I. Murdoch appears to be suggesting that what we now recognize as “affective individualism” or modern and secularized subjectivity originated during a period that idealized isolated individuals alone with their feelings, seeking for the meaning of life by understanding the moral significance of their actions and emotions. Certainly we can see the moral evolution and psychic development of this individual in the canonical gothic novels (i.e., in the trajectories of Caleb Williams or Victor Frankenstein). But in many ways, the short gothic tales, the “rationalistic allegories and moral tales” of which Murdoch speaks, represent examples of what Charles Taylor has called cultural technologies or textual practices that serve to instantiate the agenda of ambivalent secularization. For instance, it is significant that the Minerva Press, the most successful pur-
veyor of gothic novels in Britain and with their fingers firmly pressed to the pulse of their lower- and middle-class reading public, also promoted a variety of socially and politically conservative values in its publications. At the same time it also published a number of anti-Catholic pamphlets, like the one by Thomas Scantlebury, *The Rights of Protestants Asserted* in 1798, and its full title provides us with a glimpse of the continuing pamphlet warfare over denominational differences: “Clerical incroachment detected. In allusion to several recent publications, in defence of an exclusive priesthood, establishments, and tithes, by Daubeny, Church, and others. But more particularly in reply to a pamphlet lately published by George Markham, Vicar of Carlton, entitled, *More truth for the seekers.*” On one hand, the gothic was invested in an immanent Protestant, rationalistic, and Enlightenment agenda, while on the other hand, it was riddled with ghosts, superstitions, and reanimations of the world of anima. This bifurcated subjectivity is, as we have come to see, at the heart of ambivalent secularization, and in the chapbooks we can also examine how class came to play a crucial role in defining the transformations of the gothic uncanny.

Scholars most frequently claim that the short gothic tale or chapbook grew out of the earlier tradition of cheap broadside (because printed on one side of the paper) ballads or street literature, and certainly one can see in the shorter eight-page chapbooks the residue of this direct oral to written tradition. Gary Kelly has recently observed that this early street literature is characterized by its “emphasis on destiny, chance, fortune and levelling forces such as death, express[ing] the centuries-old experience of common people . . . with little or no control over the conditions of their lives. . . . For these people, life was a lottery” (2002, II:x). According to Kelly, the fact that the lower classes were the target audience of these early productions is also obvious from their very heavy use of narrative repetition, their emphasis on incident and adventure, and their episodic and anecdotal structures. The other major difference between lower- and middle-class reading materials is the absence in the lower-class works of any extended depictions of subjectivity or emotions in the protagonists (II:X, xv). One example of this lower-class ideology at work can be found in Isabella Lewis’s *Terrific Tales* (1804), a series of short vignettes that purport to be true, although the contents are fantastical and reveal an interesting mix of residual supernaturalism combined with rationalizing Christian moral exemplum. For instance, one tale concerns an aristocrat, “of very inordinate passions,” who is kidnapped by a spirit who arrived on horseback. Obviously a prose revision and redaction of the Germanic ballad “Lenora,” the homily at the conclusion remarks on his abduction as “a punishment for his excessive passions” (7). What is most interesting about these tales, besides their repetitive use of specters, devils,
ghosts in chains, warnings from Purgatory, and clouds of sulphur, is their persistent assurance that the afterworld and the realm of the transcendent exists. In one tale, a dead man appears to his friend to exclaim, “Michael, Michael! Nothing is more true than what has been said of the other world” (61), and such a message is the major reason for the popularity of these works. The supernatural was not supposed to be explained away, but instead confirmed as real. Although the elite and the intelligentsia might have been willing to accept the stark lessons of materialism and the finality of death, the lower class was not able to do so, and the gothic chapbook reveals the persistence and continuing power of the supernatural in the social imaginary.

In 1800 a three-volume gothic novel could cost as much as two weeks’ wages for a laborer, and we know that, for the most part, the library fees at a circulating library also would have been out of their reach. The longer (thirty-six- and seventy-two-page) prose chapbooks cost from sixpence to a shilling, or the price of a meal or a cheap theater seat (Kelly 2008, 218), and they seem to have had a written rather than a purely oral origin. The gothic chapbooks can best be understood in two ways: first, as adaptations of the extremely popular European fairy tale, and secondly, as redactions of the longer gothic novels and dramas. Circulating widely between 1750 and 1820, these tales are European culture’s first “best-sellers.” In fact, G. Ross Roy claims that a conservative estimate of the sale of Scottish chapbooks during this period runs to over two hundred thousand a year, a huge number given the fact that they were purchased largely by members of the working class. Originally running as twenty-four pages of single sheet, duodecimo, these truncated tales were frequently bound in coarse blue paper and sometimes illustrated with rough woodcuts and printed in a rude and unfinished style of typography (50–52).

