

Burke's Sublime in Walpole's *Otranto* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* states: "the Sublime is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 59). This emotion, as he details in his *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, processes elements found in nature through the senses, and from these senses, creates intense feelings in the mind. Through literature, authors can produce similar emotions for their audiences, providing intensely horrific entertainment through literary devices, including descriptive language, plot, setting, and characters. Believed to be the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, written in 1794, amalgamates horror, mystery, and the supernatural, denoting preliminary stages of the Sublime. Later, in 1818, Mary Shelley incorporated similar elements into her Gothic novel, *Frankenstein*. Although written at different times, both texts illustrate aspects of Burke's Sublime, including passion, terror, obscurity, power, and vastness, and ultimately depict the overwhelming power of this emotion on the mind.

In Burke's *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, he discusses how the Sublime and the Beautiful both produce pleasure but are mutually exclusive as part of the imagination. Edmund Burke, a social and political philosopher, wrote *On the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757, after studying the imagination in his undergraduate studies. He took an interest in the topic when concluding his studies of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Harris). Burke's theory was derived from curiosity, pleasure, and pain. He believed "the roots of human activity" were "passions" of these three elements, where "curiosity stimulated the mind...while pain and pleasure...corresponded respectfully to self-preservation and society" (63). Essentially, the human mind endowed itself with these elements to answer natural instincts and to make improvements in human society. Burke believed that "pleasure" is the combination of "all senses" and is "the same in all, high and low, learned and unlearned" (Burke 15). The human mind created these pleasure-seeking instincts as a reaction to the human imagination. The creation of pleasure based on the senses allowed for the human mind to experience the Beautiful and the Sublime. Often the senses are used to satiate curiosity, pain, or pleasure, and although separate, they both depend on the imagination.

To Burke, imagination was influenced by both horror and beauty. He strongly believed "the imagination [was] moved to awe and instilled with a degree of horror by what is 'dark, uncertain, and confused'" (Razeen 80). The greater the ambiguity of a situation, the greater the horror the imagination feels. Obscurity lends itself to the Sublime in that if the mind is knowledgeable about the object through openness and lucidity, the imagination does not sense harm, but

pleasurable fear. In essence, because the mind is capable of *seeing* the object for what the object is, the mind experiences pleasure, not horror.

The imagination creates pleasure through the Sublime and the Beautiful; however, pleasure is experienced in the mind only if the object is perceived as fiction. When sight and associated certainty are removed, emotions such as fear are produced, especially if one perceives the object as violent and capable of true harm (Burke 76). However, if the mind processes an object as fictional, the mind can then feel pleasure from horror. An example which would exemplify Burke's notion would be peering down the ledge of a high cliff. The mind instantaneously experiences horror because the knowledge of looming death presides as a possibility. But, because the mind categorizes this knowledge as fictional, pleasure is felt (Burke 71). Burke also argues, however, if "one gets too close to the perception, they no longer experience Sublime emotions, only fear" (30). If horrifying objects are too close in proximity or realness, Sublime emotions fade into sheer horror, becoming painful.

Burke discusses the absence of pain or pleasure, known as "tranquility" in the Sublime; Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* illustrates Burke's theory through protagonist Catherine Morland. In Part I of *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Burke states:

The human mind is often, and I think it is for the most part, in a state neither of pain nor pleasure, which I call a state of indifference. When I am carried from this state into a state of actual pleasure, it does not appear necessary that I should pass through the medium

of any sort of pain...It may be said, perhaps, that the pain in these cases had its rise from the removal of the pleasure which the man enjoyed before, though that pleasure was of so low a degree as to be perceived only by the removal. (Burke 58)

The Sublime is an overwhelming sense of power on the mind and Burke believes this power is derived from an excited state of tranquility. When one's mindset is changed from indifference due to "gratification," this newly-experienced emotion of "pain" creates the Sublime (Burke 48-9). But, if one is directly immersed in pain, pleasure is not felt because the emotions experienced become too real. In *Northanger Abbey*, main character Catherine Morland is fixated with Gothic novels "in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed," and she hopes to experience situations similar to those in her book (Austen 12). When Catherine is invited to Northanger Abbey, a supposedly haunted castle, she creates mysterious and horrific scenarios in her head. During her stay at the Abbey, a thunderstorm excites her "tranquil" state and she begins imagining the horrors from her book taking place at Northanger Abbey itself. She reaches "pain," in the form of terror, but because Catherine is too close in imagination to actual reality, she does not experience the Sublime, and instead experiences fear. The mind, as proven by Catherine, must remain at a distance in order for Sublime emotions to be felt.

