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**William Lane's "Horrid" Writers:**

**An Exploration of Violence in the Minerva Press Gothic, 1790–1799**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Through the exploration of a selection of Minerva titles from across the period of the Press's dominance, 1790–1799, focussing on the recurring trope of violence, its varying portrayals by individual authors, and its censure by critics, this thesis argues that the Press makes a unique contribution to the Romantic literary marketplace with regard to its output of violent Gothic fiction. Gothic novels were very popular in the 1790s, but they were much critiqued for their impact on readers, with critics' special concern being female readers' exposure to violent themes, which were said to be unfeminine and immoral. In this thesis, 'Gothic violence' is interpreted in several ways, extending its meaning beyond the obvious (physical harm inflicted on or by the characters in such novels), to include violence which is verbal, violence as inflicted on the reader, and violence manifested in extreme revolutions of feeling and/or in some peculiarly provocative transgression of social and ethical norms. Minerva authors capitalised on the Gothic's popularity by using its conventions and themes, however their use of violence was not simply to entertain – it was also used to portray the horrors of war and its impact on women and the domestic space; to dramatise a fear of sinister and corrupt institutions supplanting the rightful province of others such as the family, marriage and church; and to explore contemporary concerns surrounding gender roles, parental authority in marriage, and the right ways for children to balance their personal desires with societal and familial duties. In this way, violence was far more than a conventional trope of the Gothic genre for writers at the Minerva Press, rather it was a way of eliciting and exploiting contemporary anxieties and exploring issues pertaining to these. Moreover, through their use of violence, Minerva authors can be seen to deviate from the works of other writers at the time, which this thesis argues ultimately supplants long-standing views of the Press as unoriginal and its works as homogenous.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Historical Fact and the ‘Historical Gothic’: Violence and the Horrors of War.....	14
Chapter 2: Sex, Power and Secret Societies: Violence in the German Gothic.....	36
Chapter 3: Marriage; or, Rape, Incest, and Imprisonment: Violence against Women.....	61
Conclusion.....	89
Works Cited.....	91

## Introduction

In the eighteenth century, the novel itself was still relatively new and, with its capacity for communicating almost *anything* to its vast readership, it made people uneasy – particularly given the newly literate masses of women and members of the lower class. Critics at the time were concerned that communicable ideas, when corrupt, would function like “communicable diseases,” essentially infecting all those who encountered them in their reading (Cooper 25). Thus, the Gothic genre, centring on violent scenes and horrible characters, came to be treated as a dangerous form of the Romance novel, with the term ‘Gothic’ becoming one of “critical abuse” in contemporary reviews (Botting & Townshend 1).

Criticism of the genre dates from 1765, when the first reviews of Horace Walpole’s pioneering Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), were published. Writing for the *Monthly Review*, John Langhorne marvelled that “an Author, of a refined and polished genius, should be an advocate for re-establishing the barbarous superstition of Gothic devilism!” (qtd. in Sabor 481). Langhorne’s surprise at the “barbarous” nature of Walpole’s writing shows that the old use of the term Gothic – relating to the darkness, violence and brutality of the Middle Ages – was still prevalent at the time; furthermore, his referring to “Gothic devilism” reinforces the idea that works of this genre were considered to have some corrupting effect on their readers, much like the Devil himself. Following the later publication of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Samuel Taylor Coleridge likewise expressed his concern when writing a review of the novel that “the horrible” had “seized on the popular taste” (194). This demonstrates how Langhorne and Coleridge, along with other contemporary writers, seemed to believe that the late eighteenth-century vogue for Gothic novels would cause the vulnerable to become debauched by the habit of reading horrid tales.

Although such novels were popular with readers of both sexes, it was their effect on women that concerned critics the most. By the latter half of the 1790s, when the popularity of

the Gothic genre was at its height, the potential dangers of excessive and undiscerning novel reading by women had become a topic of widespread debate. In an extract from his conduct book, which was published by *The Scots Magazine* in June 1797 and entitled ‘On Romances and Novels, and the Proper Employment of the Time of the Fair Sex,’ evangelical writer Thomas Gisborne discoursed in patriarchal style that a woman’s reading should be “confined within the limits of strictest purity,” since “even of the novels which possess great and established reputations, some are totally improper” (375). The reason for this perceived impropriety, he argued, was due to their being “contaminated” with “vicious” scenes, “infamous” and “unhappy” characters, and such portrayals of “vice” as would surely leave the female reader “corrupted” (375–6). For Gisborne, as for others, the fear was that unnecessary exposure to scenes of violence and horror would cause women to eschew the virtues of order and decency, neglect social and familial duties, and abandon chaste habits.

As a result of such criticism, the tide of advice or conduct books in Britain reached its height between 1760 and 1820, coinciding with the proliferation of the Gothic novel and about which they had much to say. Conduct books integrated the styles and rhetorics of earlier genres – including devotional writings, marriage manuscripts, recipe books, and works on household economy – to offer their readers a picture of the ideal women, at the same time as handing out practical advice. According to Nancy Armstrong, these books became “so popular” that, by the second half of the eighteenth century, “virtually everyone knew the ideal of womanhood they proposed” (61). Alongside the scores of men who contributed to the construction of this “ideal,” there were also several women who wrote regarding the subject. Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1790) is a typical example of a conduct manual written by a woman and for women, being addressed through its subtitle “to a Young Lady.” In it, she sets out her ideas about how young women should educate themselves, encouraging her readers to take the “greatest care” when choosing “fictitious stories,” and avoid any which threaten to “enchant the mind” and “inflame the passions” (188). Though not entirely explicit, it is not

unreasonable to assume that Chapone has the likes of William Lane's violent Gothic novels in mind for her censure, as she goes on to express her concern that "both the writing and sentiments of most novels and romances are such as are only proper to vitiate your style, and to mislead your heart and understanding" (188). Moreover, "when a young woman makes it her chief amusement," such reading "generally renders her ridiculous in conversation, and miserably wrong-headed in her pursuits and behaviour" (188). Chapone finally ends her tirade against novel-reading in saying: "I must repeatedly exhort you, never to read anything of the sentimental kind, without taking the judgement of your best friends in the choice; for, I am persuaded, that the indiscriminate reading of such kind of books corrupts more female hearts than any other cause whatsoever" (189). Far from being alone in viewing novels and novel-reading as having a corrupting effect on readers, Chapone's work was eminently popular, appealing even to Mary Wollstonecraft and influencing her composition of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). Both women passionately maintained that women were indeed capable of rational thought, and that they deserved to be educated beyond what the novels of romance and sentimentality had to offer.

Following on from this criticism and into the late eighteenth century, Bluestocking Hannah More's 'Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education' was published in *The Works of Hannah More* (1799), and it essentially picked up where Chapone left off, adding to her argument that novels had a dangerous potential to "corrupt" rather than to educate (28). More expressed a belief that indiscriminate novel-reading would prove "fatal" to women readers, its "deleterious" effect "[seducing] the affections," "annihilating the value of chastity," and "striking at the very root of honour" (29). However, she was most disparaging about the "metaphysical sophistry" of some writers, for she thought this more than any other kind of writing "debauche[d] the heart of woman," thus "corrupting the judgement, and bewildering the understanding" (29). As the popularity of the Gothic genre continued to reach alarming heights, More observed that where previously novels "chiefly used to be dangerous in one

respect,” they had “now become mischievous in a thousand” (28). This danger, she argued, arose because they were “continually shifting their ground,” “enlarging their sphere,” and “daily becoming vehicles of wider mischief” – the implication being that novels were becoming ever more extreme in terms of their subject matter (with works of sentimentality turning to those of violence, terror and horror), as well as reaching an ever-expanding audience of female readers (28). Such censure resulted in novels being looked upon with increasing concern, but it also serves to illustrate the extent to which critics, male and female alike, feared the Gothic genre and its potential to corrupt readers, inflaming their imaginations and depraving their hearts by exposing them to scenes of sex, violence and the supernatural.

Regardless of its widespread discredit among critics, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century readers’ appetite for the Gothic novel never waned. After it had initially been made popular by authors such as Horace Walpole, Matthew G. Lewis and Ann Radcliffe, publishers of cheap fiction soon recognised the genre’s money-making potential. As a result, there were a small flood of such novels from more obscure writers, many of which were published by “that great source of the Gothick, the Minerva Press” (Sage 11).

Eighteenth-century bookseller William Lane first published under his own name in the 1780s, but around 1790 his books began to carry the imprint of the Minerva Press. With Minerva worshipped as the Roman goddess of wisdom, the name implies that Lane had hoped to be known for publishing works of quality. He even asserted that the Minerva Press was only “open to such subjects as tend to public good,” and that its publications would “never be stained with what will injure the mind or corrupt the heart” (qtd. in Davison 109). Certainly, Lane had great commercial success, with his Press now recognised by scholars as the most productive publisher of fiction between 1790 and 1820, responsible for “fully a third of all the novels produced in London” during its dominance (Behrendt 162). The extent of the Press’s popularity can be further derived from the observations of major writers, with Minerva novels meriting mentions by Jane Austen, Thomas Love Peacock, and T. B. Macaulay. Most notably, Lane’s

publications came to typify Gothic fiction, with John Feather playfully commenting that “the ‘Minerva Press novel’ became almost as much of a descriptor of a genre as ‘Mills and Boon’ was to be of popular romantic novels in the second half of the twentieth century” (n.p.). Nonetheless, the Minerva Press has been routinely derided since its inception, and William Lane heavily criticised for the lowbrow literature he published. At the time, it was thought that novels printed by Lane were mostly salacious and thus undeserving of literary merit: Thomas Love Peacock’s ‘Essays on Fashionable Literature’ rebuked Minerva works for their being “completely expurgated of all the higher qualities of mind” (qtd. in Blakey 2); while Charles Lamb regarded “the common run of Lane’s novels” as “those scanty intellectual viands of the whole female reading public” (275); and Sir Walter Scott, writing under the humorous pseudonym Rev. Dr. Dryasdust, bemoaned the “trash periodically issued from the Minerva Press,” since he believed it “poisoned the minds of our females” (79). With “viands” meaning food, and “poisoned” meaning ingesting something dangerous, the concerns of Lamb and Scott relate to Cooper’s theory on “communicable diseases” – both have the potential to damage the mind and body, but without one necessarily being aware of it. The secret nature of poison (in that you would not knowingly ingest something poisonous) suggests that these women were ignorant of the supposed damage they were doing to themselves through their reading. Moreover, the fear of what goes into women’s minds relates to that which goes into their physical bodies, thereby likening the critics’ concerns to the patriarchal fear of the female body as polluted and the spread of sexual diseases by women and prostitutes; essentially, that “poisoned” females had the effect of polluting men through contagion. The implication is that even if men were not reading such novels themselves, they were being placed in danger by the women who were. In this sense, Gothic novels could be seen to enact real violence on the female reader in the same way that fictional violence is enacted on the female heroine; both suffer from the symptoms of a violent sexual seduction where purity is violated, and their minds and bodies are forever afterward poisoned in the opinions of men.

With the novel itself struggling to achieve acceptance as an important literary form in the mid to late eighteenth century, the Gothic novel (which made up a third of the Minerva's annual output) proved to be even less acclaimed. As well as being viewed as dangerous and corrupting, critics complained of the sameness of the scores of horrid novels that continued to plague the marketplace, thanks to the likes of Lane's Press. In *The Critical Review*, one writer laments that "the press has teemed with stories of haunted castles and visionary terrors; the incidents of which are so little diversified, that criticism is at a loss to vary its remarks," while another remonstrates "surely the misses themselves must be tired of so many ghosts and murderers" (qtd. in Spector 14). Once again, much of this criticism is targeted at the female reader, with Gothic works dismissed as being capable only of entertaining the supposedly limited intelligence of the "misses" who constitute the "female reading public". The overwhelming popularity of the Gothic novel left those who did not enjoy its works at a disadvantage: while critics assumed women were entertained by such reading, they themselves were left "tired" and placed "at a loss," essentially shut out of a genre that failed to speak to them as it did to others. So, despite speaking of *readers* as being negatively affected, it may actually have been *critics* who felt threatened, finding themselves negated of a proper place and seemingly envious of the superiority of others in finding entertainment rather than displacement. Nonetheless, such statements serve to demonstrate the extent to which the popular Gothic was not taken seriously in its own time, as well as giving an indication as to why Lane's novels have never been given serious consideration in literary histories.

Despite its central role in both the conception and criticism of the Romantic novel, the Minerva Press and its output have received surprisingly little critical attention by Romanticists. Peter Garside goes some way to explaining why this might be the case when he states that the Press "was *reactive* rather than an originator of trends," and suggests its use as little more than "a barometer of taste" ('Romantic Gothic' 136). To date, there are only two book-length studies on Minerva: Dorothy Blakey's *The Minerva Press, 1790–1820* (1939) and Deborah McLeod's

PhD ‘The Minerva Press’ (1997). These have been helpful in enabling a fuller understanding of the Press’s output, particularly through checklists of titles, and, in McLeod’s case, statistical data. Notwithstanding this lacuna, there has been recent interest in the Press, in the light of Cheryl A. Wilson’s declaration that “the books of the Minerva Press are certainly ripe for additional study” (17). Three journal articles, by Elizabeth Neiman (2015), Yael Shapira (2015), and Anthony Mandal (2018), have focussed on individual authors or titles, contributing to our understanding of the Press as adumbrations of the fuller picture. Neiman’s article explores the ways in which Lane’s Press is being written back into Romantic-era history, both for its impact on the novel market and for the ‘Romantic’ tropes it inspired, as well as arguing that “Minerva novels do more than we have said they do,” since they provide opportunities for us to see how Lane’s authors “alter popular conventions in such a way that reflects experiences and values absent in original formulas” (634; 635). Shapira addresses the fact that “discussions of individual Minerva works remain sporadic and limited” by offering an examination of the marriage paradigm and illustrating how its use in the Minerva Gothic novel can be seen to deviate from the Radcliffean model, with a particular focus on the works of Isabella Kelly (2). Mandal looks to “Mrs. Meeke,” one of the most prolific novelists of the Romantic era who published the entirety of her fiction with the Minerva Press, in order to highlight the “significant, if overlooked, contributions made to the romantic novel” by women writers at Lane’s Press” (‘Mrs. Meeke and Minerva’ 132). In addition to these articles, there is also the forthcoming ‘Minerva Press’ issue of *Romantic Textualities*. Taken together, this rise in scholarly attentions confirms that now is a crucial time to be exploring the Minerva Press, its authors, and their works.

This thesis builds on what has already been done by Neiman, Shapira and Mandal in arguing that the Minerva Press and its works *are* of value, and that there is in fact much to be gleaned from their study; specifically, the aim being to provide an understanding of the use of violence by William Lane’s writers of “horrid” Gothic literature, in order to show how the

Press was indeed an “originator” in this respect, rather than merely “*reactive*” to the works of more popular writers. This thesis thus explores a range of Minerva titles from across the period of the Press’s dominance, 1790–1799, focussing on violence, its varying portrayals by individual authors, and its censure by critics. Chapter 1, ‘Historical Fact and the “Historical” Gothic: Violence and the Horrors of War,’ takes the works of Anna Maria Mackenzie, E. M. Foster, and Agnes Musgrave to examine their use of violence when describing the horrors of war and its impact on women and the home, as well as considering the basis for this violence in reality, taking into account the war between Britain and France and the incidence of the Reign of Terror. In so doing, I argue that these writers crafted their own ‘historical Gothic’ mode, by combining the fact of historical fiction with the sensationalism of the popular Gothic novel, in order to cater to the late eighteenth-century fashion for “horrid” novels, all the while defending themselves against the opprobrium typically met by the genre by citing the utility of such works for female readers. By flavouring the most fantastic sensationalism with frequent dashes of realism, these ‘historical Gothic’ novels are set apart from other works of the time by their use of violence, with the mode allowing writers at the Minerva Press to present popular Gothic horrors, but under the guise of accurate and informative historical fiction. Chapter 2, ‘Sex, Power and Secret Societies: Violence and the German Gothic,’ examines Peter Will’s *The Necromancer* (1794) and *Horrid Mysteries* (1796) in order to compare the varying portrayals of protagonists suffering at the hands of violent secret societies and their criminal leaders, and considering this in the light of contemporary anxieties concerning the prevalence of such groups on the continent. Will’s unique way of writing, given his perspective as a German living in England and translating foreign works, reveals how he caters to the English literary taste for violence toward the end of the eighteenth-century, since he significantly amended and added to the works he took as his sources. Chapter 3, ‘Marriage; or Rape, Incest and Imprisonment: Violence against Women,’ takes the female-authored, Minerva Press-published, “horrid” novels cited in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817), in order to explore

depictions of violent behaviour towards women, typically in marital relationships, but also through rape (or the threat thereof) and in threatening to cross familial boundaries in committing incest. While many authors of the Female Gothic remained true to Radcliffe's model of swooning heroines and offstage violence, others, such as Parsons, Roche, and Sleath, chose to express the struggle with the patriarchy in more aggressive, bodily terms – as has already been established by Shapira when looking at the works of Isabella Kelly. The novels discussed in Chapter 3 all fit this trend, since they do not shy away from blood and gore, although they maintain an overall Radcliffean sentimentality otherwise.

By taking a range of Gothic novels from both male and female authors who published with William Lane between 1790 and 1799, and comparing the use of violence therein, this thesis promises to give new insight into the works of writers otherwise largely overlooked, as well as offering a better understanding of how writers at the Minerva Press operated within the Romantic literary marketplace alongside more popular authors, how they shaped the Gothic novel and its inclusion of violence, and how this recurring trope was used both to elicit and exploit contemporary events and anxieties. Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates that there *were* writers at the Minerva Press using the Gothic genre and its tropes in unique and interesting ways, which goes against derivative comments made by critics which suggest that Lane's texts are not worthy of study due to their imitative and homogenous nature. Finally, the Conclusion outlines how this is of value not only to improving our understanding of the Minerva Press, but also to re-evaluating the significance of its unique output and continued influence.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Fact and the ‘Historical Gothic’: Violence and the Horrors of War**

Primarily, the criticism levelled at Lane until more recent scholarship has related to a belief that he was capable only of publishing throwaway literature, but also that his Press proliferated a violent breed of Gothic novel thought to have a corrupting effect on its readers, especially young women. For some commentators, reading in general “was dangerous because it could distract from domestic duties or transgress the limits of a private sphere” (Pearson 2). Most notably, it was the Gothic novel with its “cast of extreme characters, unnatural settings and perverse plots” that “played a significant part in late eighteenth-century debates over the moral dangers of reading” (Kilgour 6). However, writers at the Minerva Press had their own ideas about how their texts should be interpreted, wanting both to respond to public tastes for the popular Gothic and frame their works as beneficial. Picking up on the fact that “women had long been encouraged to eschew reading romances and novels in favour of reading histories,” since they were “thought to offer more suitable models of virtue to imitate and vices to avoid,” this chapter explores the ways in which Minerva authors exploited histories to shape their own ‘historical Gothic’ mode, thereby allowing them to write violent Gothic novels yet avoid the opprobrium of their numerous critics (Lake 88).

