Rebirth of the Gothic in the Metropolitan Legends

Ertuğrul KOÇ[1]

Özet

Bu makale onsekizinci yüzyıl gotik roman geleneğinin yirminci yüzyıl grafik roman tarzında yeniden ortaya çıkışını irdelemekte ve gotik edebiyatın büyük sosyal dönüşüm süreçlerinin bir ürünü olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Makale bu tarzın ilk ya da son örnekleri olsun, bu eserlerin kapitalizmin ortaya çıkışı ve insanın bilinç kazanma sürecine paralel giden metaforik göndermeler olduğu değerlendirmesinde bulunmaktadır: Gotik roman tarzının ilk örneklerinde kapitalizm nasıl eleştirilmişse, yirminci yüzyıl grafik romanlarında da kapitalist sistem ve sistemin yarattığı materyalist bireye dolaylı atıflar vardır. Sonuçta, bu tarzın örnekleri kapitalist kültüre ait bireyin manevi, ahlaki ve entellektüel boşluğunu dile getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kapitalizm, Paradigmal Dönüşüm, Şehir Efsaneleri, Sosyopati, Süper Kahraman*

Abstract

This article analyzes the reemergence of the eighteenth century gothic tradition in the graphic novels of the twentieth century and asserts that the Gothic appears at times of great social changes. Hence, early or later examples of this fiction can be seen as metaphors reflecting the emergence of capitalism and the paradigmatic evolution in man's epistemological consciousness. The target of criticism being capitalism in the early works, the latest graphic novels, too, have the tendency of covertly lampooning the system and the materialist individual the system has created. Finally, the examples of this genre dwell on the spiritual, moral, and intellectual lacunae of the individual living in capitalist culture.

Key Words: *Capitalism, Paradigmatic Shift, Urban Legends, Sociopathy, Super-hero*

Apart from the historical and artistic meanings of the term, Gothic suggests the new and the different. Although the term has generally been understood as destructively alien and grotesque, still it bears the gist of novelty for it often creates a cynical

---

1   Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies, Faculty of Art and Sciences, Çankaya University, Ankara, Turkey

perception concerning popular culture. Since the individual can evolve only through the creation of an antithesis of the culture he associates himself with, the need for Gothic will not come to an end: new and revolutionary forms and trends will be put forward to generate the difference for the purpose of evolving, and the new will always be labeled as Gothic. For an ever-changing society and individual, Gothic has become the means of questioning and revising the "established" ethics and morals through a deconstructive philosophical-ideological assertion.

From its very first emergence as a unique literary trend in the second half of the eighteenth century, Gothic has always invoked contradictory feelings and perceptions in critics. Augustans condemned the genre. Unable to understand the reasons behind its emergent popularity, they saw it as a literary form "inexpressibly hideous and revolting [for] the Gothic genre offended public morality and violated accepted canons of aesthetic and cultural order founded on common sense and reason" (Bhalla, 3). Modern critics are more appreciative of the term: "Since the late 1970s, the Gothic has become a popular field of academic study. Scores of books have been published, both on the Gothic in general, and on particular subgenres and authors" (Punter, xviii). After all, they have come to acknowledge it as a distinct and unique trend whose influential motifs still find a place in the popular graphic novels and Hollywood films. Moreover, in recent years, the popularity of gothic studies has drastically increased: a great number of scholars try to understand the *rationale* behind this influence for it still haunts the popular imagination. David Punter, Fred Botting, Sandra Gilbert, Maggie Kilgour, Robert Mighall, David Stevens, Jack Sullivan, Devandra Parma, Montague Summers, and Alok Bhalla are some of the well known scholars whose works attempt to define the controversial nature of the genre, and to explain the modern tendency towards the gothic phenomenon.