According to Edmund Burke, the Sublime and the Beautiful are broken down into five parts; many aspects of the Sublime found in Part II of *On the Sublime and the Beautiful* can be connected to the Gothic novel. The sections within—*Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime, Terror, Obscurity,*

Power, and *Vastness*—all detail elements of the Sublime found in *Otranto* and *Frankenstein*. Each element contributes differently to the overall meaning of the Sublime.

In *Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime*, Burke explains how astonishment through passion leads to experiencing the Sublime. Burke states, "The passion caused by the great and Sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (95). He believes when one experiences astonishment, or great amazement, the Sublime is experienced because the imagination becomes obsessively consumed by one's horror. Essentially, the individual becomes so enthralled with an object that the mind cannot "entertain" or conceptually fathom any others (95-6). The mind can only focus on the object it is astonished with, and "disallows the proposal of any other form of object to be introduced" (Mishra 16). Passion is believed to be the introductory state before experiencing the Sublime as the imagination focuses on a central object or idea and becomes obsessed with it. This obsession begins the eventual descent into experiencing terror.

Terror is a passion that relies on senses, especially sight, to ignite Sublime emotions. After the mind becomes fascinated by a particular object, the imagination cannot entertain any other ideas or objects, consequently creating horrible, scary situations based around that object. Burke defines this ideal in *Terror*. He believes terror removes all reasoning as it completely consumes the mind and the imagination, elevating them to a heightened stage of fear, and ultimately resulting in pleasure (96-9).

The concept of terror relies heavily upon sight insofar as the mind sees an object and becomes consumed by its horror. Typically, the larger an object, the more terrifying it becomes. A looming thunderstorm creates terror because of its size; in comparison to the storm, an individual is inferior to the lightning, the clouds, and the rain. However, Burke believes regardless of size, any horrifying object when looked upon will create the Sublime, stating, "whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is Sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous" (96). The imagination presupposes the sight as dangerous or horrifying, thus creating the Sublime.

In *Obscurity*, Burke discusses how terror is enhanced because of ambiguity caused by light (99-101). Most often, terror is felt in the darkest hours, or in locations of utter darkness. Obscurity possesses one of the greatest Sublime qualities: uncertainty. Where the mind is prohibited by light, the imagination causes one to believe there are scary entities, such as ghosts or monsters, lurking. Additionally, because the eyes are unable to clarify what the mind believes, the threat of danger is enhanced and Sublime emotions are experienced. Burke believes obscurity is the foundation of ghost stories:

Everyone will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (99)

Burke believes obscurity is the origin of spectres because the imagination creates ghost-like figures when light is removed. Furthermore, haunted tales stem from darkness because clear and present danger is less threatening, while incomprehensible and unseen danger creates terror. Experiencing obscurity creates Sublime emotions because individuals are restricted from knowledge. When one knows what to expect, the outcome is exponentially less threatening. Additionally, when sight is restricted, the mind feels less powerful and therefore believes it cannot protect itself from harm (102-7).

Horror is created due to an imbalance of power based upon sight, but can also be produced by individuals. In *Power*, Burke describes many different forms of power. From a political standpoint, Burke denotes how power can arise from "institutions in kings and commanders," as seen in *Otranto* (Burke 110-124). Those who abuse their position of power strike fear in those they govern through superiority. The ruler's actions become incomprehensible and unpredictable, and once the governed individuals feel inferior, they become fearful and experience the Sublime. In *Frankenstein*, the lens through which power is viewed is "natural" power. Burke writes: "...pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together" (112). Upon witnessing the coalition of "natural" power, which is strength and violence, Sublime emotions arise. Amalgamation of superior strength and harmful violence invites the mind to entertain the prospect of physical harm. Overall, the exertion of power, whether through rules or strength, causes others to feel insubordinate and inferior, creating the Sublime.