This chapter focusses on several novels published by Lane between 1790 and 1799, as this decade is coincident with the height of Minerva Press production, as well as with the popularity of the Gothic novel. Three novels will be discussed in particular, including: Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre: An Historic Fact* (1791); E. M. Foster’s *The Duke of Clarence: An Historical Novel* (1795); and Agnes Musgrave’s *Edmund of the Forest: An Historical Novel* (1795). While scholars such as Anne H. Stevens and Fiona Price have already discussed these works as they illustrate women’s historical writing (in *British Historical Fiction before Scott* [2010] and *Reinventing Liberty: Nation, Commerce and the Historical Novel from Walpole to Scott* [2016] respectively), a fresh approach is provided when considering them as products of female ‘historical Gothic’ writing. As this chapter argues, the

novels selected adopt the tropes of historical fiction and yet contain scenes of violence which seem far more Gothic than historic. Many have argued that the Gothic has always been historic in the sense that eighteenth-century writers understood the term to mean a very particular relationship to the past. For example, Christina Morin draws attention to the fact that contemporary perceptions of the genre saw it as “evocative of the past, its people, and its traditions,” thereby implying an “overlap of historical and gothic literary modes” (28). The distinction made in this chapter is between what is actual historic fact, and what are sensationalised Gothic horrors presented for the attention of the leisured reader – both of which were employed by Lane’s writers in order to “feed the demand of an undisciplined yet ever-expanding reading public” (Watt 8). By adding a focus on Minerva to the discussion, an analysis of these works will reveal how Lane’s Press gained popularity by catering to the fashion for violent Gothic novels, while it simultaneously responded to anxieties surrounding the corrupting influence of such violence on female readers by combining Gothic sensationalism with historic fact. In addition, this chapter offers an exploration as to how Minerva novelists used popular conventions coined by other authors, such as Radcliffe and Walpole, albeit in a different way, thereby exemplifying Elizabeth Neiman’s statement that Minerva authors were making “constant and subtle modification on and infractions to popular formulas” (635). Moreover, given that the Gothic novel was to become less popular with readers and critics alike toward the end of the eighteenth century and historical fiction more popular in the nineteenth, this essay also argues that the ‘historical Gothic’ can be seen to bridge the gap between these two genres, with late eighteenth-century Gothic writers basing their stories around historic events and settings, and nineteenth-century historical writers going on to adopt the tropes of the popular Gothic.

The label ‘historical Gothic’ is used to describe a subdivision of the Gothic genre which takes as its subject historic events and characters, typically rooting its stories in ‘ancient,’ ‘medieval,’ or simply ‘olden’ times. Montague Summers enumerates the elements of the mode

as “a good deal of sentimentality, some speechifying, [and] a tragic catastrophe,” as well as a “whiff of history,” since even allowing that many ‘historical gothic’ novels are more romantic than exact, he stipulates that they require at least an atmosphere of chronicled antiquity (156). Similarly, Frederick S. Frank cites the ‘historical Gothic’ as “one of the four principal types of Gothic romance that evolved from Walpole’s prototype,” going on to detail how works of this mode “always contain some royal or aristocratic personages who actually lived,” operate out of “a fabricated or remote ‘Gothic’ era abounding in violent values and savage superstitions,” and “may or may not include apparitions and other supernatural hardware, but typically most historical Gothic do find room for a castle spectre of a haunted vault” (‘The Gothic Romance: 1762–1820’ 6–7). More recently, Rictor Norton has looked to the ‘historical Gothic’ and disparaged the attempts of many eighteenth-century writers to recreate the authentic settings and manners of the feudal age since they were “seldom believable and sometimes laughable,” with most “having only the slightest grasp of history” (1). This chapter builds on these findings by arguing that the formation of an ‘historical Gothic’ mode was in fact tactical since its basis in history (albeit often limited) could be framed as being in some way beneficial to its readers; the label thus enabled writers to carve out a respectable niche for their violent Gothic plotlines, thereby allowing them to deliver the violence and horror of the popular Gothic under the guise of historical fiction and without incurring the same contempt as the Gothic genre itself.

Though the ‘historical Gothic’ label is said by Carol Davison to have derived from Montague Summers’s chapter of the same name, Minerva Press writer Anna Maria Mackenzie revealed her reasons for attaching the words ‘historic’ or ‘historical’ to her Gothic works much earlier than this (Davison 256). She argued in *Mysteries Elucidated* (1795) that her own use of the Gothic, founded “upon historical facts” and with subjects chosen “for instruction’s sake,” offered sufficient portrayals of “virtue,” alongside the “bold and horrible images” prerequisite to the genre, that her readers would be inspired to emulate the good rather than the bad (I: ix; xi; xiv). Effectively, Mackenzie manipulates the popular critical reception of novels and novel-

reading as corrupt, so as to avoid critique of her own work. In her discussion of the revolt against novels and their injurious effects on female readers, Jacqueline Pearson has illuminated how the eighteenth century saw “the rise of history as a discipline,” with the topic taking a “central role” in women’s education (49). Critics of the novel turned instead to recommending histories, with the likes of Hannah More, Sarah Green and Sarah Pennington championing the virtues of “fact, and not wit,” as well as the “instructions only truth can give,” and declaring the “plain and unornamented narrative” of histories far more suitable for female readers since they could not possibly “mislead the judgement” or “inflame the passions” (qtd. in Pearson 50). For women then, the function of history was primarily moral: it provided examples of virtue from which to learn, as opposed to examples of vice found in the novel. Thus, reasoned Mackenzie, the ‘historical Gothic’ was a way for writers to “escape the censure” ordinarily attracted by the genre, instead allowing them to put forward ideas with which “ladies” might be “interested and improved, without being terrified” (I: x; xv). Explicitly then, Mackenzie had a female audience in mind, and felt the need to defend her work in terms of its beneficial effect on this group. The result of Mackenzie’s efforts to keep readers “interested and improved” can be seen in her particular blend of historic details and Gothic violence, the combination of which saw the ‘virtues’ of one outweighing the ‘vices’ of the other. In this way, her work offers an example of one of the ways in which Minerva authors were deviating from the Radcliffean model: by incorporating sensationalised scenes (with more violence) for which the Press was to become famed.

Combining the historic facts surrounding a series of eleventh-century Danish invasions with the Gothic elements of violence and the supernatural, Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre* (1791) is exemplary of her own brand of ‘historical Gothic’ novel. It opens with an epigraph, intended to suggest its theme, from an English Restoration play, *Venice Preserv’d: or, A Plot Discovered* (1682), by Thomas Otway:

Think thou already hear'st the dying Screams  
Of harmless Infants  
Think thou seest their sad distracted Mothers  
Kneeling before thy Feet, and begging Pity.

Behold the furious and unpitying Soldier  
Pulling the reeking Dagger from the Bosoms  
Of gasping Wretches Death in every Quarter,  
With all that sad Disorder can produce,  
To make a Spectacle of Horror.

Otway's play was considered to be one of the most significant tragedies of the English stage in its time, enjoying revivals until the 1830s and making it likely therefore that Mackenzie's readers would have been familiar with the work. Despite claiming in *Mysteries Elucidated* her desire to write "for instruction's sake," with the intention of leaving female readers "interested and improved, without being terrified," Mackenzie here warns that her work will in fact contain such "Spectacle[s] of Horror" as the "dying Screams/Of harmless Infants," "sad and distracted Mothers," and "furious and unpitying Soldier[s]". Her 'historical Gothic' novel is thus filled with shocking scenes of violence (including the murder of three young children in front of their agonised mother) and horror (in her gratuitous depictions of death on the battlefield) bound to terrify. Such violent subject-matter seems vastly contradictory to the writer's proposed aim, particularly as it is weighted heavily against the female reader, singling out "Mothers" and those with "Infants," and suggests that Mackenzie embraces what was popular at her time of writing.

Following an epigraph which promises violent delights, *Danish Massacre* opens, as is typical of the genre, with an example of the Radcliffean 'explained supernatural': in a framing story for the novel, an elderly man and his son are made to feel "horror" and filled with "supernatural dread" while out on a walk in the Welsh hills, when seemingly from nowhere

they hear a “deep and awful groan” (I: 8–9). Despite being “almost frantic with fear,” they advance, all the while speculating that this “strange phenomenon” is the sound of a “vapour of the earth” and that the place in which they now find themselves “might be the resort of evil spirits” (I: 10). They quickly dismiss these thoughts however when they happen upon “the emaciated figure of a man apparently lifeless” (I: 12). The supposed supernatural is swiftly explained, as this figure is revealed to be Edrie Streou, the wicked and treacherous Duke of Mercia, who upon his being discovered leaves some papers which then provide the material of the story. In this way, Mackenzie adopts the trope of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to frame her ‘historical Gothic’ as a ‘found narrative,’ which not only lends credibility to her work, pandering to the mid-eighteenth-century fad for medieval antiquity despite glaring fictionality, but it also frees the writer of her authorial responsibility, thereby deflecting any untoward criticism that might otherwise be levelled at her.

Similarly, in her Preface to the Gothic-sounding *Corfe Castle; or, Historic Tracts* (1793), an historical novel on the same subject as Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre* but published two years later, Anna Millikin calls “the cold and historic facts which form its basis” the only thing recommending her novel “to the notice of the world” (qtd. in Stevens *Reading Historical Fiction* 23). Though Millikin relies heavily on popular Gothic tropes, still she chooses to signal the “historic” foundations of her work through its subtitle. The use of the ‘historical’ label in this way implies that authors such as Mackenzie and Millikin were aware of the transgressive plot content of their works and therefore use the term as a form of defence and/or disguise. From this, their comparable reliance on the ‘historic’ label as a cover for their violent Gothic novels, along with the fact that *Danish Massacre* and *Corfe Castle* are written in similar modes, on the same obscure Danish invasion, and targeted at the same readers, one might therefore conjecture the influence of Mackenzie’s ‘historical Gothic’ mode on writers both within and outside of the Minerva Press.

Mackenzie's own 'historical Gothic' describes the reign of King Ethelred of England (978–1016), for whom the chief problem was an ongoing conflict with the Danes. After several decades of relative peace, Danish raids on English territory began in earnest in the 980s, leading to what became known as the 'St. Brice's Day Massacre,' when on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1002, Ethelred ordered the slaughter of all Danish men in England. Mackenzie's *Danish Massacre* is based on the "historic fact" surrounding this event, according to its title, and therefore does not make frequent use of Gothic conventions such as the supernatural (explained or otherwise), instead generating feelings of terror and horror in its reader through descriptions of "diabolical impiety," "barbarous cruelty" and the "horrors of war" (I: 19; 24; 30–1).

Mackenzie uses "terror" and "horror" interchangeably – where typically the former is thought to draw the reader in and the latter to repel them – and yet her "horrors" seem purposely targeted at a female reader: there are scenes of rapine and murder in which a helpless infant is torn from its agonising mother and brandished aloft upon a bloody spear, and further "horrible" images presented to the female "imagination," such as the "mangled limbs of her beloved children wantonly scattered upon the field of battle by a barbarous foe" (I: 68). Equally, Mackenzie's male characters (most of whom are soldiers) are glorified through depictions of their barbaric violence, with one carrying "a drawn sword in one hand, in the other a lady," and another proudly bearing "his armour, deeply indented with various cuts, and disfigured with blood and dust" (I: 65; 137). While these may be accurate and unfiltered portrayals of the horrors of war, we are reminded by the writer that such scenes are nonetheless "calculated to agonise the feelings of a woman," and that the female characters are made to feel "apprehensions so poignant, sorrow so excessive, [and] fatigues so inimical to virgin delicacy" (II: 127; 168). The emphasis then lies not so much in the descriptions of the men themselves, but rather in the effects they have on the women around them; Mackenzie's female characters, and by extension her female readers, are "agonise[d]" by these brutish displays of masculinity, all of which are intrinsically linked to violence (mostly against women and children), as well

as being made to feel “apprehension,” “sorrow” and “fatigue” by the “horrors” with which the writer assaults them.

Although the novel begins with the wicked and treacherous Duke of Mercia Edrie Streou and is punctuated throughout with portrayals of the cruelty of his soldiers, central to the story is a Danish woman named Athela whose family he has persecuted. Athela’s suffering serves to highlight the Duke’s ruthless treatment of the Danes and culminates with the novel’s conclusion when, after her husband’s death, she appeals to King Ethelred for “justice” (I: 223). However, the “widowed mother” and her children, rather than being objects of pity to the Duke, become instead “the affecting objects” of Streou’s “unprecedented hatred” (II: 220; 223). In the bloody scene that follows – reminiscent of the violent epigraph from Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* – Athela is forced to watch as her children are murdered.

Streou is first described in the “atrocious act” of killing “the sweet Adelina,” Athela’s daughter: he “darted forwards” and “fixed his eye upon her like the vulture intent on his prey” (II: 221; 224; 225–6). The use of simile here to portray the Duke paints him in the light of someone who feeds on others to sustain himself, thereby suggesting the predatory, vampiric position of men, as well as the destructive nature of those in power. This is part of a larger theme addressed by Mackenzie since repeatedly she offers examples of the ruthlessness of men at war. In this instance, the cruelty of Streou is further heightened by her use of a male narrator to relay the scene: “a warrior,” he admits he is so “inured to deeds of death” that he is “unequal” to the task of describing them (II: 226). As a result, he deliberately neglects to mention any “explicit” details, and instead tells the reader/listener how Streou “seiz[ed] those beauteous locks that adorned her ivory neck” (II: 226). That the male narrator fixates on her physical features here eroticises the scene of her death; he highlights the attractiveness of her hair, the fair white colour of her skin and the delicacy of her neck, and in doing so he not only implies the fragility of the female form, but also caters to the male gaze by reducing Adelina to nothing more than an image of beauty and femininity even in her final moments.

Despite Athela's harrowing cries of "spare my child" and "save my Adelina," the "fatal blow" is delivered and thus we are left with the tragic depiction of a mother's grief (II: 226; 227):

The business of death was not complete; the innocent children ran back to their mother, who was now in a state of furious insanity – she started up, let fall her precious burthen who had just then resigned her breath, and putting them behind her, fixed her hands in her own dishevelled locks, and looking wildly around [...] and tearing off large ringlets of her hair, she threw them to the ground, practising various acts of madness. (II: 229 – 30)

In the emotional aftermath of her daughter's death, Athela's feelings are denied by the male narrator, with her expressions of heartache dismissed as "insanity" and "madness," and her behaviour likened to that of a "wild" animal. While Streou takes a "malignant pleasure" in thus "contemplating her sorrows," King Ethelred demands that someone "bear her off" since he "cannot look upon her grief" (II: 229; 230). Rather than acknowledging the pain of a "suffering" and "tortured" woman, the onlooking men do nothing, and the reader is "suffered to wait the issue of this horrid tragedy" (II: 228). After murdering Adelina, Streou turns on Athela's two remaining children, a son and second daughter, before finally finishing his slaughter with the mother herself.

The massacre of Athela and her children, with which Mackenzie's aptly named 'historical Gothic' novel concludes, is bound to affect all those who read it, as is suggested through the rhetorical question: "Who but Edrie could behold them unmoved!" (II: 222). An emotional response is expected by the narrator, with the reader either made to feel complicit in the acts of violence taking place, leading to abhorrence and a desire to distance oneself (much like the male narrator who cannot bring himself to describe the scene to its full extent and the King who cannot bear witness to the women affected as a result), or else made to think of the sufferer as themselves, resulting in feelings of empathy, as well as a fear that they may one day

meet with a similar fate. Although we are ultimately spared the “explicit” scenes of bloody violence, of which critics of the Minerva Press and its Gothic novels seemed so afraid, what we are left with instead is a frightening glimpse into the horrors of war and the world of men: a world where women, even in death, are either reduced to those traits found most desirable by men or simply removed from sight (II: 226). In this way, Mackenzie can be seen to use the ‘historical Gothic’ to write differently than critics portray circulating-library novelists as writing: rather than writing of ghosts and ghouls, she expertly delves into what it is that *truly* horrifies women, and surely that is a far more terrifying picture for female readers of Minerva Press texts than the vice and superstition feared by critics.

E. M. Foster’s *The Duke of Clarence: An Historical Novel*, is similar to Mackenzie’s earlier work in that it likewise features violent and bloody battles, and centres itself on the feelings of its female characters. In its opening lines, Foster sets the historic scene: it is “the year 1422, about a twelvemonth after the decease of our fifth Henry,” as well as establishing the theme of war with a story from the protagonist’s adoptive father, the Baron de Clifford:

Edgar took great delight in hearing the histories and atchievements [sic] of great warriors. To these he would listen, with the most unfeigned attention; and, whilst the Baron would fight over the battles of his youth, his countenance would become animated; his young heart would beat high, with youthful ardour and impatience, to become an actor in those scenes of glory! whilst the Baroness, with her eyes filled with love, and female softness, would shudder at the dangers, her lord had encountered; and, pressing to her maternal bosom the young Elfrida, would inwardly rejoice, that her sex exempted her from such dangers. (I: 10)

Just as in *Danish Massacre*, the sentiment conveyed is that war is no place for women; even the simple act of telling tales relating to the theme of historic violence impinges on the Baroness’s “female softness,” causes her to “shudder at the dangers,” and leaves her “pressing to her maternal bosom” the young daughter for whose safety she fears. In this sense, the act of recounting violent historic events is seen as comparable to enacting actual violence upon

women, forcing them to encounter the horrors of the battlefield in imagination if not in actuality. Although they do not necessarily travel to scenes of battle, warfare is brought to them and their domestic surroundings, so that the Baroness feels the need to protect her young daughter even within the safe confines of the home.

Other examples of violence in *Duke of Clarence* which are heightened through sensationalism, and which seem to target the female reader, include Foster's descriptions of the Hundred Years' War, which serves as the historical setting for the novel. An older Edgar takes part in these scenes, realising his aspirations of "glory!" from boyhood by perpetrating such "horrid violence" as "[cleaving] the head of the Scottish general in sunder" (I: 108; 109). Nonetheless, the male protagonist finds he is not immune to reciprocal acts of violence, receiving a dreadful blow "which almost crushed to atoms his uplifted arm" (I: 108). Likewise, the Earl of Salisbury, alongside whom Edgar fights, is mortally wounded by a cannon ball, much to the "infinite grief and horror" of all those who bear witness to what remains of his "mangled corpse" (I: 133; 134). Finally, once the fighting is over, the English soldiers, "meeting with the corpse of the Viscount of Narbonne, they hung it upon a gibbet, from the contempt they felt for his crimes" (I: 110). Later on, the female narrator reflects upon these "horrors" and the "horrid descriptions" thereof, feeling their victory is in fact "small compensation for the blood of so many heroes, which had been shed!" (II: 77; 226; 227). The real "cruelty" of war, she laments, is that it allows men "to commit the most horrid depredations, on a harmless people!" and is "the cause of rendering fatherless a numerous family, – of widowing a doating wife, – of bereaving of its only hope a fond parent" (II: 77; 78; 210). History tells us that men fight, incur horrid injuries and perhaps die, but it is the "widow and orphan" left behind who suffer most, with war leaving them "a prey to poverty, and sorrow!" (II: 210). Such reflections act to feminise the experience of war, reading deeds of violence through the impact they have on the domestic home. Furthermore, the female narrator views the wounds inflicted on men at war as tantamount to wounds on herself, as they cast a

threat to her position in society as imagined through the roles of wife, mother and child. Here the notion of history, specifically in Foster's novel the period of the Hundred Years' War, is given a secondary role to the overarching experience of loss and violence, which can likewise be felt by the reader of any period. In this sense, the Gothic subsumes the historical, as the feelings of terror and horror as experienced are prioritised over the factuality of the battles fought.

