle concentrate the central action and establish narrative borders that characters such as Emily’s father and Valancourt cannot transgress. It is up to Emily, then, as a figure in the painting, to survive and mature without the men whom she loves.

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42 Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*, 210. The narrator does interject at the novel’s conclusion with a moral: “O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!

And, if the weak hand, that has recorded this tale, has, by its scenes, beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow, or, by its moral, taught him to sustain it—the effort, however humble, has not been vain, nor is the writer unrewarded” (672).

Inside the harrowing central portion of *Udolpho* lies the novel’s central mystery of the veiled portrait. Ignoring the warnings of her servant Annette, Emily, with the same curiosity that compels la Motte to open the chest in *The Romance of the Forest*, approaches the room somewhat agitated; its connection with the late lady of the castle, and the conversation of Annette, together with the circumstance of the veil, throwing a mystery over the subject, that excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink.

Emily passed on with faltering steps, and having paused a moment at the door, before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor. (248-249)

First, it is important that what Emily saw “was no picture,” but rather something else entirely that has been placed deceptively within a frame. She is accustomed, through the force of her window-frame, to see picturesque scenes. Whatever is contained within the frame—all the more troubling because it is surrounded by customary portraits—is not picturesque. Nor is it sublime. Radcliffe’s oft-cited “essay,” titled “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” whose origins and claims I call into question below, defines effects of terror and horror. Through the obscurity of anticipation, the former excites the senses, while the latter “contracts, freezes, and nearly
In this sense, since Emily suffers through horror when she lifts the veil, she is further from experiencing the sublime, which often is inspired by a feeling of terror. Neither sublime nor picturesque (and certainly not beautiful), the figure behind the veil is abject, so removed from both the symbolic and aesthetic order that it horrifies and paralyzes its consumer.

The “waxen image” that Emily mistakes for a corpse also functions as a metonym for not only the supernatural horrors of the castle, but also the novel itself. Behind the veil lies not the ethereal or the divine, but rather the material, the man-made, the “horribly natural” (663). And as with the sections of Emily’s picturesque freedom that frame the sublime horror of Castle Udolpho, the object is “enclosed in a frame of uncommon size” (248). It is important to consider the waxen effigy as a corporeal frame, but one that is false or absent, whose lack echoes St. Aubert’s dead and soulless body: “The features, placid and serene, told the nature of the last sensations, that had lingered in the now deserted frame” (82-83). The wax figure is an artistic representation of what was reality, and although Emily’s initial shock invests the wax with an energy that turns out to be illusory, she is participating in the same “penance” forced upon an earlier monk, who was impelled to look on the figure, which “serv[ed] as a memento of the condition at which he must himself arrive” (662). Descendents of this monk had since ceased practicing this penance, but Emily recommences the act to a literal end: to her the figure is the moldering remains of Lady Laurentini and thus a horrifying harbinger of her fate inside the castle under the murderous reign of Montoni. If the representation contained within the “uncommon” frame is false, we might consider the central section of Emily’s stay at Castle Udolpho as similarly illusory, the product of a lively imagination, which creates a story to fill the gaps of information.

This most famous of any Radcliffian scene was highlighted in the unauthorized chapbook of *Udolpho* that was published in 1802, titled *The Veiled Picture*. Much of the frame that surrounds Emily’s adventures in the castle was removed and several names were changed.\(^{45}\) Not surprisingly the scene was also featured by the novel’s later illustrators. Although Radcliffe had no hand in selecting or supervising the images that appeared in later editions of her novels, it is important to examine how contemporary readers imagined the aesthetics of framing that went with the famous veil scene. Limbird’s *British Novelist* series issued *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as their inaugural publication in 1824.\(^{46}\) The series features many “Illustrated Embellishments,” one of which depicts Emily recoiling in horror after lifting the veil (fig. 1).\(^{47}\) In the engraving, the heavily gilded and framed, veiled picture appears between two portraits of a woman and a man. The adjacent portraits act themselves as frames for the centerpiece where Radcliffe veils the illusory wax effigy. At play here is a complex dynamic between representations of art and reality. As with the portraits on either side of the veil, the picturesque takes three-dimensional objects and renders them flat against a bordered canvas. Behind the veil, however, “within a recess of the wall” lays the waxen model of a dead body (662). The veiled figure that Emily takes for a real body inhabits this three-dimensional space. But it is only a representation of nature, art occupying the dimension of reality, the kind of dynamism Radcliffe imagines Lorrain’s painting to possess.

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\(^{45}\) For example, Udolpho was changed to Gorgono and Emily St. Aubert to Emily D’Orville.

\(^{46}\) John Limbird (1796-1883) hoped to supply consumers with cheaper versions of classic novels. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* cost one-sixth of its “usual price,” and one-third the price of the “cheapest,” making the novel available at “little more than the expense of the loan of it from a circulating library” (“Limbird’s British Novelist,” *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, Instruction* 2 [1823]: 272).

\(^{47}\) “Limbird’s British Novelist,” 272.
Although *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a frame narrative, it is only implicitly so, and a thematic and formal analysis, a certain lifting of the veil, is required to demonstrate its structure. Fortunately, Radcliffe was far more explicit in marking the narrative framing in her other novels, most of which exploit the found manuscript tradition to experiment with aesthetic discourses and claims of truth. Following the linear, third-person structure of her first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), Radcliffe begins *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) with an epigraph—“I could a tale unfold”—that provides the first frame for the plot of the novel. The phrase suggests that the story that follows is as shocking as the “secrets” of the “prison house” of purgatory that Hamlet’s father is forbidden to reveal to mortal ears.\(^4^8\) The epigraph also sets the stage for the novel’s themes of revenge, murder, ambition, and secrecy. We learn early on that “A veil of mystery enveloped that part of the castle, which it now seemed impossible should ever be penetrated” (12-13). Because the secret tale *is* gradually unfolded, *A Sicilian Romance* in fact

follows an opposite track from *Hamlet*. Whereas Radcliffe waits to reveal that Julia and Emilia’s mother is alive and imprisoned in what was believed to be the uninhabitable half of the castle, Hamlet learns the secret of his father’s murder in Act I. While Hamlet’s father “could a tale unfold,” Radcliffe *does* the veil remove. We see the purgatory of the sealed-off ruin, but the alleged ghost is in fact a living mother. Perhaps most important is that *Hamlet* itself (or rather Hamlet himself) embeds another play, *The Mouse-trap*, and thus sets a stage within a stage, a frame within a frame. That the action in *A Sicilian Romance* occurs at the “close of the sixteenth century,” very close indeed to *Hamlet* and the even more explicitly framed *The Taming of the Shrew*, suggests that Radcliffe had Shakespearean themes and form in mind while crafting the novel.

The frame narrative to *A Sicilian Romance* begins immediately after the title page and introduces an anonymous and un-gendered traveler in Sicily who stops to contemplate human mortality over some ruins: “‘Thus . . . shall the present generation—he who now sinks in misery—and he who now swims in pleasure, alike pass away and be forgotten’” (1). By using the enduring ruins to reflect on the transience of human life, Radcliffe connects the disparate worlds of the frame and the central narrative. As the figure admires the picturesque grandeur of the ruins, a friar interrupts, relating that “‘A solemn history belongs to this castle . . . which is too long and intricate for me to relate. It is, however, contained in a manuscript in our library’” (1). As with later found manuscripts in *The Italian* and *Gaston de Blondeville*, the document will transform from unique library artifact to reproducible public commodity through the eventual dissemination of its words as a novel. The manuscript, “‘left as legacy’” to the convent by a descendent of the Mazzini family, is transcribed into “abstracts” by the traveler, who “arranged

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49 See chapter 4 on Shelley’s *The Last Man* for more on un-gendered figures in a frame narrative.
The editor gets the definitive word in the novel, providing a pithy moral for readers who have been quickly transported back to the present, back to the distant perspective of Protestant England. This formal move to close the frame, to wrap the central text in the present-day perspective of an English traveler, effectively disassociates the romantic, yet dangerous, foreign (and Catholic) world from the novel’s readers. The terminal frame, however, remains unsatisfying, and perhaps intentionally so. The English traveler attempts to provide a moral that will justify, encompass, and conclude. He fails in his overconfident move to speak for his readers, to assume that the unruly text presents a universal truth. This struggle for objective finality demonstrates a tension between frame and framed, a tenuous narrative relationship that speaks to the Gothic project.

This formal envelopment of the central narrative demonstrates the theme of confinement that pervades Radcliffe’s novels, but is especially relevant to *A Sicilian Romance*. Sequestered in Castle Mazzini by their stepmother, the marchioness, Julia and Emilia pine for escape. Julia accomplishes this feat in a plan to elope with Hippolitus, but she always finds herself back at the castle. Even an attempted escape by ship is foiled by a storm that wrecks the ship back on the Sicilian coast. The island thus represents the borders of the central narration from which
characters cannot escape. Reminiscent of *The Tempest*, characters fall under the despotic and almost magical rule of a Prospero-like Marquis.\textsuperscript{50} As with Vivaldi in *The Italian*, Julia’s plans for escape can never work because she must instead bury herself deeper in the mystery to resolve the narrative; it is a Chinese finger trap: the more she tries to flee outward, the more she is trapped. She finds herself a prisoner again in the castle, but this time in its deepest, darkest wing where the great secret of the novel, her living mother, resides. What Julia tries to escape from is actually what she needed to find. Thus does the island magnetically draw everything in to focus the topos of the novel on one dramatic tableau, the Castle Mazzini, while simultaneously distancing the outside world of the frame.

Although the frame narrative is so prominent in *A Sicilian Romance*, Radcliffe abandons the trope in her next novel, *The Romance of the Forest*, in favor of beginning *in medias res* as characters enter a carriage and flee from Paris. In so doing, the novel fails to appeal initially to contemporary English readers with a familiar traveler and a mysterious manuscript. The opening epigraph, a misquotation from one of Banquo’s murderers in *Macbeth*, sets the stage for la Motte’s desperate measures to repair his mistakes. However, Radcliffe does experiment with the “found manuscript” device in *The Romance of the Forest* by making it an integral part of the main narrative.\textsuperscript{51} Although *The Romance of the Forest* appears to be without a narrative frame, if we examine the importance of two hypodiegetic stories—Adeline’s autobiographical tale and the fragmented central manuscript she discovers—together with the complex means through which

\textsuperscript{50} In an 1811 journal entry during a trip to the Isle of Wight, Radcliffe mentions *The Tempest*: “This resounding of the distant surge on a rocky shore might have given Shakespeare his idea when he makes Ferdinand, in the Tempest, hear, amidst the storm, bells ringing his father’s dirge” (Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 79). Norton contends that Radcliffe “seems to have memorized” several Shakespeare plays, including *The Tempest (Mistress of Udolpho, 73)*, but no critic has pointed to the allusion in *A Sicilian Romance*.
\textsuperscript{51} Jane Austen’s gentle, if not reverential, parody in *Northanger Abbey* is not meant to address the formal model of the found-manuscript-as-narrative-frame, but rather alludes to the central-narrative manuscript Adeline discovers in *The Romance of the Forest*. Robert Miles observes, the “spoof of the discovered manuscript, divests Radcliffe of interiority, for [Henry Tilney] reduces her plot to the level of meaningless motifs, whereas Catherine reinserts it” (*Gothic Writing, 1750-1820: A Genealogy* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002], 145).
Radcliffe weaves them into the main narrative, the novel bears consideration, like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as a frame narrative writ large. Just as Radcliffe moves in and out of her frames in *A Sicilian Romance*, Adeline’s tale is divided from the main text with a long dash and begins like many first person accounts: “I am the only child . . . of Louis de St. Pierre, a chevalier of reputable family, but of small fortune, who for many years resided at Paris” (35). Adeline pauses: “Pardon, Madam, a relation of these trivial circumstances; the strong vicissitudes of feeling which they impressed upon my heart, make me think them important, when they are, perhaps, only disgusting” (39). From this point on, Adeline’s tale becomes incorporated into the text of the main narrative: Madame la Motte engages Adeline in conversation to continue, but the tale never receives a terminal dash to indicate its completion.

During Adeline’s confinement in Abbey St. Clair, she combs for clues a room filled with dusty miscellany, a pile of which she upsets in the darkness. She spies a manuscript, which has floated down atop the mess:

> It was a small roll of paper, tied with a string, and covered with dust. Adeline took it up, and on opening it perceived an handwriting. She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated, that she found this difficult, though what few words were legible impressed her with curiosity and terror, and induced her to return with it immediately to her chamber. (116)

As with all Radcliffean secrets, Adeline’s perusal of the document is several times interrupted over the course of two chapters. She finally works up the nerve to confront la Motte about the manuscript. “I have run my eye over it,” he replies, “but it is so much obscured by time that it

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52 This warrants a comparison to Victor Frankenstein’s narrative. See chapter 3.
53 Miles argues: “the secret manuscript duplicates in miniature the wider conditions of the woman writer, where the disciplines of propriety enforce concealment. We observe Adeline ‘discovering’ a secret script idealizing her origins. But the text framing this discovery invites twofold recognitions: firstly, that the need to romanticize origins is an originating impulse of romance, and secondly, that this need to ‘romanticize’ is a consequence of repression” (*Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995], 142).
can scarcely be decyphered. It appears to exhibit a strange romantic story; and I do not wonder, that after you had suffered its terrors to impress your imagination, you fancied you saw spectres, and heard wondrous noises”” (144). La Motte accuses Adeline of having let her imagination, stirred from the subject of the “romantic story,” run wild. On one hand, Radcliffe here anticipates the policy of later authors, Austen and Scott among them, to indict women readers of the Radcliffe’s Gothic. But la Motte also attempts to render the “found manuscript” a fiction, which furthers the authenticity of the frame that he occupies. The manuscript is proven to be factual, however, and connected intimately to Adeline’s own history she earlier related as a hypodiegetic tale, which prompts her to preserve it with the “pious enthusiasm so sacred a relique deserved” (355). When la Motte undermines Adeline’s capacity as a reader, he attempts to privilege the authority of male readers. Yet because his assessment proves deceptive, and her reading accurate, we must question the faculty of all men to perceive truth who find manuscripts across Radcliffe’s corpus. This moment insists on an inquiry into these English travelers whose narrative authority we take for granted. By Gaston de Blondeville, the frame traveler becomes a figure of dubious authority, in many ways more a fiction than the story he introduces.

While Adeline’s history in The Romance of the Forest—provided through her oral tale and her father’s manuscript—potentially makes the rest of the novel a frame to introduce and conclude, Radcliffe also includes a clever opening device that plays with questions of authenticity. Although the novel begins with la Motte’s words while fleeing Paris, the narrator quickly interjects with a claim for truth that assumes a universal understanding from her readership, and thus provides an alternative from to the frame narrative. Shortly after the novel begins, the narrator reasons,
Whoever has read Guyot de Pitaval, the most faithful of those writers who record the proceedings in the Parliamentary Courts of Paris, during the seventeenth century, must surely remember the striking story of Pierre de la Motte, and the Marquis Phillipe de Montalt: let all such, therefore, be informed, that the person here introduced to their notice was that individual Pierre de la Motte. (2)

Norton calls this move a “specious historical framework” both because Radcliffe borrowed her information from Charlotte Smith’s translation of de Pitaval (The Romance of Real Life [1787]) and because de Pitaval never refers to la Motte or de Montalt in his court documents.\(^{54}\)

Furthermore, Radcliffe reveals the specific dates of the novel only through the writing of her characters: la Motte etches 1658 in a doorframe, and Adeline’s father writes that he was captured in 1642. The timeline for Radcliffe’s narrative remains a vague seventeenth century, and her claim to consult de Pitaval is mischievous. That she attempts to prove the authenticity of her narrative, only to render it apocryphal to readers of either de Pitaval or Smith, demonstrates her concern with exposing the impossibility of true history—a subject she would explore more forcibly and imaginatively in The Italian and Gaston de Blondville. For the narrative experimentation formed through the framing device demonstrates that the Gothic is no less invented than the “true histories” championed as real.

Radcliffe crafted the most intricate and experimental plot of her career in The Italian (1797), which followed the unprecedented successes of The Romance of the Forest and The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794).\(^{55}\) As with A Sicilian Romance, the frame narrative of The Italian begins immediately and stands apart from the central narrative’s first chapter. The opening frame

\(^{54}\) Norton, The Mistress of Udolpho, 83.

\(^{55}\) The Mysteries of Udolpho also pauses for the hypodiegetic stories, “The Provençal Tale” and “a brief history of Laurentini di Udolpho.” The former Radcliffe qualifies like she might her novels: “it is strongly tinctured with the superstition of the times” (552).
is the most celebrated part of what is today Radcliffe’s most critically appreciated novel.

“Nothing can be finer than the opening of this story,” Anna Laetitia Barbauld writes in her Introduction to Radcliffe for *The British Novelists* (1810): “This prelude, like the tuning of an instrument by a skilful hand, has the effect of producing at once in the mind a tone of feeling correspondent to the future story.”56 In his “Memoir” of Radcliffe published for *Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library* (1824), Walter Scott writes, “Most writers of romance have been desirous to introduce their narrative to the reader, in some manner which might at once excite interest, and prepare his mind for the species of excitation which it was the author’s object to produce. In *The Italian*, this has been achieved by Mrs Radcliffe with an uncommon degree of felicity, nor is there any part of the romance itself which is more striking, than its impressive commencement.”57 And Talfourd argues that the opening frame “impresses the reader with awe.”58

Still, in our time, *The Italian’s* frame has proved perplexing to critics as much as it has impressed. E. J. Clery has called the frame a “small masterpiece of ideological self-consciousness and formal dexterity.”59 And Rictor Norton argues that it exemplifies Radcliffe’s “dazzling technical proficiency.”60 Yet others find it disjointed from the central narrative. Liz Belamy sees the frame as “entirely irrelevant to the plot of the novel,” and Cannon Schmitt locates a “lack of direct plot connection between prologue and tale.”61 Despite these reservations, the frame proves indispensible to the thematic core of the novel. We should not divorce

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57 Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” ix.
58 Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 82.
59 Clery, Introduction to *The Italian*, xiii.
Radcliffe’s structural strategies from the elements of narrative. The manuscript we become privy to immediately in the space of *The Italian*’s frame provides a foundation for the main narrative’s themes of truth, secrecy, and duplicity. We access, along with the English traveler, a story that should remain secret, that was confessed with the promise of divinely appointed confidentiality. Thus, the frame not only produces a “tone of feeling correspondent to the future story,” as Barbauld notes, and “prepare[s] the mind,” as Scott observes, but it also introduces and undermines the confessional, the paradoxical space—material and memorial—where secrets are both hidden and revealed.

The frame opens upon a party of English travelers at the portico of an ancient Neapolitan church in 1764. The travelers enter the church and are accosted, as in *A Sicilian Romance*, by a friar, who points out “objects in the church, which were most worthy of attention” (1). The friar quickly disappears during a conversation between an Englishman and “An Italian gentleman, who was of the party” (2). It is this Italian, rather than the friar, who is in possession of the manuscript “written by a student of Padua” that details a singular and horrifying confession, which “became public” (4). That the subject-matter of the confession has already transgressed its sacred boundaries within the church to be studied and disseminated partially absolves the players in the frame from their culpability in further publicizing the secret. Yet the Englishman translates, we must assume, the student’s Italian prose into English (a foreshadowing of an environmental transformation that occurs at the end of the novel), and then forms it into a novel to be consumed and circulated by curious readers.

Before the manuscript is introduced, however, the travelers’ attention is excited by a man “too singular in his conduct, to pass unnoticed” (1). This man, “a tall thin figure” with an eye “expressive of uncommon ferocity” (1), Radcliffe ingeniously (and disingenuously) casts as an
uncanny mirror of Schedoni, the troubled villain of the central narrative, who is also “tall, and . . . extremely thin,” with a “large melancholy eye, which approached to horror” (34-35). By not only making this opening figure resemble Schedoni, but also characterizing him as an “assassin,” in spite of the Italian’s dubious claim that he “has no relation, with what I am about to mention” (3), Radcliffe establishes a novel-long uncertainty about whether Schedoni survives. The frame narrative for The Italian is only six years after the central action, unlike Radcliffe’s other frames which set present-day visitors against ancient ruins.62 Thus, only after a “livid corse was all that remained” (404), just two short chapters from the novel’s dénouement, are we assured that the mysterious figure in the frame is not Schedoni.

This is the only of Radcliffe’s frame narratives left open. We never return to the world of 1764, in part because the English reader is not an editor of the pages; instead, he receives a complete volume—not requiring the effort to be organized, deciphered, or translated—that can be “read as follows” (4). The closing editorial voice is instead Vivaldi’s faithful servant, Paulo. Echoing the closing frame of A Sicilian Romance, Paulo rhapsodizes, “‘you see how people get through their misfortunes, if they have but a heart to bear up against them, and do nothing that can lie on their conscience afterwards; and how suddenly one comes to be happy, just when one is beginning to think one never is to be happy again!’” (414). So close is the frame temporally to the central narrative that we are to imagine Vivaldi, Ellena, and indeed Paulo still residing “a few miles distant from Naples” at the very moment the English traveler visits the church and reads their history (412).

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62 A Sicilian Romance is set at the “close of the sixteenth century” (3), and Gaston de Blondeville during the reign of Henry III (1207–1272), or, as Willoughton can “make out” from the manuscript, “twelve hundred and something” (18).
But it is a history that should not have been revealed. In the opening frame, the English traveler inquires, “I thought confessions were always held sacred by the priest” (4). The frame thus introduces the thematic foundation on which the central narrative rests: even told orally, stories are dangerous, no matter how clandestine and trustworthy the receiver; and they become all the more dangerous when recorded in print to be promiscuously consumed by foreign eyes. The central narrative of *The Italian* is a drama of concealing and revealing, of interruptions and continuations, of traps and fissures. Since the confessional space proves permeable and its secrets open for publication, it symbolizes the narrative frame of the novel, in which the close geographic and temporal narrative worlds allow information easily to be transferred and translated. And the opening frame functions to undermine the sanctity of the confession by transforming it into a novel—a medium that inherently makes the private public. This subversive dynamic evidences the experimental aesthetics of the Gothic.

The lasting horror of *The Italian* is that the frame never returns. The frame establishes a dialectic between teller (the Italian of the party) and listener (the Englishman), which is echoed throughout the central narrative by two more pairs, Paulo/Vivaldi and the guide/Schedoni. In this formula, the Englishman is doubled by the novel’s central antagonists, who are always receivers of information, but remain either incredulous or uneasy about the transfer of secret knowledge. Echoing the Englishman’s concern about confessions, Vivaldi asks, “A confession . . . is sacred, and forever buried in the bosom of the priest to whom it is made. How, then, is it to be supposed, that I can be acquainted with the subject of this?” (320). More important, the storytellers, those characters who access and disseminate secrets, in what proves a Radcliffean trope, are always

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63 Clery notes, “The destabilizing force of the introductory encounter between the English tourist and the Italian assassin is neither redeemed nor exorcized” (Introduction to *The Italian*, xxix).
64 The confessional secret between the marquis and the Abate is central to *A Sicilian Romance*.
65 The Englishman, Clery observes, “vanishes into” the central narrative, “never to re-emerge” (Introduction to *The Italian*, xv).
servants. When Paulo speaks the last word, occupying the space where the frame should return, the aristocratic English moralist surrenders to the rejoicing Italian servant. A reviewer for the *Anti-Jacobin* points out the categorical enigma that is Paulo: “Paulo is more of an Englishman than an Italian. And Paulo is, sometimes, too much a philosopher for a servant either of England or of Italy.”

Thus, English editorial agency is usurped not only by a transnational student of Padua, but also by “the Italian,” the figure who dominates the opening frame and turns secret confessions into public information. Although Schedoni turns out to be dead, the Italian of the opening frame is careful to remind the Englishman that the assassin who takes refuge in the church “‘is by no means . . . uncommon’” (2). While Schedoni gradually “melts from demon to man,” as Talfourd observes in 1826, the Italian only harnesses his powers to relegate England and its reading subjects to the unresolved opening frame. Clara McIntyre has commented on the “unsatisfactory nature” of the novel’s title, because “all personages of the story were supposed to be of that nationality.” However, there is only one “the Italian” ever referred to in the novel, and that is the ominous figure who furtively enters into a party of English travelers to market his manuscript.

The environment that Radcliffe paints in the conclusion proves perhaps the novel’s most disturbing transformation. Vivaldi and Ellena’s “fairy-land” “pleasure-grounds” is “that of England, and of the present day, rather than of Italy” (412). In *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*, Radcliffe explains that the “references to England, which frequently occur in the foreign parts of the tour, are made because it has seemed that one of the best modes of describing to any

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67 Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 82.
class of readers what they may not know, is by comparing it to what they do.” The question, however, is not whether readers would feel comfort in a customary English setting, but rather how and why the Italian couple would appreciate the intricacies of a fine English garden. Katarina Gephardt reads the garden conversion as a “complex negotiation between cosmopolitan and nationalist standards of taste, which is reflected in the image of the hybrid garden and characters’ interpretations of landscapes.” Yet the reference to England at the end of The Italian suggests that it has been assimilated into an Italian ethos, that English aesthetics and ideologies are absorbed into foreign landscapes. Paulo’s words, “we had to go through purgatory before we could reach paradise” (413), suggest that the nationalist narratives are waiting-rooms where events of the novel serve to synthesize Radcliffe’s readership with her foreign setting. But this very English present fails to return; their narrative remains lost, unresolved, absorbed by “the Italian.” As we look over this happy valley and exalt with a triumphant Paulo, we are but subjects in Radcliffe’s most remarkable execution of the sublime. No closing boundary to form the picturesque; only measureless, un-frameable horror—a distinctly ominous contrast to the moralizing conclusions of A Sicilian Romance and The Mysteries of Udolpho. Of The Italian, The Anti-Jacobin observes: “Thus we proceed, till the development takes place. But then, we never see the veil of mysteriousness drawn aside to our perfect satisfaction. Something supernatural still remains: and, at the close of the story, we look back, through the whole, as through a moon-light haze; as through the coloured atmosphere of a

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69 Ann Radcliffe, A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794 through Holland and the Western Frontiers of Germany, with a Return down the Rhine, to which are Added Observations during a Tour to the Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland and Cumberland, vol. 1 (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1796), xi. This transformation also occurs in The Romance of the Forest: “an extensive garden, resembling more an English pleasure ground, than a series of French parterres” (164).
Gilpin.”⁷¹ The true Gothic of *The Italian* rests on the fact that the narrative remains unresolved, sprawling, and sublime. To see the picturesque frame, one can only look back; but it is an obscure view of the past, stained by uncertainty of the present.

If the sublime power in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—its supernatural forces, Montoni’s avarice and violence, and the castle’s terror—is contained by the picturesque frame of Emily’s freedom, then all the more disturbing is the unfinished frame in *The Italian*. Gilpin argues that nature “works on a vast scale,” while an artist is “confined to a span” and must adhere to “principles of picturesque beauty, merely to adapt such diminutive parts of nature’s surfaces to his own eye, as come within his scope.”⁷² The incomplete frame of *The Italian* removes the artist from the equation: neither do references to the manuscript transcribed by the “student of Padua” appear in the main narrative, nor do any editorial interruptions. We are left, instead, among the party in the sprawling “pleasure-grounds,” close enough chronologically to the year of the opening frame (as it has probably been the “several years” that separate them), that the narrative worlds collide, the picturesque world of the English traveler engulfed by the vast and unending narrative he reads. Thus is the time gap between the hypodiegetic and the diegetic worlds displaced. With such a chronological blurring, Radcliffe challenges a linear concept of history.

In *The Italian*, Radcliffe interrogates the authority of history most implicitly through yet another juxtaposition of English and Italian ideologies. Schedoni’s murder of his brother, which is the central, buried secret of the novel, and the moment to which the narrative is always attempting to return, occurs in 1752—a monumental year in English history. That year, after a long aversion to adopting the popish Gregorian Calendar that in 1582 had solved discrepancies in the Julian Calendar, England and its colonies finally adopted the “New Style.” The greatest

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⁷¹ “Mrs. Radcliffe’s *The Italian,*** The Anti-Jacobin, 28.
effect of this change was the loss of eleven days in September 1752. The move demonstrates the potential for error in human manipulations of time and implies that history is an artificial human construct that creates arbitrary margins between past and present. Radcliffe’s manipulation of time blends the narratives to the point that we cannot be comforted by a separation between England and Italy, between frame and framed. Radcliffe routinely questions these dubious chronological boundaries. Thus, what so often appear as blatant, if not lazy, anachronisms are in fact products of Radcliffe’s project to merge past with present, to suggest that history is but a narrative that can be transgressed, exposed, and erased. It is an uncomfortable reality. And it is Gothic.

Radcliffe would not publish another novel in her lifetime. In 1802, she and her husband, William, journeyed through Leicester and Warwick, stopping off at Kenilworth Castle. A great part of the description she records in her journal appears, sometimes verbatim, in *Gaston de Blondeville*, published posthumously in 1826. Norton argues that the novel was not “withheld” from publication, as has been the popular belief, but rather “withdrawn (or possibly rejected) late in 1803.” Critics generally agree that *Gaston de Blondeville* is a poor follow-up to *The Italian*. Contemporary reviewers considered it to be “less complicated,” “slight,” and “simple.” Norton regards it as such a “weakening of Ann Radcliffe’s imagination” that it must have been a “joint effort between husband and wife.” Indeed, though filled with the usual Gothic trappings, *Gaston de Blondeville* marks a sharp departure from Radcliffe’s previous novels: it is set entirely in England; it contains minute and painstakingly researched historical annotations; and, most important, it is the first of Radcliffe’s novels to feature an unexplained supernatural entity.

73 Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho*, 193. Both the *Ladies Monthly Museum* (24 [1826]: 24) and *The New Monthly Magazine* (16 [1826]: 533) specifically contend that the novel was withheld.
What Gaston de Blondeville does share with its predecessors is a frame narrative—the most ambitious and elaborate of Radcliffe’s career. As Norton has observed, Radcliffe returned to the novel three times over the course of a decade, and it appears that she added the frame narrative during the latter part of this period. This frame is presented as an “Introduction,” and thus it occupies a more paratextual space than those of her previous novels. I am hesitant, however, to attribute this formal move to Radcliffe, especially since her trustees felt the freedom to manipulate the frame by cutting out a portion of it for “On the Supernatural in Poetry.” Nonetheless, the existence of the frame, whether Radcliffe’s own design or not, suggests the degree to which the frame had permeated her Gothic structure. The frame features two English travelers, Willoughton, an antiquary, and his friend, Simpson. The pair pass through the forests of Arden, where they philosophize on Shakespeare and mortality, and then proceed onto the grounds of Kenilworth Castle. There they meet an intrusive and garrulous stranger, who, like Schedoni and his frame-narrative double in The Italian, is “tall” and “thin” (7). The stranger reveals that he is in possession of a chest, dug out of the ground, that contains “old parchments . . . and some old books” (15). Among them is an illuminated manuscript, titled a “Trew Chronique,” that purports “to be an account of what passed at Kenilworth, when Henry the Third there kept the feats of Saint Michael, and some wonderful accident that there befell” (18). Willoughton pays for the manuscripts, and the pair set off for Warwick. That night Willoughton acts as an editor, translating and deciphering, in accord with the “modern style” (27), a text alleged to have been previously edited by Grymbald, a monk.76

What follows is a story of deception and supernatural redemption. Gaston de Blondeville, a favorite of King Henry III, is accused of robbery and murder by a peasant, Woodreeve, an event that initiates the novel’s dynamic concerning social standing and the authority of truth.

76 Since the text needs to be translated, Gaston de Blondeville directly echoes Walpole’s Castle of Otranto.
Gaston is set to marry, but Woodreeve’s accusation delays the wedding. Because he is in Henry’s good graces, Gaston is presumed innocent, and Woodreeve is jailed. Woodreeve’s confinement marks a culminating shift in narrative attention in Radcliffe’s novels away from women and to men. Most of *The Italian* follows the incarceration and flight of Vivaldi, but in *Gaston de Blondeville* the focus is almost entirely on men. Radcliffe concentrates the story on an imprisoned man who witnessed an actual crime, which proves not to be a product of a lively imagination sparked by Gothic trappings. But Woodreve is still a profoundly passionate man who routinely expresses traditional feminine qualities of sentimentality and excess in the face of his predicament. In this sense, Radcliffe plays with gender roles in highlighting Woodreve’s femininity in the wake of her series of heroines—Julia, Adeline, Emily, and Ellena—and thus he, though a man, becomes one of Claudia Johnson’s “equivocal beings.”

As with Radcliffe’s previous novels, a series of ghostly incidents strike fear in the castle’s denizens and implicate the true history of past crimes. The Prior, acting on Gaston’s behalf, attempts to win Woodreeve’s confession in return for a promise of freedom. Woodreeve, resolute in demanding truth, refuses and escapes into the castle’s labyrinthine vaults. During his flight, Woodreve stumbles upon a “tapestry inclosed in a kind of frame-work” and posits that it may be hiding a door (136). It is as if Woodreve holds communication with characters from previous novels: in *A Sicilian Romance*, Ferdinand “removed the tapestry, and behind it appeared, to his inexpressible satisfaction, a small door” (39). Before he can find out, however, Woodreve witnesses another part of the tapestry lift to reveal the Prior, who is “standing under the same arch, through which he had entered” (136). Again, archways provide access to hidden spaces, and although Woodreve attempts to enter a space through the tapestry frame, he is foiled.

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Eventually, Woodreeve is detained and readied for execution. Meanwhile, during a series of combat games, Gaston proves himself dishonorable by striking down his opponent, and a ghostly knight appears to confirm that Gaston and the Prior did in fact rob and murder Woodreeve’s friend. Gaston dies on the spot in shock, Woodreeve is freed, and the narrative concludes.

As Radcliffe’s narrative frames evolve, they become aesthetic showpieces that battle with the central narrative for position in the text’s narrative hierarchy. Indeed, by *Gaston de Blondeville*, it is the narrative frame that commands and sustains critical attention rather than the much-maligned central story. Part of this transfer of narrative authority can be attributed to the endurance of the essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry” and part to the frame’s length: it constitutes nearly fifteen percent of the text, ten times that of *The Italian*. However, the narrative frame is not the only device Radcliffe employs to introduce textual matter. The central story of *Gaston de Blondeville* is broken up into days rather than chapters, and each day is introduced by Willoughton’s ekphrastic description of an accompanying illustration in the manuscript. The illustrations blueprint the architecture of the story’s various edifices and depict the narrative day that follows. Through this foreshadowing they function to frame events of each day. As with the initial frame in *The Italian*, these descriptions provide thematic clues that the narrative will reveal. In this sense, they complicate a linear reading by disclosing impending moods and settings, yet they are never detailed enough to undermine the authority of the ensuing narrative. The narrator describes the illustrations: “At the heads of the chapters and sometimes in the broad margins, there were made drawings. . . . These gave vivid ideas of the customs and manners of that period” (18). Illuminated manuscripts often employ these marginal illustrations and decorations, which function as borders and frames for the text. Anja Grebe considers them a

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78 Of course, if we are to consider “On the Supernatural in Poetry” as part of the frame, it becomes longer and more complex.
“characteristic and defining element” of the illuminated manuscript, which were “developed for, and existed only within, this medium.”

In Gaston de Blondeville, Radcliffe sets them off from the text by a pair of bordering lines, reminiscent of how she separates both initial and terminal frames from the central narratives in her previous novels. This attention to the layout of illuminated manuscripts—coupled with the fact that Radcliffe mentions such manuscripts as the most significant holdings of a library in Holland in her *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*—suggests that she was deeply invested in the aesthetics of the book in terms of the borders and interactions between image and text, author and reader, and nature and art.

In contrast to *The Italian*, the narrative frame closes as it returns to Willoughton, who muses on the validity of the manuscript and contemplates piecing through another specimen of the antiques he purchased. The terminal frame, however, is dominated by the thoughts of an extradiegetic narrator, the voice that has heretofore described Willoughton’s frame-narrative thoughts and actions. In the opening frame, Willoughton is momentarily skeptical about the true age of the manuscript. And the stranger appears all-too-ready to explain its remarkable condition: “‘what made me wonder most was to see it look so fresh, after it had laid all that time in the ground; to be sure it was well wrapped up in parchment, and the trunk was thick enough’” (15).

The stranger also reveals that he “took out some of the best of the books” from the chest, but then placed the “trunk in the earth again” (15). Thus Willoughton never sees the purported chest or the other decayed materials inside, but is allowed access only to the materials the stranger has


80 Radcliffe visited the “Stadtholder’s library,” now called the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in the Hague, Netherlands. Although the library was closed, she records, “Among the Illuminated MSS. in vellum is one, used by the sanguinary Catherine De Medicis and her children; and another, which belonged to Isabella of Castille, the grandmother of Charles the Fifth” (Radcliffe, *A Journey*, 66). Radcliffe’s attention to the materiality of the text provides an early example for critical readings of the book as object. Leah Price’s recent *How To Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2012) examines how books functioned in capacities other than reading.
selected. When Willoughton gets a chance to analyze the text, he is surprised to find that the illustrations “were traced, with more knowledge of perspective and more attention to proportion, than [he] expected” (18). The narrator reveals that Willoughton, “long before he had finished . . . had some doubts, as to its origin” (205). Yet, because he has the “enthusiasm of an antiquary,” and not the skeptical rationalism of his friend Simpson, Willoughton ignores the manuscript’s “contradictory circumstances” (205). For the narrator, at best the manuscript is dubious:

Perhaps, one better versed in antiquities would have found out, that several of the ceremonies of the court here exhibited, were more certainly those of the fourth Edward, than of the third Henry, or the second Richard, and would have assigned the manuscript to a later period than that of the title, or than that afterwards alluded to in the book, whether written by monk or layman. And though that same title said this chronicle was translated from the Norman tongue, by Grymbald, a monk of saint Mary’s Priory, it said nothing of its having been composed by one; and the manuscript itself seemed to bear evidence against such a supposition, by the way in which some of the reigning superstitions of Henry the Third’s time and of the monastic life in general were spoken of. (205)

The manuscript could have been composed any time over a period of two centuries and may not have been written by a monk at all. In questioning the authenticity of the central text with such force in the terminal frame, Radcliffe challenges the assumptions of all “enthusiastic antiquaries” who pervade the period’s fiction and culture. Critics, it appears, were fooled. A reviewer for The Port Folio derides the “tedious introduction” and accuses Radcliffe of employing an outdated formal device: “This threadbare story has long ceased to deceive any body.”81 And The London

Magazine laments Radcliffe’s “affectation of antiquity.” But in Gaston de Blondeville it is not the supernatural that is explained away, but rather the text itself. By adding the frame narrative to a “Trew Chronique,” Radcliffe in fact parodies the “found manuscript” trope, gesturing back not only to Macpherson’s Ossian and Chatterton’s Rowley, but also to Walpole, Reeve, and Lee.

When a frame narrative appears within the boundaries of the diegetic narrative, it immediately becomes part of the fictional space of the novel. As the opening frame of Gaston de Blondeville is an “Introduction,” however, it occupies a space outside the fiction and purports to be a discussion of real events. But the closing frame in Gaston de Blondeville bears no label, making it blend precariously into the finished central narrative. When the narrator questions Willoughton’s judgment and asks for “one better versed in antiquities” (205), we must call into question not only the events of the central text—historical and supernatural—but also those of the opening frame.

The most disturbing moment of Willoughton’s transformation from editor to character transpires when he appears without warning in the central text. Halfway through, the central narrative pauses: “Here Willoughton laid down the manuscript, and went to a window of his chamber, looking towards Warwick castle, that he might behold under the moonlight the very towers here mentioned” (102). When Willoughton locates a picturesque view through a window-frame, he echoes the aesthetic method employed by many of Radcliffe’s heroine. As the unfinished manuscript prompts Willoughton to return to his editing work, his prospect moves from picturesque to Gothic: “Curiosity, as to the tale he was reading, brought him back, at last, to the manuscript and to King Henry” (102). This desire to re-open the Gothic tale is, in a sense, the

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same curiosity for viewing the sublime that drives Radcliffe’s previous characters to open chests and to remove veils. Only one question remains: what is the manuscript: truth (skeleton) or fiction (wax effigy)?

When Willoughton momentarily becomes a character trapped inside the manuscript that he is editing, the novel experiences a metaleptic rupture. When we become aware that Willoughton’s actions to this point have been part of the novel’s diegetic world—a demotion that implicates the events of the introductory dialogue—and that the central story is in turn hypodiegetic, a tale buried within a tale, Willoughton descends from editorial agent to fallible character under the omniscient sway of the extradiegetic narrator. Indeed, it is as if the novel’s central theme concerns Willoughton’s fall, for the last line—after he “looked up to Heaven, and breathed a prayer of blissful gratitude and adoration; and then departed to his rest”—is the close of Milton’s elegy *Lycidas*: “‘To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new’” (206). Milton’s short preface, appended to the 1745 reprint, explains that the poem “by occasion foretells the ruine of our corrupted clergy, then in their height.”

Certainly, this is also a powerful theme in Radcliffe’s novels, especially *Gaston de Blondeville*; the dubious manuscript’s first editor is purported to be, after all, Grymbald, a monk. Whereas the ominous “the Italian” only gains authority as England and its traveling subjects are left behind, Willoughton, the consummate English aesthete, is left ignorant of his own disturbing credulity. That Willoughton will never know the error of his ways demonstrates his “lack of epistemological authority,” in Castle’s words. As with *Udolpho*’s Emily, who remains unaware of the wax effigy that is really behind the veil, Willoughton is finally firmly located in a diegetic world, and is prohibited the omniscient knowledge of the extradiegetic narrator. It is a fitting end for Radcliffe’s last novel,

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for as it interrogates and undermines the figure who seemingly occupied the narrative plane closest to the time, space, and ideology of the reader, it questions whether anything at all is truth.

The conclusion of *Gaston de Blondeville* is even more disturbingly ambiguous than *The Italian*. As with *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the central narrative is almost entirely set in a dark, labyrinthine castle, and the frame—in this case, of course, set off explicitly with what appears as a stark temporal divide—follows a traveler searching for picturesque views. Again, the sublime is contained by the picturesque frame, a boundary that separates the subversive themes of the central narrative—murder, deceit, the supernatural—from the English world. But when Radcliffe questions the authority of the frame world, implying that the manuscript is at best dubious, if not apocryphal, we see again how the unbound sublime infiltrates the frame of the picturesque. Perhaps most important to Radcliffe’s game of authority and authenticity is the essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry.” While Norton contends that the essay was either taken from the Introduction by the publisher, Henry Colburn, or was “already in the form of a separate essay prepared by Ann Radcliffe herself,” Miles considers it “an appetiser for the main fare” that was “judiciously leak[ed]” by her husband. Either way, what we have long regarded as Radcliffe’s authoritative definition of and distinction between the concepts of horror and terror (Dale Townshend goes as far as to claim Willoughton as “Radcliffe’s mouthpiece”) is part of a dialogue from the antiquary whom the narrator wishes had been “better versed in antiquities” (205). In short, in spite of the fact that some descriptive passages are direct transcriptions of her

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86 Norton, *The Mistress of Udolpho*, 197; Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*, 45. Henry Colburn, the editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, explains in a footnote to the essay: “Having been permitted to extract the above eloquent passages from the manuscripts of the author of the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho,’ we have given this title to them, though certainly they were not intended by the writer to be offered as a formal or deliberate essay, under this, or any other denomination. They were, originally, part of an Introduction to the Romance, or Phantasie, which is about to appear. The discussion is supposed to be carried on by two travellers in Shakspeare’s native county, Warwickshire” (Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry.” 145).

diary, it would be irresponsible to ignore the fact that the essay is part of a fiction—a fiction that is called into question by the narrator. Willoughton’s definition has been made Radcliffe’s, but the former is often little more than a comic foil to Simpson’s indolent rationalism. In fact, that Radcliffe’s narrator criticizes Willoughton for “refus[ing] to dwell on the evidence, which went against [the manuscript’s] stated origin” (205), should make us pause to reflect on whether we have ignored some evidence, too, on whether we have stumbled impetuously upon fiction hoping for it to be fact. If Willoughton cannot be trusted, if his definitive bifurcation and privileging of the Gothic into terror and horror is not Radcliffe’s, if it is merely fiction, then whom and what are we to believe? That Radcliffe questions textual authenticity and teleological history with such force throughout her career offers an intriguing glimpse into how she fashioned herself—or in fact refused to do so at all—for her public and posthumous life. Radcliffe’s experiment with frames troubled early readers and critics.

“Returned from the seaside I can only say that I have done my best to collect Radcliffe material, and have failed. Someone else, I dare say, will gladly attempt the memoir,—but I despair and withdraw.” So writes a discouraged Christina Rossetti in a 17 September 1883 letter. Five months earlier Rossetti was offered £50 to produce a biography of Radcliffe for John Ingram’s Eminent Women Series. Despite an exploratory announcement to The Athenaeum asking for “any hoard of diaries or correspondence hitherto unpublished,” which yielded “one or two additional trifles,” Rossetti was forced to abandon the project. Still, Rossetti’s failure should have been expected. As Scott opines in his “biographical memoir” of the author,

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89 Rossetti, Letters, 126, 160.
90 Rossetti recognized that Talfourd’s memoir, even if “utilize[d] . . . in bulk,” “would amount to about half (not all) needed” (Rossetti, Letters, 124).
Radcliffe chose to live in the “quiet shade of domestic privacy.” Radcliffe’s presumed stealth provided fodder for critics eager to appropriate the pervasive veil metaphor that runs throughout her novels to describe the author herself. In May 1823, some three months after her death, *The Edinburgh Review* contended that Radcliffe remained “much incognito,” “shrowded and unseen.” And in 1826, Talfourd explains that Radcliffe “confined herself,” as she was subjected to a world that had “rendered the habits and conversation of authors almost as public as their compositions.” The dearth of biographical information about Radcliffe is, of course, curious for such a popular and influential literary celebrity. Because *The Italian* (1797) would be her last published work, as she seemingly abandoned authorship at the height of her powers, the critical rumor-mill began to swirl that Radcliffe had died; even more enticingly, some speculated that she was institutionalized after finally succumbing to her heavily wrought Gothic sensibilities. Thus precariously ensconced within her own novels as both a veiled relic and an incarcerated heroine, Radcliffe is subject to yet another “formula,” in Castle’s words, wherein the “author herself is explained away.” Yet given that her novels consistently question the dominion of history and actually satirize Gothic themes that later authors took as ingenuous faults, we might consider Radcliffe’s incognito as a calculated move to entice critics to make a fiction out of her life and to do so primarily by using her fiction. Radcliffe’s novels function as frames made of fiction that conceal the real author, and her narrative frames further establish opaque boundaries between published text and personal life—a performance which in fact allows

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91 Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” i.
93 Talfourd, “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” 3.
94 Radcliffe’s doctor, Sir Charles Scudmore, who was present at her deathbed, writes: “She possessed a quick sensibility, as the necessary ally of her fine genius; but this quality would serve to increase the warmth of the social feelings, and effectually prevent the insulation of the mind, either as regards the temper or the understanding” (qtd. in “Mrs. Radcliffe’s Posthumous Works,” *The Monthly Magazine* 2 [1826]: 283). *The Monthly Review* had claimed that she died of “mental desolation not to be described” (“Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library,” *The Monthly Review* 108 [1825]: 269).
95 Castle, “The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” 232.
her to live behind the veil of a Gothic heroine who was created by readers and critics. Radcliffe proves that crafting biography from fiction is itself a fiction. But her novel method was not effective enough for the even more identity-conscious Walter Scott, who chose not only remain anonymous, but also to envelop his Gothic themes with elaborate frames of storytellers, compilers, and editors.
CHAPTER 3

HEARTS OF DARKNESS: WALTER SCOTT AND THE FRAMES OF GENRE

[A] poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.
—Samuel Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare

Indeed, the most romantic parts of this narrative are precisely those which have a foundation in fact.
—Walter Scott, Waverley

In an October 1826 journal entry that considers the merits of plot over “historical details,” Walter Scott muses, “Must not let the back-ground eclipse the principal figures—the frame overpower the picture.” Scott reflects on his propensity to structure his work on historical figures and events rather than plot, and he promises in the future to “weave them pretty closely together.” Scott’s metaphor suggests that imagination and history must work in tandem to produce good fiction, that the narrative must not appear subordinate to its formal foundation. Unquestionably, Scott leans most heavily on the history side of his historical fiction dialectic. His pervasive frame narratives, however, saliently synthesize the relationship between fact and fiction. Indeed, no nineteenth-century novelist—Gothic or otherwise—was so invested in frame narratives as Scott. Every Scott novel is saturated in historical details, which he meticulously supplements with repeated editorial emendations throughout his career—revisions that culminate in the thickly framed Magnum Opus editions (1829–1833).

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2 Walter Scott, Waverley; or 'Tis Sixty Years Since, ed. Peter Gardside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 363; hereafter cited parenthetically.
4 Ibid.
Yet the frame narratives in Scott’s first editions always exist in a fictional world separate from that of the central story. Thus Scott is indebted to Ann Radcliffe—despite the fact that he frequently levied criticism against her and the Gothic genre. Scott’s deep conflict with the Gothic manifests itself in experiments with anonymity and narrative layering. Gothic conventions—both formal and thematic—populate Scott’s fiction, but his project rests on neither reinventing nor repudiating the Gothic, but rather absorbing it. Through a complex system of narrative frames, Scott “overpowers” the Gothic with context, thus producing a narrative veil behind which he may hide his demons. The Gothic beats at the heart of Scott’s novels, demonstrating that there is fiction at the center of history, romance inherent in realism. This formal maneuver is also a matter of genre. Scott’s struggle with the scope of the Gothic novel resulted initially in embedding Gothic tales in his historical fiction; however, by the end of his career—at a time roughly concomitant with discarding his mask of anonymity—Scott came to terms with the Gothic through the form of the tale, a genre whose scope both suited the Gothic and released authors from the encumbrance of historical detail.

Scott’s frame narratives are many and various, and they afford a wealth of critical insight into the author’s imagination and authorial identity. What is far more difficult, however, is to codify Scott’s Gothic, which is neither ambiguous nor straightforward, but rather a career-long and calculated performance. As Fiona Robertson argues, “Scott was not merely a passive inheritor of gothic subjects and styles, but instead was actively involved in debating and

5 Michael Gamer argues, “Part of Scott’s early project . . . involves a full-scale appropriation and recasting of popular gothic materials into a respectably historical, national, masculine, and poetic mould” (Romanticism and the Gothic [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001], 66).
promoting them.”\(^7\) Scott’s first forays into fiction were inspired by decidedly Gothic sources. “[A] new species of literature” from Germany, Scott recollects in 1807, had taken hold in England.\(^8\) Scott satisfied his curiosity for the “race of poets who had the same lofty ambition to spurn the flaming boundaries of the universe” by translating German ballads for a collection proposed by M. G. Lewis, Scott’s first literary mentor and author of the sensational Gothic novel \textit{The Monk} (1796).\(^9\) Lewis’s anthology, \textit{Tales of Wonder}, was delayed until 1800, but Scott managed to see three of his poems published in \textit{An Apology for Tales of Terror}, a private printing that appeared one year earlier.\(^10\) Scott immediately focused his attention on completing \textit{The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border} (1802-03), a collection that “transformat[ed]” him, Michael Gamer observes, into an “antiquarian scholar and national bard.”\(^11\)

Scott commented explicitly on the Gothic sporadically over the course of his career. In his “Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Poets,” he recounts the effect that German supernatural tales had on his early work.\(^12\) Perhaps the best source materials for Scott’s opinion on the Gothic are his “Memoirs” of the authors he chose for \textit{Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library}. Several Gothic novelists appear in the collection, including Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe. Rather than relegating these Gothic novelists to a tangential position in the genre’s narrative, Scott places

\(^10\) In the collection, Scott provides a preliminary framing note for his “The Erl King,” a translation of Goethe. The poem is also framed by a narrator, who introduces a boy and his father, huddled close together on a windy night. The center of the poem consists of the boy’s dialogue with the Erl-King, a phantom who attempts to lure the boy away, but which the boy’s father cannot see. The narrator returns with a final stanza to reveal that the boy has died. 
\(^11\) Gamer, \textit{Romanticism and the Gothic}, 166. In 1799, Scott wrote a Gothic drama, \textit{The House of Aspen}, and finally published another drama, \textit{The Doom of Devorgoil} in 1830, after it had lain dormant for over a decade. Late in his career, Scott wrote \textit{Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft} (1830). 
\(^12\) Edith Birkhead’s pioneering study, \textit{The Tale of Terror} (1921), astutely delineates the influence of the Gothic on Scott and his reliance on the genre in his fiction. “Scott himself had once trodden in these well-worn paths of romance,” Birkhead observes ([New York: E P. Dutton, 1921], 146).
them, Robertson argues, “in the context of a developing novelistic tradition” in which “Gothic is written firmly into a literary history.”

Radcliffe appears in the tenth volume of the series, and while the introductory “Memoir” vacillates from laudatory to disapproving, it reveals that Scott was deeply engaged in a critical reevaluation of the author. While Scott applauds Radcliffe for her captivating plots, he also draws attention to the debt she owes to the Eastern tradition: “Adventures heaped on adventures, in quick and brilliant succession, with all the hair-breadth charms of escape or capture, hurry the reader along with them, and the imagery and scenery by which the action is relieved, are like those of a splendid oriental tale.” In his essay, “On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition” (1827), Scott contends that the supernatural is an expected and accepted device for Eastern tales:

There is indeed one style of composition, of which the supernatural forms an appropriate part, which applies itself rather to the fancy than to the imagination, and aims more at amusing than at affecting or interesting the reader. To this species of composition belong the eastern tales, which contribute so much to the amusement of our youth, and which are recollected, if not reperused, with so much pleasure in our more advanced life.

By comparing Radcliffe’s novels to Eastern tales—and almost certainly to Arabian Nights—Scott simultaneously legitimizes and marginalizes not only her use of the supernatural, but also the effect her texts have on the reader. Since in 1826 Scott laments his inclination to “let the back-ground eclipse the principal figures,” then his words analyzing Radcliffe’s novels in the language of painting hold special resonance:

13 Robertson, Legitimate Histories, 56, 66.
The force, therefore, of the production, lies in the delineation of external incident, while the characters of the agents, like the figures in many landscapes, are entirely subordinate to the scenes in which they are placed; and are only distinguished by such outlines as make them seem appropriate to the rocks and trees, which have been the artist’s principal objects.\textsuperscript{16}

In Radcliffe’s novels, Scott might suggest, the frame overpowers the picture.\textsuperscript{17} Scott evokes the language of the picturesque by regarding Radcliffe’s characters as “figures” who merely occupy space in the dominant setting.\textsuperscript{18} But Scott also pays special attention to the narrative frameworks Radcliffe employs, especially that of The Italian, which “introduce their narrative to the reader . . . with an uncommon degree of felicity.”\textsuperscript{19} It is likely that by late 1826 Scott had read Radcliffe’s posthumous Gaston de Blondeville (1826), a novel in which the frame decidedly overpowers the tedious central narrative.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Scott disparages many of Radcliffe’s novels both by equating them to the amusement of Eastern tales, and by suggesting that her characters always appear subordinate to her settings, he borrows explicitly from, if not pays homage to, Radcliffe’s formal innovation with the frame narrative. Whereas previous Gothic writers, such as Walpole, Reeve, and Lee, introduced the trope of the “found manuscript” as a prefatory paratext, Radcliffe weaved her

\textsuperscript{16} Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” xviii.

\textsuperscript{17} Birkhead writes, “The historical background, faint, misty and unreal in Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels, becomes, in those of Scott, arresting and substantial. . . . The terrors of the invisible world only fill the stray corners of his huge scene. He creates romance out of the stuff of real life” (The Tale of Terror, 155-156).

\textsuperscript{18} In The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, David Marshall analyzes an anecdote that appears at the end of Uvedale Price’s Essays on the Picturesque (1810) in which Sir Joshua Reynolds is confused by Richard Wilson, who “thought of [people] only as figures in the landscape” ([Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006], 16).

\textsuperscript{19} Scott, “A Memoir of the Life of the Author,” ix.

\textsuperscript{20} In his Lives of the Novelists (1821–1824), Scott writes of Radcliffe’s mysterious retirement from publishing: “We have some reason to believe that arrangements were at one time almost concluded between Mrs. Radcliffe and a highly respectable publishing house, respecting a poetical romance, but were broken off in consequence of the author changing or delaying her intention of publication. It is to be hoped that the world will not be ultimately deprived of what undoubtedly must be the source of much pleasure whenever it shall see the light” (vol. 1 [New York: Collins & Hannay, 1825], 209). This publication would be Gaston de Blondeville (1826), which has the same setting and similar subject matter as Scott’s novel Kenilworth (1821).
manuscript origin-stories into the text itself as part of the first chapter. In following Radcliffe’s lead, Scott renders his storytellers, compilers, and editors part of the fictional world of the novel. These figures, however, are often close manifestations of both Scott himself and his public identities. Together they function as a tantalizing representation of the reality of the Author of Waverley, The Great Unknown, and The Wizard of the North.

Scott achieved unprecedented fame in 1805 following the publication of The Lay of the Last Minstrel, which features an explicit and integral frame narrative. Although Scott reported that he was inspired by recitations of Coleridge’s unpublished Christabel, the poem relies far more heavily structurally, and perhaps thematically, on The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, which Scott called a “wild and imaginative tale” that “displays so much beauty with such eccentricity.” The similarity of the titles notwithstanding, Scott’s Lay features the frame-narration of the eponymous Minstrel, which is titled as an “Introduction,” thereby separating it more forcibly from the central story than the Mariner’s mesmeric and abrupt beginning. As with Ancient Mariner, the Minstrel’s frame returns after his story concludes: “Hushed is the harp—the Minstrel gone” ushers in twenty-eight lines that record the Minstrel’s new domicile where he continues his songs that profoundly affect passersby. The supernatural force which pervades Ancient Mariner is, however, less a focus of Scott’s Lay, though Scott’s poem does feature the trickster “Goblin Page,” modeled after the story of Gilpin Horner. The poem’s “supernatural devices,” Gamer argues, “attempt to relocate the causes of English-Scottish wars in a gothic past,

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22 Walter Scott, The Lay of the Last Minstrel (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1897), 138, line 554.
23 Scott received the legend of Horner from the Countess of Dalkeith. He would later explain: “As much has been objected to Gilpin Horner on account of his being supposed rather a device of the author than a popular superstition, I can only say, that no legend which I ever heard seemed to be more universally credited, and that many persons of a very good rank and considerable information are well known to repose absolute faith in the tradition” (The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, vol. 5 [Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1821], 265).
and within the very superstitions his notes trivialize.”\textsuperscript{24} Yet, because the Goblin is buried in narrative by the Minstrel’s frame, the Gothic passages become dubious if not expendable—a quality rarely evident in his later works.

After \textit{Marmion} (1808) and \textit{The Lady of the Lake} (1810), less financially successful poetry famously forced Scott to switch genres. Scott’s first two attempts at prose, however, came a decade earlier. In the appendix attached to the General Preface for the \textit{Magnum Opus} editions of his novels, Scott includes “\textit{disjecta membra}” of his early years.\textsuperscript{25} He reminisces in the Preface: “I had nourished the ambitious desire of composing a tale of chivalry, which was to be in the style of the Castle of Otranto, with plenty of border characters and supernatural incident.”\textsuperscript{26} Scott’s desire produced two fragments: “Thomas the Rhymer” and “The Lord of Ennerdale.” Of the former, Scott records, “the author’s purpose was, that it should turn upon a fine legend of superstition.”\textsuperscript{27} The latter, however, is a far more intriguing specimen of Scott’s early attempt at the Gothic. The epigraph to “The Lord of Ennerdale” reads: “IN A FRAGMENT OF A LETTER FROM JOHN B_____, ESQ., OF THAT ILK, TO WILLIAM G_____, F.R.S.E.” This is properly the first frame of the fragment. The tale begins with a conversation at Sir Henry Ratcliff’s house between a group of men about national interest and war. Sir Henry asks Maxwell, his friend, but a stranger to the rest of the party, “‘Have you found anything curious . . . among the dusty papers?’”\textsuperscript{28} Maxwell relates that he has busied himself with arranging family manuscripts into a “private history savouring not a little of the marvellous, and intimately

\textsuperscript{24} Gamer, \textit{Romanticism and the Gothic}, 184.
\textsuperscript{25} Walter Scott, Appendix to the General Preface to \textit{Waverley Novels}, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1829), Iv.
\textsuperscript{26} Scott, General Preface to \textit{Waverley Novels}, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1829), ix.
\textsuperscript{27} Scott, Appendix to the General Preface to \textit{Waverley Novels}, xlix.
\textsuperscript{28} Scott, Appendix to the General Preface to \textit{Waverley Novels}, lix. See below for a discussion of Scott’s use of the name “Ratcliff(e).”
connected with your family.”

Mention of the marvelous draws in Lady Ratcliff and her daughters, who had climbed every pass, viewed every pine-shrouded ruin, heard every groan, and lifted every trap-door, in company with the noted heroine of Udolpho. They had been heard, however, to observe that the famous incident of the Black Veil singularly resembled the ancient apologue of the Mountain in labour, so that they were unquestionably critics, as well as admirers. Besides all this, they had valorously mounted *en croupe* behind the ghostly horseman of Prague, through all his seven translators, and followed the footsteps of Moor through the forest of Bohemia. Moreover, it was even hinted (but this was a greater mystery than all the rest) that a certain performance, called the *Monk*, in three neat volumes, had been seen by a prying eye, in the right-hand drawer of the Indian cabinet of Lady Ratcliff’s dressing room.

The Ratcliff women actively participate in the Gothic, which infiltrates their lives with darkness and mystery. Their experience with Gothic texts, which apparently are devoured in secret, colors Maxwell’s tale that follows. It requires only one remark on the marvelous, the slightest breath of its potential for Gothic intrigue, to draw the audience in for the entirety of what will be only a history. The tale briefly returns to the party but breaks off mid sentence with “*Cetura desunt.*”

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29 Ibid.
30 Scott, Appendix to the General Preface to *Waverley Novels*, lix-lx. Scott here refers to Aesop’s “The Mountain in Labor” fable, the several translations of Bürger’s “Lenore” (which includes Scott’s own “William and Helen” [1796]), Schiller’s *The Robbers* (1781), and Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796).
31 Scott, Appendix to the General Preface to *Waverley Novels*, lxiv. Maxwell begins to read from the “Journal of Jan Van Eulen,” a Dutch merchant hoping to sail into England in the middle of the English Civil War. The journal breaks off as a Parliamentarian ship begins pursuit. The tale returns to Sir Henry’s party, and we learn that the unnamed narrator is relating the tale to his cousin. Maxwell next produces a letter from a woman on the ship, imploring help from an English friend, and describing how crew members from the Parliamentarian ship had come aboard, shackled, and dragged away a man who had earlier saved her from drowning. The Latin translates to “the rest is missing.”
“The Lord of Ennerdale” demonstrates that Scott early on had an admiration for the formal dexterity of Gothic texts. His tale features several frames: the first indicates that the whole text comes from the fragment of a letter; the second that an unnamed narrator relates the story to his cousin; and the third that Maxwell arranges the family manuscripts that become the main story. Scott’s tale is thus properly a fragment of a fragment, a puzzling and stunning meta-commentary on the genre. I say “meta” here because I argue that Scott designed the tale to remain as a fragment, a move that implicates simultaneously the power and the impotence of the genre on the imagination. Just as with Lady Ratcliff’s assertion that the Black Veil episode in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is tantamount to Aesop’s “The Mountain of Labor” fable, which warns of declarations of hubris that ultimately amount to almost nothing, Scott promises a tale of family intrigue and the marvelous but cuts it off abruptly before it can possibly disappoint. “The Lord of Ennerdale” also provides early evidence of Scott’s experiment with genre; the fragment is particularly well suited for Gothic themes and anticipates Scott’s later work with autonomous Gothic tales that fit the parameters of the literary annual.

As Robertson points out, Scott’s first published prose project, in which he supplied a conclusion to Joseph Strutt’s unfinished *Queen-Hoo Hall* (1808), ends with a bracketed-off found-manuscript trope: “Here the manuscript from which we have painfully transcribed, and frequently, as it were, translated this tale, for the reader’s edification, is so indistinct and defaced that . . . we can pick out little that is intelligible.” 32 Scott would later recall that it was his “duty . . . to supply such a hasty and inartificial conclusion as could be shaped out from the story, of which Mr Strutt had laid the foundation.” 33 The conclusion, despite Scott’s reservations,

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32 Walter Scott, Joseph Strutt’s *Queen-Hoo Hall*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1808), 74.
demonstrates his insistence on supplying the text with a frame, a determination he would repeat saliently in his first novel, *Waverley; or 'Tis Sixty Year Since* (1814).

Scott began composing *Waverley* some years earlier, but did not return to the manuscript until 1813. The anonymous novel opens with “Introductory” remarks, not part of an introduction, but rather appearing inside the parameters of the first chapter. Because this section appears in the non-paratextual space of the novel, it would be a mistake to refer to the speaker as Scott; just as it would be reductive to confuse the opinions of Scott’s narrator, who appears for comment throughout *Waverley*, with Scott. The voice, then, that frames the story in opposition to the Gothic, is a fictional construct, who is worried, it appears, that his novel might be mistaken for those “*missy form[s]* of publication”34.

Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, ‘Waverley, a Tale of other Days,’ must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had been long uninhabited, and the keys either lost or consigned to the care of some aged butler or housekeeper, whose trembling steps, about the middle of the second volume, were doomed to guide the hero, or heroine, to the ruinous precincts? (3-4)

The narrator continues to suggest alternate titles and to supply a laundry-list of Gothic conventions, including “*blood* and horror,” “a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke,” and “*illuminati*, with all their properties of black cowls, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark lanterns” (4). The narrator concludes that his novel “is more a description of men than manners” (5), a fitting homage to Henry Fielding’s “I describe not men, but manners,” a novel contemporaneous to *Waverley*’s setting.35 Yet, through all this posturing against the

34 Letter of 1 Dec. 1805, NLS MS 786, fos. 51v-52.
Gothic, and explicitly so against the Radcliffian school, in its form *Waverley* feels like a Gothic novel. As Ian Duncan observes, the novel “performs a more thorough absorption of Gothic conventions, taken now from the Gothic novel proper.”