Although the early gothic examples have lost their influence of shock on the modern reader, the genre and its motifs have already permeated into postmodern literature: modern graphic novels are full of super gothic villains and heroes who help trigger the subconscious response of man against the chaotic web of relations and conflicts in the metropolis. The change in setting from the castles located in the countryside to the urban centers is the result of industrialization which brought about the concept of metropolis. No longer feudal in economic relations and political structure, modern societies have carried their gothic castles, their villainous and virtuous heroes into the cities. Dennis O'Neil's Batman and the fictional Gotham City that appears in *DC Comics*; the super hero of *Marvel Comics* Spider-Man created by Stan Lee and Steve

Ditko; Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman are all heroes of the urban centers. What distinguishes these graphic figures from the eighteenth century gothic characters is that the virtuous heroes, not the villains, are the more powerful central characters, suggesting that they address the lacunae of security and the lack of savior in the modern world. When the essential pillars of civilization such as law, justice, and equality fail, the audiences, in reaction to lawlessness, injustice, and inequality come to appreciate the supra-human heroes who fight against cruelty of all sorts. This is the response of the common man against the increasing threats in his environment.

Though essential, gothic villains are no more central: they change and vary because the threats people encounter in urban centers change and vary. Eighteenth and nineteenth century gothic focused more on the perverse psychology of the villains. In twentieth century, however, this perversity has been a part of daily life as a result of the numerous threats to human existence like nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons together with terrorism and the possibility of a full scale war; and the industrial and technological cruelty which, in return, created the most heinous and unimaginable types of crime. Hence, there appeared a shift in emphasis from the villainous to the virtuous hero in the creation of character because of the high amount of threats and villainy in the "civilized" world. The dull, anodyne but virtuous heroes of the eighteenth century gothic were replaced by engaging and colorful superhuman heroes of the twentieth century graphic novels. The ability of acting beyond human limits, which usually belonged to the gothic villains, was also bestowed on the metropolitan heroes to fight against evil powers.

This, in fact, is the reaction of common man against the collapse of the old, and the emergence of the new paradigms—for nowadays any society in the western world consists of conformists who hardly consciously try to change the system—and his desire at the same time to construct a "morally superior" paradigm in place of the present, deteriorating one. Since the Gothic very often signals the coming of the "new" and evolution (or revolution) itself, the increasing interest in the previous examples of this fiction together with the modern examples may prove to reveal the deconstructive pursuits of the present capitalist (and imperialist) societies in forming a new paradigm. After all, what man has created throughout history is just a chain reaction of cause-effect relations. As present is inseparable from the past, and as the Gothic reveals ample information about the past paradigm, eighteenth and nineteenth century examples of this genre are worth analyzing in order to see what the future paradigm will be like. It is, therefore, essential to focus on the origins and originators of the Gothic to understand

the modern usage of the term, and to discern how the literary motifs used in the early gothic works have penetrated into the urban legends. The purpose of this article is to offer a new perspective on *why* the Gothic emerged, and *how* it still affects the (popular) literature of the postmodern era. Through a metaphorical reading of the five gothic works by five gothicists—*The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis, *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin, and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley— and through a comparison of these examples with the graphic novels such as *Superman, Batman*, and *Spider-Man*, the disordered social structure together with the disrupted psychology of both the past and present paradigms, which have given rise and impetus to gothic literature, will be examined.

Eighteenth century gothic includes both anachronistic and modern elements: the social and geographical settings, the characters and characterization techniques, the tone, the point of view and the works' generic structure—a mixture of myth, epic, romance, tragedy, folk tale—and the modern format (the novel form) that covers all these elements make these works appear strangely new, and outdated at the same time. The atmosphere of archaism is deceptive. Gothic metaphor of anachronism is built solely to lead to moral allegory by backdating eighteenth century people and institutions to an earlier epoch. The socio-economic, socio-political structures and individual relations are described as feudal. The depiction of a faux medieval world and its economic and power relations should be read as metaphors for the burgeoning capitalist, empiricist, and positivist paradigms of the age. The cruelty which the new economic, political, and scientific systems of the Age of Enlightenment have created is the chief concern of the early gothic fiction. In short, though seemingly archaic, all the works are about the present eighteenth and nineteenth century societies: they reveal the tensions and conflicts in the new rational, "enlightened" age. The target of criticism is the new behavior types and the new *modi vivendi* which lack the spiritual pedestal of the old paradigm. Although the age brought about a new consciousness, it also created conflicts.