Alongside the historical theme of war, *Duke of Clarence* is peppered throughout with Gothic elements. For example, in the relationship that develops between the Baron's two children, Elfrida and Edgar, the theme of incest is introduced, and it is this "fatal passion" which propels the plotline of the novel (I: 56). Another Gothic element that Foster chooses to employ is that of the supernatural, including ghosts. In addition to such supernatural sightings, and in a decidedly Gothic flourish, both Edgar and Elfrida suffer from violent visions of their own or the other's death: Elfrida imagines the "variety of horrors" that might befall her love in his absence, such as his being "dashed against a rock" at sea, and left a "mangled frame" to die in a "watery grave, in the unfathomable deep!" (I: 253). Meanwhile, Edgar dreams of the moment they will be reunited, only to awake and find "an armed hand plung[ing] a dagger in his breast" (II: 79). Horrors such as these, both real and imagined, are found throughout *Duke of Clarence*. However, the supernatural threat is never fully dismissed, warranting no explanation, thereby leaving the reader to wonder whether the ghostly sightings were real, and rendering the novel far more Gothic than historic by calling into question the factuality of Foster's writing. In this way, Foster's 'historical Gothic' novel is different from Mackenzie's *Danish Massacre*; where Mackenzie employs the 'explained supernatural' only to hint at ghosts, in Foster's work she presents the supernatural as though it is real. Consequently, a critic for *The Monthly Review* disputed the novel's historic foundation, claiming it had "slender title to the character of an historical novel," owing one assumes to its lack of historic facts and an over-reliance on supernatural elements and Gothic sensationalism (qtd. in Summers 174).

Despite its use of both violence and horrid Gothic themes (such as incest, allusions to rape, and the supernatural) for which other such novels were criticised, as well as its being issued by the widely discredited Minerva Press, *Duke of Clarence* was nonetheless well-received in its time. Testament to this is the glowing recommendation it obtained in *The English Review*, which is suggestive of its successful reception:

The novel exhibits a good picture of ancient times and manners, and, in not a few instances, abounds with pathetic and interesting events. The language is easy and elegant. The story is too complicated for us to give an account of it, as it would take up more space than is allotted to productions of this kind; but we recommend it as well calculated to amuse a leisure hour, without either endangering the morals or offending the eye of the reader. ('Art. XXVI: *The Duke of Clarence*' 233)

Although this is a very typical kind of statement in the reviews, and notwithstanding that it is the view of only one person and could well have been a "puff piece," it is interesting to note that the novel is praised in particular for not "endangering the morals or offending the eye of the reader". Similarly, Anna Maria Mackenzie praises the novel in her Preface to *Mysteries Elucidated*, as she cites the "success" of Foster's work as "prov[ing] the utility" of the 'historical Gothic' mode (I: x). Mackenzie's use of the noun "utility" here reinforces the belief held by critics that historical works were beneficial – their "utility" being that they provided an education to women novel-readers above that to be gleaned from other Romantic and circulating-library fiction. It seems it helps then that *The Duke of Clarence* "exhibits a good picture of ancient times and manners," as these reviews focus on its supposed historical accuracy, and the extent to which it conveys some kind of useful lesson about the past, rather than on its Gothic obscenity.

Further examples of the 'historical Gothic,' as the mode was repeatedly employed and shaped by writers at the Minerva Press, include the works of Agnes Musgrave. Although little is known about the author herself, we do know that she "was popular in her own day on the

strength of more than one historical novel and others of contemporary life,” with her first and best-known work, *Cicely; or, the Rose of Raby* (1795), quickly becoming a Minerva bestseller and enjoying reprints up to 1874 (Blakey 61). Musgrave went on to publish another two novels with Lane’s Press, *Edmund of the Forest: An Historical Novel* and *The Solemn Injunction* (1798), and though all three novels mentioned here contain both Gothic and historic elements, it is in her second published work that this combination is most striking.

Despite its claiming to be “an Historical Novel,” through the use of a subtitle, *Edmund of the Forest* is in fact an extravagant Gothic tale set in medieval Scotland: featuring mouldering buildings, supernatural incidents, mysterious characters, and vague historicism. It opens with an Introduction through which Musgrave excuses her “marvellous” writing and “giddy flights of imagination” by attributing them to history, as she declares the story is not her own, but rather is derived from an external source – in this case “from letters” (I: i; ii). Like other female authors at the Minerva Press, including Anna Maria Mackenzie and E. M. Foster, Musgrave draws on the ‘historical’ to justify or disguise her Gothic plot. As aforementioned, it was Walpole who first set the example of exonerating the author from writing ‘historical Gothic’ works via the ‘found narrative,’ and these female novelists use the trope in a similar way to reconcile their sensationalist combining of Gothic and historic elements. Musgrave goes on further to argue that since she “claim[s] not merit,” she does not “deserve censure,” thereby reinforcing the notion that the “historical” subtitle was used as a cover for violent and sensationalist plotlines which might otherwise have drawn criticism (I: i). Musgrave does however admit to finding “some difficulty in connecting the story without adding to it,” thus justifying her “dividing it into chapters, and affixing to each a motto applicable to the subject” (I: ii). The use of chapter ‘mottoes,’ or epigraphs as we now refer to them, is a technique employed by others and which would go on to be used in the historical novels of the nineteenth century, such as by Radcliffe and Scott, but for Musgrave they retain their early moralising function, not only connecting her work to that of more notable writers, but also commenting

upon the narrative through the use of familiar quotations and lending it credibility. Finally, the writer asks that her readers be “aware that we are now free from the shackles of superstition,” but to remember that “such a period existed” when this was not the case, and thus “not to condemn Edmund too hastily” (I: iii). In this way, Musgrave guides her reader as to how her writing should be interpreted: this, she says, is a tale of historic fact and should be taken as such, though she also pre-empts and aims to deflect the criticism of her detractors by reminding them she cannot be blamed for the superstitious beliefs of former times.

Musgrave’s novel is set in the same time period as Foster’s *Duke of Clarence* and yet the events of the Wars of the Roses are secondary to the supernatural incidents with which the story is concerned. Edmund is the eponymous “hero of the tale,” and what the reader is presented with is his journey from forest to castle to seek his destiny (I: iii). Along the way, he encounters witches in “possession of spells and charms” (II: 77); suffers from terrifying visions, such as his being “sacrifice[d]” by “fantastic form[s],” or “pressed” to the “bosom” of “a lifeless corpse” (I: 239; II: 88–9); and is “haunted” throughout by “spectre[s],” “apparition[s],” “phantom[s],” “unquiet spirits,” and “beings of another world” (I: 12; 55; 57; 63; 64). In particular, the inclusion of witches is notable as, like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), it pays homage to the King of Scotland’s own superstitious beliefs. When travelling through the forest, Edmund and the King discover “three hags,” one of whom “touched the arm of the intrepid youth with her wand, and the dagger dropped from his hand, which was suddenly benumbed” (I: 185). Musgrave does not simply hint at the supernatural, nor does she rely on the ‘explained supernatural’ much like other writers of the Gothic genre, but rather her ‘historical Gothic’ narrative brings its characters face-to-face with what they fear most, and in this description, it appears that the witches are real. Following this scene, there is a note from the “editor,” in which Musgrave, “afraid of incurring the laugh of ridicule,” excuses her writing of such “horrors” by again attributing them to “history” – specifically, “the history of James the Third of Scotland” (I: 190). She reasons therefore that it would have been wrong to exclude

such supernatural horrors as witches from her novel just because contemporary readers would have been unlikely to credit them. A notice in the *Critical Review* focuses heavily on this scene, as well as on Musgrave's reliance on Gothic tropes more generally, and is dismissive of the novel's historical accuracy as a result:

The story is supposed to have happened in the reign of James III of Scotland; and the agency of witchcraft is introduced in compliment to that monarch's credulity. [...] The scene is, indeed, a copy from Macbeth's visit to the witches; but it wants the additional charm of Shakespeare's genius. With such helps as witches, ghosts, caverns, and ruined castles, we should be too scrupulous in expecting probability: but there are bounds even to fiction. ('Monthly Catalogue: Novels. Rev. *The Duke of Clarence*' 355)

Unlike *Cicely*, *Edmund of the Forest* did not go on to a second edition, though it appeared in French in 1798/9 and an extract entitled 'The Adventures James III of Scotland had with the weird Sisters' was published in *Gothic Stories* (1799). That more than one reprinting of this collection appeared in the early nineteenth century implies some success, as well as suggesting that it was for its Gothic horrors, and not its historic authenticity, that audiences read the excerpt from Musgrave's work. As Frank further brings to light, the novel's "extensions of Reeve's *The Old English Baron* also furnished Kerr with material for her forest-to-castle plot in *Edric the Forester; or, The Mysteries of the Haunted Chamber*," so while *Edmund* itself may not have been reprinted in English, still its influence resounds ('Bibliography' 122).

Such supernatural content is evidently central to Musgrave's 'historical Gothic' Romance, and yet even she calls its veracity into question by portraying her protagonist as someone prone to fancy as a result of his own "horrid" reading. One whole chapter of Musgrave's novel is dedicated to the content of Edmund's reading; one night, he takes up "the book he had been reading the preceding evening, began where he had left off, and found the story proceeded thus" (II: 101). The "strange and romantic" story that is subsequently narrated has all the marks of an 'historical Gothic' novel. Following the tale of two brothers forced to

seek shelter in a dreary castle, it is filled with violence: “bloody marks,” “crimson stains,” and “a superb chamber, whose floor was slippery with blood” (II: 104); the suggestion of “murder” (II: 105); and the supernatural: “they observed somewhat glitter on the first landing, Egbert stooped, it was a sword, firmly grasped in a hand devoid of flesh, nought remaining but the bones, which, as he touched, gently pressed his fingers, then fell and left the weapon in his grasp” (II: 103–4). And finally, as the brothers delve deeper into the castle and its mysteries, the chapter draws to a frightening close: “hark! that groan. It was deep and deadly, yet they saw not whence it proceeded, but fresh horrors were prepared for them; for casting their eyes on the bed, they saw a human body whose —“ (II: 109). Here, Edmund is so overcome with disgust that he physically “threw the book from him with violence,” and vehemently denounces the habit of reading horrid novels, declaring he “will read no further,” since such works are surely crafted more to “alarm than amuse” (II: 110). The damage is already done however, as the result of “his fancy, heated by reading” is that “strange visions flitted through his brain, and phantoms of murdered strangers haunted his slumbers,” something which continues to happen to Edmund over the course of the novel (II: 111; 112). The inclusion of this chapter, and Edmund’s subsequent reaction to his reading, suggests that Musgrave was familiar not only with the tropes of the Gothic novel, but also with the popular critical view of such texts. Her own ‘historical Gothic’ work is not all that different from Edmund’s (since both employ the supernatural alongside sensationalised scenes of violence) and so her meta-reference to novel reading here suggests that Minerva authors were aware of the criticism attracted by the genre, and thus sought to circumvent it while still writing popular Gothic tales. It also offers some explanation as to why she was so keen for her own works to be viewed as “historical” rather than purely Gothic.

Supernatural elements aside, Minerva authors’ use of Gothic violence was not simply to entertain, but also to portray the horrors of war and its impact on women and the domestic space. For example, Stevens argues that the overarching purpose of Musgrave’s *Edmund of the*

*Forest* is actually that it “emphasises the costs of civil conflict” (*British Historical Fiction before Scott* 87). Much the same as in both Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre* and Foster’s *Duke of Clarence*, Musgrave’s ‘historical Gothic’ work brings to light the acute cost of violent historical warfare for those left behind, with the novel’s most affecting passages being those that immediately represent the cost of war to the domestic, the familiar, and the personal – namely, women left bereaved of fathers, husbands, brothers, and children. At one point, the narrator refers to the Wars of the Roses as those “fatal wars which have destroyed, and swept away whole families,” thus highlighting the fact that the domestic front was not immune from violence, unrest, and the effects of conflict (II: 63). The novel, like many others of this period, makes clear that war was an insistent presence in the lives and writing of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – taking into account the war between England and France and the incidence of the Reign of Terror. Likewise, the male characters (and perhaps readers along with them) come to realise the futility of such events, as one laments: “how anxiously do we anticipate the age, the hour, which gives us to scenes of action; ah! those scenes so wished, what bring they to view but inquietude and misery” (II: 10). The protagonist, Edmund, is much like Edgar in Foster’s *Duke of Clarence*, as he too spends his childhood “fired at the idea of glory, for from father Lawrence he had oft heard of battles and sieges, and hoped, young as he was, to signalise himself” (I: 17). However, upon joining the army of Queen Margaret and at the battle of Wakefield, Edmund “shrunk with horror as he viewed the carnage of the day, and wept the untimely fate” of those soldiers fallen around him, as well as feeling “revolted from the dire scenes of blood and devastation he had witnessed” (I: 18). Later, “another bloody engagement ensued,” which further highlights the violent nature of war, as the stream of the river Wharf becomes “choaked by the dead bodies, [and] ran red with blood for some succeeding days” (I: 19). The most obvious cost of war is the loss of human life, the “cruelty” of which causes Edmund to question: “why did I listen with greedy ear to the tales you told of heroic deeds, of the gay and courtly scenes you had mingled in?” (I: 120). These

thoughts on the part of the protagonist demonstrate a preoccupation with the physicality of war, while simultaneously critiquing the abstract concepts used to justify military engagements. Moreover, Edmund considers the wider impact of war as he comes to pass over a country “that bore the marks of constant warfare to which it was exposed,” the land, he finds, is “almost destitute of inhabitants,” such is the loss of life, and the once “fertile lands of England” are left carrying nothing but the marks of “ruin, terror, and desolation” (I: 73). Stevens has highlighted how, “as Britain stood on the brink of civil war and faced the threat of invasion from abroad, stories about earlier periods of civil conflict appealed to British readers” (*British Historical Fiction before Scott* 87). In this way, ‘historical Gothic’ novels such as this one allowed readers to explore conflict, and the feelings of loss that resulted, without necessarily having to experience them first-hand. This was particularly the case for women readers, as previously explored in *Danish Massacre* and *Duke of Clarence*, who would not have had to fight, but who would have been left to suffer the loss of their children or the men on whom they depended.

Taken together, the use of historic facts alongside Gothic tropes in Minerva Press works allows for a confident evaluation of the formation of an ‘historical Gothic’ mode. As this chapter has argued, the novels of Mackenzie, Foster, and Musgrave, alongside others, offer persuasive examples of how late eighteenth-century writers were combining violent Gothic sensationalism with historical manners, characters, and events, in order supposedly to benefit their readers while avoiding the censure of critics. Moreover, though these works did not often deal explicitly with the actual historical events they cited, they nonetheless helped to fuel late eighteenth-century readers’ interest in social and cultural history, and in the possibilities of literary-historical representation, culminating in the rise of the historical novel and antiquarian works in the century that followed.

In this way, the ‘historical Gothic’ mode as employed by Lane’s writers can be seen to bridge the gap between these two genres, at a time when the Gothic novel was becoming less popular with readers and critics alike, coinciding with the decline of the Minerva Press. Moving

into the nineteenth century, “Gothic titles only comprised 13.4 per cent of new fiction in the 1810s” (Mandal ‘Gothic and the Publishing World: 1780 – 1820’ 168). However, just because it failed to be popular, that is not to say there was not still a taste for the Gothic, and just as late eighteenth-century Gothic writers used historical settings as a means by which to position their violent narratives, so too did historical writers of the nineteenth century employ sensationalist Gothic tropes to add flavour to their antiquarian works. Although Sir Walter Scott, for example, took pains to distance his work from early examples of historical fiction, wanting to cleanse prose fiction of its fascination with what was thought ‘horrid’ at that time and thus developing what we now know of as ‘the historical novel,’ still he continued to engage with tropes familiar to the Gothic genre. Essentially, even Scott’s own narrative about the innovativeness of his historical fiction – one largely bought into by subsequent criticism – is found to be suspect, as is the neat division of Gothic and historical forms/modes in the Romantic period. The use of an ‘historical Gothic’ mode by Minerva Press writers thus adds to our understanding of the historical novel and its development in the late eighteenth century.

Ultimately, what the novels explored and analysed here all share is their use of the ‘historical Gothic’ mode, combining the fact and realism of the historic novel with the sensationalism of the popular Gothic, in order to cater to the late eighteenth-century fashion for ‘horrid’ novels, while defending against the opprobrium typically met by the genre. By flavouring the most fantastic sensationalism with frequent dashes of realism, ‘historical Gothic’ novels are set apart from other works of their time by the use of violence, with the mode allowing writers at the Minerva Press to present popular Gothic horrors under the guise of accurate and informative historical fiction. In her Preface to *Mysteries Elucidated*, Mackenzie shares the belief that “historical anecdotes are the most proper vehicles for the elucidation of mysteries” (I: xiii). This statement suggests that although her novels take place within “historical” settings, the driving force is actually a violent Gothic mystery, complete with a host of supernatural passengers. Though Mackenzie’s didactic theorising on the nature of

“licentious novel[s]” and how to write instead “for instruction’s sake” may seem at odds with the violent scenes depicted in her own works, such as in *Danish Massacre*, still her use of the ‘historical Gothic’ mode was “received with much favour,” with her novels considered to be “of a species somewhat superior to the generality of the fongous (*sic*) productions of that literary hot-bed” (referring to the Minerva Press), and her name even appearing in Lane’s prospectus of 1798 under the heading of “particular and favourite Authors” (Summers 172; Rivers 9; qtd. in Blakey 61). As explored here, the ‘historical Gothic’ mode thus went on to be adopted by later writers at the Minerva Press and into the nineteenth century, ultimately testifying to its success and value as a sub-genre of the Gothic. Moreover, that its tropes, modes and writing styles continued to be used, leaves us with the idea that Minerva persists in influence even as the Gothic (and the Press itself) became less popular.