Gothic bluebooks and chapbooks have been something of the stepchild of gothic scholarship, most frequently ignored because of their derivative nature, as well as their lack of artistic sophistication, depth, or significance.¹ Montague Summers claims that they were the reading material of “school-boys, prentices, servant-girls, by the whole of that vast population which longed to be in the fashion, to steep themselves in the Gothic Romance.” They are, in fact, commonly referred to as “the remainder trade” or “the trade Gothic” (84–85). More recently, William St. Clair has claimed that, in fact, the chapbooks were read by “adults in the country areas, and young people in both the town and the country. It would be a mistake, therefore, to regard the ancient popular print as confined to those whose education fitted them for nothing longer or textually more difficult. Many readers, whether adults or children, lived at the boundary between the reading and
the non-reading nations. They were the marginal reading constituency whose numbers fell when prices rose and rose when prices fell” (343–44). Whatever the exact class of their readership, gothic bluebooks and eventually the gothic short tale’s importance can be appreciated only by understanding that they carried the agenda of ambivalent secularization within their flimsy covers. It is not for nothing that Percy and Mary Shelley, along with Byron, Claire Clairmont, and John Polidori, were reading aloud from a collection of German tales of terror the night before Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* (1818) and Polidori penned *The Vampyre* (1819). These German short stories began their literary life as *Das Gespensterbuch* (*The Ghost Book*), a five-volume collection of tales by Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun that were first translated into French by J. B. B. Eyriès as *Fantasmagoriana; ou Recueil d’Histoires d’Apparitions, de Spectres* (1812), and then as *Tales of the Dead* (1813), when they were translated into English by Sarah Utterson. During the summer of 1816 the Diodati circle were very fashionably reading from the French collection.

The earlier “lottery mentality” that was operative in the lower-class chapbooks was eventually replaced during the late eighteenth century by what Kelly calls a dominant “investment mentality” that we can see evidenced in the emerging middle-class chapbooks. This “investment mentality” was characterized by the Protestant ideologies of self-improvement, self-advancement, modernization, and self-discipline, or “the middle-class discourse of merit” (II: x, xxiii). Increasingly hostile to lower-class street literature which it saw as politically subversive and at the same time spiritually reactionary, the middle class effectively displaced street literature by co-opting it. Hence Hannah More published her *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–98) for the lower classes, actually imitating cheap broadside and ballad chapbooks and suffusing them not with the “lottery” but with the “investment” mentality that she and her cohorts were attempting to promulgate: a disdain for immediate gratification, a focus on the disastrous consequences of moral relativism, and a stress on the accumulation of “solid and useful” knowledge for middle-class life. This strategy is identical to the one that John Guillory has identified as “covert pastoralism” (124) and claimed is operating in Wordsworth’s *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*. Sensing that they are being marginalized by a bourgeois reading public that has begun to exert power in the literary marketplace, Wordsworth and More create a binary of lower class and aristocrat and actually begin to present themselves as aristocrats in peasant dress.

But if there was a middle-class attempt to co-opt the chapbooks, there was also a concerted effort to condemn their popularity altogether. For
instance, Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) specifically condemned the “devotees of the circulating library” for indulging in a sort of beggarly day-dreaming during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole *material* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms of one man’s delirium, so as to people the barrenness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. (III: 36; emphasis in original)

There is a certain amount of fear as well as class resentment expressed here about an unregulated (nonelitist) press pandering to what Wordsworth had called the “fickle tastes, and fickle appetites” of the lower-class reading public (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, 1800).

The gothic chapbook tradition is split, then, between lower- and middle-class agendas, both of which were presenting alternative versions of the secularized uncanny to their readers. One group of tales—the middle-class variety—made claims for the powers of reason, rationality, and secularized education, while, ambivalently, it kept alive the vestiges of a belief in a mythic and sacred past of divine beings. As Kelly notes, the representation of subjectivity is much more developed in these works, but in a writer like John Aikin, a Protestant Dissenter and author of “Sir Bertrand: A Fragment” (1773), a short gothic tale that was written to demonstrate the aesthetic principles put forward in his sister Anna Barbauld’s essay “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror” (1773), this subjectivity is severely “disciplined” so that the new bourgeois citizens are those who control their emotions in even the most perilous of situations (xix). The other group of tales—the lower-class variety—persisted in promulgating a “lottery” view of life, with fate, magic, or luck as the ultimate and inscrutable arbiters in all matters and with human beings still presented as “porous selves” or pawns in the hands of tyrannical forces they could not fully understand. For Kelly, the subjectivity that occasionally appears in lower-class chapbooks is like the simulation of richer fabrics on cheap printed cottons of the period, [it] is a form of symbolic consumption rather than ideological and cultural instruction for the text’s readers. It is as if the readers of the street Gothics were aware that there was a certain model of subjectivity prized in middle-class and upper middle-class culture, but that subjectivity in itself was of
little interest, or perhaps supposed to be of little use or value, for these readers. (II:xxiii)