Foucault argues in *The Order of Things* that to understand the nature of contemporary experience, there is the need for an archeological study of the history of knowledge. He thus makes an analysis of the shifts and changes in the concept of knowledge through a study of the Renaissance (roughly, the sixteenth century), the eighteenth century, and the Modern Age (from the beginning of the nineteenth century to at least the middle of the twentieth) which all had very different conceptions of

knowledge. When Foucault's time-table is taken into consideration, the emergence of the Gothic in the eighteenth century predicts the end of the Classical Age. It appears at a time the epistemological shift took place. What Foucault says in "The Place of the King" connotes to the motives of gothic literature:

> Before the end of 18th century man did not exist any more than a potency of life, the fecundity of labour, or the historical density of language. He is quite a recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago. (Foucault, 308)

For the first time in history, man achieved epistemological consciousness and began to question his social environment and himself. Gothic literature, in this respect, appears to be the new dialect of the eighteenth century, the age of great revolutions. It celebrates, and at the same time *questions* the "invention" of man and his society.

Gothic, nowadays, has become "a highly mobile term, remaining constant only in the way it functioned to establish a set of polarities revolving primarily around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized. Initially, because the Goths left no literature or art of their own, they came to be remembered only as the invaders and destroyers of the great Roman civilization," (Punter, 3) and if the Gothic is identified with the primitive, the barbaric, and the uncivilized, the visual symbols of postmodern literature suggesting this primitivism can be classified as works having equal significance with the works produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, popular legends like *Batman, Spider-Man, and Superman* all belong to the gothic tradition for the clash between the civilized and the uncivilized constitutes the core of these works.

The modern versions of the Gothic, however, are no more about the invention of man, but about his dissention in the capitalist paradigm. Having been drawn as fantastic images in comic books and films in accordance with the tendency of the postmodern age towards the visual, the characters satisfy common man's need for the violently marvelous and magical. However, the aura surrounding these characters together with the atmospheric devices is purely gothic. Their mysterious personalities and their arcane activities; their sanctuaries in which they refresh and recreate themselves are the themes and motifs directly borrowed from the Gothic. Again they stand as metaphors depicting the cruelty of the clash in the capitalist world; either villainous or virtuous, the characters are all the products of the capitalist order.

The first author to observe and write about this clash was the eighteenth century novelist Horace Walpole, who is now considered the originator of the Gothic. He became very popular not as a member of parliament, but for his novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole must have seen the gulf in his age between the old and the new socio-economic systems, and thought it an interesting subject for discourse. In the preface to the second edition of *Otranto*—the first of the gothic novels that was received with great zeal by a reading public hungry for magic and mystery (after decades of rationalism) and keen to devour any fictitious account of medieval life—he refers to this gap: "In the former all was imagination and improbability, in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been copied with success" (Walpole, 7). In this novel Walpole builds a fictitious bridge by blending the "two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (Walpole, 7). He thus identifies the two completely different but coexisting paradigms of his age, and sees them as "romances." Walpole's work and the concomitant genre also provided an imaginary land of autopia (in Greek "no place") for the reader and the writer to take refuge in and discuss, through metaphors, the present chaotic state of the eighteenth century paradigm.

Although creative in establishing the standard motifs of the genre, Walpole associates the ancient order with the old literary motifs derived from tragedy, legend, fairy-tale, but true to the literary conventions of his day, he incorporates these forms and devices into a novel. He seems to be half in love with the old system of hereditary rights (and the rights of aristocracy). Though observant of the great social changes, he misses the revolutionary trends of his time. It is a revolutionist in the novel, Manfred, who is depicted as both a villain and a tragic hero (described a usurper, he is punished by a legendary figure, and by Providence). Daring to break the taboos of the established rules of inheritance, he pits himself against the ancient, archaic ruling order. At first, refusing to acknowledge the existence of supreme powers, and later consciously defying their authority, Manfred represents the single-minded materialistic and secular drives of the eighteenth century. His struggle to liberate himself from the political, moral, and hierarchical order of his society makes him consciously "malevolent" as he maintains his secularism and rejects submission to any power; he liberates himself from the system of Providence and from His representatives.