## **Chapter 2: Sex, Power and Secret Societies: Violence in the German Gothic**

The fiction of the late eighteenth century was decidedly influenced by contemporary events; with the French Revolution in 1789 and France declaring war on Great Britain in 1793, the threat of violence was a real concern, and thus in part writers came to reflect this anxiety by depicting scenes of bloody battle and rebellion in the pages of their novels (as seen in Chapter 1). Subtler than this, but no less effective, was the choice of some writers to exploit instead the fear of secret societies, capable of manipulating people and politicians from behind the scenes. It was thought that “alchemists, magicians, Illuminati adepts, mystics, and Freemasons” were joining forces with “politicians, journalists, scientists, writers, philosophers and libertines” to overthrow the establishment and social order of the day and alter forever the cultural landscape of Western civilisation (Birch blurb). This fear stemmed not only from the French Revolution, but also from the supposed prevalence of clandestine groups on the continent, in the wake of the re-institution of the Spanish Inquisition in 1778. With its dark secrecy, torture, and violation of liberty, even to the point of death, the Inquisition held an emotional and diabolical appeal which fit the Gothic genre perfectly: Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis depicted it most prototypically, *The Italian* (1797) revealing the inexorable workings of its secret tribunals, and *The Monk* (1796) depicting the ferocious application of its terrifying justice. However, the recurring trope of violent secret societies was used before this in the works of lesser-known writers at the Minerva Press, and this chapter looks at two such examples: namely, Peter Will’s *The Necromancer* (1793) and *Horrid Mysteries* (1796). These German Gothic novels were published in the wake of France’s declaration of war, and both offer varying portrayals of protagonists suffering at the hands of individuals or groups who associate themselves with secret societies, that they might further their personal, political, criminal, and/or sexual aims. The motif of the secret society features prominently in both these works, and is a potent paradigm for anxieties relating to the French Revolution, but also to the perceived obscure nature of increasingly complex political and economic structures and networks exemplified in

secret societies such as the Illuminati. Thus, as has been highlighted by Daniel Hall, when writing about secret societies in works of Gothic fiction, there results “modern critical confusion as to whether the depiction of these groups is a move against enlightenment towards uncertain occult pursuits and the irrational,” or whether it is rather “a criticism of the tendency of secret orders to move away from their often apparently enlightened ideals towards a lust for power and influence over others” (*French and German Gothic Fiction* 152).

Through an analysis of Will’s *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries*, this chapter builds on Hall’s argument, as well as on Ronald Paulson’s statement that “the Gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor” for the events of and reactions to the French Revolution, to further add: that the violence demonstrated within fictional secret societies dramatises a fear of sinister and corrupt institutions supplanting the rightful province of others such as the family, marriage, and church; that the Minerva Press capitalised on this fear and the public perception of clandestine male groups, with Will’s works employing violence to both elicit and exploit real concerns surrounding the spread of secret societies in contemporary society; and also that the dynamics of psychological and violent physical control exerted in and by fictional secret societies may provide a model for the Gothic novel itself (534). In addition, this chapter will demonstrate how Will does his utmost to exaggerate the terror and horror found in the source texts on which his own novels are based, thereby signalling a shift in the ‘taste’ for the Gothic novel (between continents, as well as from earlier works to those of the 1790s), the results of which can be seen in his salacious tales of sexual debauchery, supernatural power, and bloody violence, all linked to secret societies and aimed to shock, disgust and pleasure the reader all at once.

Until recently, little was known about Peter Will, other than that he resided in England and specialised in translating German works into English. Beyond this, Rictor Norton claims he was “a minister of the German (i.e. Lutheran) Chapel in the Savoy” (122), which is supported by Hamberger and Meusel who believe him to have been “a London pastor of German origin”

(qtd. in Godel 27), while Barry Murnane refers to him as “a German lawyer” (156). However, in the Preface to Valancourt Book’s 2007 edition of Will’s earlier novel *The Necromancer*, James D. Jenkins sheds a new light on the writer and his works, explaining that “Peter Will was born in Darmstadt in 1764 and later moved to London, where he served as a minister and also translated a variety of German texts, both fiction and nonfiction, into English” (x). Further contributing to the mystery that surrounds him, Will cloaked himself with the pseudonym ‘Peter Teuthold’ to pass off his works as translations. This was common practice during the late eighteenth century, where repeatedly one can see upon the title pages of books from this period: ‘Translated from the German,’ ‘Taken from the German,’ or ‘A Tale adapted from the German,’ though the ascription was often made solely to enhance the popularity of a work and to give it a fashionable cachet. This trend also corresponds with the fashion for ‘German tales’ in English Gothic reading circles and the “runaway popularity of Gothic fiction and drama after the French Revolution,” as so famously demonstrated by Isabella Thorpe and the list of ‘horrid’ novels that she shares with Catherine Morland in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), which incorporates several Minerva Press ‘German Gothic’ works, such as Eliza Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach, A German Story* (1793) and *The Mysterious Warning, A German Tale* (1796), alongside Will’s *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries* (Gamer 32). Though the German Gothic has long been recognised as a key source of some of the better-known English Gothic novels, such as Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Rainer Godel has argued that “translating may be a much too narrow description for what Will did with German texts,” since he “altered the style,” as well as “the structure,” and may even have added whole passages himself to “meet the expectations of the English audience” (27). It is these changes which are of particular interest to this chapter, as they indicate what Will considered to be the ‘English taste’ at that time, as well as pointing to a marked change in the construction of the Gothic genre in the years following the publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Rather than adhering to the previous model of rationalised Gothic horrors, Will capitalises on contemporary

concerns about secret societies and the fear they generate against the socio-political climate of the 1790s, thereby using the Gothic novel to represent a wider anxiety about revolution and the violence it engenders.

As one would expect from a translated text, *The Necromancer* is steeped in the traditions of the German *schauerroman*, which is literally translated as “shudder-novel.” From this and its subtitle, *The Tale of the Black Forest*, the English reader would be right to expect a lurid tale of supernatural incidents and violent deaths, and certainly the opening line does not disappoint: “The hurricane was howling, the hailstones beating against the windows, the hoarse croaking of the raven bidding adieu to autumn, and the weather-cock’s dismal creaking joined with the mournful dirge of the solitary owl” (5). The gloominess of the Black Forest setting contributes to the Gothic themes and mood of the novel; the “hurricane” and “hailstones” reinforce the sense of foreboding, while the “croaking of the raven” and “mournful dirge of the solitary owl” act as ominous portents, hinting at the grisly murders that are to happen later.

Alongside this focus on its forbidding Black Forest setting, *The Necromancer* is also a novel preoccupied with secret societies, villainous banditti and their leaders, all of which were typically found in German Gothic tales before they were seen in their English counterparts. As Devendra P. Varma highlights, “secret societies formed an important motif of the German novel” (x); however, Angela Wright points out that translations, or novels that only masqueraded as ‘translations,’ could “cloak significant threats to the literary, political and religious constitutions of Britain by infiltrating literary, philosophical and sentimental ideas,” from abroad, thus the secret society motif made an infrequent appearance in the English tale of terror (1–2). The story opens in the present day, where two friends, Herrman and Hellfried, meet again after a separation of thirty years. When the bad weather prevents them from going hunting, they spend their evening instead swapping ghost stories by the fire. Hellfried begins, relating his strange experiences at the town of “F—,” where certain of his possessions go missing while he is staying at the inn there. This culminates one night when he sees the

supposed thief as the ghost of his mother: “Merciful heaven! how was I chilled with horror, when I beheld the features of my deceased mother! My knees shook, a cold sweat bedewed my face, and my strength forsook me” (14). Clearly troubled, Hellfried goes off in pursuit of some explanation for this ghoulish sight (and the fact that his belongings are returned to him as mysteriously as they disappeared) and thus encounters a strange old man who seems to be acquainted with what haunts him. This stranger, it transpires, is the Necromancer of the title, and here he charmingly invites Hellfried to a frightening midnight ritual which, he says, will provide answers:

Now I hear the clock strike twelve, with the last stroke the stranger began to turn himself round about, within the circle, with an astonishing velocity, pronouncing the Christian and surname of my deceased mother. I staggered back thrilled with chilly horror. On a sudden I heard a noise under ground, like the distant rolling of thunder. The stranger pronounced the name of my mother a second time, with a more solemn and tremendous voice than at first. A flash of lightning hissed through the room, and the voice of thunder grew louder and louder beneath my feet. Now he pronounced the name of my mother a third time, still louder and more tremendous. At once the whole pleasure-house appeared to be surrounded with fire. The ground began to shake under me, and I sunk suddenly down. The ghost of my mother hovered before my eyes, with a grim ghastly look; a chilly sweat bedewed my face and my senses forsook me. (20–1)

The writer does not disclose more about this strange figure, known as Volkert, until much later, however Hellfried’s early encounter with him is crucial in that it establishes not only the supernatural theme of the novel, but also one of its major threats: that of violent secret societies and their criminal leaders, as well as the power they have to draw people into their ranks with the promise of otherwise unobtainable knowledge. Volkert having dictated the peculiar conditions under which this ritual should take place, Hellfried keenly participates in the act of necromancy by following his instructions precisely, despite claiming to be “strongly prepossessed against the belief in apparitions” and “irksome fancies” (15). In addition, he reveals the full extent to which he has been enchanted by Volkert when he declares that he “would willingly have undergone every difficulty in order to obey [his] commands, and get rid

of my doubts” (19). This scene echoes the classic German legend of Faust, and what it has to tell us about the temptation that knowledge poses to unenlightened persons; editor Jeffrey Cass also points out that the scene of their first meeting is reminiscent of Satan’s seduction of Eve, with Hellfried left to wrestle between his conscience and the “charming seducer” (17). Given that the pair have only just met, it seems extraordinary that Hellfried would surrender himself in the way that he does. However this just goes to show the perceived power of secret societies in the eyes of the writer. Moreover, the fear surrounding prohibited knowledge and its transference can also be seen to be reflected in the fear critics had for Gothic novels (such as this one) and their capacity to tempt otherwise perfectly sheltered eighteenth-century readers to the point of corruption, with violent Gothic works silently infiltrating people’s minds and homes via the reading rooms and circulating libraries of the day, thereby providing a snapshot of the literary paranoia, suspicion and open hostility that marked the 1780s and 90s.

Like Anna Maria Mackenzie’s ‘historical Gothic,’ the incidents of *The Necromancer* are allegedly “founded on facts,” with characters based on real persons and conveying real contemporary fears, such as that surrounding secret societies like the Freemasons and Illuminati, among others, all supposedly plotting world revolution (Will *Necromancer* 4). Montague Summers argued as much in *The Gothic Quest*, citing the “wild and lawless” times in which the novel is set as evidence that its basis in reality “is by no means improbable,” and further proposing that in Kahlert’s German original he was “no doubt describing [...] the ‘Buxen,’ a vast secret society which [...] ravaged the whole district of Limburg, parts of Lorraine and the province of Treves” (134). More recently, Patrick Bridgwater has added to this by revealing that the ‘Buxen’ made up their numbers of “robbers and Satanists,” and that they remained at large in Germany throughout the eighteenth century “until their leaders were rounded up and executed in 1772” (414). These villains not only plundered outlying manors and farms, but even invaded hamlets and smaller villages at midnight, burning them to the ground, all of which are real events that we see mirrored in the fictional *Necromancer*.

The threat from, and fear of, criminal secret societies, is likewise addressed in Will's *Horrid Mysteries*, which takes as its source *Der Genius*, the so-called "Memoirs of the Marquis of Grosse," by a German author, Karl Grosse, who wrote several romances between 1790 and 1805. At its core, the novel deals with the account of a narrator who, following the supposed death of his wife, seeks solace in a group suggestive of the Illuminati. This group, we are told, has been formed of "necessity," in response to the "lamentable state of [the] country," as "oppression" has strengthened their ties, and "lurking dangers" have forced them to be on their guard and to "court retirement and solitude," thereby excusing their secrecy (73). Of their members, they are selected from only "the ablest geniuses of the nation," who are then "instructed with all [of their] secrets, [and] are wholly devoted to [them]," at which point they are finally free to "feel themselves happy" (93). Finding himself in a vulnerable position and emotional state after witnessing the violent death of his wife – who dies "under [his] hands" with "the icy face of a corpse," all the while "grinding her teeth" and "contorted" in "a new scene of horror" – Carlos (our narrator) is easily drawn in by this society, realising only too late the pervasive influence they have over him and his life (49). Through this secret society narrative, Will explores the related notions of "paranoia, providence, destiny, conspiracy, fatalism, and 'higher Powers'" as Carlos wonders whether he can control his own life or whether he is controlled by 'invisible hands' working behind the scenes" (Moore 122). Thus, it came to be that the ability of an individual or group to exercise power over others obsessed Gothic fiction. However in *Horrid Mysteries* Will takes this obsession to the extreme through his portrayal of a particularly sadistic secret society which advocates murder as a means by which to control its members.

The language used in Will's translation leaves the reader in no doubt as to what Carlos is up against when the secret society members he encounters are figuratively demonised. Early in the novel, they are depicted not as humans, but rather as "phantoms," and "covered from head to foot in white cloth" (12). Moreover, their appearance is described in grotesque terms,

with “unnatural distorted countenance[s],” “chalk-white prominent chin[s],” “horrid, grinning mouth[s],” and finally “crooked red nose[s],” the overall effect of which leaves the male narrator in “the utmost degree of terror,” after he is “seized with new horrors” at the sight of them (12). This description stokes contemporary fears surrounding secret societies and exploits the public perceptions of clandestine male groups, as the horrid language used to portray them is tantamount to that which one might use to describe a monster or demon. In addition, they are made even more horrid by the fact that they easily overpower and abduct the terrified Carlos, who has his hands “tied together,” before being “forcibly dragged,” alongside his “female companion” and “fellow prisoner” Francisca, down into the “baseless tomb” of a “ruinous building” where he is forced to witness the harrowing scene of her death (13; 14).

Francisca only sighed to my left; but soon after was dragged from her chair, and plunged into the abyss before me. I heard her distinctly fall down from step to step, and dreadful screams resounded from the abyss. The hollow groans, extorted by a painful death, were interrupted now and then by woeful lamentations, and the clattering of clanging irons, which clashed against each other. My senses fled on pinions of horror. (17)

Not only does the theme of secret societies fit the Gothic archetype, dealing with matters of control and the uncontrollable, as well as betraying fears that such groups were practising at the author’s time of writing and playing their part in the politics of the day, but it also raises questions as to institutional dynamics of power and gender. Typically dominated by men, there were two secret societies from which Will takes his inspiration: the Illuminati, which was an Enlightenment-era secret society established in Bavaria in 1776, with members required to undertake vows of the utmost obedience and secrecy; and, similar to this, Freemasonry, which, though established and practised much earlier than the eighteenth century, became a more public presence during this time as the first Grand Lodge was opened in London in 1717. The society that Will depicts adopts elements of both of these, and is referred to as a “confederation of *men*” (65), reflected in the “five men” and only “four women” who make up its council of

stern arbiters (15; 16). After hearing from both characters, these council members “consult with each other in an unknown language,” before accusing Francisca of being Carlos’s “lover” and pronouncing her sentence of “death” as a result (16–7). While she goes on to spend what little time she has left bravely “defending” the narrator and “declaring to have seen [him] the first time an hour ago,” Carlos does “not once” mention the “hapless girl,” instead “pleading only for [*himself*] and for [his] *life*” (16). We see here a stark contrast in the behaviour of these two characters when faced with the prospect of a violent death: the female Francisca maintains a “firm resolution” and is “resigned to her impending doom,” the male narrator meanwhile displays nothing but “cowardice” and rages “like a child,” before “fainting and weeping upon [his] chair” (16). Francisca possesses the traits one would typically expect to find in a male character playing the part of the hero, while Carlos exhibits behaviours more usually attributed to the stock part of damsel-in-distress. However, it is Carlos who is spared and further granted the opportunity to “take a solemn oath” with the society and become one of their number, so long as he promises “not to mention a syllable of the whole affair” (17). This extract emphasises the abject fear induced by the tribunals of secret societies, and can be read as a dramatisation of those performed by the Spanish Inquisition, as the verdicts reached could not be contested. Moreover, by the necessity to diligently maintain the principle of secrecy so integral to such societies, the individual was left both literally and metaphorically in the dark, unsure as to whether even their own friends or family members belonged to the tribunal. The decision made, Francisca is forcibly “dragged from her chair,” and thus denied access to the society into which Carlos is welcomed; that she is killed to avoid spreading word of its existence is an extreme representation of her exclusion. Moreover, the violent portrayal of her death makes for unpleasant reading: the use of cacophonous language is jarring, as the hard “c” sound found in verbs such as “clattering,” “clang” and “clashing,” grates against the ear of the reader, mimicking to a lesser extent the pain experienced by the character; similarly, the use of onomatopoeia allows us to hear Francisca “sigh,” “groan” and “scream” as she falls; and

finally, that she is cast down into an “abyss” restores her to the lowly position beneath the men of the society, amongst whose ranks she is not thought fit to belong.

Whereas *Horrid Mysteries* focusses on the Illuminati-style society as a collective, *The Necromancer* focusses on a single and superior power, with the bulk of the plot revolving around Volkert, a self-styled pseudo-necromancer, who establishes himself as the leader of a group of banditti. By acting in the role of “necromancer,” performing subtle tricks and elaborate rituals alike, Volkert is able to delude all those around him into the belief that he has supernatural powers, much to the great advantage of him and his fellow freebooters. The manipulation thus exercised by Volkert over the protagonists permits an exploration of their worries and fears in the face of often terrifying and almost always inexplicable events, with mystery, secrecy and violence becoming integral parts of the plot. After Hellfried’s story about the necromantic ritual ends, Herrman begins a story of his own, revealing that he too has had a similar experience. While serving as a tutor to the young Baron de R—, he travels through a village purportedly haunted by spectral horsemen, with the landlord explaining how one of the former masters of the place was “a very wicked and irreligious man, who found great delight in tormenting the poor peasants [...] he trampled his feet upon his own children, confined them in dark dungeons, where they were often kept, for many days, without a morsel of bread. He used to call his tenants dogs, and to treat them as such – in short, he was cruelty itself” (26–7). He goes on to relate how, when this same lord hunted, the villagers would “serve him instead of dogs,” but “if any one was not alert enough then he would hunt him, instead of the deer, ’till he fell down expiring under the lashes of his whip” (27). Eventually, he meets an untimely end, falling from his horse and breaking his “wicked” neck; however, as a result of his conduct while living, “he is doomed to appear in the village, at twelve o’clock at night, and to make his entry into the castle with his infernal crew, but as soon as the clock strikes one, he is plunged back again into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (27). This, of course, turns out to be a rumour perpetrated by the machinations of Volkert, a common ruse in Gothic fiction

capitalising on the villagers' inherent fear of all things supernatural and ensuring that nobody inhabits the castle where the banditti make their hideout, but it also serves the purpose of endowing the secret society with power by hinting at the violence and horrors associated with it.