In *Vastness*, Burke illuminates how dimensions function in relation to the Sublime (127-9). Several extensions, including height, length, and depth, create Sublime emotions. He alludes to staring down into a deep valley, viewing the top of a high tower, and overlooking the ocean as reminders of one's existence, experiences which ultimately delve into the Sublime. When one views an infinite amount of space, the mind recognizes its own finite existence. A relationship between dimension and existence is experienced as the Sublime because, as Burke states, when "attending" to the "infinite divisibility of matter," one recognizes his/her "diminishing scale of existence" (Burke 129). Dependent on one's viewpoint, vastness creates the Sublime because the mind is unable to fathom the object in its entirety, and cannot fully grasp the concept of existence. Perspective is important in recognizing vastness; and, once faced with different extremities and dimensions, one has the ability to truly visualize how small their presence is, creating Sublime emotions.

The Gothic novel takes into account the five Sublime elements listed above, which directly influenced the popularity and overall meaning of Romantic literature. Romantic literature introduced "the subject of reflection, philosophy, verifiable truth and the common basis of our experience in a world of concrete, measurable physical realities," also known as the imagination (Damrosch 4). One specific genre—the Gothic novel—intertwined philosophy and the imagination. The Gothic novel was developed between 1790 and 1830 in England, and was created as a reaction against the "rigidity and formality" of other forms of Romantic literature as it "[took] its roots from former terrorizing writing that dates back to the Middle Ages" (Oates 1994). With dark undertones and agonizingly

frightening motifs, the Gothic novel invites readers to experience terror based solely on their imagination. The Gothic novel was extremely popular during its time due to the "threat" or imaginative "fear" imposed on readers because of an "interest in the bizarre, eccentric, wild, savage, lawless, and transgressive, in originality and the imagination" (Kilgour 3). The threat of "bizarre" found in these texts excited readers, thus enhancing their interest in the texts. Some features of the Gothic novels elevated interest levels by captivating readers into a state of both excitement and horror; this interest relates back to the pleasure gained from being exposed to the Sublime. As Burke argued, because the suspense and threat of danger looms close enough for readers to sense, but not close enough to seem real, the impending emotion stemmed derived from this pain is pleasure. The pleasure gained by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers enhanced their experiences with this type of literature, quickly launching its popularity. Many famous Gothic novels exposed pleasurable haunting motifs and features still found in literature today.

The Gothic novel is identified by certain features which are also found in the Sublime. Authors use these features—"specialized settings, machinery, character types, themes, and plots"—to exploit mystery, gloom, and terror, which are all themes and emotions noted in the Sublime (Evans 5). Specialized settings include remote time periods and regions of obscurity. Popular regions include areas of extreme gloom, danger, or where supernatural elements may reside. Such locations include: mysterious dungeons, wild natural scenes, or areas of violent storms. These settings add to the mystery and horror found in the Sublime by creating images of uncertainty through darkness. Supernatural

beings, the Gothic villain, and the Byronic hero—"an agent of terror"—are all "character types" that inspire obscurity and create horror, because "this iconography [of dark and obscure figures] has haunted various critical representations of the rise of the genre" (Evans 5). The reigning emotion over readers of Gothic literature is curiosity, transformed into fear. In addition, while specific characters exhibit or create terror, themes function in this way as well. Themes of death, power, and love all play a role in the creation of a Gothic novel. Essentially, the Gothic novel was popular because of the emotional, yet pleasurable toll it took on its readers through different literary techniques.

As the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* set the standard for the Gothic novels through plot, characters, and dramatic themes. The author of *Otranto*, Horace Walpole, resided at Strawberry Hill, a gothic-styled castle that was the backdrop for his novel. In fact, "Strawberry Hill became Horace Walpole—so much so that it formed a new image of itself in his novel" (Fairclough 10). Walpole was determined to write a novel, and in 1764, he printed copies of *Otranto* for his friends and family to read. The premise of the story was a union between old romances and realistic texts of modern time. Set inside a medieval castle—much like his own Strawberry Hill—*Otranto* "was [written] to unite the marvelous turn of incident, and imposing tone of chivalry, exhibited in the ancient romance, with that accurate exhibition of human character, and contrast of feelings and passions" (6). Illuminated through plot, setting, and characters, Walpole linked chivalry, as portrayed by the Byronic hero Theodore, with the Gothic, as noted by supernatural beings and horror. Additionally, the main character, Manfred, became the Gothic villain as he demonstrated a "contrast" of feelings through

anger, lust, and empathy. The plot—man desires power, chivalrous hero appears and conquers—lends itself to the Sublime as dark passageways, themes of death, chivalry, gloom, and the supernatural appear. Although this text was the earliest Gothic novel and is juvenile in many areas, the story interacts with horror and creates Sublime emotions for its readers, launching them into the Sublime.