The idea of rebellion against the established system is what makes these works the examples of "discordant" literature, and their authors the nonconformist writers for the Augustans. Manfred's refusal to become submissive suggests Milton's rebellious Satan, or the Titan Prometheus who refuses the authority of God (or Zeus), who is the

established system itself. Gothic does not, in fact, favor the idea of a just God. On the contrary, God is the cruelest of all: "The demonic God functions as a superhuman emanation of the evil passions of humankind, as fabulous as the conventional myth of Satan and as socially destructive: the latter enslaves humankind through fear, while the figure of God has authorized cruelty through the ages" (Schock, 59). As God comes to represent the established "unjust" order, the radical will naturally collaborate with His antithesis Satan, the rebellious and the revolutionist. Hence, by rejecting to belong to the system, the "villain" discards the ancient order and authority of Providence. This individual liberation is what the gothicists have both celebrated and condemned in their works.

While Manfred is punished by divine powers, Theodore, the owner of the castle by birth, is "helped" to reestablish the feudal order. He is not only the grandchild of the previous ruler of Otranto (Alfonso), but also the child of the friar (Jerome). He thus carries the double inheritance of religion and aristocracy, and comes to represent the feudal paradigm. Manfred and Theodore stand for different systems: Theodore, the ancient order, and Manfred, the modern one. As Walpole shows, each of these systems has its own deficiencies: Manfred's system is greedy and exploitative while in the system Theodore represents there is no individuality. The concept of "poetic justice" in the story is quite odd and unsatisfactory. Providence and Alfonso destroy the castle, the center of Manfred's worldly authority. They are the hostile powers that belong not to this world but to an anterior paradigm. They are like the cartoon characters of the comics. Though associated with "virtue," they use their supreme powers against man. The super villains of the graphic novels owe a lot to such supernatural figures created in the early gothic examples.

In the age of television, internet, and mobile phones, almost everybody knows the super characters and their stories in comics. People wish Superman, Spider-Man, and Batman were here and real to keep them and their city safe from harm. Superman comes to Earth from a distant planet called Krypton just before it explodes. He is raised by a tenderly loving and caring Kansas couple. He has superhuman powers and abilities; he is far above mortal men and protects the city of Metropolis together with the world against evil. Spider-Man, on the other hand, is a human character and according to the story, he is the alter ego of student Peter Parker, who, as a result of an accidental bite from a radioactive spider, acquires the spider's relative strength and agility plus an intuitive sense for danger. After his Uncle Ben is killed by a burglar, Parker determines to use his new powers to fight against crime. He gets dressed in a mask and form-fitting

costume. He equips himself with spider-like web slingers. In the form of a human being he is able to do whatever a spider can do. When it comes to Batman, his story is slightly different from that of Spider-Man. He is the crime fighting alter-ego of millionaire Bruce Wayne. According to the storyline, Wayne inherits a fortune as a boy after his parents are killed by robbers; when Wayne grows up, he dedicates himself to fighting crime and chooses the guise of a bat in order to frighten criminals. He has no supernatural powers, unlike the two other heroes. He lives in the dark Gotham City, and operates out of his secret crime laboratory, the Bat Cave.

For both the early gothic novels and the modern comics, the concept of crime is the locus. The characters commit and/or fight against crime. The "supernatural" phenomena appear not as ghosts and goblins any more, but as the supra-natural characters who create and prevent crime. They are mysterious; they operate in the problem centers, and from time to time they need to take refuge in their laboratories or laboratory-like caves to design new crimes or crime-fighting devices. They do not belong to the system: they develop their own methods to commit or fight against crime.

In fact, all modern heroes are above the law. They pursue and capture criminals without any legal right given to them. They take the law into their hands, (just like Providence and Alfonso in *Otranto* enjoying unchallengeable authority) and this definition of heroism goes in parallel with the definition of villainy in the gothic works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By working outside the law, Superman is in affect breaking it. True, this "good" character is a well-meaning hero. However, he pays no attention to the rights of others as he is obsessed with the global interests of America, and whoever defies these interests becomes his natural enemy. This civilized looking but ferocious character is easy to recognize by the masses as he culturally and geographically stands for the global superpower, the west. He stands as the symbol of western imperialism. His enemies, who usually come from *outer space*, therefore, can be classified as characters representing the global superpower (or the powerlessness) of the east.

