

GOTHIC MUTABILITY:  
THE FLUX OF FORM AND THE CREATION OF FEAR

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to offer revisions to current conceptions of Gothic origins and form by redefining the limiting categories “male Gothic” and “female Gothic” as well as their supernatural correspondents, “horror Gothic” and “terror Gothic.” Instead of focusing on gender, or the typically gendered use of the supernatural, the focus of this study is on the impact that fear has in the novel, formally. This thesis proposes that Gothic fear is put to one of two ends: astonishment or action. Using Edmund Burke’s definition of the sublime as one in which the subject is astonished into inaction and Sigmund Freud’s definition of the uncanny as one in which an obscure threat prompts the subject into action, I suggest that the formal differences in the Gothic are more accurately represented by the terms “sublime Gothic” and “uncanny Gothic.” Yet even by reorienting the critic’s perception of the division that seems so prominent in the genre, it is, at best, a superficial tendency. The Gothic allows for both types of fear to be present. Studying the ways in which authors switch between modes of fear, and the ways in which these uses transcend gender boundaries, creates new ways for categorizing and studying the Gothic novel.