Despite Scott’s resistance to Radcliffe’s oeuvre and Gothic conventions, *Waverley* is fully framed, a structure it shares with the Gothic novel. *Waverley* concludes with “A Postscript, which should have been a Preface,” in which the narrator begins: “Our journey is now finished, gentle reader, and if your patience has accompanied me through these sheets, the contract is, on your part, strictly fulfilled” (362). What follows is a highly intriguing meta-dialogue in which the narrator permits the reader to close the book and then discusses the reasons why the chapter could not have worked as a preface: “most novel readers, as my conscience reminds me, are apt to be guilty of the sin of omission respecting that same matter of prefacing” (362-363). This demonstrates that frames are significant elements of the text in determining what an audience would read and, perhaps more importantly, what they would not; in this case, Scott avoids paratexts (prefaces, introductions, advertisements) and instead places introductory remarks within the borders of the fictional world. The second reason for the postscript, the narrator explains, is because many readers begin at the end (a troubling reality for readers of Radcliffe’s Gothic); thus does the last chapter for two reasons function more effectively than would a preface. Most interesting, when the narrator reveals that the manuscript for the novel had lain dormant until it was found “by mere accident among other waste papers,” he participates satirically in the found manuscript trope; and his ending dedication to Henry Mackenzie, part of

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36 Ian Duncan, “Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,” in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 127. Scott’s insistence on *Waverley* not being a Gothic novel recalls earlier writers’ resistance to calling their work novels. In Maria Edgeworth’s Advertisement to *Belinda* (1801), for example, she writes: “The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale—the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel” (vol. 1 [London: R. Hunter, 1821], iii).
how he “inverted the usual arrangement” of a novel (365), seems a move that tactically gestures toward the famous found (but corrupted) manuscript in *The Man of Feeling* (1771).  

Despite *Waverley*’s success, Scott chose to remain anonymous, and wrote shortly after its publication, “I intend to maintain my *incognito.*” Even under pressure from his friend J. B. S. Morritt to admit authorship with the novel’s second edition, Scott remained resolute: “I shall *not own* *Waverley;* my chief reason is, that it would prevent me of the pleasure of writing again.” It was not just the pleasure of the ruse that compelled Scott to remain anonymous, however; professional obligations factored in as well: “In truth, I am not sure it would be considered quite decorous for me, as a Clerk of Session, to write novels.” Although Scott’s next novel, *Guy Mannering; or The Astrologer* (1815), appeared attributed to “The Author of ‘Waverley,’” its title-page quatrains from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* provided at the very least a blatant clue. Scott included neither prefatory nor introductory remarks for *Guy Mannering*, and he even eschewed the narratorial “I” in favor of “our.”

*The Antiquary* (1816) was published next, this time attributed to “The Author of ‘Waverley’ and ‘Guy Mannering.’” The novel begins with an “Advertisement,” which announces that the three-novel series is now complete, and contains an apology from the author: “I have been more solicitous to describe manners minutely than to arrange in any case an artificial and combined narrative, and have but to regret that I felt myself unable to unite these two requisites of a good Novel” (3). Thus does *The Antiquary* not only divorce itself from *Waverley*’s “more a description of men than manners,” but it also presents a more reserved and tempered narratorial voice that apologizes for shortcomings rather than boasting about strengths;

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37 For more on Mackenzie’s found manuscript, see chapter 1.
and it sees the need for an “Advertisement” rather than Waverley’s “Introductory.” These formal moves take “The Author of Waverley” from disparaging the Gothic to employing its structural liberties.

Although Jonathan Oldbuck declares, “‘Lord deliver me from the Gothic generation!’” (121), The Antiquary is perhaps Scott’s most Gothic novel. Radcliffian tropes abound: harrowing escapes, disappearances, buried treasure, romantic entanglements. And Jonathan Oldbuck’s puzzling labyrinthine abode contains a secret passage that echoes A Sicilian Romance: “Oldbuck unlocked a drawer, and took out a bundle of keys, then pulled aside a piece of the tapestry which concealed the door of a small closet, into which he descended by four stone steps” (26). During a search of his oppressively large collection of antiquities, Oldbuck comes across the “rare Quarto of the Augsburg Confession” (85). This accidental discovery of a foundational Lutheran text not only parodies the found manuscript device, but it also, David Punter argues, “asserts the crucial contribution of writing and print culture to the preservation of national identity—in a chain to which Scott, of course, sees himself as belonging . . . by inserting Oldbuck himself into the continuity of history.”

In employing the found manuscript in this way, however, Scott not only preserves a place for Scottish history, but also authorizes what is perhaps the most prominent trope of the Gothic novel.

Furthering The Antiquary’s Gothic identity is the inset story, “The Fortunes of Martin Waldeck,” told by Isabella Wardour. The tale proved so appealing that it was later excerpted in

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42 The story concerns a giant demonic being, reported to roam the woods and mines of a German village. One brazen citizen, the titular Martin, confronts the demon to rekindle a fire; the next morning, the ashes have turned to gold, and Martin becomes rich and powerful. Disrespected at a public gathering, Martin retaliates and is beaten. With the aid of his family, he escapes, and the party is met on the road by the demon, who exalts in watching Martin expire.
several literary annuals and was referred to by Jane Austen in a letter. Oldbuck, channeling the ethos of *Waverley*’s narrator, reacts disapprovingly to Isabella’s story: “[he] alone curled up his nose, and observed, that Miss Wardour’s skill was something like that of alchemists, for she had contrived to extract a sound and valuable moral out of a very trumpery and ridiculous legend” (146). Oldbuck’s reaction must be tempered by his general disregard of the Wardours’ intelligence. It is suggestive, however, that the woman who recites the Gothic tale is also at the center of the novel’s Gothic romantic subplot, in which Lovel is revealed to be Major Neville. Unlike *Arabian Nights*’ Scheherazade, however, although Isabella proves her worth as tale-teller and improviser—“it was impossible for a lover of fairy-land like me to avoid lending a few touches to make it perfect in its kind” (137)—it is instead Lovel who must change identities to win her hand.

On the title-page of *The Antiquary* appears an anonymous eight lines, usually attributed to Scott, which begin: “I knew Anselmo.” Scott here provides a hint of what is to come in *Tales of My Landlord*. Anselmo is a character in *Don Quixote* who tells probably the most famous hypodiegetic story in the novel, “El Curioso Impertinente.” Because the story is read to travelers at an inn, Scott’s veiled reference introduces the thematic frame of *Tales of My Landlord*. Scott had abandoned in print the narrator who produced his first three of novels and had switched publishers. Thus he was free to experiment with a new formal framework—stories told and recorded at an inn—that the *Don Quixote* reference introduces. On 29 April 1816, Scott writes to James Ballantyne that his new project would be “a 4 volume work a Romance totally different in style and structure from the others; a new cast, in short, of the net which has hitherto made

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43 In December 1816, Austen writes to James Edward Austen: “You and I must try to get hold of one or two, and put them into our novels: it would be a fine help to a volume; and we could make our heroine read it aloud on a Sunday evening, just as well as Isabella Wardour, in the ‘Antiquary,’ is made to read the ‘History of the Hartz Demon’ in the ruins of St. Ruth, though I believe, on recollection, Lovell is the reader” (*Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deidre Le Faye [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011], 337).
miraculous draughts.” Scott intended to use his new works to test the generic boundaries that he had in part established with the first three Waverley Novels. Because Scott had published *Tales of Terror* (1799) and then had contributed to Lewis’s *Tales of Wonder* (1801), his new undertaking appears, at least in its preliminary form, to be Gothic.

The first volume of *Tales of My Landlord* is introduced as “Collected and Arranged by Jedidiah Cleishbotham, Schoolmaster and Parish-Clerk of Gandercleugh.” John Sutherland notes that Scott was “hugely amused” by Washington Irving’s frame editor of *History of New York* (1809), Diedrich Knickerbocker. Each of the volumes bears two epigraphs. Six lines from Burns reinforce the Scottish identity of the volumes; hearken back to *The Antiquary* (as *The Antiquary* gestures forward), for Burns was inspired to write the poem after a meeting with the English antiquarian, Francis Grose (1731-1791); and suggest that stories, once rendered in print, are potentially promiscuous and prone to piracy:

> Hear, Land o’ Cakes and brither Scots,
> Free Maidenkirk to Jonny Groats’,
> If there’s a hole in a’ your coats,
> I rede ye tent it,
> A chiel’s amang you takin’ notes,
> An’ faith he’ll prent it!

The second epigraph, from *Don Quixote*, is even more suggestive, as it both introduces the figure of the landlord who unlocks the tales of passersby and reveals the formal strategy of the volumes

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45 Scott experimented in his frames with humorous names. Cleishbotham anticipates later jests, like Dickens’s schoolteacher, Mr. M’Choakumchild, in *Hard Times*.
to feature a frame narrative that encloses not only the novels themselves, but also the hypodiegetic tales that appear within them:

It is mighty well, said the priest; pray, landlord, bring me those books, for I have a mind to see them. With all my heart, answered the host; and, going to his chamber, he brought out a little old cloke-bag, with a padlock and chain to it, and opening it, he took out three large volumes, and some manuscript papers written in a fine character.  

*The Black Dwarf* features both the outermost frame narrative that encompasses the whole of *Tales of My Landlord* and its own frame narrative that appears, as with *Waverley*, inside chapter 1, though it is here titled “Preliminary.” The frame for *Tales of My Landlord* is introduced by Cleishbotham, a “Scotch Dominie” in Blackwood’s words, who records that Gandercleugh occupies a central region of Scotland and thus many a patron with many a tale travels through the doors of the Wallace Inn. In this sense, Scott inverts Radcliffe’s framing devices: where her manuscripts come from foreign travel, his storytellers are domestic itinerants. Where Radcliffe relies on the Gothic mystery of the foreign “other,” Scott never strays from Scotland. In the frame, Cleishbotham contends, “I am NOT the writer, redacter, or compiler of the Tales of my Landlord; nor am I, in one single iota, answerable for their contents, more or less.” Rather, it is Peter Pattieson, the now-deceased fellow schoolmaster, who arranged the tales collected by the landlord of the Wallace Inn. This contradiction of personality between Scott’s two frame

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48 Thomas Jonathan Wooler borrowed the title *The Black Dwarf* for his radical journal, inaugurated in January 1817.

49 MS letter, Murray Archives, Blackwood Box 2. Extracts in Smiles, I, 466 and Oliphant, I, 68.


characters, John Sutherland argues, “neatly prismatizes aspects of Scott’s own literary career—the drudging ‘clerk,’ and the genius man of letters.”\textsuperscript{52} In this sense, the fictional frame characters are all parts of Scott’s multifaceted occupational identity.

Cleishbotham concludes by explaining the formal function of the frame: “each Tale is preceded by a short introduction, mentioning the persons by whom, and the circumstances under which, the materials thereof were collected” (9). Some reviewers were not so complimentary about the framing device. The Critical Review, for example, explaining that “Peter Pattieson is supposed to have framed the novel,” considered it a “clumsy expedient” that has “nothing . . . to do with the merits of the novels themselves.”\textsuperscript{53} The Edinburgh Magazine was particularly scathing:

Nothing, for instance, can be more perfectly useless, cumbersome, and altogether inconceivable, than the vehicle in which he lumbers along these three series of Tales—called of My Landlord—as \textit{lucus a non lucendo}—because My Landlord has nothing to do with them; . . . a vehicle so laboriously constructed, and yet so inefficient and incomplete after all, that we will venture to say no man of genius, but this author, would ever have designed to frame it; yet such is his genius, so many traits of it are ever shining throughout all this dense fog, so delighted does he himself seem with the invention, and to enjoy it so much more even than some of his most inimitable fictions, that he at last forces us to like it in spite of ourselves.\textsuperscript{54}

Both critics specifically refer to Scott’s metadiegetic story as having “framed” Tales of My Landlord. That this rhetoric existed during Scott’s early years as a novelist may suggest that his

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\footnote{52} John Sutherland, \textit{The Life of Sir Walter Scott}, 195.
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later admission, of having let the “frame overpower the picture,” refers to the frame he produced for *Tales of My Landlord*. At the very least, it demonstrates that readers saw Scott’s narrative frames as participating in an aesthetic discourse. For Scott, looking back, the intricate plotting and characterization of the frame may have confused rather than complemented the main narratives. In fact, Angus Calder, editor of a modern edition of *Old Mortality*, suggests that readers skip the initial frame and begin with chapter 2. But this is part of the point. The more Scott added in complexity (and sometimes length) to the frame narratives, making them important ingredients in the fiction of the novel, the less weight the Gothic sections could command inside. Rather than displacing or deflecting the Gothic, then, Scott found a means to internalize its narrative force, to crush it under heavy frames, to conceal it in a fog.

In the frame that introduces *The Black Dwarf*, two men arrive at the Wallace Inn hoping to sell their sheep to a patron in the area. Scott next introduces yet another frame, that of the publisher, who makes commentary on Cleishbotham’s editorial emendations. These “liberties,” the publisher explains, “appear only to have been taken by the learned gentleman when his own character and conduct are concerned” (12). Although Cleishbotham establishes his authority in his verbose and haughty “Introduction,” Scott quickly undercuts his editor by making him subordinate to the publisher. The pair of travelers return later, and with the aid of drink, begin to tell stories of the Black Dwarf. Pattieson, as will become customary in the frame for *Tales of My Landlord*, is charged with creating a narrative from the oral stories.

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55 Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson, who took the reins from Calder for the Oxford edition, similarly contend: “For the contemporary reader, unfamiliar with Scott’s work, the advice given by Calder in his 1975 edition still holds good: skip the 1830 Introduction, skip the framing narratives of Cleishbotham and Pattieson, and begin with the wappenshaw which opens the action proper” (*Old Mortality* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009], xxxix).

56 Scott’s hierarchy suggests that those who possess the story, in this case the farmer and his shepherd, occupy the lowest rung beneath compiler (Pattieson) and editor (Cleishbotham), all of whom answer to the whims of the publisher (Blackwood).

57 Celeste Langan argues that Scott’s use of “‘northern pronunciation’” in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* “seems to threaten the Enlightenment ideal of transparent communication,” which stemmed from the “development . . . of
After my usual manner, I made farther enquiries of other persons connected with 
the wild and pastoral district in which the scene of the following narrative is 
place, and I was fortunate enough to recover many links of the story, not generally 
known, and which account, at least in some degree, for the circumstances of 
exaggerated marvel with which superstition has attired it in the more vulgar 
traditions. (14)

Thus, thanks to Pattieson’s work filling in the gaps, *The Black Dwarf* is a specimen of the 
explained supernatural, despite Scott’s disapproval of the device. As usual Scott’s criticism 
comes at the expense of Radcliffe: “A principal characteristic of Mrs Radcliffe’s romances, is the 
rule which the author imposed upon herself, that all the circumstances of her narrative, however 
mysterious, and apparently superhuman, were to be accounted for on natural principles, at the 
winding up of the story.” Radcliffe is most successful, Scott continues, at “exciting” rather than 
“explaining.” Yet Scott presents the titular dwarf, Elshie, as a supernatural force, who is a 
“being who hovers around” (20) and “display[s] a degree of strength which seemed inconsistent 
with his size and apparent deformity” (28). When Elshie gives Isabel Vere a rose to produce 
when under threat, Scott sets the stage for a supernatural intervention to her unwanted marriage. 
Although Scott laments “those necessary evils, the concluding chapters,” that “must unravel the 
skein of adventures which they have been so industrious to perplex,” his Gothic novel leans on 
the same crutch. Elshie is in fact Sir Edward Mauley, who retired acrimoniously from the 

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58 In the *Magnum Opus* edition of the novel, Scott reveals that the titular Black Dwarf was inspired by the real dwarf 
David Ritchie, whom Scott had met in 1797. An article (with an illustration) that made this connection far earlier 
appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* (October 1817, pp. 207-212), under the title, “Account of David Ritchie, the 
Original of the Black Dwarf.”


60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.
world after being scorned by his love and friend, and whose powerful influence voids Isabel’s unwanted match so that she may marry Earnscliff.

By making Elshie the hero of the novel, Scott reverses a Gothic trope: Elshie’s supernatural power in fact aids the protagonists rather than being something they must conquer. Yet Elshie’s features strike fear in all who see him to the point that shuts he himself away to wallow in his own misanthropy. In this sense, Elshie, the only Gothic element of the novel, buries himself in obscurity in much the same manner that Scott buries Gothic themes in his other novels. The architecture and purpose of the house establish a physical frame that mirrors the novel’s structure. Elshie lives in an intensely private domicile that he, with prodigious strength, framed: “he would have deemed it polluted by the step of any human being. When he shut himself up in his habitation, no entreaty could prevail upon him to make himself visible, or to give audience to any one whomsoever” (32-33). Only Isabel is allowed inside: “Within these narrow precincts Isabel now found herself enclosed with a being whose history had nothing to reassure her, and the fearful conformation of whose hideous countenance inspired an almost superstitious terror” (109). Because Elshie has no history throughout the novel, he becomes a mystery. But when Scott reveals the real Sir Edward Mauley, Elshie the supernatural entity is replaced by a man with a history that provides the resolution for the narrative. Scott’s explained supernatural rests not just on providing natural answers for seemingly supernatural events, but also in absorbing the Gothic into the historical.

The Black Dwarf’s ending created controversy between Scott and his publishers. After reading through the manuscript, Blackwood approached Scott with his concerns. Accompanied by endorsements from his English partners, Blackwood asked for a rewrite. Scott was outraged
and refused to comply. In private, however, he admitted his mistake.⁶² “So I quarrelled with my story,” he writes to Lady Louisa Stuart on 14 November 1816, “& bungled up a conclusion as a boarding school Miss finishes a task which she had commenced with great glee & accuracy.”⁶³

So dissatisfied was Scott with the novel that he provided an anonymous essay for The Quarterly Review in January 1817. Anonymously reviewing his anonymous novel is, Robert Miles argues, a “double masquerade.”⁶⁴ “It contains some striking scenes,” Scott writes in the review, “but it is even more than usually deficient in the requisites of a luminous and interesting narrative.”⁶⁵

Scott’s attempt to combine a historical romance with the Radcliffean Gothic was for him a failure, but the novel still contains a rather explicit allusion to Radcliffe. Isabel is prompted to use the rose by Hubert Ratcliffe, Elshie’s confidant and proprietor. It is Ratcliffe who narrates Elshie’s story, effectively acting as the agent for explaining away any lingering supernatural questions. Misspellings of Radcliffe’s name as Ratcliffe were commonplace even into the twentieth century.⁶⁶ That Scott had earlier featured in “The Lord of Ennerdale” the Ratcliffe family, who are avid readers of The Mysteries of Udolpho, suggests Radcliffe remained a powerful influence on Scott when he attempted his own Gothic novel in The Black Dwarf.

Scott’s admitted bungling of the conclusion of The Black Dwarf suggests that he struggled with the parameters—or framework—of the Gothic tale. To fill up only one volume proved for him an impossible task, and he abandoned any further attempts, jumping immediately into The Tale of Old Mortality (1816), which would occupy the final three volumes of the first

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⁶² For more detail on the disagreement, see John Sutherland, The Life of Sir Walter Scott, 195-197.
⁶³ Walter Scott, The Letters of Sir Walter Scott 1815-1817, 293.
⁶⁵ Walter Scott, “Tales of My Landlord,” The Quarterly Review 16 [1817]: 442.
⁶⁶ Of course, we may read the “rat” in Ratclif(e) as an insult directed towards Radcliffe. In The Heart of Midlothian, the Tolbooth prison informant named Ratcliffe recognizes George Robinson’s disguise, thus foiling the latter’s plan to rescue Effie Deans. In Tales of a Grandfather (1828–1831), Scott records the history of Charles Ratcliffe, brother of the Earl of Derwentwater, who was beheaded in 1747 for treason committed some thirty years earlier. “The Lord of Ennerdale,” cited above, features the family of Ratcliffs, readers of Gothic fiction.
series. Instead of acting as autonomous texts, Scott’s Gothic tales continued, like “The Fortunes of Martin Walbeck” in The Antiquary, to be incorporated into his longer novels, such as Redgauntlet (1824). We might consider this move as yet another framing device—an attempt to transform the Gothic by burying it within both historical romances and the other fictional frameworks that are located outside. “Wandering Willie’s Tale,” which appears in Redgauntlet, is Scott’s most celebrated short text, and immediately was abstracted as a complete tale in several magazines.67 The London Literary Gazette boasts that the “fine episode” is “one of the best ‘auld warld stories’ which his pen has produced.”68 And the Westminster Review calls it an “excellent legend,” which is “decidedly the best thing in the book.”69 The tale is framed not only by the novel’s intricate plot, which mixes narrative and the epistolary, but also more locally through Darsie Latimer’s letter. Darsie records Willie’s story as he is conducted through the borderlands by the blind fiddler. “He commenced his tale accordingly, in a distinct narrative tone of voice,” Darsie writes: “I will not spare you a syllable of it, although it be of the longest; so I make a dash——and begin.”70 Willie’s supernatural tale, which is summed up by his moral, “‘it is nae chancy thing to take a strange traeller for a guide, when ye are in an uncouth land’” (101), also concludes with a long dash. This is reminiscent of Radcliffe’s novels; when both frame narratives and embedded stories begin and end, Radcliffe includes a long, solitary dash to denote structural separation.71

70 Walter Scott, Redgauntlet (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 86; hereafter cited parenthetically.
71 The blindness of Willie the storyteller resonates with Scott’s later claims in “The Death of Laird’s Jock”: “although poetry and painting both address themselves to the same object of exciting the human imagination, by presenting to it pleasing or sublime images of ideal scenes; yet the one conveying itself through the ears to the understanding, and the other applying itself only to the eyes, the subjects which are best suited to the bard or tale-teller are often totally unfit for painting, where the artist must present in a single glance all that his art has power to tell us. The artist can neither recapitulate the past nor intimate the future. The single now is all which he can
Although scenes and even tales featuring supernatural elements appear late into Scott’s career, *Tales of My Landlord* consistently remains his most Gothic enterprise, not only thematically, but also structurally. By 1816, frame narratives had become a decidedly Gothic convention, and Scott had moved from mocking these conventions in the “Introductory” remarks in *Waverley* to embracing them for *Tales of My Landlord*. Whereas the frame for *The Black Dwarf* formulaically introduces storytellers into the Wallace Inn, the frames that introduce the remaining novels in *Tales of My Landlord* become progressively more experimental and increasingly disjointed from the thematic content of the main narrative. Thus Scott both echoes and departs from Radcliffe, whose frames also become more intricate but additionally indispensable to the novel’s thematic content.

*The Tale of Old Mortality* completes the first series of *Tales of My Landlord*, filling the space left by the dwarfed *Dwarf*. The novel’s frame is perhaps the most Gothic of Scott’s corpus. In a 13 September 1816 letter, Blackwood calls it “an Introduction so exquisitely striking, pathetic, and original, as, I think, to equal any similar composition in the English language.”\(^72\)

Rambling along a stream near Gandercleugh, Pattieson begins to reflect on the implications of a nearby burial-ground. “It has been long the favourite termination of my walks, and, if my kind patron forgets not his promise, will (and probably at no very distant day) be my final resting-place after my mortal pilgrimage” (6). A footnote from Cleishbotham confirms that Pattieson now rests at the site he wished, a gloomy reminder that the tales are posthumous. Fittingly, Pattieson thereafter meets with the titular Old Mortality, an itinerant who restores the graves of the Covenanters by re-etching their names and epitaphs. Old Mortality sees it as his duty,

\(^72\) MS letter, Murray Archives, Ballantyne Box.
“renewing to the eyes of posterity the decaying emblems of the zeal and sufferings of their forefathers.”

Old Mortality recites to Pattieson the tales of the dead, although they are only hearsay, “with the minute circumstantiality of an eye-witness” (11). As he establishes in The Black Dwarf, Pattieson gathers alternate sources to verify and to supplement the tales. Yet it is Old Mortality’s words on mortality that further prognosticate Pattieson’s prediction of an untimely death: “‘your days are yet in the spring; and yet you may be gathered into the garner of mortality before me, for the sickle of death cuts down the green as oft as the ripe’” (12). The only chance at immortality, for even Old Mortality dies in the frame, is to be put into words—though only if your words are significant enough to be “re-chiseled” when they begin to fade into obscurity. For those graves refashioned by Old Mortality “have remained indelibly legible” (12).

The main narrative of Old Mortality breaks off for a “Conclusion” in which Pattieson admits his struggle to end his stories with gestures to the future of the characters. Miss Martha Buskbody, a voracious novel reader, helps Pattieson finish during a conversation. “‘This will not do,’” Buskbody responds to Pattieson’s desire to end the novel: “‘you have, as I may say, basted up your first story very hastily and clumsily at the conclusion’” (350). Scott again apologizes for the formulaic conclusion of The Black Dwarf, in which he hastily records each character’s future, opting this time to provide these details only at the behest of a curious woman. So voracious for detail is Buskbody that Pattieson struggles to supply the future of one particular character. “‘Consider, my dear Miss Buskbody,’” Pattieson appeals, that “‘even the memory of the renowned Scheherazade, that Empress of Tale-tellers, could not preserve every circumstance’” (352). Similar to Pattieson, “who delighted much in the collection of olden tales and legends, and in garnishing them with the flowers of poesy” (8), Scheherazade

had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of bygone men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred.  

However, while Scheherazade’s story-telling prowess allows her to survive, Pattieson dies before the stories he collects see publication. Pattieson fears the future, botching it with *The Black Dwarf* and choosing to reveal it in *Old Mortality* through a past-tense dialogue. His frame closes:  
“gentle Reader, returning you my thanks for the patience which has conducted you thus far, I take the liberty to withdraw myself from you for the present” (352). It is in the present that Pattieson exists; his immortality, like the graves restored by Old Mortality, exists in indelible printed words. But he is restored only in the present of the reader, and he dies when his stories end.  

In 1817, Scott left the frame of *Tales of My Landlord* and achieved more unprecedented success with *Rob Roy* back under the name of the “Author of Waverley.” He returned, however, for the second series of *Tales*, which was published on 25 July 1818, and featured only one novel, *The Heart of Midlothian*. The novel begins with Cleishbotham’s “prolegomenon” letter to his readers in which he addresses critics who have not only accused him of being the fictional product of another’s pen, but also questioned the authenticity of his narratives. As with

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75 The novel closes with a “Peroration” from Cleishbotham, rendered as a cul de lampe, in which he laments the whims of his publisher. Whereas Pattieson’s voice fails to return at the end of *The Black Dwarf*, his “Conclusion” completes the frame of *Old Mortality*, and Cleishbotham’s last words close the editorial frame he established to begin *Tales of My Landlord*. The conclusion of the series in relation to Pattieson’s death recalls the politics of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, in which writing is equated to life.
76 *Rob Roy* begins with an “Advertisement,” in which the “Author of Waverley” makes his triumphant return, having been requested by his publishers to arrange some manuscript pages they had come upon into a narrative.
the preceding *Tales*, Pattieson’s frame begins inside chapter 1 and is titled, “Being Introductory.” Attached is a misquoted epigraph from George Canning and John Frere’s parody of Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Triangles* (1798). After a short diatribe on the changing speed, functions, and danger of mail-coaches—which recalls the editorial digressions in both Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* and Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*—Pattieson describes witnessing the aftermath of a mail-coach wreck in Gandercleugh, reminiscent of the accident that begins Austen’s unfinished novel *Sanditon*. He comes upon the overturned vehicle; no one has been killed, but two women are disheveled, and three men must be rescued from the nearby river. A new coach arrives to transport some of the people, but two lawyers and a poor elderly gentleman must wait and repine at the Wallace Inn. There the lawyers begin to speak about the Tolbooth Prison in Edinburgh, known also as the Heart of Midlothian, which is about to be closed. They lament that the prison will not be afforded its last rites, the final gift it has always offered to its prisoners. “‘[I]t would be a tale of unvaried sorrow and guilt,’” Pattieson observes.\(^77\) Hardie, one of the young lawyers, disagrees. The stories the prison can tell are “‘infinite’” and are “‘sufficient to gorge even the public’s all-devouring appetite for the wonderful and horrible’” (14). The prison is a space of confinement, and its stories should remain sealed, yet its closing allows stories to escape for public consumption. In this sense, Scott’s prison echoes the dynamics of Radcliffe’s confessional, where what should remain secret is exposed and disseminated.

The frame continues as Hardie asserts, “‘The inventor of fictitious narratives has to rack his brains for means to diversify his tale, and after all can hardly hit upon characters or incidents which have not been used again and again, until they are familiar to the eye of the reader’” (15). It is the repetitive monotony of contemporary novels that Hardie criticizes. For the “‘real records

of human vagaries’” (17) can be found in the papers of the courtroom. The legal tales of the two travelers are supplemented by the old man, whose time in prison supplies “ancient traditions, known only to the inhabitants” (25). Pattieson thereafter retires “to take down memorandums of what I had learned, in order to add another narrative to those which it had been my chief amusement to collect, and to write out in detail” (25). Yet again, Scott conflates the layering of narrative framing with the practice of memory-accumulation; Pattieson’s frames highlight the terms through which he collects the stories that he stockpiles to transform from oral to print. Pattieson next appears in the third series of Tales of My Landlord, and Scott further develops the trope of collection and adaptation, making Pattieson translate not only words but also images into text.

The frame for The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) is the “most enigmatic,” in James Chandler’s words, in Scott’s corpus. The story of Dick Tinto, a struggling painter and friend of Pattieson in Ganderclough, was the best celebrated of Scott’s introductory frames. The London Literary Gazette applauded the “clever episode” that “introduces” The Bride of Lammermoor “to our acquaintance.” Mirroring the fate of Scott’s embedded Gothic tales, the frame was frequently featured in magazines as an autonomous story of its own under such titles as “Dick Tinto: A Character from ‘Tales of My Landlord,’” “The Fortunes of an Artist,” and “The Life of Dick Tinto.” The figure of Dick Tinto even became symbolic of struggling artists throughout the nineteenth century. The question remains, however: what does this frame have to do with the novel, perhaps Scott’s most overtly Gothic endeavor? George Levine regards Tinto’s frame story

80 These titles come from The Arts and Artists 2 (1825): 255-267, La Belle Assemblée 19 (1819): 18-21, and New Elegant Extracts 3 (1827): 57-67, respectively.
as both “awkward and inappropriate” and “extraordinary irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{81} And while Kathryn Sutherland notes that in the manuscript the frame “appears to have been an afterthought,” and that Tinto’s biography “threatens to bury the real significance of the frame,” Scott’s objective shines through to offer a “shrewd critical comment . . . on the fickleness of popularity and the relationship of art to consumer demands.”\textsuperscript{82} Robertson similarly considers the frame a “general aesthetic comment and a specific orientation for the novel which it introduces.”\textsuperscript{83} In tracing the novel’s many references to painting back to Tinto’s aesthetic philosophy, Robertson contends that the frame “alerts readers to the possibilities and the shortcomings of a highly self-conscious piece of historical reconstruction.”\textsuperscript{84}

Tinto’s story on one hand provides a means for Scott to explore the opposing forces of description and dialogue, yet another dialectic that he must resolve.\textsuperscript{85} But on the other, the frame recalls Radcliffe’s attention to aesthetic discourse in constructing her novels’ structures and scenes. By framing the tragic history of the Ashton family—which Scott later reveals was based on the actual story of the Dalrymple family—with a dialogue on aesthetics, Scott implicitly undermines the truth of the central narrative. If the frame discusses the terms of representation, the economy and prospect of art, then the central narrative becomes colored by this fiction. History is constricted and adapted by the frame of aesthetic discourse. Scott calls attention to the


\textsuperscript{82} Kathryn Sutherland, Introduction to Walter Scott’s \textit{The Bride of Lammermoor} (London: Penguin, 2000), xix-xx.

\textsuperscript{83} Fiona Robertson, Introduction to Walter Scott’s \textit{The Bride of Lammermoor} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), xii.

\textsuperscript{84} Robertson, Introduction to Scott’s \textit{Bride of Lammermoor}, xv.

\textsuperscript{85} This tension came up later in Scott’s career in his short story, “Death of the Laird’s Jock,” which he contributed to the 1829 annual \textit{The Keepsake}. Scott argues that poetry appeals more forcibly to the imagination that painting. The central image of his tale, he hopes, will be painted, because “the interest is so much concentrated in one strong moment of agonizing passion, that it can be understood, and sympathized with, at a single glance” (187). Scott concludes the tale (which is framed on both ends with his critical commentary) by describing how the painter may represent the figures on a canvas. Artist Henry Corbould (1787–1844) took Scott’s challenge and painted the scene directly how Scott described. For more on Scott and painting, see Richard J. Hill’s \textit{Painting Scotland Through the Waverley Novels: Walter Scott and the Origins of the Victorian Illustrated Novel} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).
artistry of the frame that surrounds the Gothic interior by making Tinto, an artist who rebels against the damaging formula of aesthetic production and consumption, the collector and then transmitter of the story. Thus the true history of the Dalrymple family flows through so many circuits of adaptation before it arrives to readers that it is at best dubious and at worst not historical fiction at all—but instead Gothic.

Tinto begins his working life in his father’s modest tailoring business. His overabundant imagination and love of sketching leads him to abandon this trade in pursuit of more noble work as a painter. Beginning with inn signs, Tinto develops his craft to become a moderately successful portrait painter. But as his pool of sitters dries up, Tinto is forced to take his talents to London, where he inevitably fails and dies destitute. Tinto’s demise supplies Pattieson with a moral: “the great truth [is], that in the fine arts mediocrity is not permitted, and that he who cannot ascend to the very top of the ladder, will do well not to put his foot upon it at all.”86 The rest of chapter 1 consists of Pattieson reminiscing on conversations he had with Tinto about beginning Tales of My Landlord. Tinto is so excited by the proposition that he proposes an “ornamented and illustrated edition, with heads, vignettes, and culs de lampe” (21). In a sense, Tinto seeks to frame the text in his art, much as he will do for “The Bride of Lammermoor,” the story he provides to Pattieson.87

Of most concern to Tinto in criticizing Pattieson’s style is that “‘by indulging in prolonged scenes of mere conversation . . . you have lost the power of arresting the attention and exciting the imagination’” (22). Tinto produces a large picture, which represents a woman watching in agony as a man and her mother engage in a caustic debate, to prove his point that

87 This is the only text in Tales of My Landlord in which Pattieson metaleptically appears in the main narrative: “At present it is different; and I myself, Peter Pattieson, in a late journey to Edinburgh, had the honour, in the mail-coach phrase to ‘change a leg’ with a peer of the realm. It was not so in the days of which I write” (231). Pattieson appears several times in the narrative as “I,” each time in an attempt to explain vagaries or uncertainties in the narrative. This is especially evident when Pattieson calls the novel “AN OWER TRUE TALE” (342).
Pattieson does not possess the eye to read the entire story of a single scene. Although Pattieson cannot come to terms with Tinto’s aesthetic philosophy, Tinto remains undaunted: “‘I have compassion on your dullness, and am unwilling you should be deprived of the pleasure of understanding my picture, and of gaining, at the same time, a subject for your own pen’” (25). Thus Tinto describes an excursion during which he came across a story that both pays homage to and updates the Radcliffian Gothic:

‘I was seduced into the mountains of Lammermoor by the account I received of some remains of antiquity in that district. Those with which I was most struck, were the ruins of an ancient castle. . . . I resided for two or three days at a farm-house in the neighbourhood, where the aged goodwife was well acquainted with the history of the castle, and the events which had taken place in it.’ (25)

Tinto’s account echoes Radcliffé’s found-manuscript frames, but Scott updates the device by making Tinto an artist who is ready to adapt and interpret the story to his aesthetic ends; thus there remains little reason to authenticate the story Tinto provides. Tinto hands Pattieson a “parcel of loose scraps” that contain not only drawings but also handwritten notes, which Pattieson later “wove . . . into the following Tale” (25). Now Pattieson acts as a tailor, the occupation Tinto refused, stitching together picture and description into a unified narrative.\footnote{The influence on Thomas Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus here is clear. The Editor of Sartor must sift through Teufelsdröckh’s papers. In so doing, he becomes a kind of tailor, and thus the “tailor is retailored.”} The Bride of Lammermoor indeed relies less on dialogue than previous Scott novels, and more on description, often of Gothic castles that, like Walpole’s Otranto, contain moving (and moved) portraits. And several scenes, in what seem allusions to Tinto, Pattieson interjects with declarations: “The scene was worthy of an artist’s pencil” (32), and two travelers would “have
made a good painting” (84-85). Yet this is still “disputed . . . ground” that Pattieson cannot fully reconcile, as his “persons, like many others in this talking world, speak now and then a great deal more than they act” (25). And the irony is that the frame is in great part a dialogue between the two actors. That Scott rather explicitly draws attention to the novel’s potential flaws demonstrates again his discomfort in producing a full-length Gothic novel. Despite the fact that *The Bride of Lammermoor* is saturated with Gothic tropes (more so even than *The Black Dwarf*), and framed in a thematic move that draws parallels to Radcliffe, Scott expresses frustration with his attempt to combine the Gothic with historical fiction. It is no surprise, then, that the third series of *Tales of My Landlord* would conclude with such a dramatic and Gothic stroke.

*A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, published together with *The Bride of Lammermoor*, concludes *Tales of My Landlord* not only in being the last of the series that Scott would write for more than a decade, but also because it features the collapse of the series’ frame. For the first time, Cleishbotham is absent from the opening frame, and is referred to only in passing by Pattieson, whose comments appear in an “Introduction” that is not part of chapter 1. This formal move marks already a disengagement from the strategy of the rest of the series. Rather than appearing as part of the main story, Pattieson is now disconnected from it, his words more paratextual addition than fictional construction. Pattieson is, moreover, for the first time unnamed; he has already begun to disappear. Nevertheless, Pattieson’s frame proceeds true to form. He details the life of a respected military veteran of Gandercleugh, Sergeant More M’Alpin, whose tale Pattieson records. “It was, therefore, with great pleasure, that I extracted

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89 Scott may have been thinking of Fielding’s references to his friend, “the Ingenious Hogarth” in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (51). For more on this collaborative relationship, see P. J. De Voogd’s *Henry Fielding and William Hogarth: The Correspondences of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981).
90 Scott returned for a fourth series of *Tales of My Landlord* in 1832 with *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous*. Cleishbotham appears again without reference to his being earlier uncovered as a fiction. He has found new manuscripts of Pattison’s (misspelled throughout) that are his duty to publish, and he has now employed Pattison’s younger brother, Paul.
from my military friend some curious particulars respecting that time,” Pattieson writes. But his words come with a warning. The tale is mixed with that measure of the wild and wonderful which belongs to the period and the narrator, but which I do not in the least object to the reader’s treating with disbelief, provided he will be so good as give implicit credit to the natural events of the story, which, like all those which I have had the honour to put under his notice, actually rest upon a basis of truth. (7)

Pattieson cautions that the inclusion of the supernatural—in this case, apparitions, which are explained in a later appendix on wraiths—in a historical tale are a product of the time. The more discerning contemporary reader should approach these moments incredulously and place weight instead on the novel’s real elements. Yet again does Scott use the Gothic willingly only to discredit it in the face of historical truth. The novel concludes with a customary dividing line, after which is followed: “READER! THE TALES OF MY LANDLORD are now finally closed, and it was my purpose to have addressed thee in the vein of Jedediah Cleishbotham; but, like Horam the son of Asmar, and all other imaginary story-tellers, Jedediah has melted into thin air” (183). Scott refers here to Tales of the Genii (1764), a series of stories purported to have been composed by Horam and to have been translated by Sir Charles Morell. In reality, in a complex frame to maintain anonymity, the tales were written by James Ridley. Scott concludes Montrose and indeed Tales of My Landlord:

I retire from the field, conscious that there remains behind not only a large harvest, but labourers capable of gathering it in. More than one writer has of late

92 The narrator also refers to Cleishbotham as Ariel from The Tempest, suggesting that he has served in debt to the author, but that he holds a tenuous authority that is always ready to be exploded.
93 Scott’s move to reveal the fictional figures of his frame may be a response to the disastrous forgeries committed by Macpherson and Chatterton.
displayed talents of this description; and if the present author, himself a phantom, may be permitted to distinguish a brother, or perhaps a sister shadow, he would mention, in particular, the author of the very lively work, entitled “Marriage.” (183)

The death of Cleishbotham, however, does not mark the removal of anonymity. In fact, Scott adds another layer to the frame of Tales of My Landlord. Although his compiler, editor, and setting are now unveiled as fictions, Scott himself does not appear. Rather, “I” is yet another nebulous narrator. The real Scott had no intention of retiring. The loss of Pattieson and Cleishbotham makes way not only for the anonymous narrator’s “sister shadow,” friend and fellow anonymous novelist, Susan Ferrier, but also for the return of the “Author of Waverley.” Indeed, even through the debilitating illness that especially inflicted him in the latter stages of The Bride of Lammermoor, Scott began immediately to write Ivanhoe. “The Author of Waverley” would appear intermittently for the next decade, yet this amazing run of anonymity could not last forever.

At a dinner party in 1827, in the midst of financial ruin stemming from the failure of the Ballantyne printing business after the 1825-6 banking crisis, Scott finally revealed himself as the “Author of Waverley.” A year later, he was approached by Charles Heath, founder of The Keepsake, and asked to contribute to the literary annual. Scott could not ignore the invitation given his finances, and he mulled over the monetary prospects in a 30 January journal entry:

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94 Ina Ferris reads this as a “premature announcement of retirement as the Author of Waverley,” but at no point is Tales of My Landlord directly attributed as having this authorship, despite what most readers could assume (“The Historical Novel and the Problem of Beginning: The Model of Scott,” The Journal of Narrative Technique 18.1 (Winter 1988), 75.

95 Ivanhoe begins with a lengthy and humorous “Dedicatory Epistle” from Laurence Templeton to the Revered Dr. Jonas Dryasdust. Similarly, The Monastery (1820) begins with a very long “Introductory Epistle” from Captain Clutterbuck to the Author of Waverley, whose response follows.
Heath’s object was to engage me to take charge as Editor of a yearly publication called the *Keepsake*, of which the plates are beyond comparison beautiful. . . .

Each novel of three volumes brings £4000, and I remain proprietor of the mine when the first ore is cropped out. This promises a good harvest, from what we have experienced. Now to become a stipendiary Editor of a New-Year’s Gift-Book is not to be thought of, nor could I agree to work for any quantity of supply to such a publication. Even the pecuniary view is not flattering, though these gentlemen meant it should be so. But one hundred of their close printed pages, for which they offer £400, is not nearly equal to one volume of a novel for which I get £1300 and have the reversion of the copyright. No—I may give them a trifle for nothing or sell them an article for a round price but no permanent engagement will I make.”

Although rejected by Cadell for *Chronicles of Canongate*, “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror” would appear as the first story in *The Keepsake* for 1829. On 13 April 1828, Scott writes: “Amused myself by converting the *Tale of the Mysterious Mirror* into *Aunt Margaret’s Mirror*, designed for Heath’s what-dye-call-it. Cadell will not like this, but I cannot afford to have my goods thrown back upon my hands. The tale is a good one.” Occupied concurrently with writing his series *Tales of My Grandfather*, a history of Scotland meant for his grandchild, Scott certainly had tales on his mind. However, the tales that appear in *The Keepsake* not only satisfy Scott’s lingering anxiety over description and dialogue, but they also prove Scott’s mastery of the

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Gothic short story, a genre that he had previously buried in his historical novels, but that periodicals had re-framed as autonomous stories.\(^98\)

William Harrison Ainsworth, the first editor of *The Keepsake*, explains that the annual sought to “render the union of literary merit with all the beauty and elegance of art as complete as possible.”\(^99\) Scott contributed four tales to the 1829 *Keepsake*, which brought him alongside such writers as Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Percy and Mary Shelley. Some of these authors were called upon to provide stories to accompany pre-existing engravings. While Mary Shelley would satisfy this demand with “The Sisters of Albano,” Scott’s contributions were original productions that required engravings to be produced; in this sense, artists were called in to frame Scott’s stories. Scott’s experiment with genre and the Gothic is most evident in “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror.” The tale demonstrates that Scott conceived of *Tales of My Landlord*, at least originally, as a Gothic collection.

The narrator begins the tale with a description of his childhood under the tutelage of his Aunt Margaret, a sort of Miss Havisham figure for whom “time has stood still.”\(^100\) Scott’s customary frame narrative is at work here: the tale begins without referring to an introduction, and the narrator spirals off into a discussion of property preservation in the face of modern land development. The narrator then pauses to explain: “With this slight introduction, the reader will know as much of Aunt Margaret and her nephew as is necessary to comprehend the following conversation and narrative” (6). This is the first frame of the tale, and the narrator proceeds by recording a conversation with Aunt Margaret. After more posturing, the dialogue turns to the merits of the supernatural. Aunt Margaret separates the reactions to the supernatural between the

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\(^{98}\) As Paula Feldman points out, in *The Keepsake* the “short story blossomed as a genre” (Introduction to *The Keepsake for 1829* [Ontario: Broadview, 2006], 7).


female and male imagination; the former is ""susceptible of the slight shuddering . . . when you hear a tale of terror"" and a ""desire to avoid looking into a mirror"" (11). The latter reaction, however, Aunt Margaret cannot describe. In the mirror, Aunt Margaret observes, ""That space of inky darkness seems to be a field for Fancy to play her revels in"" (12). She then explains, in good Gothic fashion, how she came across the story that follows: ""this dislike to look into a mirror in particular times and places has, I believe, its original foundation in a story, which came to me by tradition from my grandmother, who was a party concerned in the scene of which I will now tell you"" (12). Because the main story follows under the heading of chapter 1, the tale has properly two frames: the narrator explaining his relationship with Aunt Margaret and the conversation with the narrator about the supernatural. That the tale becomes increasingly Gothic as it moves inward through layers of narrative contrasts Scott’s method in his novels. Whereas there is little lead-up or anticipation built towards the embedded Gothic tales that appear in his novels, the *Keepsake* stories (perhaps as a result of space constraints) begin in a Gothic mode that increases in potency as it progresses.

In the main story, the libertine Sir Philip Forester marries Jemmie Falconer, a naïve girl with a substantial dowry. Soon nearly destitute, Sir Philip leaves for the continent where he wishes to serve as a volunteer in the military. He quickly loses contact with Jemmie, and she, though disabused by her sister, consults a controversial doctor in Edinburgh who claims to be able to see any person’s whereabouts through a mirror. The doctor is, in what seems a direct homage to Radcliffe, an Italian, “dressed in a full suit of black clothes” (26). The Italian’s mirror is symbolic of the tale itself: “as if it had self-contained scenery of its own, objects began to appear within it, at first in a disorderly, indistinct, and miscellaneous manner . . . at length in

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101 See chapter 3, which in part concerns Mary Shelley’s *The Field of Fancy*, the abandoned first conception of *Mathilda*. 
distinct and defined shape and symmetry” (32-33). In the mirror, the sisters see Sir Philip about to be married. He is attacked by a guest at the wedding, later revealed to be Jemmie’s brother, who perishes in the scuffle. The image fades, and the story breaks at a long, Radcliffean dash to return to the world of the narrator and Aunt Margaret, who tells the narrator that Jemmie soon died, and that a “natural explanation” for the mirror could not be attained” (40). The main story returns without formal warning to explain that Sir Philip came once more to seek forgiveness from Jemmie’s sister. Once she finds out that Sir Philip was the murderer, he flees: “He threw himself over the balustrade, and alighted safely in the lobby, though a leap of fifteen feet at least, then dashed into the street, and was lost in darkness” (44). As we shall see with Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in chapter 4, the story’s doomed figure returns to seek solace from his tormenters, and where Shelley’s creature is “lost in the darkness and distance,” Sir Phillip is “lost in darkness.” The story concludes, “So closed the tale of the Mysterious Mirror,” but we are left, again as with *Frankenstein*, without a resolution for the opening frames. Although the tale is “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror,” the central story takes over, and Sir Philip is allowed escape, only “believed to have returned to the continent, and there died in exile” (44). Scott thus appears to have borrowed much from Shelley, whom he had unknowingly praised in an early review of *Frankenstein*.

Scott’s next contribution to the 1829 *Keepsake* is the far more formulaic Gothic tale, “The Tapestried Chamber.” It is, unsurprisingly, framed, though this time Scott appears directly as “The Author of Waverley” to explain that the tale is the product of a story he heard from Anna Seward. Scott’s move here is calculated. Rather than take credit for any part, and thus provide proof of his use of the supernatural, his proxy, Seward, “always affirmed that she had derived her
information from an authentic source”; he will “simply rehearse, as I heard it, a story of supernatural terror.”

In departing from all of Radcliffe’s novels except Gaston de Blondeville, neither Keepsake tale relies on the explained supernatural. Rather, the most Gothic stories of Scott’s career rest on the existence of the paranormal, on magic mirrors and haunting ghosts. Still, Scott’s claim that the story was originally Seward’s deflects his culpability in the story’s thematic content.

Scott planned for both Gothic Keepsake stories to be included in the second series of The Chronicles of Canongate, but after they were rejected by Cadell, Scott changed course and expanded another short story he had been undertaking that would eventually become The Fair Maid of Perth (1828). Scott had proposed that the first series of Chronicles (1827) would be Eastern tales, but the two volumes instead ended up as three short stories narrated by the fictional figure Chrystal Croftangry. Seven chapters outline Croftangry’s history, amounting to almost half of the text, which serve as the opening frame for the three short tales. Croftangry also introduces each tale and closes the entire text with concluding remarks. The first series of Chronicles is most notable because it marks the first time Scott admitted his authorship in print; yet this preface is immediately followed by Croftangry’s fictional frame. This demonstrates that Scott’s frame narratives never function as authorial subterfuge. The fact that his frames are almost always part of the fictional space of his novels suggests that Scott’s manipulations of the

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104 Walter Scott, “The Tapestried Chamber,” The Keepsake for 1829, ed. Paula Feldman (Ontario: Broadview, 2006), 124. In the tale, General Browne visits his old friend Woodville, who has recently inherited a castle. Woodville puts his friend up in a room that he knows may be haunted, but refuses to warn him. Browne then relates the night’s adventures—another narrative layer to match that of “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror”—during which he saw a hideous ghost. A trip to the castle’s portrait gallery reveals that the woman who haunts the chamber there committed crimes of “incest, and unnatural murder” (142).
device from its Gothic roots in masquerading antiquity were imaginative experiments in form and not narrative layering enacted to mask his own authorship or authority.  

In March 1828, Scott completed the second series of *Chronicles of Canongate*, which consisted only of *The Fair Maid of Perth*, perhaps the most intriguing formal experiment of Scott’s career. The novel begins with a framing device in chapter 1, again narrated by Croftangry, but instead of moving chronologically through chapters, the main narrative also begins with chapter 1. In the first chapter 1, Croftangry happens to be walking by a house to let in the neighborhood of Canongate, Edinburgh, where the chief assistant to Queen Mary was murdered more than two centuries earlier. The landlady shrieks when a prospective client from London attempts to clean a stain of blood that has survived from the murder. Croftangry hears the commotion and assists in showing the man the door. For his trouble, the landlady allows Croftangy to wander at his leisure through the historic house.

Two Gothic tropes are introduced and satirized in the frame. Croftangry wishes, “with the good luck of most editors of romantic narrative, [to] light upon some hidden crypt or massive antique cabinet, which should yield to my researches an almost illegible manuscript, containing the authentic particulars of some of the strange deeds of those wild days of the unhappy Mary.” During a conversation with his cousin, Mrs. Bethune Baliol—who aided him in the first series—concerning whether he will sleep in the house, she asserts, “Who knows what dreams might be produced by a night spent in a mansion of so many memories! For aught I know, the iron door of the postern stair might open at the dead hour of midnight, and, as at the time of the conspiracy, forth might sally the phantom assassins, with stealthy step and ghastly

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105 Robertson, for example, argues that Scott’s third-edition preface to *Waverley* “initiates a system of self-defence which was to become increasingly important in the various frame-narratives and different layers of introductory and explanatory material in subsequent novels” (“Walter Scott, *Waverley*,” in *A Companion to Romanticism* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999], 212).

look, to renew the semblance of the deed’’ (16). After Croftangry supplements his cousin’s yarn with the ghosts of several figures of Scottish lore, she inquires, ‘‘You will put them to some action, and since you do threaten the Canongate with your desperate quill, you surely mean to novelise, or to dramatise, if you will, this most singular of all tragedies?’’ (19). Croftangry responds that the ‘‘well-known paths of history’’ (20), thanks to writers like William Robertson, do not make for good novels. Mrs. Baliol retorts that the difference between historical and novel writing is in the imagination: ‘‘The light which [Robertson] carried was that of a lamp to illuminate the dark events of antiquity; yours is a magic lantern to raise up wonders which never existed. No reader of sense wonders at your historical inaccuracies’’ (20). Mrs. Baliol’s metaphor suggests that mimesis need not be the goal of the novelist. Rather, historical romances are products first of the author’s imagination, and fictional figures should be introduced against the backdrop of history. This theory comes just two years after Scott privately apologized for his penchant to rest too heavily on the strictures of history at the cost of plot and character. The Gothic Keepsake stories, it appears, may be a product of Scott’s reevaluation of his craft to act more as a lantern than a mirror. The magic lantern, moreover, is an fascinating choice to describe the novel, because it was most celebrated for its use at conjuring phantasmagoria, projections of the ghostly figures that Croftangry reports he may see during his dreams in the house. During Scott’s life, the most famous practitioner of magic lantern phantasmagoria was Étienne-Gaspard Robert, known in England as Robertson. Mrs. Baliol’s reference to Robertson could in fact suggest that the imaginative power of the novel is greater than even that of the magic lantern.  

Of The Fair Maid of Perth, The Mirror contends, ‘‘Like the author’s other productions, the present is part historical, and part filled in from his fertile but accurate invention,—so nicely

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107 In 1832, Scott’s friend David Brewster, who invented the Kaleidoscope, published Letters on Natural Magic, addressed to Scott, which attempted to tackle the mysteries of the supernatural.
are history and fiction blended by his master-hand.” Indeed, Scott takes several historical liberties with the novel. It is in the frame to *The Fair Maid of Perth*, however, where Scott is most experimental and imaginative. The indelible stain of blood that inspires Croftangry sets the stage for the novel’s themes of deceit and violence. But it also functions to connect past with present in the same way that Scott’s novel will. The blood represents the Gothic manuscript that Croftangry hopes he may happen upon. If it has permanently soaked into the wood, as Croftangry meticulously speculates, the blood resembles the ink of a manuscript on paper that bridges past and present Scottish history. Although a man from London attempts to erase it (in what seems a veiled critique of Blackwood’s London partners), Scottish history is permanently rooted to its bloody, violent—and Gothic—past.

Late in his career, even after financial ruin and the loss of anonymity, Scott maintained a covert relationship with the Gothic. Each of the Gothic tales he contributes to *The Keepsake* not only hides behind layers of narrative frames, but also perpetuates a gendered Gothic. In “Aunt Margaret’s Mirror,” while Aunt Margaret tells the tale, and she knows only how women will react to its supernatural themes, the narrator is allowed to be a questioning figure who comes from the outside to seek rational explanations from his Aunt’s tale. Even more bombastically, Scott places the posthumous burden of “The Tapestried Chamber” on Seward, whose poems he had edited with a prefatory memoir early in his career. Not exactly known for her love of the Gothic, Seward wrote in 1794: “I read not . . . the novel trash of the day.” As with Isabella

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109 Qtd. in Rictor Norton, *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764-1840* (London: Continuum, 2006), 344. Seward did, however, admire some of Radcliffe’s work.
Wardour’s recitation of “The Fortunes of Martin Walbeck” in *The Antiquary*, Scott continues to present his Gothic as the product of women.\(^{110}\)

Scott’s Gothic, which emerges imaginatively and passionately in both his short stories and hypodiegetic tales, was never fully realized at the level of the novel. The heavy-handed attention to history that had won him unprecedented success in his early Waverley Novels, proved not so easy to abandon for *Tales of My Landlord*, the series of volumes he hoped to be “Romance[s] totally different in stile.” His late regret at letting “the frame overpower the picture” speaks to an inability to allow his plots and characters to escape the boundaries of history and reality.\(^{111}\) Despite his apology, Scott further buried the Gothic in formal framework with the *Magnum Opus* editions of his novels (1829-1833).\(^{112}\) Adding lengthy contextual introductions and detailed notes to each novel effectively makes history dominate fiction. Even his frame figures, whose role was to masquerade for the real Scott, become decidedly marginalized in narrative importance. As introductions pile upon introductions, frames can overpower frames. Even before the *Magnum Opus* editions, however, Scott always sought to find a hiding place for the Gothic in his novels. His 1827 comments on the supernatural reveal his methodology:

> the supernatural in fictitious composition requires to be managed with considerable delicacy, as criticism begins to be more on the alert. The interest which it excites is indeed a powerful spring; but it is one which is peculiarly

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\(^{110}\) Scott’s choice of Woodville for one of the characters’ names in “The Tapestried Chamber” appears to align with the “sentimental sounds of Belmour, Belville, Belfield, and Belgrave” he mocks in *Waverley* (3).

\(^{111}\) Robertson calls this the “subordination of the supernatural to the historical and cultural” (*Legitimate Histories*, 13).

\(^{112}\) Robertson reads the *Magnum Opus* frames as being equally inconclusive as those previous: “These notes are stories in themselves, subject to the same play of internal verification and the same inconclusiveness as the main text, and they continue rather than replace the suggestion about the conditions and limitations of narrative which Scott first conveyed through the frame-narrative of Pattison and Tinto” (*Introduction to Scott’s* *Bride of Lammermoor*, xvi).
subject to be exhausted by coarse handling and repeated pressure. It is also of a character which it is extremely difficult to sustain, and of which a very small proportion may be said to be better than the whole. The marvellous, more than any other attribute of fictitious narrative, loses its effect by being brought much into view.\(^{113}\)

Scott transformed the Gothic convention of narrative frames into a realistic Scottish setting and used them to secure his own Gothic themes in central-narrative locations. Thus it is that Scott’s Gothic never appears forced or unwieldy, but rather maintains an organic, controlled, and, for him, more real feel. But there is a reason critics continue to focus on the supernatural elements in Scott’s fiction. The Gothic was his first love, his first literary production, and in many ways his most imaginative and enduring work comes out of his reverence for the genre. His attempt to make it a part of “legitimate” literature went hand in hand with providing it borders, giving it frames of history, of reality, of truth. It is fitting that Lockhart’s *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837-38) is a frame narrative.\(^{114}\) The burden of contextual framing falls on the shoulders of a capable Lockhart, as Scott becomes immortalized as art in the central narrative of his life.

Shortly after Lockhart’s *Memoirs*, work began on the Scott Monument. Inaugurated in August 1846, after almost a decade’s worth of planning and construction, the foreboding structure pierces the sky in central Edinburgh. Within its pointed archways constructed of blackened stone sits Scott’s statue. The author who so often buried the Gothic thus rests inside a decidedly Gothic edifice; his grey, clean vestments and neoclassical attitude forever contrasted and buried against and amid the dark frame of the Gothic. The monument serves as a reverse


\(^{114}\) For more on Lockhart’s framing an abridgment of *Memoirs* into a *Narrative* in 1848, see Leah Price’s *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 52-54.
architectural metaphor for the structure of Scott’s novels. At the heart rests the historical image of Scott, his faithful dog Maida at his feet, which is surrounded by both Gothic style and—perhaps most important—statuettes of characters from his novels.\textsuperscript{115} Although Scott attempted to distance himself from the Gothic, his penchant for frame narratives not only kept him close to the genre, but also maintained and propagated its most fundamental formal convention. Yet, while Radcliffe and Scott gave the frame narrative its agency and potency, it was Mary Shelley who made it famous and enduring, for it is \textit{Frankenstein} that continues to fascinate and frustrate readers and critics alike.

\textsuperscript{115} Among the sixty-four statuettes are Old Mortality, Jeanie and Effie Deans, Ravenswood, and Lucy Ashton. The Black Dwarf, Peter Pattieson, Jedidiah Cleishbotham, and Dick Tinto unfortunately do not appear.
CHAPTER 4

FRAMING FRANKENSTEIN: MARY SHELLEY AND THE POLITICS OF EDITING

But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized.
—William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*¹

What is the strong control
Which leads the heart that dizzy steep to climb,
Where far over the world those vapours roll,
Which blend two restless frames in one reposing soul?
—Percy Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*²

On 31 October 1831, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was published as a revised volume for *Bentley’s Standard Novels.*³ This most famous of all literary self-editings remains controversial: excising and supplementing, softening and clarifying, Shelley fundamentally altered *Frankenstein*, re-presenting it in the form which has made it enduringly popular, while also emphasizing the vital distance—temporal and moral—between the texts and their authors. What I want to suggest is that the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* epitomizes Shelley’s career-long concern with the ramifications of editing, which culminates in her 1839 editions of Percy Shelley’s poetry and prose. Through the formal device of the frame narrative, Shelley poses questions of how a text, and perhaps more critically, its author, mutate under the editorial pen. Walton’s letters that frame the novel’s embedded stories provide an unstable narrative boundary, which Shelley employs to interrogate the roles of editors, the intermediaries between authors and

³ The 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* was published together with Part I of Friedrich Schiller’s *The Ghost-Seer* in *Bentley’s* vol. IX. Part II of Schiller’s novel appeared alongside Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* in vol. X.
readers; to undermine the notion of a complete narrative in terms formal, temporal, and spatial; and to demonstrate that the written word, when filtered through editorial channels, is a monstrous and destructive force.

As the child of two authors, Shelley was familiar with the frustrations of the literary marketplace—an experience augmented by the uneasy reality of her father-as-editor. William Godwin edited the 1823 edition of *Frankenstein*, which Shelley later used as the copy text for her 1831 revision. Shelley’s 1823 historical novel, *Valperga*, also bears the mark of Godwin’s editorial hand. More infamously, Godwin had collected Mary Wollstonecraft’s posthumous works for publication in 1798, which revealed his late wife’s scandalous amours and allowed unprecedented access to her creative mind. This was a plan “drastically ill-conceived,” Lucy Newlyn argues: “In adopting a confessional mode, Godwin defeated his own purposes: appearing as advocate instead of detached biographer, he succeeded in further alienating an audience that was still not ready for his enlightened and liberal views.” Godwin’s unmitigated policy of truth as editor and biographer was met with vitriol from consumers hungry for touch-ups and idealizations. This error in judgment may be conceived of as Godwin’s failure to frame his project, to ease his readers into the potentially scandalous heart of the text through layers of narrative voices.

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4 Charles E. Robinson notes that Godwin was the first to reorganize *Frankenstein* into two volumes (the Draft was two volumes, but the Fair Copy and 1818 edition are three) and speculates that Shelley used Godwin’s “word changes” “perhaps unknowingly” for the 1831 edition (“Texts in Search of an Editor: Reflections on The Frankenstein Notebooks and on Editorial Authority,” in *Textual Studies and the Common Reader: Essays on Editing Novels and Novelists*, ed. Alexander Pettit [Athens, GA: The U of Georgia P, 2000], 105).

5 On 18 February 1823, Godwin wrote to Shelley: “Your novel is now fully printed, & ready for publication. . . . I have taken great liberties with it, & I am afraid your amour propre will be proportionally [sic] shocked. I need not tell you that all the merit of the book is exclusively your own. The whole of what I have done is merely confined to the taking away things which must have prevented its success” (Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Shelley*, vol. 1, ed. Betty T. Bennett [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980], 323).

Perhaps as a result of Godwin’s missteps, Shelley became intensely concerned with her public persona as author. She reveals in the 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*: “I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print.” Shelley’s apparent trepidation of public scrutiny must be tempered with the fact that the ploy of anonymity was an expected trope, and Shelley only echoes the women writers who influenced her, especially Frances Burney. Catherine Gallagher traces Burney’s use of the pronoun “nobody” to argue that, while the author “clears a linguistic space that can be occupied by a suppositional being,” she nonetheless “stands in the place of Nobody, . . . [and] represents the very void that made room for her.” Paula Feldman points out that the “myth” of authorial anonymity by Romantic women authors “was often either a temporary state or a transparent pose.” Maneuvering through the chauvinist politics of the publishing world required Shelley to bridge these positions, simultaneously desiring concealment and practicing publicity.

Although Shelley participated in the anonymity game in public, she nevertheless continued to express to friends a reluctance to expose herself to public scrutiny. In April 1829, seven years after Percy’s death, she writes to Edward Trelawny:

> There is nothing I shrink from more fearfully than publicity. . . . I will tell you what I am—a silly goose—who far from wishing to stand forward to assert myself in any way, now than [sic] I am alone in the world, have but the desire to wrap night and the obscurity of insignificance about me. This is weakness—but I cannot help it—to be in print—the subject of men’s observations—of the bitter

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hard world’s commentaries, to be attacked or defended!—this ill becomes one who knows how little she possesses worthy to attract attention—and whose merit—if it be one—is a love of that privacy which no woman can emerge from without regret. . . . But remember, I pray for omission. . . . I only seek to be forgotten—

Perhaps it was clothed in the obscuring guise of editor that Shelley felt most comfortable. Each of her three editions of Percy’s poetry proudly bears her name, either as editor on the title page or in signature following a preface or dedicatory words. Shelley became an advocate of her husband’s posthumous reputation, a surrogate pen to reproduce his revolutionary voice. In desiring “omission,” Shelley sought to erase herself from her own productions, to hide herself as author behind herself as editor—a role that is further obscured by the many fictional editors that appear in her novels. Shelley’s novels thus comment on both authorship and the editorial process. If she wished “to wrap night and the obscurity of insignificance about me,” then it is not surprising that she sought means to shield her stories from her self—and vice versa. Narrative frames provide just such a boundary. Often seemingly tangential or insignificant to the story within, narrative frames populate the text with makeshift editors, which distance the author from

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10 Shelley, The Letters of Mary Shelley, 2:72. The letter is in part a response to Trelawny’s request for materials on Percy Shelley, which Mary declined. Trelawny subsequently sent Shelley the manuscript of his exaggerated autobiography, Adventures of a Younger Son (then called A Man’s Life), to find a publisher. Shelley suggested that he remove potentially offensive passages. On 27 December 1830, she writes, “allow me to persuade you to permit certain omissions. . . I have named all the objectionable passages” (120). Shelley’s 25 March 1831 letter to Trelawny demonstrates her intimate knowledge of the politics of publishing: “if you please try [John] Murray—he will keep me two months at least—and the worst is if (as he is an arrant coward) he won’t do anything . . . and we shall be in a greater mess than ever—I know that as a woman I am timid and therefore a bad negociator [sic] except that I have perseverance & zeal—and I repeat—experience of things as they are—” (132). Shelley’s implicit reference to the subtitle of her father’s Caleb Williams here is a particularly effective rhetorical device.

11 Percy Shelley had a hand in veiling his wife from her work for commercial reasons. In a 17 July 1821 letter to Charles and James Ollier, he writes: “I think it of consequence that the circumstances of Mrs. S.’s having written the work [Valperga] I propose to you should be kept a profound secret, and I repose upon my confidence in you to that effect. On consideration, I think that it ought not to be announced as written by the author of ‘Frankenstein’: it bears every indication of the greatest popularity and many people might have been prejudiced by ‘Frankenstein’ against a second attempt of the same author” (Percy Shelley, The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, vol. 1, ed. Roger Ingpen [London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1912], 882-883).
the central text as the frames multiply outwards. However, Shelley does not suggest that the text should be trusted in the hands of these editors. Rather, the opposite. For Shelley, the force of narrative frames is twofold: they rupture links between author and text by highlighting editorial figures that occupy the interstitial space between manuscript and published text, and simultaneously they scrutinize the role and power of these intermediaries.

The Shelleys’ relationship with their editors and publishers proved productive, but often contentious. As William St. Clair observes, authors “were obliged to operate within a commercial system in which they, their advisers, and their publishers attempted to judge what the market wanted and how best to supply it.”