Among the early examples of the Gothic, Ann Radcliffe has a special place for her works are more national and more local: she gives a Protestant underpinning (or Protestant ethic) to her novels, and the Englishness of her good characters is made apparent. She thus sets a tradition for her predecessors: she sets her stories in Catholic countries like France and Italy, the countries known as the epitome of Papal control, or the countries where the earlier paradigm still reigns. By attributing all the evils of the new socio-economic system to the Catholic world, Radcliffe purges the materialistic (or

capitalistic) drives of her own society. Like Romans in history who saw themselves superior and more civilized when compared to those of other nations, Radcliffe, too, depicts the values and moral attitudes of her own culture as superior to the norms and values of other peoples, other nations. Like Walpole, Radcliffe makes both the setting and character familiar to English eyes. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* she attributes sentimental English characteristics to good characters like St. Aubert, Emily, and Valancourt. Conversely, the ambitious figures are made to confront with sentimental English attitudes. The villains like Montoni, Orsini, Verezzi, and Cavigni are described as if they belonged to a different race of human species. Montoni, the dark villain of the story, tries by menacing and murderous means, and by the help of his friends, to secure Emily's estates. After a long struggle with this villain, Emily manages to escape from his cruelty. The novel concludes on a note of melodrama: its ostensible moral is that the power of vice is as temporary as its punishment is certain. Innocence, supported by patience, is held always to triumph at the last.

A similar nationalistic (and melodramatic) attitude can be observed in the comic characters. Despite being read, watched, and loved all over the world, these characters have their local tones and national identities. Superman, for instance, is an American character both by nature and nurture while Batman's Gotham city stands for New York and Spider-Man is a New Yorker. Superman's story is a classic American success story. He can move planets and run faster than the speed of light. In the 1978 movie, he turned the time back. He is not only a superhero but a demigod, representing the superpower of the United States in handling world affairs. The lawless intervention of Superman into problems all around the world shows great analogy with the world policies of America; like Superman, America "saves" the world from the evil powers. In the new series of the story, most probably, the world will see Superman fighting against "Islamic terror" and/or against the nuclear weapons of North Korea and Iran, depicted as characters like the alien android Brianiac or Lex Luthor.

The theme of nationalism together with anti-Catholic sentiment constitutes the core of Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin's works, but this time with a completely anti-sentimental attitude. Although they belong to different decades, they can be grouped as the gothicists who criticized the perverse practices of religion (or Catholicism). Lewis was a callow diplomatic attaché, who set out deliberately to make a contribution to the Gothic; Maturin was an Anglo-Irish Anglican curate of rather unorthodox opinions. In contrast to the "climate of opinion" (Becker, 5) of the age, which is obsessed with useful moral purposes in literature, Lewis and Maturin often make contemporary problems (social, political, and ethical) for scabrously comic, rather than didactic purposes.

119

Lewis uses the same stock features of the burgeoning gothic genre (some derived from romance) as Walpole: passionate and greedy villains, specters, corpses, and skeletons appear in his novel, embodying both the threat of the past and the neurosis of the present. Again the distinction between the old and the new is strongly emphasized. In *The Monk* Lewis portrays a world through the two stories (that of Raymond and Ambrosio) torn between the ancient and the modern. All the characters (the villains and the heroes) fall victim to an alienation of the present from the past. Through this theme *The Monk* incorporates all that Enlightenment left unexplained, and compares and contrasts the rational sentimental order of the age with its unacknowledged, anachronistic, or despised counterpart.