Traced throughout *Otranto* are features of Burke's Sublime, beginning with the elements of *Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime*. Although Manfred is the main character of *Otranto*, Walpole uses all characters as a catalyst for the Sublime. The novel begins with the death of Conrad, Manfred's son. Conrad's body is found in pieces under an enormous helmet covered with feathers. The immediate reaction of on-lookers is horror and disgust. The scene is grotesque; Manfred's son was mutilated by the force of Alfonso the Good's gigantic helmet falling on top of him. The townspeople are enveloped by their amazement; in sheer astonishment together they exclaim "Oh! my lord! the prince! the prince! the helmet! the helmet!" (Walpole 28). The on-lookers become tantalized by the horrific scene in front of them. Even Manfred becomes enthralled by the scene, unable to speak. Like Burke describes, the individuals involved were "suspended" in their curiosity and astonishment. The onlookers and Manfred experienced Sublime passion due to their astonishment with the situation.

While Burke's section *Of the Passion* is exemplified by Conrad's death, *Terror* is exemplified by Manfred's domestics, Jaquez and Diego, when they recount the spectre of Alfonso the Great they saw in the gallery. In *Terror*, Burke states mistaking terror as "actual pain" is an element of the Sublime

(96). Additionally, he believes when one loses "all reasoning" due to horror, the Sublime is experienced (58). In *Otranto*, Jaquez and Diego were asked to search for Isabella, Manfred's new love interest. However, in their pursuit, they came across "Satan himself," forgetting to complete Manfred's request. By Burke's standards, the men experienced Sublime terror, especially Diego—" [He] will never recover!... He cried out, and ran back" (Walpole 41-2). In this instance, Diego was suspended in his fear; although he is usually courageous, his bravery is wounded and he experiences sheer terror. Furthermore, while Jaquez does not see the spectre, his emotional reaction is parallel to Diego—he is consumed by the horror of the situation and loses "all reasoning." Jaquez and Diego's terror exemplifies the Sublime.

The domestics' terror is relative to Sublime ambiguity; in *Obscurity*, Burke reveals how ambiguous situations, including dark passageways and supernatural spectres, are Sublime. In *Of the Sublime*, Burke explains when a situation is vague or unclear based upon light, Sublime will be experienced because one is unable to acknowledge the reality of the situation (59). *Otranto*, set in a medieval castle, immediately points toward obscurity; with dimly-lit passageways and dark galleries, the castle breeds the Sublime. Isabella, who was to be wed to Conrad before his death, is now chased by Manfred. She is able to escape into "a vault" where an "imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleam from the roof of the vault... fell in" (Walpole 37). Her sight was restricted; she could only vaguely decipher parts of the room due to obscure light. Her mind was incapable of processing any other objects in the room, creating Sublime emotions within Isabella's imagination.

Likewise, Sublime obscurity can be achieved through an intense light, where "supernatural occurrences...are brought forward into too strong day-light" as noted by Diego when he sees "the gigantic limbs" of Alfonso the Great's ghost (Fairclough 12). Here, Diego sees clearly the object. His mind is able to process what he is seeing; however, because the object is a dismembered limb of an unknown source, Diego's mind experiences sheer horror and creates Sublime emotion. In both cases, dim and bright lighting causes obscurity by either prohibiting or enhancing sight.