12 Percy Shelley forged a longstanding connection with Charles Ollier, who formed a publishing firm with his brother James in 1817. On 3 August 1817, Percy Shelley sent the Fair Copy of *Frankenstein* to Ollier, and included a note: “I send you with this letter a manuscript, which has been consigned to my care by a friend in whom I feel considerable interest.” Ollier declined, prompting Shelley to chide, “I hope ‘Frankenstein’ did not give you bad dreams.” Shelley faced more disappointment from Ollier later that year.

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12 William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 161. Pierre Bourdieu argues: “The public meaning of a work . . . originates in the process of circulation and consumption dominated by the objective relations between the institutions and agents implicated in the process. The social relations which produce this public meaning are determined by the relative position these agents occupy in the structure of the field of restricted production. These relations, e.g. between author and publisher, publisher and critic, author and critic, are revealed as the ensemble of relations attendant on the ‘publication’ of the work, that is, its becoming a public object” (*The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson [Oxford: Polity Press, 1993]), 118-119.


15 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:551. As Robinson points out, the Olliers did not have the means to purchase full copyrights, to fund the majority of publishing expenses, or to publish by commission. These financial limitations obliged Shelley to fund his own publications from 1817-1819, and probably prevented Ollier from publishing *Frankenstein* ( “Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood,” 186). Shelley had previously sent *Frankenstein* to Byron’s publisher, John Murray, but by 18 June it was declined. Murray’s rejection came following consultation from William Gifford, editor of the *Quarterly Review*. Gifford later met the ire of William Hazlitt, who criticized Gifford’s role as editor and critic of the periodical: “our Editor, by virtue of the situation he holds, is superior to facts or arguments: he is accountable neither to the public nor to authors for what he
concerning his poem *Laon andCythna*, and he aired his grievances in a dramatic letter. On 22 August, Shelley found a publisher for *Frankenstein* in Lackington and Co., though again with some conflict over profit percentages. Shelley’s disappointment with Ollier—which apparently affected neither their friendship nor their future professional partnerships—perhaps stemmed in part from an understanding of symbiotic collaboration that the author thought his publisher had violated. *Frankenstein* was special, of course; but even more important, the manuscript came thoughtfully crafted and meticulously edited. *Frankenstein* had evolved from an ur-text in the summer of 1816, to a substantially longer Draft (two volumes), and finally to a Fair Copy (three volumes), the latter two of which both Shelleys edited with fastidious and commercially savvy pens. As Charles E. Robinson observes, “*Frankenstein* is a series of texts in search of an editor, one who will ultimately give form and shape to the novel.” That editor is Robert Walton in the

says of them, but owes it to his employers to prejudice the work and vilify the writer” (*The Spirit of the Age* [London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960], 289). Hazlitt levied his most biting criticism of editors of periodicals in his “Chapter on Editors” (1830): [editors] have got a little power in their hands, and they wish to employ that power (as all power is employed) to increase the sense of self-importance; they borrow a certain dignity from their situation as arbiters and judges of taste and elegance, and they are determined to keep it to the detriment of their employers and of every one else” (*Sketches and Essays* [London: John Templeman, 1839], 352.).

16 Ollier declined to publish the poem without major changes. On 11 December 1817, Percy Shelley writes: “It is to be regretted that you did not consult your own safety and advantage (if you consider it connected with the non-publication of my book) before your declining the publication, after having accepted it, would have operated to so extensive and serious an injury to my views as now. The instances of abuse and menace which you cite were such as you expected, and were, as I conceived, prepared for. . . . You do your best to condemn my book before it is given forth, because you publish it, and then withdraw; so that no other bookseller will publish it, because one has already rejected it. You must be aware of the great injury which you prepare for me. If I had never consulted your advantage, my book would have had a fair hearing” (*The Letters of Percy Shelley*, 2:569-570). Shelley finally capitulated to Ollier’s revisions, and the poem was published as *The Revolt of Islam*. Mary Shelley also had her frustrations with Ollier’s constant delays and silence. On 28 December 1830, she writes, “My dear Sir—I hope your tiresome silence is not occasioned by your being dead” (*The Letters of Mary Shelley*, 2:121).

17 The parties finally agreed to Mary Shelley receiving one-third profits on the 500 copies (Robinson, “Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood,” 190).

18 Robinson points out that the “dramatically structured two-volume Draft version was sacrificed to the expediency of expectations and finances in the commercial world of publishing that influenced the Shelleys’ decision” (“Texts in Search of an Editor,” 102). For more on the Shelleys’ edits at the various stages of the novel, see Robinson’s “Texts in Search of an Editor,” 96.

frame narrative to *Frankenstein*, but over a decade later Mary Shelley would take back the editorial reins.\(^\text{20}\)

On 18 February 1831, Mary Shelley wrote to Ollier, who now worked for publishers Richard Bentley and Henry Colburn, asking, “Have they any idea of publishing *Frankenstein* in their edition?”\(^\text{21}\) St. Clair notes that for the *Standard Novels* series Bentley “insisted that the author should correct errors and supply new material either in the text or as a paratextual preface or notes.”\(^\text{22}\) Shelley agreed to revise *Frankenstein* for the 1831 edition, supplying both a new, longer genealogical preface and many substantive textual emendations. Bentley purchased the copyright for the novel from Shelley, which his firm kept late into the nineteenth century. That Shelley actively strove to see a new edition of *Frankenstein* published by Bentley suggests that she planned for her “hideous progeny” to “go forth and prosper” (197)—again. It would be a project that merged Shelley’s identities as author and editor, but it was a far different mind who looked back on the production of her youth.

Of all Shelley’s roles as editor, none carried so much responsibility as that of creating a posthumous persona for Percy Shelley—a resolution no doubt partially triggered by her father’s disastrous memoir. After his death, Mary Shelley labored to compile a selection of Percy’s poems that would showcase his talents, but not alienate conservative readers. In so doing, Neil Fraistat argues, “Mary Shelley successfully monumentalized Shelley.”\(^\text{23}\) Susan Wolfson traces

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\(^\text{20}\) Walton addresses his letters to his sister, Margaret Walton Saville, whose initials (MWS), many scholars have noted, are also Shelley’s. Robinson includes Margaret as a possible editor: “Do we read the manuscript written out by Walton for Margaret’s eyes only—or do we read a version of that manuscript that his sister Margaret received and then edited for the press?” (“Texts in Search of an Editor,” 93).


Shelley’s presence as editor of her husband’s work: “Across her volumes, she emerges as a uniquely privileged mediator, the intimate who is the poet’s ideal, best reader.” This 1824 edition was thwarted by the legal threats of her father-in-law and quickly pulled from the shelves. Up sprung, to the discontent of Mary (and we must assume of Timothy Shelley, too), several pirated editions. But it was likely that William Benbow’s 1826 edition, pirated directly from Mary Shelley’s text, but also supplemented with several extra poems, had the most effect on her. In 1826, Shelley finished her least critically successful novel, The Last Man, a text whose foundation lies not only in its apocalyptic theme, but also in its critique of the editorial process. Shelley’s struggles with the politics of editing appear saliently in her framing devices that lead up to her two most ambitious editorial projects: the reissue of Frankenstein and the long-awaited 1839 editions of Percy’s poetry and prose. Shelley’s framing device in Frankenstein affects the central story by calling into question the authenticity of the narrative, which demonstrates the author’s deep concern over how stories can be misrepresented by editors who turn fiction—and their authors—into monsters.

Shelley’s preoccupation with narrative frames began early in her career. In History of a Six Weeks’ Tour (1817), she provides not only a preface to explain the text’s genesis and to apologize for its faults, but also a short introductory account of the group’s arduous passage over choppy waters from Dover to Calais. This short entry serves as the opening frame for the chapter-like divisions by country that are terminated by four lengthy letters. Percy Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” closes the text, providing a final introspective account of the implacable power of nature that mirrors the introduction. Shelley began her next novel, Mathilda (written in 1819 but

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25 When Shelley approached Charles Ollier for access to Percy Shelley’s letters to the publisher in 1839, Ollier refused, hoping to benefit financially from the letters himself (Robinson, “Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood,” 185).
not published until 1959), with a framing device titled “The Fields of Fancy,” but removed it from the completed draft; and in *The Last Man* (1826) she provides her most concise, yet elaborate and enriching, framework, which tests generic, temporal, and authorial boundaries by juxtaposing the immortality of text against human mortality.\(^{26}\)

As with her predecessors, Shelley’s frame narratives function in part as boundaries that superimpose layers of narration between the author and the text. Garrett Stewart argues that Shelley’s frame narratives “undergo their own textuality, enact their own becoming-text, by invoking an attention whose personification they finally obliterate.”\(^{27}\) In his study of Romantic novels, Victor Sage makes an explicit connection between editing and framing: “To edit is to frame a text. To frame a text is to produce a hierarchy of discourses, in which other discourses can be framed; and essential to that act is to mark their edges in some way, by intratextual, intertextual or paratextual means, sometimes all three, and sometimes all together.”\(^{28}\)

*Frankenstein*’s intricate and imaginative system of layered narratives not only responds to Radcliffe and Scott, but also paves a new path for the Gothic novel. From the paratextual 1818 Preface and 1831 Introduction, to Walton’s opening and terminal frame-letters, and finally to the creature’s and Safie’s embedded stories, Shelley constructs a dynamic discourse of narratives, which contradict, overlap, and intersect to form a novel that exposes structures of perspective, understanding, and truth.

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\(^{26}\) Shelley also employs frame narratives in short tales that appeared in *The Keepsake*, “The Mourner” (1830), “The Evil Eye” (1830), and “The Mortal Immortal: A Tale” (1834), and two unpublished tales, “Valerius: The Reanimated Roman” and “An Eighteenth-Century Tale: A Fragment.”


Shelley probably added Walton’s introductory letters in October 1816. They were not part of the non-extant 1816 ur-text composed during the famous Geneva summer and are missing from the 1816–17 manuscript Draft. Robinson speculates that Shelley added them to “enlarge her ‘story’ into a ‘book,’” and elsewhere argues that the letters, coupled with Safie’s central tale, “experienced some kind of textual trauma and were discarded after they were rewritten in some other form.” Regarding the transformation from tale to novel, Marilyn Butler similarly asserts, “In order to make a novel Mary Shelley must have felt she needed at least eighty-thousand new words.” Yet the novel proved still to be of an awkward length. St. Clair observes, “Frankenstein was only stretched to three volumes by printing few words to the line, few lines to the page, and few pages to the volume.” Indeed, measuring Frankenstein against the bulging three-volume novels of Walter Scott renders it decidedly diminutive; yet Shelley clearly understood that a big creation could come out of a small package.

Frankenstein’s frame narrative puzzled contemporary reviewers. “The story begins at the end,” the Literary Panorama observes. And The British Critic contends: “In a sort of introduction, which precedes the main story of the novel, and has nothing else to do with it, we

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29 Robinson notes that Shelley was reading travel literature at this point, which possibly prompted her “to redraft sections of the beginning of Notebook A” (The Frankenstein Notebooks, part 1 [New York: Garland, 1996], lxxxii). This revision may account for the missing pages of the Draft that would have contained Walton’s introductory letters and a portion of chapter 1.

30 David Ketterer notes, “The opening frame letters and all or part of the closing frame chapter . . . could have been made during the twenty-or-so writing days for the period January to approximately 1 April 1817” (“Decomposing ‘Frankenstein’: The Import of Altered Character Names in the Last Draft,” Studies in Bibliography 49 [1996]: 264). Robinson places it at an earlier date: “Mary Shelley wrote or rewrote the introductory Walton Letters while or after reading Russian-travel and sea-voyage literature in October/November 1816” (“Editing and Contextualizing The Frankenstein Notebooks,” Keats-Shelley Journal 46 [1997]: 40). Walton’s letters (I-IV) are missing from the Draft and probably would have made up pages 1-33 of Shelley’s Notebook A. Part of chapter 1 is also missing (making up pp. 34-40 of Notebook A), and the extant draft starts, “servants had any request to make” (Robinson, The Frankenstein Notebooks, 1:11).

31 Robinson, The Frankenstein Notebooks, 1:lxx; Robinson, “Editing and Contextualizing.” 40. Robinson reasons that the Shelleys had this discussion on or around 21 August 1816 (The Frankenstein Notebooks, 1:lxxxi).


33 St. Clair, The Reading Nation, 359.

34 “Frankenstein; or, the modern Prometheus,” Literary Panorama 8 (1819), 412.
are introduced to a Mr. Walton, the Christopher Sly of the piece.\(^\text{35}\) That the reviewer links the novel’s opening letters to Sly’s drunken frame in *The Taming of the Shrew* implies that Walton figures as merely the occasion for storytelling. In the play, Sly is tricked into thinking he is a lord, and the central story of Katharina, Bianca, and their suitors is performed for Sly’s entertainment. A messenger informs Sly: “... they thought it good you hear a play / And frame your mind to mirth and merriment, / Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.”\(^\text{36}\) But it is the Lord’s trick on Sly that frames the play and puts the audience in the right “frame of mind” for the themes of gender, marriage, and trickery that follow. For the reviewer to equate Walton to Sly also suggests that Victor’s story is a fiction, a story he tells to soothe Walton’s own troubled mind. However, the reviewer fails to notice how profoundly imperative the frame is to the story inside, as it is more than mere decorative dressing. If Walton’s letters, following Derrida’s conception of the parergon, occupy the space between art (Victor’s narrative) and reality (Margaret/reader), then the creature’s appearance in the frame is the novel’s primary horror. If the creature can jump authoritatively from story into frame—the narrative space where Walton eventually travels “towards England” (186)—then how safe is Margaret (or readers) outside the frame?

Given the reading list she recorded while formulating and composing *Frankenstein*, Shelley’s inclusion of a frame narrative proves unsurprising. In the 1818 Preface to *Frankenstein*, Percy Shelley writes, “[we] occasionally amused ourselves with some German stories of ghosts, which happened to fall into our hands. These tales excited in us a playful desire of imitation” (4). Shelley refers to the collection of supernatural tales, *Fantasmagoriana*, which

\(^{35}\) “Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus,” *The British Critic* 9 (April 1818), 432-433.

features the frame narrative “The Family Portraits.” In the tale, Ferdinand comes upon a house, where he is told, “Every one is to relate a story of ghosts, or something of a similar nature.” Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”—which was, in Anne Mellor’s words, a “horrifying spectacle that haunted Mary Shelley’s imagination”—perhaps provides the most direct formal parallels to *Frankenstein*. The novel abounds with allusions to “Ancient Mariner,” and Shelley supplements a reference to the poem in the 1831 edition. Beth Lau argues that Coleridge was a “sympathetic and congenial figure” to Shelley, and his influence on the novel “challenge[s] the idea that Mary Shelley rejected ‘masculine Romanticism.’” However, the greatest link between the texts is that both feature crucial frame narratives. In Coleridge’s poem, the Mariner’s gaze arrests a passing wedding guest, preventing him from enjoying the nearby festivities. Victor’s tale seems similarly mesmerizing, as Walton falls immediately for his charisma and intellect. Just before the narrative frame returns in “Ancient Mariner,” the titular wanderer describes his fate:

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37 *Tales of the Dead: The Ghost Stories of the Villa Diodati*, ed. Terry Hale (London: The Gothic Society, 1992), 23. In the 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley records the plot of “The Family Portraits”: “There was the tale of the sinful founder of his race, whose miserable doom it was to bestow the kiss of death on all the younger sons of his fated house, just when they reached the age of promise” (194). Although Shelley contends that the stories “are as fresh in my mind as if I had read them yesterday” (194), her memory of the stories from the collection, as with her recollection of dates, is foggy. “The Family Portrait” thematically parallels Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, as it features a vengeful ancestral portrait. It does not, however, follow the Radcliffean model: “You see my history is very far from affording any natural explication of the wonders it contains; explanations which only tend to chock one’s reason” (*Tales of the Dead*, 31). The supernatural events of the tale remain unexplained. The French translation, which is the copy Shelley asserts the group read, is *Fantasmagoriana; ou Recueil d’Histoires d’Apparitions, de Spectres, Revenans, Fantômes, &c. Traduit de l’allemand, par un Amateur* (2 vols. Paris, 1812). The text was translated in English in 1813 by Sarah Elizabeth Utterson under the title *Tales of the Dead*. “The Family Portraits” was also recited by M. G. Lewis when he visited Villa Diodati in August 1816.


39 In Walton’s second letter, after he writes, “I am going to unexplored regions, to the land of mist and snow;” but I shall kill no albatross, therefore do not be alarmed for my safety” (10), Shelley adds: “or if I should come back to you as worn and woful as the ‘Ancient Mariner’? You will smile at my allusion; but I will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean, to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Johanna M. Smith, 30).

‘Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.41

The Mariner’s hypnotic hold on his listener (and readers) echoes Victor’s words to Walton:
“‘nothing can alter my destiny: listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined’” (17). If we follow the connections, Shelley casts Walton as the wedding guest, that nameless repository for the Mariner’s tale. Yet Walton means much more, as his letters appear without an introductory omniscient narrative voice (unless we give this agency to the novel’s preface or introduction). Where Coleridge’s poem begins “It is an ancient Mariner,”42 Walton appeals directly to his letter reader: “You will rejoice to hear” (5). Even more significant, when the Mariner relates, “this frame of mine was wrenched,”43 he suggests that the horror of the story that festers inside him erupts to consume his outer existence. The monster that impetuously shoots the albatross, and then leads his crew on an unnecessary journey to death, invades the frame (bodily and formally) of the Mariner, forcing him to tell and retell, to spread horror to innocent ears. Most significant, the two stanzas from “Ancient Mariner” quoted above appear as

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42 Coleridge, Ancient Mariner, 1, line 1.
43 Coleridge, Ancient Mariner, 7, line 65.
the epigraph for Shelley’s tale, “Transformation,” first published in the 1831 Keepsake.\textsuperscript{44} The confessional frame-structure of “Transformation” echoes not only “Ancient Mariner” and \textit{Frankenstein}, but also, even more saliently, \textit{Mathilda}.\textsuperscript{45}

Although “Ancient Mariner” may be the most direct influence on Shelley’s conception of \textit{Frankenstein}’s narrative frame, many other texts warrant notice.\textsuperscript{46} On 24 July 1816, Shelley records, “I read nouvelle nouvelles and write my story.”\textsuperscript{47} This marks Shelley’s first mention of \textit{Frankenstein}, which is recorded together with a reference to Madam de Genlis’ \textit{Nouveaux Contes Moraux et Nouvelles Historiques} (1802), a collection of short tales. Among them is “Le Palais de la Vérité,” which itself features an inset story. Among other texts Shelley records having read in 1817, the year she added Walton’s frame letters, are Sydney Owenson’s \textit{Wild Irish Girl} (1806) and Walter Scott’s \textit{Tales of My Landlord}.\textsuperscript{48} One should not ignore the possible influence Lady Morgan’s novel had on \textit{Frankenstein}, as its epistolary correspondence—following Goethe’s lead

\textsuperscript{44}“Transformation,” Paul A. Cantor contends, “clearly constitutes a rewriting” of Byron’s \textit{The Deformed Transformed}, an unfinished play that Shelley had transcribed in 1822-23 (“Mary Shelley and the Taming of the Byronic Hero: ‘Transformation’ and \textit{The Deformed Transformed},” in \textit{The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond \textit{Frankenstein}}, eds. Audrey A Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993], 89). The narrator, Guido, begins by justifying his confession: “I have heard it said, that, when any strange, supernatural, and necromantic adventure has occurred to a human being, that being, however desirous he may be to conceal the same, feels at certain periods torn up as it were by an intellectual earthquake, and is forced to bare the inner depths of his spirit to another” (Shelley, “Transformation,” in \textit{The Keepsake}, ed. Frederic Mansel Reynolds [London: Hurst, Chance, & Co., 1831], 18). The tale that follows chronicles Guido’s love for Juliet, his subsequent dissipation in Paris, and his descent to poverty back home in Genoa. There, alone and an outcast, he witnesses a shipwreck, its only survivor “a misshapen dwarf, with squinting eyes, distorted features, and body deformed” (27). Guido agrees, as payment for the dwarf’s chest of riches, to exchange bodies for three days. In his new body, Guido observes the dwarf rekindling Juliet’s love. Jealous with rage, Guido attacks, stabbing the dwarf and falling on his opponent’s sword in suicide. He awakes in his old body, now accepted by Juliet and her father, yet forever changed from his ordeal. Shelley might be echoing Scott’s \textit{The Black Dwarf} (1816), a novel that makes up one-quarter of the first series of \textit{Tales of My Landlord}, which is framed by an enthusiastic compiler (Peter Pattieson) and an irascible editor (Jedidiah Cleishbotham); see chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{45}Because the tale is set during the reign of Charles VI (1368-1422), in both France and Italy, the confessional-structure also resembles the novels of Ann Radcliffe. Moreover, the lone survivor of the shipwreck echoes not only “Ancient Mariner,” but also Mary Wollstonecraft’s “The Cave of Fancy.”

\textsuperscript{46}Shelley records having read Ann Radcliffe’s \textit{The Italian} (1797) in 1814, a novel which features a dazzling introductory frame narrative (see chapter 2), and Chaucer’s \textit{The Canterbury Tales} in 1815.

\textsuperscript{47}Mary Shelley, \textit{The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844}, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 118.

\textsuperscript{48}Mary Shelley read Scott’s \textit{Tales of My Landlord}—which could only have been the first series, \textit{The Black Dwarf} and \textit{Old Mortality}—from 2-6 February 1817. She records Percy reading the collection a month later on 23 March. Mary began correcting the manuscript of \textit{Frankenstein} on 10 April of that year.
in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which Shelley had also recently read—is abandoned as the novel concludes in favor of a collating editorial voice.\(^{49}\) As both Mary Poovey and Mary Favret have pointed out, Walton’s writing transforms from letters to journal entries at the novel’s close.\(^{50}\) We may see this change early on when Walton claims that Victor’s narrative will give Margaret “pleasure”; but for him, taking full possession of the text, it will inspire “interest and sympathy . . . in some future day!” (18). Walton becomes more editor than letter-writer as he assimilates himself to Victor’s influence. Because his is the outermost layer of narration, Walton gets both the first, and, as Poovey notes, “the last, if not the definitive, word.”\(^{51}\) But it is the creature who dominates the dialogue of the terminal frame and its concluding action: “He sprung from the cabin-window,” the open frame of Walton’s ship, and “He was soon borne away by the waves” (191). Where Goethe’s Werther and Owenson’s Henry/Horatio have their narratives usurped by an editorial voice, Shelley’s creature invades and pervades the editor’s world—the readerly space from which layers of narrative once kept him separate. While the creature was a blot on the horizon in the opening frame, when he enters Walton’s ship he is a fully articulated character, who is emotional, eloquent, and remorseful—who is human.

The creature develops his humanity through watching, mimicking, and reading outside the De Lacey cottage, a domestic space where Western (Felix) and Eastern (Safie) meet and mingle. In this sense, *Frankenstein* is also indebted to Eastern tradition. The creature acquires a

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\(^{49}\) This is a device also employed by Jane Austen in her unpublished epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*. An editorial voice concludes the novel: “This correspondence, by a meeting between some of the parties, and a separation between the others, could not, to the great detriment of the Post Office revenue, be continued any longer” (*Northanger Abbey; Lady Susan; The Watsons; and Sanditon* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990], 270).


\(^{51}\) Poovey, “My Hideous Progeny,” 339.
“cursory knowledge of history, and a view of the several empires at present existing in the world” (95) from Volney’s *Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les Révolutions des Empires* (1791). In the text, which is, Felix explains (through the creature), “‘framed in imitation of the eastern authors’” (95), the narrator visits ruined empires of the East. His “whole attention,” like that of Johnson’s Rasselas before him, “bent on whatever concerns the happiness of man in a social state.” Viewing some ruins, the narrator is approached by an apparition, from then on referred to as the “Genius,” who takes over the narration with tales of the past and prophecies for the future of mankind. In 1815, Shelley records having read Henry William Weber’s *Tales of the East* (1812), which Kamran Rastegar describes as the “most significant effort to organize and evaluate the body of available [Eastern] texts.” Weber’s introduction to the collection merits explication. Often with ingenuous hyperbole, Weber lauds Eastern tales as having “contributed more to the amusement and delight of every succeeding generation . . . than all the works which the industry and imagination of Europeans have provided for the instruction and entertainment of youth.” Weber goes on to assert that Eastern tales hold a special place in literary triumphs of the imagination:

Such a storehouse of ingenious fiction and of splendid imagery, of supernatural agency skilfully introduced, conveying morality, not in the austere form of imperative precept and dictatorial aphorism, but in the more pleasing shape of example, is not to be found in any other existing work of the imagination.

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52 Volney is a pseudonym for Constantin François de Chasseboeuf (1757-1820), a French historian and philosopher who travelled extensively through the East.
54 Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 44.
56 Ibid.
Weber’s contention is particularly relevant to the Shelles’ project. Percy Shelley’s review of
Frankenstein, which was not published until it appeared in The Athenæum in 1832, notes the
novel’s moral: “In this the direct moral of the book consists; and it is perhaps the most important,
and of the most universal application, of any moral that can be enforced by example. Treat a
person ill, and he will become wicked.”57 Coupled with its investment in the supernatural,
Frankenstein appears to follow many of the tenets Weber outlined for Eastern tales.

In addition to Weber’s collection, Shelley read Rasselas in both 1814 and 1817, a work
that Johnson modeled after Oriental tales. Jessica Richard notes that Eastern texts “form a central
component of the instruction Rasselas conveys,” which is to demonstrate the “insufficiency of
any one ‘choice of life’ to fulfill human desire.”58 Shelley records having read William
Beckford’s Vathek (1782) in 1815, which blends the Eastern tale with the Gothic novel. She also
twice read Denis Chavis’s translation of Arabian Tales, a continuation of the anonymous 1706
English translation, Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. That Victor compares himself to Sinbad in
Frankenstein indicates Shelley had the structure of Arabian Nights in mind when she was
constructing her framing device.59 Joseph Lew argues that Frankenstein follows an “Orientalist
literary model,” yet he makes only passing mention of Arabian Nights.60 The framing device that
surrounds the many tales (which themselves contain tales) in Arabian Nights is the harrowing
narrative of the storyteller Scheherazade. As Ros Ballaster notes, “The teller of the oriental fable
is seeking to establish narrative credit with a powerful auditor. And this credit is not a matter of

Composition,” Walter Scott writes, “So far Frankenstein, therefore, resembles the ‘Travels of Gulliver,’ which
suppose the existence of the most extravagant fictions, in order to extract from them philosophical reasoning and
moral truth” (The Foreign Quarterly Review 1 [1827]: 73).
59 Victor’s words on Sinbad are as follows: “I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a
passage to life aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light” (35).
60 Joseph W. Lew, “The Deceptive Other: Mary Shelley’s Critique of Orientalism in Frankenstein,”
Studies in Romanticism 30 (Summer 1991): 269. David Ketterer also mentions this connection, though more in
relation to the Safie story.
profit, but rather survival.”\textsuperscript{61} Under the bloody knife of King Shahryar, Scheherazade each night creates a cliffhanger for a tale, and then each morning begins a new tale to stay alive. Shelley appears implicitly to model Victor on Scheherazade.

Following his post-experiment illness, Victor is rejuvenated by Clerval’s stories: “in imitation of the Persian and Arabic writers, he invented tales of wonderful fancy and passion” (51).\textsuperscript{62} And later, relating his history to Walton revitalizes Victor, and he perishes when his tale concludes. In the 1831 edition, Walton describes Victor’s increasing strength as he prepares to tell his story: “From this time a new spirit of life animated the decaying frame of the stranger.”\textsuperscript{63} The knowledge that the creature is still within his grasp spurs Victor to tell his story again (for he has already told it to the incredulous local magistrate), which allows him not only to stay alive long enough for Walton to be inspired to carry out his dying wish, but also, like Scheherazade, to make Walton forget about his own perilous situation. It is, moreover, no coincidence that the tale of Safie, the “‘sweet Arabian’” (93), appears at the very heart of \textit{Frankenstein}, and is its last and, in Marc Rubenstein’s words, seemingly “peculiar and unnecessary” inner story.\textsuperscript{64} Felix’s passion for Safie’s appearance mirrors Victor’s enthusiasm at seeing the creature: “‘The arrival of the Arabian now infused new life into his soul’” (101). More tales, more life. Whereas Felix finds life from his reunion with Safie, the creature is revitalized by reciting the De Lacey story to Victor.

\textsuperscript{62} In the 1831 edition, Shelley supplements Clerval’s educational endeavors: “He came to the university with the design of making himself complete master of the oriental languages, as thus he should open a field for the plan of life he had marked out for himself. Resolved to pursue no inglorious career, he turned his eyes toward the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise. The Persian, Arabic, and Sanscrit languages engaged his attention, and I was easily induced to enter on the same studies” (Shelley, \textit{Frankenstein}, ed. Johanna M. Smith, 67).
\textsuperscript{63} Shelley, \textit{Frankenstein}, ed. Johanna M. Smith, 34.
Texts from the members of the 1816 Geneva summer also illuminate the structure of *Frankenstein*. Percy Shelley’s first major work, *Alastor* (1816), features a frame narrative in which an anonymous speaker recounts the travails of a wandering Poet. As she does for many of Percy’s poems in the 1839 *Poetical Works*, Mary Shelley provides another frame for the poem through a preface and a substantial concluding note—a process that Newlyn contends was a “retrospective attempt to put the record straight.”65 Wolfson considers Shelley’s notes as frames that are included for the sake of readers: “Such familiarizing frames particularly mattered to the poems that readers found too fanciful, abstract, incomprehensible.”66 While Lew observes that *Frankenstein* both “imitates and inverts” the plot of *Alastor*,67 we might also consider Byron’s Oriental tales in relation to *Frankenstein*. Especially relevant is *The Giaour* (1813), in which multiple narrators record their points of view on Leila’s murder and the Giaour’s costly revenge. In addition, Byron’s vampire “Fragment,” written in Geneva as part of the ghost-story-contest, was published with *Mazeppa* (1819), a poem in which a third-person voice frames the titular character’s first-person narrative. In this sense, *Frankenstein* is part of a dynamic imaginative exchange between cooperative authors who were experimenting with narrative and perspective.

Most relevant to *Frankenstein* is Canto III of Byron’s *Childe Harold*, began as he quitted England amidst investigations into his personal affairs. It is the only of the four cantos with a framing device.68 While it is intriguing that Canto III of *Childe Harold* begins, like *Frankenstein*,

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65 Newlyn *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 36.
66 Wolfson, “Mary Shelley, editor,” 203.
67 Lew, “The Deceptive Other,” 258.
68 Byron begins the canto in reverie, addressing his daughter, Ada:
   
   "Is thy face like thy mother’s, my fair child!
   Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
   When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
   And then we parted,—not as now we part,
   "Awaking with a start" (3.1.6), the poet finds himself aboard a boat, and he begins the canto proper. Byron closes
   the frame in the canto’s concluding stanzas: “My daughter! with thy name this song begun—" (3.115.1).
on a boat, in reverie over a distant woman, it is even more important that the creature’s final words to Walton, hovering over Victor’s corpse, echo those of Byron’s speaker. The roles, however, are painfully reversed. Whereas Byron wishes “To aid thy mind’s development,—to watch / Thy dawn of little joys,—to sit and see / Almost thy very growth,—to view thee catch / Knowledge of objects,—wonders yet to thee!” (3.116.1-4), it is Victor’s abandoned creature who wishes for this relationship with his creator. Like the creature, Ada was a “child of love,” and, “though born in bitterness, / And nurtured in convulsion” (3.118.1-2), the speaker takes solace in his daughter’s unyielding love. In the 1831 Introduction, Shelley recalls,

In the summer of 1816, we visited Switzerland, and became the neighbours of Lord Byron. At first we spent our pleasant hours on the lake, or wandering on its shores; and Lord Byron, who was writing the third canto of Childe Harold, was the only one among us who put his thoughts upon paper. These, as he brought them successively to us, clothed in all the light and harmony of poetry, seemed to stamp as divine the glories of heaven and earth, whose influences we partook with him. (193)

In a summer where Shelley remembers with some horror the “blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship” (195), Byron was productive. But Childe Harold becomes consumed by Byron’s personal life; Canto III is formally enveloped by lamentations for his abandoned creation, Ada. Perhaps Shelley found some inspiration from Byron when developing Frankenstein’s themes of creation, abandonment, and regret. However, because some of Childe Harold’s Canto III was composed during Byron’s sojourns with Percy Shelley, and because Mary Shelley transcribed one of the three fair copies, we might infer that the canto’s
frame narrative structure, rather than influencing Shelley’s novel project, is instead a product of a collective literary mindset forged that productive summer.\footnote{Jerome McGann writes that Canto III “narrates Byron’s movements from his departure from England in April 1816 to his arrival in Geneva in June, where he met Shelley” (Byron, The Major Works, 1026, n. 19).}

Critics are at odds with one another over the function of the frame in *Frankenstein*. Much scholarship on the novel focuses on the means by which the levels of narratives foster unreliable narrators.\footnote{Of most note is Lawrence Lipking’s “*Frankenstein*, the True Story; or Rousseau Judges Jean Jacques” (in *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter [New York: Norton: 1996], 313-332).} However, each narrator is first and foremost an editor. As both Walton and Victor edit Victor’s story, and Victor edits the creature’s with his own words, truth must travel through so many filters that it inevitably loses its original potency. This narrative confusion only adds to the potential terror of the text. What if Victor is lying? Or the creature? Or Walton? While Victor is the main storyteller, he participates in editing his own words, taking editorial authority from Walton: he “corrected and augmented [Walton’s notes] in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy” (179). Victor even acts as editor over Walton’s expedition. Walton records, “I have related my little history frankly to him. He appeared pleased with the confidence, and suggested several alterations in my plan” (16). Thus Victor edits Walton’s future, changing his path and irrevocably altering his history, the story he transcribes to Margaret.

But Victor is profoundly unreliable as both narrator and editor. After Victor tears the creature’s mate to pieces, the creature threatens, “‘I shall be with you on your wedding-night’” (140). Just three paragraphs later, however, Victor revises “his words,” recording, “‘I will be with you on your wedding-night,’” thus adding emphasis to the creature’s statement through italics and replacing “shall” with “will” (141).\footnote{Victor repeats the quote in vol. 3, p. 159. The manuscript Draft in all three instances reads “marriage night,” rather than “wedding-night” (Robinson, *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, 2:483, 485, 545).} Because the creature uses “shall” in the first-
person indicative, he is grammatically more correct than Victor.72 One might posit that Shelley made this distinction not only to highlight Victor’s unreliability as a narrator and editor, but also to point out again the difference between creature (humanities) and creator (science).73 In the 1831 edition, Shelley added emphasis to “shall” through Walton: “But success shall crown my endeavours.”74 Lindley Murray’s *An English Grammar* (1808) explains that “will” in the first person singular and plural “intimates resolution and promising,” but in the second and third person “only foretells it.”75 Conversely, in the first person singular and plural, “shall” foretells, but in the second and third person “promises, commands, or threatens.”76 Thus, Victor’s revision of the creature’s words ironically seals his fate by making what was an ominous prediction an explicit threat.

That there are translations between languages to which we are not privy only adds to the confusion. The creature speaks to Victor in French (as that is the language he learned from the De Laceys), but Victor, we must assume, communicates with Walton in English—thus the story is transcribed through Walton’s hand in English. The creature’s words in French would be in the *futur proche*: “Je vais être,” whereas Victor’s (or Walton’s) translation is “Je serai.” In this sense, the creature puts far more emphasis on the threatening intent of his words. Some chapters later, Victor again supplements the creature’s words, this time adding an exclamation point to his italics and word change—even though he has promised fidelity, “never deviating into invective

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72 In Walton Felch’s *Grammatical Primer* (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Co., 1841), for both the future and perfect future tenses, “shall” is used with “I” and “we,” and “will” is used with “though,” “he,” “you,” and “they.”

73 Maureen N. McLane notes that when the creature blackmails Victor into creating a mate, he “makes clear the implicit hierarchy of knowledge” (*Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004], 101). “Natural science,” MacLane continues, “not language, literature, or consciousness—will provide the monster the community of two he desires” (102).


76 Ibid.
or exclamation” (169). Immediately following the final wedding-night quote, Shelley cleverly has Victor record, “Such was my sentence” (159), implying not only that the creature plans to punish Victor, but also that Victor has taken control of the creature’s voice—what were “his words” are now “my sentence.”

Yet the creature is so persuasive that we must stop to consider his ability to manipulate his audience. Although Walton recognizes the creature’s power of speech, he still seems controlled by it, as he fails to carry out Victor’s dying wish, hesitating with a “mixture of curiosity and compassion” (187). Walton’s frustrated capitulation to the creature’s eloquent commands causes the novel’s ambiguous and unsettling conclusion. Although the creature’s earlier cries for compassion at the De Laceys are supplanted by his disturbing visage, by the time he tells his story to Victor, he can even verbally manipulate his own creator. When Victor comes to the realization that the creature strangled William, he lashes out, “Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. He was the murderer!” (56). After Victor hears the creature’s side of the story, however, which details William’s insulting epithets, and the creature’s intention only to “‘silence him’” (117), Victor changes his opinion, referring to “The death of William, the execution of Justine, the murder of Clerval, and lastly of my wife” (166-167). The creature’s first kill was an accident, and it appears, as a result of a persuasive narrative, that Victor believes him. Clerval and Elizabeth are the strangled corpses on which the creature leaves his printed hand for Victor to read; effusive William was but a mishap.

Other scholarship addresses whether the narratives serve either to blend or to distinguish the characters from one another, arguments which reach a variety of conclusions concerning Shelley’s use of doubling in terms of characters and voices. While Beth Newman contends that

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77 In the manuscript Draft, this quote does not feature an exclamation point (Robinson, The Frankenstein Notebooks, 2:545). In the Fair Copy, however, the exclamation point is present (647).
Frankenstein “blurs the distinction between the voices of its narrators,” Criscillia Benford reads separate voices in the narratives through “three distinct models of social order.” 78 Most critics see the frame narrative in Frankenstein as serving to shield Shelley from her “hideous progeny.” Poovey argues that as Shelley “does not limit herself to a single perspective she also avoids taking responsibility for any definite position on what is undeniably an unladylike subject.” 79 The frame, Mellor contends, “builds a series of screens around [Shelley’s] authentic voice.” 80 Mellor goes even further, however, to suggest that Shelley implicates herself in this process by framing the novel with Percy’s words: “She has thus enveloped her novel in a protective covering of borrowed speech, allowing Percy not only to write the Preface but also to dominate the conclusion.” 81 Critics also claim that the many frames shield English readers from the horrors within. Newman argues that the frames “mark the exclusion of Mrs. Saville—and the reader as well—from the horror of the narratives they contain.” 82 Matthew C. Brennan similarly observes that “the narrative frame forms a boundary between” the subject matter at the center of the novel and its English readers, which include both Margaret and Shelley herself. 83

Yet no one has acknowledged Walton’s veiled address in which he establishes far more intimacy with the reader than Victor ever achieves. Both of Walton’s opening and terminal

80 Mellor, Mary Shelley, 57.
81 Mellor, Mary Shelley, 68. Mellor here refers to the Fair Copy, which Percy took over at the end. He seems to have changed the Draft’s, “he was carried away by the waves and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness & distance,” to what appears in the Fair Copy: “he was soon borne away by the waves, & lost in the darkness of distance” (Robinson, The Frankenstein Notebooks, 2:817). The Fair Copy is still not the same as what appears in the 1818 edition: “He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (191). Mellor argues that the Draft, “by suggesting that Walton has only lost ‘sight of’ the creature, preserves the possibility that the creature may still be alive” (Mary Shelley, 68). At issue here, too, is the difference between “darkness and distance” and “darkness of distance.” There is still an implication in the Fair Copy that the creature is out of sight rather than lost, as the darkness is created by the distance instead of existing concomitantly.
frames begin with a resounding call to the readerly “You.” Of course, he is addressing the silent interlocutor, Margaret, but as Walton’s writing moves increasingly from letter to journal, the second “You” that opens the terminal frame appeals directly to the reader. When measured against Victor’s opening, “I am by birth a Genevese” (18)—an autobiographical opening familiar to readers of Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*—Walton’s frame achieves a closer proximity to the reader. But this intimacy is uncomfortable, and possibly dangerous, as Walton’s narrative is twice invaded by the creature, whose “powers of eloquence and persuasion” dominate the terminal frame (188). For the great horror of *Frankenstein* is that there are no solid boundaries, either in the narrative or of the narrative. Any limits can be transgressed, be they physical, psychological, or generic. Although editorial emendations attempt to contain narratives, to gain control of story and author, they are permeable and unreliable, and allow monstrous ideas to escape. Walton’s frame thus interrogates the ethics of editing because it proves easily transgressed, manipulated, and controlled. The creature’s metaleptic appearance in Walton’s frame marks the uncanny horror of the novel, the point at which editor is consumed by story. “I am interrupted” (186), Walton portentously declares when the creature enters his terminal frame. So was William. The creature’s appearance in Walton’s frame marks the novel’s fundamental leveling of structure. But this scene is the apex (or rather nadir) of the many other permeable frames in *Frankenstein* that function as harbingers for the novel’s Gothic fate.

“Every thing must have a beginning,” Shelley writes in her 1831 Introduction, “and that beginning must be linked to something that went before” (195). As Shelley records that she

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84 The novel begins: “You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings” (5); and Walton’s terminal frame begins: “You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congealed with horror, like that which even now curdles mine?” (178). These passages, which open both ends of the frame, mirror each other not only in their addressee, but also with Margaret’s prophesy coming to fruition: was the creature all along part of Margaret’s “evil forebodings”? Is Margaret the novel’s sibylline editor?
began her tale with “It was on a dreary night of November” (197), both Victor’s earlier history and Walton’s frame letters must be connected to the creature’s electrifying origin. As Victor collects the materials for his experiment, he encounters a problem of proportion: “to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour” (35). When Victor decides “to make the being of a gigantic stature,” he echoes Shelley’s project of supplementing her tale, a process during which she no doubt also “spent some months in successfully collecting and arranging . . . materials” (35-36). And similar to her initial plan of a story that would only later turn into a novel at Percy’s backing, Victor makes the creature large, “contrary to my first intention” (35). Shelley struggles like Victor to find a frame for the “reception” of her secret and hideous work. This frame must accomplish two things: it must include the horrific story, and it must offer protection to the readership, the receivers of the work. Mary Shelley contends that it was Percy who “urged me to develop the idea at greater length” (197). But if Percy Shelley provided the impetus for adding parts to her original tale, it was Mary Shelley who continued the process. The 1831 Introduction is, in Shelley’s words, an “appendage to a former production” (192). Lew points out that in it “we find yet another set of frames.” This is where we first encounter the creature, looming ominously in Shelley’s description of her dream. And because this new introductory frame was published in Colburn’s Court Journal nine days before the novel appeared in print, the creature escapes even the boundaries of the novel, and invades new generic and physical realms. Outside Victor’s “hideous narration” (167), then, are more pieces of an unruly and

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85 The line appears in the 1818 edition in vol. 1, ch. 4, p. 38.
86 Victor’s process in some ways also echoes the giant suit of armor that appears in pieces throughout Wapole’s Castle of Otranto.
87 Lew, “The Deceptive Other,” 271.
implacable literary creature, one that achieves its terror from its imperfection. Disproportionately built, poorly planned, and impetuously conceived, the creature-as-story nonetheless escapes the editor’s eraser and bores through his frame.

The creature can be understood as a symbol for the novel’s frame-structure. Poovey goes as far as to assert that the creature wishes “to deny its symbolic status . . . to break free into the realistic frame that Frankenstein occupies.” Many readers have pointed out that Frankenstein is as much a patchwork of different parts as its creature. Victor bemoans, “I had been the author of unalterable evils” (70). Yet he is far more editor than author. As Mellor has pointed out, it was Percy Shelley who “introduced all the references to Victor Frankenstein as the ‘author’ of the creature.” Because the creature is made up of heterogeneous parts of once-homogenous bodies, his process of selecting, grafting, stitching, and enlarging is the undertaking of an editor. Victor’s editing leaves the creature “‘hideously deformed and . . . not even of the same nature as man’” (96). When editors manipulate the physical matter of the text, they affect the spirit endowed by the author. Thus, editors occupy the middle ground between authors and readers. Although Victor “selected [the creature’s] features as beautiful” (39), the completed work is unfit for any audience. After the creature is “‘loaded . . . with epithets’” (117) by William Frankenstein, which result solely from the horror of Victor’s botched editing, he realizes that his purpose is to hunt, to haunt, and to destroy. He is a frame-breaker, dancing with glee around the burning De Lacey

89 Poovey, “My Hideous Progeny,” 337.
90 Mellor, Mary Shelley, 65. Yet elsewhere Shelley reveals her husband’s disinterest in framing a text. In her note to The Cenci, she writes: “He believed that one of the first requisites was the capacity of forming and following up a story or plot. He fancied himself to be defective in this portion of imagination—it was that which gave him least pleasure in the writings of others—though he laid great store by it, as the proper framework to support the sublimest efforts of poetry. He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract—too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian. It perhaps is not strange that I shared this opinion with himself, for he had hitherto shown no inclination for, nor given any specimen of his powers in framing and supporting the interest of a story, either in prose or verse” (The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, vol. 2 [Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871], 275-276).
cottage from which he was denied hospitality; it is the creature rather than Victor who is the “Modern Prometheus,” the subtitle to the novel.

When Shelley bids her “hideous progeny [to] go forth and prosper” (197), she echoes the creature’s vendetta against his creator: “‘I declared an everlasting war against the species, and . . . against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery’” (111). It is no surprise that the creature listens in on Felix’s reading of *Ruins of Empires*, and will ruin the novel’s own Frankenstein empire. For the creature is the novel—a horrific assemblage of letters that Victor “‘cast . . . abroad [as] an object for the scorn and horror of mankind’” (114). The creature contends to Victor, “You would not call it murder, if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands” (119). Since the frame is made up of an assortment of letters, we must follow Favret’s words and consider *Frankenstein* and its characters as “baggy monster[s],” not unlike the existence of Harley in Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (a bundle of papers, some of which is used as gun-wadding) or Teufelsdröckh in Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (papers dispersed among six bags labeled with signs of the Zodiac). The terror of the creature, and perhaps of the novel itself, is not only that he is incomplete and deformed, the product of an ambitious, but rushed and impetuous, young student, but also that this “hideous progeny” is allowed to “go forth and prosper” (197). “I had gazed on him while unfinished” (40), Victor bemoans. The creature has a “deformity of its aspect” (56), is a “‘blot upon the earth’” (96), and is a “‘filthy type’” of human, “‘more horrid from its very semblance’” (105). In his suggestions for revision, Percy carried it even further, scratching out “am the devil”

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91 As Robinson notes, “Victor’s assembling of disparate body parts into his monster is not that different from Walton’s assembling his discrete notes about Victor into a narrative” (“Texts in Search of an Editor,” 91).
and writing above the famous “am an abortion.” Perhaps most important, however, the creature’s frame is out of proportion. Although Victor reveals, “His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful” (39), he later describes the “distorted proportions of a well-known form within” (176), and when Walton encounters the creature up close, he describes it as “gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions” (186-187). The creature’s frame can barely contain the “work of muscles and arteries beneath” (39), the loathsome viscera of horror that Victor robbed from charnel houses. Thus what Victor planned to make beautiful, turns out to be sublime. It is a material revision of an exploratory draft. What Shelley planned as a story is published as a novel—and an unruly one at that.

Yet Walton’s frame *is* proportionate. Although he writes that his “day dreams . . . want (as the painters call it) keeping” (9)—mirroring Shelley’s own attempt to frame the 1816 dream of her “hideous phantasm” (196)—he manages editorial symmetry. Both the opening and terminal frames contain roughly 5,000 words. Victor’s journal, which the creature steals from Victor’s coat-pocket, details the “four months” that make up “every step . . . in the progress of [Victor’s] work” (105). Since it can be conjectured that Walton’s voyage lasts from approximately May to September—four months—we may read the novel as a daydream wherein Walton finally is able to give adequate proportion to his imagination, to become the great poet to which he always aspired. Even more important, the Shelleys were away from London from 2

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94 In the 1831 edition, Victor tells Walton: “we are unfashioned creatures, but half made up” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Johanna M. Smith, 36).

95 Shelley calls the creature in her dream a “hideous phantasm,” and then refers to the “idea” of the “ghastly image of my fancy” as a “hideous phantom” (196).

96 Stewart observes, “As the ur-text within this nest of tales, transcripts, and transmissions . . . , never quoted from, and never seen again—it is the origin under erasure of all that follows” (*Dear Reader*, 121).

97 On 11 December, Walton writes to Margaret: “I do not intend to sail until the month of June” (8). On 28 March of the next year, Walton, now posted in Archangel, writes: “my voyage is only now delayed until the weather shall permit my embarkation. The winter has been dreadfully severe; but the spring promised well, and it is considered as a remarkably early season; so that, perhaps, I may sail sooner than I expected. I shall do nothing rashly” (10).
May to 29 August 1816, again a period of approximately four months. Thus, it takes a similar amount of time for Mary Shelley, Victor, and Walton to go from “blank incapability” to “hideous progeny.”

_Frankenstein_’s greatest opened boundary is Walton’s frame. Stewart notes that because the novel “never arrives at a narrated destination” its terminal frame “functions . . . as an open bracket.” In her analysis of the novel’s letters, Favret explains the indefinite conclusion best: “Walton’s missive never ends, and something monstrous escapes.” The structure of the novel, Eleanor Salotto observes, “indicate[s] a resistance to closure of the self and story.” Walton’s terminal frame fails to conclude; no “affectionately yours” appears to assure Margaret and the readers of his safety. Instead, the creature disappears with only a promise that he will “consume to ashes this miserable frame” (190). There is no proof that the creature will carry out this deed. As with Walton’s frame, the creature’s conclusion remains inconclusive, an empty frame open for interpretation. Walter Scott considered the ending “an uncertainty,” and even Walton remarks, “How all this will terminate, I know not” (183). But it is less uncertain than it is

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Jessica Richard points out, however, Walton’s plan is rash for the start: “he embark[s] at a time and from a location that guarantee the failure of his expedition” (“‘A Paradise of My Own Creation’: _Frankenstein_ and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration,” _Nineteenth-Century Contexts_ 25.4 [2003], 305). Walton’s plans were to sail in June, but he posits that the weather may allow him to embark sooner in April or May. By his next letter, sent 7 July, he is “well advanced on [his] voyage,” far enough in fact that he refers to the “floating sheets of ice that continually pass,” as the ship has “already reached a very high latitude” (11). It is likely, then, that Walton embarks after April and before July. The period between 19 May to 19 September (Walton’s last date entry, which was corrected in 1823 from 9 September) is four months. On 13 May 1816, the Shelley party arrived in Geneva; they left on 29 August.

98 Shelley may have also framed the novel on history. Walton sets off on water from Archangel, a northern-Russia seat port. In 1812, John Bellingham shot and killed Spencer Perceval in the lobby of the Parliament, marking the only assassination of a Prime Minister in British history. Bellingham had twice worked as an agent for import/export in Archangel, but during his second stint he had been jailed for outstanding debt. He was immediately caught, prosecuted, and hanged for his crime, his body made available to be dissected and anatomized. Perhaps Shelley was inspired by this history to suggest that crimes across the world find a path back home—that Margaret Saville is not as safe in England as we may think.

99 Stewart, _Dear Reader_, 117.


unfinished. Like the creature itself, and like Walton’s journey, the novel is incomplete, ending, using Shelley’s words from her 1831 Introduction, on a “mortifying negative” (195). For the creature is several times particularly adept at fading into the darkness and ice. After the creature’s narration concludes, Victor watches “him descend the mountain with greater speed than the flight of an eagle,” and then loses him “among the undulations of the sea of ice” (122). This scene is bookended by similar moments in Walton’s frames. Walton sees the creature for the first time in the opening frame through a telescope and watches “until he was lost among the distant inequalities of ice” (12). And the novel concludes with the creature “lost in darkness and distance” (191). These disappearing acts also reflect Shelley’s anxiety over the “blank incapability of invention” (195) that she admits to in the 1831 Introduction. For what Victor creates, both as physical body and as oral tale, fades into nothingness, disappears into the ice at the poles of the earth and into the white pages at poles of the novel. It is a new beginning for the creature, as he is “borne” (191) from the womb of Walton’s ship, Walton’s frame narrative, and Shelley’s novel.

When the creature enters the ship, prompting Walton to declare, “I am interrupted” (186), he disturbs the linear structure of the narrative. The novel could easily have ended just before:

Margaret, what comment can I make on the untimely extinction of this glorious spirit? What can I say, that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow?

All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble. My tears flow; my mind

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103 Reviewers were interested in the dynamics of this scene. John Wilson Croker at the *Quarterly Review* remarks that the creature, “notwithstanding his huge bulk, jumps in at Mr. Walton’s cabin window” (“Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,” *The Quarterly Review* 18 [January 1818]: 381-382); *The British Critic* notes that the creature “most unceremoniously climbs in at [Walton’s] cabin window” (437); and *La Belle Assemblée* observes that the creature “comes in at the cabin-window of Captain Walton’s ship . . . and then plunges into the icy waves, the same way as he entered” (“Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus,” *La Belle Assemblée, or Bell’s Court and Fashionable Magazine* 17 [March 1818]: 141).
is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. But I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation. (186)

Without Victor’s aid, Walton is left to his own devices, and the creature’s appearance in the text of the frame is a result of a discerning, and perhaps audience-aware, author-cum-editor: “the tale which I have recorded,” Walton justifies, “would be incomplete without this final and wonderful catastrophe” (186). The moment of the creature’s interruption, which forces Walton to provide a more fitting conclusion, never returns. In this sense, the past-tense encounter with the creature—“am interrupted” moving to “I entered”—never receives a concluding frame in which Walton continues his letter. The creature’s presence ruptures temporal boundaries as he consumes Walton’s final words. After all, in the end, he boasts, “‘My work is nearly complete. Neither yours nor any man’s death is needed to consummate the series of my being, and accomplish that which must be done; but it requires my own’” (190). It is the creature’s narrative now, and it is up to him to conclude it. Yet it is a birth, not a death; it is to be promethean fire, not ashes.

Victor, Walton, (and we) have been duped. Thus, when we turn the final page, it is blank, icy, and distant—reminding us of our complicity, as we “have sat,” like the creature, “and enjoyed the ruin” (111). Charged with a document that implicates the creature in the ruin of a family and its associates, Walton sets sail “towards England,” towards Margaret, and towards readers—with only the promise of not being tracked, traced, and terrorized.

Like Walton in *Frankenstein*, at twenty-eight Mary Wollstonecraft abandoned an ambitious project. In 1787, Wollstonecraft began “The Cave of Fancy,” but it appears her burgeoning career as an editor and writer at Joseph Johnson’s printing house relegated fiction to the backburner. She would never finish it. What Wollstonecraft had begun, however, was the story of a sage, named Sagestus, who returns home one day after a terrible storm to find a
shipwreck, its dead crew washed up and scattered about the shore. Sagestus ambles about reading the occupations and personalities of the dead through their physiognomies. Eventually he comes upon a young girl who has survived. He names her Sagesta and decides to educate her through the tales of dead spirits he conjures from purgatory. Thus the story of Sagesta’s education would have acted as the outside frame for the several tales within. Wollstonecraft finished only one, however. Critics have agreed that “The Cave of Fancy” probably inspired Shelley’s preliminary framework for *Mathilda*, the fiction that immediately followed *Frankenstein*. In its first draft, Shelley titled the text *The Fields of Fancy*, but in the finished manuscript the opening framework was discarded. Elizabeth Nitchie, the first editor of the *Mathilda* manuscript, calls *The Fields of Fancy* framework “unrealistic and largely irrelevant.” Subsequent editors have chosen not to include it. Yet, while Shelley excised this opening frame from *Mathilda*, she did not abandon the structure of the framing device that she employed so effectively in *Frankenstein*. For *Mathilda* is made up of many frames, each existing paradoxically both to bury and to showcase the central horror. But as in *Frankenstein*, the frames in *Mathilda* reveal an unreliable narrator-cum-editor and an ambiguous ending that this time allows the horror of incest to escape into the world of its readership. In removing the opening didactic, philosophical, and ethereal frame of *The Fields of Fancy*, Shelley transformed the text into a personal, uncomfortable, terrifying, and controversial confession—in short, she made it Gothic.

In *The Fields of Fancy*, an unnamed narrator—who has, like Shelley, recently suffered a tragic loss—is visited by a spirit, Fantasia. The narrator, who initially refuses to follow Fantasia, falls asleep and finds herself in the Elysian fields, lying “beside a lovely fountain shadowed over

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by willows” where the “ground was covered by short moss & sweet smelling heath.”

Shelley appears here to be reminiscing on her own adolescent escapes—which included visits by a wooing Percy—to Wollstonecraft’s grave at St. Pancras, on either side of which Godwin had planted two willow trees to hang in mourning. Fantasia explains to the narrator that she will see the part of Elysium where the dead reside, who, while living, “wished to become wise & virtuous by study & action,” but who now “endeavour after the same ends by contemplation” (109). The narrator comes upon a group huddled around Diotima (the prophet and instructor of Socrates), a “woman about 40 years of age” whose “eyes burned with a deep fire and every line of her face expressed enthusiasm & wisdom” (110). Diotima, who appears to be modeled on Wollstonecraft—and fittingly so if Shelley borrowed thematically from “The Cave of Fancy”—hopes to guide those who in life were “misconducted in the pursuit of knowledge” (111), rhetoric which appears to cast the text as a conduct manual. Among the party in Elysium is an unnamed woman “of about 23 years of age in the full enjoyment of the most exquisite beauty” (111). She is Mathilda. After professing that the only way to achieve true happiness is to seek knowledge through the “study of [one’s] own heart” (115), Diotima beckons Mathilda to tell her story as a therapeutic release that may allow her to join her dead loved ones in the afterlife. Before Mathilda begins her “tale” of “dark and phren[iz]ed passions” (117), the narrator awakens with the promise to return the next day to hear the story.

Thus Mathilda begins her tale, which in many ways is a drama of loved ones entering and leaving the framework of her psyche. Her father, gifted, though impetuous and conceited, falls madly in love with Diana, and they sequester themselves from the company of others. Diana dies, however, just after giving birth to Mathilda, and Mathilda’s father, overcome by grief, flees

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to the East in what is possibly an allusion to the framing devices of Eastern tales. Mathilda is raised under the cold care of her aunt, who moves her to the shores of Loch Lomond in Scotland—a move that in some ways echoes Shelley’s own period in Scotland without her father in 1812. After sixteen years, Mathilda’s father returns. As the smooth reunion sours into silence, jealousy, and animosity, Mathilda persuades him to reveal his deep secret. He painfully admits a romantic attachment to his daughter, writes a farewell letter, and again flees, absconding once again from her familial and psychological frames. Mathilda chases him to the coast but finds him dead. After staging her own death, Mathilda moves to a solitary cottage where she later meets Woodville, a young poet who has recently lost his love, Elinor. Woodville replaces Mathilda’s father emotionally, entering her frame as quickly as the latter departed. Realizing the impossibility of a stable romantic union, Mathilda attempts to form a suicide pact. Woodville refuses and, like Mathilda’s father before him, leaves the framework of the novel. Alone again, Mathilda falls mortally ill, and her narrative ends ambiguously.

Readings of *Mathilda* tend to be heavily autobiographical, beginning with Nitchie and then becoming increasingly elaborate under Anne Mellor, Tilottama Rajan, and Terence Harpold. Most see the text as both a reaction to Shelley’s grief for the loss of her children, Clara and William, and a response to suppressed (or perhaps repressed) emotions about her husband and her parents. In these readings, Mathilda is Shelley, the unnamed father is Godwin, and Woodville is Percy. Since Godwin, it appears, blocked the publication of Mary’s text, it is possible to surmise that he suffered great anxiety over such scandalous themes, especially if he too saw himself represented in it. Seeing these autobiographical readings as perhaps too narrow,

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106 This scene tantalizingly echoes the conclusion of Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820); see chapter 5.
however, more recent studies have focused on Mathilda’s thematic and structural elements, wishing to examine it as such without sampling the tempting psycho-biographical fruit. Still, in these formal readings, the frames have remained largely ignored. Shelley populates Mathilda with frames, but, as with any similarly formal reading of Frankenstein, ignoring the biographical paints an incomplete picture—or rather a frame without a painting.

After Shelley completed the manuscript for Mathilda in Italy, she sent it to England with Maria Gisborne, who, at one point was Godwin’s romantic interest, but, by 1819, had developed “the most open and cordial friendship” with the Shelleys. Gisborne was to present the manuscript to Godwin in the hopes that he would use his influence to see it published. It appears that he refused, though we have no direct explanation from Godwin, nor does Gisborne provide many clues. Gisborne, who in her journal had earlier championed Shelley’s efforts, records that Godwin thought the “subject . . . disgusting and detestable.” Yet no one has considered what Godwin was to do with such a strange text, both thematically and formally. Shelley hints at the text’s awkward structure through Mathilda’s rhetorical question: “What am I writing?” Shelley refers to it in her journal as a “tale” in September, 1819. But in a period dominated by the three-volume novel, what was this memoir-letter? Again, as with Frankenstein, this tale was too long for a short story, and yet it falls well short of the standard novel; even today critics cannot agree on its generic identity. Nevertheless, Godwin did suggest (according to Gisborne), that Mathilda required a preface “to prepare the minds of the readers, and to prevent them from being tormented by the apprehension from moment to moment of the fall of the

111 Shelley, Journals of Mary Shelley, 296.
112 Nitchie several times refers to Mathilda as a “novelette.”
heroine.” A review of *Frankenstein* from the *Literary Intelligence* makes clear the power of a preface to soften potentially harmful material: “This is a bold fiction; and, did not the author, in a short Preface, make a kind of apology, we should almost pronounce it to be impious.” Might we assume, then, that if either Shelley had prefaced the text, Godwin might have approved? And what if Mary Shelley had decided to include *The Fields of Fancy* framework that effectively distances Mathilda and her story from the reader and renders it a didactic tract concerning the search for happiness through self-discovery?

That Shelley’s revisions to the final manuscript could “torment” the reader (and we may assume they did Godwin) suggests that Godwin could not approve of a tale of incest without a preface to shield the subject matter from readers, to mitigate the horror with an editorial framework. It is a curious fact that Godwin did not request that either Shelley provide a preface to explain the text’s intent and to apologize for its horrors. For his part, Godwin did little in his preface to *Caleb Williams* to introduce or justify its many subversive themes; rather, he points out that he wished to show “things as they are.” Perhaps holding a mirror to incest somehow went too far even for Godwin’s radical tastes. Yet Percy Shelley’s *The Cenci*, written during the summer of 1819, and based on Mary Shelley’s translation of the Cenci family history, is modeled on a factual story of incest, and the former provided a lengthy prefatory explanation for the play. In Godwin’s suppression of *Mathilda*, which Shelley requested to be returned, but to no avail, he again acted as an editor, and this time, as he did with Wollstonecraft, he acted as one with a personal stake in the text. No preface could have discouraged autobiographical readings, then or now. For *Mathilda*, though inspired by Shelley’s reading, and her personal heartache, is no historical text. Removing *The Fields of Fancy* was a bold move that transformed the text from

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113 Quoted in Clemit, “From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Matilda*,” 67-68.
114 “*Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus,*” *The Belle Assemblée* (1818): 139.
conventionally certain to radically inconclusive, from universal to personal, from comforting to horrifying, and from didactic to gothic.

At the end of *The Fields of Fancy*, Shelley allows Mathilda to speak shortly about her death, for she is still narrating it, working through her problems in purgatorial Elysium. Shelley clearly struggled with the ending for *Mathilda*, however, as it is evident from extant manuscript pieces that she for some time kept *The Fields of Fancy* ending even after she had dropped the opening frame. It appears Shelley finally decided that having Mathilda write about her own death would be too unrealistic, so she chose instead to conclude the text ambiguously—a device she had effectively employed in *Frankenstein*. Shelley’s struggle here suggests that *The Fields of Fancy* still made its presence felt within the finished draft. Harpold argues that “The discarding of the frame conflates the previously discrete levels of the narrative,” which he reads as a “collapse.” Harpold fails, however, to unpack Mathilda’s father’s words: “‘Diana died to give her birth; her mother’s spirit was transferred into her frame, and she ought to be as Diana to me’” (179, emphasis added). If we continue to read *Mathilda* at least in part through an autobiographical lens, then we may infer that Wollstonecraft’s “The Cave of Fancy,” which Shelley re-imagined into *The Fields of Fancy*, was not abandoned, but rather was consumed by Mathilda’s narration. Mathilda’s afterlife is her life after her father’s death and after her feigned death. Thus, Mathilda is an amalgamation of Victor Frankenstein and the creature. Both creator and abandoned product, she is the embodiment of *Frankenstein*’s potential doppelgängers—an editor who selects, connects, and constructs, but who also severs, divides, and destroys. But it is her father that, in his wretched condition, most resembles the creature. He, too, remains nameless; and echoing the creature’s promised flight with his mate to South America, Mathilda’s

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father suggests traveling “‘to some fertile island where we should live at peace for ever’” (161). He begins, however, to blame Mathilda for his existence: “‘Why do you bring me out, and torture me, and tempt me, and kill me’” (172). The only means for resolution is to be erased from her history: “‘Thus you may console me by reducing me to nothing’” (172). Mathilda becomes a voracious destructive force, an editor of her own story whose own search “for nothingness” (189) must make nothings out of everyone in her story: her mother, aunt, and father, and then her attempt to do so with Woodville’s life. But as his history is part of her post-incest frame, she implicates Woodville in her fall, consuming and dissecting him through acts of ventriloquism on the page.

Mathilda’s memoir frames a series of inset stories. After an opening frame that establishes her disposition and motivation for writing, she begins the tale of her father’s history. Only after she is finished, in what is a far more detailed history than she provides in The Fields of Fancy, can Mathilda “come to [her] own story” (156). Buried at the end of her story, which includes the majority of the plot, is Woodville’s history, a curious, if not awkward, move: the letter is intended for Woodville, who would, of course, know his own story. Mathilda returns to the present after she records the thwarted suicide pact. “I close my work,” she writes, “the last that I shall perform” (209). As with Frankenstein, we can trace Shelley’s interest in frame narratives through both her contemporaneous reading and the text itself. Not only was Shelley influenced by the structure of Wollstonecraft’s “The Cave of Fancy,” but she had recently read Scott’s framed gothic novel The Black Dwarf (1816) and had again pored over Byron’s framed works The Giaour, Mazeppa, and Childe Harold. Most interesting, however, are the references to framed texts within Mathilda’s tale. She several times quotes Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner,” drawing clear parallels between the obligatory storytelling limbo of Mathilda and the Mariner.
Mathilda also refers to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, in which 100 tales are framed both individually and as a whole by accounts of the domestic activities of the ten storytellers who have sequestered themselves from the raging plague. (Shelley would return even more directly to the *Decameron*’s themes when crafting *The Last Man*.)