The new system depends on the powerful assertion of human nature. It is, however, institutions, especially the institution of religion that represses people's natural emotions, creating perverse individuals in the process. Nowadays it is the technological cruelty of capitalism that has replaced God's ferocity. Making life go on faster but blocking the humane development of individual, technology is the new Catholicism; man has already started worshipping and praying to the institution of technology and its gods. Modern man sit before his TV set and watches the great human tragedy; he hears the groans of others but does nothing in return, or just waits for someone to come up and change everything back to normal. This is social psychosis which makes man lose contact with reality. This sociopathy, if uncured, creates more and more outlaws with shattered personalities, and more and more "heroes" and "villains" in graphic novels.

The same theme keeps recurring in the comics, and both the evil and good characters fall victim to sociopathy. What makes these characters recognizable and memorable is the duality in their personalities. "Within this genre one may witness the relentless destruction of 'the human'. . . The abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (Hurley, 3). Both loving and cruel, and loveable and hateful they easily kill, and bestow life at the same time. In the background of these characters, however, lies some sort of tragedy. Especially the villains in *Batman* like Penguin, Joker, Two-Face, Cat-woman are all figures who, as a result of a great disaster in their pasts, have emerged and appointed themselves to commit crimes. They are the ones excluded from the social system; they have been refused by the institutions of society or condemned by the same institutions to solitary existence. In return, they try to take revenge from the system which has oppressed and tortured them. They have no family, no friends, and as a result, no love to enjoy or to offer. Even if they have some sort of

love, they easily suppress this feeling and/or use it to mock the "weakness" of the ones who have this feeling. They, therefore, hate the system which has deprived them of normal human relations.

Institutional cruelty was what the early Gothic writers lampooned in their works. In both *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer,* this perversity is made apparent. Ambrosio in *The Monk* is at first presented as an example of virtue like *Two-Face* in Batman. He is well-known in Madrid for his "sublime" sermons, and given the ironic epithets: "celebrated orator," and "man of holiness" (Lewis, 9). However, he turns out to be a lustful, perverse villain at the end. His pursuits are venal: he rapes his sister and kills his mother. He collaborates with Satan and is severely punished at the end, despite the chance given to him by Providence. He remains stubbornly flat on account of his upbringing in the Capuchin church, which has suppressed his individuality. He is, therefore, unable to exist out of the Catholic paradigm as the modern man thinks that life is "impossible" outside the capitalist system. Through *Melmoth,* Maturin describes a similar process of brutalization and dehumanization obtaining between individual and institution. For him, repressive Catholicism creates evil characters that retreat into the very bosom of the institution, corrupting it still further. This vicious circle is what the capitalist order has been doing to the individual. The system, while corrupting the individual, is at the same time, making him try to find purgation within the same system. Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man are, in fact, the corrupt heroes of the corrupt system. As long as man is unable to create an alternative of capitalism, they will be welcomed as heroes saving us from and protecting us against evil.

Modern comic writers are in more appreciation of the sanctions among social groups and their discriminating ethos. What the early gothicists criticized as war of sects is what the modern writers present as social and individual differences of characters in the metropolis. This schism is the result of the economic, and therefore, the political system that the world is facing now. This is on account of capitalism, and according to the logic, capitalism depends on the individual. This individual can be considered as a person, a company, or a nation and there must always be an ongoing fight. This fight must be for the purpose of development, advantage, and priority. In this system only the best and the fittest can survive. The weak and the incompetent are eliminated and/or vaporized. The important concept here is not the welfare of the individual, but economic development and production of goods which, the capitalist mentality imposes, will eventually benefit everyone. As a result, capitalism has no ethical responsibility or conscience for the person whom it crushes underfoot. This is Darwinism put into total practice in society as an economic system.

Both evil and good characters of the comics are the ones (or the victims) representing the clash in the capitalist order. They stand for opposing polarities, each equipped with dreadful weapons to be victorious over the other. Although for a while one side is defeated, after refreshing itself, it comes again into existence. These evil and good characters complete each other, and the audience finds the contrasting poles of his personality in the clash between them. Lex Luthor, the arch-foe of Superman, for instance, has been seen as the dual opposite of the Superman, devoid of morals and relying on intellect rather than strength. Although initially depicted as a mad scientist, he was later described as a Machiavellian industrialist and white-collar criminal. The clash between the two suggests, at some point, the inner struggle in the system, and the inner struggle in the individual living in the capitalist order. Like the heroes and villains, he, too, has to assume different personality traits and create others.