Sublime emotions for Isabella, Diego and other characters are experienced through obscure visions, but are also triggered by the power Manfred asserts over them. Manfred, lord of Otranto, is an authoritative figure who dictates the actions of those around him. When Manfred learns of a prophesy which is detrimental to his rule, he orders Isabella to marry him because his wife, Hippolita, cannot provide him another heir due to "her own sterility" (Walpole 27). As he exerts his power over Isabella, she flees to safety. As Burke states in *Power*, "natural" power causes the Sublime, as the Sublime coalesces "violence and strength." A "too-mighty tyrant," as Manfred is deemed by his wife, he intertwines the power of a commander and his natural power over Isabella (Walpole 56). She feels superior to his lordship, and because of the imbalance between their size, cannot fend off his advances. He also becomes violent near the end, killing his daughter, Matilda, when he mistakes her for Isabella (Walpole 104). His rash decisions as a father, husband, and ruler invite others to feel inferior to him and cause them to experience the Sublime.

Power is Sublime superiority based upon strength; in *Vastness*, Burke shows that

the Sublime is based upon existence. As noted by Burke in *Vastness*, if the mind witnesses something extreme, whether in dimension or distance, it creates the Sublime (128). Although *Otranto* does not demonstrate vastness in distance, many objects and supernatural elements are overwhelming in size and create Sublime emotions for the characters. One example, mentioned previously, demonstrates vastness through size. Alfonso the Good's helmet, which falls on Conrad in the opening scene of the text, exhibits vastness in size. The helmet was described as "enormous" and was a "hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being" (Walpole 28). Manfred is shocked by this sight, and in fact, loses his ability to speak. As he and the on-lookers witness this horrible scene, their minds took into account their own mortality and existence. The helmet is for Manfred the "diminishing scale of existence" because "the imagination is lost as well as the senses" (124). He loses his son, his ability to speak, and begins to fret for his existence as he witnesses the tragedy that lay before him. This sparks Sublime emotions as depicted through his fear.

The heavy use of Burke's five elements within Walpole's text produces Sublime emotions for his characters; however, his constant use of Gothic language demands that readers experience the Sublime as well. Literature is special in that it creates mental images for readers. Each word used in a text is important as it sets the mood, the setting, and other various aspects of literature play an important role on the emotions of the reader. Each word affects the reader differently; more soothing words will have a greater positive effect on the mind, while harsher, more violent language will impart a destructive, horrifying effect. Walpole contrasted the two

types of language to impose similar effects on his readers; specifically, he utilizes Gothic language frequently to evoke terror. He uses words such as "astonishment," a direct vocabulary term from Burke's *Enquiry* (Walpole 79), "Satan," a representation of the Devil (41), and "spectre," or a ghost (43), frequently to exert Sublime effects on his readers. Additionally, to describe horrifying situations, Walpole used phrases such as "Words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation" (36) and "The castle is certainly haunted" (38). By using phrases such as these, Walpole instructs his readers how to feel and what to imagine. Additionally, through phrases and terms aforementioned, Walpole is able to create suspense for the audience by revealing limited information. This technique is used when Manfred is desperately searching the passageways of the castle to find Isabella. This chase scene envelopes readers into the text and by not revealing all information to the reader, Walpole captivates the audience and makes them crave more.

Horace Walpole's *Otranto* began the trend of Gothic novels in Romantic literature. His use of language, plots, characters, and themes within his novel sparked the popularity of the books during his time, and created an obsession with horror novels and films still seen today. By 1816, Shelley's *Frankenstein* had mastered the elements of a Gothic novel, setting a new standard for Gothic dramas, poems, and plays. *Otranto* and *Frankenstein*, although written at different times, are united through the Gothic and are exemplary of two Sublime ideals "First, medieval life was dark, gloomy, and barbarous; second, it would be terrifying if enlightened gentlemen and 'sensible' ladies were projections of the primary source of terror" (Evans 8). While Walpole's novel

touches upon these ideas, Mary Shelley's novel expanded and greatly lengthened attributes of gloom and terror through her characters, themes, and language.