In addition, Mathilda reveals that, during her father’s absence, he had “wandered through Persia, Arabia and the north of India and had penetrated among the habitations of the natives with a freedom permitted to few Europeans” (161). And Mathilda later mirrors this wandering, joining her father in a purgatorial state that borrows from Shelley’s first conception of Mathilda in Elysium. Mathilda goes on to record that her father “felt some what like one of the seven sleepers, or like Nourjahad, in that sweet imitation of an eastern tale” (162). Again, as in *Frankenstein*, Shelley implicitly refers to Johnson’s *Rasselas*. Mathilda’s father leaves England to find happiness among the peoples of the East, but he, unlike Rasselas, in the end returns home. And the uncertain endings of both *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda* nicely echo the last chapter of *Rasselas*: “Conclusion, in which nothing is concluded.” Perhaps *Rasselas* inspired Shelley in terms not only of her text’s length, but also of its themes of wandering, unattainable happiness, and the struggles of love.

Whatever the inspiration for the framework of *Mathilda*, Shelley used it to heighten the Gothic effect. What was the “hideous narration” of Shelley’s “hideous progeny,” *Frankenstein*, is in *Mathilda* the “hideous necessity” (152) of revealing the incestuous secret. Encompassing both sides of the Gothic that Radcliffe’s character Woodville defines in “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826), Mathilda admits, “there was a sacred horror in my tale that rendered it unfit for utterance, and now about to die I pollute its mystic terrors” (151, emphasis added). Yet, unlike Victor Frankenstein before her, who refuses to reveal the details of his experiments with Walton,

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116 Radcliffe’s essay is excerpted from the frame narrative that appears in *Gaston de Blondeville*; see chapter 2.
Mathilda subconsciously exposes her father’s incestuous desires. Like the Ancient Mariner, Mathilda admits that “a feeling that I cannot define leads me on” (151). Although Mathilda quickly addresses her tale to Woodville, Shelley initially makes the reader the direct audience: “I do not know that any will peruse these pages except you, my friend, who will receive them at my death. I do not address them to you alone. . . . I shall relate my tale therefore as I wrote for strangers” (151). Shelley grants immediate access to the secret that Mathilda later promises never to tell. The horror here lies in the promiscuity of print; once Mathilda records the secret, it becomes free for any reader’s consumption, manipulation, and further dissemination. Mathilda becomes the letter she writes: “I see the desolate plain covered with white,” she begins, “save a few black patches” (151). “I was as a solitary spot” (190), she later records, as she increasingly comes to exist only in letter. As with the subject of Wordsworth’s Lucy Poems, Mathilda survives only in print, but it is a posthumous existence, one that frames her death. She dreams that she and her father “should perhaps meet in a vessel” (159)—as Victor, the creature, and Walton do—but it is Mathilda who is the vessel, “the sole depository of my own secret” (185), until she deposits the secret onto the page.

The promise to live on in print compels Mathilda to make immortal a history of moral abhorrence, to bury formal devices and biographical stories within her own framework. While in *The Fields of Fancy* Shelley uses storytelling as a means to relieve and to relive earthly passion and to discover self-knowledge as a path to heaven, in *Mathilda* the act of letter-writing is a profoundly selfish performance that also exists to place Mathilda even closer to her father. Charlene Bunnell observes that Mathilda “constructs” her father’s “image from a picture, a letter, and some history.”117 He exists for sixteen years as nothing but a miniature—which she wears “exposed” (159) on her breast, anticipating the scandalous revelation of the secret—and a letter

of farewell. Mathilda admits that her father’s first letter “was the only relic I had to remind me of my parents” (155). That she “copied his . . . letter and read it again and again” (159) effectively doubles her father and makes Mathilda into an editor, putting his writing into her own hand. Her father next exists in another life as a part of Mathilda’s letter to Woodville. And in death, her father returns to letter state, both because he writes her another farewell letter, and because she sees him dead, “stiff and straight . . . [and] covered by a sheet” (184).

Mathilda is, moreover, an unreliable editor. Pamela Clemit observes that the “discrepancy between the instructive tenor of the frame and the wish-fulfillment of inset narrative highlights the unreliability of Mathilda’s first-person account and invites us to read her story as a warning of the dangers of a selfish passion, designed to educate the listening narrator.” Shelley’s revision makes Mathilda’s story less a search for self-knowledge through suffering that is aimed as a warning to readers and more a tragic tale to shock that is told from only one point of view: that of the scorned, heartbroken, and suicidal self-editor. Because Wollstonecraft’s “The Cave of Fancy” was itself unfinished, perhaps Shelley was, at the beginning, able herself to find something life-giving in essentially re-imagining her mother’s text (or even revitalizing her through text). But the wholesale abandonment of Wollstonecraft from the draft she sent to Godwin suggests that Shelley sought to distance her mother from the story’s controversial themes, an editorial policy at which Godwin failed so miserably. Mathilda’s story inherently lacks finality; she cannot write her death, and, unlike Victor Frankenstein, she cannot allow another to frame it. In Shelley’s revision from The Fields of Fancy, the story becomes fragmentary, only pieces of a history lacking a definite conclusion. There is, paradoxically, a vastness in a fragment. That it has no end makes the short and unfinished story impossible to delimit and difficult to describe—a series of sublime effects. The fragment demands reader-

118 Clemit, “From The Fields of Fancy to Matilda,” 67.
response and readerly completion, and Mathilda seems directly to appeal to this fact: “I will leave this complication of what I hope I may in a manner call innocent deceit to be imagined by the reader” (187).

As Shelley suggests in Frankenstein (and continues to do in The Last Man), the Gothic is not to be found in enclosed cloisters or labyrinthine castles; rather, the vastness, formlessness, and inconclusiveness of the sublime foster true terror. The fragment thus lends itself to the gothic. Nothing contained, little explained. We might see the start of Shelley’s insistence in crafting a Gothic rather than didactic text early on when she re-imagines “The Cave of Fancy” into The Fields of Fancy. From confined to open, from sheltered to exposed, Shelley’s title-change reflects the dueling modes of the Gothic initiated by Radcliffe’s engagement with picturesque and sublime. When Mathilda’s father returns after sixteen years, Mathilda finds herself lost in the wilderness, increasingly confused by the series of trees (or a confusion of letters) that lead her further and further astray. When she chases her father—the scene Godwin found most enthralling, perhaps because it so clearly echoes the many pursuits in Caleb Williams—she fears that “field succeeding field, never would our weary journey cease” (183). And when she bids Woodville goodbye, Mathilda again finds herself lost in the expanse of nature; there she spends the night, wet and cold, the beginning of her mortal illness.

The Fields of Fancy proved too tidy to hold Mathilda’s story. Making the narrator the framer of all other stories renders the text unreliable, inconclusive, and uncomfortable. For, as with the creature’s promise at the end of Frankenstein, to consume himself in fire, could it be that Shelley’s revisions ask us to question Mathilda’s motivations, or even to doubt that her consumption will consume her? If in The Fields of Fancy Mathilda’s narration was to prove therapeutic, could it not in Mathilda? Could she be revived by allowing her tale to spread
indiscriminately and promiscuously—to be never ending? Could she have faked her death again? These open endings recall Radcliffe’s narrative method at the end of *The Italian*: it is a sublime landscape Shelley creates, one that is populated by the undead figures of her novels and that swallows grief and depravity within the framework of a personal confession made public in print. Mathilda writes to Woodville, a poet, a professional writer whom she cannot expect to retain or suppress her secrets. She writes not just to memorialize, but also to spread history, the memoir that unleashes the diseases of her mind, to infect readers with her pain.

Shelley returned to the themes of Wollstonecraft’s “The Cave of Fancy” to frame *The Last Man* (1826). However, her introductory frame, rather than curtail the horror of the story, as Godwin wanted for *Mathilda*, accomplishes quite the opposite effect, exacerbating the horror of a tale that implicates not the demise of a character, but instead that of an entire species. In *The Last Man*, Shelley adapts Radcliffe’s found manuscript model to apocalyptic ends. As with Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, the frame to *The Last Man* begins inside the novel proper and features English travelers who stumble upon a manuscript. But this manuscript is prophetic, not historical; it is a fundamental anachronism that reveals the future but still gestures to the present; it is, most disturbingly, a warning for a cataclysmic scourge that cannot be prevented.

*The Last Man* came on the heels of several personal disasters: the deaths of two children, the accidental drowning of Percy Shelley, and the protracted and acerbic dispute over his estate that followed. Thus, as with all of Shelley’s work, it has been read primarily through an autobiographical lens. Shelley’s thinly veiled characterizations in the novel only add to readings of *The Last Man* as a *roman à clef*. Adrian, the virtuous and sensitive humanitarian, is quite

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119 Godwin’s insistence that *Mathilda* needed a preface to defray the horror of the heroine’s fall—word that surely trickled back to Shelley through Maria Gisborne—may have prompted Shelley to re-imagine such a frame for *The Last Man*. 
clearly a representation of Percy; and Lord Raymond, impetuous, power-hungry, yet thoughtful and courageous, perhaps even more saliently, is modeled on Byron, who had also recently died.

Shelley’s project here in some sense appears to be a response to Thomas Love Peacock’s caricatures of Percy Shelley and Byron in Nightmare Abbey (1818). Peacock was a close friend and intellectual partner of Percy Shelley’s, but his satirical treatment of Shelley’s romantic idealisms in Nightmare Abbey must be added to the ultimately negative attitude towards Mary and Percy’s elopement that he chronicled in his Memoirs of Shelley (1858-62). However, as Marilyn Butler asserts, Nightmare Abbey both resists and encourages readings of Scythrop as Shelley. Nightmare Abbey’s treatment of Scythrop’s love interests, whom Butler, going against most readings of the novel, argues are not representations of Mary Shelley and Harriet Westbrook, makes the novel “far more ironic and allusive . . . and its meaning is not conveyed so simply through Scythrop’s experience as its novelettish form at first suggests.” Still, it is possible that Shelley sought to re-present Percy through the ideal character of Adrian to discourage the public’s assumption that all of Peacock’s satire through Scythrop was actually meant as a personal attack on Percy. At the very least, Shelley appears to be remodeling Percy as hero rather than foil, his life as tragedy rather than comedy. And it is no coincidence that Shelley’s idealization of Percy in response to Peacock’s satire mirrors her attempt to memorialize him by publishing his more muted and sympathetic poems in 1824, a plan conceived to temper the market before she would unleash his full, often anarchistic, violent, and fundamentally secular, corpus in a later, complete collection.

121 By making Shelley into a comic character, Peacock further pokes fun at his friend whom he thought could not appreciate comedy. In his Memoirs of Shelley, Peacock provides two anecdotes that demonstrate Shelley’s adverse reaction to comedy in the plays A School for Scandal and Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.
Critics have pointed out other historical allusions in *The Last Man*, but most curious is to read Mary Shelley into the figure of the novel’s narrator, Lionel Verney. Sir Timothy Shelley’s litigation against Shelley forced her to publish *The Last Man* anonymously. It may be Shelley’s reaction to this slight that she refuses Lionel the status of a name until chapter 2, and this only through the words of his sister, Perdita. Borrowing from the delayed, and comical, revelation of the hero’s impotent name in *Tristram Shandy*, it appears that Lionel possesses identity only through the discourse of others. His voice does permeate these narrative borders, as Lionel is often entity rather than character, more bystander than actor. Shelley makes most overt her connection to Lionel in her journal, writing of her “Last Man”: “Yes I may well describe that solitary being’s feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me.” First, by referring to Lionel as a “being,” Shelley connects his tormented isolation to the similar “being” of *Frankenstein*. Second, as a “relic,” Shelley implies she is already part of the past, petrified for the readers of the future, like Lionel, by her texts. Shelley here mirrors Keats’s words in a 30 November 1820 letter: “I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence.”

Most readings of *The Last Man* engage with its political implications (as a reaction to its turbulent historical moment) or its treatment of epidemic (as a novel about nationhood, population, emigration, and human rights). Many have found the structure of *The Last Man* troubling. The tale of Lionel’s life and the creation of his domestic circle with Perdita, Adrian, and Lord Raymond takes up a great chunk of volume I. This personal history quickly spirals out to national and then to global intrigue as the plague grows in virulence. First mentioned in

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124 Of the latter, see Fuson Wang’s “We Must Live Elsewhere: The Social Construction of Natural Immunity in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*” (*European Romantic Review* 22.2 [2011]: 235-55); Peter Melville’s “The Problem of Immunity in *The Last Man*” (*SEL* 47.4 [2007]: 825-46); and Charlotte Sussman’s “‘Islanded in the World’: Cultural Memory and Human Mobility in *The Last Man*” (*PMLA* 118.2 [2003]: 286-301).
volume II, the plague takes center stage, and becomes, as Shelley is careful to personify it, the novel’s central and most intriguing character. As Charlotte Sussman puts it, “the novel necessarily describes the gradual unraveling of that net,” the systematic destruction of everything Lionel builds in the first volume.125

More recent discussions of the novel have begun to engage its perplexing framing device. In volume I, the fictional Introduction follows the familiar “found text” strategy of Radcliffe, but complicates it in a complex web of temporal layering and editorial intervention. Samantha Webb has found connections here to both Radcliffe and Scott and suggests that this strategy of “appropriation of the manuscript erects a mediating, corrective discourse that usurps the narrative authority of the internal narrator and locates that authority within an institutional discourse.”126 In the Introduction, two travelers, with the help of local guides, explore the “antiquities which are scattered on the shores of Baiae” in Italy.127 At last, they enter the Cumeaen Sibyl’s Cave. With difficulty they proceed farther and farther into the depths of the cave, ignoring the warnings of the guides. They eventually find themselves “at a wide cavern with an arched dome-like roof,” where “leaves” of written text are “strewed about” (3). Many have pointed out that the travelers have entered a sort of womb where the productive act of writing takes place. Reading the Introduction as part of a tradition of invoking Sibyl, Timothy Ruppert argues that “Shelley surpasses her contemporaries by restoring the Sibyl, a prophetic female voice from Western antiquity, as a principal vatic authority.”128 The first voice, then, is

Sibyl’s prophetic one, and her sheets are passed to Lionel’s voice, and then back in time to the anonymous editor’s.

The framework of *The Last Man* belongs to other traditions, however, ones that are closer to Shelley. When Shelley has the text of the novel recovered from Sibyl’s Cave, she clearly echoes her mother’s “The Cave of Fancy,” where a series of didactic tales comes from the experienced voices of specters conjured from the afterlife by Sagestus. *The Last Man* is just as much a series of tales. The novel was advertised as a “new Romance, or, rather Prophetic Tale,” and within Lionel refers to his text only as a tale. As with Eastern tales, Lionel’s text incorporates several “tales” told to him by Perdita, Adrian, Raymond, and others. Shelley exchanges Wollstonecraft’s sage, Diotima, for her own prophet, Sibyl, though both represent pillars of female knowledge and power in Western antiquity. Yet Shelley’s prophet is muted, her words appropriated by the crude labor of the editorial pen. Sibyl’s writing is quickly usurped by both Lionel’s words and the 1818 editor’s cuts and additions, which serve partially to silence a powerful female voice, rather than to circulate it. The closing words of the novel mirror its title, as the last man roams the earth as author, editor, publisher, and audience; Sibyl, the figures in the cave, and Shelley herself have been absorbed by “Verney—the LAST MAN” (470); what is his story becomes history.

Perhaps more pertinent to the novel’s opening framework is Coleridge’s 1817 collection of poetry, *Sibylline Leaves*. In the preface, he explains that he chose the title as “an allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state in which they have been long suffered to remain.”

Included in this collection is “Ancient Mariner,” which, like *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda* before it, parallels many themes in *The Last Man*. Of course, the framework of the poem could once again have influenced Shelley’s conception of framing devices. But the thematic elements of

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“Ancient Mariner” are echoed as well. The Mariner is, after the sudden and dramatic deaths of his crew, left alone on his vessel. As the plague begins to reach England in *The Last Man*, “a tempest-struck vessel had appeared off the town: the hull was parched-looking and cracked, the sails rent, and bent in a careless, unseamanlike manner. . . . One only of the crew appeared to have arrived with her” (217). But it is also Lionel’s insistence that he carry on writing that echoes the Mariner’s seemingly ceaseless and circular narration. “I am again impelled by the restless spirit within me to continue my narration” (266), Lionel writes. Shelley would furthermore have known that Coleridge’s collection, though boasting to contain the “whole of the author’s poetical compositions, from 1793 to the present date,” was conspicuously incomplete.130 The previous year had seen what are now two of Coleridge’s most famous poems finally published in *Christabel; Kubla Khan: A Vision; The Pains of Sleep* (1816). Sibyl’s Cave in *The Last Man*, its “wide cavern with an arched dome-like roof” (5), echoes the “stately pleasure-dome” of “Kubla Khan.”131 And in Coleridge’s cave, the fountain’s “Huge fragments” function like “Kubla Khan” itself, to be collected and analyzed in the vein of the editorial narrator in *The Last Man*.132 If Coleridge’s collection is incomplete, itself but a fragment of his oeuvre, then what “Literary Life” is ever complete?133 What pages did the editor of Sibyl’s leaves ignore, fail to gather, or, perhaps, more like Coleridge, suppress?

For *The Last Man*, more so than any of Shelley’s novels, fundamentally concerns the ethics of editing. The anonymous editor of the opening frame only inaugurates the many echoing editors found within. Lord Raymond seeks to “join [England’s] dismembered frame” (57) through rehabilitation projects, both of infrastructure and of the arts. To accomplish the latter,

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130 Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves*, i.
133 Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves*, ii.
Raymond charters the construction of a new national art gallery. One blueprint catches his eye: “The design was new and elegant, but faulty; so faulty, that although drawn with the hand and eye of taste, it was evidently the work of one who was not an architect” (107). Raymond decides that he will help fix the design’s faults; he “pointed out the errors, and the alterations that he wished to be made; he offered the Greek a pencil that he might correct the sketch on the spot” (107). The Greek man is, however, not the designer. Raymond finds, after scouring the haunts of the poor, that Evadne, his second and perhaps more fitting love, drew the designs. Shelley here sets up a female-creator-to-male-editor dynamic that mirrors both Sibyl’s fragmented voice in the frame and her experience with *Frankenstein*.

Lionel is the novel’s most consummate editor, stitching together the tales of his loved ones into a unified narrative. Several times, however, Lionel pauses to address the reader directly. “Will not the reader tire,” he writes, “if I should minutely describe our long-drawn journey from Paris to Geneva?” (399). Thus Lionel takes responsibility as editor for removing extraneous detail, for keeping his tale within the bounds of readerly interest. Echoing Victor Frankenstein in several enticing ways, Lionel glosses over the secret horrors of his tale:

I dare not pause too long in the narration. If I were to dissect each incident, every small fragment of a second would contain an harrowing tale, whose minutest word would curdle the blood in thy young veins. It is right that I should erect for thy instruction this monument of the foregone race; but not that I should drag thee through the wards of an hospital, nor the secret chambers of the charnel-house. This tale, therefore, shall be rapidly unfolded. Images of destruction, pictures of despair, the procession of the last triumph of death, shall be drawn before thee,
swift as the rack driven by the north wind along the blotted splendour of the sky.

(399-400)

By working as a framer for his story, Lionel also acts as a proxy for the anonymous editor of the opening frame. Some time after Adrian enters his life, and Lionel “began to be human” (29), he explains how the world appears to him: “All events, at the same time that they deeply interest me, arranged themselves in pictures before me. I gave the right place to every personage in the groupe, the just balance to every sentiment” (174). In other words, Lionel edits his world to place it within his frame of reference.

Perdita is especially implicated in Lionel’s editorial design. She “stood before a large mirror—she gazed on her reflected image; her light and graceful dress, the jewels that studded her hair, and encircled her beauteous arms and neck, her small feet shod in satin, her profuse and glossy tresses, all were to her clouded brow and woebegone countenance like a gorgeous frame to a dark tempest-pourtraying picture. ‘Vase am I,’ she thought, ‘vase brimful of despair’s direst essence’” (135). Perdita is only frame, not canvas within—despair personified as vacuous vessel; as with the creature in Frankenstein, she is a receptacle for the whims of an author, and her agency foils plans. She escapes from Lionel’s frame with her suicide; he cannot contain her depression, the first plague that blights the domestic circle. Lionel next laments the fall of art: “farewell to painting, the high wrought sentiment and deep knowledge of the artist’s mind in pictured canvas—to paradisiacal scenes, where trees are ever vernal, and the ambrosial air rests in perpetual glow:—to the stamped form of tempest, and wildest uproar of universal nature encaged in the narrow frame” (321-322). For, once mankind is gone, nature ceases to be represented by art—no writer, no audience, no novel.
The most powerful editorial voice, however, appears in the novel’s opening frame. “I visited Naples in the year 1818” (3), the Introduction begins, presenting the novel’s first narrator, one who becomes immediately and then increasingly amalgamated with Lionel. The unnamed narrator has also been connected with the author herself, as the Shelleys visited the same Italian spots (the Elysian Fields and Avernus) on 8 December 1818. But this narrator has been far too readily substituted for Shelley to the point that critics always gender it female. The two explorers, however, are never gendered; Shelley carefully refers to them collectively as “us” and “we,” and the narrator calls the other “friend” and “companion.”

There is no hint at the pair’s romantic relationship, no reference to “husband,” as Percy Shelley would have been. Instead, the narrator remains not only anonymous, but sexless, again appearing as a reference to Shelley’s status of authorship in the face of forced anonymity. And Shelley’s move here possibly also alludes to sexless editorial figures, such as Johnson’s Mr. Rambler, who describes himself as a “neutral being between the sexes.”

The narrator proceeds in the Introduction to detail the collection of the writing, which “seemed to contain prophecies” handed down by the Cumaean Sibyl. As the Sibyl stories go, however, the papers are scattered and unarranged, it being left up to the discoverers to act as editors. “We made a hasty selection of such of the leaves, whose writing one at least of us could understand,” the narrator explains, “and then, laden with our treasure, we bade adieu to the dim hypaethric cavern” (6). The explorers return several times to the cave to collect more of the remains, after which they must decipher them: “Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form” (5). The narrator becomes

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134 This scene does, however, echo *Frankenstein*, when Victor and Henry Clerval travel to Matlock to visit the “wondrous cave, and the little cabinets of natural history, where the curiosities are disposed in the same manner as the collections at Servox and Chamonix” (134).

not only an editor of the “obscure and chaotic” sheets, but also admits to being a translator: “they owe their present form to me, their decipherer” (6). Yet the narrator apologizes if the story has “suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in my hands” (7). This reveals not just an anxiety over the labor of an editor, collating, excising, and condensing, but also one of authorship, which is both “adaptation and translation,” the grand task that transcends any editor, of giving both “form and substance” (7) to something that lacked it.

Thus, the narrator resembles Victor Frankenstein. If, as I have suggested earlier, the creature is not only rudely stitched-together pieces of other bodies, but also letters that must be transcribed and reconstructed by Walton and then Margaret Saville, then what the narrator accomplishes in *The Last Man* is to bring to life yet another “hideous progeny,” a creature that realizes Victor Frankenstein’s fear of “race of devils” who threaten the “existence of the whole human race” (138), one that destroys not just a family, but extinguishes an entire species—the plague: “That same invincible monster, which hovered over and devoured Constantinople—that fiend more cruel than tempest, less tame than fire, is, alas, unchained in that beautiful country” (221). Worse than Frankenstein, that “modern Prometheus,” this unbound anti-Promethean force extinguishes rather than illuminates, takes away humanity rather than giving it sustenance. Sophie Thomas has pointed out that the frame in *The Last Man* is left open, which suggests the “impossibility of ending, the difficulty of concluding.” In this way, *The Last Man* is a fragment writ large, and acts “as a reflection on the infinality of writing itself.”

Lionel’s closing words, “the LAST MAN” (470), are the last words of *The Last Man*. Implicated here is the horror of the editor not returning, of the year 1818 being forever lost at the dawn of the

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137 Thomas, “The Ends of the Fragment,” 23.
twenty-second century. In other words, when the editor disappears, so too does human history; Lionel’s last words have no follow-up, no voice to respond, to moralize, to assuage. In

*Frankenstein*, we have only the possibility of the creature living on to practice more violence; in *The Last Man*, the plague wipes out all knowledge, all memory, all history, to the point that the opening-frame narrator can no longer exist. Thus does *The Last Man* render the editor a “nobody” by literally making the author the final “somebody.” Shelley makes a monument out of Lionel, memorializing his story while making her editor’s story inconsequential—if not impossible.

Twelve years after she enshrined author and extinguished editor in *The Last Man*, perhaps in frustration over her thwarted editorial efforts in 1824, Shelley was finally able to publish Percy’s complete works. In a 7 December 1838 letter to publisher Edward Moxon, Shelley writes,

> The M.S. from which it was printed consisted of fragments of paper which in the hands of an indifferent person would never have been decyphered—the labor of putting it together was immense—the papers were in my possession and in no other person’s (for the most part) the volume might be all my writing (except that I could not write it) . . . & I think that it is law that a posthumous publication must belong entirely to the editor . . .

Percy exists for Shelley as a confused pile of papers that she must organize, a puzzle that only she can solve. In reconstructing and re-presenting Percy from fragmentary poems, unfinished essays, and personal letters, Shelley became not just an editor, but a Sibyline prophet who holds the key and copyright to truth; not just an editor, but an experienced, practiced, and judicious

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Victor Frankenstein, collecting and stitching together fragments to breathe new life into a misrepresented, misunderstood, and unacknowledged legislator.

*Frankenstein*, more than any other novel, made the frame narrative a Gothic convention, and Shelley’s later adaptations on the device afforded it a force that could subvert rather than merely supplement the central narrative. Before *The Last Man* wiped out the species in a plague-ridden dystopian future, other novelists had re-imagined the potential of narrative framing. For Charles Robert Maturin, the frame narrative encourages experiments with how a character lives, moves, and controls the stories of multiple unruly witnesses who are contained within the frame of the monster himself. As with the creature in *Frankenstein*, Maturin’s titular figure in *Melmoth the Wanderer* not only breaks narrative frames, but in so doing also muddles the boundaries between hero and villain, human and creature, and character and narrator.
CHAPTER 5

“[T]HE VERY FRAMES WERE BROKEN”: GOTHIC OMNISCIENCE IN MELMOTH THE WANDERER

‘It is no limitation of omnipotence . . . to suppose that one thing is not consistent with another, that the same proposition cannot be at once true and false, that the same number cannot be even and odd, that cogitation cannot be conferred on that which is created incapable of cogitation.’
—Samuel Johnson, Rasselas

‘When the eye of God is on me, most reverend fathers, I am never in darkness.’—
‘The eye of God is on you, . . . and so is another eye, to which he has deputed the sleepless vigilance and resistless penetration of his own.’
—Charles Robert Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer

There is no other novel like Melmoth the Wanderer (1820). Its inscrutable protagonist and sprawling yet claustrophobic plot have baffled readers for almost two centuries. Brilliant, evocative, and innovative, yet flawed, dense, and sometimes incomprehensible, it is, in Dale Kramer’s words, a “marred masterpiece.” Although called an “encyclopedia of the sublime” for its unique presentation of “a wholly gothicized universe,” Melmoth encourages diverse critical responses. For some the novel “dramatizes all the critically acclaimed ingredients of the Gothic recipe,” while for others its “Gothic elements are very slight.” It has been called the “last and greatest expression of its kind,” and the “Gothic romance to end all Gothic romances,” providing

a profound final blow before Victorian re-imaginings of the genre; and its author, the enigmatic Charles Robert Maturin, is often credited with establishing an Irish-Gothic that influenced Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. Where negotiable, or even tangible, the plot concerns the movements of Melmoth, a figure who made a Faustian pact with the devil in exchange for partial immortality. In hopes of relieving his burden, Melmoth supernaturally appears in such restricted spaces as a madhouse and the dungeons of the Inquisition to market his powers to desperate customers.

_Melmoth the Wanderer_ is built on an elaborate system of frames, which layer, intertwine, and envelop, but are almost always unsteady, fragmented, or otherwise incomplete. Maturin’s framing aesthetic intensifies Radcliffe’s sublime to the end that characters, environments, and even plot are veiled in ominous obscurity. The novel’s most complete feature is, paradoxically, its shadowy central figure, who looms large yet remains frustratingly abstract. Melmoth’s very intangibly allows him to wander freely (though not unencumbered) through the novel’s complex architecture. He breaks narrative frames, bores through physical boundaries, and penetrates delicate psyches to affect and infect every action, every word. He is thus the consummate omniscient narrator, making _Melmoth_ not just a “story about storytelling,” but also a narrative about a narrator. Melmoth is, in Balzac’s words, a “great allegorical figure” for narrative omniscience, whose power, rather than constructing form, leaves it crumbling in his wake.

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Like his novel and its hero, Maturin was a contradiction. Husband to celebrated singer Henrietta Bunbury and father to four children, Maturin was also a notorious dandy, who loved to dance and to experiment with fashion. He preached sermons that promoted the tenets of high-Calvinism and yet wrote novels that, Baudelaire remarked, “projected splendid, dazzling beams on the latent Lucifer who is installed in every human heart.”

Born to Huguenot immigrants in Dublin in 1782, Maturin attended Trinity College and became curate of St. Patrick’s Church in 1803. Behind the scenes, Maturin read widely and wrote extensively. He had a shrewd understanding of the literary marketplace and attempted to repeat the success of Sydney Owenson’s *Wild Irish Girl* (1806) with his own *Wild Irish Boy* in 1808. Maturin’s greatest literary success, however, was drama. *Bertram; or the Castle of St. Aldobrand*, which was supervised by Scott, promoted by Byron, and later viciously excoriated by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, thrived on Drury Lane in 1816, and starred the renowned Edmund Kean.

Although his previous works were published anonymously, Maturin was identified with *Bertram* from the beginning. The play brought him fame, but it also compromised his career in the clergy; he was never removed from his position or publicly sanctioned, but any aspirations for promotion were made impossible. Two disastrously unsuccessful plays followed, and Maturin quickly saw himself facing poverty.

These financial troubles forced Maturin to return to the Gothic romance in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. His first published fiction was the self-financed *Fatal Revenge; or, the Family of Montorio* (1807), a novel brimming with Gothic matter. Although long considered an unnecessary imitation of Radcliffe, whose novels Maturin called “irresistibly and delightfully

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10 Coleridge’s criticism appears in chapter 23 of *Biographia Literaria*. In one particularly scathing section, he writes: “I want words to describe the mingled horror and disgust, with which I witnessed the opening of the fourth act, considering it as a melancholy proof of the depravation of the public mind” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000], 469).
dangerous,” Fatal Revenge in fact proves imaginative and innovative and reveals Maturin’s early interest in formal complexity that he would highlight in Melmoth.¹¹ Maturin chose to publish the novel under the pseudonym Dennis Jasper Murphy, which he later revealed was “vulgar and merely Irish sounding.”¹² The preface, which provides the first frame, apologizes for the current stock of poor Gothic romances, but then argues that there is no feeling so “powerful or universal as the fear arising from objects of invisible terror.”¹³ Thus the “abuse of the influence of this passion by vulgar hands, is no argument against its use” (5). The closing line signals that what we have read is in fact part of the fiction: “let this serve to inform my Readers, that I am four and twenty, that I never had literary friend or counselor, and that I am an Irishman of the name of Dennis Jasper Murphy” (viii). Robert Miles has proved that Maturin was born in 1780 and not 1782 as other sources have claimed.¹⁴ That Maturin was actually twenty-six when he wrote the preface to Fatal Revenge, signed 15 December 1806, suggests that even Maturin’s paratexts should be considered dubious if not part of the fiction that follows.

The novel is “introduced” in a “striking manner,” Scott boasted. In 1697, two brave but curiously furtive soldiers, brothers Ippolito and Annibal, die in battle during the Nine Years War.¹⁵ Before they die, a ranking officer forces them to reveal their history. This central narrative, told by the “Italian officer” (xi) as a sort of Radcliffean revelation of a secret confession, is the brothers’ story that began some years earlier. The narrative embeds tales within tales: letters, fragmentary journals, and poems complicate the plot. The brothers’ uncle, Orazio, thought dead, disguises himself as the vampiric monk Schemoli to enact revenge on his brother

¹³ Charles Robert Maturin, Fatal Revenge; or, the Family of Montorio (London: Longman, 1807), iv; hereafter cited parenthetically.
who usurped him. Through the manipulation of supernatural effect, Orazio convinces Ippolito and Annibal to murder their father. In a twist, Orazio is revealed to be their actual father, and he dies just after seeing the brothers pardoned for the crime. Gothic tropes pervade the novel, and Maturin conspicuously borrows from Radcliffe (explained supernatural) and Lewis (violence and cross-dressing). But *Fatal Revenge* is a virtuoso effort, a “sprawling first attempt,” Jim Kelly contends.\(^{16}\) It demonstrates, Christina Morin argues, “Maturin’s concern with the devastating effects the interruption of the past can have in the present and future.”\(^ {17}\) While managing to blend the disparate schools of the Gothic, and providing a “concrete link” to the later Gothic of Shelley and Byron,\(^ {18}\) Maturin also demonstrates a knack for narrative complexity, not only by applying a frame narrative, but also by incorporating a series of frames in the many embedded tales.

*Fatal Revenge*’s scheming monk Schemoli in many ways is a precursor to *Melmoth*’s titular Wanderer.\(^ {19}\) Schemoli is “unearthly” with a “whole appearance more remote from the beings or business of this world” (67), and he moves “like something [that] had strayed from its prison-house of pain” (75). Yet they are dissimilar in the most important way. *The Dublin Inquisitor* defines the difference between Maturin’s two Gothic endeavors, and offers an intriguing account for the influence of Eastern tales on *Melmoth*: “the English school of Romance may be divided into two classes:—one, which spurns every restraint, and, like the stories of the east, acknowledges no law but the writer’s convenience—the other, subject to the necessity of a satisfactory explanation.”\(^ {20}\) In short, Schemoli, who is only Orazio in


\(^{19}\) Their eyes, however, are markedly different: in Schemoli’s “large fixed eye, all human fire appears to be dead” (67), while Melmoth’s eye is all fire in its hypnotic “preternatural lustre” (39).

disguise, rests in the realm of the Radcliffian explained supernatural, while Melmoth remains very much unexplained.

Walter Scott’s review of the *Fatal Revenge*, which he claims was “selected almost at random,” decries the imitators of Radcliffe and Lewis who have satiated the market:

> We strolled through a variety of castles, each of which was regularly called Il Castello; met with as many captains of condottieri; heard various ejaculations of Santa Maria and Diabolo; read by a decaying lamp, and in a tapestried chamber, dozens of legends as stupid as the main history; examined such suites of deserted apartments as might fit up a reasonable barrack; and saw as many glimmering lights as would make a respectable illumination.\(^{21}\)

Lacking the clairvoyance to see his own 1829 short story, “The Tapestried Chamber,” Scott nonetheless found himself “insensibly involved” in *Fatal Revenge*, which contains “all the usual accoutrements from the property room of Mrs Radcliffe.”\(^{22}\) Scott finds genius in Maturin but regrets that it has been wasted on so frivolous a production. He criticizes the crutch of the explained supernatural and accuses Maturin of lacking originality in imitating Radcliffe’s design. Scott concludes the review by urging Maturin to find a mentor. In no doubt his most savvy career move, Maturin did just that. He wrote directly to Scott, perhaps without the knowledge that the literary patron and law clerk was in fact the author of popular poetry. “[W]ith all this,” Maturin wrote, “I might do something and my introduction to the literary World would be both dignified and Endeared by owing it to one who can stoop from the Summit of Literature to console the humblest wanderer on its rugged Acclivities.”\(^ {23}\) Scott with some hesitation took Maturin under

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\(^{21}\) Scott, *Periodical Criticism*, 159, 162.

\(^{22}\) Scott, *Periodical Criticism*, 162, 166.

his wing, and the authors began a decade-long correspondence. In an early letter, Scott expresses his repeated disappointment that Maturin failed in “mitigating some of [the] . . . horror” in Fatal Revenge. However, even in his obsequious replies to Scott, Maturin remained unapologetic and uncompromising in insisting on the legitimacy of the Gothic. On 15 February 1813, Maturin wrote to Scott to explain his plans for a new Gothic venture:

I am writing at present a poetical Romance, a wild thing that has a Chance of pleasing more than Regular performances, when it is finished I will submit it to you, and most gratefully avail myself of your interest with the Booksellers—tales of superstition were always my favourites, I have in fact been always more conversant with the visions of another world, than the realities of this, and in my Romance I have determined to display all my diabolical resources, out-Herod all the Herods of the German school, and get possession of the magic lamp with all its slaves from the Conjurator Lewis himself. I fear however they will never build a palace of Gold for me as they did for their Master Aladdin.

Maturin refers not only to M. G. Lewis, Scott’s early mentor and author of the sensational novel, The Monk (1796), but also to the Arabian Nights story of Aladdin. Rubbing the magic lamp of the Gothic, Maturin implicitly suggests, will be financially beneficial, but never make him rich. The Gothic was Maturin’s only imaginative resource (and recourse), however, whether or not he acknowledged the fiscal limitations of the genre. Despite Maturin’s potential misgivings, he resolutely carried out his plan in the Gothic play, Bertram, which is the primary subject of correspondence between the Maturin and Scott. Scott was entranced by the manuscript and sent it off to be read by an equally enthusiastic Byron. However, Scott had one qualm: “I do not well

24 Ratchford and McCarthy, Correspondence, 7.
25 Ratchford and McCarthy, Correspondence, 14.
know *what* to say about the Black Knight——it is at once a grand & terribly bold attempt to introduce upon the stage an agent of this nature & I wish your idea may be perfectly understood by the audience.”

Byron was more forceful in his criticism: among other alterations, he recommended, “the ‘dark Knight’ must also be got rid of.” The play’s success prompted plans for a print-version, which Maturin planned for from the beginning. By this time, Scott seems to have changed his mind concerning the supernatural agent. In a 22 July 1816 letter to Maturin, Scott writes:

> The attempt to prune poets luxuriances is often like the cropping Sampson’s hair——the means of depriving him of his strength——and although I like the printed play very much, yet I alway [sic] miss’d the dark mysterious machinery of the black Knight whose influence and agency gave to the atrocities of Bertram an appearance of involuntary impulse which serves to reconcile the feelings of sympathy, with which we cannot help regarding him, with the horror that his actions are calculated to inspire.

Maturin sent Scott the original manuscript of the play as a token of appreciation. But the print version still would not feature the controversial Knight. Maturin complained, “They have printed it as acted, and, if I may be allowed a coined and apparently affected expression, have *un*-Maturined it completely, they have broken my wand and drowned my Magic Book, and Prospero himself, without his storms, his Goblins, & his Grammary, sinks into a very insignificant sort of

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26 Ratchford and McCarthy, *Correspondence*, 30.
27 Ratchford and McCarthy, *Correspondence*, 40. Byron’s friend, George Lamb, was even more forceful: “The Dark Knight of the Forest and all relating to him should clearly be cut out: He is a personage who would be unintelligible to the majority of the audience, or if intelligible, offensive” (Ratchford and McCarthy, *Correspondence*, 42).
28 Ratchford and McCarthy, *Correspondence*, 62.
Personage.”29 All of these factors were leading to something monumental. Maturin was set to embark on a new project—original, Gothic, and undeniably “Maturin.”

In his 1818 essay, “Novel-writing” (which was also a review of Maria Edgeworth’s novels *Harrington* and *Ormond*), Maturin delineates a short “progress of romance.”

“The transition,” Maturin writes, “from the vapid sentimentality of the novel of fifty years ago to the goblin horrors of the last twenty is so strong and sudden that it almost puzzles us to find a connecting link.”30 Maturin suggests Charlotte Smith’s novels as perhaps providing such a link. He moves on to examine Radcliffe and Lewis, and then derides all of their foul imitators, before contending:

> the magic book has been shut for ever, and the hand that presumes to open its pages now must have more than mortal nerve. A sad interdict hangs over the desolated regions of romance: bells may ring on lonely heaths with as little notice as if they rung for noon-day prayers in the centre of the metropolis; ghosts may glide and glare, and flutter and squeak, with as little effect; suits of armour fall, and nobody stoops to pick them up; daggers are dropt at our feet, and we never think of tracing ‘gouts of blood on their blade and dudgeon.’ Even Adelinas appear in vain at their window, to watch the slow-stealing shades of twilight, and chaunt their vesper hymns; we leave them to their fate, pitilessly indifferent whether they are immolated by the mysterious and vindictive baron, or are run away with by the spirit, who at the canonical hour of midnight appears from behind the usual sliding pannel, with the indispensable accompaniment of

29 Ratchford and McCarthy, *Correspondence*, 59.
30 Maturin, “Novel-writing,” 47. It is a rich quotation, to say the least; fifty years would in fact be contemporaneous to Walpole’s *Otranto*, which arguably initiated “goblin horrors,” and twenty years before 1818 would be *Lyrical Ballads*. Perhaps the combination of Coleridge’s “supernatural” and Wordsworth’s “ordinary life” (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 314) is the “transition” Maturin is looking for.
rattling chains and sulphurous flashes, to confirm all the hints already given by trap-doors and stains of blood, and all that had been whispered, moaned, or muttered by storms, thunders, and mysterious housekeepers, of the secret of the southern tower.\textsuperscript{31}

Maturin pits the Gothic novel as the Gothic victim, imprisoned and ignored in a dungeon of its own artifice and obsolescence. He closes the door on the Gothic—and, importantly, even on his own Gothic of \textit{Fatal Revenge}. The market has been satiated and will never recover its hunger. That Maturin wrote the essay at the initial planning stages for \textit{Melmoth}, however, suggests that he would be the author with an “immortal nerve.” \textit{Melmoth} might be considered Maturin’s attempt to reinvent the genre, rather than the last gasp of a dying form.

On 2 May 1818, Maturin wrote to Archibald Constable proposing plans for a “Poem, consisting of distinct parts, something like \textit{Lalla Rookh}, to be connected by a prose narration which is independent of, but diffused between, the various Poems.”\textsuperscript{32} This germ of an idea would eventually grow into \textit{Melmoth}. That Maturin proposed for his next text to resemble Irish poet Thomas Moore’s \textit{Lalla Rookh} (1817)—an Eastern romance that features a prose frame that connects four narrative poems—suggests a structural plan for a frame narrative and a complex system of embedded texts that is modeled after Eastern texts like \textit{Arabian Nights}.\textsuperscript{33} Although the final product of \textit{Melmoth} would neither look nor feel like Moore’s text, it is important that Maturin had the formal qualities of Eastern tales in mind when constructing the novel.

Maturin forwarded the first part of his new text to Constable in July 1819. By August, Constable had acknowledged the receipt of another chunk of the novel, but he was distressed as

\textsuperscript{31} Maturin, “Novel-writing,” 50.
\textsuperscript{32} NLS MS 673, 11v.
\textsuperscript{33} References to Eastern tales abound. To name only a few: “Sinbad the Sailor” (16), “Simorgh in the Eastern fable” (111), and “The sultan in the eastern tale” (208).
it was seemingly unrelated to the first. Because Maturin had only referred to the text as “Tales,” Constable envisioned it as forming a series that would resemble Tales of My Landlord, no doubt hoping to benefit from The Author of Waverley’s success. When Constable received the third shipment, however, he was thrown into a panic. On 9 September, he wrote to Maturin:

[W]ith great difficulty we send part of it belonging to the first Tale, and a part to the second, at least we thought so, so little however appeared to connect with the first Tale that we could not make up the third sheet and what is just recd. is in no way so far as we can notice, connected with what is received of the first in one word we are wholly at a stand, and it is utterly impossible that the work can proceed except some plan is pursued whereby the connection of the various portions of the MS is kept up—there is no paging, no connecting word nothing to guide us—and after corresponding for two months there are only two sheets set up and that without a title you have never yet said what portion was lost or how it fitted with what came before.34

Maturin’s silence forced Constable to arrange the novel himself. Constable gave the novel its title and added “the Wanderer” right before printing.35 When Maturin did respond, it was in hopes of extending the work, from five to as many as eight volumes. Constable declined the proposal, pointing out that even The Author of Waverley received no such accommodations. Despite the struggle, Constable met his publishing deadline. Sharon Ragaz, who first brought to light this anxious, and often one-sided, correspondence, argues that Melmoth is the “product of an extended process of collaboration, negotiation, procrastination and accident.”36 For this

34 NLS MS 790, pp. 639-40.
reason, it is difficult to consider the novel’s structure in terms of authorial intent. Although all texts go through the wringer of editors and printers—as Mary Shelley demonstrates in *Frankenstein*—*Melmoth* is a particularly intriguing example of a joint literary venture.

Initial reactions to *Melmoth* were mostly hostile. *The Quarterly Review* quipped, “Mr. Maturin has contrived . . . to unite in this work all the worst particularities of the worst modern novels.”37 “Compared with it,” the review continues, “Lady Morgan is almost intelligible—The Monk, decent—The Vampire, amiable—and Frankenstein, natural.”38 *The Edinburgh Review* was particularly harsh in its remarkably accurate summary:

To complete this phantasmagoric exhibition, we are presented with sybils [*sic*] and misers; parricides; maniacs in abundance; monks with scourges pursuing a naked youth streaming with blood; subterranean Jews surrounded by the skeletons of their wives and children; lovers blasted by lightning; Irish hags, Spanish grandees, shipwrecks, caverns, Donna Claras and Donna Isidores,—all opposed to each other in glaring and violent contrast, and all their adventures narrated with the same undeviating display of turgid, vehement, and painfully elaborated language. Such are the materials, and the style of this expanded nightmare.39

Some reviews admired the work, however. *Blackwood’s* asserts, “Mr Maturin is, without question, one of the most genuine masters of the dark romance.”40 *Melmoth* is told with “tremendous truth and force,” *The Eclectic Review* contends.41 Nevertheless, most were confounded by the novel’s form, which was, one reviewer argues, “singularly clumsy and

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38 Ibid.
inartificial.”

The novel’s tales appeared to be “unconnected with each other” or “very inartificially connected.” Most reviews saw the novel’s seemingly disparate tales as possessing only one link, that of Melmoth himself.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its confounding structure and overwrought composition history, readings of the novel’s form are rich. Without question the most critically engaging aspect of Melmoth is still its puzzling narrative structure, for which critics have attempted to find a metaphoric equivalent. A remarkable contemporary piece in The Quarterly Review proves prescient for modern readings, observing that the novel’s tales “are contained one within another like a nest of Chinese boxes; but instead of being the effect of nice workmanship, Mr. Maturin’s tales are involved and entangled in a clumsy confusion which disgraces the artist, and puzzles the observer.”

Catherine Lalone reads in the complex structure of the novel a “fractal set of

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43 “Melmoth, the Wanderer,” The Lady’s Monthly Museum 13 (1821): 95; “Remarks on ‘Melmoth,’” New Monthly Magazine 14 (1820): 663. The use of “inartificial” to describe the novel’s frame is intriguing, but it appears that the reviewers meant “Not in accordance with the principles of art; constructed without art or skill, rude, clumsy; inartistic,” rather than “Without complexity or artifice; not elaborately designed or worked out; plain, simple, straightforward,” which the OED traces to 1823.
44 Chris Baldick calls the “strangely overwrought narrative structure” a “preposterously convoluted contrivance” (Introduction to Charles Robert Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989], xi, x); Douglas Grant reads it as a “casual arrangement” (Introduction to Charles Robert Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968], x); Rosemary Jackson notes its “relentlessly fragmented structure” (Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion [London: Routledge, 1981], 104); and most recently Christina Morin has analyzed its “strange and bemusing structure” (129). Jack Null notes that the “complex structure reveals the novel to be an embodiment of a way of perceiving the truth of human experience” (“Structure and Theme in Melmoth the Wanderer,” 137); Robert Kiely argues that it “defies conventional chronological sequence and replaces it with obsessive variations on the single theme of human misery” (The Romantic Novel in England [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972], 71); Elizabeth Napier contends that it “recapitulates [a] pattern of doubling and intensification, each narrator relating an ominously similar tale of oppression, despair, and temptation” (The Failure of the Gothic [Oxford: Clarendon, 1986], 63); Joseph Lew sees the “violent wrenchings of chronology” as “recreating within the reader the same divisiveness the narrative depicts in its major characters” (“Unprepared for sudden transformations’: Identity and Politics in Melmoth the Wanderer,” Studies in the Novel 26 [1994]: 174); Fred Botting compares the “inescapable . . . narrative labyrinth” to the “human condition” (The Gothic [London and New York: Routledge, 1996], 108); Margot Gayle Backus interprets the frame narrative “as offering a vision of a costly and barely survivable escape from an elaborate system of familial and economic control that is, over time, breaking down” (The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order [Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999], 114); and Laura Doyle reads in the novel a “structure of a pained dialectic of telling and listening, of seeking witness and giving witness” (“At World’s Edge: Post/Coloniality, Charles Maturin, and the Gothic Wanderer,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction 65.4 [2011]: 530).
45 “Melmoth, the Wanderer,” The Quarterly Review 24 (1821): 304.
Chinese boxes.” Using similar metaphors, William Axton describes the novel as a “system of interpolated tales nested one within another like the boxes of a child’s toy,” and Joseph Lew notes: “structurally it resembles a series of Russian dolls, each containing a smaller one inside.” G. St. John Stott provides the most intricate metaphor for the novel: “Just as images seen in two mirrors set to face one another seem to be infinitely multiplied, so the violence, evil, and despair in Melmoth seem multiplied and intensified by their juxtaposition in the interpolated tales.”

Richard Albright criticizes these and other “misleading metaphors” and suggests that “the quest of coherence” involves the reader “eliding the disjunctions.” Kathleen Fowler similarly argues, “The reader must herself wrest its integrity from apparent chaos.” Thus is Melmoth a particularly interactive text that necessitates a joint effort between reader and text.

In his preface to Melmoth, André Breton writes: “One must wait until 1820 for a new meteor to detach itself from the ritual framework of the Gothic window and suspend its endless rain of ashes. Melmoth, the wanderer will consume, in flashes of great spiritual scope, all the power that remains in a genre that continues to falter at the hands of mercenaries.” Breton agrees with many other critics in assigning Melmoth an important position in the history of the Gothic.

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47 Axton, Introduction to Melmoth the Wanderer, xv; Lew, “‘Unprepared for sudden transformations,’” 176.
49 Richard Albright, Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction [Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2009], 80.
51 Several critics have examined the novel’s interest with transmission. Julia Wright argues that the “theme of inheritance . . . reinforces the novel’s concern with lines of transmission, as well as its dependence on iterative patterning that is itself a challenge to notions of historical progress and the imperial expansion those notions underwrite” (Ireland, India, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature [Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007], 161); Baldick argues that it is “secretly as much about transmission as it is about transgression” (xii); and Richard Albright observes that it is a “novel about hours and generations, and about transmission: of property, title, and identity across generations” (68).
but it is his metaphor of framing that is most intriguing. The mindless imitations of Radcliffe and Lewis that Scott early on condemns made the Gothic formulaic. Their adherence to the standard Gothic trappings produced a limiting framework, which curbed innovation and imprisoned the imagination. *Melmoth*, Breton suggests, broke this frame with an original, fiery, and unearthly power.

Modern scholars have failed to consider *Melmoth* through the metaphor of frames, but the effect was not lost on contemporary reviewers. *The London Literary Gazette* blast Maturin for “out-Byroning Byron,” and contends, “he might and ought to have avoided the monstrous framework in which he has exhibited this picture, or rather series of pictures.”53 *The Eclectic Review* similarly asserts, “Such is the frame-work of Mr. Maturin’s inventions, and such the foundation on which he has rested a strange and fantastic fabric.”54 *Melmoth* should be considered, following the early reviewers, as an intricately woven tapestry that exhibits a series of framed scenes (fig. 2). The anonymous narrator’s account of young John Melmoth’s adventures at his enigmatic uncle’s estate envelops the text and serves as its most conspicuous frame. Contained within this frame are Stanton’s manuscript and the Wanderer’s dream—which appear at the either end of the novel—and Monçada’s long narrative (“The Tale of the Spaniard”), which itself frames several other tales. Early on in Monçada’s tale, he compares monastic life to the “wrong side of tapestry, where we see only uncouth threads, and the harsh outlines, without the glow of the colours, the richness of the tissue, or the slendour of the embroidery, that renders the external surface so rich and dazzling” (86). This metaphor proves similar to Walton’s words in *Frankenstein* concerning the “reverse side of the picture.”55 If the novel’s tapestry is Monçada’s tale—the text that meets the frame at both ends—then Maturin

suggests that what we will see is the dark underbelly of the world, the picturesque reversed, the beautiful made sublime.

Figure 2: The frame-structure of *Melmoth the Wanderer*
Melmoth begins in 1816, a monumental year for Maturin and the Gothic. The “year without a summer,” which cast Europe in a murky, miserable haze, provided the setting for the famous ghost-story contest at Villa Diotati; and it was also Maturin’s most successful year with the remarkable stage success of Bertram. By the time Maturin began writing Melmoth and sending sheets to Constable, he no doubt had read Frankenstein. In fact, Melmoth’s command, “sit and listen to my tale,” clearly borrows from the words of both Victor (“‘listen to my tale’” and “‘listen to my history’”) and his creature (“‘Listen to my tale’”). As with the creature, Melmoth goes from pursuer to pursued. While he seeks out victims in their moments of greatest weakness, Melmoth is also tracked by both Stanton and Monçada, not to mention the reader, perhaps the most dogged of his pursuers. The mysterious appearances and disappearances of figures in the text borrow from Shelley’s descriptions of her creature. Walton observes in the opening frame “a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, . . . lost among the distant inequalities of the ice,” and then he watches the creature in the terminal frame “borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance.” In Melmoth, Isidora and Melmoth encounter a “figure so obscure, that it at first appeared like a spray moving in the misty night,—then was lost in darkness as it descended the hill,—and then appeared in a human form, as far as the darkness of the night would permit its shape to be distinguishable” (434). And the creature’s prophetic words to Victor, “‘I shall be with you on your wedding-night,’” anticipate Melmoth’s words to Isidora about her arranged wedding: “‘I will be there!’” (577). Finally, the creature’s calling-card, the “black mark” he leaves on his victim’s throats, is echoed by the “black mark” (584) around the throat of Melmoth’s child, whom he allegedly killed. Where

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56 Shelley, Frankenstein, 17, 78. Thematically, as both contemporary and modern reviews have noted, Melmoth is perhaps most indebted to Godwin’s St. Leon (1799), in which the titular character also gains immortality at a profound price.
57 Shelley, Frankenstein, 12, 191.
58 Shelley, Frankenstein, 140.
59 Shelley, Frankenstein, 174, 147.
Victor’s initial project is to create life from death, however, *Melmoth* is concerned only with the later implications of *Frankenstein*, the burden of a life of suffering and the relief of death. This thematic bent may demonstrate Maturin’s Christian ethos, surrounded and enveloped as it is by the Gothic supernatural. Melmoth’s albatross is his immortality, a power that is in fact a curse, for it prevents him salvation in the afterlife.

The outermost frame for *Melmoth* begins with young Melmoth, who is ordered to be witness to his rich and enigmatic uncle’s dying days, entering a neglected and crumbling house. A symbol of the family’s decaying lineage, the house might also be considered the first broken frame of the novel: “There was not a fence or a hedge round the domain: an uncemented wall of loose stones, whose numerous gaps were filled with furze or thorns, supplied their place” (11). The house itself is full of broken frames that suggest the novel’s deconstruction: the “dismantled frame” of a window provides young Melmoth a decidedly un-picturesque view of the “most cheerless of all prospects, . . . the garden of death” (29), which anticipates both Tennyson’s “Mariana” and Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush”; and family portraits stare at spectators from “their mouldering frames” (36). Young Melmoth quickly penetrates another sealed space, his uncle’s closet, which resembles the room in which Adeline finds her father’s manuscript in *The Romance of the Forest*: “There was a great deal of decayed and useless lumber, such as might be supposed to be heaped up to rot in a miser’s closet; but John’s eyes were in a moment, and as if by magic, riveted on a portrait that hung on the wall” (20). The portrait of Melmoth achieves a sort of dynamism, though not so locomotive as Walpole’s in *Otranto*, as it appears to move while young Melmoth stares in a trance. As with many a Gothic character before him, curiosity gets the best of young Melmoth. Although his uncle’s will cautions that he “had better not” read it, “the

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60 This scene also recalls Catherine’s mistaken assessment of General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. 
wild and awful pursuit of an indefinite object, had taken strong hold of his mind” (25), and young Melmoth proceeds into Stanton’s story.

Maturin refers to the heavily fragmented and often illegible manuscript in a series of superlatives that make his Gothic found-text more spectacular and curious than any before it: “The manuscript was discoloured, obliterated and mutilated beyond any that had ever before exercised the patience of a reader” (32). And later: “No antiquarian, unfolding with trembling hand the calcined leaves of an Herculaneum manuscript . . . ever pored with more luckless diligence, or shook a head of more hopeless despondency over his task” (65-66). That Maturin provides no summation of the textual shards means that he charges readers with the task of arranging the pages, like sibyls, to have a hand in forming a history. Stanton’s manuscript, however, is not the first tale in the novel. Young Melmoth first encounters the “doctress of the neighbourhood,—a withered Sibyl” (12) named Biddy Brannigan, who provides the history of the Melmoth family, what Laura Doyle calls a “short history of colonization.”61 Regina Oost notes that Biddy’s story, which is “never contradicted by the ensuing narratives,” establishes “both the model and the foundation of the Gothic tale-spinning that follows.”62 Biddy, like the readers, or indeed like Constable, is tasked to construct Stanton’s history, and she arranges the tales that follow. Although she assembles a history of the family and its most extraordinary member, her work is prophetic. As we have not yet encountered the many tales embedded within the novel’s frame, Biddy’s short tale is a teaser for what follows. She provides important information to take along on the reading journey that is part of the novel’s frame—an effect mirrored by both the name and date that appears at the “border” (20) of Melmoth’s portrait and

the codicil on old Melmoth’s will, written “at the corner of the parchment” (24). Yet because Biddy is a phony doctor, “half-imposter,” Judith Wilt observes, her words must be met with reservations. Her story calls into question the authenticity of oral communication and thus affects the agency of Monçada’s oral tale, the novel’s longest embedded narrative.

Stanton’s fragmented story describes his encounter with and subsequent “incessant and indefatigable” (66) search for Melmoth. At a play, Stanton “discovered the object of his search for four years” (48), the same time between the novel’s frame setting and its publication, suggesting Stanton is in some sense a representation of Maturin, who saw fame in 1816 with *Bertram* and financial ruin thereafter that spurred him to write *Melmoth* in 1820. Stanton’s public propagation of Melmoth’s powers eventually leads him to a madhouse, where Melmoth turns the table and now stalks the den of desperation. At the madhouse, Stanton himself reads a manuscript, and must put up with the ravings of both a “puritanical weaver” and a “loyalist tailor” (55). These political antagonists are linked by their sartorial occupations. But where the puritan produces fabric from thread, the loyalist provides textiles their use value as clothing. The pair form an allegory for Maturin’s experiences with book publishing, which recalls Victor’s editing of the creature in *Frankenstein*. For Maturin, as a high-Calvinist, the puritan weaves the threads of his story. To become a book, however, the fiction-weaver must rely on the publisher, who tailors the text by readying it for the marketplace with editorial cuts and stitches.

Stanton’s story prompts young Melmoth to heed his uncle’s wishes for him to destroy the portrait and manuscript: “He tore it from the frame with a cry half terrific, half triumphant” (67).

Young Melmoth separates the portrait from its frame in an attempt to prevent the narrative of

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63. The words are “Jno. Melmoth, anno 1646” (20).
64. Maturin’s publisher, Archibald Constable, was no loyalist. He headed the *Edinburgh Review*, which leaned heavily Whig and opposed the Tory *Quarterly Review*. Maturin did, however, publish in the *Quarterly Review*, but the magazine would harshly criticize *Melmoth*. 
history from consuming his own story. But the portrait becomes animated during its destruction: “as the wrinkled and torn canvas fell to the floor, its undulations gave the portrait the appearance of smiling. Melmoth felt horror indescribable at this imaginary resuscitation of the figure” (67). The repeated destruction and fragmentation of texts in *Melmoth* is what gives them their life for the reader. Disgusted by the portrait’s reanimation, young Melmoth “tore, cut, and hacked it” (67). Confronted with Monçada’s miniature copy of the portrait, young Melmoth again reacts with violence, “crushing the portrait, glass and all, under his feet” (82). And in Monçada’s tale, to name only one more example, Alonzo instructs his brother to “Tear [a letter] to pieces, throw the fragments into the fountain, or *swallow them*, the moment you have read it” (131).  

After he disposes of his ancestor’s relics, young Melmoth stumbles into the ocean while witnessing a shipwreck. The only survivor of the disaster, Monçada, saves young Melmoth’s life. Safe inside, Monçada begins his tale, which encompasses all of the novel’s other embedded narratives until the main frame returns. Confined in a monastery by his family, Monçada is framed in his chamber by “four bare walls” (188). Aided by his long-lost brother, Juan, with whom he communicates through dangerous letter-exchanges, Monçada begins preparations for escape. A subterranean passage under a wall gives him hope for freedom—recalling similar passageways in *The Castle of Otrano* and *The Italian*—and acts as a frame between art and life: “this tantalizing image of escape and freedom, amid the withering certainty of eternal imprisonment, gave a kind of awakened sting to the pains that were becoming obtuse. I entered the passage, and drew as close as possible to the door that shut me out from life” (193).  

Monçada’s dreams are quickly crushed, however: his brother is killed, and he is captured as a prisoner of the Inquisition. Melmoth makes his appearance during Monçada’s worst state of

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65 To swallow the letter is to render it totally irrecoverable. Pieces, like the fragmented tales that populate *Melmoth*, can be rearranged and stitched together to experience at least partially the story as a whole.

66 Melmoth later enters young Melmoth’s frame through a similar “passage” (598).
despondency: “he certainly took advantage of my agony, half-visionary, half-real as it was” (264). Melmoth tempts Monçada with a promise of freedom, but it is eventually a great fire that crumbles the towers of the Inquisition and provides the means for escape. When Monçada links the omnipotence of the church in Spain to “Omnipotence itself,” he may as well also be referring to Melmoth: “‘If I climb up to heaven, thou art there;—if I go down to hell, thou art there also;—if I take the wings of the morning, and flee unto the uttermost parts of the sea, even there—’” (199).

During his imprisonment, Monçada begins writing a memorial of his circumstances. He struggles to find the means to satisfy an “absurd and perpetual demand for paper” (146), but manages to write volumes. Officers several times search his person for papers (which Monçada conceals like Pamela Andrews by stitching them into his clothes), and they rummage the small trimmings he collected for his cell: “The prints were snatched from the walls,—held up between them and the light.—Then the very frames were broken, to try if any thing was concealed in them” (151). Eventually Monçada is found out and brought before the Superior, but the evidence they produce is not his memorial, but instead a copy of it. Monçada’s memorial undermines the oral sanctity of the confessional. The copy not only suggests that what is recorded in print can be disseminated promiscuously, but it also sets the stage for the arrival of the next embedded tale.

Rescued by fire, Monçada meets the Jew, Adonijah, who hides him underground and tasks him with transcribing a manuscript, titled “The Tale of the Indians.” Set on an island in the Indian Ocean, the story concerns Immalee, a young woman unlike any of the natives, and who has no recollection of her past. Melmoth almost immediately appears in the tale, invading on several occasions the island where Immalee is trapped. It is later rumored that Melmoth, like Prospero, “possessed a peculiar sway over that island” (362). Melmoth transfixes Immalee with
his stories of world suffering, choosing her, Alison Milbank argues, as the “tabula rasa . . . for his attentions.” But Immalee also becomes a palimpsest written over by Melmoth’s image and ideology. She tells him—in language that anticipates Catherine’s “I am Heathcliff,” in *Wuthering Heights*—“You were the first human being I ever saw who could teach me language, and who taught me feeling. Your image is for ever before me, present or absent, sleeping or waking. . . . [T]he indelible image, is written on mine” (416). Immalee, cast as Eve to Melmoth’s Satan, “tasted of the tree of knowledge, and her eyes were opened, but its fruit was bitter to her taste” (343). He decries the faults of several religions, yet nonetheless Immalee chooses to be a Christian. During a dramatic storm, Melmoth proposes marriage, but with a warning that her life must then be made up of darkness and pain. Immalee hesitates momentarily, and Melmoth leaves for good.

Three years pass, and Melmoth—in the role of pursuer—finds Immalee, now named Isidora, reunited with her family in Spain. Their romance reignites: now Romeo to her Juliet, Melmoth courts Isidora in her garden as she leans out a window, which “shut out the form of the stranger—not his image” (394). The window acts as a frame for her imagination to travel back to her island, to render Melmoth a figure in the art of her memory: “She lingered at that casement till she imagined that the clipped and artificially straitened treillage of the garden was the luxuriant and undulating foliage of the trees of her paradise isle” (396). After a clandestine escape, the pair are married in a ruined monastery by a ghostly hermit. The tale then pauses “to retrace a short period of our narrative” (439) by following the adventures of Isidora’s father, Don Francisco di Aliaga.