In both of Will's German Gothic inspired tales, the secret societies he portrays, along with all those who lead them or make up their number, let it be known that they are in some way associated with Satanic, supernatural, and/or occult practices, thereby suggesting that their power is all-encompassing and otherworldly, even though there is no truth to their claims and they serve only to highlight the myth of power. In this way, they are akin to the Illuminati, who were sworn to further knowledge for the betterment of mankind, no matter what the means or cost, by way of "devious and secret plotting, [...] pseudo-science and occult philosophy" (Paulson 546). In *Horrid Mysteries*, the confederation which haunts the narrator is likened to a "spectre," with the man who introduces Carlos surrounded by rumours of his being a "sorcerer and necromancer" (22; 35). Likewise, in *The Necromancer*, Volkert is said to be skilled in the "infernal arts," which he uses to peddle his "diabolical business," and further courts the falsehood that he is able to "raise up" the ghosts of people's departed friends and relatives (57; 71–2). However, if the novelist can ascribe power over his or her characters to people (such as Volkert in *The Necromancer*), and/or to organisations (such as the confederates in *Horrid Mysteries*), rather than to the chaos of nature or events of the supernatural, then the trials and tribulations of those characters are at least partially explained and can be the more easily removed. To this end, Will does not wait until the conclusion of his novels to reveal a rational explanation for the irrational events he describes: in *Horrid Mysteries*, Carlos learns early on that it is the confederation who are "most unaccountably implicated in those very objects where [he] had the least reason to suspect their agency" (130); meanwhile in *The Necromancer*, it is Volkert himself who admits that he undertook his deceptions purely for "the pleasure every one feels, when he can prove the superior power of his genius, which is the head spring which

animates us as well to good as to bad actions [...] and raises us above the common herd” (164). Volkert also explains in detail how he was able to do this, by employing “spies,” “associates” and the “assistance of the robbers,” to make use of “large kettle drums” to give the impression of thunder, a “lanthorn composed of blue glass” to create an ethereal glow, “brimstone” to give off a burning smell, an “hollowed pumpkin” in the place of a “fractured disfigured head,” and finally “the apparition itself was effected by means of a camera-obscura” (158; 160–63). For Volkert and the confederates, as for real-life societies such as the Freemasons and Illuminati, their association with the supernatural is merely a means by which to exercise a violent form of psychological control; it signifies their power, as well as reinforcing their sense of superiority over the credulous multitudes, placing them on the outskirts of society and yet still able to manipulate events from within, much like the Gothic novel itself.

To return to the argument put forward by Hall that, when writing about secret societies in works of Gothic fiction, there can be found “criticism of the tendency of secret orders to move away from their apparently enlightened ideals towards a lust for power and influence over others,” Will’s portrayal of the sinister and unscrupulous Volkert does indeed suggest he was critical of institutional abuses of power (*French and German Gothic Fiction* 152). The horrors that result from the necromancer’s actions, including the coercion of a young girl into a sexual encounter and the violent suicide of a landowner, all of which are undertaken purely for the “pleasure” of so doing, lead us to cast him in the role of villain whose punishment when captured is deserved (164). Although, in this respect he is more akin to Radcliffe’s Schedoni than to Lewis’s Ambrosio, since he does have some redeeming qualities and the writer elicits sympathy for him through descriptions of his ostracism. Ultimately, the capture, imprisonment, torture and execution of Volkert not only fits the violent preoccupations of the Gothic genre, but it also serves to reinforce the public desire to quash those who they perceive as dangerous or ‘other,’ such as those associated with secret societies. However, as well as being critical of

the necromancer and his actions, there is further criticism from Will of the crowd, and the enjoyment they take from the scene of Volkert's public execution:

Now I directed again my melancholy looks towards the dreadful place of execution, and beheld Volkert undressing himself, and approaching with firmness the stool stained with the smoaking blood of his friend. Now he was seated, the sword of the executioner lifted up – now it glittered in the morning sun, ready to strike the fatal blow. I shut my eyes involuntarily – a sudden hollow humming told me that Volkert had conquered. Awful sensations thrilled my palpitating heart, and I forced my way through the gaping multitude without looking once more towards the horrid place where Volkert had expired. (166)

The narrator notes with disgust the “more than beastly satisfaction” of those who have gathered to watch, with the adjective “beastly” metaphorically likening the crowd to animals baying for blood and suggesting that they feel a primal safety in their numbers, much like the blood-thirsty mob that tramples the wicked prioress in Lewis’s *The Monk* (1795) and recalling the real-life massacres of September 1792 (165). Although the reader is made to feel that Volkert’s punishment is deserved, the crowd thus becomes no more admirable than the tyrant, since they are clearly capable of the same atrocities or worse. This same society fears acts of violence committed by mysterious individuals and clandestine groups and would have been cowed and frightened by Volkert’s claims of necromancy, but still they delight in enacting their own form of violence through the employment of the death penalty as a way of punishing such figures. The result of this is that, far from presenting a warning to others, the portrayal of Volkert’s death “reifies public execution as the real Gothic terror in the enlightened world of eighteenth-century men,” rather than in the “ultimately campy and fictive creations of Volkert’s imagination, and certainly not in his banal larcenies” (Cass xxi). Will’s representation of Volkert’s dignified death, which sees him “approaching with firmness the stool stained with the smoaking blood of his friend,” thus reverses the plot trajectory which sees the criminality and social ostracism of mysterious figures and secret societies as the Gothic threat. Now, it is the condemning public that is complicit in the creation of criminal elements and bloodlust in

seeing them destroyed. Moreover, we see here the blurring of the old black-white morality of earlier Gothic fictions: from one point of view Volkert is seen as a cruel manipulator, who lets no barrier stand between him and the fulfilment of his wants and needs; but with a simple shift in moral perspective, from the other he is the helpless passive victim of his repressive environment and violent persecution. And finally, the excitement elicited in the crowd by this violent spectacle of death can in turn be likened self-reflexively to the reading of Gothic fiction, for as much as critics lambasted such novels still they were popular, passed from hand to hand and read with great pleasure.

Whereas the German source text for *The Necromancer* is focussed on its narrator's reactions to criminal manipulation to create a primarily psychological narrative, Barry Murnane argues that Will's "eccentric and hyperbolic amendments to Kahlert's work serve to decentre this specifically Enlightened focus," since he is "only interested in the actual violence," such as in the scene of Volkert's execution (156). Peter Will's *The Necromancer* was published by Lane's Minerva Press in 1794, and combines Karl Friedrich Kahlert's *Der Geisterbanner* (1792), which roughly translates as 'The Spectral Banner,' with Friedrich Schiller's *Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre* (1786), which translates as 'The Criminal of Lost Honour'. One such "amendment" that Murnane refers to then is Will's major addition to Kahlert's work, as he fuses whole sections of Schiller's text onto the end of the necromantic narrative. Another is that he aims to heighten the horror of the text by depicting the narrator's reactions to pseudo-supernatural events in even more extravagant terms, with examples of such hyperbole including: "gloomy thoughts," "seized with horror," "abode of horror," and "thrilled my soul with horror, and black despair" (15; 25; 35; 41; 45; 58). Jennifer Driscoll Colosimo laments how "the philosophical content" of Kahlert's original work is "stripped away" by Will, only to be "replaced by lurid and bloody embellishments to the plot" (292). However, when Kahlert came to publish a second edition of *Der Geisterbanner* in 1799 he re-translated the English adaptation, "acknowledging" Will and "translating" his additions and amendments into

the revised German model (James D. Jenkins ix). Murnane has highlighted how, despite remaining faithful to the English text in general, Kahlert omitted some of Will's more explicitly violent and sexual scenes, thereby suggesting that both writers ultimately believed the English Gothic to be "more explicitly horrific and brutal than its German equivalent" (157). That Will "increases the horror of his version is unquestionable," states Hall, since he extended the work "to become rather more sadistic" ('The Gothic Tide' 69). It is clear then that the 'English taste' for which Will caters is one which revels in the shockingly supernatural, brutally violent, and sexually distasteful, the reason for this being that "the bloody upheavals of the French Revolution had rendered everyday reality so horrific that contemporary writers had to invoke the supernatural and demonic realms for material which could still shock or startle their readers" (Paulson 536). Will's work, with its interesting two-way influence, thereby suggests that the popularity of Gothic fiction in the 1790s was due in no small part to the widespread anxieties and fears in Europe aroused by the turmoil in France – anxieties and fears which were then transferred to/released in tales of darkness, confusion, blood, horror, and violence.

Despite its popularity at a time when English readers hungered for what James Watt has referred to as the "exuberance and vigour" of German works, Will's *Necromancer* has never been endorsed by the critical establishment, either in its own time or now (69). One late eighteenth-century critic declared his fervent hope that it was indeed a translation, since he would be "sorry to see an English original so full of absurdities," whereas another lamented its capacity for "infusing into the credulous multitude a firm belief in the existence of sorcery" (qtd. in Will *Necromancer* 198). Their criticism centres on the Gothic themes of the novel, its inclusion of necromancers and the ghosts they raise, and the potential this has to corrupt readers, which is similar to other criticism of the Gothic genre and novel-reading in general, as explored in the Introduction to this thesis. Meanwhile, twentieth-century critics such as Michael Sadleir and Frederick S. Frank have described the work as "incoherent" and "incomprehensible" respectively, though such comments are more a critique of its sometimes

confusing narrative structure, than of its supernatural content (qtd. in James D. Jenkins vii). Similarly, following its publication in 1796, Will's *Horrid Mysteries* has been repeatedly lambasted by critics, with many singling it out for its lurid portrayals of sex, power, and violence: in the late eighteenth century, one writer for the *Critical Review* clearly did not find much to admire in the work, dismissing it simply as "gross and absurd nonsense" ('Monthly Catalogue: Novels. Rev. *Horrid Mysteries*' 473), while in his twentieth-century essay entitled *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H. P. Lovecraft derisively labelled the work as "trash" (36). In response to such criticism, E. J. Clery surmises that William Lane was not particularly concerned with the quality or morality of the works he published, and notes that by the early 1800s the Minerva Press had become associated with "bad" writing (138). Without the references in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, it is likely that many of the 'horrid' novels spawned in the late eighteenth century would have slipped into obscurity. However, *The Necromancer* has been republished several times, including in 1840 as part of writer and humanist William Hazlitt's *Romancist and Novelist's Library*, and again by the clergyman and authority on the occult Montague Summers in 1927. Likewise, *Horrid Mysteries* is also one of the 'horrid' novels mentioned by Austen, and in Thomas Love Peacock's Gothic parody *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) a character modelled on Percy Bysshe Shelley sleeps with a copy of Will's work under his pillow. It appears then that these novels have enjoyed popularity with readers in spite of what critics have had to say about their violent plotlines, with mentions by famous authors and reprints as recently as 2007 for *The Necromancer* and 2016 for *Horrid Mysteries* (both from Valancourt Books) as testament to their enduring interest.

In his role as translator, Will was also responsible for translating several works of German mysticism, as well as works by the infamous Illuminati, and it is perhaps because of this that we find "magico-political" themes (to take a term used in the full title from another of Will's translations: *The Victim of Magical Delusion* [1795], by Cajetan Tschink) explored in *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries*, at a time when there were widespread anxieties and

fears in Europe surrounding secret societies and their perceived part in the events of the French Revolution. Whilst in *The Necromancer* Volkert largely acts alone, playing the part of puppet master in his self-orchestrated “pantomime,” the secret society portrayed in *Horrid Mysteries* appears more powerful for acting as a large and united group, with the narrator consistently manipulated throughout by figures linked to them in varying degrees (66). Carlos is right to acknowledge that his actions are controlled by the society, that they are the “unknown hands, that direct all affairs,” and that they have “for some time been dispersed all over Spain” (47). In addition, he learns the terrifying truth that he is “surrounded everywhere with invisible spies,” and that there is “a deep-layed, powerful and extensive plan” in place for him (18; 55). For Carlos, his fears result not from the apparent Gothic horrors and ghosts, nor from the supernatural explained or otherwise, but rather from the fact he knows he is being manipulated and can do little or nothing about it – and, above all, that he is not sure how this is happening, or why. This sense of unresolved mystery is one that occurs in the works of Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Radcliffe, and is one way in which many contemporaries “read” the Revolution (Paulson 541). In this way, secret society narratives served to stoke English “paranoia [...] that the French Revolution was a secret plot concerted by the Bavarian Illuminati and Jacobins” (Wright 71). The consequence of this, as Robert Miles observes, was that late eighteenth-century readers became “gripped by the idea of living in a society riddled with conspirators, spies and informers” (51).

Through the powerful and far-reaching society that he depicts in *Horrid Mysteries*, Will further explores the dangerously dependent nature of belonging to such a group, versus the challenge of living apart from others as Volkert attempts in *The Necromancer*, and also raises the wider question as to whether one should attempt to improve society as a whole, or improve oneself. In *Horrid Mysteries*, the confederates describe their feelings of belonging as “the consciousness of being united to a society who are all allied by the strongest ties, who never suffer a member of their body to sink under the weight of misery,” and declare this to be “a

great alleviation in every suffering” (55). However, the group depends upon its members not only to achieve their shared aims, but also because they believe that “the means of gratifying ambition, and of executing lofty plans, can only be met beyond the depressing limits of a domesticated life” (55). We see here the start of the group’s real intention to mimic, threaten, and eventually replace the bonds of marriage, family, and the church, suggesting the fear that perceived sinister and corrupt institutions (such as the Freemasons and Illuminati) sought to supplant their rightful province.

At first encounter, Carlos is disgusted by the confederate’s reliance and overarching desire to execute their plans no matter what the cost – be it violence, murder or sexual coercion – and yet, after losing his wife and with no family to speak of, he is ultimately drawn in by the allure of this inter-reliant society, and thus succumbs:

Being surprised and conquered, I sank into the arms of the venerable speaker. “Approach, my brethren,” he resumed, “and receive the oath of eternal love from his lips.”

I was in the twinkling of an eye encircled by every arm; and the horrid vow escaped my lips at the altar, amid the kisses of my new brethren. Being inebriated by a beverage out of the goblet, I dropped down at the foot of the altar, laying my hand upon the cross: my arm was uncovered, a vein opened with the point of a dagger, and the streaming blood circulated in a goblet among all my brethren. The old man embraced me once more, “Go now, my son” said he to me, “go, and receive the reward which you deserve.” (75)

Reading more like a romantic or sexual encounter, – complete with “kisses,” a “vow,” and taking place before an “altar” – the society welcomes Carlos into their “family” (69). However, he soon after learns that “in order to qualify for the intimate union which has a more extended purpose in view,” any other familial or romantic ties he has “must be dissolved” (55). This “extended purpose” can be read as the society’s ultimate aim of replacing the need for the institutions of marriage, family, and the church. Following this scene, Carlos is blasphemously referred to as the “son” of the society adepts, thereby implying a parent/child relationship and

replacing the need for genetic offspring, as well as the need for marriage to a woman for the purposes of insemination and pregnancy, and thus supplanting the traditional family unit. In this way, the secret society provides a mixture of mystery, eroticism, terror and politics: mystery in its clandestine meetings and exclusive membership; eroticism in the intimate and illicit nature of their same-sex interactions and the way in which they depend wholly upon one another; terror in the blood-spilling rituals that solidify their union and mind-altering drinks with which they ply their members; and politics in its espousal of whole-world ideals and ideas of achieving a new and better form of justice.

In addition to the psychological and supernatural threat they pose to their male members, secret societies and their criminal leaders further pose a sexual threat to the women within and outside of their ranks, with Will using the trope of violence to critique institutional abuses of power and gender. Lucien Jenkins highlights the fact that, unlike *Horrid Mysteries* and in stark contrast to the methods of Ann Radcliffe, *The Necromancer* is “exclusively masculine,” and that all “the relationships that matter are those between men” (7). The novel does not have a heroine; the theme of a young women being threatened or kidnapped, such as occurs in *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), does not feature in *The Necromancer*; and there is no female figure in this novel to match the likes of Radcliffe’s Emily or Ellena. There are just two women who play a part in the novel, in that their actions influence the events of the plotline: the first is Helen, with whom Volkert has sex in exchange for his services, and the second is Jenny, the beloved of the criminal Wolf and for love of whom he falls into his life of crime. Featuring only in an episode narrated by Volkert, Helen in particular is memorable for her ability to speak and act, petitioning him to interject with her father on her behalf after he denies her the right to marry the man of her choosing. However, despite her power to communicate and seeming intelligence in concocting a plan whereby her lover is able to visit her by masquerading as a spectre in their supposedly haunted house, she still has to employ her sexuality in order to achieve the outcome she desires. In an extraordinary account,

and one which Montague Summers did not print in his edition of 1927, we learn how Helen persuades Volkert to aid her in her plight:

During this woful speech I had been standing before the lovely maid, holding her by her trembling hand, and bending my ear close to her lips, as she was whispering her woes to me. When she had finished her plaintive tale, she pressed me to her heaving bosom, her burning kisses thrilled the very pulses of my heart with voluptuous rapture, her lily arms encircled my neck, her whole lovely form seemed melted into one with mine – but you may easily guess what was the consequence! (147)

Volkert thus spends the night in the girl's bedchamber, engaging in a passionate sexual encounter which leaves him "heated" and "in high spirits," but which attracted censure from critics, and all in exchange for his performing (or rather faking) a necromantic ritual which she hopes will change her father's mind (147). This scene raises several salient questions: with Helen being young, unmarried and inexperienced, we are left to wonder whether or not this is a gross abuse of power on the part of Volkert; and, moreover, does her exchange of sex for services place Helen in the position of whore/prostitute, with the necromancer thereafter referring to her as "the seduced girl," and thereby demeaning her sexuality to nothing more than a base commodity (147)? The fact that Summers chose to exclude this scene from his re-edition of the novel further reinforces its illicit nature, as well as highlighting Will's critique of institutional abuses of power and gender dynamics – and not just those of secret societies – with sexual coercion and the abuse of women common practice among men in positions of power (as shall be further explored in Chapter 3).

In another necromantic ritual which takes a darkly sexual turn, Volkert channels the spirit of a recently deceased man, only for the revelation to come to light that he forbade his daughter from marrying her fiancé because "he is her brother!" (59). Through this supernatural storyline, Will introduces the theme of incest, that violent abuse of familial boundaries so often employed by writers of the Gothic genre. In his recent book *Queer Gothic*, George Haggerty

refers to “erotic fear,” such as the terror associated with incest, as being one of the hallmarks of Gothic fiction (22). Jenny DiPlacidi also sees incest as “representative of a range of interests crucial to writers of the Gothic,” and in this case it can be seen as mirroring the unrest, violations of power and violence engendered by the French Revolution (3). Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* all capitalise on this, and these are novels from which Gothic imitators frequently borrow, with the theme of incest also appearing in other Minerva works, such as Eliza Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), Mrs Carver’s *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* (1797), and Mrs Patrick’s *More Ghosts!* (1798). However, all is not as it seems in *The Necromancer*: here, as elsewhere, it is Volkert who is the author of a Gothic fiction, engineering this supernatural scene, as he does others, to his own advantage.