Spider-Man has perhaps the greatest number of foes among the characters in comics. These are Dr. Octopus, Hobgoblin, the Lizard, the Scorpion, Sandman, Rhino, Mysterio, the Vulture, Shocker, and many others. Batman's villains are his doubles: Cat-woman, Joker, Penguin, and the Two-Face, all represent the various aspects of the hero. For the man of capitalist order who can no longer assume a solid identity but many, these heroes and villains with various identities are as "normal" as he himself. Like the common man they are illogically technological; they use and abuse science in their un (lawful) worldly affairs. The majority of these villains' powers originate with scientific accidents or with the misuse of scientific technology. They have emerged as a result of an influence in the gothic tradition which is called today "science-fiction."

The capitalistic, progressive drives together with the idea of divided self in individuals are perhaps best represented in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The novel takes its source material from the scientific advances and positivist ideology of the nineteenth century. The gothic machinery so far developed assumes a new form: the passionate hero-villain is changed to a scientist; the castle or monastery to the labyrinths of laboratory work; the supernatural being summoned from hell, to the deformed Monster, created in a laboratory; and the ruined abbeys and tombs to charnel houses and cemeteries from which Dr. Frankenstein, the representative of progressive science, collects the body parts for his creation. Mary Shelley's novel is important as it has stood an example to the creators of scientifically formed characters in comics. The positivist mentality has already made man believe in laboratory work. This empiricism, however, has been thought to be limitless in the sense that science, depending on empirical knowledge, would create miracles. *Frankenstein* is about this miracle and at

the same time it is a warning to the future generations about the dangers science would create for man. The archetypal fears of mankind concerning Doomsday, which once found expression in the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages now finds expression in the myths of the postmodern age. As the doppelganger images for devastating chaos and redemption itself, a situation which a metropolitan has to face up every day of his life, these comic characters fulfill the functions of being both the ravisher and the savior. This chaos has emerged on account of the economic system which, while gathering people in the jungle of the metropolis, has separated them at the same time as the haves and the have nots, leaving them all in isolation and making them believe only in material success.

Mary Shelley seems to have foreseen this dystopia. The condemnation of Enlightenment, industry, and capitalist oligarchy is overtly expressed in her novel *Frankenstein*. Although now considered one of the first examples of science fiction, the novel analyzes the capitalist mentality of both society and individual. Accordingly, Mary Shelley, like her predecessors, makes her work a critique of sentimental Augustan culture. She draws a picture in which she emphasizes both environmental and psychological antinomies in both individuals and society in order to fully penetrate into the conflicts of her age, and warn future generations about the awaiting perversity for which science would pave the way.

Mary Shelley adopts the terminology of science and positivism to better indicate the catastrophe that rationalism can bring about. Her romantic background informs her dislike of the current materialistic system. The novel is a romantic response to those socio-economic and socio-political developments, which, in the nineteenth century, created a new and brutal morality for an industrial economy. *Frankenstein* thus stands a critique of the society and of the multiple personality individual created by Industrial and Scientific Revolutions. Through the three central figures—Robert Walton, the credulous sentimental (or romantic) adventurer; Victor Frankenstein, the industrious but ethically irresponsible man of the age; and Frankenstein's creature, the Monster, and artificial, semi-human experiment—and through their narratives, Mary Shelley suggests the various (but equally disastrous) paths along which the self conscious but hypocritical modernist of the Industrial Age might "progress."