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67 Milbank, “Sacrificial Exchange and the Gothic Double in *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” 117.
Aliaga’s section, which eventually contains two embedded tales, marks Maturin’s most conspicuous homage to Scott. Constable had pleaded with Maturin to design his Gothic fiction after the model of Scott’s *Tales of My Landlord*, which would require a framing device to unite distinct tales into a four-volume collection. By the time *Melmoth* was published, the first three series of Scott’s *Tales* were complete. Although he would return to pen a final series the year before his death, Scott had effectively ended the production in 1819 with his surly editor Cleishbotham having “melted into thin air.”69 Maturin, of course, ignored Constable’s request, but he did incorporate Scott’s setting for tale-telling: the inn. On his journey home, Aliaga is forced to take rest at a dingy inn where a mysterious man passes by. Aliaga interrogates the innkeeper, who explains, “‘Your worship must needs be a stranger in this part of Spain not to have heard of Melmoth the wanderer” (440). His curiosity piqued, Aliaga requests more information. The innkeeper directs his inquiries to “one who can gratify your curiosity—it is a gentleman who is preparing for the press a collection of facts relative to that person” (441). The stranger in question, who overheard the conversation, approaches, and explains that Melmoth ‘is one of those beings after whom human curiosity pants in vain,—whose life is doomed to be recorded in incredible legends that moulder in the libraries of the curious, and to be disbelieved and scorned even by those who exhaust sums on their collection, and ungratefully depreciate the contents of the volumes on whose aggregate its value depends. There has been, however, I believe, no other instance of a person still alive, and apparently exercising all the functions of a human agent, who has become already the subject of written memoirs, and the theme of traditional history. Several circumstances relating to this extraordinary being are even now in the hands of curious and eager collectors; and I have myself attained

to the knowledge of one or two that are not among the least extraordinary. The
marvellous period of life said to be assigned him, and the facility with which he
has been observed to pass from region to region, (knowing all, and known to
none), have been the principal causes why the adventures in which he is engaged,
should be at once so numerous and so similar.’ (441)

Aliaga agrees to hear the stranger’s story, and he sits in rapt attention “to catch the sounds to
which fear gave a more broken and hollow tone, at the close of every page” (442). The stranger’s
story is “The Tale of Guzman’s Family,” which concerns Walberg, a destitute German musician,
whose wife is in line for her brother’s immense inheritance. Guzman’s will, to the horror of
Walberg’s family, instead stipulates that the money be left entirely to the church. To survive, the
family takes desperate measures, culminating in Walberg’s plan to kill them. Before this,
however, Melmoth visits Walberg, and makes his customary proposition: “it is in his power to
bestow all that human cupidity could thirst for” (473). Walberg refuses, and before committing
the murders, the real will is uncovered, and the family is saved. Null observes that this is the only
tale in the novel to conclude; and Oost sees similarities between this central tale and the frame of
John Melmoth concerning the theme of “avaricious uncles,” which corresponds to Maturin’s
own financial troubles concomitant to producing the novel.70 Baldick also finds an
autobiographical aspect to the tale, arguing that, because it is “deeply embedded,” it
“concentrates many of Maturin’s own fears of impending poverty, and some of his presumed
resentments against his family’s financial claims upon him”71

The stranger concludes the story and reveals that he possesses more stories about
Melmoth, ominously offering to tell them, “‘Should we again meet’” (483). Aliaga falls asleep

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70 Null, “Structure and Theme in Melmoth the Wanderer,” 136; Oost, “‘Servility and Command’: Authorship in Melmoth the Wanderer,” 301.
71 Baldick, Introduction to Melmoth the Wanderer, xviii.
after the stranger retires and awakens to find the traveler, who was before denied entrance into the inn, sitting nearby. The traveler reveals that he has overheard the story, and he takes Aliaga to a room where the first stranger lies stretched out in death. “There is no mark of violence,” the traveler contends, “no distortion of feature, or convulsion of limb—no hand of man was on him. He sought the possession of a desperate secret—he obtained it, but he paid for it the dreadful price that can be paid but once by mortals. So perish those whose presumption exceeds their power!” (488). In horror, Aliaga retires, and the next day he leaves the inn on horseback; but he is soon joined by a “singular figure,” the traveler, who wishes to relate his Canterbury tale, which “may operate as a warning the most awful, salutary, and efficacious to yourself” (493).

The traveler begins “The Lovers’ Tale,” the first to be set in entirely in England. After the tale concludes, Aliaga becomes impatient, wondering how the traveler “forces himself on my company, harasses me with tales that have no . . . application to me” (561). The traveler assures Aliaga that his next tale will be of “peculiar interest” (561). The traveler proceeds with the story of Isidora, not previously revealed, much of which is unknown even to Aliaga. The traveler then warns: “listen to me,—there is an eye fixed on her, and its fascination is more deadly than that fabled of the snake!—There is an arm extended to seize her, in whose grasp humanity withers” (563). Aliaga rushes off in horror and soon thereafter brings home a man for Isidora to marry. She is secretly pregnant with Melmoth’s child, however, and Melmoth spoils the wedding, killing her rash brother. Isidora surreptitiously gives birth to “an infant demon” in a dungeon, which is later found murdered. During the scuffle at the wedding, Aliaga recognizes Melmoth to

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72 Cousins Elinor and John are in love, but John’s mother—echoing Scott’s *Bride of Lammermoor*—concocts a story to keep John free to marry a third cousin, Margaret, who is in line for an inheritance. Although Elinor attempts to reignite John’s love, he eventually marries Margaret, and Elinor absconds. Margaret soon dies, John’s mother admits her deceit, and Elinor is tasked with taking care of John, now an invalid in his grief. Once again, Melmoth appears at a period of great strife, offering relief to Elinor. With the support of a clergyman, she refuses, and dies alongside John.
be the traveler who had followed him on horseback. When the traveler is identified as Melmoth, he becomes both “subject and object of his own narration,” Sage observes; but it also muddles the words and actions of previous speakers, unidentified or not, and makes Melmoth an even more ubiquitous force in the novel.\(^{73}\)

Monçada concludes the tale, as the novel returns to its frame, with the intention of continuing with more stories from the Adonijah’s vault. Young Melmoth, whom the editor quips, “perhaps the reader has forgot,” has been disturbed by the long tale, and is possessed with the “wild hope of seeing the original of that portrait he had destroyed, burst from the walls and take up the fearful tale himself” (598). This is just what happens:

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\text{at that moment the door opened, and a figure appeared at it, which Monçada recognized for the subject of his narrative, and his mysterious visitor in the prison of the Inquisition, and Melmoth for the original of the picture, and the being whose unaccountable appearance had filled him with consternation, as he sat beside his dying uncle’s bed. (598)}
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Melmoth’s (re)appearance in the frame marks perhaps the novel’s most explicit reference to \textit{Frankenstein}. In Walton’s opening frame, he views an unknown, giant figure on the ice, and by the terminal frame, when the creature enters the ship, we know the whole history, and are intimately connected with the creature’s existence, much of which has been supplied by his own narration. Similarly, Melmoth is but a figure in the opening frame, but by the end his many encounters have been revealed, some of which also come from his own voice. Melmoth has become, therefore, “a predator who is himself a victim,” in Terry Eagleton’s words, and a villain-cum-hero.\(^{74}\)

\(^{73}\) Sage, Introduction to \textit{Melmoth the Wanderer}, xix.

Still, although Melmoth contends, “Who can tell so well of Melmoth the Wanderer as himself” (599), he never gets the opportunity. After some declarations of his intentions and dramatic pauses, Melmoth asks Monçada and young Melmoth to retire so that he may sleep. “The Wanderer’s Dream” is the last embedded tale in the novel. In the dream, only known to the anonymous narrator of the frame, Melmoth falls off a cliff, and
tottering on a crag midway down the precipice—he looked upward, but the upper air (for there was no heaven) showed only blackness unshadowed and impenetrable—but, blacker than that blackness, he could distinguish a gigantic outstretched arm, that held him as in sport on the ridge of that infernal precipice, while another, that seemed in its motions to hold fearful and invisible conjunction with the arm that grasped him, as if both belonged to some being too vast and horrible even for the imagery of a dream to shape, pointed upwards to a dial-plate fixed on the top of that precipice, and which the flashes of that ocean of fire made fearfully conspicuous. He saw the mysterious single hand revolve—he saw it reach the appointed period of 150 years—for in this mystic plate centuries were marked, not hours—he shrieked in his dream, and, with that strong impulse often felt in sleep, burst from the arm that held him, to arrest the motion of the hand.

(602-603)

Dropped from the giant “clock of eternity” (603), Melmoth grasps in vain at all those whom he tempted, falls into a Miltonic ocean of fire, and awakens. Young Melmoth and Monçada return to find Melmoth, now withered, no longer resembling his portrait. He beckons them again to leave, and in the morning they see only signs of his flight from the house, footsteps that turn into

75 Melmoth’s dream is strikingly similar to King Arthur’s in Malory’s Morte Darthur. Just before he dies Arthur dreams about being dropped from a wheel into black water.
signs of a dragging body that terminate at an ocean cliff; the only indication of Melmoth’s fall a
handkerchief hanging on the side of the precipice. The novel concludes as young Melmoth and
Monçada “exchanged looks of silent and unutterable horror, and returned slowly home” (607).

As with Frankenstein, the lack of any resolution to Melmoth’s fate leaves the ending
decidedly ambiguous—the ultimate loose end to the tapestry of the novel. In other words, the
frame narrative, which should provide structure for the concerns of the central narratives,
ultimately breaks down. Catherine Lalone observes that Melmoth is a “character whom no walls
can stop,” which promotes the “dreamlike, bewildering erasure of all spatial boundaries.”76 Sage
envisions the novel’s frames on a vertical hierarchy that is a “paradoxical act” because “the
framed will escape into the frame and appear higher up.”77 It is, Sage posits elsewhere, part of a
“frame-breaking’ principle.”78 Moments of metalepsis pervade, if not define, the novel.
Breaking the framed boundaries between narratives in fact is what gives them life for the reader.
When not dozing off, Aliaga routinely interrupts the traveler’s narrative. And roughly halfway
through Monçada’s tale, young Melmoth interrupts: “‘Hold!’” (332). His shock is part of
Maturin’s intricate weaving: taking a break from seducing Immalee and ruining her life,
Melmoth travels to England to tempt Stanton in the madhouse. Not only has young Melmoth
invaded Monçada’s tale, then, but Stanton has as well; and because Stanton’s and Immalee’s
narratives occur concomitantly, Immalee retroactively becomes a part of Stanton’s manuscript.
Melmoth, of course, is still the novel’s most powerful frame-breaker, freely passing between
frames of architecture (madhouse, inquisition, inaccessible island) and narrative (young
Melmoth’s frame; the tales of Stanton, Monçada, Guzman, and Immalee).

76 Catherine Lalone, “Verging on the Gothic: Melmoth’s Journey to France,” European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange
77 Victor Sage, “The Author, the Editor, and the Fissured Text: Scott, Maturin and Hogg,” Authorship in Context:
From the Theoretical to the Material, eds. Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay (Basingstoke, England:
Pulgrave Macmillan, 2007), 23.
Frames bleed into frames in *Melmoth* to the point that structure breaks down to resemble the many “formless masses” in the novel: burned towers of the Inquisition (p. 268), the parricide’s beaten body (p. 284), the ruined hermitage-bower (p. 435), and Mortimer Castle (p. 520). Employing the rhetoric of painting and music, Maturin endorses the effect of blending. He describes a scene in “The Lovers’ Tale”:

it was like a finely coloured painting, where the tints are so mellowed and mingled into each other, that the eye feels no transition in passing from one brilliant hue to another, with such exquisite imperceptibility are they graduated, —it was like a fine piece of music, where the art of the modulator prevents your knowing that you pass from one key to another; so softly are the intermediate tones of harmony touched, that the ear knows not where it wanders, but wherever it wanders, feels its path is pleasant. (518)

Maturin’s insistence on blending may also account for the narrators’ voices remaining, in Fowler’s words, “irritatingly consistent.” More likely is that Maturin conceived of his novel, like a writer from the *Edinburgh Review*, as a “phantasmagoric exhibition.” One scene dissolves into another to create a fluidity that destabilizes framing structures. There is a plasticity to the frame-breaking that causes them to melt into one another, to become one giant, yet coherent, mass of broken frames. Even the editorial frame enters the world of the fiction; puzzling footnotes that point out anachronisms and offer often dubious context promote, Sage observes, “doubt and suspicion in the Reader about the transmission of this text and the

79 Maturin criticizes the reverse effect: “Just opposite this picture, whose hues were so bright, and whose shades were so tender, were seated the figures of the aged grandfather and grandmother. The contrast was very strong; there was no connecting link, no graduated medium,—you passed at once from the first and fairest flowers of spring, to the withered and rootless barrenness of winter” (450).
80 Fowler, “Hieroglyphics in Fire,” 521.
Authority of its Author.”² If Maturin, like Shelley before him, calls into question the authority of the editor and the author, he undermines not only Constable’s role but also his own in the production of the novel. Editor has blended into author and into character. Extradiegetic into diegetic into hypodiegetic. And vice versa. There is no hierarchical narrative structure left standing. All is formless mass. *Melmoth* remains only Melmoth. In this sense, *Melmoth* defies the sort of “fixed point of view” that Marshall McLuhan associates with print; instead the novel resembles Walter Ong’s theory of orality, which advocates a method of criticism that highlights the living sources that lie behind the printed work.

*Melmoth* challenges the conception of an authoritative perspective not only through the editorial figure who crops up repeatedly in footnotes, but also through Melmoth himself, whose physical and mental dexterity blurs the boundaries between character and narrator. For Melmoth to function as an omniscient narrator, he must possess superhuman, if not in this case supernatural, capabilities. Many critics have commented on Melmoth’s seeming evanescence: linking him to the politics of Irish landowners, Baldick calls him an “absentee villain”; Fowler points out that the only “‘valid’ portraits” of him are the two portraits young Melmoth destroys; and Vijay Mishra intriguingly posits that the novel “can only gesture to his presence; it can only frame him (as it repeats its own fragmentary narratives), but it cannot totalize or ‘present’ him to consciousness.”³⁴ These comments, however, are reiterations of how the characters in the novel describe his singular presence. He is always a figure, but never distinct. Melmoth is part of a

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² Sage, “The Author, the Editor, and the Fissured Text: Scott, Maturin and Hogg,” 25. The footnotes appear to be at a different editorial level than the parenthetical remarks; for example, “(There were other details, both of the menaces and temptations employed by Melmoth, which are too horrible for insertion. One of them may serve for an instance)” (64).


long line of physically dynamic Gothic villains. As with Radcliffe’s Schedoni and Maturin’s own Schemoli, Melmoth seemingly materializes into sealed spaces, and vanishes mid-sentence: “And as he spoke, he disappeared” (407). And this is only to reappear in another frame.

Melmoth’s declarations of his mental power suggest his omniscience. Thackeray would later refer in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) to the “omniscience of the novelist” several times by noting that “novelists have the privilege of knowing everything,” and that the “novelist . . . knows everything.”85 Melmoth boasts, “I know it all!” (415), and later “I believe it all—I know it all” (433). “[H]e came,” Monçada details, “like one who had a key to the door of my dungeon, at all hours, without leave or forbiddance,—that he traversed the prisons of the Inquisition, like one who had a master-key to its deepest recesses” (254). And during the fire in Monçada’s tale, Melmoth stands “on a pinnacle of the spire”—echoing Johnson’s “extensive view”—“surveying the scene in perfect tranquility” (270). Anticipating Dickens’s narrators in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *A Christmas Carol*, Isidora “perceived that she was borne on with a kind of supernatural velocity” (429); and Melmoth warns her: “‘You are in my power,—absolutely, hopelessly in my power. No human eye can see me—no human arm can aid you. You are as helpless as infancy in my grasp’” (432). If only William Frankenstein were so lucky. Able to arrest other characters’ movements, Melmoth “seemed to announce an internal power above all physical force” (583); and like any good omniscient narrator his “‘charmed life’ enabled him to penetrate the cells of a madhouse, or the dungeons of an Inquisition” (350).

We may read Maturin’s most intriguing—and brazen—allusion to omniscient narrators through a reference to the powers of God. During the systematic religious lesson Melmoth gives to Immalee, he describes God’s power:

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It is the consciousness of a Being superior to all worlds and their inhabitants, because he is the Maker of all, and will be their judge—of a Being whom we cannot see, but in whose power and presence we must believe, though invisible—of one who is everywhere unseen; always acting, though never in motion; hearing all things, but never heard. (323)

Flaubert, one of Maturin’s French devotees, argues, “An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere.” J. Hillis Miller writes that “omniscience is both like and unlike the knowledge traditionally ascribed to God. It is an authentic perfection of knowledge.” Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg offer an important qualifier to the analogy of omniscient narration and God:

Omniscience includes the related godlike attribute of omnipresence. God knows everything because He is everywhere—simultaneously. But a narrator in fiction is imbedded in a time-bound artifact. He does not ‘know simultaneously but consecutively. He is not everywhere at once but now here, now there, now looking into this mind or that, now moving on to other vantage points. He is time-bound and space-bound as God is not.

87 J. Hillis Miller, The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy (South Bend, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1968), 64.
88 Robert Scholes, Robert Kellogg, and James Phelan, The Nature of Narrative (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 272-273. Jonathan Culler has defined omniscient narration as a situation in which “the focalizer is a godlike figure who has access to the innermost thoughts and hidden motives of the characters” (Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997], 90). “Omniscient narration,” Culler continues, “where there seem in principle no limitations on what can be known and told, is common not only in traditional tales but in modern novels” (90). Omnipotence, termed too vague by many narratologists, has been replaced by the various states of focalization. In his book Narrative Discourse, Gérard Genette splits focalization into three parts: zero focalization (which is most similar to narrative omniscience), internal focalization, and external focalization. In her book Narratology, Mieke Bal takes issue with Genette’s formula, especially with zero focalization, which she deems impossible, and instead argues that focalization is split between two types: external and character-bound/internal.
In this definition, Melmoth seems to be more God than omniscient narrator. The anonymous narrator of the novel’s frame describes Melmoth as leading a “charmed life, ‘defying space and time’” (75). He is the perfect representation of Monçada’s “Omnipotence himself”: “‘If I climb up to heaven, thou art there;—if I go down to hell, thou art there also;—if I take the wings of the morning, and flee unto the uttermost parts of the sea, even there’” (199). Because he invades every tale, every frame in the novel, and does so even when the tales occur concomitantly, Melmoth is everywhere simultaneously. Knowing all, and known to none, he defies chronology by lurking in the shadows of all narrative locations and times. As David Punter observes, “There is no linear, coherent history; it is not possible neatly to arrange a set of monuments that will attest to the clean lines of conflicts won and lost.”

Because Melmoth is everywhere, Sage notes, “historical narrative is turned inside out,” which has the effect of “creating further horror rather than authenticity.” Yet Melmoth is “imbedded in a time-bound artifact” in his dream. Dangling and then dropped from the giant clock of life and death, Melmoth’s status of omniscience dramatically concludes.

Critics have struggled to reconcile Melmoth’s claims to immortality with his apparent expiration date of 150 years. The promise of immortality is Melmoth’s greatest bargaining chip, and he never refers to any limit to this power. Indeed, two lifetimes is far from immortal. The 150-year-span is mentioned only twice: young Melmoth merely adds the dates between the portrait and present day, commenting in astonishment “that a man living 150 years ago is alive still” (21), and Melmoth sees the single hand in his dream reach the “appointed period of 150 years” (603). One question remains: why has he returned to see young Melmoth before he dies,

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and why is his death so abrupt that it prevents him from telling his own tale? It has been assumed that Melmoth fails in finding someone to take on his burden. After all, he says just that:

‘No one has ever exchanged destinies with Melmoth the Wanderer. I have traversed the world in the search, and no one, to gain that world, would lose his own soul!—Not Stanton in his cell—nor you, Monçada, in the prison of the Inquisition—nor Walberg, who saw his children perishing with want—nor—another.’ (601)

Poe was critical about Melmoth’s failure, remarking that he “plots and counterplots through three octavo volumes for the entrapment of one or two souls, while any common devil would have demolished one or two thousand.”91 And Balzac apparently thought it so egregious that he wrote a sequel to the novel, Melmoth réconcilié (1835), in which Melmoth succeeds in passing his burden to Castanier, a cashier, and thus is free to die in peace. Although proving to be one of the figures whom Melmoth grasps at as he falls into the abyss of time in his dream, Monçada’s extraordinary appearance in the narrative frame is worth recalling. Chasing after the mysterious figure during a storm, young Melmoth sees it (in a scene that seems to be inspired by William Cowper’s poem, “The Castaway” [1799], and Caspar David Friedrich’s painting, Wanderer above the Sea of Fog [1818]) surveying an impending shipwreck:

the figure, who stood still higher, appeared alike unmoved by the storm, as by the spectacle. Melmoth’s surtout, in spite of his efforts to wrap it round him, was fluttering in rags,—not a thread of the stranger’s garments seemed ruffled by the blast. But this did not strike him so much as his obvious insensibility to the distress and terror around him, and he exclaimed aloud, ‘Good God! is it possible that any thing bearing the human form should stand there without making an

effort, without expressing a feeling, for those perishing wretches!’ A pause ensued, or the blast carried away the sound; but a few moments after, Melmoth distinctly heard the words, ‘Let them perish.’ He looked up, the figure still stood unmoved, the arms folded across the breast, the foot advanced, and fixed as in defiance of the white and climbing spray of the wave, and the stern profile caught in the glimpses of the stormy and doubtful moon-light, seeming to watch the scene with an expression formidable, revolting, and unnatural. At this moment, a tremendous wave breaking over the deck of the hulk, extorted a cry of horror from the spectators; they felt as if they were echoing that of the victims whose corpses were in a few moments to be dashed against their feet, mangled and lifeless. (74-75)

Young Melmoth slips and falls into the ocean during his pursuit of the figure and awakens to find himself back in bed. He learns that “Crew, passengers, all had perished, except this Spaniard. It was singular, too, that this man had saved the life of Melmoth” (79). Monçada becomes the Ancient Mariner to young Melmoth’s wedding guest. He holds his listener in rapt attention as his “Tale of the Spaniard” gives way to other tales until the frame returns when the “subject of his narrative” (598) makes his monumental reappearance.

Maturin pleaded with Constable to accept up to eight volumes for his novel. And even after it was published in four, he proposed plans for a sequel. The return of the frame appears to indicate that Maturin had such a plan in mind: “The narrative of the Spaniard had occupied many days; at their termination, young Melmoth signified to his guest that he was prepared to hear the sequel” (598). But as the pair gather round a fire for more storytelling, they are interrupted. ““We

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92 It should be noted that Melmoth may have had a hand in two earlier shipwrecks. He reveals to Aliaga that Isidora survived a shipwreck, in which “the crew and passengers perished,” that stranded her on her island, and that she was rescued from the island by “some vessel in distress” (562).
are watched,’” young Melmoth ominously recognizes, and they have always been, by reader, by author, by Melmoth. But he has already lost his power: once of “preternatural lustre” (39), his eyes “were as the eyes of the dead” (599). Speaking of himself in third-person, Melmoth cries, “his wanderings are over!” (601). But are Monçada’s? The very ambiguity of Melmoth’s pact, his life and death, Monçada’s fate, and young Melmoth’s future, is what makes Melmoth so Gothic. That the Gothic appears most saliently at the novel’s poles, in its frame, makes the novel a challenge to Scott’s historical romance. Where Scott buried the Gothic by incorporating it into central tales rendered apocryphal by meticulous context, Maturin effectively performed the reverse. At the novel’s core lies a love story—hegemonic and emotionally abusive, to be sure, yet thematically distinct: crumbling ruin is here replaced by lush paradise; hate by love; death by life. Maturin’s reversal of Scott’s form provides an example of his “rebellion,” in Sage’s words, “against Scott’s historical romance.” In so doing, Maturin legitimizes the Gothic by destabilizing history. He writes in the dedication to The Milesian Chief (1812): “If I possess any talent it is that of darkening the gloomy, and of deepening the sad; of painting life in extreme, and representing those struggles of passion when the soul trembles on the verge of the unlawful and the unhallowed.” Thus Maturin followed his talents, but it was a compulsory labor for survival. “Did my profession furnish me with the means of subsistence,” he writes in the preface to Melmoth, “I should hold myself culpable indeed in having recourse to any other, but—am I allowed the choice?” (6). As with his hero, whose fate is not a choice, but is rather “assigned”

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93 That Melmoth undermines unities of time, place, and perspective in fact connects it more forcibly to the tradition of realism. George Levine writes that Frankenstein “is the perfect myth of the secular, carrying within it all the ambivalences of the life we lead here, of civilization and its discontents, of the mind and the body, of the self and society. It is, indeed, the myth of realism” (“The Ambiguous Heritage of Frankenstein,” in The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel, eds. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher [Berkeley: U of California P, 1979], 30).

94 Albright notes, “Immalee’s timeless, idyllic, Rousseauvian existence is placed at the exact center of the novel” (Writing the Past, Writing the Future, 78).

95 Sage, “The Author, the Editor, and the Fissured Text: Scott, Maturin and Hogg.” 25.

“commissioned” (484), and “accorded” (601), Maturin was forced to write, in Foucault’s words, “so as not to die.” Perhaps Melmoth passes his power in death to Maturin, rather than Monçada. “Like the Deity behind this universe,” Schiller writes, “the simple poet stands behind his work; he is himself the work, and the work is himself.” In the end, it is Maturin left surveying the ruin he created.

Melmoth’s Faustian pact, whether accepted or forced, becomes the burden that links the novel’s action. Despite Melmoth’s eloquent rhetoric and displays of showmanship, even the most desperate sufferers will not agree to his terms. Melmoth’s powers are in fact his affliction. And they are uncompromisingly supernatural. James Hogg’s The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) raises the stakes on an ambiguous power of a godlike authority in the figure of the noxious zealot Robert Wringhim. As the next chapter shows, Hogg also incorporates frames to interrogate structures of narrative, character, and truth, but his Gothic rests on the disgust of a natural phenomena; what Robert thinks is his divine supernatural right is in fact nature’s fatal revenge.

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98 Frederick Schiller, The Works of Frederick Schiller, vol. 4 (Boston: S.E. Cassino, 1884), 288.
CHAPTER 6

JAMES HOGG’S “DISGUSTING ORAL TALE”: PRINT IDENTITIES AND FRAMES OF PRODUCTION

[W]hen my flesh and my bones are decayed, and my soul has passed to its everlasting home, then shall the sons of men ponder on the events of my life; wonder and tremble, and tremble and wonder how such things should be.
—James Hogg, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner

‘And mind ye recommend weel that them ’at brake t’ bits o’ frames . . . suld be hung without benefit o’ clergy.
It’s a hanging matter, or suld be; no doubt o’ that.’
—Charlotte Brontë, Shirley

“I like to write about myself,” James Hogg declares in his autobiographical Memoir of the Author’s Life: “in fact, there are few things which I like better.” Hogg’s confession proves unsurprising given that he wrote three editions of his Memoir, beginning as early as 1806, when he was only thirty-six. But it is also misleading. That Hogg enjoyed writing about Hogg is undeniable. So did many others. The question remains, then, who is Hogg? Simultaneously a celebrated author, national icon, and dimwitted character, “James Hogg” constitutes a combination of complex and conflicting identities, some endorsed, others unauthorized. Issues of identity consume Hogg’s writing early on, but it is in his bleak and often opaque The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) where identity becomes inextricably tied to the novel’s complex narrative structure. As Ian Duncan observes, “The form of the Confessions brilliantly elaborates Gothic themes of the fragmented and buried text.”

2 Charlotte Brontë, Shirley and The Professor (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2008), 42.
3 James Hogg, Memoir of the Author’s Life, in Altrive Tales (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), 11.
Confessions is a preeminent Gothic text: it features supernatural doppelgangers, murder mysteries, multiple and mutable perspectives, and perhaps the most detestable protagonist in literature; and its final moment of disturbing metalepsis outstrips previous narrative frame-breakers in Frankenstein and Melmoth the Wanderer. In its system of narrative frames, Confessions merges Radcliffe’s found manuscript device with Shelley’s examination of the politics of editing to interrogate the mechanistic composition of identity prompted by an increasingly print-conscious culture.

The novel’s titular first-person confessions are framed on one end by the editor’s biography of the sinner, Robert Wringhim, and on the other by a narrative detailing the excavation of Robert’s remains. The thematic focus of the novel is that Robert can never produce, but he can be reproduced; he exists outside the field of production, but is himself replicated both textually and corporeally. Hogg engulfs and entangles Robert in a series of frames, each a mode of (re)production, to express an anxiety over the increasing constrictions of authorship in an industrialized, commodified, and automated world that imprisons the imagination in structures of mechanism. Yet Robert always escapes and resists this framing; he is, more so even than Shelley’s creature or Maturin’s Melmoth, un-frameable.

In every way repugnant, Robert nevertheless is the novel’s hero. His memoirs and confessions defy categorization and identification, and even when the Editor’s biographical frame envelops and attempts to codify the mystery of his life and death, Confessions as a whole posits more questions than it answers. Even more forceful that Mathilda’s “What am I writing?”5 are the Editor’s words: “WHAT can this work be?” (222). Neither text provides an answer. However, where Mathilda at least stipulates that her memoir will fall into the hands of Woodville, Robert’s “Private Memoirs and Confessions”—echoing the movement of Radcliffe’s

opening confession in *The Italian*—become disturbingly public and perpetually available to be scrutinized, misunderstood, and manipulated by editors and readers. Through Robert’s several experiences being framed in mechanisms of production, and then escaping these frames, Hogg challenges conceptions of print identity, not only for Robert, but also for his author, Hogg himself, who is as much a character in his novel as his anti-hero.

The first frame of production that surrounds Robert is the structure of the novel itself. The Editor embeds Robert’s text inside a narrative that reproduces Robert’s life in a way that often conforms, but sometimes conflicts, with the first-person memoir and confession. In the second frame, Hogg makes Robert a potential player in the contemporary turmoil of Luddite violence. When Robert entangles himself in the frame of a weaving loom, he becomes a marionette of industry, dangling from the web of production from which he is excluded. The final frame is represented by Robert’s body and its curious afterlife as printed text. In the Editor’s terminal frame, Hogg reveals that Robert was unceremoniously and hastily buried in a bog, where the natural properties of peat preserved his body and his manuscript. Hogg routinely wrote about the preservative power of bogs in his fiction, mostly as plot twists, but in *Confessions* he engages this natural phenomenon to articulate his support for the purity of oral tradition over the artifice of mechanized print. The sinner’s bog body is an uncanny symbol for the printed text—a form of communication that preserves (but indelibly alters) the ephemera of speech and handwriting.

*Confessions* explores the terms of self-ownership in a culture of print and suggests that identity is a public construction in which the individual is molded, divided, and disseminated. As Douglas S. Mack notes, “The point of intersection between orality and print was very much
Throughout his career, Hogg leaned heavily on the side of oral tradition as the path to truth, and routinely presented print as a dubious representation of history. Suzanne Gilbert observes, “Hogg was comfortable with the variation and multiplicity inherent in oral traditions, which often contradict the values of print tradition, and was perfectly willing to introduce his own variations.” Thus oral tradition intersects with the project of the Gothic, which also thrived on highlighting the diverse perspectives of human experience. *Confessions* engages the Gothic frame narrative, which introduces diverse voices and challenges textual authenticity to demonstrate that identity is fleeting and fluid in a culture of print. Robert’s body, the final text in *Confessions*, is violently beaten and torn by frames of production until his triumphant appearance outside his memoir irreparably breaks the narrative frame and leaves the Editor—in a decisive moment of narrative destabilization—to admit, “I dare not venture a judgment, for I do not understand it” (232). Hogg suggests that print identity consists of intersecting frames of reference, and to locate and claim self-ownership sometimes requires violently breaking these frames.

Hogg’s professional life was, like Maturin’s, a contradiction, as he refused to compromise his status as a humble Borderlands laborer to suit his growing fame as an Edinburgh author and celebrity. Hogg’s family were shepherds and farmers, who faced bankruptcy following a failed business venture. Work took precedence over school, and Hogg did not return to reading until his late teens. During his employment as a shepherd in the Ettrick Forest, Hogg

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7 Even Hogg’s caricature as the Ettrick Shepherd in *Noctes Ambrosianae* makes clear his championing of oral over print: “an oral tradition out o’ the mouth o’ an auld grey-headed man or woman is far best, for then you canna dout the truth o’ the tale, unless ye dout a’ history thegither, and then, to be sure, you’ll end in universal skepticism” (*Noctes Ambrosianae*, vol. 1 [Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1868], 201).
struck up an important friendship with William Laidlaw, whom he helped to collect tales for Walter Scott’s collection, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1803). Laidlaw introduced Hogg to Scott in 1802, but by then Hogg had been writing prodigiously, and was celebrated enough by Ettrick locals to earn his first appellation: Jamie the Poeter. The moderate success of some published writing allowed Hogg to establish a sheep farm, but again he saw failure, and was forced into bankruptcy in 1810. A literary life was his only recourse. Yet even that began as a failure; his weekly paper *The Spy* lasted only one year. Hogg was forced to lean on the financial support of friends until he found fame in 1813 with his poem, *The Queen’s Wake*. Hogg was unable to repeat the success, however. Perhaps inspired by Scott’s successful generic transformation, Hogg turned his attention to prose. Scott had already found success in formal experimentation, as both *Waverley* and *Tales of My Landlord* featured intricate frame narratives, so it is no surprise that Hogg also incorporated this device in much of his fiction.9

The achievement of *The Queen’s Wake* also bears some consideration for how Hogg formally constructed his prose.10 The poem concerns the return of Mary, Queen of Scots to Scotland from France and details the celebrations that await her arrival. A competition is held between minstrels, and the narrative embeds their songs. Thus, the narrative of Mary’s return provides the frame for a series of poetic tales. *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* continues Hogg’s incorporation of frames, as chapter 2 begins with an editorial intervention: “Before proceeding

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9 *The Brownie of Bodsbeck and other Tales* (1818) was his first moderate success, which consists of three stories set in his old stomping-grounds of Ettrick. Hogg would write two more novels in the 1820s before the *Confessions*. Scott’s first three series of *Tales of My Landlord* (1816–19) introduce an enthusiastic collector of stories (Peter Pattieson) and an irascible editor (Jedidiah Cleishbotham); see chapter 3.

10 Elaine Petrie observes that Hogg “loves to create . . . a narrative frame where one character relates the story to another as a fireside entertainment . . . It is this Hogg, the storyteller with the love of traditional folk narrative, that we need to remember when we turn to *Queen Hynde*” (“*Queen Hynde* and the Black Bull of Borroway,” *Papers Given at the Second James Hogg Society Conference*, ed. Gillian Hughes [Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998], 128). Hogg’s attention to folklore and storytelling was evident dating to his youth. The success of *Queen Hynde*, however, signals a change in which Hogg began incorporating storytelling sequences and narrative frames into his subsequent fiction.
with the incidents as they occurred, which is the common way of telling a story in the country, it will be necessary to explain some circumstances alluded to in the foregoing chapter.” It is an especially startling intervention, however, because the novel begins *in medias res* with dialogue. Hogg later revised the novel, which was published posthumously in 1837, and included an introduction that allowed him to excise two explanatory paragraphs from chapter 2. The editor returns to close the frame in the last chapter: “I hate long explanations, therefore this chapter shall be very short; there are, however, some parts of the foregoing tale, which require that a few words should be subjoined in elucidation of them.” In some ways echoing Scott’s private disappointment with *The Black Dwarf*, Hogg was displeased with how his novel concluded: “In copying it I have been greatly puzzled about leaving out or keeping in the last chapter which is wholly an explanatory one and of course not animated.” To explain some of the mysterious circumstances that the story elicits, Hogg’s editor prompts readers to consult another text:

> If there are any incidents in the Tale that may still appear a little mysterious, they will all be rendered obvious by turning to a pamphlet, entitled, A CAMERONIAN’S TALE, or *The Life of John Brown*, written by himself. But any reader of common ingenuity may very easily solve them all.

No such text existed, however; Hogg adapts Radcliffe’s found manuscript device and establishes authenticity by making an apocryphal text seem commonplace and readily available. The first edition demonstrates Hogg’s growing affinity for disrupting linear narrative. After *Confessions*, Hogg began to incorporate frame narratives into the tales he published in both *Blackwood’s* and

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13 Qtd. in Hogg, *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, 195.
15 In *Noctes Ambrosianae*, the Ettrick Shepherd discusses Radcliffe’s Gothic against the oral tales he heard in his youth: “I hae nae doubt, sir, that had I read *Udolfo* and her ither romances in my boyish days, that my hair would hae stood on end like thato’ ither folk, for, by nature and education baith, ye ken, I’m just excessive superstitious. But afore her volumes fell into my hauns, my soul had been frightened by a’ kinds of traditionary terrors” (201).
literary annuals.\textsuperscript{16} Even his earlier historical novels bear the stamp of narrative framing. The \textit{Three Perils of Man} (1822) features two competing narratives, one at Aikwood Castle and the other at Roxburgh Castle, which also embed shorter tales. \textit{The Three Perils of Woman} (1823) also employs dual narratives, but this time Hogg separates them temporally, setting one in the contemporary Scottish Borders and the other in the Highlands in 1746. Douglas Mack sees \textit{The Three Perils of Woman} as a direct challenge to the linear progress narrative Scott employed in \textit{Waverley}. The novel establishes a “circular, cyclical narrative in which it is asserted that human life repeats the same old glories, follies, and iniquities from generation to generation.”\textsuperscript{17} Instead of chapters, Hogg writes “circles,” and as Mack points out the section set in 1746 comes second, implying a mirroring of past and present, if not a chronological reversal. Both novels set the stage for the intricate narrative structure of \textit{Confessions}, which Victor Sage argues “disrupts Scott’s horizontal privileging of linearity and teleology.”\textsuperscript{18} The destabilization of chronology in \textit{Confessions} is but one reason that the novel, in Penny Fielding’s words, has proved both “fecund and frustrating.”\textsuperscript{19}

Contemporary reviews of \textit{Confessions} also criticized its form and pointed explicitly to the framing structure of the novel. \textit{The Quarterly Theological Review}, for example, contends:

“Neither the title, the subject, the frame-work, the filling up, the style, the language, nor the tendency, possesses, so far as we can see, one single attribute of a good and useful book. . . .


\textsuperscript{17} Douglas S. Mack, “James Hogg in 2000 and Beyond,” \textit{Érudit} 19 (2000): para. 10. Still, because Scott’s Introduction to \textit{Waverley} is part of the fiction, the novel in some sense resists linear movement; we begin and end in the present with Scott’s fictional editor.


The framework [is] disjointed and ill contrived; the filling up a heap of undigested matter.”

The reviewer observes that the frame of the novel destabilizes rather than supports the terms for the central narrative. Since the Editor’s Narrative makes up the entirety of the frame, the novel challenges the authority of editors on texts, echoing Shelley’s project in *Frankenstein*, especially those that are as unapologetically personal as the confessions that appear within. The fiction of *Confessions* effectively begins on the novel’s title-page, as contemporary reviewers pointed out. “Put no confidence in Title-pages,” one reviewer declared; and another: “The title is false, illusory, and considering the story, almost blasphemous.”

Although Hogg’s name appeared prominently on the title-pages of his previous works, especially advertising their status as “by the author of ‘The Queen’s Wake,’” here it is nowhere to be found. Instead, *Confessions* is “Written by Himself: With a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts, and Other Evidence, by the Editor” (fig. 3). From its opening, then, the novel claims authenticity, purporting to be a dual narrative between the Justified Sinner and the unnamed Editor. By placing the Editor and Robert together as co-authors, the title-page also simultaneously promotes the Editor to the privileged position of opening paratext and demotes him to the level of character. Even the dedication that follows comes from “The Editor’s esteem” (47) for the current Lord Provost of Glasgow, William Smith, but we can only speculate whether Hogg had any real esteem for Smith.

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22 The dedications for both *Brownie of Bodsbeck* and *Three Perils of Man* prominently feature Hogg’s name.
Most significant, the frontispiece to the first edition of *Confessions* is a facsimile of a late entry in the central journal—which explicitly echoes Melmoth’s demise in Maturin’s novel four years earlier—when Robert is at the height of his suffering: “hung by the locks over a yawning chasm to which I could perceive no bottom” (221). The Editor attempts to control Robert’s handwriting: “I have ordered the printer to procure a fac-simile of it, to be bound in with the volume” (232). Note that the Editor ask the printer to “procure” rather than produce; it is at best a borrowing and at worst a theft of part of Robert’s identity. Print culture is particularly problematic here because
even handwriting, what should be unique and ephemeral, becomes reproducible. Hogg even includes in Robert’s neat hand a correction, suggesting the Sinner’s editorial work on his own text (fig. 4).

Figure 4: The frontispiece facsimile in Hogg’s Confessions

All of these “authenticity effects,” in Ian Duncan’s words, proved ineffective.23 Reviewers revealed Hogg as the author immediately. “Write what he will, there is a diseased and itching peculiarity of style,” The British Critic observes, “which, under every disguise, is always sure to betray Mr. Hogg. We had not read twenty pages of this most uncouth and unpleasant volume, before we satisfied ourselves of its parentage.”24 The Examiner similarly asserts that “its principal defect is, that with much elaboration in the assumption of disguise, no one can be deceived for a moment. In other respects, the strong hand of Mr. HOGG is often recognisable.”25

23 Duncan borrows the phrase from James Buzard.
Some years earlier Hogg had to fight to ensure his name would not be revealed in connection with *The Chaldee Manuscript*, a text proving to be far more scandalous. With the aid of new partners, John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, William Blackwood published the inaugural issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in April 1818.\(^{26}\) Nothing could eclipse the controversy the first issue created. Together with Wilson’s harsh review of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* and Lockhart’s vitriolic criticism of the “Cockney School” of poetry, the issue featured *The Chaldee Manuscript* as its introductory framework. Attacking many of Edinburgh’s elite through a satiric Biblical allegory, *The Chaldee Manuscript* triggered a lawsuit against Blackwood that nearly brought the magazine to a halt. Hogg was the author of the manuscript of *The Chaldee Manuscript* and included instructions for how he wished it to be presented: “Please read over this beautiful allegory of mine with the editor of the Magazine and cause him to add a short history of its preservation in the Archives of Rome or somewhere and by whom it came to be noticed and translated into our language.”\(^{27}\) Someone at *Blackwood’s* granted Hogg’s wishes, and *The Chaldee Manuscript* itself came attached with a fictional introductory frame:

> The present age seems destined to witness the recovery of many admirable pieces of writing, which had been supposed to be lost for ever. The Eruditi of Milan are not the only persons who have to boast of being the instruments of these resuscitations. We have been favoured with the following translation of a Chaldee MS. which is preserved in the great Library of Paris . . . , by a gentleman whose attainments in Oriental Learning are well known to the public. It is said that the celebrated Silvester de Sacy is at present occupied with a publication of the

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\(^{26}\) Blackwood disbanded his previous venture, *The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, after just six issues.

original. It will be prefaced by an Inquiry into the Age when it was written, and
the name of the writer.  

Thus the opening title in the magazine’s inaugural issue was a found manuscript. As Margaret
Russett argues, “Blackwood’s transformed the ontological status of magazine writing by
fictionalizing its own origin.” Furthermore, Hogg’s good-natured barbs in the original text were
heavily supplemented once they met the eyes of Wilson and Lockhart. What was thirty-seven
verses more than quadrupled with a “good deal of deevilry,” not to mention substantive
alterations to the manuscript’s form. In 1856, James Frederick Ferrier, the Scottish
metaphysicist, expressed the impetus for the scandal that ensued:

To drag into publicity not only persons who, from their distinction, were in a
manner public property, but persons, moreover, who had never been heard of
beyond the privacy of the domestic circle—to describe them in absurd figurative
types, and to invest them with the most ludicrous allegorical appendages, was an
offence against propriety, and a violation of social usages, which our sober
judgment must condemn.

Hogg feared for his safety and reputation once the issue went public: “For the love of God open
not your mouth about the Chaldee M.S. All is combustion,” Hogg wrote to Laidlaw: “Deny all
knowledge else they say I am ruined if it can by any means be attached—Let all be silence.”

Eventually the storm dissipated, though not before an enraged John Scott, the editor of The
London Magazine, proposed a duel that would later end his life.

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29 Margaret Russett, Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760-1845 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
2006), 178.
30 Hogg, Memoir of the Author’s Life, lxv.
31 Ferrier, ed., The Works of Professor Wilson, 294.
33 J. H. Christie accepted the terms and killed Scott during the duel.
Hogg’s professional relationship with *Blackwood’s* was both productive and contentious. Although Hogg had over one hundred pieces published in the magazine, some forty others were rejected. Hogg was characterized in its pages as a naïve dullard with heavily inflected Scots speech, and the rather unfortunate homophone of his name was fertile ground for cutting barbs. Still, Hogg enjoyed playing with identity and anonymity. In 1813, in response to adopting the name J. H. Craig of Douglas Esq., he writes, “I think the Ettrick Shepherd is rather become a hackneyed name.” Of Hogg’s role in the magazine, Thomas C. Richardson argues, “Hogg was not just an author; he was a character in the ongoing fictions of the magazine and a commodity for sale to *Blackwood’s* consumers.” Russett reads *Blackwood’s* itself as a “generic imposter” that, “Far from preserving Hogg’s anonymity,” instead “eclipsed his differences from the private person.” Duncan similarly calls it an “effective reversal of anonymity.” Thus Hogg is hidden neither in his novels nor in *Blackwood’s*. While Scott managed to maintain his anonymity and to live the dual life of private author and public clerk, Hogg was a public spectacle to be bought, sold, and trashed—much like his Sinner, Robert Wringhim. Since Hogg was satirized as a character in *Blackwood’s*, it is not surprising that he later sought to redeem himself as a character in his own novel, *Confessions*.

The Editor’s Narrative in *Confessions* provides the opening and terminal frames for Robert’s text and makes its own efforts to claim authenticity. As the Editor asserts that Robert’s history “has been handed down to the world in unlimited abundance,” we may surmise that the opening frame is made up of “Curious Traditionary Facts” (49). Thus the closing frame, in

36 Richardson, “James Hogg and *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 186.
37 Russett, *Fictions and Fakes*, 172.
keeping with the title-page, uses “Other Evidence,” which is primarily material: Hogg’s letter to
Blackwood’s and Robert’s preserved corpse and text. Yet we do not arrive at the material
evidence until the end because the Editor promotes oral tradition over print. After he consults
“some parish registers” concerning Robert’s lineage, he quickly turns “to tradition . . . for the
remainder of the motley adventures” (49). The Editor’s words establish early on the central
theme of the novel, a challenge to print production. Duncan argues that Hogg’s fiction evinces an
“emergent, modern idealization of writing as a transfigured mode or medium of industrial
production: one that closes the circuit of the human by guaranteeing, at one end, the purposeful labor of an individual author, and, at the other, the corporate identity of a national culture.”

But in Confessions it is the perfected form of writing—print—that is interrogated and promoted as a fiction in the face of more pure discourse; time and again, oral testimony proves more authentic and factual than written evidence.

In the Editor’s Narrative, Hogg employs the usual Gothic trappings—a castle, a loveless marriage, and a door that locks from the outside—but mocks convention with humorous role-reversal and the absurdity of religious extremism, all of which the Editor records with what appears a distant and imperceptive pen. Hogg inverts traditional Gothic roles, making the laird, the rakish hunter, sympathetic. Together, Rabina and Reverend Wringhim exacerbate and exaggerate the terms of their religion; with fiery indignation they promote the merits of the few elect and condemn the iniquity of the reprobate masses. Soon, however, the laird finds company with his housekeeper, Arabella Logan, whom he provides the keys to the castle. According to the Editor, Rabina gives birth to a son, the laird’s namesake and heir. Quickly thereafter, another son

40 Echoing Radcliffe’s A Sicilian Romance, the laird arranges an “upper, or third, story of the old mansion-house . . . for her residence. She had a separate door, a separate stair, a separate garden, and walks that in no instance intersected the laird’s” (57). Unlike Radcliffe’s novel, however, access to Rabina’s apartment is not limited to the laird: “the Rev. Mr. Robert arrived safely and devoutly in her elevated sanctuary” (57).
is born, but, unacknowledged by the laird, he is baptized “out of pity and kindness” (61) by the Reverend as a second Robert Wrighim, the first character-doubling in the novel. We learn later, though importantly only in Robert’s confession, some possible explanation for Robert’s parentage. The Reverend’s aid, John Barnet, explains to the Reverend: “I hae said mony a time, that he resemble you, sir. Naeboby can mistake that” (123). The pieces put together suggest that Robert is the Reverend’s son, and George is the laird and Arabella’s, though these relationships are never confirmed. The Editor refuses to make deductions from Robert’s printed text, choosing instead to rely on oral testimony. The uncertainty of Robert’s origin is the first instance of his inability to be a product, to fit into the reproductive social order.

The Editor’s Narrative proceeds by detailing the exploits of its protagonist, the outcast Robert, who is referred to continually through a series of adjective/noun descriptors that function further to blur his identity: “intrusive being,” “obstreperous interloper,” “polluted brother,” “uncouth aggressor,” and “unaccountable monster,” to name only a few.41 Robert begins to stake a spot at his brother’s side, acting “like the attendance of a demon on some devoted being that had sold himself to destruction” (76). He is George’s familiar spirit, but again Hogg inverts the terms: rather than aid the person, or be forced into servitude like Ariel in The Tempest, Robert bothers, harasses, and embarrasses George. Later, Robert sees himself as Shakespeare’s Caliban, or even Shelley’s creature, “born an outcast in the world” (117). Following a dramatic struggle atop Arthur’s Seat, George is attacked and stabbed to death, and Robert takes over the family estate. Thomas Drummond, who engaged in a dispute with George the evening of George’s death, is accused of the murder and flees the country. Despondent, Arabella Logan vows to uncover the mystery of George’s murder. On her way to court for an unrelated burglary, the details of which remain hazy, as the Editor is “ignorant of these matters,” Arabella Logan

41 These descriptions appear within a span of only a few pages in Confessions (pp. 65-67).
encounters Arabella Calvert in prison. As there are only three women of note in the novel, and two are Arabellas, it is yet another example of productive doubles in the narrative. After some tense negotiation, Arabella Calvert reveals her eye-witness account of George’s murder and thus provides the first description of the novel’s central doubling, the introduction of Robert’s unauthorized copy, Gil-Martin.42

Arabella Calvert witnesses the scene framed through the window of a brothel and testifies to seeing Robert and a man who looked exactly like Drummond spring on George and eventually stab him in the back. The Arabellas later confront and subdue Robert, who makes the first specific reference to his own familiar spirit: “O, Gil-Martin! Gil-Martin! where art thou now?” (114). Robert echoes Juliet’s famous words to Romeo (“O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?”), which are part of her speech pleading for the abandonment of names. If no longer Montague or Capulet, the lovers can be one. Robert seems to beg for a similar union based on emotion and the conviction of religion rather than the lines of inheritance. Presumably, after the Arabellas leave to alert the authorities, Gil-Martin comes to the rescue and helps Robert escape. The Editor reveals: “this is all with which history, justiciary records, and tradition, furnish me relating to these matters” (116). With his subject unaccounted for, and his oral evidence exhausted, the Editor concludes his narrative:

I have now the pleasure of presenting my readers with an original document of a most singular nature, and preserved for their perusal in a still more singular matter. I offer no remarks on it, and make as few additions to it, leaving every one

42 As a young student, Robert becomes jealous of an overachieving classmate, M’Gill. Robert earlier admits to “some notorious lies that I had framed” (119), and sets out to ruin M’Gill’s favor. Together with drawing vicious caricatures of the teacher and blaming them on M’Gill, Robert tells the teacher that M’Gill has been cursing him. The lies work to Robert’s advantage, but as Duncan has pointed out the name is another familiar doubling. Gil-Martin quickly enters the scene and destroys Robert’s life, possibly as a psychological payback for ruining the other schoolboy with a similar, though inverted, name.
to judge for himself. We have heard much of the rage of fanaticism in former
days, but nothing to this. (116)

The Editor again demonstrates his preference for oral accounts, choosing to present an unrevised
printing of Robert’s text, and referring to what readers have “heard” rather than what they have
read. That the Editor has had access to Robert’s text and has read it is obvious, but the
discrepancies between his narrative and Robert’s confessions demonstrate that he considers the
printed pamphlet dubious when compared to the oral testimonies he has gathered. When Arabella
Logan accuses Robert of the murder, she speculates that his mother, Rabina, was the instigator.
The Editor interjects, “Mrs. Logan was wrong, as will appear in the sequel” (96). That the Editor
absolves Rabina from the murder proves that he knows Robert’s real motives. Yet in
innumerable other instances, the Editor appears consummately dismissive of Robert’s history.
Even more important, the Editor refers to Robert’s text as a sequel, implying that it should be a
continuation of the events of Robert’s life.43 But Robert begins his text, like any good
autobiography, at his birth. Since both narratives begin at Robert’s birth, and highlight many of
the same events, the Editor has framed his narrative, gathered from “traditionary” sources,
against Robert’s printed pamphlet.

Contemporary critics understandably found the dual narratives puzzling and incoherent. *The New Monthly Magazine* argues, “it is altogether unfair to treat the reader with two versions
of such extraordinary trash,” and the *Westminster Review* observes, “[t]he author has managed
the tale very clumsily, having made two distinct narratives of the same events; and however true
it may be in mathematics, it certainly does not always hold in storytelling, that two halves are

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43 The OED defines sequel: “The ensuing narrative, discourse, etc.; the following or remaining part of a narrative,
etc.; that which follows as a continuation; esp. a literary work that, although complete in itself, forms a continuation
of a preceding one.”
equal to one whole.” Critics still find the novel’s form jarring. The narrative doubling, Catherine Spooner notes, “profoundly destabilizes notions of unitary meaning.” And Susan Manning observes, “[t]he languages, suppositions and intentions of these narrators are utterly opposed; both are, finally, found wanting as complete or objective accounts.” And Duncan points out chronological discrepancies between the narratives, which create a “general disorder that undoes the work’s insistence on an apparent formal symmetry.” Indeed, Hogg spends even more time challenging Robert’s authority with his own text than he does the Editor. Robert systematically loses control of his life, his text, and his body under the control of a figure with supernatural, if not extradiegetic, power.

Robert begins his text by acknowledging his religious motives and calling on those who avoided his vengeance to give thanks to their “gods of silver and gold” (117). His was a life of sorrow, he records, following in the footsteps of the doomed Werther. He makes a father out of Reverend Wringhim, who “knew the elect as it were by instinct” (120), and early on displays his proclivity towards malice. Yet Robert’s memory is at best selective: at one point he admits, “I cannot from memory repeat his words” (144), but then at the next, “I remember my actions and words as well as it had been yesterday” (147). Robert’s recall appears to be tied to his fatal narcissism; only his thoughts and acts are worth remembering. More important, if Robert cannot remember others’ words, then he discounts oral testimony; and if he later strives to see his text printed and then disseminated, then he opposes the convictions of both the Editor and Hogg.

It is not until Reverend Wringhim appoints his son as one of the elect that Gil-Martin appears. Robert points out Gil-Martin’s significance to his narrative: “I come now to the most important period of my existence,—the period that has modeled my character, and influenced every action of my life,—without which, this detail of my actions would have been as a tale that hath been told—a monotonous farrago—an uninteresting harangue—in short, a thing of nothing” (129). It appears to be a biting critique against the Editor’s Narrative, as the Editor fails to gather much evidence of Gil-Martin through his “tradionary facts.” The oral testimony of Robert’s servant, Samuel, for example, even when gathered from anonymous sources, proves to be more valuable information of the mysterious figure than the Editor ever discovers: “‘they say that he whiles takes your ain shape, or else enters into you, and then your turn a deil yourself” (189). Without Gil-Martin as a central force in his life, Robert suggests there would be no life worth telling. Nonetheless the Editor constructs a piecemeal biography, relying less on what Robert has written than on what others say about him. Gil-Martin is a symbol for print reproduction and thus not a part of the oral tradition on which the Editor relies. Gil-Martin is a lie, an imitation with devious intentions to ruin Robert’s identity through coercion and framing him for crimes.

Gil-Martin takes a position at Robert’s side, shadowing him as Robert had his brother. Their belief in the same religious convictions, Gil-Martin argues, has made them partners. His motives are far more sinister, however. While Robert believes Gil-Martin to be a Russian dignitary in disguise, he is in fact a “guide and director” (139). Gil-Martin tricks and cajoles Robert and even acts in his stead. Gil-Martin fastidiously and mysteriously pursues and continues to manipulate Robert, acting as the owner of his identity. Gil-Martin’s doubling is also a reproduction; while Robert is unable to produce copies of his life, Gil-Martin easily reproduces
it. Robert stays outside the frames of production but cannot stop others from succeeding. When Gil-Martin accosts George on Arthur’s seat, he takes the form of Robert, but multiplies it for a disturbing effect: “he took it for some horrid demon by which he was haunted, that had assumed the features of his brother in every lineament, but, in taking on itself the human form, had miscalculated dreadfully on the size, and presented itself thus to him in a blown-up, dilated frame of embodied air” (80).

Gil-Martin is, above all, a narrator-figure who displays his omniscience through “some supernatural power” (180), not unlike Maturin’s titular Melmoth. Gil-Martin has the “‘power of vanishing in one moment’” (209), and Robert declares, “I was astonished at his acuteness and knowledge about every thing” (133). He never stays in one house for long, often changing hourly “for the purpose of seeing and knowing more and more of the human race” (151). And he reveals to Robert how he changes his appearance: “I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts. . . . I can never be mistaken of a character in whom I am interested” (137). And Robert praises him: “‘you have the cameleon art of changing your appearance” (137). Robert’s choice of words recalls Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda (1801), in which Clarence Hervey’s “chameleon character seemed to vary in different lights, and according to the different situations in which he happened to be placed.”

Where Hervey’s ability to adapt is seen as admirable (he eventually marries Belinda), Gil-Martin’s is insidious. Gil-Martin, moreover, is not merely socially savvy, but rather possesses supernatural physical powers that separate him from the novel’s characters. Robyn Warhol has coined the term “chameleon narrators”: “existing on many different diegetic levels, adopting the

49 In her novel, Rosanne; or A Father’s Labour Lost (1814), Laetitia Matilda Hawkins writes in a footnote: “The chameleon-character may, like the manoeuvring [sic] of a pantomime, strike and amuse for a time; but variety and sameness are more related in their effects than in their causes; and it may be as wearisome to see a windmill perpetually in motion, as invariably still” (vol. 3 [London: F. C. & J Rivington, 1814], 39).
appearances of many figures,” the chameleon narrator “differentiates himself from any one real person or fictional character.” 50 Robert continues to explain Gil-Martin’s powers: “by setting his features to the mould of other people’s, he entered at once into their conceptions and feelings” (133). Gil-Martin exerts his narratorial control, as he persuades Robert to begin purging the earth of its reprobates. A local pastor is their first victim; the second, George. About this time Robert begins conceiving of himself as being “two people” (158), or having a “second self . . . who appears in my likeness” (176). Gil-Martin ceases including Robert in his plots, and two others are murdered: Rabina and a young woman. In a seemingly psychological retribution for his crime of framing M’Gill, a fellow student, Robert is now framed by Gil-Martin, who leads authorities to the bodies of the dead. Now wanted for murder, Robert goes on the lam, and heads for the Scottish Borders.

Robert’s first stop takes him to the house of a weaver, who becomes suspicious when Robert stumblingly says his name is Cowan, rather than revealing Colwan. Robert’s similarly pronounced false name recalls (or rather anticipates) the opening paragraph of the Editor’s Narrative, which speculates that, from the Colwan family, “spring the Cowans that spread towards the Border” (49). Again, the Editor appears to ignore events in Robert’s text that he could use as evidence for his own narrative. Furthermore, because officers had earlier enquired about Robert’s whereabouts, the weaver knows more about Robert, Gil-Martin, and their crimes than the Editor ever bothers to include: “I was feared ye might be that waratch,” the weaver explains, “that the deil has taen the possession oi, an’ eggit him on to kill baith his father an’ his mother, his only brother, an’ his sweetheart” (201). Robert cannot assuage the weaver’s suspicions, and he is locked up in a room with the weaver’s loom, a “confusion without end”

(202). Shocked to find that his new garb has been replaced by his old, black clothes—suggesting that Gil-Martin has located the new digs—Robert went doiting in amongst the weaver’s looms, till I entangled myself, and could not get out again without working great deray amongst the coarse linen threads that stood in warp from one end of the apartment unto the other. I had no knife whereby to cut the cords of this wicked man, and therefore was obliged to call out lustily for assistance. (203)

Robert is trapped within the frame of loom, what Jason Marc Harris calls the “legendary matrix of the folk.” The weaver appears, calls Robert a devil, and asks how he became entangled. Robert explains: “‘I wanted to be at the light, and have somehow unfortunately involved myself in the intricacies of your web’” (203). The weaver, incensed, replies: “‘what made ye gang howkin in there to be a poor man’s ruin?’” (204). The more Robert moves, however, the more stuck he becomes:

My feet had slipped down through the double warpings of a web, and not being able to reach the ground with them, (there being a small pit below,) I rode upon a number of yielding threads, and there being nothing else that I could reach, to extricate myself was impossible. I was utterly powerless; and besides, the yearn and cords hurt me very much. For all that, the destructive weaver seized a loomspoke, and began a-beating me most unmercifully, while, entangled as I was, I could do nothing but shout aloud for mercy, or assistance, whichever chanced to be within hearing. . . . I determined to get out of his meshes at any risk. This effort made my case worse; for my feet being wrapt among the neither threads, as I

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51 Jason Marc Harris, Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 106.
threw myself from my addle on the upper ones, my feet brought the others up through these, and I hung with my head down, and my feet as firm as they had been in a vice. The predicament of the web being thereby increased, the weaver’s wrath was doubled in proportion, and he laid on without mercy.

The metaphor of Robert-as-fly, trapped in a spider web of his own treachery and deceit, is in play here, of course, and the weaver makes it explicit: “‘an’ here do I find him abscondit like a speeder i’ the mids o’ my leddy’s wab . . . an’ at last should hae weaved a net to catch the deil’” (205).

On one hand, *Confessions* is concerned with the products of weaving and the transformative power of clothes. The black pious garb defines Robert, and when he changes to a Shepherd’s frock and hat, he is nearly undetectable. The principle power of the scene, however, lies in the weaver’s anger over Robert being a “poor man’s ruin,” of potentially breaking the frame of his loom; for implicit in this scene of entanglement and violence is the contemporary history of Luddism, organized efforts to destroy the frames of weaving machines.

As Luddites were skilled artisans who used their hands and creativity to produce fashionable commodities, they became a fitting metaphor for writers who similarly struggled within the limiting machinery of conventional and popular fiction. With *Confessions* Hogg may

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52 Robert later finds himself in a similar predicament attempting to extricate himself from a horse stall.

53 Luddite “frame-breakers” engaged in the first widespread, organized violence that targeted machines. E. J. Hobsbawm calls Luddite efforts “collective bargaining by riot” and notes not only the organization and diversity of the executions, but also their success (E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers,” in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* [New York: Basic Book, 1964], 7). The Luddites were a nebulous, yet surprisingly organized, group of British artisans who reacted against the influx of large-frame weaving machines during the Napoleonic Wars. Inspired by the mythical figure Ned Lud(d) (also known as Captain, General, or King Ludd), the Luddites destroyed the machines that factory owners had installed to increase productivity and limit workforce. In a 23 March 1813 letter, Walter Scott writes, “I had the burden of constant attention to the police of the little county of which I am Sheriff, where certain agitators of Luddism had begun to be busy” (Walter Scott, *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894], 277). In response to a series of riots from 1811-1813, the British government instituted the Frame Breaking Act. Lord Byron gave an impassioned speech in 1812 to Parliament in defense of Luddites. In spite of his efforts, the Frame Breaking Bill was passed. Byron countered with a scathing poem that ran in the *London Morning Chronicle*: “Men are more easily made than machinery—and / Stockings fetch better prices than lives” (Lord Byron, *Selected Poems* [London: Penguin, 1996], 13-14). (Hogg corresponded with Byron in 1813 and 1814 and wrote a commemorative poem after the poet’s death.) As a result of the bill, several Luddites were prosecuted and sentenced to Transportation; many others were executed. Unrest only spread, however, manifesting itself a generation later in the similar 1830 Swing Riots.
have ushered in a new literary attention to Luddism that was a thematic resource for Victorian authors. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), for example, Job Legh posits, “‘It’s true it was a sore time for the hand-loom weavers when power-looms came in: them new-fangled things make a man’s life like a lottery.’”\(^{54}\) That Tennyson’s Lady of Shalott leaves her loom and “Out flew the web and floated wide” suggests the necessity to break away from the frames of mechanized artificiality to see reality—but this frame-breaking inherently requires violence and self-sacrifice. Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849) directly engages with the turmoil of the Luddite uprisings of 1811-1812. “I only wish the machines—the frames—were safe here,” Robert Moore states in the novel, “and lodged within the walls of this mill. Once put up, I defy the frame-breakers. Let them only pay me a visit and take the consequences. My mill is my castle.”\(^{55}\) As Carlyle laments in 1829, only five years after *Confessions*, “books are not only printed but, in a great measure, written and sold, by machinery.”\(^{56}\) Hogg reacts to this mechanization of writing in *Confessions*. One reviewer even called the novel “incoherent machinery.”\(^{57}\) Robert unknowingly acts as a Luddite, challenging the frames of production at the weaver’s as much as his narrative subverts the Editor’s frame. But his efforts prove unsuccessful; he is still controlled and subdued by the weaver’s loom and manipulated and transformed by the Editor’s narrative. The tapestry of

\(^{54}\) Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1907), 448. This anticipates the distinction between Mr. Tulliver and Mr. Wakem in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): “It is clear that the irascible miller was a man to interpret any chance shot that grazed him as an attempt on his own life, and was liable to entanglements in this puzzling world, which, due consideration had to his own infallibility, required the hypothesis of a very active diabolical agency to explain them. It is still possible to believe that the attorney was not more guilty toward him than an ingenious machine, which performs its work with much regularity, is guilty toward the rash man who, venturing too near it, is caught up by some fly-wheel or other, and suddenly converted into unexpected sausages” (ed., A. S. Byatt [London: Penguin, 1985], 334).

\(^{55}\) Brontë, *Shirley*, 23. Responding to his mother’s question what influences him, Martin Yorke replies, “By a complication of motives, the intricacies of which I should as soon think of explaining to you as I should of turning myself inside out to exhibit the internal machinery of my frame” (591-592).


\(^{57}\) “The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,” *The London Literary Gazette*, 451. The reviewer may be referring to the “machinery” of supernatural effects in line with Pope’s introduction of spirits in *The Rape of the Lock*. 
revenge and punishment traps him, but he eventually makes his escape. While the weaver “slackened the web to release,” the Editor’s frame similarly relaxes its hold when Robert’s text and body appear outside the boundaries of their narrative layer.

Although Robert’s entanglement in the weaver’s loom may be a reference to Luddite violence that erupted during Hogg’s lifetime, it is important to note that the scene is set in 1712, far before large-frame machines began to replace manual labor in the manufacture of linen. The loom that Robert is accused of violating, then, requires the weaver’s individual labor. Robert becomes ensnared in a device more analogous to oral tales and handwritten manuscripts than to mechanized print. Thus Robert resists not only frames of mechanized fabrication, but also all modes of production and individual discourse. In either respect, the loom represents a means of production that simultaneously envelops and rejects Robert. When it appears that Robert is framed by the editor’s narrative or weaver’s loom, he in fact fails to fit. It is the weaver who embodies the three fates and can decide on Robert’s demise. He is at the weaver’s mercy, as he has “no knife whereby to cut the cords of this wicked man” (203), rather than under will of God. Robert is spared, finally, by the weaver’s wife, and free from yet another frame. But as the epigraph from Brontë’s Shirley suggests above, his frame breaking comes at a price.