Similarly, in *Horrid Mysteries*, Carlos has several dubious erotic and sexual encounters over the course of the novel, all of which caused it to attract the censure of critics, as explored earlier in this chapter. However, that it was deemed improper does not mean that it was also unpopular; indeed, the fleshy scenes found in the pages of Will’s German Gothic are undeniably part of its appeal to many readers, such as the fictional Scythrop in Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), who not only sleeps with a copy of the work beneath his pillow, but also reveals his disturbing desire to re-enact the ‘wedding’ of Carlos and Rosalia. Following on from the scene in which Francisca is put to death and Carlos swears his “horrid oath” to the society, the narrator further solidifies his union with the group by taking part in a violent mockery of the marriage ceremony with one of their female associates, Rosalia, promising to forsake all other women for her (96). Rosalia gives the declaration: “Swear that no other being shall intrude between us; that no living being, not even a thought, shall tear our bond asunder; that we will be united for ever, and keep firm to the society who gave us leave to love each other; that neither of us shall attempt to alienate the other from it,” to which Carlos dutifully replies: “I swear” (83). Although, in keeping with the Gothic themes of the novel, this

romantic exchange is tinged with violence, as the focus is on a disclaimer that, should either of them be unfaithful to the other, then “each of us shall prosecute the faithless party with nameless tortures,” such as having “the marrow in his bones dry up,” or “cankered poison corrode his heart, burning thirst parch his tongue in the midst of water, and an insatiable hunger torment him in the lap of plenty!” (83). Such tortures, torments, and horrors, all echoing the punishment of Tantalus, are not what one would typically expect to find in the marriage vows, and yet for Carlos and Rosalia they take centre stage. More violent still is the way in which Rosalia draws the ceremony to a close:

Her hand was still armed with the dagger. She bared my arm, and opened a vein, sucking the blood which flowed from the orifice in large drops; and then wounded her arm in return, bidding me to imbibe the roseate stream, and exclaimed, “thus our souls shall be mixed together!” However, she dropped suddenly fainting into my arms, exhausted by the loss of blood. I started up, seized with terror, bound up her wound with my handkerchief, and with difficulty restored her to the use of her senses. But I was also seized with a sudden fainting fit, having neglected my wound; my eyes grew dim, and my senses fled. (84)

This act of blood-mingling and blood-sucking inextricably links sex with violence, just as Rosalia links Carlos to her, as well as to the society, in the most powerfully symbolic way. The scene is also a precursor to that which occurs over an hundred years later, in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), between Mina Harker and the eponymous vampire, with much being said by critics about the overtly sexual nature of blood-drinking “where blood is again a substitute for semen” (Bentley 30). Will does this again, with further unsubtle imagery, when the pent-up attraction between Carlos and his future wife explodes after he spies her fondling his cane in secret, surprises her, and thus accidentally discharges his “unhappily cocked” rifle, causing the bullet to nick his fingers and the blood from which “streamed into the face and on the bosom of the Baroness” (313). Given the apparent danger of romantic exchanges and their disparaging views on marriage, it seems strange that the secret society featured in *Horrid Mysteries* allows Carlos to engage in these relationships. Moreover, rather than concentrating on their ideas of a

new order and world domination, they become more interested, almost to the point of obsession, with ensuring that Carlos's vows to Rosalia remain intact, and that any other relationships he forms are disrupted, either by interfering love rivals or with the woman's sudden death, all of which only serves to further strengthen the link between love, sex, and violence in the mind of the reader. In this way, the writer highlights the illicit nature of romantic exchanges, while at the same time dramatizing the danger of sexual relations. Thus, Will's portrayals of sex and sexual relationships in both *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries* come to represent corruption, superstition, and repression, thereby exploiting the dramatic resonances of the Revolution and its anti-clericalism, opposed as it was to the influence and activities of the clergy and/or church in secular or public affairs.

Whatever their "excesses and improbabilities" may be, Peter Will's *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries* are novels grounded in the realities of the 1790s, when the public perception was that clandestine male groups were working behind the scenes to foment revolution, overturn the social order of their day, and ultimately supplant the rightful province of institutions such as the family, marriage, and church (Grove xiii). They are novels about dynamics of control and the uncontrollable in the late eighteenth century, simultaneously eliciting and exploiting contemporary fears and anxieties surrounding secret societies, their tribunals and membership, manipulation of the supernatural, and the use of violence. Moreover, as Minerva Press texts often were, they are reflections of the literary tastes of the time, as evidenced by Will's additions and amendments to the original German source texts, and his perception of the 'English taste' for violence toward the end of the century. They also point to the interconnectedness of England with the continent, as German texts were quickly translated and made available to English readers; the terror and gloom achieved by the Black Forest setting, and which are characteristic of the popular Gothic genre, are expressive of concerns surrounding events beyond human control, and further reflect the uncertainties engendered by the French Revolution.

As has been explored throughout this chapter, violent secret societies lie at the heart of both *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries*. Their focus in these works is on overthrowing the established world order, as well as eradicating the need for such Godly institutions as the family, marriage, and church. Moreover, they hint at the very strong, but hidden power of the Inquisition, one of the most evident and fearful organisations in the Gothic genre as a whole, as well as of the prevalence of Freemasons and the Illuminati. The fictional figures of mystery who steer the actions and will of the protagonists are, in some way, involved with these real-life controlling forces, and thus have recourse to all manner of devices and helpers. In this way, Will's works offer an example of the ways in which powerful groups can elicit, marry, and exploit violence and the supernatural in order to control individuals and societies – from robbers who terrorise lone travellers and plunder small towns and villages, to individuals or groups able to influence people in positions of great power, be it in institutions such as the church, politics, or even the royal family. In his critical essay 'Idee sur les romans' (1800), the Marquis de Sade concurs that "this kind of fiction, whatever one may think of it, is assuredly not without merit: 'twas the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe had suffered," thereby suggesting that Gothic novels such as these were so popular with readers because the conditions of the Revolution generated a need to articulate this fear in some way (qtd. in Lynch 174). From sexual transgression to social unrest, the material we find in the pages of such works was ultimately playing out in the streets and houses of revolutionary Europe in the 1790s – a stark reminder that the violence and chaos encountered in the Gothic genre is not as detached from reality as one might hope, and as shall be further explored through the depictions of violent marital relationships by Minerva Press writers in the chapter that follows.

### **Chapter 3: Marriage; or, Rape, Incest, and Imprisonment: Violence against Women**

Towards the end of the 1790s, “the Minerva Press was specialising not only in Gothic Romance but also in allied forms of domestic fiction with horrifying or terrifying dimensions,” and it is to these types of texts we now turn (Bannet 139). Chapters 1 and 2 explored the varying portrayals of violence in the ‘historical’ and ‘German’ Gothic – the former concerning itself with men at war, and the latter with male-dominated secret societies. Chapter 3 investigates the ‘domestic’ Gothic, looking specifically at negative depictions of marriage and violence against women in Minerva Press works from the end of the eighteenth century, to see how these writers were deviating from the tropes of the genre and employing scenes of violence, rape and incest, both to elicit and exploit contemporary concerns surrounding gender roles, parental authority in marriage, and the right ways for children to balance their personal desires with societal and familial duties. While bloody battlefields and sinister conclaves would have been far removed from the lives of most contemporary readers, marriage was much closer to home. In this respect, domestic violence was a potential threat, far more likely to be encountered than supernatural horrors. This chapter thus focusses on a selection of ‘domestic’ Gothic novels, all published by William Lane’s Minerva Press between 1790 and 1799 and notable for the violent romantic relationships they portray. Just as Anna Maria Mackenzie, E. M. Foster, and Agnes Musgrave all heightened the violence encountered at times of war to sensationalise their ‘historical’ Gothic works, and Peter Will utilised the theme of violent secret societies to dramatise a fear of sinister and corrupt institutions, this chapter demonstrates how Eliza Parsons, Regina Maria Roche, and Eleanor Sleath all emphasised the violence experienced by their female characters – thereby deviating from other writers of the so-called Female Gothic – in order to stoke contemporary fears concerning the imbalance of power between the sexes. Furthermore, through an analysis of works by Parsons, Roche, and Sleath, this chapter illuminates how late eighteenth-century novelists were employing the traditional ‘marriage plot’ to interpret the violence and abuse that took place within the confines of this sacred

institution; how stereotypically Gothic devices were manipulated to sensationalise violence against women; and also how these writers' heroines were characterised through their responses, or rather their resistance, to domestic violence, the threat of rape and/or the transgression of the incest taboo, and the supernatural.

The Gothic has been repeatedly scrutinised over the years, and discriminations made between the manifold qualities that constitute this expansive genre. In particular, when Ellen Moers first wrote of the "Female Gothic" in 1977, she not only coined a new term, but also allowed for a new way of thinking about the genre, with much of the feminist work of the mid-1980s focussing on gendered discourse and the apparent dichotomy between female supernaturalism and male reason (essay title). Gendered distinctions had certainly been made before this, as in the work of Ann Radcliffe who famously characterised the unique division between terror (typified by the subtle and suggestive effects of her own writing) and horror (demonstrated by the excessive fiction of male writers such as Matthew Lewis) in her posthumously published essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826). Rather than further complicating definitions of the Female Gothic, as this is an area which has received much critical attention recently, this chapter refers to the Female Gothic as conceived by Radcliffe, and thus highlights the ways in which the works of Parsons, Roche, and Sleath deviate from her own. It was through these writers' exploitation of violent scenes and extreme depictions of marital violence befitting the immensely popular Gothic genre that they were able to voice their critiques of and anxieties about the threat of domestic violence and power imbalances in marriage.

In the early to mid-eighteenth century, genteel women were often required to marry in order to secure their futures, and yet were hindered from freely choosing a husband, resulting in unsuitable matches and unhappy marriages. The phrase "the matrimonial trap" – used by Mary Delaney in a letter to her sister in 1733 – thus aptly illuminates the apprehensions with which many women viewed the institution of marriage (qtd. in Thomason 163). Although the

late eighteenth century saw an increase in what we might call ‘love’ marriages, especially in the working and middle classes, still strategic partnerships were encouraged, with some daughters married off by parents seeking to make a match on the basis of status and wealth, as opposed to love. Lacking the power either to avoid it or to define it for themselves, many women thus chose the written word as “a means by which to exercise the power they otherwise lacked” and warn others of the potential pitfalls they faced (Thomason 1). Women writers such as Parsons, Roche, and Sleath accordingly used their novels to provide an education for their female readership, teaching them what to fear and how to respond, but unlike traditional conduct books this educational impulse was combined with: the exploitation of contemporary anxieties, a desire to thrill readers, and the need to make a profit on their works. An example of such ‘teaching’ can be found in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817) where the heroine is aware of the threat of marital violence even as an unwed virgin, because books have given her experience of what to expect. Catherine Morland’s ‘awareness,’ in the case of General Tilney, ultimately turns out to be skewed: he does pose a threat to her safety, but it is not exactly the kind she fears. Nonetheless, her reading list, we are told, includes such horrors as *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1794), *The Mysterious Warning* (1796) and *Clermont* (1798), all published by Lane’s Minerva Press. Presumably, Austen herself was familiar with these works, since she rightly identified them all as belonging to the ‘horrid’ genre she wished to satirise. After investigating the individual novels and their affiliations with the various schools of Gothic literature, Michael Sadleir concluded that her choice “was rather deliberate than random, [and] was made for the stories’ sake than for their titles’ sake,” thereby implying that Austen had a motive for selecting these texts over others (9). A novel about novels in general, but Gothic novels in particular, *Northanger Abbey* is a work of satire famously parodying the idea of a life lived as if in one of these dark and terrifying tales. However, it is also used to powerful effect as Austen employs the mock-Gothic style to juxtapose the “alarms of romance” against the “anxieties of common life,” one of which was a

fear of marital violence as explored by writers at the Minerva Press toward the end of the eighteenth-century (Austen 148). As a result, it is these ‘horrid’ novels – written by Parsons, Roche, and Sleath, and satirised by Austen – which have been selected for analysis here. In addition to their being featured in the list of *Northanger* ‘horrid’ novels, a central consideration in their choice has been the ways in which these texts all deviate from the Radcliffean model, showing greater similarities to the Male Gothic than the Female, as shall later be explored. Moreover, as well as including examples of violence which fit the focus of this study, they also embed a unique sort of resistance to violence and male power. I argue therefore that by including examples of marital violence within their novels, these women not only exposed, exacerbated, and exploited contemporary fears concerning the threat of domestic abuse, but they also registered their dissatisfaction with the traditional marriage system as their culture had defined it, and it was the Gothic genre – with its ability to combine the opposing elements of horror and romance – that was uniquely suited to the exploration of such fears.

The most famous work of English Gothic novelist Eliza Parsons, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is chronologically the first of seven ‘horrid’ novels cited by Austen. Initially published in two volumes by the Minerva Press, it was “popular in circulating libraries” and widely read in the 1790s (Snodgrass 270). Following this success, there were a further six editions of the novel: in 1793, 1794, 1824, 1839 and 1854, according to Garside, Raven and Schöwerling (592). It was not then reprinted until 1968, as part of a set for the Folio Society by Devendra P. Varma. Although it remains relatively obscure today, despite the recent critical attention that the Gothic has received, its comparatively early date marks it out as an important work of the genre: not only does it predate both Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysterious Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), but it also defies Radcliffe’s early conception of the Female Gothic genre, containing far more elements of horror (associated with the Male Gothic), than terror (which is typically considered Female).

Most notably, what sets *The Castle of Wolfenbach* apart from other works of its time is that it features an uncharacteristically brave heroine, who remains unruffled in the face of explicit evils and grisly horrors. As identified by Cynthia Wolf, Gothic heroines typically “divide neatly into spritely and helpless,” with some willing to pick up a candle and go exploring in the dark, and others only capable of cowering behind closed doors (101). Parsons’s Matilda Weimar falls very much under the first category since she is “determined” to stay at the eponymous castle, notwithstanding the rumours told her by the local peasantry of its being “haunted,” with “bloody floors, prison rooms, and scriptions, they say, on the windows, to make a body’s hair stand on end” (4). Blood, confined spaces, and strange messages are all standard tropes of the Gothic, and so it seems that these accounts are meant to dissuade the young heroine from entertaining any such thoughts of entering the building. Her faithful servant Albert meanwhile, with whom she is travelling, baulks at the idea, only ultimately conceding due to his feeling “ashamed to have less courage than his mistress” (6). It is not long before they are all in bed and the clock strikes twelve, at which point they hear “plainly a clanking of chains,” followed by “two or three heavy groans” and a “violent noise, like two or three doors clapping to with great force” (7). However, we quickly learn that Matilda is a woman “unaccustomed to fear,” being as she is in possession of curiosity and courage “superior to those terrors by which others have been intimidated” (11). Rousing herself from her bed, she goes into the next room to wake Albert, presumably hoping for some reassurance, but finds him with “drops of perspiration” streaming down his face, “eyes starting,” and “incapable of speaking” – not the hero we would typically expect (7). Parsons introduces her ‘spritely’ heroine in this way so that she is immediately established as an independent and strong-minded young woman, and not one who will play the part of a passive victim. This characterisation is strengthened by the inverting of stereotypical assumptions of gender (although it does fit the stereotype of class, whereby a belief in the supernatural is dismissed as the rationalisation of a lesser mind for things unexplained), as well as the favourable comparison of Matilda with her

male companion. Rather than being a ‘damsel-in-distress,’ Matilda comes to her own rescue. She does “not suffer her mind to dwell on the cause being supernatural,” instead she is convinced that “there must be some mystery” which she resolves to explore (8).

Through its opening, Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* pays homage to Radcliffe’s second published novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, but Parsons deviates from the Radcliffian model in her far more explicit depiction of marital violence. As the haunting in Parsons’s work progresses, Matilda notices “a light glide from the opposite wing, which her room fronted, and which Bertha had informed her was particularly haunted” (7). This observation clearly connects the narrative with that of Radcliffe’s, where the heroine Julia similarly notices a light from the opposite wing of the castle, but which, it transpires, emanates from the hidden chamber of her long-believed-dead mother. For Matilda, she discovered that the light she has seen comes not from the ghosts rumoured to haunt the castle, but rather from the long incarcerated Countess of Wolfenbach, who has been rendered a prisoner in her own home at the hands of her jealous husband. Through this shared storyline, both novels reveal their aim of using violence to show the power imbalance in marriage. Almost immediately after Matilda has uncovered the mystery behind the supposed haunting, the Countess is abducted. When Matilda later returns to her chambers to meet with her she finds the lady’s servant, Margarite, “on the bed weltering in blood” which has been spilled from “a wound in her throat” (26). Further surveying this grisly scene, she notices the room has been “stained all over with blood” and “on the floor was plainly mark’d the shape of a hand and fingers traced in blood, which seemed to have flowed in great quantities” (27). Such “great” quantities of blood suggest that this was a violently charged attack; unnecessarily so, since it is likely that the Count would have easily overpowered the elderly Margarite. Fortunately, we learn that the Countess has escaped a similar fate, but this discovery is only secondary to the gruesome scenes that Parsons chooses to depict so early in the novel. Michael Sadleir heavily criticised Parsons for her use of “coldly violent” imagery, alongside “scenes of almost sadistic cruelty,” but it can be argued that Parsons in fact exposes

the bloody consequences of a forced and loveless marriage far more effectively than does Radcliffe (13). By using sensationalised scenes to thrill the reader to a higher degree, inspiring ‘horror’ rather than mere ‘terror,’ Parsons further aids her warning about power imbalance and the dangers faced by women in marriage, since she writes as much to critique as to entertain.

As well as criticising Parsons for her “violent” and “sadistic” descriptions, Sadleir compared her unfavourably with fellow ‘horrid’ novelist Regina Maria Roche, who he likened to Radcliffe for her supposedly sentimentalised style. However, in *Clermont*, Roche also depicts scenes of domestic abuse and marital violence which are explicit, and greater in similarity to those presented by Parsons than Radcliffe. Today, Roche is considered to be a minor Gothic novelist who wrote in the shadow of Ann Radcliffe, despite being a bestseller in her own time, with the popularity of her third novel, *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), rivalling that of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Roche’s first two novels were pure romances, and yet she responded to the vogue for Gothic in the last decade of the eighteenth-century by modifying her sensibility and adding hints of suspense, the supernatural, and even horror to her writing in *The Children of the Abbey*, *Clermont*, and *Nocturnal Visit* (1800).

Included in Isabella Thorpe’s list of ‘horrid’ novels in *Northanger Abbey* and published by the sensationalist Minerva Press in 1798, Roche’s *Clermont* is darker in tone than her other works, featuring examples of marital violence and containing several scenes of murder, as well as suggestions of rape and incest. It relates the story of the beautiful Madeline, who lives in happy seclusion with her eponymous father until they are visited one day by the mysterious Countess de Merville. Madeline goes on to travel with the Countess to complete her education by seeing something more of the world. However, a series of unfortunate events ensues, beginning the moment the heroine finds her benefactress in a battered and bloody heap on the floor:

A deep groan reaching their ears, made them hastily rush up the aisle from whence it proceeded, where, with feelings too dreadful to relate, they beheld their friend, their benefactress, lying stretched before the monument of her husband, apparently lifeless, and a small stream of blood issuing from her side. A shriek of mingled grief and horror burst from Madeline, and, unable to stand, she sunk beside her and clasped her trembling arms around her. (p. 119)

The story of *Clermont* is decidedly Gothic in that it includes: dark castles, gloomy weather, poetic landscapes, tragic heroines, and despicable characters. As Anthony Mandal highlights, it is furthermore “populated by a plethora of villains and sub-villains, but the most evil are the D’Alemberts, father and son” (‘Revising the Radcliffe Model’ 4). Madeline’s first sight of the younger D’Alembert is in this scene as he stands over the bleeding body of the Countess de Merville, his mother-in-law and her benefactress, having attempted to assassinate her. However, at this stage his face is obscured, so he remains unrecognised to both heroine and reader.