Frankenstein, a text about bringing life to the deceased, was inspired by the real-life experiences of Shelley. In the summer of 1816, Mary Shelley and several colleagues traveled to Lake Geneva in hopes of finding inspiration for writing (Damrosch 329). During this time—appropriately remembered as the "Haunted Summer"—four individuals, including Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori, held a contest to see who could write the scariest novel. Shelley's *Frankenstein* was a triumphant success after she found inspiration in a thunder storm. She wrote: "The scene illuminated for an instant, when a pitchy blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over heads amid the darkness" (Hitchcock 16). She experienced an intense, terrifying feeling where "the torments which we may be made to suffer, are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures" (59). Her imagination was captivated by the horror of the storm and brought Sublime pleasure to her mind. Throughout *Frankenstein*, elements of this powerful emotion are found. As viewed in the storm, natural settings commonly lend themselves to the Sublime and this is a frequent theme within Shelley's text. Her main character, Victor Frankenstein, depicts Sublime emotions with his creation of a once-dead life form, often referred to as "creature," "monster," or "devil" (Shelley 16, 28, 30). Victor becomes the Byronic hero, although none of his actions inspire heroic actions; in fact, his obsession with creating the monster—who becomes the Gothic villain—is the reason why many characters are killed within the story. Shelley uses literary devices such as hyperbole and foreshadowing

to enhance her Gothic story, which culminates themes of death, destruction, fear, and gloom. Ultimately, the plot, a supernatural fantasy of bringing life to something deceased, creates the Sublime tone that is found throughout the entirety of *Frankenstein*.

The emotion described in *Of the Passion created by the Sublime* is seen in the obsessive compulsion of the main character, Victor, in his pursuit to create life. Victor was sparked to create life when he witnessed a lightning strike a tree. He states, "I never beheld any thing so utterly destroyed. The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment!" (Shelley 24). Here, the language delves directly into the Sublime. In *Passion*, Burke argued that the Sublime is experienced with astonishment; when the mind becomes engulfed with an idea, the imagination cannot focus on anything else (95). This is represented in Victor's actions following the incident. He had initially begun his work without a moment to lose—"Winter, spring and summer passed away during my labours" (Shelley 36). This demonstrates his persistence, and more importantly, his obsession. Burke believes that astonishment and amazement is the single factor that begins passion and the Sublime, and for Victor, his astonishment with the tree sparked his Sublime passion for creating life.

Victor's inability to focus on any other object except for creating life facilitates his Sublime obsession which turns into Sublime terror. His passion overtook his life completely, as he did nothing except work. Burke argues, "the Sublime anticipates our reasoning, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (96). For Victor, this "force" was his creating life. He ultimately creates a monster whose nature was indeterminate and thus turned his pleasure into sheer horror. With Victor's creation, his initial obsession turned in

horror, representing Burke's *Terror*. Victor had taken the body parts of human beings and assembled them together in hopes of creating life; it is not until all parts are together that the monster invariably becomes disastrous in actions and appearance. His "lust" for the creature was overwhelmed by his fear; he is incapable of thinking or "reasoning," as Burke states, about anything except for his horrible creation. Victor never sought to understand the consequences of bringing the creature to life until he physically sees him. Here, sight introduces terror. Victor even recognizes his horror when he states, "now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley 37). Here, he demonstrates the contrast between the Sublime and the beautiful. However, his pleasure with the outcome of his obsession was transformed from astonishment to terror.

While seeing his creature brought to life enabled Victor to experience the Sublime, the removal of clarity and subsequent obscurity does too. Burke believes "[i]n nature, dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions, than those have which are more clear and determinate" (101). If an object or scene is ambiguous, Sublime experiences take precedence, mainly because sight is limited. Shelley's constant depiction of her characters and settings provoke Sublime emotions to surface. During the story, Victor chases the monster after discovering his creation murdered two individuals close to him. While he anxiously searches, "staccato flashes enable Frankenstein to make out the Creature's dizzying course as it leaps from crag to crag, and in the intervals of darkness, while his eye is recovering from each blinding glance, he reflects" (Shelley 888). When the light

flashed, Victor was able to make out the creature, however, the instant the light was removed, Victor had to rely on other senses to find the creature. Because of this situation, Victor experiences the Sublime because "the tortured male body rendered himself simultaneously dangerous and endangered" (Picart 22). Because the creature is seen as "dangerous," Victor experiences fear and his limited sight lends itself further to the Sublime.