Lamed during his fight with the loom, Robert is forced to travel to Edinburgh in hopes of blending undetected among the masses. He finds employment at a printing house—a business of print machinery that Carlyle excoriates above—where he is inspired to print his memoirs, which will “astonish mankind, and confound their self-wisdom and their esteemed morality” (208). Robert convinces his employer, James Watson, that the text will be a religious parable in the

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58 Most notable is Joseph-Marie Jacquard’s mechanized loom named the “Jacquard loom,” which developed on the innovations of earlier machines, and was introduced in 1801. However, conflict over new weaving technologies was by no means limited to the early nineteenth century. In 1675, weavers rioted against the introduction of new weaving machines that cut labor costs, and violence bubbled over throughout the eighteenth-century.
style of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and decides against a pseudonym. As a result of Gil-Martin’s scheming, Watson finds out about the true nature of the memoir, however, and burns all the copies; only the “clean copy” survives. Robert’s memoir concluded, he must record the rest of his adventures in a daily journal. Thus Robert inverts the formula with which previous texts concluded. Whereas the letters in both Goethe’s *Werther* and Austen’s *Lady Susan* give way to editorial summary—not to mention Walton’s letters transforming to journal-prose in *Frankenstein*—Robert’s memoir turns into journal fragments. Forced to leave the city, Robert eventually finds work as a shepherd, but ill treatment and the continued machinations of Gil-Martin lead him to realize that death is the only way out. The memoir concludes: “I will now seal up my little book, and conceal it; and cursed be he who trieth to alter or amend!” (222). Robert retracts his previous plan to “see what numbers of my works were to go abroad among mankind,” making his history “private memoirs and confessions” (208) rather than a public harangue on his justified sins. This change, Norman Vance argues, “subverts confessional narrative” to create “not absolution but Faustian despair and suicide.”59 The Editor returns to speculate:

WHAT can this work be? Sure, you will say, it must be an allegory; or (as the writer calls it) a religious PARABLE, showing the dreadful danger of self-righteousness? I cannot tell. Attend to the sequel: which is a thing so extraordinary, so unprecedented, and so far out of the common course of human events, that if there were not hundreds of living witnesses to attest the truth of it, I would not bid any rational being believe it. (222)

Again, the Editor refers to a sequel, but in this instance it is the terminal frame rather than
Robert’s memoir. In this sense, the text flows linearly, a triptych that tells the story in a series of
scenes. The Editor quickly subverts any chronological uniformity, however, by inserting a real
letter from Blackwood’s signed by “JAMES HOGG,” which “bears the stamp of authenticity in
every line” (225-226). The Editor seemingly ignores the letter’s “traditionary facts,” although it
is in his possession. In this sense, we might follow one reviewer’s words: “In order to make the
‘Private Memoirs’ which are subjoined to this narrative in any degree intelligible, it will be
necessary to treat them as if they were written in Hebrew, and to begin at the end.”\textsuperscript{60} Hogg
begins the fiction even earlier, by writing to Blackwood on 7 August 1823, “I send you in for
Maga the particulars of a curious incident that has excited great interest here.”\textsuperscript{61} The letter,
importantly, is only an extract, demonstrating again the Editor’s proclivity to cut before pasting.

Addressed to Sir Christopher North, John Wilson’s pseudonym in Blackwood’s, the letter
details the history of a preserved corpse found in the Scottish Borders. The section that appears
in Confessions is missing a contextual frame. The “Hogg” of the letter opens by describing his
motivation for writing, making Wilson complicit in the story’s genesis. Hogg claims that North
(as Wilson is referred to throughout) should remember a conversation they had, standing back to
back, and apparently full of drink, in the threshold of the Ambrose Inn. Two Hoggs immediately
appear in the letter, who are, in Russett’s words, “both real and fictitious at once”: the Hogg
whose eloquent and precise prose provides the narrative of the events, and the Scots-speaking
Hogg of Blackwood’s and Noctes Ambrosianae, who appears in dialogue.\textsuperscript{62} Thus the two Hoggs
that appear in print are fictions, but perhaps are part of Hogg’s multiple print identities that he
hopes to satirize. To North’s inquiry concerning the dearth of writing sent in by Hogg of late, the

\textsuperscript{60} The British Critic, 68-80.
\textsuperscript{61} Hogg, The Collected Letters, 193.
\textsuperscript{62} Russett, Fictions and Fakes, 175.
author replies that he has exhausted his subject matter. North several times argues in response that Hogg has the “phenomena of nature” to choose from:

‘A man who has such an eye as you have, for discerning the goings on of the mighty elements, can never want the choice of a thousand subjects whereon to exercise his pen. You have the night, with her unnumbered stars, that seem to rowl through spaces incomprehensible; the day dawn, and the sunshine; the dazzling splendours of noon, and the sombre hues that pervade the mountains, under the congregated masses of impending vapours.’

North’s words imply that Hogg should turn to the beauties of nature to spur his imagination, to be, in short, a Romantic poet. Hogg makes an attempt:

I came home here, and looked about me soon and late with a watchful eye, and certainly saw many bright and beautiful appearances on the face of the sky, and in the ever-varying hues of the mountains; still I had witnessed all these before; so had every old shepherd in these glens; and I could not persuade myself that any of these was the particular thing, a description of which you wanted; because they were, in fact, no phenomenons, if I understand that French word properly, nor ever were viewed as such by any of our country people.

Hogg’s words suggest a shifting poetic ideology. Everyday events are not miracles. The Leech-Gatherer and the Solitary Reaper labor for life, not for poetry. It is August 1823: Keats and Shelley are dead; Byron is in Greece (where he too would die within the year). Thus Hogg turns to death and the abject to supply a phenomenon: a supernatural naturalism. Hogg’s dialogue with

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64 Hogg, “A Scots Mummy,” 139-141. Phenomenon, of course, is Greek in origin—yet another dig by Hogg at his characterization in Blackwood’s.
North turns into a story, supplied through the curious exploits of two shepherds. When Hogg concludes the opening frame, “But hereby hangs a tale,” he equates the text to Robert’s body, for it is Robert who is ultimately found hanging. He is a tale, buried in the bog.

Hogg’s story describes the location of a suicide’s grave that comes with some “traditionary history” (222). Once again the oral evidence bypasses the Editor’s Narrative, which concludes with Robert’s escape from the Arabellas. An “unfortunate youth” (223) lies in the grave who had lived one hundred years ago. The day of his death, the despondent youth pleaded with a companion to stay with him: “‘Then if ye winna stay wi’ me, James, ye may depond on’t I’ll cut my throat afore ye come back again’” (223). This is the first indication that Hogg has had a hand in fictionalizing the oral tale. At no point in Robert’s memoir does he speak in Scots; rather, he explicitly sets his educated vernacular against people like the weaver. Hogg’s characterization makes Robert sympathetic, a youth “remarkable for a deep, thoughtful, and sullen disposition. There was nothing against his character that anybody knew of” (223). There is no mention in the letter of Robert’s religious extremism, his murders, or Gil-Martin. In fact, Hogg never mentions Robert’s name, as if it was lost through the many transmissions of the “disgusting oral tale” (224). The only indication that might indicate Robert’s appearance is that Hogg reports the grave to be located at “Cowanscroft,” meaning a tenant farm run by the Cowan family—the name Robert adopted at the weaver’s. The youth fails to return home, and a passerby finds him hanging by the neck against a hayrick. Even the death is a “singular circumstance” (224), for the youth hangs himself with a brittle hay rope that should not have held his weight. The next morning, servants wrap the body in a blanket, mirroring Rabina’s wedding-night treatment by the laird, and bury it with the rope still intact. Over one hundred years pass when two men, “casting peats,” find the grave and open it halfway, noting that the

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body has remained remarkably preserved. 1712 meets 1823 in the grave. Hogg interrupts once during the story with a message to North and returns in the end to close the frame:

These are all the particulars that I remember relating to this curious discovery; and I am sure you will confess that a very valuable receipt may be drawn from it for the preservation of dead bodies. If you should think of trying the experiment on yourself, you have nothing more to do than hang yourself in a hay rope, which, by the by, is to be made of risp, and leave orders that you are to be buried in a wild height, and I will venture to predict, that though you repose there for ages an inmate of your mossy cell, of the cloud, and the storm, you shall set up your head at the last day as fresh as a moor-cock.

Hogg’s reference to the preservation of a body in a “mossy cell” proves his intimate knowledge of a natural phenomenon: the bog body. The particular properties of sphagnum peat, found in the raised bogs of northwestern Europe, tan skin into leather and stifle bacteria, both of which prevent decay and promote the preservation of hair, nails, brain, viscera, and select clothing. Through the symbol of the bog, that dangerous and bewildering quagmire teeming in the muck and mire of history, Hogg pits the fleeting fluidity of identity against the promiscuous permanency of text. The treatment of Robert’s preserved body by the party of diggers demonstrates that, for Hogg, the destruction of identity is a violent act, which breaks personal, authorial, and textual frames of production.

66 Hogg, “A Scots Mummy,” 139-141. In the editorial interruption, Hogg returns to the Scots dialect, even though he is not in dialogue with North: “Well, you will be saying, that, excepting the small ornamental part of the devil and the hayrope, there is nothing at all of what you wanted in this ugly traditional tale. Stop a wee bit, my dear Sir Christy. Dinna just cut afore the point. Ye ken auld fools an’ young bairns shouldna see things that are half done. Stop just a wee bit, ye auld crusty,cribbled,crabbit,editor body, an’ I’ll let ye see that the grand phenomena of Nature’s a’ to come to yet” (139-141). The curious diggers, William Shiel and W. Sword, are shield and sword, defense and attack, and they both have Walter Scott’s initials. In fact, Scott plays quite a role in the Editor’s terminal frame. He loans a horse to Laidlaw to aid in the search, and all the members of the group are related to him either professionally or personally.
In his letter to Blackwood’s, Hogg exclaims, “I never heard of a preservation so wonderful,” and he proceeds to give a detailed description of the discovery:

The features were all so plain, that an acquaintance might easily have known him. One of the lads gripped the face of the corpse with his finger and thumb, and the cheeks felt quite soft and fleshy, but the dimples remained and did not spring out again. He had fine yellow hair, about nine inches long; but not a hair of it could they pull out till they cut part of it off with a knife. They also cut off some portions of his clothes, which were all quite fresh, and distributed them among their acquaintances, sending a portion to me, among the rest, to keep as natural curiosities. (225)

The Editor’s version of events only further indicates that the corpse is a bog body. After Hogg’s letter, the Editor details his expedition to find the suicide’s grave. As he is now participating in the action in a first-person narration, the Editor enters the diegetic world rather than existing outside of it. Peter Garrett argues, “The editor becomes another protagonist in his story of discovery and another unreliable narrator in his bafflement.” The Editor enlists the help of Mr. L——t and L——w, probably Lockhart of Blackwood’s and William Laidlaw, and they proceed to the location, “taking Blackwood’s Magazine for August along with us” (226). In this way, the magazine, and specifically Hogg’s letter in it, becomes an object that traverses frames, moving from the real world of Blackwood’s and its readers into the fiction of the novel. At a village in

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67 In his pioneering study, The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved (1969), P. V. Glob contends that the first “properly documented” bog body was described by Elizabeth Rawdon, the Countess of Moira (1731-1808) (The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988], 103). Hogg’s letter appears carefully modeled after bog body testimonials, especially Lady Moira’s: both Hogg and Lady Moira find themselves in possession of preserved fragments of clothing, and both (though for Hogg, perhaps dubiously) send them along with the letter to prove authenticity.

Ettrick, they meet Hogg, who has, Duncan wryly notes, been “penned within” the text, and enquire about the location of the remains. Hogg replies in Scots:

‘Od bless ye, lad! I hae ither matters to mind. I hae a’ thae paulies to sell, an’ a’ yon Highland stotts down on the green every ane; an’ then I hae ten scores o’ yowes to buy after, an’ if I canna first sell my ain stock, I canna buy nae ither body’s. I hae mair ado than I can mange the day, foreby ganging to houk up hunder-year-auld banes.’ (226)

The party is forced to proceed without Hogg’s direction, and they soon learn that the letter “was hardly a bit . . . correct,” as the grave site is not where Hogg documented. This is yet another example of Hogg romanticizing Robert’s story, for the party learns that Robert was unceremoniously and violently buried.

Through his “‘ingenious lies’” (226)—false information about the burial site and the body, opaque Scots dialect, and surly disingenuousness—character-Hogg attempts to preserve authenticity from the distorting spade and pen of the editor. He knows the Editor’s proclivity to champion oral evidence and takes advantage of it. This careful posturing serves not only to “cast doubt on the authenticity” of the Editor’s piecemeal biography, Michael Mason argues, but also to show, in Magdalene Redekop’s words, his “suspicion of print” in the face of the backhandedness he received courtesy of Blackwood’s. Yet Mason contends that Hogg includes the scene “to discredit oral tradition,” when in fact character-Hogg leads astray an Editor who will render oral testimony into printed fact. Frustrated by the unhelpful Hogg, the editor hires the help of some locals, and they proceed to a different spot, where the “ground did not appear to

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69 Duncan, “Authenticity Effects, 100.
be wet, but a kind of dry rotten moss” (228). The Editor relates, “To work we fell with two spades,” and the diggers come across bones ( decayed fully from the earlier, partial exhumation), find a skull (like many a bog body, damaged by a spade), and then unearth the rest of the body: the “remains lay under a close vault of moss, and within a vacant space; . . . all was perfect” (228-229). Among the preserved clothes, they find Robert’s manuscript journal, which L——w calls a “‘most precious treasure’”:

‘I hae often wondered how it was that this man’s corpse has been miraculously preserved frae decay, a hunder times langer than ony other body’s, or than even a tanner’s. But now I could wager a guinea, it has been for the preservation o’ that little book.’ (231)

L——w seems ignorant of bog bodies, crediting the preserved pamphlet to supernatural forces, and even the Editor attributes the “singular remains” (227) to the fact that it “was wrapped so close together” (231), rather than the “mossy mortar” (228) and the “constant flow of liquid stuff” (229) he earlier notes in the grave.

Both Douglass Mack and David Groves have argued that Hogg’s Blackwood’s letter is based on real events. Mack notes an 1895 letter from William Amos to Hogg’s daughter in which Amos insists, “‘The Suicide’s grave was no myth, but a reality which I have visited several times.’”73 Groves brings to light the testimony of John Burnett, who worked for Hogg in the early 1820s. Burnett recalls that Hogg one day decided to prove a story he had heard from his grandfather, which mirrors the letter in Confessions, about a suicide’s grave in the moors:

72 Together with L——w (whom Adrian Hunter and others identify as William Laidlaw), one of the men the editor recruits for assistance is W——m B——e. Hogg could be referring to Scottish poet William Beattie (Hunter, Introduction to Confessions, by James Hogg [Ontario: Broadview, 2001], 227, n. 1) or William Blake (David Groves, “‘W—M B—E, A Great Original’: William Blake, The Grave, and James Hogg’s Confessions,” Scottish Literary Journal 18 [1991]: 27-45).
Mr Hogg came down from the hills with some others, and gave Johnnie an old bonnet of the Glengarry sort and some pieces of woollen cloth to wash in the burn. Johnnie washed them, and on coming in was told that these were some of the clothes of the suicide, who had been buried in the moss just as he was, with the hay-ropes still round his neck, and the moss had preserved them from decay.\textsuperscript{74}

If accurate, Burnett’s account complicates several things about \textit{Confessions}. First, we see that Hogg procures not just cloth from the body, but also takes its bonnet. In Hogg’s letter, he writes, the “broad blue bonnet was sent to Edinburgh several weeks ago, to the great regret of some gentlemen connected with the land, who wished to have it for a keep-sake. For my part, fond as I am of blue bonnets, and broad ones in particular, I declare I durst not have worn that one” (225). Yet, when the editor meets Hogg, he makes note of the author’s “broad blue bonnet” (227), and then itemizes what he subsequently takes from the grave: “I have likewise now got possession of the bonnet, which puzzles me most of all. It is not conformable with the rest of the dress. It is neither a broad bonnet, nor a Border bonnet; for there is an open behind, for tying, which no genuine Border bonnet, I am told, ever had. It seems to have been a Highland bonnet, worn in a flat way like a scone on the crown, such as is sometimes still seen in the west of Scotland” (230).

It appears that Hogg, playing another trick on his gullible editor, has swapped bonnets with the bog body. Thus Hogg participates not only in blurring chronological boundaries, making both his and Robert’s dress anachronistic through his hat exchange, but also in making sure that what the Editor puts in print (the details of Robert’s dress) is incorrect. What is perhaps even more important, by wearing a relic of Scottish history from the bog, and making himself a character in

his anonymous novel, Hogg preserves himself in print, all the while undermining the very
authority of print-production with a false oral testimony.

Through the pilfering of Robert’s body, Hogg demonstrates the potential deceit of print
and questions its authority as either an indicator of truth or an authentic and legible record of
history. *Confessions*, Ina Ferris argues, “places in question the antiquary’s conviction that . . . the
past can be authentically approached through the concreteness and intimacy of its fragmentary

Robert’s bog body is desecrated, mutilated, distorted, and left to decay, resembling
what Mark L. Schoenfield reads as the “butchering” of Hogg’s “self” by his critics. Seeing his
memoirs completed in type-set, Robert rejoices, “[W]hat numbers of my works were to go
abroad among mankind” (208), but it is instead his body and pamphlet that are dismembered and
circulated by voracious editors. Robert’s true history is “consigned to flames” (209), and his
corpse left to dissolve, the only record of his existence—the “‘precious treasure’” (231) that he
wished to “conceal” (222)—excavated and distorted by the editor’s pen. Susan Manning
observes that, for the novel’s editorial exhumers, the manuscript demonstrates the “power of
explanatory narrative over spectacle and event.” Yet, because the preserved confession fails to
supply concrete, objective evidence that would codify the narrative, its presence creates a
paradox: “The grave at once preserves the text . . . and resists its incorporation.”

When Robert’s body functions as a leathery shield to preserve his narrative, it simultaneously answers

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78 Ibid.
questions and demands new, unanswerable ones. “Unlike the liquefying corpse,” Duncan reminds us of the scene, “a writing can be reanimated, by the act of reading.”79 Robert earns perpetual life through a printed surviving confessional; but it is a dubious identity, misunderstood, fractured, dismembered, and stitched together without his guidance. If Robert in some sense represents Hogg’s experience at Blackwood’s as a contributor and a character/caricature—when, in Russett’s words, he was a “puppet animated by other hands”—then we see in this descending series of Hoggs (author, editor, character, body, text) uncanny figures that represent the tenuous and multifaceted fiction of identity.80 By asking who and what is Hogg, through an increasingly puzzling mise en abyme, Hogg effectively regains control of his identity by exploding it, by demonstrating its irreconcilable heterogeneity. In other words, capitulating to editors—by preemptively realizing their process of dismemberment, renovation, and reanimation—paradoxically renders their efforts to create his identity in print futile.

Reminiscent of Shelley’s stake in revisions of Frankenstein, it appears that Hogg sought to reissue the novel under the title The Suicide’s Grave in 1828 with his name finally appearing as the editor on the title page.81 Inarguably, this title is catchier, but it does not possess the frustrating length and dubious specificity that Hogg perhaps intended for the novel’s first

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80 Duncan reads Wringhim’s exhumation in Confessions as an example of the “seeming paradox of the uncanny as common property, if not central theme, of a national identity in Scottish literature” (“Upright Corpse,” 37). Rather than reflect an established Scottish national identity, the uncanny, Duncan continues, “marks . . . different recognitions of the status of that identity as a problem rather than a solution—an emergent, powerfully charged, contested and unstable ideological formation” (38).
81 In 1895, Confessions was reprinted, with far more fidelity to the 1824 edition than it had known for some decades, under this title. When the novel was published in the collection Tales and Sketches (1836-37), it was titled The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Fanatic. Garside calls this posthumous edition “a hatchet-job, expunging challenging theological content, any hint of ‘indelicacy,’ and the interlinking oral intrusions so vital to the original’s narrative structure” (Garside, Introduction to James Hogg’s The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002], xi). Duncan argues that the title change, “in ratifying the Editor’s verdict, promotes him from a figure within the fiction to an authority over it” (“Fanaticism and Enlightenment in Confessions of a Justified Sinner,” in James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author, eds. Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009], 58).
printing. Hogg’s title-change has an interesting back-story that reveals his belief concerning the novel’s thematic core. In a 25 October 1823 letter to Hogg, Owen Rees, a partner at Longman & Co., writes, “We will with pleasure undertake the publication of ‘Memoirs of a Suiside [sic].’”82 And just one month after the novel appeared, the fellows at Blackwood’s opine in a dialogue with “Hogg” that the author someday will be “dug up, no doubt, quite fresh and lovely, like this new hero of yours, one hundred summers hence. I hope you will take care to be buried in the top boots, by the by—they will gratify the speculators of the year two thousand and two.”83 These references suggest that Hogg may have early on been touting the suicide as central to the text. In so doing, Robert’s death, bog burial, and corporeal preservation, those scenes where Hogg’s presence is most palpable, become the real crux of the story. When the “narcissistic center of the text,” in Magdalene Redekop’s words, finally becomes the focus, those sections tinged with the editorial ink are relegated to secondary, if not subordinate, status.84 When Robert appears at the end of the text as a preserved corpse (in Hogg’s letter and in the Editor’s narrative), he ruptures the boundary between narrative layers. “The textual fissure between frame and framed,” Victor Sage argues, “provokes suspicion and doubt in the reader.”85 Robert’s appearance creates even more ambiguity than do previous moments of terminal-frame metalepsis, when it is unclear whether Frankenstein’s creature commits himself to flames or whether Melmoth the Wanderer really falls to his death. In each example, the anxiety stems from the villain’s potential survival. Robert has no control over his identity—from his dubious inheritance, to Gil-Martin’s narratorial control, to the Editor’s pilfering of his body—and his appearance in the Editor’s Narrative is

82 Garside, Introduction, lvi.
83 John Wilson, Noctes Abrosianae, vol. 1 (New York: Readfield, 1854), 443-44. I am indebted to Garside for locating and reprinting the first part of this dialogue in his indispensible introduction to Confessions (Edinburgh UP, 2002).
84 Redekop, “Beyond Closure,” 165. Richardson agrees: “Ultimately, the primary focus of the second ‘Editor’s Narrative’ is on James Hogg himself” (“James Hogg and Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine,” 186).
85 Sage, “The Author, the Editor, and the Fissured Text,” 27.
fundamentally passive. His is the death of the Gothic antagonist, though preserved in text to be misread, edited, and misappropriated. Hogg's vision of textual economics versus imaginative freedom is apocalyptic. *Confessions* marks—as with Shelley’s *The Last Man* just two years later—an anxiety over the permanency of texts and the mortality of humans; that identity is not personal property, but rather public commodity.

Significantly, as Susan Levin points out, both *Confessions* and Hogg’s *Memoir* consist of three distinct parts. And all the characters in the novel—Robert, the Editor, and Hogg—are ultimately manifestations of the author’s fragmented identity, themselves doubled and dead. Hogg’s unabashed declaration, “I like to write about myself,” seems (self) justified. But writing “about” oneself could also suggest writing around or approximately, while never actually providing a mimetic or true autobiographical representation. In this sense, Hogg is as un-frameable as Robert, and both like to write “about” themselves. Author and hero are also linked in their moments of frame-breaking metalepsis. Where Robert moves into the intimate world of the Editor as a preserved bog body, Hogg travels from completely outside the text—as it was published anonymously—and into it as a character whose interaction with the Editor is just as disturbing. Hogg traverses title-page and dedication before he twice disrupts the novel: first through his letter to *Blackwood’s* and second as a surly Scots-speaking shepherd. Thus Hogg forces himself into the printed text, but in a way that he dictates; he is a foil, a trickster in his own novel, though one who is authentic, unaffected, and clever—an identity far more potent than the Ettrick Shepherd of *Noctes Ambrosianae*.

Hogg’s attack on print in *Confessions* is hypocritical, of course, given that his livelihood in many ways depended on his writing being printed and sold. Although Hogg gathers his fiction

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87 Hogg, *Memoir of the Author’s Life*, 11.
from oral traditions and makes claims for historical truth, he capitulates to the culture of print. Even so, Hogg was prescient concerning the decline of the oral and Gothic traditions, as *Confessions* (together with Shelley’s *The Last Man*) provides a provocative final blow for the Romantic Gothic. Over two decades would pass before novelists made the Gothic their found manuscript, realizing that its formal dexterity was a part of the search for realism, rather than its adversary. Thus *Confessions* bridges the Romantic and Victorian Gothic. In its formal framing and suspicion of truth, the novel is a clear influence on the Brontës, the novelists who revitalized and reimagined the Gothic as a part of the dark, morbid, but natural world.
CHAPTER 7
FRAMES OF INHERITANCE: GENERATIONAL GOTHIC IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL

He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind:
and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.
—Proverbs 11:29

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.
—W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming”¹

Yeats’s apocalyptic mythology in “The Second Coming” argues that the structures of faith, history, and time collapse from the center outwards. When the gyre—the spinning, conical symbol of cognitive process and historical progress—comes to its apex, however, its mirrored opposite reaches its own nadir. This concept can be usefully applied to the narrative structures of Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847) and Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848). For it is at the center of both novels that things fall apart. When the central narratives of these framed texts reach their emotional height, they give way to a second-generation character—an ominous, inscrutable creature who tears through narrative boundaries to dominate the frame world. The Brontës raised the stakes established by their Romantic predecessors. The Victorian Gothic becomes rooted in the horror of biology, as lines of inheritance become terms not only of property, but also of character. What is at stake here for the Brontës is whether the home or the womb makes the monster. But this question also turns out to be a problem of narrative: the framing devices of both novels involve a transmission of stories, which—in

functioning as another mode of inheritance—implicate narrators and authors in the creation and dissemination of monsters.

At the end of “The Second Coming,” Yeats asks: “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” The image is the (re)birth of Christ, or perhaps an anti-Christ, a second-coming. That it is, for Yeats, a figure who brings annihilation rather than transcendence echoes the horror of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Born at the core of both novels are characters who mirror their parents, not only psychologically and physiologically, but also in name. Catherine begets a Catherine and an Arthur. That these doubled children must always be controlled, confined, and manipulated suggests an anxiety of inheritance that signals an early attention to biological matters of heredity. Laura C. Berry observes that both novels “define the paradigmatic subject not as a woman but as a child, especially one in need of training.” Nature must correct the failings of nurture.

Furthermore, in the sense that both novels feature frame narratives that are invaded by a monstrous force borne and then developed at the text’s center, they are indebted to Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The creature departs from the narrative ambiguously, jumping from Walton’s ship with the dubious promise of self-immolation. The Brontës similarly offer only vague details of their characters’ future; we can only speculate what Cathy and young Arthur grow up to do or be, but we may infer, though the framework of inheritance lines, impending tragedy. This lack of finality—which we have seen as well in Maturin’s *Melmoth*, Hogg’s *Confessions*, and (inevitably) Shelley’s *The Last Man*—signals the horror of the Gothic text. What has escaped the narrative potentially occupies a world closer to the reader. And at the heart of these Gothic texts

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lies an issue of creation: who is culpable when production goes awry? The murderous creations in *Frankenstein* and Hogg’s *Confessions* are products of singular births and unstable family dynamics. But the question the Brontës address through Cathy and young Arthur concerns the efficacy of environmental rehabilitation, whether the “sequel” can turn out better than the original. If a child is born a monster, is there any hope?

Narrative frames and biological inheritance intersect at the condition of tenancy, what is in many ways the focus of both novels. On the surface, the novels’ characters are tenants of the titular houses: Wuthering Heights and Wildfell Hall (not to mention the secondary houses Thrushcross Grange and Grassdale Manor). But they are also tenants of the novels named for the houses. They are confined within the text and only exist, metaphorically speaking, when readers open the covers. Furthermore, in both novels the narrators, at one time or another, are themselves tenants—which destabilizes narrative hierarchy, as extradiegetic voices come under the control of diegetic actions. Perhaps most significant, the characters (and the house and the novels) are tenants of biological traits; they are frameworks for a genetic system of dispositions that exist inside and control appearances, attitudes, and behaviors. As Emily Brontë writes in 1841, “What tenants haunt each mortal cell, / What gloomy guests we hold within— / Torments and madness,

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4 *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* ought to be read as sister-texts. Many critics have pointed out that the titular edifices both have the initials WH, and Wildfell Hall recalls Wuthering Heights, as it sits at the top of the “wildest and the loftiest eminence in [the] neighbourhood” (20). Both novels feature characters (secondary, but crucial to the plot) with “bell” in their names, which may be linked to Ellis and Acton Bell. In *Wuthering Heights*, Isabella Linton becomes a pawn in Heathcliff’s game to wrest Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange from the Earnshaws and Lintons. Judith E. Pike considers Isabella’s letter to Nelly a “critical tool to ferret out the question of . . . reliability” (“My name was Isabella Linton”: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff’s Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64.3 [2009]: 352). In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen Graham’s husband, Arthur, begins an adulterous relationship with his friend’s wife, Anabella. Arthur’s adultery provides the final impetus for Helen to leave. Before she absconds in the cover of night, however, Helen helps the cuckolded Lord Lowborough through his depression and thoughts of suicide, but his child, also named Anabella, “too painfully reminded him of [her] mother” (389). The name repetition between mother and daughter provides a double for the more troubling inheritance of the novel, between Helen’s alcoholic husband, and their son, Arthur.

5 In *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood is Heathcliff’s tenant; he stays most of the time at Thrushcross Grange, but does spend a disturbing night at Wuthering Heights. Gilbert Markham, the narrator of *Wildfell Hall* ends up married to Helen Graham, the titular tenant, and thus is himself ultimately a tenant.
tears and sin!” These genetic frameworks transfer through reproduction into a new generation, who are potentially destructive amalgamations of their parents’ traits. While the novels, narratives, and houses appear to imprison these reproductions, the characters, like previous Gothic creatures, break the frames.

In the 1830s, when the Brontës were collecting the often bleak life-experiences that would later appear in their novels, social activists began to warn of a deterioration of the human race that would result from the influx of machines in labor, coupled with unregulated hours and hazardous work conditions. The defects would pass from generation to generation, becoming increasingly disastrous on the well-being of the nation at large. The phrase “Like begets like; each after its kind” was used liberally in the influx of essays on heredity. In his text, *The Manufacturing Population of England* (1833), Peter Gaskell argues:

> Bodily deformity, bodily defect, or ugliness, may not, nay, in general, will not be transmitted. But an universal weakness and want of tone in all organs, a disposition little able to resist disease, sufficiently prove, that although the child has not inherited the peculiar failings of its parents,—yet it has, an heirloom, their weakened constitution, attended with all its liabilities to physical inferiority.

Activist pamphlets and statistical journals prompted officials to pass laws to regulate some of the working conditions (the 1833 Factory Act and the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act), and the 1832 Reform Bill for the first time gave industrial cities much-needed representation. But it is

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7 Thomas Carlyle expresses a profound and pioneering concern with the growing machinery of society in his essay *Signs of the Times* (1829).

8 Peter Gaskell, *The Manufacturing Population of England* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1833), 169-170. Gaskell bases many of his findings on physiognomy, a pseudoscience that appears also to concern Helen Graham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She keeps her husband’s portrait to “compare my son’s features and countenance with his, as he grows up, and thus be enabled to judge how much or how little he resembles his father” (334).
important to consider the charged rhetoric that writers like Gaskell used, which suggested a physical and mental deterioration of the social body that was a matter of not just industrial conditions, but also hereditary transmission.

Staffan Müller-Wille and Hans-Jörge Rheinberger argue that, beginning in the early modern period, reproduction began to be conceived as the “transmission and redistribution of a more or less atomized biological substance,” and in the nineteenth century, heredity “moved into the center of the life sciences.” French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) theorized that organisms pass traits to their offspring and became an early advocate for organic evolution. For Lamarck, evolution occurs as the result of two forces, one that makes organisms increasingly complex, and the second that adapts them to their environment. Lamarck’s *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809) introduced a theory of the “transmutation of species,” a proto-evolutionary idea of a species developing into another species. Lamarck’s theories influenced other sciences. Orson Squire Fowler, an American phrenologist, published his book, *Hereditary Descent* in 1847, a productive year as well for the Brontës. Fowler warns his readers:

> Behold, O parents! . . . The destinies of your DEAR PROSPECTIVE CHILDREN are thus placed completely within your control. Nay, willing or unwilling, you are COMPELLED to wield them, or else not to become parents. A NECESSITY exists. Your children are OBLIGED to be what you are, and cannot help themselves.\(^\text{10}\)


\(^\text{10}\) Orson Squire Fowler, *Hereditary Descent* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1847), 21. Fowler’s philosophy anticipates later nineteenth-century ideas of eugenics promoted by Francis Galton. “PARENTAGE,” Fowler writes, “and the means of thereby IMPROVING OUR RACE, remain enshrouded in comparative darkness. How long shall this species of ignorance be tolerated, and even fostered! How long shall man continue his researches and discoveries in these minor matters, yet leave this by far the richest field of philosophy and human improvement, almost unoccupied? . . . but has not the time fully come for collecting and disseminating that knowledge on this
Fowler argues that the child is the product of its parents, that the “physical and mental capabilities of mankind are INNATE, not created by education . . . [and] have a CONSTITUTIONAL character inherited from parents.”

Also appearing in 1847 was a pioneering text on heredity by French doctor Prosper Lucas titled *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle*. Charles Darwin relied heavily on Prosper’s work for his own studies on organic evolution later in the century. Most influential was Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, which caused a sensation when it was published anonymously in 1844. It is likely that the Brontës had access to Chambers’s text, or that they had read the meticulous reviews that appeared in *The Examiner* and *The Athenæum*. At the very least, their father, Patrick, a minister and local philanthropist, provided his daughters access to a range of temperance pamphlets that he used in his own work.

The formal structures of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are inextricably linked to these questions of inheritance because the doubling children are produced not only by their parents, but also by the series of authors and narrators who (fail to) frame them. Similar to reviews of Maturin’s *Melmoth* and Hogg’s *Confessions*, early critics found the novels’ structures muddled and outdated. *The Examiner* argued that *Wuthering Heights* was “wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable,” and contended: “It is not easy to disentangle the incidents and set them forth in chronological order”; the *Atlas* similarly considered the novel a “sprawling story” and a “disjointed tale”; the *Literary World* criticized the “improbabilities and incongruities of the plot”; and the *Britannia* asserted it was “very unskilfully constructed.”

Several months after their review of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Examiner* considered *Wildfell Hall* “very

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inartificially constructed,” and argued against the “faulty construction of the tale.”13 The frame narratives have also provided fodder for diverse modern critical assessments. Gilbert and Gubar, for example, read the frames of *Wuthering Heights* as a “Romantic storytelling method that emphasizes the ironic disjunctions between different perspectives on the same events.”14 And J. Hillis Miller argues that the novel “produces its effect on its reader through the way it is made up of repetitions of the same in the other which permanently resist rational reduction to some satisfying principle of explanation.”15 The many frames of *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall*—those narrative, architectural, and biological—work together to create a complex system of inheritance lines. Both novels, in John T. Matthews’s words on *Wuthering Heights*, “would be unimaginable without . . . framing.”16

*Wuthering Heights* has proved both fascinating and frustrating to critics for generations. Three contemporary reviewers called it “strange,” which suggests an assertion of the novel’s foreignness, in terms formal, thematic, and generic.17 One reviewer remarks, “baffling all regular criticism . . . we must leave it to our readers to decide what sort of book it is.”18 Helen Small observes that the “embedding of narratives within narratives involves an acute, and at times comedic, willingness to invoke and disturb expectations of genre, above all of sentimental romance.”19 Miller excoriates scholarship on *Wuthering Heights* that fails to read its diversity of meaning, arguing that it is “not incoherent, confused, or flawed. It is a triumph of the novelist’s

Miller continues: “the secret truth” is that “there is no secret truth.” Miller’s deconstructionist objective considers the novel’s structures of narrative as in fact resistant to singular meaning. Indeed, it proves difficult to piece through the diverse narratives that the novel continually introduces and then undermines. In this sense, as Matthews notes, the frame “sinks into the background of the monumental passion which it discloses.”

Lockwood’s outermost frame embeds Nelly’s central story. Yet because Nelly can report only what she witnesses, other narratives, in Beth Newman’s words, “keep the story going.” Isabella and Zillah provide Nelly with vital pieces for her narrative to Lockwood. Michael S. Macovski argues that these “interpretive valuations . . . distort almost every episode of the story,” which forces the reader to be the “last in a framed succession of interpreters.” As Miller argues, there is perhaps another interpreter between Lockwood and the reader—Ellis Bell, an editorial figure who readies Lockwood’s journal for publication.

The novel rather famously has been criticized for its refusal to allow its central lovers to tell their own stories. Bernard Duyfhuizen argues that the “embedding of multiple voices” in the frame narrative structure “encrypt[s] a story of passion and revenge that cannot speak for itself.” Matthews agrees, arguing, “the narrative frame is required by the incapacity of the central lovers to utter their relation. Perpetually frustrated, they cannot articulate the relation that would bind them, and so they leave a gap to be framed and filled by the loquacity of the narrators.” These claims ignore, however, the crucial story that a young Heathcliff tells Nelly

20 Miller, Fiction and Repetition, 52.
21 Miller, Fiction and Repetition, 51.
22 Matthews, “Framing in Wuthering Heights,” 27.
26 Matthews, “Framing in Wuthering Heights,” 27.
of his adventure with Catherine at Thrushcross Grange. It is the first separation of the juvenile lovers—Catherine taken in and gentrified by the Lintons; Heathcliff locked outside as a pariah—which culminates in Catherine’s economically and socially motivated union with Edgar. This scene marks Heathcliff’s first moment as a storyteller, a practice he rarely repeats, given that emotional candour may harm his plans for revenge. The novel’s most tense narrative relationship, however, lies between the competing voices of Lockwood and Nelly. That each attempts to wrest control of the story from the other suggests the impossibility of narrative authority and reliability.

Wuthering Heights begins with Lockwood’s portentous first journal entry: “1801—I have just returned from a visit to my landlord.”

Before we know who is writing, we are introduced to the occupation of that “capital fellow,” proprietor of the “perfect misanthropist’s Heaven” (11)—Heathcliff. While the first line sets the stage for the novel’s thematic concern with tenancy and inheritance, it also alludes to Scott’s Tales of My Landlord. Whereas Scott’s novels in the series are framed by an editor and a collector of tales told by traveling tenants, Brontë makes the tenant the recorder of the tale. Thus the mode of exchange that tacitly appears in Scott’s series, tenancy traded for storytelling, is transposed in Wuthering Heights: not only does Lockwood pay to be accommodated at the nearby Thrushcross Grange, but he also must access other avenues than his landlord to discover the family story. In fact, it takes an illness stemming from a dangerous trek through the snowy moors to occasion the means to hear the history from his caretaker, Ellen Dean. This is not to say, however, that Heathcliff remains taciturn. Lockwood finds Heathcliff “very intelligent on the topics we touched” (5), and later remarks that during his invalidity Heathcliff “was charitable enough to sit at my bedside a good hour, and talk on some other

subject than pills and draughts” (80). Lockwood’s frame instead blends Scott’s content with the Arabian Nights. In a reversal of Scheherazade gaining life through her loquacity, Lockwood hopes Nelly “prove[s] a regular gossip” to “rouse me to animation or lull me to sleep by her talk” (28). He later asks himself, “Why not have up Mrs. Dean to finish her tale? . . . [S]he’ll be delighted to find me capable of talking cheerfully” (80). Brontë’s 1801–2 setting for Lockwood’s frame also locates the novel at the center of the colonial politics that occasioned Sydney Owenson’s Wild Irish Girl (1806), a novel with which Wuthering Heights shares concerns over lines of inheritance and figures who disturb a familial community from the outside. The voyeuristic Englishman of Owenson’s novel meets resistance from the ancient Irish family he stalks, and in Wuthering Heights Nelly tells Lockwood, “We don’t in general take to foreigners here . . . unless they take to us first” (39). The relationship between these two novels only cements Terry Eagleton’s reading of Heathcliff as a symbol for Irish struggle.28

Heathcliff has been considered—similar to assessments of Maturin’s Melmoth before him—as a ubiquitous presence who coalesces the disjointed narrative. In a 14 August 1848 letter to her publisher W. S. Williams, Charlotte Brontë argues against a comparison between Heathcliff and her own Rochester of Jane Eyre, noting of the former: “The worst of it is, some of his spirit seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures: it haunts every moor and glen, and beckons in every fir-tree of the ‘Heights.’”29 The Athenæum criticized Brontë’s characterization of Heathcliff: “he might have been indicated with far fewer touches, in place of so entirely filling the canvas that there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence.”30 More recently, Melvin R. Watson contended that “Heathcliff is the story” and makes a “coherent

whole out of what might have been a chaotic heap.”

A reviewer for Britannia criticized Heathcliff’s apparent ability to inflict the entire narrative with his malaise: “Wuthering Heights would have been a far better romance if Heathcliff alone had been a being of stormy passions, instead of all the other characters being nearly as violent and destructive as himself.”

Yet, despite Lockwood’s assertion that his landlord “forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living,” Heathcliff is Wuthering Heights—the titular building, but not necessarily the novel. To promote Heathcliff as the singular centerpiece of Wuthering Heights reduces the importance of not only the novel’s characters, but also its narrators, the latter of which quite literally construct Heathcliff through selective memory and edited writing. But Heathcliff may be regarded as a symbol for the house he usurps, and vice versa. As Lockwood early on points out, Wuthering Heights is “strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones” (2). Later Nelly describes Heathcliff’s eyes as a “couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil’s spies” (50). Finding Heathcliff dead in the terminal frame of the novel, Nelly reports her struggles to prepare the body: “I tried to close his eyes—to distinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation, before any one else beheld it. They would not shut—they seemed to sneer at my attempts” (298). What was once closed from the world now lies open, and Wuthering Heights advertises its vacancy. Lockwood, for example, finds that the gate “yielded to my hand” (272). But this exposure is only possible at Heathcliff’s death; and significantly it is Heathcliff’s appearance at the house as a child that exemplifies the receptive freedom that he slowly destroys.

The Earnshaw patriarch leaves for business in Liverpool with the promise to return with a fiddle for Hindley and a whip for Catherine. To the children’s dismay, the fiddle comes back crushed, and the whip is lost “in attending on the stranger”—the young gypsy boy whom they name after a deceased child, the first example of an ominous name-doubling. Thus Mr. Earnshaw exchanges Catherine’s whip for a whipping boy. As Nelly quips, “So, from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house” (32). Heathcliff learns his first lesson when he is denied entrance into Thrushcross Grange. When he and Catherine are found spying through the windows at the Linton property, Catherine is immediately assimilated, despite her promise “to grow up as rude as savages” (40), and Heathcliff—stemming from Isabella’s pleadings to “‘Put him in the cellar’” (43)—is banished outdoors. The world outside Wuthering Heights closes on Heathcliff, and his soul-mate is forever lost. Heathcliff sees through the Lintons’ windows a life he claims not to desire. And it is a house built on the fabric of blood, “a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables” (41), which Heathcliff can subvert with the blood of violence and death at Wuthering Heights. When he returns from his mysterious three-year sojourn, Heathcliff begins what Carol Jacobs calls a “series of usurpations,” a systematic sealing-off of Wuthering Heights—acting first as tenant, then as landlord, and finally as warden.33 There he tries his hand at a sort of proto-eugenic experiment—a kind of island of Doctor Heathcliff—snuffing out Earnshaw traits and raising his own.

Once Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights, unaccountably wealthy and physically majestic, he offers his tenancy there to Hindley, a “liberal payment” (88) for such an unfrequented abode. Hindley quickly comes to realize his opponent’s plan: “‘He knocks at the door as if he were master here already!’” (155). After Hindley succumbs to his vices,

33 Carol Jacobs, “Wuthering Heights: At the Threshold of Interpretation,” boundary 2 7.3 (Spring 1979): 56.
anticipating Arthur’s drunken and dissolute death in *Wildfell Hall*, Heathcliff takes control of the house. Nelly puts it bluntly: “The guest was now the master of Wuthering Heights” (165). However, Heathcliff’s plan to unite the families through his son with Isabella is foiled by Linton’s invalidity. Even Edgar has hopes for the traits that Linton would inherit. As Nelly relates, “He had a fixed idea, I guessed by several observations he let fall, that as his nephew resembled him in person, he could resemble him in mind; for Linton’s letters bore few or no indications of his defective character” (235). Indeed, Linton’s physical and emotional traits far more resemble Edgar than his father. And Linton acknowledges this paternal difference and repudiates attempts by others to trace Heathcliff in his actions: “‘hate my father,’” he cries at Cathy, “‘and spare me for contempt!’” (235). He is perhaps the silver lining in the unsettling lines of inheritance in the novel; Linton is more a Linton than a Heathcliff. Still, his death opens up new possibilities for Heathcliff, and perhaps more disturbing ones, for Linton would have never grown into his father’s sequel.

With Linton out of the picture, Heathcliff must guarantee that the lines of inheritance fall to himself. Now that Heathcliff serves as “mortgagee,” he can establish Wuthering Heights as a prison of his memory in an attempt to store Catherine there and even to recreate her through hereditary lines. Once an heir, Hareton becomes nothing better than the “model of a jailer” (245). *The Athenæum* describes the house as a “prison which might be pictured from life.”34 Destroying the barriers that separate the families realizes Catherine’s contention: “‘If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be’” (73). As he later reveals to Nelly, “‘The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!’” (288). Heathcliff refers specifically to Cathy’s inherited traits: he is “seized with a sort of surprise at her

boldness, or, possibly, reminded by her voice and glance, of the person from whom she inherited it” (239). Yet he imprisons Cathy and Hareton, and keeps the former inside the property-wall, which ultimately forces their romantic union. Nelly’s claim, “[T]he crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two” (281), appears in fact to be an expression of Heathcliff’s desire. Despite the torture that the presence of the pair causes him, he nonetheless shackles them together, both physically and emotionally. In this sense, attentive to the biological principles of heredity, Heathcliff may hope to fashion a child that will combine Catherine’s traits that her daughter and nephew share. His attempt at creating a new Catherine to inhabit the structure of his mind comes from an inability to trap Catherine’s memory in this same space. Although she artfully spoke to him through interstices in wall-boards and nimbly climbed through skylights to see him when living, her ghost cannot cross the threshold of his psychic dreamscape. She is more jailor of his mind than prisoner.

Echoing the intricate and indispensible opening frame passages of Radcliffe, Brontë invests the frame to *Wuthering Heights* with crucial information that both anticipates and affects elements of Nelly’s main story. When Lockwood first encounters Wuthering Heights, its landlord stands leaning over the gate as porter to his metonymic house. Once Lockwood “pass[es] the threshold,” he gains access to the foundational space of Heathcliff’s psyche, the rooms that imprison Cathy and Hareton; and it is a jarring entrance, “without any introductory lobby or passage” (2). Utilitarian rooms, such as the kitchen, prove accessible: “its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye” (3). A storm and prodigious snowfall prevent Lockwood’s four-mile passage to Thrushcross Grange. Although he jumps over the gate in a haughty attempt to flee on his own, Wuthering Heights draws Lockwood back, and he is permitted respite for the night by the housekeeper, Zillah. Without Heathcliff’s knowledge, Zillah readies a room that is
meant to remain uninhabited. Carol Jacobs argues that Lockwood “penetrates to the innermost chamber of the structure and to the enclosed oaken bed within, and here he experiences the very center of Wuthering Heights as a dream, or, more accurately, as a series of nightmares.” ⁴⁵ In the secret, upper room of the house, Lockwood enters the realm of Heathcliff’s subconscious. But this is already Catherine’s space, too. She has etched a series of names on the ledge of a window. “This writing,” Lockwood surmises, “was nothing but a name repeated in all kind of characters, large and small—Catherine Earnshaw, her and there varied to Catherine Heathcliff and then again to Catherine Linton” (15). The middle set of names reveals the union of souls Lockwood experiences in the room. As Heathcliff has not yet become Mr. Heathcliff, the name that Nelly later posits she “should say in future” (88), it is a combination of first names, an equal pairing that blurs two identities, and anticipates Catherine’s later declaration, “‘I am Heathcliff’” (73). ⁴⁶

Lockwood encounters more of Catherine’s writing in the room, as the white spaces of her Bible provide room for her diary, but he fails to examine it fully, falling into another series of dreams. In the last of his dreams, which have now become so mingled with the narrative of his reality that it is difficult to tell them apart, Lockwood reaches out the window and grasps the “fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!” (20). Lockwood’s violent reaction, tearing the ghost’s wrists along the shards of broken glass, implicates him early on as a double of the destructive and violent Heathcliff. When Hindley attempts to shoot Heathcliff from inside the house, Nelly reports that the “charge exploded, and the knife, in springing back, closed into its owner’s wrist. Heathcliff pulled it away by main force, slitting up the flesh as it passed on” (157). ⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ So too does it presage the pair molding together in their connected graves.
⁴⁷ Lockwood’s other mirroring of Heathcliff comes via his treatment of animals. Heathcliff hangs Isabella’s dog and is the hoarder, we are to assume, of the dead rabbits that Lockwood notices in the opening frame. Moreover, Catherine tells Isabella, “‘he’d crush you, like a sparrow’s egg’” (91). For his part, Lockwood revels in the fact that he will “devastate the moors” (271) on a hunting expedition with a friend.
then breaks through the windows of the house to subdue Hindley with even more violence. But it is a reversal of thresholds: where Lockwood prevents the ghost’s entry into the room, Heathcliff keeps his tenants imprisoned in the house. Only Lockwood can escape the house; terrified of the reality of his dream, he leaves Heathcliff beckoning Catherine’s ghost to enter. Yet he must suffer for his passage out of Heathcliff’s domain. His perilous journey renders him an invalid under the care of a garrulous Nelly.

After Nelly concludes with the first part of her story, which takes Lockwood to young Heathcliff’s initial plans for revenge, she disingenuously apologizes for the minutiae of her history: “I forget these tales cannot divert you. I’m annoyed how I should dream of chattering on at such a rate; and your gruel so cold, and you nodding for bed! I could have told Heathcliff’s history, all that you need hear, in half-a-dozen words” (54). Lockwood begs her to continue in the same detail and reveals that he is “interested in every character . . . more or less” (54). Lockwood conspicuously cares to hear most about Cathy, however, a relationship that Nelly appears later to promote. “[W]ho knows how long you’ll be a stranger?” she tells Lockwood: “You’re too young to rest always contented, living by yourself; and I some way fancy no one could see Catherine Linton and not love her. You smile; but why do you look so lively and interested when I talk about her?” (226). Lockwood reveals his dream of running away with Cathy: “What a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!” (270). Lockwood’s desire to “migrate” to the city not only echoes the creature’s goals with his mate in Frankenstein, but it also belies his earlier assertion of being “cured of seeking pleasure in society, be it country or town” (23). Nelly’s attempt at matchmaking for Lockwood either suggests that she willfully
ignores the kindling love between the two prisoners of Wuthering Heights, Cathy and Hareton, or it demonstrates that the frame narrative has its own timeframe in which conditions change when Lockwood is absent. That is, Nelly will not have witnessed the budding (yet aggressive) love between Heathcliff’s inmates until the period of time between Lockwood leaving for his “six months in London” (264), and his return in September 1802 (271).

The terminal frame of <i>Wuthering Heights</i> begins at two points. The first when Lockwood records, “Thus ended Mrs. Dean’s story” (264), after which he travels to Wuthering Heights to give Heathcliff news of his departure. The second point is perhaps more explicit. Chapter 18 begins: “1802.—This September, I was invited to devastate the moors of a friend, in the North; and, on my journey to his abode, I unexpectedly came within fifteen miles of Gimmerton” (271). The mirroring of the two ends of the frames (“1801—” and “1802.—”) echoes not only Walton’s “You” addresses to his two frames, but also <i>Frankenstein</i>’s narrative symmetry. Lockwood’s opening and terminal frames occupy the same number of first-edition pages. Once Lockwood leaves, dreaming of what could have been with Cathy, Nelly’s world continues to exist. And crucial events occur that must be told in the terminal frame. This is, I believe, a crucial innovation on the Gothic frame narrative. When Radcliffe’s novels return to the frame (if they do), there is little indication that events may have transpired during the passage of time. Victor’s story in <i>Frankenstein</i>, moreover, takes approximately one month, but Walton neither makes an appearance in the central narrative, nor reveals any events aboard the ship.38 And although young Melmoth occasionally appears during Monçada’s narrative in <i>Melmoth the Wanderer</i>, Maturin fails to include events that may have transpired during the long and divergent tales. In <i>Wuthering Heights</i>, Lockwood can leave the world of the novel, but things carry on.

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38 This means that Walton records (only) two-thousand words per day of Victor’s story.
They also fall apart. He and readers must play catch-up. As with Hogg’s *Confessions*, this supplement comes in the form of a “sequel.”

Yet there has already been a sequel to the first narrative. Nelly’s first break appears after she leaves Wuthering Heights with Catherine after Heathcliff has mysteriously disappeared. Lockwood records that the “housekeeper’s story” had ended, and that he “felt rather disposed to defer the sequel of her narrative . . . now that she is vanished to her rest” (79). There is yet another sequel of sorts, which fittingly begins volume 2, just after Catherine’s death and Cathy’s birth. At each point, Lockwood justifies hearing the tale, on one hand eager for Nelly to “continue the history of Mr. Heathcliff . . . to the present day” (80), while on another, commenting, “She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator and I don’t think I could improve her style” (137). So powerful a narrator is Nelly that Lockwood’s interruptions in her narrative become less and less frequent until her initial story ends and he leaves Thrushcross Grange. But he cannot stay away for long as he is drawn magnetically back into Nelly’s story.

Brontë’s other innovation on the Gothic frame story comes through Lockwood’s sometimes active participation in the story, which is a reversal of the metalepsis that usually occurs in Gothic novels, but in fact may be an echo of Hogg’s appearance in *Confessions* as “James Hogg.” Lockwood travels inward through narrative layers as much as any character moves outward into his frame. Duyfhuizen argues that Lockwood’s involvement “blurs [the] embedding structure,” which renders the “threshold separating the levels extremely narrow . . . making it impossible for readers to believe that his transcription is totally objective and reliable.”

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39 Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission*, 219. Matthews observes, “Although we are meant to forget the narrative frame of Wuthering Heights periodically, Brontë does not allow us to relinquish it entirely. As if to recall us from the illusion of depth created by the frame’s perspective, the novel draws us back to the surface intermittently, in part
conspicuously exhibits his passivity: loaded emotions are buried beneath the creature’s resonant words, and Walton fails to realize Victor’s only desire: to see the creature dead. And the bumbling editor of Hogg’s *Confessions* concludes the novel with confusion, his only means of narrative interference the pilfering of the sinner’s preserved corpse. Lockwood, on the other hand, actively attempts to become part of the story. Although he understands that Heathcliff “evidently wished no repetition of my intrusion,” Lockwood repeatedly returns to Wuthering Heights in what appears an attempt to remind its inhabitant (and readers) that he exists.

Moreover, Lockwood challenges Nelly’s authority over the text by transcribing her story “in her own words, only a little condensed” (137). Whereas Victor edits Walton’s transcription, acting as an author-cum-editor, Lockwood flaunts his role as intervening editor who refuses to stay in the background. Nelly, as far as we know, never has access to Lockwood’s writing; the novel’s many narrative frames are not a cooperative effort between storytellers and editors—not like Walton and Victor or even the Shelleys—but rather forcefully one-sided. This anticipates Gilbert’s editing of Helen’s diary in *Wildfell Hall*, from which he removes “a few passages here and there” (110), even though he earlier promised fidelity in copying the “particularities and circumstantial details” from his “faded old journal” (10).

Nelly feigns shock as she begins the conclusion of her narrative, “‘Ah! you have not heard of Heathcliff’s death, I see!’” (275). It is as quick as Woolf’s “Time Passes” deaths in *To the Lighthouse* and as shocking as Catherine’s rather uncelebrated death (“About twelve o’clock that night was born the Catherine you saw at Wuthering Heights: a puny, seven-months’ child; and two hours after the mother died” [145]). The rest of the novel concerns the “sequel of Heathcliff’s history,” what Nelly terms a “‘queer’ end’” (275). As with Hogg’s Robert...
Wringhim, whose death and preservation are also curious, to say the least, Nelly provides the details of Heathcliff’s slow decay. It is significant, however, that what dominates Lockwood’s closing frame is not “Heathcliff’s history,” but rather Nelly. To adhere to the example of previous frame narratives, her story should occupy the center. Instead, her sequel makes up the majority of the terminal frame; her storytelling prowess usurps Lockwood’s authority, as he begins to disappear entirely from the text. Despite his significance in opening the novel and introducing its chief actors, Lockwood’s actions during his final visit to Wuthering Heights demonstrate his ultimate superfluity not only to the families, but perhaps even to the narrative.

Seeing Cathy and Hareton step outside together to gaze at the moon, Lockwood felt irresistibly impelled to escape them again; and, pressing a remembrance into the hand of Mrs. Dean, and disregarding her expostulations at my rudeness, I vanished through the kitchen, as they opened the house-door, and so should have confirmed Joseph in his opinion of his fellow-servant’s gay indiscretions, had he not, fortunately, recognized me for a respectable character by the sweet ring of a sovereign at his feet. (300)

Once the main link between reader and story, Lockwood becomes but a consumer of Nelly’s story himself, paying the storyteller for her tale and buying Joseph’s silence. He slips out of Wuthering Heights and out of Wuthering Heights. It becomes Nelly’s novel, as much as it is the creature’s in Frankenstein. Raised alongside Hindley, Catherine, and Heathcliff, Nelly grows up as part of the family; she is as much a product of the tense inter-familial dynamic as the central characters who never can tell their tale.

Opinions of Nelly have ranged from Charlotte Brontë’s assessment, “For a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity, look at the character of Nelly Dean,” to James Hafley’s
controversial and pithily titled 1958 essay, “The Villain in Wuthering Heights.”\textsuperscript{40} Most other critics have fallen somewhere in between. Newman argues that Nelly functions as a “fetishized substitute” for Lockwood’s indirect gaze on Cathy.\textsuperscript{41} She is remarkably adept at fading into the background as an objective observer, as she keeps the “door of communication open . . . to watch how they would settle their disagreement” (63). Fredrick Burwick reads Nelly as “much the manipulator as the reporter of events,” and notes that Nelly’s frankness about her lying “encourages the reader to believe [her] narrative, but the knowledge that she lies must affect our reading of her moral judgements.”\textsuperscript{42} Indeed, Nelly is the consummate tale-teller inside her own tale. Edgar chastises Nelly for her fictions: “‘The next time you bring a tale to me, you shall quit my service, Ellen Dean’” (113). Nelly’s own propensity to story-tell affects Cathy, who creates “fanciful tales” (169), and must complain, “‘I didn’t tell a tale’” (217), at Nelly’s accusations. Cathy learned from her mentor, who “invented and reiterated” (181) tales to sooth the child. Nelly’s capacity for fiction belies the reliability of her narrative. She even boasts of the depth of her reading, a certain harbinger of trouble for heroines past. “I have read more than you would fancy,” she tells Lockwood: “You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into” (55). It is perhaps Nelly’s hypocritical treatment of writing that defines her. Although she carries letters between Heathcliff and Catherine, and is rebuked by Edgar for “carrying tales” (136), she threatens to fire the milkman whom Cathy enlists to deliver letters to Linton. An avid reader who exists through stories, she nonetheless vacillates between, on the one hand hoarding Isabella’s letter (“Any relic of the dead is precious” [119]), while on the other destroying Cathy’s


\textsuperscript{41} Newman, “The Situation of the Looker-On,” 1033.

private affairs with Linton by burning their love letters. And she is a judgmental critic: “they appeared very worthless trash to me” (199).

Nelly’s two most significant manipulations, however, involve Heathcliff. Displaying tendencies towards violence in his story to Nelly, Heathcliff boasts that he “‘might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley’s blood!’” (42). But these are only dreams for the child, whose means of revenge against Hindley have heretofore rested on blackmail. It is rather Nelly who plants in Heathcliff the confidence to enact actual violence. “‘[Y]ou could knock him down in a twinkling,’” she contends: “‘don’t you feel that you could?’” (50). Thus Nelly hastens Heathcliff’s violence in Wuthering Heights, the tactic that he uses most advantageously, as he subdues his subjects through not only threats of physical brutality, but actual violence as well.43

Significantly, Heathcliff’s culture of fear is entirely domestic, taking place behind closed doors. His attitude outside remains relatively amiable, coaxing Cathy to visit Wuthering Heights during their chance encounter in the moors, and revealing decidedly human emotions to Nelly, leaning against a tree outside Thrushcross Grange following Catherine’s death. A reviewer for the New Monthly Magazine noted this theme: “‘Wuthering, ’ . . . as expressive in provincial phraseology of ‘the frequency of atmospheric tumults out of doors’ must do, however much the said tumults may be surpassed in frequency and violence by the disturbances that occur in doors.’”44 Wuthering Heights functions as yet another frame of Wuthering Heights, a threshold that further separates the violence from the outside world, what N. M. Jacobs would term an

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43 Heathcliff’s violence against Cathy is particularly jarring. She demands keys to the door and attempts to wrest them from Heathcliff’s hand. He pauses for a moment, reminded of Catherine’s fiery passion, but Cathy’s “action recalled him to the present,” and he subdues her with a “shower of terrific slaps” (239).


46 “[O]bserving on the floor a curl of light hair, fastened with a silver thread; which, on examination, I ascertained to have been taken from a locket hung round Catherine’s neck. Heathcliff had opened the trinket and cast out its contents, replacing them by a black lock of his own. I twisted the two, and enclosed them together” (148). Nelly’s act, coupled with the eventual burial of the three bodies adjacent to one another, realizes Catherine’s plan to unite the two men: “she seized Linton’s reluctant fingers and crushed them into [Heathcliff’s]” (84).

 Those locked outside rely on gossip and tall-tales; only narrators—and, most explicitly, Nelly—access the novel’s violent interior.

Nelly’s greatest achievement, however, is the manipulation of the circumstances surrounding Heathcliff’s death. She reports to Lockwood that Heathcliff was badly wounded following a gun accident, but her final tale justifies Heathcliff’s wishes: “I concealed the fact of his having swallowed nothing for four days,” she admits, “fearing it might lead to trouble” (299). Nelly prevents any speculation of suicide so that Heathcliff cannot be denied the burial he desires. That Nelly acts as the final agent in Heathcliff’s plan not only suggests that she in fact works to realize Heathcliff’s goal, but it also provides a fitting echo of her twisting together Heathcliff’s and Edgar’s locks of hair in Catherine’s locket. Nelly acts as Heathcliff’s confessor, though he admits, “‘My confessions have not relieved me’” (289). But it is a path neither to Heaven nor damnation that Nelly aids him in taking, but rather one to purgatory. Nelly also informs Lockwood of some reports of ghosts in the area: “‘the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their bible that he walks,’” but she immediately qualifies these reports as “‘Idle tales’” (299). Her contention proves persuasive. Lockwood’s words conclude the novel: “I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (300). Lockwood alters the entire emotional resonance of the text: what was “wuthering heights” is now a “soft wind
breathing through the grass.” Moreover, these words that dispute the supernatural come from a man who, one year earlier, had run screaming for Wuthering Heights after his violent encounter with Catherine’s ghost. “‘If the little fiend had got in at the window,’” he screams at Heathcliff, “‘she probably would have strangled me!’” (22). There is very real danger in this early dream, but by the end of the novel, Lockwood is incredulous, aligning himself with Nelly’s skepticism about the villagers’ sights.

The novel’s conclusion appears to have affected reviewers, too. In June 1848, G. W. Peck writes, “The characters are drawn with dramatic force and made to seem alive, yet when we lay the book aside, they collapse, they die they vanish,” and Peck then supplements his contention, arguing that the novel “will live a short and brilliant life, and then die and be forgotten. . . . Poor Cathy’s ghost will not walk the earth forever; and the insane Heathcliff will soon rest quietly in his coveted repose.”47 Yet obviously Wuthering Heights has achieved a shelf-life that Peck could not have imagined. Its characters continue to haunt readers. Despite its oppressive Gothic atmosphere, Wuthering Heights does conclude rather positively. Catherine gets her wish of uniting her two lovers in the grave, and Heathcliff gets to molder into Catherine first (as he removes the adjacent walls of their respective coffins). There are still questions, however, of who will be the next generation of tenants to hallow the halls of the dueling structures and whose set of traits these tenants inherited. Anne Brontë would borrow from Wuthering Heights both structurally and thematically, but her novel—on the surface less atmospherically dark—traces lines of inheritance to far more Gothic levels.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall consists of a protracted letter from the narrator, Gilbert Markham, to his friend, known only as Halford. Gilbert’s letter embeds a transcription of Helen

Graham’s diary, a formal move Garrett Stewart sees as the “frailest and most bizarre of provocations.”  

Gilbert explains that the impetus for his letter is a debt to his friend, whom we later learn married Gilbert’s sister, Rose. In a previous meeting to which we are never privy, Halford gave Gilbert a “very particular and interesting account of the most remarkable occurrences of [his] early life.” That Gilbert was unable to repay the debt immediately with a story of his own has soured Halford’s recent correspondence. In an explicit allusion to the found manuscript trope, however, Gilbert relates that he has “been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times; I am now in a very proper frame of mind for amusing you with an old world story” (9). Gilbert transcribes his history from a “faded old journal” because his “memory alone—tenacious as it is” proves not strong enough for him “to depend upon” (10). Now that Gilbert is in the correct “frame of mind,” his opening frame concludes. Stewart contends, “Whether framed or framing, each phase or level of story admits—and transmits—the libidinal economy of the other.”

Elizabeth Langland agrees that *Wildfell Hall* presents “narrative as exchange,” and she reads the novel’s “narrative within a narrative not as hierarchical or detachable parts but as interacting functions within a transgressive economy.”

The exchange of histories between Gilbert and Halford demonstrates the commodity value of

50 Stewart, *Novel Violence*, 104.
51 Elizabeth Langland, *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State UP, 2002), 34. Gilbert makes the themes of commodity and exchange even more explicit when he interrupts his own narrative: “This is the first instalment of my debt. If the coin suits you, tell me so, and I’ll send you the rest at my leisure: if you would rather remain my creditor than stuff your purse with such ungainly, heavy pieces,—tell me still, and I’ll pardon your bad taste, and willingly keep the treasure to myself” (19). In his reading of Balzac’s 1830 novella *Sarrasine*, Roland Barthes argues that the novel is the story of a force (the narrative) and the action of this force on the very contract controlling it. Thus, the two parts of the text are not detached from one another according to the so-called principle of “nested narratives” (a narrative within the narrative). The nesting of the blocks of narrative is not (merely) ludic but (also) economic. Narrative does not engender itself by metonymic extension (subject to its passage through the stages of desire), by paradigmatic alternation: narrative is determined not by a desire to narrate but by a desire to exchange. (*S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang, 1974], 90.)
secrets. Although the men are friends, the novel could not work if Halford had already known Gilbert’s history. We must assume, then, that Gilbert has remained silent about a subject that he wishes to hide. He tells Halford that he will include all the minute details, “save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporary interest to the writer” (110). But it should be Helen who desires silence, as it is her story that makes up the emotional—and Gothic—core of the novel. That Helen gets no word in either the opening or terminal frame about the terms of this exchange, Langland argues, in fact “reaffirms the patriarchal status quo of masculine priority and privilege.”

Elizabeth Signorotti similarly argues, “Markham’s appropriation and editing of Helen’s history reflects an attempt to contain and control her.” Eventually, Gilbert appropriates Helen’s final words into his terminal frame. Her secret is out and channeled through another voice. If we are to follow Miller’s addition of the “editor” Ellis Bell as yet another frame to Wuthering Heights, then we might read Anne Brontë through Acton Bell as even further displaced from her novel. In the case of Wildfell Hall, Halford acts as the silent editor, much in the same vein as Margaret Saville in Frankenstein.