Of the three narratives in the novel, Frankenstein's is enclosed inside Robert Walton's, and the Monster's own account of his tale inside Frankenstein's. All three stories exhibit the uneasy and dangerous coexistence of opposing sentiments in Mary Shelley's age: the rational and the romantic. Robert Walton, the would-be romantic,

conveys, through his narrative, the naiveté of a "commonsensical" or "sentimental" approach to life. Frankenstein, the romantic *entrepreneur* whose philanthropic schemes after the creation of the Monster, turn into nightmare, embodies two different aspects of industrial bourgeois society. With his desire to do good he represents the "enlightened" virtues of his society. His "deviant" search and its unforeseen catastrophic consequences, however, epitomize the folly of the nineteenth century. The Monster's tale makes plain that he is the victim of the schism between sentiment (or faith) and pragmatism (or science). He is like the evil characters of the graphic novels, but more pathetic. He is the isolated residue of his culture's selfish social and individual pursuits, as well as an emblem of the disrupted psychology of Victor Frankenstein himself. The Monster's murders can therefore be interpreted as the consequences of Dr. Frankenstein's well-meaning pursuits. Illustrated as a symbol of the progressive eighteenth century man, in the character of Dr. Frankenstein, Mary Shelley indicates the great situational irony of her age: she shows the discrepancy between the humanistic dreams of her culture and the perversity that these dreams lead to.

> In Victor's education as a man of science, and his experimental creation of a synthetic human creature through the reanimation of disparate dead body parts, the novel establishes and assesses several distinct kinds of experimental investigation into the meaning of life, some associated with modern science, others with Renaissance alchemy and occult. Such concerns reflect Shelley's interest in the radical political culture of her time and the recent past. (Ellis, 141)

For Mary Shelley the new system is not a scientific utopia, but rather a hybrid contraption, artificial and greedy. Despite the alchemical and necromantic origins, the Monster is a child of the eighteenth century capitalist drive towards positivism and utility. The irony is that he has been created specifically and exclusively for a paradigm which cannot bear him, but rather drives him into psychosis.

The modern versions of evil characters like Manfred in *Otranto*; Montoni, Orsini, Verezzi, and Cavigni in *Udolpho*; Melmoth and Ambrosio in *Melmoth* and *The Monk*; and the Monster in *Frankenstein* can be found in characters in *Batman, Spider-Man, and Superman*. When compared with the villains of early gothic works, the contemporary villains are more aggressive, less human (and humane), and less pathetic; they are either the products of science or use science to establish their own dominions. Despite their brutality, still they gain our sympathy. The duality in their personalities makes these characters one of us. Though defamiliarized for the eyes of the audience

124

through colorful costumes, still they are familiar. They are the suppressed archetypes of savagery, the avatars of the modern world, and the doubles of the seemingly humane mass man of the capitalist order.

The widespread crime and the ongoing conflicts and terrorism all over the world have already fired the anxieties and creative energies of both the writers and critics of the Gothic. Frustrated by the chaos the capitalist system has created, the audiences take refuge in the gothic world. Emerging at times of great social changes, the Gothic, then, is a genre that deals with the anxieties of the common man concerning his present, deteriorating paradigm. It is a response that man can give to the hostile, threatening world. Making man face up the widespread crime in the capitalist order within an autopia and showing him that the future world will be a capitalist dystopia, the eighteenth century gothic and the modern graphic novels function on two different levels. First, they have helped eliminate the reaction against the system by making people passively take refuge in a fantasy world. Second, they reveal the positivist and materialist drives in human nature, and indicate the necessity of change or revolution. The pathetic evil figures and the victim-heroes of the graphic novels indicate the social corruption in the modern age. Symbols of their nation, they, in fact, demonstrate the greedy policies of American imperialism, and the inner turmoil within the capitalist system. As products of decaying paradigms and using "grotesque" motifs within the accepted literary traditions, these works can be classified as autopian, and within the autopia created by these novels, the audiences have the chance to either take refuge and forget about the mundane world, or accept the characters in these works as allegorical representations of the chaotic state mankind is in. Like heroes and villains, being all victims of the capitalist order, the audiences take their share from the general corruption, isolation, and loneliness.

WORKS CITED

Becker, Carl. *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1970.

Bhalla, Alok. *The Cartographers of Hell*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1991.

Brewer, Derek. *English Gothic Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1994.

Ellis, Markman. *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1970.

Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Lewis, Matthew. *The Monk*. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.

Punter, David and Byron, Glennis. *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Schock, Peter A. *Romantic Satanism*. New York: Macmillan, 2003.

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.