The scene in which the Countess is discovered on the floor, bleeding, is the first instance of real violence encountered by Madeline, and it marks a shift in the novel’s focus. As Sadleir highlights, “terror now takes possession of the stage,” since there is “a transference from domestic felicity to the dramatics of horror,” characteristic of this type of Gothic (11). Effectively, Madeline has her eyes opened, from her rural idyll in pre-revolution France and the once bounteous and hospitable castle of the Countess, to a *real* world representative of revolutionary France where violence and abuse abounds. To reflect this change, the weather becomes stormy and Madeline spends a night listening to the ghost stories of the servants. The climax of this distressing period comes with the news of the Countess’s death. She is then placed in her coffin before her daughter Madame D’Alembert arrives, in order to conceal the cause of her death.

What the D’Alemberts represent is a violent form of seduction that rendered women powerless: just as fathers controlled daughters, so husbands controlled wives, leaving them

unable to make decisions for themselves and effectively forcing them to play the parts of victims in real life as in fiction. After the Countess dies, Madeline is unprotected and thus vulnerable to the typical threats made by the Gothic villain – in this case coming in the form of the violent and abusive husband of Madame D'Alembert. D'Alembert's cruelty is accentuated when he banishes his wife and spreads the news of her death, so that he might marry Madeline and procure her wealth. This happens after the reinstatement of Clermont to the fortune of Montmorenci, which means that it no longer passes to Monsieur D'Alembert who is revealed as a distant relative. Accustomed to living with money and being an extravagant man, he is not happy about this discovery and so determines to marry Madeline. His father further takes up his case and enters Madeline's chamber via a secret passage to convince her to marry his son. Naturally, she is repelled at the idea and rejects it, but being refused, the father of D'Alembert flies into a violent rage, “grasping her hand, and looking at her with a fiend-like countenance” (275). This scene highlights the discrepancy between *real* choice and the *illusion* of choice given to some women: they could freely choose to accept or reject a proposal of marriage, but faced aggression as the possible consequence of refusal. Mandal draws some comparison here between Roche's villain and Radcliffe's Montoni, illuminating the fact that where “Montoni is essentially a bandit whose evil is exaggerated by Emily's fervid imagination, the D'Alemberts come closer to the horror-Gothic conception of villainy, as depicted in M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)” ('Revising the Radcliffean Model' 5). In this way, Roche's novel is more aligned to the Male Gothic than it is the Female: her writing is far more explicit and extreme in its violent scenes, and her characters far more evil, ultimately signifying her Gothic work as different from those of other female writers of the genre at that time.

Another way in which Roche's work differs from that of other female writers, such as the fiction of Radcliffe, is its use of incest, which is arguably the most violently extreme transgression of both familial and sexual boundaries. Although the novel concludes with the

heroine's marriage to DeSevigne, Jenny DiPlacidi has recently highlighted how this is not as idyllic an ending as it at first appears: "In *Clermont*, the mysterious familial ties surrounding the heroine and her lover (her almost double cousin) emphasise instant familial attraction and female choice in spousal selection" (196). DiPlacidi thus draws attention to the incestuous nature of Madeline and De Sevigne's union – one which leaves the reader to consider the complications of "an endogamic union sought by kin that creates a static family unit" long after the novel is over (196). Roche's work is unusual in this unconventional coupling, as well as in having its male love interest discovered to be the destitute son of an illegitimate brother and lacking any fortune of his own. That the now-wealthy, and therefore more powerful, Madeline still chooses De Sevigne for her husband indicates that this is indeed a love match, and yet rather than presenting this as a positive celebration of female choice, the suggestion of incest not only undermines their relationship, but also calls the heroine's judgement into question and ultimately implies that women make potentially dangerous decisions when it is left to them to choose their marital partners themselves.

As has been explored, Roche's *Clermont* contains violence, murder, and domestic abuse, as well as suggestions of rape, and an incestuous union, all of which, though sensationalised, are employed by the writer in order to confront several important issues pertaining to women and marriage that other works of Gothic fiction fail to address. For example, Radcliffe favoured "hiding the blood and gore from her audience, preferring to keep any violence 'offstage' – safely away from her sensitive, largely female, readership" (Kröger 3). In this way, Radcliffe, along with other writers of the same style, limits her female characters' struggle to a passive form of confrontation which Diane Long Hoeveler calls a "female-marked communication system," and relies on "the gossip of servants, the tales of legends that have their own oral histories, the painted miniatures and portraits, as well as visual theatrics," rather than on the graphic expressions of violence found in Roche's work (86). Where others merely hint at violence, as is thought to be common for writers of the Female

Gothic, Roche is far more upfront, aggressive, and physical in her writing style, exposing her heroine to increased violence, physical hardship, and threatened molestation. Roche's explicit rendering of violence in *Clermont* is both sensationalised, but also recognisable in its humanity: violence, she reminds us, is not intrinsically improbable, rather it *is* human and it *does* happen.

In particular, the figure of the “violent or abusive husband,” as has already been explored in both Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and Roche’s *Clermont*, “dominates the marriage literature of the eighteenth century” (Roulston 157). At a time when “the laws and customs concerning marriage and parental authority had become the subject of intense debate,” marriage became narratable through its gradual unravelling, as in the instance of the Count and Countess of Wolfenbach and Monsieur and Madame D’Alembert (Trouille 77). Ad yet, writing of violence within the confines of marriage and the supposed safety of the marital home involved transgressing certain boundaries of propriety, something that Parsons does through her description of the violent murder of Margarite and the subsequent scene in which Matilda and her accomplice are left to conceal the still-bloody body in a trunk out of sight. Once this is done and Matilda recovers from her initial shock, she takes a closer look at the Countess’s cell and notices the following lines etched into the glass window panes:

*“I am dumb, as solemn sorrow ought to be;  
Could my griefs speak, my tale I’d tell to thee.”*

In another place these lines were written;

*“A wife, a mother – sweet endearing ties!  
Torn from my arms, and heedless of my cries;  
Here I am doomed to waste my wretched life,  
No more a mother – a discarded wife.”* (29)

Through the figure of the Countess, Parsons explores the construct of marriage, alongside the roles of wife and mother, and what these things meant to women in eighteenth-century society. After marrying the Count, the Countess finds herself “dumb”; she loses her independence, and with it her voice. Thus, her “griefs” are all that remain and they must speak for her after her disappearance. From these lines, we learn that the Countess has lost her once “sweet” epithets of “mother” and “wife,” and that without these she feels her life is no longer worth living. And yet, she uses poetry here not only to lament her fate but to resist it, thereby constructing for herself a kind of pseudo-maternal role in warning a future female reader. This calls to mind the violent epigraph from Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre*, which was explored in Chapter 1 and presented us with “the dying Screams/Of harmless Infants” and their “sad distracted Mothers”. Here, in a similarly painful account, the Countess relates how her child was “torn from [her] arms [...] heedless of [her] cries,” leaving her “no more a mother,” only “a discarded wife”. Not content with merely imprisoning her and depriving her of the comfort of motherhood, her husband the Count further forces her to ‘haunt’ the castle gallery each night, to shine a lamp and rattle chains on the walls, in order to scare off any would-be intruders for fear of ghosts. In effect, this is precisely what the Countess has become, as her spectral existence interrogates the eighteenth-century’s legal limitations of the roles of wife and mother. Moreover, through the poem etched into the window panes of her cell, the Countess enacts another kind of ‘haunting’ – one that is more authentic than the antics demanded by her husband, and that works both to subvert and resist his tyrannical power. Without even being present, the Countess is able to warn Matilda of the danger she faces if she is to remain at the castle, and prevents history repeating itself by inspiring her eventual escape.

Running alongside the story of the Countess’s persecution by her husband is Matilda’s own persecution by her uncle, a storyline through which Parsons further deviates from the Radcliffean model to introduce the theme of incest to her text. We come to learn that the reason for Matilda’s flight through the forest at the start of the novel is that her uncle, the lascivious

Count Weimar, wishes to seduce her. Having taken care of Matilda for years, his behaviour becomes increasingly inappropriate as she grows older: he shows her several indecent drawings and is “forever seeking opportunities to caress [her]” (13). This behaviour culminates in a conversation between the Count and his attendant which Matilda happens to overhear:

One morning after dressing I went into the garden, [...] and plainly heard Agatha’s voice saying, “I tell you, Sir, there is no other way, send Albert off for a few days, or turn him off at once, for he loves Miss Matilda as if she were his own child, and therefore we must get rid of him; but you are so long settling your mind – get into her room at night when she’s asleep, I’ll take care nobody comes there, or tell her roundly at once you are not an uncle to her – I would not longer stand upon ceremony.”

“Well, Agatha, I’ll take her advice, and dispatch Albert tomorrow, and the next night I will be happy.” (14)

From this exchange, we learn that *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is a Gothic novel which “centres on incestuous desire,” as the female protagonist deduces that her uncle plans to dispatch her loyal servant Albert, sneak into her room at night when she is asleep, and rape her (DiPlacidi 2). Incest, a sexual act associated with transgression, violation of power, and violence, is often consigned to one of two gendered plots: Anne K. Mellor, for example, argues that “the Gothic novel written by men presents the father’s incestuous rape of his daughter as the perverse desire of the older generation to usurp the sexual rights of a younger generation, while the Gothic novel written by women represents incest as a cultural taboo which functions to repress the sexual desires of women” (197–8); meanwhile, for David Punter and Glennis Byron, “the male Gothic text, both in its subject matter and its narrative conventions, is usually considered to be particularly transgressive: violence, especially sexual violence, is dealt with openly and often in lingering detail [...] In the female Gothic plot, the transgressive male becomes the primary threat to the female protagonist” (278–9). Taken together, Jenny DiPlacidi has shown how these assessments from Mellor, Punter and Byron represent what a large proportion of

scholarship on the genre argues: “the meanings of incest differ based on their presence in works designated as Male or Female Gothic” (4). In the female-authored *Castle of Wolfenbach*, an uncle’s violent pursuit of his niece positions the female as passive victim to an aggressive male sexuality that, while condemned for its violation of this incest taboo, nonetheless adheres to a familiar structure of power and sexuality that is aligned with Mellor’s understanding of incest as the perverse desire of men to control a younger generation of women, unlike the presentation of incest in other Gothic texts such as Walpole’s widely discredited *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), which saw this relationship inverted through the story of a mother who seduces her son. In this way, the incestuous relationship depicted by Parsons is read as the inevitable consequence of patriarchal control over female bodies and property, since Count Weimar has the attitude of the *droit du seigneur* and sees it as his right to possess his niece, even ordering a *lettre de cachet* against Matilda to see her returned to him that they might marry. For Parsons, the theme of incest is thus representative of a range of interests crucial to writers of the Gothic, including: forms of desire and the structure of the family, as she explores through the relationship of Matilda and her uncle, clearly highlighting the match as an undesirable one; the dominance of men in a heteronormative world, which causes her readers to question the imbalance of power between the two characters; and sexual relations, marriage and pregnancy as a means by which to imprison women, thereby evoking eighteenth-century anxieties concerning marriage and women’s choice therein.

Another ‘horrid’ novel which employs the theme of incest, and further explores the issues surrounding marriage and the violence it engenders as raised in Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and Roche’s *Clermont*, is Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine*. Subtitled ‘A Romance,’ the work was part of a brief but popular vogue for German tales, with its supposed origins signalling to English readers that it is sure to contain much taboo material, along with graphic descriptions of sensational and/or sexual violence (as has already been explored in Chapter 2 through the works of Peter Will). It is curious then that murders do not register

anywhere near as deeply in Sleath's novel as they do in those of 'the German school'. It opens instead with the story of a heroine who has been tricked into a marriage performed by a pretend priest, and then abandoned by her husband after he tires of her: "But what was her grief and astonishment when he informed her that their nuptials were not solemnized by a priest, and that the marriage was consequently illegal!" (67). Following the shame of this discovery, Julie de Rubine is taken ill, but on her recovery she adopts the pseudonym "Madame Chamont" and retires for a life of seclusion with her son, Enrico, and a little girl, Laurette, whom she has been asked to adopt, and for which she receives payments from a mysterious benefactor (67). Much like Matilda in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, Julie is established early on as a strong and independent heroine with a "masculine" mind, being characterised through her reaction to this "most humiliating and degrading" of incidents, at first falling ill but then resisting the Marchese's influence by removing herself entirely from his home and establishing a life for herself elsewhere (6; 38). Running alongside the story of Julie's failed marriage is that of her son and adopted daughter, who experience a "semi-incestuous erotic childhood that becomes a shared adolescent love" (Moody ix).

In this way, Sleath centres her novel around the experiences of women in love and relationships: first through the story of a betrayed and jilted wife, and then a sister who falls in love with her adopted brother, in order to shine a light on issues surrounding marriage and family structure, as well as stoking anxieties around incest and domestic abuse. In particular, it is clear throughout that Enrico and Laurette have feelings for one another, but Julie fears they may be related – that the Marchese to whom she was married is in fact Laurette's father as well as Enrico's. This incestuous suggestion is further complicated when the Marchese later meets with an adult Laurette, becomes taken with her, and finding she will not simply sleep with him resolves "if no possibility existed of contaminating the angelic purity of her mind, since she was not only the most beautiful, but the most interesting object he had ever beheld, finally to offer his hand" (273). Understandably given her upbringing and the experience of her adoptive

mother Julie, Laurette is cautious of marriage, viewing it as “an attachment which must eventually form all the happiness or torment of the future of my life” (233). This reflection from the female protagonist highlights the important role that marriage played in the lives of some women during the eighteenth century, as their future happiness, security, and well-being relied on it. Laurette’s misgivings are confirmed when, after rejecting his proposal, the Marchese (who has been careful to woo her nicely up until this point) becomes suddenly threatening: “his dark piercing eyes assumed a ferocious and dreadful appearance, so different from their former expression” (281). Much like D’Alembert in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, the Marchese is enraged by the refusal of a younger woman to marry him, and thus fails to accept her answer, resolving either to win her hand in marriage, or else have her, or his son and rival for her affections, killed. Consequently, Laurette looks upon the Marchese with an increasing “sensation of awe, mingled with terror” (281). Undeterred by her rejection of him in this scene, the Marchese has Laurette imprisoned at the Castle of Elfinbach, “that he might continue his persecutions successfully” (285). Laurette’s use of the word “persecution” here implies the undesirability of his attentions and her wish that he would desist, as well as offering the interpretation of the Marchese’s wooing of her and offer(s) of marriage as a kind of “persecution” in themselves, with of course increasingly violent trappings. By the same token, the Marchese sees her refusal of him as an affront, since he believes he offers her “a situation which every other woman would embrace with transport” (286). The conflict between Laurette and the Marchese culminates when she overhears a conversation in which he gives voice to his “intention of sacrificing her life,” and thus “death, in its most terrifying form, was presented to her affrighted imagination” (299; 353). Laurette is rescued before this happens, but nonetheless the sensationalism of her storyline serves to highlight the extent to which some men viewed women as property with which they could do as they pleased.

Over the course of the novel, Sleath uses several interpolated tales which relate the stories of women who have suffered as a result of marriage in order to ask questions about the

nature of social and political authority, and how far parents should determine the life-choices of their offspring, such as was done by parents when arranging marriages for children/wards. In the first instance, we learn that the heroine only eloped with the Marchese after her guardian and aunt Madame Laronne decided on an alternative (and to Julie's mind less desirable) match with Signor Vescolini. Although Julie "rejected his proposals with dignity and energy," making clear that "her resolution was irrevocably fixed," still the Signor, having had it on good authority from her aunt that she will marry him, responds "that nothing on earth should alter his determination; and, though he had much rather use permission than force, if one would not prove effectual, the other must" (62; 63). Subsequently, Julie reflects that "to escape unassisted from the power of Vescolini was impossible, even if it could be effected, without a protector to act in her defence, she was still liable to insult and persecution," and so "these arguments determined her to accept the offers of the Marchese" (66). However, that this decision turns out to be a bad one, leaving her abandoned with two young children in tow, ultimately calls her *own* judgement into question also. Next, Sleath presents her readers with the story of Adela, who finds herself in a similar position to the heroine, and likewise for whom "nothing appeared so dreadful to her as marriage" with a man of her parent's choosing, and yet she questions "how was it to be avoided, if her guardian insisted upon her compliance? How could she presume to oppose him, to whose will she had hitherto yielded the most implicit obedience?" (83). Rather than settling on an alternative match for herself as Julie does, Adela chooses instead to remove herself from the situation entirely, and with it the prospect of marriage altogether, by forming "a resolution of secluding herself in a convent" (88). For Adela, the convent acts as a form of resistance, allowing her both to escape the control of her parent and avoid marriage with a man she detests. Later on in the novel, Laurette struggles with a similar decision, debating whether or not to consent to Enrico's proposal, since "to enter any engagement without the sanction of those under whose protection I am placed, would justly expose me to censure, and would appear, to the unprejudiced and discerning, as the height of indiscretion and ingratitude" (247).

That Sleath writes of multiple stories involving women made miserable by the interference of their parents/guardians, along with the unsuitable matches and violence they incur as a result, suggests her dissatisfaction with a system that denied women the ability to make their own marital choices – a decision upon which rested *their* future happiness.

By focussing on the plight of women in love and relationships in this way, the novel's paradigms recall particular obsessions from Radcliffe's works, including the importance of marriage, questions of parental authority, and even the dark father-lover who seeks to murder his daughter-niece. However, Sleath writes of such issues in far more bodily and aggressive terms, dealing explicitly with scenes of death and violence. For example, there is the death of Adela's lover the Chevalier, who is shot by his rival for her hand in marriage, and which Adela is made to watch "in horror" as "at last the wan countenance on which she gazed assumed a more ghastly paleness, the films obscured his sight, the pulse that had long beat feebly, fluttered and then ceased for ever, and that captivating, that once graceful form, become stiffened in death!" (84; 85–6). Madame Chamont suffers from "confused, wild, and horrible" dreams, which present to her mind images of Vescolini "covered with blood, and gasping in the agonies of death" (143). Likewise for Laurette, "dreadful foreboding visions terrified her fancy," as she envisions the moment when "the assassin drawing a stiletto from beneath his cloak, which he had previously concealed, gave her the mortal stab; then, as if not sufficiently glutted with the sight before him, he drew the instrument from her bosom, yet reeking with her blood, and plunged it into the heart of Enrico" (303). As a result of such scenes, Michael Sadleir places Sleath's writing "about midway between Mrs Roche and Mrs Parsons (22). Sadleir sees Sleath as "more aggressive than the former, with a great taste for bloodshed and a greater fondness for violent incident; but she is an ardent lover of sensibility" (22). In this respect, Sleath can be seen to combine the violent sensationalism for which Lane's Press was famed, with the sensibility of the likes of Radcliffe, wanting both to take pains with the descriptions of her characters and settings, but also conscious of the expectations of readers wanting to be shocked

and titillated by Minerva works. The tragedies, sexual scandals, and constraints to women's life that Sleath depicts in *The Orphan of the Rhine* do call to mind the plight of real gentlewomen in her era, but they are sensationalised depictions thereof, used as much to entertain as to critique.