Gilbert explains that he “can liken” Halford to an “old coat, unimpeachable in texture, but easy and loose—that has conformed itself to the shape of the wearer, and which he may use as he pleases” (35). The clothes metaphor serves to justify Gilbert’s “use” of Halford as impetus for revealing the history. The coat conceals Gilbert (and Acton Bell and Anne Brontë) from the disturbing subjects within and removes the authors’ culpability by making any public dissemination of the private letter Halford’s doing. Comparing Halford’s frame to a coat also explicitly echoes the clothes-theory frames of Swift’s A Tale of a Tub and Carlyle’s Sartor

52 Langland, Telling Tales, 33.
Resartus. The editors of the Parlour Library edition, which appeared in 1854, evidently also felt inclined to “use” Halford’s frame as they pleased, for they excised the entire opening frame of the novel. Many subsequent English editions were based on this corrupt version, which begins, “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827.” The opening call to “You” seems to address the reader, but Halford’s name nevertheless appears awkwardly some ten pages in, and then several times thereafter. It must be acknowledged, however, that Halford’s frame, which several times bleeds into Gilbert’s story, has its moments of inconsistency. Gilbert provides a lengthy description of Helen, telling Halford, “I don’t know whether I’ve told you before,” yet surely Halford has met Helen, his sister-in-law and wife of his good friend.

As with Wuthering Heights, contemporary critics found the novel’s form distracting. A reviewer for The Examiner contends that, “[o]wing to the faulty construction of the tale, it is scarcely possible to analyze it.” Josephine McDonagh observes that the “labyrinthine structure . . . strains the realism of the text.” Despite these criticisms, Wildfell Hall is a bold novel that reveals the unsavory, the dangerous, and the libidinal. At a full three volumes it stands alone, unlike Anne Brontë’s previous novel, Agnes Grey, which was packaged (or perhaps framed) by Wuthering Heights the previous year. In an October 1848 review, E. P. Whipple calls the novel a “less unpleasing story” than Wuthering Heights. The structure of Wildfell Hall leads to a sort of heart of darkness; as we move inward, from Gilbert’s letter-writing frame to his letter-story of meeting Helen to Helen’s diary, the Gothic becomes increasingly powerful. The climax of Gilbert’s letter-story comes at his brazen, violent act against Helen’s brother, Frederick Lawrence. Thinking Lawrence a rival suitor for Helen’s hand (and conveniently ignoring his

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54 This quote appears in the Oxford edition on page 10.
56 Josephine McDonagh, Introduction to Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), xxxiii.
resemblance to young Arthur). Gilbert attacks him, “impelled by some fiend at [his] elbow” (98), knocking Lawrence from his horse with a heavy blow to the head from the metal base of a riding-whip. This impetuous violence reveals a new, dark side to Gilbert, one that connects him to Arthur in much the same way that Emily Brontë coded parts of Heathcliff onto Lockwood. Signorotti notes that “Markham’s account—albeit unwittingly—further reveals the close parallels between himself and the men described in Helen’s story, particularly between himself and Arthur.”

Both men attempt to spy on Helen, reading their own anxieties, for example, onto the subjects of her paintings and the signatures that appear in her books. Moreover, as Lorene M. Birden points out, the “humor is concentrated in the outer frames,” but nothing remotely comedic occupies Helen’s serious and weighty diary. It is as The Examiner complained: “Just at the time when we begin to feel some interest about Markham and the lady, we are thrown back upon her previous history, [and] we cannot go back and recover the enthusiasm which we have been obliged to dismiss.” This is precisely the point. Helen’s diary irrevocably darkens the novel. Humor and the pastoral romance collapse as the core erupts with Gothic intrigue.

Despite the dark resonances at the heart of Wildfell Hall, categorizing it as a Gothic novel seems a stretch, not only because it features humor, but also because it comes in the wake of the seemingly more disturbing Wuthering Heights. Yet the titular edifice appears more as an ancestor of the Radcliffean Gothic than the previous WH. Gilbert observes that Wildfell Hall is “in ruins,” and that there were only “two or three rooms made habitable” (13) in the “superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era” (20). The windows of the uninhabitable portion of the house “were in darkness, and many exhibited their black, cavernous gulfs, entirely

58 Signorotti, “‘A Frame Perfect and Glorious,’” 22. As with Lockwood in Wuthering Heights, Gilbert kills birds, a harbinger of evil in Agnes Grey.
destitute of glazing or framework” (47). The house and its inhabitants become part of local
legend, stories which are passed “respecting the haunted Hall and its departed occupants” (21).
The reversal here is that the mysterious tenant lives in the habitable portion, unlike the mother in
Radcliffe’s A Sicilian Romance. Helen first appears, nevertheless, in familiar Gothic attire, “a
tall, lady-like figure, clad in black” (16). Brontë transforms the genre by focusing on the mystery
of Helen’s life, not her death, the secret of Helen’s public appearance, not her disappearance.
Gilbert’s voracious behavior—seen in the Ichabod Crane-like moment of “demolishing the tea,
ham, and toast”—manifests itself in an unhealthy curiosity about Helen’s situation. Whereas the
other country-folk gossip, Gilbert turns to invasion and violence in his role as amorous detective.
But it is Helen who lifts her own veil, in the form of her diary.61

Where both Lockwood’s and Nelly’s involvements in their own narratives challenge their
reliability, Gilbert’s immersion in his narrative undermines any and all means of objectivity. As
with Lockwood’s repeated intrusions, Gilbert makes no secret of his “pretext[s] for invading the
sanctum” (63). Wildfell Hall’s “time-eaten air-holes, and its too lonely, too unsheltered
situation” (20) in fact provide access for the erratic narrator. That Gilbert names his dog Sancho
makes him a Don Quixote-figure, a disturbed, disguised, and profoundly unreliable narrator. He
is as well motivated by jealousy, demonstrated not only through his violence against Lawrence,
but also through his arrogance in being unable to comprehend Helen’s reluctance to love. “I was
by no means a fop,” Gilbert boasts to Halford, questioning Helen’s social restraint. When Gilbert
presents Helen with an expensive edition of Scott’s Marmion, he demonstrates his ignorance, if

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61 In fact, the Gothic evils of Gilbert’s frame prove to be his admirers. Eliza, for example, possesses an “expression
various, and ever changing, but always either preternaturally . . . wicked, or irresistibly bewitching—often both” (17).
not rejection, of social decorum. Making Helen a debtor anticipates Gilbert’s later debt to Halford, another character Gilbert chastises for not being “naturally communicative” (9), and it woefully ignores her financial limitations and her clear attempts to hide her flight from Arthur through the guise of widowhood.

Helen’s portrait of Arthur proves to be the initial spark that leads to her life of misery. On the back of another painting “was his own face that I had sketched there and forgotten to rub out!” (132). Intrigued and wanting a motive for flirtation, Arthur steals the portrait and then finds a version in miniature to possess as well. Although she burns the latter, her fate is sealed, her curse has begun. Echoing the misunderstanding over painting between Austen’s Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Elton, Arthur describes the power of another portrait, “‘I should fall in love with her, if I hadn’t the artist before me’” (135). It is an ill-fated union based on appearance rather than personal depth. Helen’s inability to see the monster behind the gentlemen—or perhaps the back of the picture—gives way to her similar refusal to acknowledge the real burden of her doomed son.

Arthur’s most brazen act occurs when he reads Helen’s diary. Looking surreptitiously over her shoulder, Arthur snarls, “‘With your leave, my dear, I’ll have a look at this’” (309). He wrestles the diary away and quickly comes to know her plans for escape. It is a disturbing scene reminiscent of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, when Count Fosco reads Marian

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62 Gilbert’s gift also has subtle structural implications. *Marmion*, like many a Scott work, is heavily framed. Each of the six cantos opens with a different dedictory introduction, and an envoy to the reader concludes the volume. Thematically, *Wildfell Hall* is perhaps most indebted to Tennyson. In a significant gender reversal, Anne Brontë links Tennyson’s Mariana to her cuckolded Lord Lowborough, who exclaims “‘O God, that I might die!’” (289), quite close to Mariana’s last line, “‘O God, that I were dead!’” (Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Mariana,” *Tennyson’s Poetry*, ed. Robert W. Hill, Jr. [New York: Norton, 1999], 36-37, line 84). Moreover, echoing “The Lady of Shalott,” Helen is referred to as the “lady of Wildfell Hall” (71). Arthur functions as Helen’s Lancelot, a surprising role reversal given his legendary name, and all the more intriguing if we factor Tennyson’s own doomed A. H. into the mix.

63 Gilbert perceives Helen’s coldness as an unwarranted bias: “I was annoyed at the continual injustice she had done me from the very dawn of our acquaintance. Without knowing anything about my real disposition and principles, she was evidently prejudiced against me” (31).
Halcombe’s diary and then adds his own postscript to the end. When Arthur commandeers Helen’s diary, he not only foils her attempt to leave with young Arthur, but he also he breaks a narrative frame. As with the creature’s interruption of Walton’s journal in the terminal frame to *Frankenstein*, Arthur’s transgression arrests the progress of both Helen’s design and her narrative. Two months later, Helen begins her journal anew, and immediately commences her project of reframing young Arthur’s constitution in a desperate effort to prevent his alcoholism. Her plan to leave thwarted by Arthur’s possession of her diary, Helen is forced to proceed on another extreme, to subdue young Arthur’s troubled disposition through environmental discouragements aimed at counteracting his father’s biological traits. In the terminal frame to the novel, Arthur dies, and Helen eventually accepts Gilbert’s advances. Thus young Arthur is to be raised in a new frame, outside the noxious influence of his father. But the question remains whether the environmental change will work, or whether young Arthur is already his father’s sequel, and thus a monster who invades and infects the outer frame.

A reviewer for *Britannia* concluded of *Wuthering Heights*: “temper is often spoiled in the years of childhood. ‘The child is father of the man.’ The pains and crosses of its youthful years

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64 In his 1621 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton quotes Plutarch: “*Ebrii gignunt Ebrios*, one drunkard begets another” ([London: Chatto & Windus, 1891], 138). In a note to his poem *The Botanic Garden* (1791), Erasmus Darwin writes, “It is remarkable, that all the diseases from drinking spirituous or fermented liquors are liable to become hereditary, even to the third generation, gradually increasing, if the cause be continued, till the family becomes extinct” [London: J. Johnson, 1799], 156). Darwin’s observation of hereditary alcoholism is revolutionary, if not borderline sensationalist. Nonetheless, his words—which also provide an early theory of evolutionary “survival of the fittest”—had a profound impact on early nineteenth century tracts on alcohol, often driven by temperance leagues. “[I]t is conceded on all hands,” one temperance organization concluded, “that there are many persons who from constitutional peculiarities or hereditary tendencies can take absolutely no alcohol at all without narcotism” ([New York: D. Appleton, 1835], 16). A reviewer for *Blackwood’s*, which the Brontës cherished reading, found MacNish’s argument flawed. “The distinction here made between choice and necessity, seems to us scarcely justifiable,” the reviewer argues: “We never shall believe, that whole classes of men have... an innate and constitutional fondness for liquor” (“The Anatomy of Drunkenness,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 23 [April 1828]: 483).
are engrafted in its blood, and form a sullen and a violent disposition.”

Using Wordsworth’s famous quote from “My heart leaps up when I behold,” the reviewer suggests childhood experience affects adult disposition. The Brontës go further in their investigation of traits “engrafted in [the] blood” by demonstrating that character—especially its negative aspects—form hereditarily and that environment only exacerbates latent tendencies that ultimately cannot be avoided. A reviewer for the Atlas considers Wuthering Heights a “sprawling story, carrying us, with no mitigation of anguish, through two generations of sufferers.”

Nelly makes the lines of inheritance explicit, implying not only the fact of biological transmission, but also the power of naming: “The little one was always Cathy: it formed to him a distinction from the mother, and yet a connection with her; and his attachment sprang from its relation to her, far more than from its being his own” (162). Another reviewer argues that the novel “lifts the veil and shows boldly the dark side of our depraved nature.” However, the Radcliffian veil for the Brontës reveals not only the extremes of romantic obsession and the depravity of revenge—or rather Percy Shelley’s “Fear / And Hope, twin Destinies”—but also the inner-workings of nature; lines of inheritance are issues of biological determinacy, not wax figures, but flesh and blood monsters who taint the populous. In the novels, we get to see the effects of these atomic inner workings, and it is what (Doctor) Heathcliff wants: “‘Had I been born where laws are less strict, and tastes less dainty, I should treat myself to a slow vivisection of those two, as an evening’s amusement’” (238). Q. D. Leavis observes that in Wuthering Heights

Catherine is judged by the author in the parallel but notably different history of the daughter who, inheriting her mother’s name, and likenesses both physical and

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psychological, is shown by deliberate choice, and trial and error, developing the maturity and therefore achieving happiness, that the mother failed in, whereas we have seen the mother hardening into a fatal immaturity which destroys herself and those (Heathcliff and Edgar principally) involved with her.  

Cathy is, in a sense, redeemed at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. She shares her teenage years in misery with Hareton, and they both possess the capacity to heal the wrongs the other endured. Hareton provides Cathy the unconditional love she lost at her father’s death, and Cathy gives Hareton the promise of manners and education, what Gilbert and Gubar call a move “away from nature and toward culture.” It is an uneasy transition, however, and both stumble on the path to happiness. Hareton collects books, hiding them from a destructive Heathcliff, who evidently sees education as power. But Cathy berates the effort, caustically retorting, “you gathered them, as a magpie gathers silver spoons, for the mere love of stealing! They are of no use to you” (267). By the end, Cathy’s rough exterior begins to chip away, and she helps Hareton with his reading through more gentle and flirtatious barbs. We should have seen the happy union coming. As Jane Eyre is an heir all along, so too is Hareton an heir of the Heights and the Grange. It is not a cozy ending; Lizzie and Darcy they are not; but given the trajectory of the novel, it seems hopeful that a new generation can shake off the hereditary burdens of their forefathers to lead, at the very least, lives of quiet grandeur, and celebrate the end of Heathcliff’s biological legacy. Yet Heathcliff’s ominous declaration, “I’m seeking a tenant for the Grange” (254), is a never-ending prophecy, an acknowledgment of basic biological truths of reproduction and transmission. In 1849, George Bacon Wood warned of the “danger of constant intermarriages between near

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70 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 301.
71 Gilbert and Gubar point out the potential play between Hareton and heir/ton (The Madwoman in the Attic, 301).
connexions, who may be supposed to have the same defects of constitution.” In the end, Cathy and Hareton go to live at Thrushcross Grange and will presumably create new tenants, ones who may unite the pernicious traits of siblings Hindley and Catherine.

The fate of the world at the end of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is even less sunny. Anne Brontë writes in the preface to the second edition of the novel, “I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it,” and Brontë promises fidelity rather than flattery in drawing her characters: “I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear.” The novel serves, for Brontë, as a warning to readers not to follow her characters into the traps of evil: “if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain” (4). *Wildfell Hall* is modeled at least in part on Branwell Brontë’s forays into adultery and dissolution from alcoholism, the former of which Anne saw firsthand working as a governess where her brother was also briefly employed. The latter, regrettably, became part of the sisters’ everyday lives. Brontë steps around the real issue, however, that pervades her novel: it is potentially not just Arthur who has been trapped in the biological hold of alcoholism, but Helen, too. Biological lines of inheritance make change for some characters impossible, no matter the nurturing effort to suppress dangerous tendencies. Echoing Rochester’s ill-fated marriage to Bertha Mason, who suffers from hereditary madness in *Jane Eyre*, Helen Graham marries a monster. The horror, however, is that she makes one, too.

Tucked away in Helen’s diary is a short explanation concerning why she was brought up by her aunt and uncle. During an argument, Arthur questions Helen about whether her father

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“has thought proper to drink himself to death?” (227). Significantly, either Helen or Gilbert attempted to hide this fact: before Helen gives Gilbert her diary, she “hastily tore away a few leaves from the end” (109). The section in question is not revealed, for Gilbert begins transcribing Helen’s diary just before she meets Arthur, and her childhood remains a mystery. (Gilbert also stops Helen’s diary when she mentions him as the “beau of the parish” [335], which further links her two loves.) The reader must fill in the gaps in the history here to infer that Helen’s father was in fact a drunk, who forced Helen to flee. The Markham family, who brew their own ale, remain inconsiderate of Helen’s situation, making “hospitable attempts to force [wine] upon them” (27), which are delicately refused. Gilbert’s wording is curious: to be simultaneously hospitable and forceful is quite a feat.

Far more conspicuous is Arthur’s struggle with alcohol; it is the subject, in fact, of the majority of Helen’s diary. Arthur several times leaves Helen for months on end for holidays of debauchery in London. But it is when he brings the drinking party inside their home that Helen really notices the deleterious effects of spirits. He invites his friends for hunting trips and social gatherings, the latter of which lead to his open adultery and steady physical decline. Helen addresses the latent trouble early on: “His very heart . . . is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought it” (157). Nevertheless, at the very center of the novel (as with Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*) young Arthur is born. Her husband’s constant inebriety leads Helen to fear for young Arthur’s life. “[W]here hope rises fear must lurk behind,” she writes: “He may live to curse his own existence” (202). Young Arthur is doomed from the start; he is but a “tiny epitome of [his] father” (203).

Helen appears confident in the competing effects of biology and environment on a developing character, far before Francis Galt would coin the term nature vs. nurture in the late
nineteenth century. Environment for Helen is a factor in changing condition; she admits, “I am familiarized with vice and almost a partaker in his sins. Things that formerly shocked and disgusted me, now seem only natural” (222). Her husband is a “contaminating influence” (275), which only exacerbates her child’s connection to Arthur’s deranged “spirit and temperament” (277). Arthur and his drunkard friends “delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show, and to instruct in all the evil habits he could acquire,” and most distressingly young Arthur “learnt to tipple wine like papa” (296). Helen calls her husband’s intemperance “monstrous,” but the real Gothic horror of the novel is that Helen and Arthur have made their own monster. As Wood argues in 1849, “when both [parents] are diseased . . . the chances of escape on the part of the children are greatly diminished.” Still, Helen attempts to assuage young Arthur’s growing dependence through a sort of pre-Pavlovian conditioning. Her endeavor to rehabilitate young Arthur is worth quoting in length:

I have succeeded in giving him an absolute disgust for all intoxicating liquors, which I hope not even his father or his father’s friends will be able to overcome. He was inordinately fond of them for so young a creature, and, remembering my unfortunate father as well as his, I dreaded the consequences of such a taste. But if I had stinted him, in his usual quantity of wine, or forbidden him to taste it altogether, that would only have increased his partiality for it, and made him regard it as a greater treat than ever. I therefore gave him quite as much as his father was accustomed to allow him; as much, indeed, as he desired to have—but into every glass I surreptitiously introduced a small quantity of tartar-emetic, just enough to produce inevitable nausea and depression without positive

\footnote{Wood, A Treatise on the Practice of Medicine, 157.}
sickness. Finding such disagreeable consequences invariably to result from this indulgence, he soon grew weary of it, but the more he shrank from the daily treat the more I pressed it upon him, till his reluctance was strengthened to perfect abhorrence. (313-314)

Helen acknowledges that the monster is “grounded in his nature” (314), and that no amount of environmental punishment or stimulus will completely break young Arthur’s condition. Yet she institutes a “regime of regulation and training,” in McDonagh’s words. Eventually, all alcoholic beverages (for Helen has introduced a wide variety) become “objects of terror” (314) for young Arthur; once innocent and happy, he is forced to find Gothic fear in a natural substance.

Helen’s flight from her husband, and even his eventual death, cannot reform the life they created. Still, Helen’s desire to remove her husband entirely from her child’s life involves an erasure of his name. Arthur becomes “one who shall be nameless” (316), a creature rather than a father. Wildfell Hall thus explores the ramifications of a monster creating a monster. It is Victor’s fear in Frankenstein: “one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror.”

McDonagh argues that the novel’s moral ground lies in “universal redemption—in which even the drunkard Arthur can be saved through suffering at the end of the novel—and an ideology of self-help through regulation and training of the body’s appetites and passions.” Certainly, this is what Helen hopes for her son. Brontë’s implication, however, proves far more disturbing.

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75 McDonagh, Introduction to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, xxiii.
77 McDonagh, Introduction to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, xvii.
Young Arthur is the child and grandchild of alcoholics—two men, indeed, who drank themselves to death. From both paternal and maternal sides is young Arthur made a monster. Cathy at least had her father, and Hareton his mother to soften the violent passions of the other parent. Hints at young Arthur’s dissolution come through Gilbert’s pen. *Wildfell Hall* concludes with Gilbert telling Halford, “I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived together, and how blessed we still are in each other’s society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us” (417). Young Arthur is conspicuously absent, or like his father, unnamed, in Gilbert’s concluding words. One can see an ominous anticipation of Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*; the oldest child, as well named after his father, takes the matters of his half-siblings into his own disturbed hands. We meet young Arthur, after all, like Isabella’s dog in *Wuthering Heights*, incapacitated and hanging from a tree.

The Gothic of these novels lies in the questionable efficacy of these attempts at environmental refashioning. In *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood muses, “if I surrendered my heart to that young person, and the daughter turned out a second edition of the mother!” (136). Lockwood’s words overtly blend biological and textual production. In her Preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë articulates the authorial requirement to allow a creation to be read, criticized, and manipulated by the public:

> Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is. But this I know; the writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master—something that at times strangely wills and works for itself. He may lay down rules and devise principles, and to rules and principles it will perhaps for years lie in subjection; and then, haply without any warning of revolt, there comes a time when it will no longer
consent to ‘harrow the valleys, or be bound with a band in the furrow’—when it ‘laughs at the multitude of the city, and regards not the crying of the driver’. . . .

Be the work grim or glorious, dread or divine, you have little choice left but quiescent adoption. As for you—the nominal artist—your share in it has been to work passively under dictates you neither delivered nor could question—that would not be uttered at your prayer, nor suppressed nor changed at your caprice. If the result be attractive, the World will praise you, who little deserve praise; if it be repulsive, the same World will blame you, who almost as little deserve blame.  

This anxiety over production, which consumed women writers as early as Anne Bradstreet (demonstrated in her poem “The Author to Her Book”), also vexed Mary Shelley, who reluctantly bid her “hideous progeny [to] go forth and prosper” for the 1831 edition of Frankenstein. It would be a mistake to overlook the possible connection between Wuthering Heights and the troubled author of Frankenstein. For it is a Catherine who dies after giving birth to a Catherine, just as Mary Wollstonecraft dies giving birth to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. But where Shelley lived to address her novel as a “hideous progeny,” the voices of Emily and Anne Brontë gave way in death to Charlotte’s often acerbic criticism. The subject matter for Wildfell Hall was a “mistake,” Charlotte argued in a 5 September 1850 letter, “too little consonant with the character, tastes, and ideas of the gentle, retiring, inexperienced writer. She wrote it under a strange, conscientious, half-ascetic notion of accomplishing a painful penance and severe duty.”  

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78 Brontë, Letters of Charlotte Brontë, 750-751.  
79 Shelley, Frankenstein, 197.  
production, inheritance, and exchange. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote that Emily Brontë “must have been a remnant of the Titans, great-granddaughter of the giants who used to inhabit the earth.”

Even reviewers traced authorial talent across genetic lines: “The work of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one.” Wuthering Heights, the reviewer suggests, is the first in what will be a series of grand productions in the future. This was not to be so, of course. As one early biographer notes, “Mrs Brontë died, leaving her six motherless children the inheritance of a consumptive constitution and a morbid tendency, which was probably heightened by the eccentric notions of their father on the subject of early education.” The Brontës are doomed by nature and nurture to write Gothic novels and to suffer early deaths. Stewart argues that Wildfell Hall “issues quite unabashedly from a Victorian discourse of print interchange, dependent on a general circuit of investment and withdrawal that takes shape as a more or less intimate mode of emotional give and take.” The concern of both novels, then, is about who bears the responsibility for a controversial textual production, and—reminiscent of Scott’s project in Tales of My Landlord—who are the landlords and tenants of authorship. In Wildfell Hall, Helen perhaps puts it best: “I hate them to be seen,” she tells Arthur of her sketches, “I can’t let you have it, indeed!” (136). Helen’s method to achieve anonymity, moreover, sounds much like the three Bells stamped on the title pages of their novels: “I take the precaution to give a false name to the place also, in order to put them on a wrong scent, if they should attempt to trace me out by it” (41). But as the Brontës’ disingenuous publishers proved, mixing the Bell names as they saw fit to increase demand, the disguises probably proved more trouble than they were worth.

83 “A Lesson from a Woman’s Life: Charlotte Bronte,” Titan 24 (May 1857), 454.
84 Stewart, Novel Violence, 104.
Biological issues of heredity inspired Victorian authors, especially those who came after Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Yet we can trace this thematic and formal concern in novels that followed in the Brontës’ wake. Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852–53) engages with issues of inheritance, which penetrate the novel’s other social, religious, and legislative concerns. Esther Summerson is abandoned by her mother, Lady Dedlock, but physical similarities between mother and daughter suggest the relationship early on not only to the watchful Guppy, but potentially also to readers. More significant, however, is Dickens’s use of frame narratives. The dynamic series of framing devices that introduce and conclude *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41) pave the way for the zenith of the Gothic frame narrative in *Bleak House*. The novel’s dual narratives, one penned by Esther and the other by an omniscient narrator, cooperate and compete to form a dynamic system of perspectives that actually undermine structure and challenge the very realism the novel seemingly affirms.

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85 For an interesting reading of Dickens, heredity, and Darwin, see Goldie Morgenthaler’s *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like* (London: Macmillan. Press Ltd., 2000).
CHAPTER 8

FIRST AND THIRD: DICKENS’S DUELING NARRATIVES AND GOTHIC REALISM

Dickens’s characteristics as a master of fiction have nothing whatever to do with the special form of ingenuity which constructs “plots”; it was his misfortune that he could never outgrow that primitive view of the novel, and that, by endeavouring to fit his original work into an old-fashioned frame, he merely encumbered himself, and showed at a disadvantage in comparison with writers far below him.
—George Gissing, The Immortal Dickens

The difficulty of space is CRUSHING. Nobody can have any idea of it who has not had an experience of patient fiction-writing with some elbow-room always, and open places in perspective. In this form, with any kind of regard to the current number, there is absolutely no such thing.
—Dickens to John Forster, February 1853

Dickens’s letter to Forster expresses his frustration over the limitations that Household Words imposed on his new serial novel, Hard Times. Although Dickens wished to take an extended break following the arduous and exhausting run of Bleak House (1852–1853), economic demands forced him to fit a new novel into a relatively narrow range of periodical numbers. Dickens condemns the publishing limitations that prevent him from creating again a sprawling world of coincidence and connection. But what is more frustrating for Dickens is that he cannot find “open places in perspective.” At issue here is not only form and content, but also narrative structure. The nineteen-number-run of Bleak House permitted Dickens the space to experiment with perspective, to employ two narrative voices that contrast, compete, and, most important, coordinate. As with any Dickens text, vestiges of eighteenth-century novels pervade and shape Bleak House. The unique narrative of the novel, however, is most indebted to the formal structures of its Gothic predecessors, a debt also evident in his earlier novel, The Old

3 The final part came out in September 1853 and was a “double number” that contained numbers nineteen and twenty.
*Curiosity Shop* (1841). For Dickens’s two most Gothic novels are frame narratives. His innovation on the device blurs the narrative divisions between framer and framed, which also undermines—and perhaps synthesizes—the space between objective and subjective, writer and reader, fiction and reality. Through this formal dialectic, Dickens suggests that a single perspective, even an omniscient one, cannot adequately articulate the fluid and diverse world. The frame narrative allows Dickens to occupy the perspectives of multiple subjects (and sometimes objects) to interrogate the conventions of realism against fictions of memory, authenticity, and objectivity.

Dickens achieved this unique conception of realism by borrowing from the thematic and formal history of the Gothic, a genre that appears most decidedly tangential, if not wholly opposed, to the conventions of realism. *Bleak House* is a productive merger between a conservative realism and an anarchic Gothic. As George Levine observes, Dickens “was less easy with the limits of realism than most of his contemporaries.” The Gothic frame narrative is particularly suited to exploring issues of perspective, to challenge prescriptions of time and place. Dickens demonstrates that realism requires a deconstruction of tradition, what Levine calls for late-nineteenth-century novelists a “self-conscious rejection of certain conventions of literary representation and of their implications.” If we consider *Bleak House* against Dickens’s earlier experiment with two voices in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, we may perhaps read the novel as a highly dynamic frame narrative, one that continues to borrow thematically and formally from the Gothic tradition, but that reinvests it with a vibrant and complex energy. Jonathan H. Grossman argues that the narrative division between city and country in *The Old Curiosity Shop* “is as

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4 I omit here the first-person *Great Expectations* (1861); Dickens’s last complete novel, the potential Gothic masterpiece, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65); and the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870).


serious a formal experiment as that of the more famously split narrative of *Bleak House.*”\(^7\) The system of framing devices that introduce and conclude *The Old Curiosity Shop*, however, are even more germane to Dickens’s project in *Bleak House*. Both novels employ two narrative voices, distinct in perspective, purpose, and power, that frame one another. What was a pragmatic method to follow the strands of multiple plots in *The Old Curiosity Shop* became the formal crux of *Bleak House*—a novel that interrogates and challenges the boundaries of narrative, genre, and truth.

*Bleak House* has been considered to exemplify the subgenre of the “Urban Gothic.”\(^8\) Yet moving from London’s central fog and slum-housing depths to its gentrified suburbs involves little diminution of Gothic effect. This oscillation between the horrors of city and county Dickens first employed in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Indeed, the rhythmic narrative movement is that earlier novel’s central rhetorical strategy, as we learn that Nell’s flight from London does not release her from Gothic dangers. As Alison Milbank argues, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the “Gothic is the motor that truly drives the action.”\(^9\) Few have considered the novel, however, as part of a formal Gothic tradition; rather, similar to Scott’s novels, Dickensian realism absorbs Gothic atmospheres, themes, and characters. Yet *The Old Curiosity Shop* explicitly begins with a frame narrative—marking it as a Gothic novel—one in which a first-person encounter with a wandering child acts as a sort of adaptation of the found manuscript device.\(^10\) However, the novel’s complex system of narrative frames makes this curious meeting the second instance of a

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\(^10\) Few have pointed out that *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a frame narrative: Adela Styczynska asserts that Dickens “experiments with the frame narrative” in the novel, “though it is not consistently treated” (*Dickens the Moralist and the Artist: The Novels of 1850-1860* [Łódź: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1988], 166).
found manuscript. The story itself has to be found among the manuscripts tucked away in Master Humphrey’s clock.

_The Old Curiosity Shop_ began its run in serial installments three weeks into Dickens’s short-lived periodical _Master Humphrey’s Clock_ (4 April 1840–4 December 1841). Dickens included not only a preface for the periodical, but also two different prefaces for the novel when it was printed in full in 1841 and in cheap edition in 1848. In the preface to _Master Humphrey’s Clock_, Dickens explains that he never intended that the group of friends who frame the periodical’s tales would become “active agents in the stories they are supposed to relate.”¹¹ This preface is the first in a series of apologies Dickens makes for the failings of _Master Humphrey’s Clock_. The product of an overactive imagination, Dickens explains, the periodical was the result of an author “conjuring up bright figures where there is nothing but empty space.”¹² The 1841 preface to the novel’s first complete edition consists almost entirely of quotations from Fielding’s _Tom Jones_, which contend that authors are required “to provide a bill of fare, which all persons may peruse at their first entrance into the house.”¹³ Dickens apologizes, however, that the host or author, in opening his new establishment, provided no bill of fare.

Sensible of the difficulties of such an undertaking in its infancy, he preferred that it should make its own way, silently and gradually, or make no way at all. It has made its way, and is doing such a thriving business that nothing remains for him to add. (5)

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¹¹ Charles Dickens, _Master Humphrey’s Clock_ (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), iii.
¹² Ibid. This assessment is reminiscent of the man whom Nell and her grandfather meet in _The Old Curiosity Shop_: “the labourer . . . read new histories in his furnace fire” (339).
Most significant in Dickens’s reference to Fielding, and his apologies for failing to act hospitably to his reader-guests, is that Fielding’s words do not appear in a paratext; they are not even author-Fielding’s words. Instead, the “biographer” of *Tom Jones* provides the opening statements to Book 1, which appear inside chapter 1. This fictional figure emerges several times throughout the novel, checking in with readers and offering points of rest on their long journey. Although Dickens claims that he has “provided no bill of fare,” he too participates in framing his novel inside the fiction: in the case of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the story of Master Humphrey’s encounter with Nell begins the novel and frames the action thereafter. Humphrey introduces the main players of the novel, before leaving, like Fielding’s biographer, to let the story plot its own path. Edgar Allan Poe read the 1841 preface as itself a fiction: “In his preface to the present volume, Mr. Dickens seems to feel the necessity for an apology in regard to certain portions of his commencement, without seeing clearly what apology he should make, or for what precise thing he should apologise . . . but we are quite sure that all this is as pure a fiction as ‘The Old Curiosity Shop’ itself.”

Dickens’s 1848 preface makes more explicit his initial plans for the periodical and the thematic inspiration for the novel. Dickens conceived of *Master Humphrey’s Clock* as “detached papers,” which were “to include one continuous story,” the through-line of Humphrey and his friends in the Clock club. As John Bowen observes, the tales in the periodical are mostly Gothic in nature, and they are presided over by the “ghost,” Humphrey, who “exists in a world that treads the boundaries of life and death.” Once the novel was published outside of the periodical, Dickens caused it to “be freed from the incumbrance of associations and interruptions with which it had no kind of concern,” and canceled Humphrey’s opening frame, its pages now

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the “property of the trunkmaker and buttermaker” (7). Dickens’s decision perhaps stemmed from harsh reviews of Master Humphrey’s Clock. Thomas Hood, whom Dickens greatly respected, reviewed the periodical for the Athenæum in November 1840. “The main fault of the work is in its construction,” Hood writes, and then continues with an illuminating and biting critique that compares the novel to previous frame narratives:

[I]t was assumed that the Reader would be interested in the interest taken by those shadowy Personages, in the narratives brought forward at their Club-meetings. This was a mistake. In the Arabian Nights, indeed, we take an interest in the interest excited in the Sultan, by each of the Thousand and One Tales; because a yawn from Shahriyar would be the story-teller’s death warrant; but the auditors of Master Humphrey possess no such despotic power—his head does not hang by its tale; and accordingly, whilst interested ourselves at first hand,—say by the history of the Old Curiosity Shop and its inmates,—we think no more of the gentle Hunchback, his friend, and the Old Clock, than of as many printing-house readers and an Editor’s box.¹⁶

For Hood, the framing device for the periodical fails to garner enough interest to justify its existence against the texts it introduces. In a sense, Humphrey dies under the audience’s knife because his adventures (or lack thereof) do not elicit the required amount of reader-investment. Readers of Master Humphrey’s Clock become no better than printers and editors, objective cogs in the publishing machine. As G. K. Chesterton observes, Dickens “liked to have story within

¹⁶ Thomas Hood, the Athenæum (7 November 1840), in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 95-96. Dickens loved Arabian Nights. As Gissing explains, “Dickens seems to make more allusions throughout his work to the Arabian Nights than to any other book or author. . . . He sought for wonders amid the dreary life of common streets; and perhaps in this direction his intellect was encouraged when he made acquaintance with the dazzling Eastern fables and took them alternately with that more solid nutriment of the eighteenth-century novel” (Charles Dickens: A Critical Study [New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912], 31-32).
story, like room within room of some labyrinthine but comfortable castle. In this spirit he wished ‘Master Humphrey’s Clock’ to begin, and to be a big frame or bookcase for numberless novels. The clock started; but the clock stopped.” Dickens would later find a “comfortable castle” in Bleak House. Nonetheless, Dickens felt it necessary to respond to Hood’s review with a personal letter, and the pair engaged in a rosy correspondence. In the face of reviews like Hood’s, Dickens dispensed with the frame of Humphrey’s “horological predilections,” to use the words of a Metropolitan Magazine reviewer. After Dickens disbanded Master Humphrey’s Clock, he referred to it as one of the “lost books of the earth,” which will be used as protective lining and foodstuff wrapping. This textual afterlife, in which writing becomes less useful than the paper it is printed on, echoes the gun-wadding fate of the manuscript in Mackenzie’s The Man of Feeling—a connection that Dickens will make more explicit as part of the murder mystery in Bleak House.

Master Humphrey’s back story provides the opening fictional frame for the novel and its successor, Barnaby Rudge (1841). The periodical opens:

The reader must not expect to know where I live. At present, it is true, my abode may be a question of little or no import to anybody, but if I should carry my

18 Metropolitan Magazine (June 1840), in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, 93. This reviewer also criticized the “want of novelty and of art in introducing” the stories in the periodical (93). Poe also criticized the failings of Humphrey’s frame: “The design of the general work, ‘Humphrey’s Clock,’ is simply the common-place one of putting various tales into the mouths of a social party. The meetings are held at the house of Master Humphrey—an antique building in London, where an old-fashioned clock-case is the place of deposit for the M.S.S. Why such designs have become common is obvious. One half the pleasure experienced at a theatre arises from the spectator’s sympathy with the rest of the audience, and, especially, from his belief in their sympathy with him. . . . This is sympathy doubled-diluted—the shadow of a shade. It is unnecessary to say that the design invariably fails of its effect” (Essays and Reviews, 209).
19 See Leah Price’s recent How To Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2012). Price examines an excellent quote by Andrew Wynter (1819–76) about Mudie’s Circulating Library: “Thousands of volumes thus read to death are pitched together in one place. But would they not do for the buttermen? was our natural query. Too dirty for that. Not for old trunks? Much too greasy for that. What were they good for, then? For manure! Thus, when worn out as food for the mind, they are put to the service of producing food for our bodies!” (144).
readers with me, as I hope to do, and there should spring up, between them and me, feelings of homely affection and regard attaching something of interest to matters ever so slightly connected with my fortunes of my speculations, even my place of residence might one day have a kind of charm for them.  

Keeping with his own attempt to maintain anonymity, Humphrey describes himself as a “misshapen, deformed, old man,” which connects him not only to Nell’s grandfather, but also to the antagonist of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the dwarf Daniel Quilp. Humphrey begins a storytelling club, the first member of which is a deaf man (whose affliction nevertheless allows him to speak), and others follow: Jack Redburn and Owen Miles take over the estate after Humphrey dies. Samuel Pickwick and Sam Weller also appear in the periodical and achieve, Bowen notes, a “strange supplementary half- or afterlife.” The group writes stories and places the manuscripts in the cell of Humphrey’s favorite old clock. On a strict schedule, Humphrey chooses from the “piles of dusty papers” hidden in the clock, so that the members may “draw means to beguile time from the heart of time itself.” *The Old Curiosity Shop* comes from Humphrey’s hand as the novel is introduced as “Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey.” The subtitle is the first subtle indication that Humphrey may have more involvement in the novel than he earlier lets on.

Humphrey begins *The Old Curiosity Shop* as one of Dickens’s roaming flâneurs, echoing the author’s previous alter-ego, Boz. “Night is generally time for walking,” Humphrey explains: “a glimpse of passing faces . . . is often better for my purpose than their full revelation in the

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20 Dickens, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, 1.
21 Dickens, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, 3.
22 Bowen, *Other Dickens*, 144.
daylight” (9). Humphrey speaks of a “never-ending restlessness” (9), but his jaunts through London speculate rather than interrogate. Nell Trent quickly becomes the “found object” of the novel, however, which not only transforms Humphrey from imaginative bystander to active agent, but also makes Nell the novel’s Gothic text. “An adventure which I am about to relate,” Humphrey writes, “arose out of one of these rambles, and thus I have been led to speak of them by way of preface” (11). It is a chance encounter, and the most salient example that makes The Old Curiosity Shop, Richard Maxwell asserts, “the most accidental of Dickens’s novels.” Thus Dickens adds to the interminable list of prefaces by making Humphrey’s description of his rambles before meeting Nell itself a preface, though it is one that he refuses to excise in the novel’s volume printings. Chesterton notes that the novel’s “opening and original framework express the idea of a random experience, a thing come across in the street; a single face in the crowd, followed until it tells its story.” Since Humphrey is himself “arrested by an inquiry” (11), it is Nell in fact who does the finding. In other words, Nell’s night-rambles are equally as important as Humphrey’s in making the connection that sparks the novel. In this sense, Nell is Humphrey’s double: she replaces him early on as the novel’s emotional focus. During their walk, linked hand in hand, observer becomes observed: “she stole a curious look at [his] face” (12). Still, in their journey to her grandfather’s shop, each beguiles the other; Nell refuses to reveal the secret to her dangerous wanderings, and Humphrey purposefully protracts the walk by leading Nell through streets she cannot recognize. Humphrey is “motivated solely by curiosity,” Audrey

25 Compare Humphrey’s description to the horror of the industrial city that Nell and her grandfather experience: “It was like being in the confidence of all these people to stand quietly there, looking into their faces as they flitted past. . . . Falling into that kind of abstraction which such a solitude awakens, the child continued to gaze upon the passing crowd with a wondering interest, amounting almost to a temporary forgetfulness of her own condition” (331-332).
Jaffe argues. It is a devious trick by our narrator, ensuring that she leads him all the way to the door of the shop and eventually inside; and it undermines his earlier contention that his practice is only in “speculating on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets” (9). Nell’s appearance changes the game; unlike Boz, who remains almost entirely a detached viewer from the scenes he describes, Humphrey makes himself part of the action, not just a first-person narrator, but also a character in the novel he frames. In this sense, Humphrey echoes previous narrators, such as Brontë’s Lockwood, who appear in and affect the story that they frame.

This blurring of narrator and character becomes more explicit in the novel’s terminal frame, which, as with the opening sheets, Dickens abandons. As with little Nell, Humphrey has a secret, one which he “all along with difficulty repressed,” and it is a profound secret indeed. He reveals to the other members of the group:

‘You will one and all forgive me . . . if, for the greater convenience of the story, and for its better introduction, that adventure was fictitious. I had my share indeed—no light or trivial one—in the pages we have read, but it was not the share I feigned to have at first. The younger brother, the single gentleman, the nameless actor in this little drama, stands before you now.’

Humphrey subverts the entire authority of his opening frame, which he exposes as a fiction, and he does so by retrospectively breaking the frame from the outside in. He never met Nell wandering London’s streets, and he was never inside her grandfather’s shop. He appears in The Old Curiosity Shop, instead, as the unnamed “single gentleman,” who enters the novel as a tenant

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29 Dickens, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, 224.
31 Grossman argues that Humphrey “breaks out from the tale’s (diegetic) story-world to reveal that he both exists within it and supplies a semi-omniscient viewpoint upon it” (*Charles Dickens’s Networks*, 137).
at the Brasses’ business, and is apparently only referred to as such because the room advertises to be “let to a single gentleman” (250). Anticipating both Emily Brontë’s Lockwood and Anne Brontë’s Helen Graham, the narrator becomes a tenant in the novel, housed within the diegetic story rather than being the landlord of it. The mysterious single gentleman traces Nell’s movements in the countryside through the forced testimonies of various characters she has encountered. As with Bucket’s detective work in Bleak House, however, the single gentleman’s efforts prove too little, too late. His search turns up a dead body. Poe criticized Humphrey’s revelation and puzzling character-transformation:

[I]n “The Old Curiosity Shop,” we feel displeased to find Master Humphrey commencing the tale in the first person, dropping this for the third, and concluding by introducing himself as the ‘single gentleman’ who figures in the story. In spite of all the subsequent explanation we are forced to look upon him as two. All is confusion, and what makes it worse, is that Master Humphrey is painted as a lean and sober personage, while his second self is a fat, bluff and boisterous old bachelor.32

Poe’s criticism nearly arrives at what is at stake in the novel. Dickens wraps the text in several frames that undermine rather than support one another. There is no authoritative voice if the master of ceremonies lies to his audience. Ultimately, Dickens was given the opportunity “to wind up my Clock.”33 Barnaby Rudge appeared in uninterrupted installments after the terminal frame to The Old Curiosity Shop, and the periodical concluded thereafter. Yet when Dickens oversaw the publication of The Old Curiosity Shop as a complete edition, he declined to abandon

32 Poe, Essays and Reviews, 211.
33 Charles Dickens, The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960), 21. This is an especially intriguing play on words: while Dickens is ending the periodical, he is also “winding up” the clock so that it will continue working on time.
Humphrey’s opening frame, which occupies the first three chapters of the novel. In this sense, *The Old Curiosity Shop* anticipates Lockwood’s frame in *Wuthering Heights*. As much as Humphrey gives way to another narrator, one who is a more powerful storyteller, Lockwood relinquishes his position of authority to Nelly Dean—the other Nell of the 1840s. As we have seen, however, Humphrey installs himself back in the text in a far more dynamic and provocative manner than Lockwood’s visits to Wuthering Heights. In some ways reminiscent of “James Hogg” in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Humphrey is twice a character in his own novel: not only the single gentleman, but also the Master Humphrey of the novel’s first three chapters, who introduces the titular shop and its inhabitants.

Humphrey describes the peculiar contents of the Curiosity Shop once he gains entry as “one of those receptacles for old and curious things which seem to crouch in odd corners of this town and to hide their musty treasures from the public eye in jealously and distrust” (13). This description applies to the subjects in the house as much as the objects that surround them. Nell’s grandfather, like Humphrey, only goes out at night, prowling the streets for curiosities: “nothing . . . looked older or more worn than he” (13), Humphrey relates. After Humphrey meets Kit and engages in some disagreements over the terms of the grandfather’s guardianship, he leaves the house and returns home. His encounter with Nell and the characters he witnessed in the shop prevent rest. He attempts to solve the mystery—Nell’s secret that she refuses to reveal—by recalling other stories, but to no avail; Humphrey is stymied by the curiosity of the Curiosity Shop and its inhabitants:

I am not sure I should have been so thoroughly possessed by this one subject, but for the heaps of fantastic things I had seen huddled together in the curiosity-dealer’s warehouse. These, crowding upon my mind, in connexion with the child,
and gathering round her, as it were, brought her condition palpably before me. I had her image, without any effort of imagination, surrounded and beset by everything that was foreign to its nature. . . . ‘It would be a curious speculation . . . to imagine her in her future life, holding her solitary way among a crowd of wild grotesque companions; the only pure, fresh, youthful object in the throng.’

(20-22)

Humphrey’s imaginative scene mirrors Dickens’s words in the 1848 preface: “I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild” (8). Thus Dickens explicitly conflates the first-person narrator with the paratextual author. If Humphrey has the same imaginative intention for Nell as his author, then he plays a far more crucial role in the invention of the fiction than merely a narratorial device for an introductory frame. Since Humphrey later confesses that his entire opening frame is fiction, everything before he enters the novel at its midpoint as the single gentleman is speculation or, at best, hearsay from someone present for its entirety like Kit.

At least part of this narrative predicament—where the terminal frame nullifies the authority built in the opening frame(s)—stems from the nature of periodical writing. The first frame of The Old Curiosity Shop only becomes a fiction retrospectively; once a number is published, disseminated, and consumed by readers, there is no possibility to return. If Dickens was crafting the story on the fly, so to speak, then he probably did not have the impact of the terminal frame in mind from the beginning. In other words, the dynamic sequence in which Humphrey reveals that he is the single gentleman, rather than being a deliberate subversion of the novel’s authority, could be a means for Dickens to transition from The Old Curiosity Shop back to Master Humphrey’s Clock. What gets us into the story will not get us back out. Rather
than being afforded the opportunity to end the story without returning to frame (as in Radcliffe’s
*The Italian* or Shelley’s *The Last Man*), Dickens had to come back to Master Humphrey and his
Clock group because they are storytellers who introduce new stories—in this case *Barnaby
Rudge*.

But even if we refuse to read Humphrey’s confession as undermining the narrative
authority of the novel’s first three chapters—by making them, in short, as fictional as the rest of
the novel—there remains a question of whether Humphrey actually returns to the shop in chapter
2. Humphrey is a writer of fiction, and his imagination has been sufficiently stirred during the
first chapter, which is also where the first number of the novel ends in *Master Humphrey’s
Clock*. Do the next two chapters constitute yet another frame? The first three chapters introduce
most of the novel’s main players. If, however, they are part of Humphrey’s speculative
imagination, then his encounter with Quilp loses its potency. The answer to whether “he were
really a human creature” proves inconsequential if Quilp is but a singular manifestation of
Humphrey’s dream to surround Nell with the “wild grotesque.” As Theodor Adorno argues,
Quilp is an example of Dickens’s “prebourgeois” art, “a bearer of objective factors, of a dark,
obscure fate and a starlike consolation that overtake the individual and permeate his life but
never follow from the law of the individual.” 34 Quilp is, Philip Rogers contends, “the human
embodiment of the crowd’s incessant energy.” 35 He is synecdochal of the fearsome “throng” that
besets Nell at every turn. Hood calls him a “‘Little Enormity,’” but questions whether “such
beings exist in real life.” 36 Quilp was not Dickens’s only big character in a small package, of
course (the eponymous Little Dorrit and Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend* come to mind), but

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36 Hood, the *Athenæum*, in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, 98.
he is unique in his villainy. Quilp exists in the novel as both a subjective usurper of the Curiosity Shop and its wares and an objective vessel for the horrors that face childhood. His death releases Nell from the “wild grotesque,” but unfortunately this liberation is much too late.

Regardless of the fictional implications of Humphrey’s frame(s), the novel’s opening-frame inclusion of the its main antagonist recalls the formal methods of its Gothic predecessors: *Frankenstein*, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and *Wuthering Heights* all introduce, in various ways, the Gothic antagonist into the frame-world. But we get the feeling that Quilp has for some time been close to Nell, the emotional heart of the novel. She is to Quilp’s devious plans as she is to Jarley’s wax-work show: “the chief attraction” (221). Where Walton, for example, is stunned by the appearance of the creature, Quilp appears to be a common feature in Nell’s young life, a danger who has constantly surrounded her. She delivers a letter to the dwarf’s wharf and there braves his threats. The third chapter of the novel begins with Humphrey’s description of Quilp’s “particulars”: “an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in statue as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant” (29). The inventory of the grotesque continues to fill a long paragraph, as we are meant to feel suspicious and unsettled before we know of his devious machinations. It sets Quilp, moreover, starkly against Humphrey’s first portrait of Kit, who immediately inspires a “grateful feeling” (15). They are binary associates of the shop, one who procures its worthless objects and the other who protects its priceless subject. The novel ends with a description of Kit’s happy family and the information that the Old Curiosity Shop has been demolished to make way for a “fine broad road” (556). Kit is the only thing left standing that recalls Nell and the shop—besides the novel.

In the 23 May 1840 edition of *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, Dickens disposed of Humphrey’s first-person narration. It is the most unsettling part of the novel, yet it is, as
Grossman observes, “a shift that definitively indicates to readers that the tale had
metamorphosed into a novel.” The frame concludes: “And now that I have carried this history
so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, I shall for the
convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have
prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves” (35). Here Dickens was
forced “to disembarrass himself,” of the first-person narration, Michael Slater argues. Jaffe
reads Humphrey’s removal from the narrative as a “displacement rather than a disappearance—
the hiding, but not the removal, of the self.” The narrator goes from somebody to nobody, but it
is a transformation that bears residual effects. Humphrey never totally disappears; the third-
person narrator that takes his place remains oddly personal, offering to take readers by the hand
to conduct them from one plot to the next. Maria K. Bachman argues, “This abrupt shift in
perspective, from first-person narrative mode to a third-person omniscient perspective, not only
reveals the multi-layered complexity of focalization in the novel, but also shifts the burden of
story world stewardship, of curiosity about others, onto the reader.” Yet, because the remainder
of the novel is third-person, past tense, the characters never really “speak and act for
themselves,” but rather are channeled retrospectively through the omniscient narrator’s voice.
Despite the narrator’s dynamic power (“the historian takes the friendly reader by the hand, . . .
springing with him into the air” [250]), it is the “magic reel,” which, “rolling on before, has led
the chronicler thus far” (548). The story is a history and the narrator does not invent, but rather
records. Dickens seems to consider the characters as the active agents and omniscience as merely
an ex post facto operative to lead readers through the adventures. Dickens’s early definition

37 Grossman, Charles Dickens’s Networks, 93.
38 Michael Slater, Charles Dickens (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 152.
39 Jaffe, Vanishing Points, 49.
makes omniscience a passive player and suggests that the novel is a history, a retrospective and objective account of a story that has already occurred. The omniscient narrator, in the case of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, has no hand in determining action or in rendering judgments. It is a conspicuously different narrator from those who later structure action, mood, and response in Dickens’s later novels. Yet the movement between first- and third-person voices creates an unsettling dynamic that Dickens adapts and engages in *Bleak House*.

When Humphrey “detaches” himself from the narrative, he leaves Nell alone and vulnerable.\(^{41}\) Although Kit claims in the frame, “‘I’d have found her. I’d bet that I’d find her if she was above ground, I would, as quick as anybody’” (17), it is Humphrey whom Nell must approach for safe passage. But abandoning his involvement in the narrative sets the stage for Quilp’s terror. Indeed, the third-person section of the novel begins in chapter 4 at the residence Quilp shares, or rather presides over, with his troubled wife; and when Nell reappears it is not within the pseudo-sanctuary of the shop, but rather out delivering a letter from her grandfather to Quilp at his other, more fittingly Spartan, abode. She thus enters Quilp’s narrative territory, an invasion that Quilp turns into the terms for a loathsome future pairing: “‘see if one of these days you don’t come to be Mrs Quilp of Tower Hill’” (53). The fear of growing up, of coming to the age where she can be married off to Dick Swiveller, or even more disturbingly, Quilp, stymies Nell’s growth and makes her a doll for display, ready to die before the adult world provides an even more dangerous future.

Quilp’s extraordinary ability to see everything and be anywhere in London challenges the authority of the omniscient narrator. Nell’s flight from Quilp’s gaze is an attempt to escape the

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\(^{41}\) Yet by including a terminal frame, regardless of how Humphrey reveals his involvement in it, Dickens envelops Nell’s story in another world of characters who prevent easy access from the outside. Although Humphrey cannot protect Nell (even as the single gentleman, whose chase finds only her grave), he can shield her in layers of narrative, a fitting redemption for a man who dreamed of surrounding her with “wild grotesque companions.”
terrorizing omniscience that takes over after Humphrey disconnects. Since “Nothing escaped the hawk’s eye of the ugly little man” (45), Quilp’s vision is not only acutely perceptive, but also high and hovering. London is Quilp’s frame, and Nell’s escape to the countryside with her grandfather marks an endeavor to locate a new frame where she can reside in safety and security. Grossman observes, “Nell’s journey thus initiates a division between a single-focused narrative plot thread and the multistranded plot activity in London.” Quilp boasts, “‘I’m upon the old gentleman’s track and have got a new light’” (59), but the track proves difficult to follow in the country, and, eventually, even his city light expires. Nell’s city danger stems not just from Quilp, however; her brother, Fred, also plans to access the fortune he believes she possesses. As with Humphrey’s encounter with Nell, Fred’s plan relies on a disturbing assertion of her innocence: “‘If I take her in hand, I will be bound by a very little coaxing and threatening to bend her to my will’” (63). Gothic terror surrounds Nell and boxes her into the shop, but her only sanctuary passes into the hands of Quilp: “The house was no longer theirs. Even the sick chamber seemed to be retained on the uncertain tenure of Mr Quilp’s favour” (91). Humphrey removed, Quilp is the new proprietor of both the Old Curiosity Shop and The Old Curiosity Shop. “[T]here are new masters down stairs,”” Kit warns Nell: “‘It’s a change for you’” (96). She must escape not only malicious associates, but also devious family members. But the very person she entrusts to accompany her for her flight turns out to be the villain who continually exacerbates her fall.

The two settings of The Old Curiosity Shop speak to Dickens’s interest in crafting the novel through sets of opposing tones and themes. As Norman Page observes, the novel is “structured upon . . . polarities.” Nell’s flight marks the novel’s bifurcation between plots of the city and country. Reading the novel in the context of evolving transportation networks,

42 Grossman, Charles Dickens’s Networks, 108.
Grossman argues that Nell’s “walking forth on a long-distance journey severs her from her community,” and that the “connections” she made in London “keep breaking.” Her plot, Michal Peled Ginsburg argues, “runs parallel” to the city’s “subplots without intersecting with them.” Yet Quilp does appear in Nell’s portion of the narrative. Concealed among the shadows, she spots him: “Who could have failed to recognise, in that instant, the ugly misshapen Quilp!” (212). That she manages to hide reverses the roles of the gaze; Quilp’s observational powers seem to lessen outside of his familiar cityscape. Nell’s only fear is that one day Quilp will “suddenly encounter them” (223)—the fear of being tracked succumbs to the possibility of a coincidental meeting. Yet again, the terms of an accidental meeting with Nell link Quilp with Master Humphrey, the character who dreamed of Nell being surrounded by the “wild grotesque.”

Nell’s movement from the dangerous surroundings of London to the open air of the countryside, however, proves futile. Quilp’s watchful eye is replaced by Codlin’s gaze from behind his traveling stage-curtain. Her own grandfather, moreover, replaces Quilp as the figure of fear. When she “saw a figure just gliding in at the door” (232), Nell assumes Quilp has found them out (as would readers), but instead it is her grandfather, sneaking about to steal money to gamble away. Her grandfather transforms into a villain of proportions that even Quilp cannot realize. Nell describes his changed figure: “another creature in his shape, a monstrous distortion of his image, a something to recoil from, and be the more afraid of, because it bore a likeness to him, and kept close about her, as he did . . . so like yet so unlike him” (236). This recalls the untenable doubling between Master Humphrey and the single gentleman. Grandfather is yet another projection of the author who cannot save his child. Although Nell hopes their flight will

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begin a new life, the countryside paints more images of death than the city. Whereas Nell’s disturbing vision of blood seeping under her chamber door following her grandfather’s suicide is only a dream, death becomes a reality for the schoolmaster’s young pupil, who is the first character in the novel to die.

The rural world that Nell and her grandfather traverse itself frames scenes that are a sort of nightmarish realism. When Nell and her grandfather step off the boat, they find themselves in another urban world markedly different from the often jocular and familiar spaces in London. They “passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street, and stood, amid its din and tumult, and in the pouring rain, as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle” (331). Amid the sprawling chaos of a manufacturing center, Nell and her grandfather are faced finally with contemporary England, an industrial hellscape of smoke, metal, and fire. Yet they are not part of the machine, “stunned and bewildered by the hurry they beheld but had no part in” (331). It is a Gothic realism, where the “working-day faces come nearer to the truth” (332), nearer than London’s Boz- and Humphrey-like strollers. Weak and vulnerable, they are saved by a man, who is also “but an atom . . . in a mountain heap of misery” (332). He leads them to a furnace, and there they pass the night as he “read[s] new histories in his furnace fire” (339). In a sense, this nameless man is analogous to the narrator, “their conductor,” a historian who—anticipating how Dickens describes himself in the preface to the complete edition of *Master Humphrey’s Clock*—“conjurer[s] up bright figures where there is nothing but empty space.”

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46 Dickens, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, iii. Another point in *The Old Curiosity Shop* at which realism meets the Gothic is in Mrs. Jarley’s wax-work show. Jarley explains that the figures are “‘so like life, that if wax-work only spoke and walked about, you’d hardly know the difference. I won’t go so far as to say, that, as it is, I’ve seen wax-work quite like life, but I’ve certainly seen some life that was exactly like wax-work.’” (208). Reality and representation merge in the framework of wax. We might be reminded of the wax effigy blurring similar lines in the large frame in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Yet Mrs. Jarley only has to change the hair and clothing of one
few characters who aid Nell during her journey, but he fails to appear again, the nightmare of industrial refuse acting as a boundary from the “freedom of pure air and open country” (339).

Yet, like the bird she leaves for Kit’s safekeeping, Nell stays caged, enclosed within the bars of the “wild grotesque” that cast shadows on her light. The figures she encounters in the country prove dangerous in their own way; Jarley’s wax-works and Codlin’s Punch and Judy show expose Nell to the “threat of objectification,” Garrett Stewart argues. These dangers to subjectivity also function as harbingers of death. When Nell starts to sicken, curious onlookers begin “closing round the object of sympathy” (347), as if she is already a wax showpiece. Time and again Nell and her grandfather find themselves accidentally back in cities, industrial wastes of poverty and misery, from which they must escape. As Bowen notes, Nell’s “story moves on only to stand still, to re-encounter the same thing over and over and over again.” Sue Zemka similarly observes the novel’s “protracted and circuitous narrative,” and Laurie Langbauer notes its “aimless, peripatetic motion.” The “magic reel” that “has led the chronicler” throughout the novel spins and spins; wherever Nell journeys, she seemingly arrives back at points of suffering and misery. By the time she reaches the church and is installed by the schoolmaster there as its tenant, Nell is only fit to die, to become the permanent wax-work for the viewing pleasure of the cast of characters that remain. That Nell considers the church a “place to live and learn to die in!” (390) suggests that she hopes not only to accept and to understand her mortality, but also to prepare readers for the inevitably of her death. John Kucich argues that Nell becomes a

wax celebrity for it to become another. Thus reality is malleable, fluid, and, most important, deceptive. Nell becomes a living attraction in the show, and in her wax-like state in death, she blends artistic permanency with human mortality.

48 Bowen, Other Dickens, 136.
“Victorian sacrament,” and the end of the novel “deliberately sketches an idealized, uncorrupted vision of a community that is recovered by Nell’s death.” Domestic bliss can only be realized through Nell’s absence. Dick, now entirely free from Fred’s plans of marriage and extortion, finds happiness with the Marchioness and becomes heir to previously unknown money; and Kit, liberated from the burden of being a bodyguard, finally recognizes Barbara’s love, which Nell’s image had blinded him from reading: Barbara “was the book—there it was before him as plain as print” (520). And there it was before for readers, too, but the hope for Nell and Kit obscures the novel’s more realizable and suitable connections.

Conditions are not so clear during the demise of the novel’s villains. Although Sampson Brass has spent the majority of the novel working on Quilp’s side, his associate’s treachery changes his mind: “Punish Quilp,” Brass pleads, “Weigh heavily upon him. Grind him down. Tread him under foot” (501). But as with so many things in the novel, Brass fails to see his revenge exacted. Quilp dies of his own devices. His greatest foil ends up being Kit, but he displaces his violent energy on an object, a curious fact as he has been so willing to throttle the boy at the wharf. The giant carved-admiral sculpture rescued from the hull of a broken ship provides Quilp an effigy of Kit to berate and physically abuse. The statue taunts Quilp, reminding him of his failings, much as the enlarged armor drives Manfred to madness in The Castle of Otranto. Quilp collects pieces of commerce and nationhood, but remains removed from their operations. And it is his propensity to leave ship-refuse lying about that makes the path from his house so dangerous the night of his death. Quilp’s urban space has its revenge on its master. “I should drown him,” Quilp muses after learning of Sam’s betrayal: “Too easy a death, too short, too quick—but the river runs close at hand” (507). Instead, it is both Quilp and

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Fred who meet this fate. Significantly, the conditions of Quilp’s death mirror Humphrey’s dream about Nell at the end of chapter 1. “I had forever before me,” Humphrey records, “alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay, and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams” (22). Dickens provides several hints that foreshadow Quilp’s demise: Sam Brass stumbles through Quilp’s yard “over some stray lumber” (461), and Mrs. Quilp remarks of the “‘many times I have lost my way in coming here through this thick fog’” (506). Whereas Quilp trips among the fog and lumber during the “‘black, devil’s night’” (510), and drowns in the dark void of the unyielding waters below, Nell dies and is then enveloped in the light of the loving players in her tragic history. Both have stayed and died in their respective narrative frames, but both perish from their circular movement that ends up being stasis.

Perhaps the most curious part of The Old Curiosity Shop is not the similarly staged, yet tonally opposite, deaths of the novel’s antitheses, but rather the single gentleman’s failure to save Nell. Dickens acknowledged the pleadings from his readers to spare Nell, but responded in a letter to W. C. Macready, “Yet it must be.”\(^5^1\) It seems that Humphrey was forced to face the same conclusion. Yet to introduce himself into the novel only to fall tragically short of his only narrative function is a disingenuous maneuver on the part of both Humphrey and his author. As Ruskin quipped, Nell “was simply killed for the market, as a butcher kills a lamb.”\(^5^2\) The truth is likely less insidious. Nell’s fate is inevitable. The single gentleman persistently looks at his watch, seeming to know that he is always too late. Humphrey guards his secret until the terminal frame because his involvement cannot alter her fate. When the group enters the church as the

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\(^{51}\) Dickens, Letters, 2:180.

novel closes, Nell’s grandfather asserts that she has been in a long sleep. Around her resting place, “peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose” (540). The fictional opening frame similarly places Nell in a “gentle slumber” (22), as Humphrey resurrects her for the novel. Thus Humphrey’s terminal frame becomes truly a confession—a testimony of his sins for letting a child die as the single gentleman, and leaving a child alone as himself. Since Dickens and Humphrey express the same desire to surround Nell with the “grotesque and wild,” both are implicated in her death. Removing Humphrey’s confessional eases some of the blame for Nell’s death off Dickens and onto her anonymous relative (if not onto her other culpable relative, her grandfather), but no sort of narrative maneuvering could absolve Dickens for his filicide. As a writer for Punch surmises, “the Child . . . seems to have been killed because she was getting troublesome as she grew up and got older.” It is likely, given the afterlife she gained in Victorian discourse, that Nell’s gradual illness and eventual death were the passages that prompted readers to return on a weekly basis—certainly not the promise that Master Humphrey would reappear and close the frame.

In Hood’s criticism of Master Humphrey’s framing device, he compares the interest the novel excites to the Arabian Nights. The latter, Hood argues, keeps readers engaged because Scheherazade’s life is always on the line. If her stories tire Shahryar, she dies; and if her stories fail to engage readers, they will stop reading. Hood’s comparison draws interesting parallels to a detailed, but curiously tangential, relationship in the novel. When Dick Swiveller finally comes out of his illness, he tells the Marchioness, “‘I have woke up by mistake in an Arabian Night instead of a London one’” (476). Dick eventually gets his wits back and realizes that his dream is a reality. He is a changed man and soon a husband to the Marchioness. The novel is decisively a

collection of “London Nights,” which builds interest in the issues that affect its readership. The
love story between Swiveller and the Marchioness provides a kind of embedded tale that in fact
elicits attention rather than, in Hood’s words, fails to get readers “interested in the interest.”
Despite being an early, though ignorant, player in the threats against Nell, Swiveller is
redeemed—and at least partially so, like Esther in Bleak House, through a debilitating illness. In
Hood’s construction, characters in novels are under constant danger of losing attention; the
shutting of the book (or in this case declining to purchase next week’s installment) is a
character’s death. In his failure to entertain, Humphrey, in fact, is more vulnerable than Nell. He
is doubly under fire, not only to keep the readership interested, but also to mind the ticking of his
mortal life-clock.