The combination of obscurity and aspects of Burke's concept of *Power* ignite Victor's fear, thus creating Sublime emotions. Burke states: "wheresoever we find strength, and in what light soever we look upon power, we shall all along observe the Sublime concomitant of terror, and contempt the attended on a strength that is subservient and innoxious" (112). The creature exerts "natural" power, the coalition of violence and strength, on several individuals he comes in contact with. He murdered three individuals—William, Henry Clerval, and Elizabeth—with his massive hands (Shelley 49, 138, 154). The murdered individuals were subservient to the power of the creature without choice. They were unable to escape the power of his massive hands and ultimately wound up dead. The Sublime is established through "power which derives the effect to strip a considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt" (Burke 59). Due to his strength, the creature exercises superiority and eliminates lives through violence: the culmination of terror and the Sublime.

Essential to the text is the overarching theme of vastness. In *Vastness*, Burke describes the Sublime in terms of dimension and distance; he mentions that "height is less grand than depth; and that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than at looking up at an object of equal height"

(128). He suggests that Sublime vastness is derived from sight, and that coming in contact with distances and dimensions that outmatch one's own creates terror and introduces Sublime emotion (128-9). At the end of *Frankenstein*, the setting exemplifies vastness. The final passage of the novel depicts the creature springing from "the cabin-window" as he "was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley 179). Nature is portrayed as infinite, allowing the mind to wander and imagine. Most importantly, the scene provokes thought based upon existence—existence of one's own person and of the creature. Beyond the reader's understanding, the sea in which the creature escapes is unknown in size, length, and depth. The narrator is left to ponder the creature's existence, thus experiencing the Sublime.

While the five elements of the Sublime create Sublime emotion, the Gothic language Shelley uses acts as a catalyst for readers to experience the Sublime. Throughout *Frankenstein*, Shelley uses words such as "catastrophe," "dreaded," "tortures," and most obviously, "Sublime" to describe the creature, scenery, and Victor (Shelley 37, 164, 134, 100). This ignites Sublime emotions within the readers' minds, which "nothing but a word could annex to the others, and raises a very great degree of the Sublime" (Burke 170). Words are used to convey the powerful qualities which excite the "tranquil" mind into an excited, horrified state. Shelley encourages Sublime thought by depicting the creature as "a savage shattering that bespeaks his rage" (Picart 25). The overwhelming references to the creature as a "savage" or "devil" automatically strike fear into the minds of the readers (Shelley 49, 55). In addition to the creature, many references to nature as fearsome—"Victor

might be driven into the wide Atlantic, and feel all the tortures of starvation, or be swallowed up in the immeasurable water around him"—also launch readers into a state of Sublime emotion (134). The language plays a major role as the ocean is described as "wide," "tortuous," and "immeasurable." Here, Shelley plays on vastness and power. Overall, Shelley uses language to ignite her readers into a state of sheer Sublime emotion through language.

Both Walpole and Shelley use literary devices, elements from Burke's *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, and language to create lasting images in the minds of their readers. It is important to note that these two texts show the preliminary—*Otranto*—and final—*Frankenstein*—stages of a monumental literary genre. Although the texts were written at different points in time, their similarities unite the two as Gothic novels. Both authors used personal experiences as catalysts for their books—Walpole's estate, Strawberry Hill, was the backdrop for *Otranto*, while Shelley's experience with a terrifying yet captivating thunderstorm led to her creation of *Frankenstein*. The two novels cultivate themes of gloom, horror, and death through plot, setting and characters, to evoke Sublime emotions into their readers' mind.

The Sublime, as defined by Burke in *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, unite the two texts through passion, obscurity, terror, power, and vastness. Obsession, ambiguity, fear, power, and dimension all rule through the texts and cause the Sublime to become not only a theme and dominant trait, but a way of imagination. Although the Gothic novel was most popular from 1794 to 1818, the subsequent use of the Sublime gave these two texts the ability to provoke a new kind of pleasure in their readers—the pleasure of horror. As catalysts for the mystery novels

and scary movies today, *The Castle of Otranto* and *Frankenstein* provided a stage for modern Gothic literature. The Sublime is more than experiencing horror; it is about the union of terror and imagination. Marrying together one's mind with a perceived threat creates a pleasure unlike any pleasure ever experienced before. Edmund Burke states the Sublime "is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (58). For Horace Walpole and Mary Shelley, their life experiences allowed them to express this powerful emotion for their readers; these authors enabled the literary world to feel pleasure in terror. Their imaginations led to the Sublime. Where will your imagination take you?

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