Notably, Austen included a second novel by Parsons in Thorpe's list of 'horrid' novels: *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), subtitled 'A German Tale,' which was likewise published by the sensationalist Minerva Press and again contains many familiar Gothic tropes, such as dark family secrets, incest, seduction, and ghostly apparitions. However, it differs from the author's earlier work in that we follow a male, rather than a female, protagonist – but that is not to say women are any less crucial to the plot. While the novel revolves around the virtuous Ferdinand and tells the story of his travels across Europe, the emphasis is on the women he encounters along the way, all made miserable by marriage and the vices of their husbands.

Like *The Castle of Wolfenbach* before it, *The Mysterious Warning* opens with a supposedly supernatural incident following the death of the protagonist's father, which not only establishes it firmly within the Gothic tradition, but also exemplifies Parsons's violently sensational writing style. After the "struggling soul escaped from the clay-cold body of Count Renaud," Ferdinand enters "the chamber of death" to see his parent one final time, but "shuddered involuntarily at the scene before him, day-light was excluded, the glimmering tapers, the solemn stillness, [and] the black pall thrown over the bed which concealed a lifeless form" (7; 13). In Parsons's typically grisly fashion, she relates the scene as he withdraws the pall from the body:

His head fell upon the bed, and he wept aloud; but his almost stagnated senses were instantly recalled by a deep and heavy groan that vibrated to his heart: He started up and eagerly gazed on the lifeless body, all was still as death; he looked fearfully round the room, the gloom seemed increased, the tapers burnt more dimly, horror took possession of his soul; the groan was not a chimera, not the illusion of fancy; but from whence it could proceed, for it seemed very near to him? Again he turned his eyes to the bed, busy imagination, agitated spirits, and unsteady eyes, made him

conceive the lips moved [...] Almost instantly a low and hollow voice pronounced the words “*Pardon and peace!*” He heard the words distinctly, attempted to rise, but with a faint shriek fell senseless on the floor! (13–4)

As evidenced by his shrieking and fainting in this scene, Ferdinand lacks the mettle of *Wolfenbach*'s Matilda when faced with the supernatural. Instead, he has a “womanish weakness,” is all too willing to believe in ghosts, and thinks that his father has spoken to him here from beyond the grave (15). The reason for his unease and desire for “*Pardon and peace!*” is that the male protagonist married without his father’s permission, which would certainly have been frowned upon in the eighteenth century. In fact, any marriage that took place under such circumstances would have been rendered “void” if a lack of parental consent “could be proved by clear and convincing evidence that the parents had ordered a connection to be broken off, or where they had no knowledge of the intended marriage until it had taken place and then did not acquiesce in it” (Probert 301). Such is certainly the case for Ferdinand, since the news of his secret marriage is met with displeasure by his father and, as a result, he finds himself “cut off from all legal claims” to the family fortune (20).

As in her earlier work, Parsons uses marriage to introduce and explore the theme of incest, but rather than invoking the more commonly encountered father-daughter incest, as is hinted at in Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine*, this time it is a sort of pseudo-incest between Ferdinand, his wife Claudina and elder brother Rhodophil. At first sight, we are told that Claudina’s “uncommon beauty instantly attracted the eyes of both brothers,” but in the end it is Ferdinand who succeeds and “very soon engaged *his* heart to her, and acquired no small share of her’s” (38–9). However, after marrying privately, Rhodophil inherits everything from their father who disapproves of Ferdinand’s choice, which in turn leads Claudina to enter into an affair with the wealthier brother.

Not only does the relationship between Ferdinand, Claudina, and Rhodophil introduce the theme of incest, but it also highlights the issues surrounding marriage and women’s lack of

choice in their husbands. What Ferdinand finds most attractive about Claudina is “her humble situation,” “slender income” and the “dangers to which she is exposed by her residence with an unprincipled woman” (38–9). This “unprincipled woman” turns out to be her aunt Dupree, who plans “to *sell* her niece” to “a young Nobleman” in return for “a handsome sum for herself” (39). For the “mercenary and poor” Dupree, marriage is a way of attaining wealth; for Ferdinand, it is an opportunity to rescue a “damsel in distress”; and for Rhodophil, it is a means by which to control his younger brother (39). For Claudina meanwhile, there is no choice. It is only after marrying Ferdinand and sleeping with Rhodophil that she takes matters into her own hands, rejecting both men, denouncing her vows, and retiring to a nearby convent with their child in tow. Claudina insists thereafter that “no clue will be found” as to her whereabouts, since she has “taken measures too securely for any possibility of discovery” (59). However, Ferdinand believes she is concealed within the nunnery closest to the family castle, and after inquiring of the porteress there he receives the following message:

The young lady refuses to see you; she denies that you have any authority over her; bids you remember the *dreadful circumstances lately passed*, and never presume to trouble her more. The *letter* she left for you sufficiently explained her sentiments: *Her child* is with her, but it has *no longer a father*, nor after this day will any messages from you be received or delivered here. (74–5)

‘Claudina’ refuses to emerge, although it later transpires that this message came from someone else entirely. In an extraordinary account of mistaken identity, the reader is alerted to the fact that there is another woman, who arrived within the same time frame and under the exact same circumstances, hiding at the same nunnery as Ferdinand’s wife. Claudina’s storyline thus highlights one of the many reasons why women in the eighteenth century might have sought out the solace of an all-female religious environment: to exercise their choice in avoiding a loveless marriage. As it does for Adela in *The Orphan of the Rhine*, the convent acts as a form of resistance, and an alternative, to an aggressively patriarchal society.

Claudina and Ferdinand's is not the only example of marriage gone wrong that Parsons presents us with in *The Mysterious Warning*. After he fails to gain entrance into the aforementioned convent, Ferdinand continues with his journey and stops next at a ruined castle which serves as the home of a gloomy aristocratic hermit; it is here that he finds an example of "cruel neglect" in the marriage of Baron S\*\*\* and his wife Eugenia which further serves to reinforce Parsons's critique of the marriage system as it stood throughout the eighteenth century (89). After the Baron unexpectedly dies one night of a "partial stroke," Ferdinand ventures into the "damp, cold dungeon" beneath the castle (from whence he has heard the "cries" of some "poor souls") only to discover "two wretched beings" in a scene "replete with horror" (90; 93; 94). These turn out to be Eugenia, the Baron's wife, and the Count, her lover, and it is only once Ferdinand releases the pair that we learn more about their history and how they came to be imprisoned. Much like the Countess in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, Eugenia has been forced into marriage by her father, who promises her daughter to the Count in return for his saving them from banditti: "Yes, dear Baron, Eugenia is your's, I pledge you my word, and answer for my child" (101). Her father's use of the possessive pronoun clearly indicates Eugenia's status as an object to be traded, and upon hearing Eugenia's retort that she "cannot" marry the Baron, he dismisses her as an "ungrateful," "foolish wayward girl," before further stating that "it is sufficient for me to declare my pleasure, and for her to obey" (101). Eugenia later explains that her heart "has long been in the possession of another" who her father does not consent to her marrying, but still this does nothing to deter the Baron, who feels "overwhelmed with a thousand turbulent passions, disappointed love, wounded pride, jealousy and despair" (102). If anything, Eugenia's "repugnance" inflames the Baron's passions further, for in his eyes it makes her all the "more beautiful" and "more interesting than ever," thus he determines that "she should be mine, whatever might be the consequences" (101; 102). Through her portrayals of the Countess of Wolfenbach and Eugenia, both forced into loveless marriages by their fathers, and still accepted by the men they have rejected, Parsons implies

her abhorrence of a system which denies women any element of choice and which had the potential to result in extreme cases of domestic violence such as are depicted here.

The ultimate “consequence” of the Baron’s decision to force his union with Eugenia is Parsons’s depiction of an unhappy marriage in which abuse and violence abounds. Much like the Count in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, the Baron S\*\*\* is shown to be a jealous and controlling husband. We learn more of the Baron’s story and how he came to imprison his wife from his memoirs, which constitute the final chapter of the novel’s first volume and continue into the second. Through his writing here, the Baron reveals an innate distrust of women, framing the work as a warning against “the fascinating charms of false, deceitful woman” (98). Women, he believes, are “syren[s]” capable “only” of “deceit,” “insidious arts” and “the most treacherous designs” – the “intelligent reader” therefore will “learn to detest” them just as much as he does, and, moreover, they will “learn from [him] the triumph of *Revenge!!!*” (98). Along with this misogyny, the baron also possesses the traits of “pride,” “ambition,” a sense of “superiority,” and an “authoritative and sullen grandeur,” all of which means he expects “submissive obedience” from his vassals and, by extension, his wife (98). On the night that they are wed, Eugenia manages to trick her now-husband into letting her spend the evening by herself, and it is during this time that she escapes. Upon discovery of this, the Baron orders his men to pursue her, although he gradually comes to “the most certain conclusion [...] that she had escaped to some Convent” (122). As with Ferdinand’s wife Claudina, the assumption is that women are either married or reside in a convent, both of which can function as either a refuge from patriarchal authority or just another form of prison/imprisonment. As time passes, the Baron becomes more hateful, and retires from society to ramble as Ferdinand does, though still “Eugenia, the *faithless*, ungrateful Eugenia, occupied every thought and desire” (115). His travels lead him to the castle of Count M\*\*\* (the home of the man to whom Eugenia was originally promised by her father) and it is here that he learns Eugenia had been “privately married some years ago” and now lives at the castle where she has not long been “lay-in of a

little girl” (119). Incensed, the Baron confronts Eugenia, “*you*, who at the altar gave *me* your hand and faith, and now live as an adulteress with the man you swore never to be joined without your father’s consent; know you are still *my* wife, and I will prove my right by my power of punishing you” (121). Marriage for the Baron means exerting his complete authority over a woman to do with as he wishes, as indicated by his repeated use of the possessive pronoun here, and when Eugenia fails to agree to such terms he believes that the only alternative is to “prove” his right by violently “punishing” her, though not with death:

If I destroyed the Count and Eugenia I had nothing to fear; but my revenge in that case would be incomplete; I wished to see them miserable, to endure a living death. Some times different ideas struck me, which my still violent passion suggested as a greater triumph over Eugenia, to assert my claim as a husband, and force her to submit to me even in preference of the object she had preferred to me. (124)

Sadistically, the Baron contemplates exerting his physical force over Eugenia and implies here his “violent passion” to rape her; this, he believes, would offer a “greater triumph” than other punishments, and he appears to take “a supreme delight” in the idea of asserting his rightful “claim” as a husband by forcing her into submission in this way (124). However, since he cannot have Eugenia imprisoned by marriage, he decides instead to imprison her literally, locking her in the castle dungeons along with her lover and their young daughter. He maintains her under these conditions for “upwards of twelve years,” by bringing her daily provisions – but only just enough to increase her suffering by having to watch that of her family (94).

Parsons’s depiction of extreme marital cruelty reaches its climax when, in a scene comparable to that found at the conclusion of Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Danish Massacre*, Eugenia is forced to watch helplessly as her daughter dies, “devoured by a fever occasioned by the damps of the dungeon, and want of proper food” (127). Entering the dungeon with their provisions one day, the Baron is “exquisitely gratified” to see “her late beautiful child consumed by a fever, and gasping for breath,” and he declares this unexpected turn to be “a

luxury of revenge” (128). By using words such as “exquisitely” and “luxury” to describe what Eugenia finds to be an “agonising sight!” the Baron reveals a complete lack of empathy; he is only momentarily “shock[ed]” when the little girl is “seized with convulsions” and “struggles” briefly before dying, but shakes off this feeling “by recalling to memory the wrongs I had endured from a faithless, ungrateful woman,” once again finding “pleasure [...] in seeing her wretchedness so complete!” (128). For the Baron, the death of Eugenia’s daughter with the Count is all his “vindictive heart could desire” (127). This scene, and the Baron’s reaction to it, is “so replete with horror” that it makes for difficult reading, striking the hearts of those with children and thus making it hard to imagine anyone quite so inhumane. Unsurprisingly, it all proves too much for the poor Eugenia, who becomes manic: her reason is “disturbed,” she is “distracted” with grief, and begins behaving and talking “wildly” (127). It is her daughter’s death which finally breaks her resolve – for what little strength she had remaining leaves her entirely – and, from this scene on, the Baron is met by her with “the wildest lamentations,” although we are told through his narration that upon brutally “threatening her with a whip or stick she shrinks down and is silent” (130). By inadvertently murdering her child and leaving Eugenia, much like Victoria in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, “no longer a mother or a wife,” the Baron finally exerts the power and authority he craves, suggesting that without those titles women have nothing to fight for as Eugenia is reduced to submission at last.

These are not novels interested in ghosts and ghouls, rather they are fascinated by questions of gender roles, parental authority in marriage, and the right ways for women and children to balance their personal desires with their societal and familial duties. The chief problematic that each of the stories works through is sexual: exploring concerns surrounding bigamy, rape, incest, and marriage. Essentially, *The Mysterious Warning* opens with the love of two children for the same woman: Claudina marries Ferdinand, but when he is away she has an affair with his brother Rhodophil. This dynamic is then repeated in the various interpolated tales, not all of which have been covered here: Eugenia marries a Baron, but is also married to

her true love the Count; another nobleman, Count Wolfran, is engaged to Theresa, but has already married Theresa's school-friend Louisa, and thereafter marries another woman, Theodosia; Theodosia then leaves Wolfran to marry a gentleman named Reiberg; and finally, the protagonist Ferdinand is married to Claudina, 'released' from his vows on account of his wife's shame, and thus marries Theresa with the novel's conclusion. Likewise, in *The Castle of Wolfenbach* the story starts with Matilda trying to escape the tyranny of her uncle, which leads her to uncover the dark family history behind the infamous castle after which the novel is named. Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* explores various incestuous attractions, first between a brother and a sister, as well as the more traditionally Gothic depiction of the sexual desire a father has for his daughter, and questions their societal acceptability. Roche's *Clermont* also hints at incest, as well as highlighting several instances of marital abuse and the violent ways in which men pursued women in marriage for sexual gratification and financial gain. These complicated plotlines all embody the illicit desires and intra-familial obsessions that lie at the heart of the late eighteenth-century 'domestic' Gothic.

Ultimately, a perverse sort of 'marriage plot' dominates in all these works. The protagonists end up in happy unions, though they must work through their own unhappy situations to their conclusions and also encounter several worrying and traumatic examples of marriage gone wrong along the way. That Parsons, Sleath and Roche all present so many poor and violent relationships and yet still uphold marriage as the ideal to which their protagonists ought to aspire is somewhat ironic, since in the process of exposing and responding to marital violence these writers reveal their opinions about the ideal roles of women and men in marriage, understandings of the place of parents in their children's lives, and thoughts about the best relationships between family and community. Also, this Gothic 'marriage plot' appears to be one of the tensions at the heart of the genre – between the conventional, 'happy' endings, and the brutal, nightmarish middle portions of these novels. While many authors of the Female Gothic remained true to Ann Radcliffe's sentimentalised model, others, such as Eliza Parsons,

Regina Maria Roche, and Eleanor Sleath, alongside Charlotte Dacre and Mary-Ann Radcliffe, to name a few, chose to express the struggle with the patriarchy in more aggressive, bodily terms. The novels explored here all fit this trend, depicting blood and violence, while also maintaining an overall Radcliffean sentimentality otherwise. In this way, they may be seen to combine the sensationalism that came to be expected of Minerva Press works with the romantic preoccupations of literature in the late eighteenth century.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has considered the use of violence by William Lane's 'horrid' Gothic writers in order to show how the Minerva Press was in this respect an "originator," rather than merely "reactive" to the works of more popular authors (Garside *Romantic Gothic* 136). As has already been established, the Gothic novel was popular in England during the Romantic era, and writers of this genre typically produced dark and frightening tales with an emphasis on violence, in spite of attacks from critics. Coinciding with the efflorescence of such works during the 1790s was the rise of William Lane's Minerva Press, which dominated the market for popular fiction and, of its noteworthy output, fully a third consisted of Gothic titles. According to critics from the eighteenth to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many of these novels were poorly-written and inferior imitations from writers who looked to the likes of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis for inspiration, exploiting the same tropes and sometimes even plagiarising whole passages and plotlines. However, as has been shown here through Chapters 1–3, there were others who worked to build on what had been done before, pushing the boundaries of what was deemed acceptable in horror literature at the time to curate scenes of ever-increasing violence and brutality, in order both to convey messages about contemporary issues and events (including the French Revolution, the supposed prevalence of secret societies, and the roles and rights of men and women in marriage) and express anxieties (such as the impact of conflict and war on the home, the influence exerted by clandestine male groups in the politics of the day, and the imbalance of power between the sexes and threat of marital violence) pertaining to these. Through the exploration of a range of Minerva titles from across the period of the Press's dominance, 1790–1799, focussing on the recurring trope of violence, its varying portrayals by individual authors, and its censure by critics, this thesis has argued that the Press makes a unique contribution to the Romantic literary marketplace with regard to its output of violent Gothic fiction.

This study, however, has been primarily concerned with the trope of violence, and does not account for Minerva Press novels outside of the Gothic genre. In this way, my findings are limited to just one type of literature for which the Press was famed, but cannot accurately represent the whole. Moreover, the scope of this thesis has not allowed space for an examination of Gothic works outside the period of the Press's dominance from 1790–1799, though further research could broaden this study to account for all the years in which the Press was active, spanning almost 40 years from 1780–1820. To be sure, by digging so deeply into such a small number of novels, hundreds more Gothic texts have been overlooked, all of which could, and should, be looked to as an area of pertinent further study in order to better our understandings of the role the Press played in the conception of the Gothic genre.

Overall, this thesis supports the argument for a change in the reception of William Lane's Minerva Press and its outstanding output of Gothic novels; no longer can these works be dismissed as 'trash,' nor its writers derided as copycat hacks. Rather, there is much to be gleaned from their study about: the currency of violence in Gothic fiction and the ways in which it was used both to elicit and exploit contemporary anxieties about war, gender roles, social institutions, and even the novel itself; the blurring of boundaries between Radcliffe's early definition of the Male and Female Gothic, as women writers at the Press employed elements of 'horror' more usually attributed to men; and about the Press itself, and its unique contribution not only to the Romantic literary marketplace, but also to the formation of that genre for which it became so well-known, the popular Gothic. As this study exemplifies, there were indeed writers at the Minerva Press who discovered new ways of using the Gothic, and who found new means for investing it with interest – thereby demonstrating a line of development from Horace Walpole's pioneering Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, and preceding the later works of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin.

**30,852 words**

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