The terminal frame to Master Humphrey’s Clock appears immediately after the serial-run
of Barnaby Rudge concludes. Humphrey describes the pleasures of his imagination in its
capacity to fill his empty apartment with the specters of past associates, much in the way that
Dickens reintroduced Weller and Pickwick in the periodical. A member of his Clock group, the
deaf gentleman, concludes the periodical, detailing Humphrey’s death, the group’s mourning,
and the division of property delineated in the will. He leaves the apartment “deserted,” and
closes the frame: “MASTER HUMPHREY’S CLOCK has stopped forever.”54 Both Nell and
Humphrey, then, die in the presence of worshippers, but the former was tragic where the latter
was humane. Furthermore, the end of the periodical explicitly echoes the conclusion of Scott’s A
Legend of the Wars of Montrose: “READER! THE TALES OF MY LANDLORD are now
finally closed, and it was my purpose to have addressed thee in the vein of Jedediah

54 Dickens, Master Humphrey’s Clock, 426.
Cleishbotham; but . . . Jedediah has melted into thin air.”\(^5^5\) Both Scott and Dickens feel the necessity of providing closure for their frame characters; the sacrifice is for the greater good of the authors, who may move on to other, more lucrative, endeavors.

Following the failure of *Master Humphrey’s Clock* (and probably still cross over his earlier fallout with *Bentley’s Miscellany*), Dickens was fed up with periodicals. “I am afraid of a magazine,” he writes to Forster on 1 November 1843: “I know whatever we may say at first, a new magazine . . . would require so much propping, that I should be *forced* (as in the *Clock*) to put myself into it, in my old shape.”\(^5^6\) Dickens suggests here that engaging in another magazine entails creating a foundation—or frame—that embeds texts. To do so requires the installation of yet another iteration of Dickens—a Boz or a Master Humphrey—a master of ceremonies who is as much a fiction as the fictions he introduces. To do so, Dickens protests, would be exhausting, and he would rather “fade away from the public eye for a year, and enlarge my stock of description and observation by seeing countries new to me.”\(^5^7\) The labor of writing for a periodical, a position that Dickens had held intermittently for almost a decade, in fact kept him from urban speculation, the impetus and evidence for his writing. Nevertheless, he could not stay away from periodical engagement for long. On 1 March 1850, the first issue of Dickens’s *Household Words* was published. The rhetorical framework for this periodical, however, would not be a character to mirror Dickens; indeed, it would not be a character at all. In a 7 October 1849 letter to Forster, Dickens outlined a proposal for *Household Words*:

> The original matter [will] be essays, reviews, letters, theatrical criticisms, &c, &c, as amusing as possible, but all distinctly and boldly going to what in one’s own

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\(^5^7\) Ibid.
view ought to be the spirit of the people and the time. . . . Now to bind all this together, and to get a character established as it were which any of the writers may maintain without difficulty, I want to suppose a certain SHADOW, which may go into any place, by sunlight, moonlight, starlight, firelight, candlelight, and be in all homes, and all nooks and corners, and be supposed to be cognizant of everything, and go everywhere, without the least difficulty. . . . [as] a kind of semi-omniscient, omnipresent, intangible creature. 58

The binding that Dickens proposed would frame the various texts of *Household Words* exists as the disembodiment of his previous character-hosts. Whereas Boz and Master Humphrey have context and corporeality, the shadow is ephemeral, able to go unnoticed and unacknowledged. 59

The shadow would permit Dickens the freedom to hover over houses, slip through cracks and keyholes, and most importantly dwell as an objective observer. By the time the first volume of the periodical was published, however, Dickens’s narrative framework had changed: what he planned to be a “shadow” became instead a totally disembodied nothing that could exist in homes as “that light of Fancy” which “can never be extinguished.” 60 Rather than an individual voice, the shadow is more a product of the collective, writing in the editorial (or royal) “we.” Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues that the narrator in a realist text is “‘nobody’. . . . [It] is not individual, and it is not corporeal. . . . [I]t is a collective result, a specifier of consensus.” 61

Paradoxically, then, Dickens achieved a level of realism in *Household Words* by making his narrator un-real, what Jaffe calls Dickens’s “semi-omniscient figures,” who “disturb . . . the

59 Dickens couldn’t help but give his “shadow” some context: “I want to open the first number with this Shadow’s account of himself and his family. I want to have all the correspondence addressed to him” (*Letters*, 5: 623). Yet Dickens would eventually abandon this framework, too, and other, even more inscrutable Dickensian elements, would bind together *Household Words*.
boundaries between first- and third-person narration.” Dickens had already been experimenting with this new conception of omniscience in *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), but in *Bleak House* he engaged in his most innovative and complex narrative—one that is built on frames.

The unique, dual-narrative form of *Bleak House* invites rich criticism. Yet even the third-person voice in *Bleak House* proves unique as its present-tense evokes a sense of urgency that Esther Summerson’s past-tense third-person calms. Ermarth argues that in *Bleak House* “the powers of historical Nobody narrative are divided between two separate narrations, one with a capacity for oversight but no memory, and the other with a memory but insufficient oversight.”

The third-person narrative in *Bleak House* seems a product of Dickens’s developing conception of omniscience. It is a hovering, darting, omnipresent voice; but, as many have pointed out, it is also often subjective, judgmental, and angry. It has the capacity not only to observe, but also to inhabit. Esther’s narrative remains more grounded, serene, and ingenuous. For this reason, productively or not, the narratives have often been considered as gendered opposites; it is difficult indeed—and perhaps intentionally so—to read the third-person narrator as anything but “him,” especially because Dickens gendered earlier his semi-omniscient “shadow” proposal male.

Curiously enough, contemporary readers seemed not to be surprised by the dual narrative. *The Eclectic Review* observes, “One part of [Dickens’s] method in ‘Bleak House’ seems to have imposed a special difficulty in the way of preserving the unity of the work. As though it were not enough to break it up into pieces, . . . he has given to it the character of a double narrative. The tale is told by two parties, or rather is distributed to the share of two parties.”

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64 “Bleak House,” *The Eclectic Review* 6.98 (December 1853): 666. This reviewer considers the omniscient narrator to be the “author speaking in his own person” (666).
drawing attention to the novelty of the narrative structure, reviewers were generally irritated at
the contrivance. The *Illustrated London News* complained that “Mr Dickens fails in the
construction of a plot”; “Bleak House,” The *Spectator* notes, suffers from “absolute want of
construction”; and *Bentley’s Miscellany* argued, “We feel that the story has not been carefully
constructed.” But not all reviews were critical of the structure. “[T]he conduct of the story
appears to us singularly skilful,” Forster writes for the *Examiner*: “The studied and elaborate care
bestowed upon the construction of *Bleak House* is very manifest.” Of course, one cannot
evaluate Forster’s remarks without considering the possibility of a positive personal bias for his
friend. Still, there is a surprising lack of contemporary discourse that refers specifically to the
dual narration. T. S. Eliot perhaps first altered the critical dialogue, calling the novel Dickens’s
“finest piece of construction.” Thinking of *Bleak House* as experimental or meta-fictional
seems a modern reaction, perhaps one that underestimates Victorian readers.

Joan Douglas Peters refers to the novel’s “double-narrational frame,” and Thorell Porter
Tsomondo observes its “frame-within-the-frame narrative setup” but steers clear of making a
distinction between framer and framed. Arguing for a blending of perspectives more than a
system of narrative nesting, Monika Fludernik suggests that the two voices “reflect
complementary spheres of life, resulting in a montage of viewpoints rather than in a mere frame-
narrative.” I would like partially to borrow from Caroline Levine’s terminology that *Bleak
House* “imagines society itself as a network of networks” to consider the novel as a frame of

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65 *Illustrated London News* (24 September 1853), in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, 281; George Brimley, the
*Spectator* (24 September 1853), in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, 293; *Bentley’s Miscellany* 34 (October 1853), in
68 Joan Douglas Peters, Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida,
2002), 100; Thorell Porter Tsomondo, The Not So Blank, ‘Blank Page’: The Politics of Narrative and the Woman
69 Monika Fludernik, “Extract from ‘Virgin Territories: The strategic expansion of deictic options,’” in Narrative
frames. The complete 1853 edition binds the nineteen serial installments into one structure that is the object of the book. Embedded inside that structure lie two narrative frames, which themselves feature the novel’s thematic frameworks of architecture, urban topography, and social distinction. As with its Gothic predecessors, however, these structures provide false boundaries that are transgressed by narrators, characters, and objects. Wherever there appears to be separation, there is union; whoever promotes disassociation in fact practices collusion. As Graham Storey observes, the narratives function “to show the ultimate connectedness of the apparently unconnected.” This engagement is what lies at the heart of Dickens’s famous digression, “What connexion can there be,” though it is not just characters, but also narratives that are “curiously brought together.” The novel is a bridge between the “innumerable histories of this world . . . from opposite sides of great gulfs” (197)—gulfs of gender, time, geography, and ontology. Grossman observes, “In Dickens’s hands, the novel as an art . . . could enable his community, whose individuals were increasingly atomized, to come to know their manifold unseen connectedness.” Like the “‘cartloads of paper’” (88) that make up the Chancery case, Bleak House too must be brought together, litigated, and solved.

Two schools of thought dominate scholarship of the novel’s form and differ mainly in allowing one voice authority over the other. Merritt Moseley, for example, contends, “The narrators in Bleak House are not coordinate; Esther is subordinate.” John McBratney conversely argues that the existence of Esther’s narrative proves that the “third-person narrator’s

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73 Grossman, Charles Dickens’s Networks, 6.
story is only part of the total story that can be told.” And Peters goes as far as to argue that Dickens himself was “privileging” Esther’s narrative by “suggesting that the qualities associated with that voice are those most conducive to producing a novelistic text.” Hilary M. Schor even asserts that Esther’s narrative “thrives on the contrast between that magisterial . . . third-person narrator.” I would argue, instead, that the two narratives thrive on one another. More symbiotic than hegemonic, in fact, one narrative cannot exist without the other; the many contrasts dwell beneath the countless points at which the voices converge and cooperate. W. J. Harvey considers Esther’s narrative as a “brake, controlling the runaway tendency of Dickens’s imagination,” which creates the “effect of pulsation, of constant expansion and contraction, radiation and convergence.” But this reading, intriguing as it may be, fails to consider that the third-person narrator’s first two chapters, “In Chancery” and “In Fashion,” are stuck in quagmires of stalled circulation, whereas Esther’s first chapter, “A Progress,” concentrates an entire Jane Eyre-like Bildungsroman of Esther’s childhood and entrance into adulthood at Chancery. It also ignores the jarring tone of Esther’s breakneck journeys with Bucket to locate her mother. As Schor states, Esther’s “‘I’ shatters the complacency of those initial chapters.”

Esther’s narrative is all about Esther, despite her reservations and promises: “It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of my life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now” (27). Whereas the frame narrative of Master Humphrey’s Clock, in Hood’s opinion, fails to win audience interest and

76 Peters, Feminist Metafiction, 102.
fades into the background of the more engaging texts that it introduces, Dickens made sure that in *Bleak House* neither frame could render the other superfluous. Jarndyce expresses Esther’s importance best: “‘What concerns you, my dear Esther . . . concerns us all’” (532). The very fact that her narrative is first-person seems to establish her interiority and subjectivity in contrast to the third-person narrator’s perceived distance and objectivity. As Jaffe notes, “omniscience cannot ‘do’ the personal.” But this assessment glosses over the fact that the narrator sometimes speaks for characters, often replacing their dialogue with his own voice. This effect is most evident with Jo:

> Jo suddenly comes out of his resignation and excitedly declares, addressing the woman, that he never known about the young lady, that he never heern about it, that he never went fur to hurt her, that he would sooner have hurt his own self, that he’d sooner have had his unfortnet ed chopped off than ever gone a-nigh her, and that she wos wery good to him, she wos. Conducting himself throughout as if in his poor fashion he really meant it, and winding up with some very miserable sobs. (558)

The narrator moves from his familiar voice into Jo’s dialect and back again without skipping a beat in a dynamic example of free indirect discourse. Ermarth argues that the narrator “focuses not on the depths of personality but on the depth of the social world taken as a whole.” Through Jo, however, the narrator simultaneously speaks of the individual and the social. One could posit that the most impersonal part of *Bleak House* is Skimpole, who “speak[s] of himself as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person” (66).

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80 Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 129.
81 This occurs even earlier: “Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don’t know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think” (134).
Dividing the narratives to examine them as separate texts allows access to surface-level differences that affect a complete reading. Where Moseley, Jaffe, and others fail is in considering _Bleak House_ as split into halves. This is far from the truth. Esther’s narrative contains almost 30,000 more words than the third-person narrator’s, amounting to nearly twelve percent more space in the novel. In terms of sheer page count, then, Esther dominates. The most important perspective that this sort of analysis demonstrates, however, is how much characters move between the narratives, and what happens to them when they transgress these narrative boundaries. The first move from Esther back to the third-person narrator involves a transition wherein Esther figures: “While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire” (76). It is what Grossman would call the “characters’ simultaneous circulation; a coordinating ‘Meantime . . .’ logic bound together community.”

Thereafter, Esther is rarely referred to in the third-person narrative, and only by Mrs. Chadband, Guppy, and finally the detective, Bucket. The second of the orphaned triumvirate, Ada, appears only once in the third-person narration, and remains unnamed as one of the “two young people . . . directed to be in attendance” at Chancery (9-10). Her partner, Richard, makes a far more profound narrative jump. He is the only one of the three to achieve a speaking role in the third-person narration. Richard’s appearance in chapters that feature the vampiric Vholes are a harbinger of his demise. His dealings with Vholes prove to be the precipice of his steep pecuniary and physical demise. However, it is novel’s eccentric family-philanthropists, the Jellybys and the Pardiggles, that substantiate an implicit connection between Esther and the narrator.

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83 For more on the surface differences between the two narratives, see Massahiro Hori’s _Investigating Dickens’ Style: A Collocational Analysis_ (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), which uncovers “viewpoints of vocabulary, sentence structure, sentence length, symbolism and metaphor, as well as of person and tense” (124).

84 Grossman, _Charles Dickens’s Networks_, 6.
Esther’s famous first line—“I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever”—not only immediately establishes a curious disingenuousness that her thoughtful and careful prose constantly undermines, but it also suggests that she has been assigned to write—or “obliged” as she later puts it—to provide her “portion” of the story (17). Peters argues that Dickens “constructs in dialogical juxtaposition two different modes of representing the same social ideology.” However, Peters does not point out that the comic injustices of “telescopic philanthropy” remain entirely confined to Esther’s narrative but for one crucial instance. Woodcourt finds Jo momentary refuge at George’s Shooting Gallery: “Jo is brought in. He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle’s Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby’s lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article” (564). Only Esther has encountered the Pardiggles and Jellybys; they never make their way to the other narrative. One of two explanations is thus possible: either the narrator is flexing his omniscient muscles, tracking Esther’s movements among these families, or he is working in cooperation with his counterpart; together they form the whole argument for focusing attention on domestic philanthropy. The narratives are collaborative, rather than different, ideological models. Jaffe argues that in Bleak House there is a “boundary omniscience cannot cross, [which] raises a problem for the very notion of omniscience.” That is, the necessity of Esther’s narrative to complete the story consequently limits the powers of the “omniscient” narrator. This permits the argument that Esther, the retrospective voice of the future, “might as well be omniscient.” But Jaffe’s reading does not consider when the third-

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85 Peters, Feminist Metafiction, 103.
86 Jaffe, Vanishing Points, 128.
87 Jaffe, Vanishing Points, 130.
person narrator does see into Esther’s world. Moreover, Esther appears also to know the
narrator’s story. Jo, the pathetic young street-sweeper, makes his first appearance in the third-
person narration. When he comes into Esther’s frame, however, he is nameless and referred to
exclusively as a “boy,” until Esther records: “We went back into the hall and explained to Jo
what we proposed to do” (386). That this is the only mention of Jo by name in Esther’s narrative
suggests that her knowledge of his name is posthumous.

The most significant discrepancy between the two narratives may prove to be what binds
them so intimately together. Esther becomes the “mistress of Bleak House,” its key-holder and
manager. Jarndyce frees Esther to marry Woodcourt and provides the couple with a second
Bleak House, what Schor describes as a “doll’s house version.” Eventually, Jarndyce installs
Ada, widowed but with her own sequel-child named Richard, as the new mistress of the old
Bleak House. Like the Curiosity Shop and the Brontës’ houses before it, Bleak House is more
than just a titular edifice; its adjectival power invests the novel with a bleakness that Esther’s
“summer sun” can only rarely light. Dickens’s working notes demonstrate that he labored over a
title for the novel, moving between “Tom-All-Alone’s” and “The Solitary House” (among
several others), before arriving at Bleak House after ten half-sheets of manuscript paper. Bleak
House, in short, is crucial to Bleak House and is the setting and subject for much of Esther’s
narration. It does not appear, however, in the third-person narration. Nor does the word “bleak.”
The narrator travels from the squalid depths of Tom-all-Alone’s to the fashionable heights of
Chesney Wold and looms over the “heart of the fog” at Chancery (6). But Bleak House remains
the one sanctuary from the narrator’s sight, which makes it an interesting reversal of the
conventional Gothic house. Although the labyrinth of connecting rooms leave you “wondering

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how you got back there, or had ever got out of it” (62), it is more asylum than prison. Jo absconds all-too-easily. Rather than a mystery of Udolpho, there is a “mistress of Bleak House” (63), who is the chief cog in the secreted machinery.  

_Bleak House_ initially follows the pattern of Gothic frame narratives, but then reimagines the mode. The narrator’s full stop (“London.” [5]) echoes the year-entry that begins _Wuthering Heights_ (“1801—”). And Esther’s “I,” which begins her first-person narrative, is reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein’s story and Robert Wringhim’s confessions. While Richard’s move from Esther’s narrative into the voice of the third-person narrator proves destructive, for other characters the jump is more complicated. Jo’s movement into Esther’s narrative in many ways functions as the climax of the novel. Sick from living in the swamp of disease that is Tom-all-Alone’s, Jo infects Charley, Esther’s maid and friend, who then infects Esther. As with Dick Swiveller’s illness in _The Old Curiosity Shop_, Esther’s sickness and recovery alters her emotional perspective. She no longer lives in fear of implicating her mother. That mirror is shattered. Before Esther enters Bleak House and meets her guardian, John Jarndyce, she stays a night at the Jellyby house. It is a curious stop-off, which Jarndyce justifies to Esther: “I want to know your real thoughts, my dear. I may have sent you there on purpose” (61). It is a test of Esther’s character to discover her opinion of foreign philanthropy. Her reply seems to confirm Jarndyce’s hopes: “it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir” (61). Esther’s illness marks the worst result of all philanthropic efforts: her attempt to fulfill domestic (national) obligations by preventing death instead nearly kills her. She perhaps should have focused on other domestic obligations—her home, Bleak House. Dickens suggests that there are always

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89 After Lady Delock dies, Chesney Wold becomes particularly Gothic: “A waste of unused passages and staircases. . . . With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy” (766–767).
closer, more personal wrongs to right before one can spread one’s philanthropic influence outward; to use a magnifying glass rather than a telescope.

When Esther first visits the lowly brickmaker family—on a stop with Mrs. Pardiggle and her despondently abstemious children—she expresses an explicit feeling of being an outsider: “Ada and I were very uncomfortable. We both felt intrusive and out of place” (99). Certainly, visiting the decay Mrs. Jellyby creates from her foreign philanthropy is a far cry from the domestic ruin Esther witnesses at the brickmaker hovel: physical abuse, alcoholism, starvation, and a dead infant (which gets placed like a book upon a shelf and stays there as a “small waxen form” [102], immeasurably more horrifying than the effigy in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*). Esther feels “out of place” because she is just that. As her aunt portentously declares, “‘You are set apart’” (19). Now ward and proxy-mistress to an aristocratic lineage, Esther enters a social sphere from which she is distinctly removed. It is a world more negotiable for the third-person narrator’s eye—a world best viewed with disembodiment rather than experienced as a body, as a corporeal frame. The third-person narrator can enter spaces without risk, whether corporeal or social.\(^9\)

The reversal of this feeling comes during Jo’s short stay at Bleak House. He knows, despite being near death, that he has transgressed a social boundary from which no good can come. *Bleak House* demonstrates how permeable these barriers have become; how a central issue like Chancery can invade and affect the lives of anyone; how disease spreads through all bodies, rich or poor. Sir Leicester laments this social sea-change in reference to Rouncewell’s audacious attempt to remove Rosa from service at Chesney Wold: “the floodgates of society are burst open, and the waters have—a—obliterated the landmarks of the framework of the cohesion by

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\(^9\) Esther’s illness, when compared to the actions of not only the third-person narrator, but also Woodcourt, comes across as a gendered punishment. Philanthropist women are made the butt of jokes, if not subjects of scorn: Mrs. Jellyby ignores and employs her family and Mrs. Pardiggle make hers miserable martyrs for her cause. Yet Woodcourt is championed for his philanthropic efforts (not to mention surviving a shipwreck and becoming a hero thereafter) and does not fall ill after encounters with Jo.
which things are held together!’” (504). It is the novel that brings these elements together, linking disparate characters and contexts within its confines. Rouncewell’s audacity reflects the steady transformation of a nation built more on the framework of industry, the machines of labor and production, than on primogeniture. In *Bleak House*, Dickens suggests that these connections sometimes prove detrimental (Esther’s illness and Jo’s death), but more often than not he demonstrates their benefits, the conditions and situations that bring distant subjects and things into association to effect social progress. In other words, Dickens’s “connexion”s are the reality of the world, and the potential for suffering and happiness are the results of a broken, or perhaps reformed, framework that the novel can effectively reflect and even affect.

London is an “army of bricks and mortar,” Dickens writes in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and it is also both constructed on and subsisting from the iron of industry. “[B]etween us and these people,” Esther writes, “there was an iron barrier which could not be removed” (99). Those who produce the boundaries—the brickmaker and Rouncewell, the ironmonger—ultimately destroy them. But Esther fails to see that her philanthropic efforts are also part of removing these barriers. Ironically, it is Lady Dedlock who most violates her husband’s social framework, and it is the great secret of the novel: her continued affection for Captain Hawdon and discourse with Jo undermine the lofty position she parades. Although she is at the “centre of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree” (12), she in fact occupies the social space between the two Courts of Chancery, the Chancellor’s and Krook’s.

Sir Leicester’s regret over the crumbling framework of society reaches its apex during his employment of Bucket: “Of all men upon earth, Sir Leicester seems fallen from his high estate to

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92 Montague Tigg complains about this same breakdown in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44) concerning his friend being detained for an outstanding bill: “I do feel that there is a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere, that the whole framework of society is shaken, and the very first principles of things can no longer be trusted” ([London: Chapman and Hall, 1901], 89). As it comes from Tigg (later Tigg Montague), however, this is a dubious assertion.
place his sole trust and reliance upon this man” (669). Bucket proves to be a particularly interesting figure in *Bleak House*, who manages, with more skill than any other character, to traverse the worlds of the two narrators. He is adept at tracking characters who also move between the narratives, locating and interviewing Jo and implicating and arresting Hortense. In fact, as Ermarth points out, “The two narratives finally converge on the trail of Lady Dedlock.”

The novel’s initial transition back to the third-person narration, “While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes” (76), is echoed when the narratives meet: “I had gone to bed and fallen asleep, when my guardian knocked at the door of my room and begged me to get up directly” (674). Bucket enters Esther’s narrative and drags her on an untimely pursuit of her mother. Travelling through London’s depths, Esther loses her conception of time: “If I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration” (687). Ultimately, the duration proves too lengthy. Lady Dedlock, like Jo “‘moving on to the berryin ground’” (559), lies dead at the cemetery of Captain Hawdon. The body-count in the novel is considerable, even for Dickens. “‘They dies everywheres’” (383), Jo explains; and Jarndyce concludes, “‘Bleak House is thinning fast’” (616).

Esther’s dizzying trip with the enigmatic Bucket is a sequel to an even more curious traveling experience. After her aunt dies, Esther takes a carriage to boarding school at Greenleaf. “There was a gentleman in the coach,” she recalls, “who sat on the opposite seat and looked very large in a quantity of wrappings” (24). Although she does not acknowledge her tears, the man berates her for crying, which he proves by wiping her tears away with the cuff of his coat. “‘Now you know you are,’” he states to Esther, “‘Don’t you?’” (24). Esther finds him mysterious, simultaneously off-putting and friendly: “I thought he was very strange; or at least that what I

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could see of him was very strange, for he was wrapped up to the chin, and his face was almost hidden in a fur cap” (24). He offers her sweets, which she refuses, and he eventually gets off at his stop: “We left him at a milestone, I often walked past it afterwards, and never for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind” (25). Yet, when Esther first meets Jarndyce, she reveals:

From the moment of his first speaking to us his voice had connected itself with an association in my mind that I could not define; but now, all at once, a something sudden in his manner and a pleasant expression in his eyes recalled the gentleman in the stagecoach six years ago on the memorable day of my journey to Reading. I was certain it was he. I never was so frightened in my life as when I made the discovery, for he caught my glance, and appearing to read my thoughts, gave such a look at the door that I thought we had lost him. (60)

The coachman was Jarndyce all along. Esther’s earlier disingenuousness here about his passing out of her memory in fact proves that he is very much a part of it, important enough to bear mention during her momentous trip from being an abject disgrace to a valued ward. But her reaction, “I never was so frightened,” makes the discovery a discomforting example of the Gothic uncanny. Most important are the gentleman’s words aboard the coach, “Now you know you are [crying] . . . Don’t you?” which mirror Bucket’s rather disturbing attempt at comfort during the pursuit of Lady Dedlock: “Now you know me, don’t you?” (690). For Esther seems to require reminding of the “now,” or rather of the “then.” Six years have passed since she met Jarndyce on the coach, and seven years after she becomes mistress of the new Bleak House she records her story. When characters are withheld for suspense, can Esther’s narrative be a
biography, be a true account? Or is it that history is fundamentally a fiction that is reported only by surviving actors?

Given that the single gentleman in *The Old Curiosity Shop* retrospectively becomes Master Humphrey, we may read the coach-man “becoming” Jarndyce in a new light. If *The Old Curiosity Shop* is also the “Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey”—who is simultaneously and paradoxically himself in the opening frame, the single gentlemen throughout the central narrative, and also the narrator—then perhaps *Bleak House* is partially Jarndyce’s adventures, simultaneously a character in the novel and its present-tense, omniscient voice. The coach-man’s acerbic attitude towards Esther’s servant, “‘Con-found Mrs. Rachael! . . . Let her fly away in a high wind on a broomstick!’” (25), is never echoed by the magnanimous and cool-headed Jarndyce. But this split personality (Jarndyce and Jarndyce) mirrors the omniscient narrator’s capricious mood swings. The novel opens “In Chancery” during proceedings (or more likely recedings) over the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case—an interminable litigation that bears Jarndyce’s name, but from which he strives to remain removed. An exasperated Richard tells Vholes:

> If any man had told me when I first went to John Jarndyce’s house that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed—that he was what he has gradually turned out to be—I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas now I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment

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94 Robert Giddings observes, “Sometimes Esther quotes John Jarndyce as sounding a great deal like the omniscient narrator. . . . His description of Tom All-Alone’s . . . is the particular realization of the omniscient narrator’s generic representation, in Chapter 1, of Chancery’s holdings” (*The Changing World of Charles Dickens* [London: Vision, 1983], 192).

95 Reviewing the novel for *The Spectator*, George Brimley complains of the Chancery suit, “The centre of the arch has nothing to do in keeping the arch together” ([24 September 1853], in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, 293). Perhaps Brimley alludes to Dickens’s own reference to a crumbling arch after Tulkinghorn’s murder: “What was his death but the key-stone of a gloomy arch removed, and now the arch begins to fall in a thousand fragments, each crushing and mangling piecemeal!” (666).
of the suit; that in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce. (486-487)96

Jarndyce may be at the center of both the case and the novel; a body on one hand and an abstraction on the other. That the omniscient narrator refuses to refer to Bleak House only highlights his involvement. Jarndyce’s name in the case attracts litigants in the novel in much the same manner as the omniscient narrator brings characters together. Perhaps it is that, following Master Humphrey, Jarndyce has decided to let Esther “speak and act for” herself. Who else could write the other “portion” of the novel? Esther’s narrative concludes *Bleak House*, and Jarndyce earns top billing: “I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen” (770). Jarndyce’s face here contrasts Esther’s pock-marked visage, the scars that lead her to ponder, as the novel ends: “they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—” (770). On one hand, it is significant that Esther’s last words are cut off in a dash, which echoes Jo’s unfinished recitation of the Lord’s Prayer at his death: “‘Hallowed be—thy——’” (572). But it appears also that Esther is looking for a response, fishing for a compliment, as it were, from someone other than Woodcourt, someone who has ended the “portion” of his narrative with a “dull repose” (767).

“*Bleak House* is not certainly Dickens’s best book,” Chesterton writes, “but perhaps it is his best novel.”97 It is the height of the author’s powers, Chesterton suggests, at crafting a specimen of the genre, but it is not his finest work of literature. (That recognition Chesterton

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96 As Jane M. Ford points out, “There is never any indication in *Bleak House* that John Jarndyce at any time, past or present, has worked to earn the money he is so generously spending. . . . [T]here is an unnamed usurer in the background throughout the novel, and the blackest note in this black novel may well be that the usurer is the ostensibly ‘good’ man” (*Patriarch and Incest from Shakespeare to Joyce* [Gainesville, FL: U of Florida P, 1998], 67).

97 Chesterton, *Collected Works*, 342.
would award to *David Copperfield.*) *Bleak House* took the novel to novel territory. It is “constructed only too well,” George Gissing asserts, in what appears to be a deliberate reversal of early criticism: “it is a puzzle, yet ingeniously simple; the parts fitting together very neatly indeed.”98 But the formal structure of *Bleak House* marks the pinnacle of the Gothic frame narrative that Dickens had already redefined with a similar narrative experiment in *The Old Curiosity Shop.* In *Bleak House* the Gothic meets realism. Dickens demonstrates that at least two voices are necessary to imagine the real world. Put simply, *Bleak House* merges objective and subjective narratives to create realism. In so doing, however, Dickens questions the very categories that he introduces: his third-person narrator has limited omniscience and often becomes biased and overtly personal; and Esther frequently offers a perspective of the world that seems oddly detached and disembodied and that either refuses to or simply cannot see through other characters’ eyes. As Ermarth argues, “the split narration implicitly questions the power of overview to hold things together and the power of memory to be objective.”99 Dickens suggests that the world is made up of both objective and subjective realities, and *Bleak House* acts as a sort of check and balance system. Esther’s narration corroborates the third-person narrator’s and vice versa. The evidence is incontrovertible; where there can be holes and prejudices in the many accounts that make up Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman and White* and *The Moonstone,* Dickens achieves realism by looking through two eyes that sometimes see the same things, but that can separate temporally and spatially unlike individual sets of eyes. Yet, like our own eyes, which achieve depth through the combination of two distinct images of the same scene, *Bleak House* realizes a third-dimension that relies on the reader to become the binding—or frame—that

98 Gissing, *Charles Dickens,* 67. Gissing had his criticisms with the novel, however: “I have left it to this place to speak of the sin, most gross, most palpable, which Dickens everywhere commits in his abuse of ‘coincidence.’ *Bleak House* is the supreme example of his recklessness” (68).
merges the narratives, that figure whom Esther refers to as “the unknown friend to whom I write” (767). Perhaps Esther’s description of Bleak House is really a description of Bleak House: “you lost yourself in passages” (62). Esther’s final dash is a dramatic demonstration that the novel can never conclude in its textual afterlives. No surprise that Dickens wrote in his notes, “Wind up. End (?)” (799).

Before the Jarndyce case becomes “absorbed in costs,” Conversation Kenge expresses his belief in the “great system” of Chancery, which he explains while “gently moving his right hand as if it were a silver trowel, with which to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the system, and consolidate it for a thousand ages” (741). Dickens, of course, has sought to attack the foundation on which this structure rests in Bleak House. “Innumerable children have been born into the cause,” the narrator remarks early on: “innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it” (8). This works for the novel, too, which is “thinning fast,” but always building steadily. Bleak House explodes the “structure of the system” of the novel form to interrogate the fictions of realism, to negotiate the subjectivity in objects and the objectivity in subjects. The Gothic gives Dickens the tools to break down the formula, while seemingly spreading his own cement. Unfortunately, Household Words left so little “elbow room” for Dickens to “open places in perspective” that he was forced in Hard Times to limit his views, to conform to convention. Bleak House thus marks not only the creative destination of the Gothic frame narrative, but also its terminus. There could be no moving forward, no innovation on the form—even supposing—
CODA

GLORY IN A GAP: JAMES, CONRAD, AND FRAMING REALISM

O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell
and count myself a king of infinite space,
were it not that I have bad dreams.
—Shakespeare, Hamlet

And what can be the worth of that solicitude which a peep into the third volume can utterly dissipate? What the value of those literary charms which are absolutely destroyed by their enjoyment? When we have once learnt what was that picture before which was hung Mrs. Ratcliffe’s solemn curtain, we feel no further interest about either the frame or the veil. They are to us merely a receptacle for old bones, an inappropriate coffin, which we would wish to have decently buried out of our sight.
—Anthony Trollope, Barchester Towers

After Bleak House, the Gothic frame narrative appears to have gone dormant under the season of high Victorian realism. Narrative experiments with perspective and authenticity were supplanted by the multi-plot, third-person omniscient novels of Eliot, Trollope, and Hardy. Yet the Gothic frame narrative managed to survive as it was adapted by sensation novels and “scientific romances.” It took Henry James and Joseph Conrad to refresh the device in its Gothic mode, employing it as a vehicle for interrogating the fiction of omniscience. A recent study argues that James’s novels present a “self-conscious inversion of the conventional Gothic

3 Eliot’s Gothic tale The Lifted Veil (1859) could be considered a frame narrative.
4 Sensation novels took uncomfortable themes such as crime, bigamy, and larceny and put them in familiar domestic and urban settings. Wilkie Collins was especially receptive to Gothic themes and forms in his sensation novels: The Woman in White (1859–60) and The Moonstone (1868) consist of first-person accounts framed by a overarching mystery; and Armadale (1866) begins with a three chapter “prologue” set in 1832 that frames the main story set nearly two decades later. Frame narratives also thrived in science fiction: Jules Verne’s 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1870), James De Mille’s A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder (1888), H. G. Wells’s The Time Machine (1895), and M. P. Shiel’s The Purple Cloud (1901). Verne’s 20,000 Leagues concludes, like Bleak House, with a dash, and Captain Nemo’s fate remains ambiguous. We might also be reminded of the other Captain Nemo, Esther’s father James Hawdon, in Bleak House.
narrative frame,” in which James is “quoting the Gothic conventions rather than using or invoking them.”5 This contention is untrue for both novelists, for what is at stake here is quite the opposite. James and Conrad found in the Gothic frame narrative the resources to explode the conventions of Victorian realism to create a foundation for a new period of novel writing that would refuse to hang its hat on the perverse conventions of omniscience. James’s narrative technique—from which Conrad happily borrowed and supplemented—works through a conscious application of the Gothic mode. This is not to say that either author is derivative, but rather that they are players in the history of the Gothic frame narrative, which, far from dead, continues to thrive in new mediums today.

In his preface to Roderick Hudson, James muses on the craft of the novelist: “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which [figures and things] shall happily appear to do so.”6 The struggle for the novelist, according to James, is to provide narrative boundaries, both spatial and temporal: “The prime effect of so sustained a system, so prepared a surface is to lead on and on; while the fascination of following resides, by the same token, in the presumability somewhere of a convenient, of a visibly-appointed stopping-place.”7 In James’s “canvas of life,” fiction must be cut and then framed in what is a difficult process of focus and inclusion measured against marginalization and exclusion. This methodology in some ways echoes Poe’s 1846 remarks on the “close circumscription of space” he created when writing “The Raven.”8 Whereas Poe achieves Gothic effects by confining his subject inside a haunting chamber of voices, James was able to engage the difficult management of stopping-points to

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7 James, “Preface to ‘Roderick Hudson,’” 6.
create disturbing effects of irresolution. In other words, Jamesian Gothic relies on the sublime, the indefinable environment, the unruly matter of subjectivity. In a 1905 essay on James’s style, Conrad speaks to the rejection of finality in terms of its production of realism:

[I]t is obvious that a solution by rejection must always present a certain lack of finality. . . . Why the reading public which, as a body, has never laid upon a storyteller the command to be an artist, should demand from him this sham of Divine Omnipotence, is utterly incomprehensible. But so it is; and these solutions are legitimate inasmuch as they satisfy the desire for finality, for which our hearts yearn, with a longing greater than the longing for the loaves and fishes of this earth. Perhaps the only true desire of mankind, coming thus to light in its hours of leisure, is to be set at rest. One is never set at rest by Mr. Henry James’s novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on.\(^9\)

At stake here for Conrad is a readership who insists on experiencing an ending, an outcome that requires omniscience, an objective power that mounts the world into a manageable frame. For Conrad, the world is made up of subjective experiences, perspectives colored by bias and human limitations. Thus fiction should never end with objective resolution from a voice that cannot possibly exist. This effect, though Conrad fails to acknowledge it, is decidedly Gothic. That late-Victorian writers refused the fiction of finality echoes the formative thematic power of the Gothic novel. Does the creature immolate himself at the end of *Frankenstein*? Does Walton return safe to England? Examples are many and varied, but irresolution and questions of

inauthenticity are fundamentally disturbing—and thus real. James expressed the struggle of indeterminate realism in his notebooks while he was writing *What Maisie Knew* (1897):

> I have brought this little matter of Maisie to a point at which a really detailed scenario of the rest is indispensable for a straight and sure advance to the end. Let me not, just Heaven—not, God knows, that I *incline* to!—slacken in my deep observance of this strong and beneficent method—this intensely structural, intensely hinged and jointed preliminary frame. In proportion as this frame is vague do I directly pay for the vagueness; in proportion as it is full and finished do I gain, do I rejoice in the strength.\(^\text{10}\)

James explains that he must avoid a vague frame, one that is either obscure in its language or that fails precisely and crisply to form the informational edges of the central story. James achieved this clarity in the frame to *Maisie*, a novel of childhood experience and adult self-absorption, but when he tackled the Gothic *The Turn of the Screw*, the frame would be anything but distinct and definite. *Maisie* begins with an opening frame—neither an introduction nor a part of chapter 1—that details the results from a divorce between Maisie’s dissolute and irresponsible parents. Chapter 1 opens with her first six-month term living with her father. The frame never returns, and readers, like the governess Mrs. Wix, are left to “wonder at what Maisie knew.”\(^\text{11}\) James understood the power of narrative frames and struggled, as his note to the novel suggests, to balance detail with ambiguity. Anticipating Derrida’s argument on the parergon as an interstitial space that blends reality and representation, James challenged the proscriptions of Victorian omniscience to demonstrate that reality cannot be objective, that human experience is necessarily


dynamic and often unsettling. What makes fiction most real is not a god-like omniscience, but rather human voices, not perfection, but fallibility. As Conrad writes, “fiction is nearer truth.”\(^{12}\) Paradoxically, the more suspicious, the more available for interrogation and criticism, the more real.

James understood the implications of such a disturbing experiment with narrative, as he crafted, just one year later, his great Gothic work, *The Turn of the Screw*. The novella first appeared in James’s 1898 two-story collection *The Two Magics*, and he revised it several times over his career. In 1895, James noted that he heard a ghost story from the Archbishop of Canterbury, but *The Turn of the Screw* fundamentally transforms several of the original story’s themes.\(^ {13}\) Whereas he heard a tale of apparitions who tempt wicked children, James implicates all the narratorial figures in the disturbing plot. As with *What Maisie Knew*, James leaves us wondering what any of the characters actually knew—whether child, governess, storyteller, or narrator. Nita Schechet examines the gender implications of the novella’s narrators and observes, “Neither male narrator resumes his opening narrative after the governess’s tale, creating a layered narrative, an open-bottom frame and the source of the story’s ambiguity.”\(^ {14}\) And T. J. Lustig notes that the novella “systematically blanks out beginnings and endings.”\(^ {15}\) But the


\(^{13}\) On 12 January 1895, James records, “Note here the ghost-story told me at Addington (evening of Thursday 10\(^{th}\)), by the Archbishop of Canterbury: the mere vague, undetailed, faint sketch of it—being all he had been told (very badly and imperfectly), by a lady who had no art of relation, and no clearness: the story of the young children (indefinite number and age) left to the care of servants in an old country-house, through the death, presumably, of parents. The servants, wicked and depraved, corrupt and deprave the children; the children are bad, full of evil, to a sinister degree. The servants die (the story vague about the way of it) and their apparitions, figures, return to haunt the house and children, to whom they seem to beckon, whom they invite and solicit, from across dangerous places, the deep ditch of a sunk fence, etc.—so that the children may destroy themselves, lose themselves, by responding, by getting into their power. So long as the children are kept from them, they are not lost; but they try and try and try, these evil presences, to get hold of them. It is a question of the children ‘coming over to where they are.’ It is all obscure and imperfect, the picture, the story, but there is a suggestion of strangely gruesome effect in it. The story to be told—tolerably obviously—by an outside spectator, observer” (*The Notebooks of Henry James*, 178-179).


question remains concerning the effect of these bookending blanks: what really is being hidden and what is real?¹⁶

*The Turn of the Screw* begins *in medias res* as a group of partygoers have just finished listening to a chilling ghost story that involves a child. Douglas, a particularly shadowy member of the group, boasts that he knows a story that ups the ante, for it involves ghosts and “*two children*”—another turn of the screw.¹⁷ An unnamed narrator, together with the equally enthralled listeners, prods Douglas to tell his story, but though he has its contents indelibly printed on his heart, he prefers to read it directly from an original manuscript. “The story’s written,” he explains: “It’s in a locked drawer—it has not been out in years” (5). This is a familiar Gothic trope, which James borrows from any number of earlier novels, including Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest*, Scott’s *The Antiquary*, and Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Douglas sends away for the manuscript, and some time later he begins by way of a “prologue,” which is “required for a proper intelligence” (8). Douglas’s words, which provide the manuscript some introductory context—and construct a framed frame—come through the voice of the narrator, who promises to have taken them “from an exact transcript of my own made much later” (8). We learn that the manuscript is written in the hand of an unnamed governess, to whom some listeners infer that Douglas had a romantic attachment. The governess answers an advertisement to care for the nephew and niece of a “gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel” (9), at an Essex

¹⁶ One reviewer applauded James’s skill for introducing and surrounding the story’s disturbing central theme: “Can the treatment of such abomination be within the pales of art? One is obliged to admit that it can be, because Mr. James has demonstrated it—demonstrated it as we hope it will not be demonstrated often. It has, however, required all the resources of his skill. The marvel is that he never even falters—makes one false stroke with his brush. As it stands, ‘The Turn of the Screw’ is a masterpiece; one fails to see how it could be improved. Its art gives the envelopment to the subject that it saves superbly. It is the kind of envelopment one finds in the portraits of Whistler, for instance, and that is perfect” (“Mr. James Turns the Screw,” *Dixie. A Monthly Magazine* [January 1899]: 59-60).

manor named Bly. The frame concludes with the narrator offering his services for a title (which is ignored), and the governess’s manuscript begins at chapter 1.

Bly is a veritable Gothic edifice, housing the main characters: the governess, the two children, Miles and Flora, and Mrs. Grose, another caretaker. Flora’s singular beauty set against the backdrop of the manor sparks the governess’s imagination: “I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of storybooks and fairy-tales” (19). This is the first indication that the governess creates fictions out of reality, a trait that taints her later claims of truth and authority. The governess receives a letter early on which informs her that Miles has been expelled from his boarding school, for reasons unrevealed, and has been forced to return to Bly. The siblings, now united, present a dazzling tandem of intelligence and beauty to the governess, who intimates in veiled statements her jealousy and unease with their unique attributes and aptitudes. Gradually, the governess learns of the previous servants at Bly, though Mrs. Grose, in echoing the simultaneous reticence and garrulousness applied by Nelly in Wuthering Heights, asserts, “‘I won’t tell tales’” (24). That the children never speak of their previous caretakers drives the governess’s curiosity, which is intensified when she begins seeing ghosts.

Returning from a walk in the gardens, the governess sees a figure of a man standing at one of the manor’s towers, as “definite as a picture in a frame” (31). This marks the governess’s first allusion to framing when describing the apparitions she sees. Earlier she “take[s] in the whole picture and prospect” of Bly’s grounds, “from my open window” (16). Like many a Radcliffean heroine, the governess routinely frames her views through windows, creating picturesque borders for her potential imaginings. The figure she views atop the house leads her to question, “Was there a ‘secret’ at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable
relative kept in unsuspected confinement?” (34). Referring to both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre* positions the governess as an avid reader of Gothic fiction and thus, as with Austen’s Catherine Morland, a probable victim of its snares. Her next encounter with the figure proves far more disturbing and detailed. She sees it staring in at a window, she surmises, looking for Miles. She later describes its features and dress to Mrs. Grose, who confirms that it is Peter Quint, a servant who had earlier died.

Quint appears to be explicitly modeled on Dickens’s devious dwarf Daniel Quilp, who appears in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Similar to *The Turn of the Screw*, Dickenses’s novel is framed not only by the first-person account of Master Humphrey, but also by Dickens’s periodical *Master Humphrey’s Clock*. If we disregard the complicating terminal frame the latter provides, *The Old Curiosity Shop* concludes with a short reflection on time and change: “so do things pass away, like a tale that is told!” So too does the governess’s story abruptly stop at Miles’s “stopped” heart, as he passes away. While in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Quilp is the “prime mover of this whole diabolical device,” Quint is the primary cause of “‘general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain’” (4). James’s subtle indications of sexual abuse on the part of Quint in fact color Dickens’s uncomfortable scenes between Quilp and Nell. Moreover, Quilp drowns after drunkenly stumbling over lumber in the dark and falling into nearby water; and Quint’s reported death is equally as singular. A wound on his head “might have been produced—and as, on the final evidence, had been—by a fat slip, in the dark and after leaving the public house, on the steepish icy slope, a wrong path, altogether, at the bottom of which he lay” (53). Where Quilp’s death marks the end of his terrible plans to marry Nell, however, Miles is not so lucky. Quint haunts the child even in death. But as much as Quilp may be a fictional product of Master

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19 Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 497.
Humphrey, and a gruesome figure who surrounds Nell, Quint may also be a product of the governess’s imagination. Although Quint is the central terror of the story, he is only a fleeting symbol of the more disturbing events of the novel that remain shrouded in secrecy.

Mrs. Grose reveals that Quint and another servant, Miss Jessel, who previously held the governess position, “‘were both infamous’” (61). Quint reportedly had been inappropriate with many of Bly’s inmates, but the implication of an illicit sexual relationship with Jessel makes her a partner in his crimes. Thus the governess also begins to see the ghostly figure of the woman, dressed in black, apparently attempting to haunt Flora. But it is Quint who continues to appear and eventually makes his way into the house, where the governess has an intense encounter with him on some stairs. The governess concludes, “‘They’re seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows, the further edge of pools; but there’s a deep design, on either side, to shorten the distance and overcome the obstacle’” (93). The barriers that the governess reads as physical, however, are more correctly textual, what James calls in his notes “‘coming over to where they are,’” entering the narrative space of the children, transgressing their frame of reference.  

Although the governess acts as a “gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes” (103), the house remains permeable through its windows. Quint becomes “like a sentinel before a prison” (164), an unsettling shadow of omniscience, who looks down and in but never at.

The ghosts stay as silent as the children, however, and the governess must continue to ply Mrs. Grose for answers. Mrs. Grose’s surface-level restraint stems from her employer, the distant uncle who “‘didn’t like tale-bearing,’” but as with Nelly in Wuthering Heights Mrs. Grose’s shell is all too easily cracked. “She had told me, bit by bit, under pressure, a great deal” (66), the

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20 James, The Notebooks of Henry James, 178.
governess boasts, pressures which include verbal harassment: “‘But I shall get it out of you yet!’” (69). The secret proves too much for the governess to manage as she “felt the importance of giving the last jerk to the curtain” (67). These words are puzzling. Since she has read The Mysteries of Udolpho, the governess well knows that the corpse Emily thinks she sees behind the veil in Radcliffe’s novel is nothing but a waxen effigy.21 Perhaps, then, the governess (or the string of editors, or James himself) is intimating that the truth is all a fiction, a malleable representation of what never was. The secrets of Bly are the products of the governess’s overwrought imagination. The ghosts provide a cathartic representation of guilt for the governess, molded and housed within frames.

Thus the governess’s description of Quint warrants some examination. “‘I’ve been dying to tell you,’” she explains, “‘he’s like nobody’” (45). Yet she describes Quint perfectly, from his hatless head and red hair down to his stolen clothes. She even boasts of her ability to sketch each of the ghostly figures: “I came to be able to give, of each of the persons appearing to me, a picture disclosing, to the last detail, their special marks—a portrait on the exhibition of which [Mrs. Grose] had instantly recognised and named them” (64). How, then, can Quint be both somebody and nobody? “‘He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor’” (46), the governess asserts. But it is always the children who are such dazzling actors, in their playtime “not only popp[ing] out . . . as tigers and as Romans, but as Shakespeareans, astronomers, and navigators” (74). In fact, the governess’s description of Quint could also be applied to the mysterious figure of the author who haunts the text. Before Flora leaves Bly, she challenges the governess’s authority: “‘I don’t know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have. I

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21 Of course the veil is a common trope in Gothic fiction other than Udolpho. In Radcliffe’s The Italian, for instance, Ellena is routinely veiled and mistaken by Vivaldi; for a Victorian example, Eliot’s The Lifted Veil concerns the curse of man’s supernatural ability to see into the future and to access the thoughts of others.
think you’re cruel. I don’t like you!’” (139). Flora either refuses to acknowledge, or cannot see, in the governess’s words, “the hideous author of our woe—the white face of damnation” (164). Miles, once again, is not quite so lucky. In the novella’s momentous final scene, the governess squeezes Miles as she sees Quint looking in at the window. Whether Miles dies from seeing Quint or whether it stems from some other shock is never revealed. But we may infer that Miles sees something, more than Flora’s nothing. It is, perhaps, an encounter with the “author of our woe,” a realization that his life has been dictated by a supernatural authority, that he is himself a fiction, that proves fatal.

We might thus read The Turn of the Screw as a Gothic text that explores a potentially destructive encounter between a figure of omniscience, the ghostly shadow that peers into and hovers over homes, and a character who believes that she dictates her own senses and actions. As with The Old Curiosity Shop, the most disturbing character in the novel may be the unnamed narrator who records the events of the opening frame. He ultimately controls the reception of the text, manipulating the terms for fiction and reality. The governess’s words the night of Miles’s death demonstrate her struggle to maintain subjectivity:

Here at present I felt afresh—for I had felt it again and again—how my equilibrium depended on the success of my rigid will, the will to shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature. I could only get on at all by taking “nature” into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding, after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue. No attempt, nonetheless, could well require more tact than just this attempt to supply, one’s self, all the nature. How
could I put even a little of that article into a suppression of reference to what had occurred? (153-154)

Confronting the unnatural could result in a “new plunge into the hideous obscure” (154), which portends Miles’s “cry of a creature hurled over an abyss” (168), and echoes Melmoth’s dream and then death in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. The governess’s “rigid will” is controlled by the whims of the unnatural—in this case not only the apparitions she sees, but also the system of editors with access to her story. She is defined by the transmission of her story from Douglas’s manuscript reading to the narrator’s transcription and editing. She has no choice in the matter of how the text is introduced, constructed, and disseminated. When one of the listeners asks Douglas if he has a title for the story, he responds in the negative, and ignores the narrator’s quick declaration, “Oh, I have!” (13). The title, of course, is James’s, but it is also the governess’s, or rather the narrator’s transcription of the governess’s manuscript. How could the narrator have known a fitting title before hearing the story? The phrase is first the governess’s, then Douglas’s, and finally the narrator’s. But these are uncanny repetitions of the phrase. Whereas Douglas uses it in reference to a ghost story involving “two children” (4), the governess must “turn . . . the screw of ordinary human virtue” (153) to approach Miles about the ghosts. As we move inwards from the title-page, to the narrator’s frame, to the governess’s tale, the meaning of the phrase changes, which in fact destabilizes the unity of the text as a whole.

Most disturbing, however, is the potential doubling of character and narrator. Douglas reveals that the governess who supplied him the manuscript before her death was in love, and members of the group hypothesize that this lover was Douglas. She was ten years older than

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22 Perhaps he read *Bleak House*; chapter 34 is titled “A Turn of the Screw.”

23 *The Turn of the Screw* is itself framed by the title, *The Two Magics*, which also included the story “Covering End.”
Douglas and was the governess of his sister. In her story, the governess is twenty years old, Flora is eight, and Miles is ten. Since Miles is the same age as Douglas, it could be that Douglas’s sister is in fact Flora. The governess’s magnetic attraction to Miles and his adult manner—which includes the scandalous words he tells his friends that get him expelled from school—perhaps is the illicit secret of the novel, that what the governess sees in Quint and Jessel is in fact a manifestation of her guilt over her own indiscretions with a young boy, what is at best love, and at worst pedophilia. The governess one day sees Miles facing a window and

an extraordinary impression dropped on me as I extracted a meaning from the boy’s embarrassed back—none other than the impression that I was not barred now. This inference grew in a few minutes to sharp intensity and seemed bound up with the direct perception that it was positively he who was. The frames and squares of the great window were a kind of image, for him, of a kind of failure. I felt that I saw him, at any rate, shut in or shut out. He was admirable, but not comfortable: I took it in with a throb of hope. Wasn’t he looking, through the haunted pane, for something he couldn’t see? (157)

The window frames Miles’s reflection, a portrait not of a ghost outside, but of a child trapped inside, consumed by his oppressive protector. The governess sees Miles and Quint, the cause and representation of her guilt, framed in the same window. She wants the children to blame the dead, to pass her sins to the ghosts of servants past, but Miles/Douglas is too innocent to understand, too young for his heart to beat for her love. “I caught him, yes, I held him,” the governess reveals: “it may be imagined with what a passion” (169). His “little heart” stops, “dispossessed,” but not from ghosts—instead from a forbidden love. The novel ends—ambiguous, frustrating, and Gothic—the villain alive and the blame securely passed to the
voiceless dead. As with Frankenstein and Melmoth the Wanderer, the conclusion is equivocal; what on the surface appears to be the death of a child in fact could be the termination of the governess’s love. The woman who sent Douglas the manuscript story “before she died” (5) may have finally found the courage to admit her wrongdoing to the victim who has remained very much alive.

The Turn of the Screw features the inextricable voices of so many narrators that it may be read as a means for James to distance himself as author from his fiction. As the governess records, “I was a screen—I was to stand before them” (54). As one of the text’s narrators, she conceals James as author. This move fundamentally echoes the strategies of novelists who preceded him: Mary Shelley giving way to Margaret Saville, Walton, Victor, and the creature; and Emily Brontë to Ellis Bell, Lockwood, and Nelly. But James’s New York Edition (1907–09), in which he provided new prefaces to his novels, connects him even more prominently to Walter Scott. Unlike Scott’s Magnum Opus editions, however, James’s prefaces were built on aesthetics and narrative rather than context and biography. John H. Pearson argues that James “created the modern reader . . . by assuming authority over his work both as its creator and ideal consumer, and then overtly and covertly instructing his readers how to appreciate and discriminate Jamesian literary art.” The prefaces, Pearson argues, perform a manipulation of his readers rather than a reassessment of his novels.

Whatever the effect James sought to achieve with the New York Edition, adding prefaces ultimately belies any earlier attempts at masking himself as author. Paratextual frames that explain the fiction in effect highlight the author, which, once again, connects James to Scott, who

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24 The frame characters in The Turn of the Screw are structured similarly to those in Scott’s Tales of My Landlord. In the latter, Cleishbotham is the editor and Pattieson the deceased collector; and in the former the unnamed narrator is the editor and Douglas the deceased collector.

abandoned anonymity in 1827 and then made a spectacle out of his authorial self thereafter. Five years after he reframed his novels with the New York Edition, and almost a decade after Conrad’s laudatory “Henry James: An Appreciation,” James penned an essay, “The New Novel,” in which he examined Conrad’s storytelling frame narratives:

Mr. Conrad’s first care . . . is expressly to posit or set up a reciter, a definite responsible intervening first person singular, possessed of infinite sources of reference, who immediately proceeds to set up another, to the end that this other may conform again to the practice, and that even at that point the bridge over to the creature, or in other words to the situation or the subject, the thing ‘produced,’ shall, if the fancy takes it, once more and yet once more glory in a gap. It is easy to see how heroic the undertaking of an effective fusion becomes on these terms, fusion between what we are to know and that prodigy of our knowing which is ever half the very beauty of the atmosphere of authenticity.26

Whether or not James intended it to do so, this passage illuminates a reading of Gothic novels, especially Frankenstein. The “creature” that Victor produces is yet another storyteller who himself introduces Safie’s story. Each of the frames in Frankenstein reveals a gap in knowledge even more than it builds a bridge. It is the ultimate “fusion” of these narratives that makes the novel authentic or real because it relies on a dynamic relationship between teller and listener in which the former tantalizingly withholds information that only another teller can know. The same phenomenon applies to several of Conrad’s novels, where Charles Marlow’s “prolonged

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hovering light of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case exposed” constructs story within story—connected by crumbling, perilous, and apocryphal bridges of information.  

Marlow first appeared in *Youth* (1898) and then in *Lord Jim* (1899–1900) and *Chance* (1912). In a 1917 “Author’s Note” on *Youth*, Conrad explains Marlow’s origins. Although Marlow has been considered “a clever screen, a mere device, a ‘personator,’ a familiar spirit, a whispering ‘daemon,’” Conrad argues that he “made no plans.” Conrad proceeds to explain that Marlow is a friend with whom he collaborates, though he is never sure when the relationship will end. This uninformative tease solicits readings of Marlow as an alter-ego, especially because both are sailors and storytellers. J. Hillis Miller lays this reading to rest: “The reader who says Conrad speaks directly for himself either in the words of the frame narrator or in Marlow’s words does so at his or her peril and in the defiance of the most elementary literary conventions. Whatever the frame narrator or Marlow says is ironized or suspended, presented implicitly in parabasis, by being given as the speech of an imaginary character.” Marlow is perhaps more of an idol, not only in posture, as Conrad describes him in *Heart of Darkness*, but also in the sense of hero-worship. Where Conrad must be subject to judgment, Marlow is free in fiction, floating above the world, as James writes, rather than living in it.

Ian Watt reads in Marlow a “much more extreme and overt break with the distance, impersonality, and omniscience of third-person narration” than is available in James’s narrators; Conrad’s narrative is even more personal and “internalized” because it is as “fully adapted to the direct relation of the individual’s inner thoughts and feelings as to the description of the external

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28 Joseph Conrad, Preface to *Youth*, in *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Norton, 2006), 289. Recall that the governess is also a “screen” in *The Turn of the Screw*.
What is most crucial for Watt in his reading of Conrad’s narrative technique is the effect of “delayed decoding,” which “combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning.”

Although Marlow tells the story in the past-tense, he often describes impressions he had in the present before revealing the actual details. Whereas so much is left unresolved in the governess’s narrative in *The Turn of the Screw*, Marlow’s trick is to create information blanks after the fact, a means of adding an effect of reality through the sensations of a subjective mind. Delayed decoding “simultaneously enacts the objective and the subjective aspects of moments of crisis.” We might be reminded of the dual narratives in *Bleak House*, which so uniquely blend subjective and objective experiences to establish a deep and realistic perspective of the world.

*Heart of Darkness* begins aboard the “Nellie” (the last of the nineteenth-century Nells), a ship anchored in the Thames, awaiting a tidal change to carry it out to sea. Five characters are on the ship, including an unnamed narrator and Marlow. Although the narrator asserts that the sea has made the group “tolerant of each other’s yarns—and even convictions,” he expresses explicit annoyance at Marlow, who demonstrates the “weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear.” The narrator immediately undermines Marlow’s authority as a storyteller, but, like Coleridge’s Wedding Guest, “cannot

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31 Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 175.
33 We must also read Kurtz’s report for the “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs” as an echo of Dickens’s “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts,” though the former is fictional and the latter a real organization, which has operated since 1701.
choose but hear.” Jakob Lothe argues, “In the classic frame narrative the frame narrator is often the most authoritative and knowledgeable of the narrators,” yet in *Heart of Darkness*, “although the frame narrator passes on Marlow’s story and appears to be reliable, his insights are distinctly inferior to Marlow’s.” This argument holds little weight as Conrad’s narrator merely echoes the many unreliable and dubiously informed framing voices that precede him: Shelley’s Walton, Hogg’s editor, and Brontë’s Lockwood, to name only a few. Most significant is that the “host” of the excursion, the Director of Companies, is “trustworthiness personified” (3), yet he remains silent, allowing the potentially untrustworthy voice of Marlow to dominate until the terminal frame, when the Director interrupts, “‘We have lost the first of the ebb’” (77), and the ship moves and Marlow’s story ends.

In the frame, however, the narrator does supply a vital argument concerning narrative structure. “The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity,” he contends, “the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (5). For most tales, the narrator suggests, the meaning lies in the meat of the story, but for Marlow it appears in the story’s framework. The connotation of the word “within” complicates the quote: meaning could be found inside the shell or in the shell itself. Moreover, the nut is “cracked,” which suggests an incomplete, if not broken, framework—a metaphor that recalls the ambiguous conclusions of earlier Gothic novels. The narrator’s assertion has several

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other implications. The first is that Marlow’s tale is itself framed, and we can perhaps see this effect if the scenes outside of Africa frame his river adventures and meeting with Kurtz. Although he barely survives the journey, Marlow does manage to return to London and to settle Kurtz’s business. Thus the frame outside Africa should be the hazy, “misty halo” that surrounds the distinct and defined interior. But this is rather the opposite; the central passages in Africa, the kernel, the heart of darkness, are a nebulous dreamscape, which in fact bewilders not only Marlow in his return to England, but also readers. Marlow recalls:

No, they did not bury me, though there is a period of time which I remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire. I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. (70-71)

Marlow’s words echo Gulliver’s misanthropic disgust after his several returns to England in *Gulliver’s Travels*. The unbelievable and marvelous people and places that the characters have seen taints their perceptions of the modern, “civilized” world. The second implication of the narrator’s shell metaphor is even more significant: if the narrator follows Marlow in believing that meaning is located in the frame, then he implicitly suggests that the framework he provides is more relevant than Marlow’s story. Perhaps it is. The narrator reflects on history and human
progress while anchored on the Thames. But these are the narrator’s words; this is his metaphor, his conception of Marlow’s storytelling—not Conrad’s.

The narrator complains that the group aboard the ship is fated “to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (7). Yet again this undermines Marlow’s authority by drawing immediate attention to the fact that it will provide no resolution. Indeed, as with Esther Summerson’s final dash, Marlow’s story trails off mid sentence: “‘It would have been too dark—to dark altogether. . . .’” (77). The text’s avoidance of finality, however, keeps with Conrad’s praise of James. *Heart of Darkness* purposefully frustrates readers who desire conclusiveness. Finality only becomes available, courtesy of the narrator, in the frame. Like Fielding’s biographer-host, the narrator breaks in for points of rest, several times noting Marlow’s intervals of silent reflection. The most dramatic of these pauses comes nearly halfway through the text:

> It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (27)

The narrator becomes a reader, experiencing Marlow through a disembodied voice, and participating in a fruitless search for meaning, for structure, for resolution. Marlow fails to help his cause as he undermines his own authority. “You know I hate, detest, and can’t bear a lie,’” he asserts: “‘There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies’” (27). Yet his last act is a lie: he tells Kurtz’s “Intended” that the dead man’s last words were her name, rather than the disturbing “‘The horror! The horror!’” (69). And he tears off the genocidal postscript from Kurtz’s final
report, editing the villain so that he may be remembered as a hero. There are so many holes in the story, so many blanks of knowledge, that it is impossible to construct complete meaning. Marlow’s story, like his sunken ship, is missing its rivets. In the frame, the sea and the river are “welded together without a joint” (3), which recalls the “intensely structural, intensely hinged and jointed preliminary frame” of What Maisie Knew. The meaning comes through the flexible connection between frame and framed, between Africa and London, between the “heart of darkness” (35) and “one of the dark places of the earth” (5). The points at which the narratives meet provide the structure and finality that Marlow (and perhaps Conrad) sought to deny: at the joints we see that the “thing monstrous” (365) and the “monstrous town” (5) present the same horrors.

Following James and Conrad, the frame narrative began to be employed by novelists adapting the Gothic: in Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome (1911), an unnamed first-person narrator frames Frome’s third-person story; and in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! (1936), narratives by Quentin Compson and several other characters detail the life of Thomas Sutpen in non-chronological pieces. Children’s literature also borrowed from the frame narrative, using storytelling figures to introduce tales: A. A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh (1926), for example, features a narrator who blends the real and fictional Christopher Robin. The frame narrative found an even more productive life, however, in film. What these many adaptations suggest is

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37 James, The Notebooks of Henry James, 257.
38 The uncanny repetition of the title is also in play in Heart of Darkness. The phrase appears twice in Marlow’s narrative, and then the narrator picks it up, but refuses to quote it directly, in his last words: “the heart of an immense darkness” (77).
39 For only a few examples: The Wizard of Oz (1939), Sunset Boulevard (1950), The Princess Bride (1987), Forest Gump (1994), and Slumdog Millionaire (2008). The 1920 silent film The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari features a frame story and concerns a homicidal doctor who hypnotizes a somnambulist to commit murders. Recently, the Gothic and the frame narrative have converged again in the “found footage” film genre. The Blair Witch Project (1999) presents camera footage from a documentary group, and the film ends in silence as one character drops the camera on the ground. That Blair Witch famously duped many moviegoers into debates over its reality connects it with the found manuscript Gothic of The Castle of Otranto. Several horror franchises have followed this mode (Paranormal
that the Gothic frame narrative is formative not only to the novel, but also to all forms of knowledge. After its eighteenth-century origin and then development that took it into the mid-nineteenth century, the Gothic frame was then parsed and adapted by the wildly successful genres of sensation and science fiction, only to be reformed and revitalized in its Gothic form at the turn of the century. From drama to film, epic to fragment, novel to tale, the frame narrative proves pervasive, provocative, and productive. It offers limitless narrative possibilities, simultaneously creating structure while presenting the tools for deconstruction. Since Victorian writers employed frame narratives to achieve an authenticity from a blending of objective and subjective perspectives that the fiction of omniscience refused to realize, we may look to the Gothic as the foundation for the realist novel. Perhaps it is not the comfortable realism we expect, that which directs us towards claims of objectivity, but it is a realism based on human experience, the often disturbing, sometimes horrifying reality of perspective, untruth, and doubt.

_Activity, V/H/S, REC_, as have many tangential genres, including monster-invasion (_Cloverfield_ [2008]), supernatural teen-fantasy (_Chronicle_ [2012]), and raunchy teen-comedy (_Project X_ [2012]).