As I noted above, it is important to recognize that the longer chapbooks and bluebooks appear to be indebted to the earlier fairy tales as they evolved first in Italy and then in France during the 1690s. But it is also significant to recall that for the Enlightenment mentality, as Locke demonstrated, the passing on of superstitious beliefs was invariably linked to a scene in which fairy tales were read to children (Essay II:33, 10). *Le conte de fée* originated in France as a tale that privileged the power of women, the “fairies,” in order to effect what Jack Zipes has called “a secular mysterious power of compassion that could not be explained.” According to Zipes, the creative powers of the fairies should actually be understood as originating in the lost witches who were burned by the Church in an effort to eradicate religious heresy and nonconformity with the Church’s male hierarchy (1991, xx). By resurrecting the specter of female creativity and power, the fairy tale effectively kept “pagan” notions alive in the public domain so that, as Zipes notes, “there was something subversive about the institutionalization of the fairy tale in France during the 1690s, for it enabled writers to create a dialogue about norms, manners, and power that evaded court censorship and freed the fantasy of the writers and readers, while at the same time paying tribute to the French code of *civilité* and the majesty of the aristocracy” (1991, xx).

In addition to developing an early canon of fairy tales that included “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Bluebeard,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and other familiar tales, the French tradition was enriched first by Antoine Galland’s translations of the Arabic tales *The Thousand and One Nights*, published in twelve volumes between 1704–17 in France (trans. English 1706; German 1712) and then by François Petis de la Croix (1620–75), who translated tales of the Sultana of Persia into French as *Contes Turcs* (1707). *The Arabian Nights* was, of course, favorite childhood reading for Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Percy Shelley, and later De Quincey and the Brontës. Based on both written documents and oral traditions that originated in the fourteenth century, these tales began what we now recognize as the “orientalizing” tendencies in the gothic; that is, its use of a foreign and exotic setting to safely distance the actions and characters, as well as the social and political critiques from their obvious analogues in Europe. Hence a tyrannical and polygamous Caliph could be condemned as a despot rather than taking the risk of blatantly or dangerously criticizing the policies or adulteries of Louis XIV. The orientalist ideology, as we know from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), was complicit in
the imperialistic agenda of Europe, but it also functioned as a secularizing strategy in its implicit presentation of Christianity as just another man-made religion like Hinduism or Islam. Used by progressive writers like Thomas Paine in England, Benjamin Franklin in America, and rationalists like Wieland in Germany or Voltaire in France, orientalism in a literary text worked to normalize the practitioners of a supposedly “pagan” religion, thereby presenting all religions as equally and essentially systems of prejudice and superstition. By the time Charles Mayer published his forty-one-volume Cabinet des Féées (1785–89), a collection of virtually every tale published in France during the past one hundred years, these stories were an amalgam of oral traditions originating in Italy, French aristocratic legends, and orientalist pastiches (see Bottigheimer).

In many ways the gothic bluebook tradition in England is an outgrowth of the earlier situation in France. Shortly after the publication of the first fairy and oriental tales in France, these French tales were reprinted in a series of cheap chapbooks called the Bibliothèque bleue and sold by peddlers called colporteurs (“chapmen” in Britain) to members of the lower classes throughout France and central Europe. As Zipes notes, the contents of the “bluebooks” were abridgments of the original tales; the language was simplified; and there were multiple versions of the tales designed specifically for different audiences: children as well as adult nonliterates who would have had the tales read aloud to them (1991, xxi). Similarly, German folk literature was also circulated in cheap, mass-produced little books that Goethe referred to as “schätzbare Überreste der Mittelzeit” or cherished remains from the Middle Ages (Buch, 38; also see Ward; Astbury). It is, of course, a short step from the Bibliothèque bleue to the gothic bluebooks that first showed up in England during the mid- to late eighteenth century and contained a number of abridged and vastly simplified gothic novels intended for the newly literate or, in fact, for reading aloud to a non-literate adult audience. It is also significant that by 1794 the French fairy tales of Countess D’Aulnoy were translated and published by the Minerva Press as The Pleasing Companion: A Collection of Fairy Tales calculated to improve the heart; the whole forming a system of moral precepts and examples for the conduct of youth through life. The title alone makes the ideological agenda explicit: the reading of fairy tales was viewed as a crucial component of the civilizing process that sought to inculcate bourgeois moral values into the often unruly lower classes.

It is also important to note that there was a strong fairy tale tradition in Germany, obviously derived from the French models that it had quickly imported. Johann Karl August Musäus (1735–87), a middle-class writer, published his collections of rude folktales, Die Volksmärchen der
Deutschen, between 1782–87 (translated into English in 1791 by Thomas Beddoes, father of the gothic dramatist Thomas Lovell Beddoes). Perhaps the tale with the most longevity within that collection was Die Entführung (The Abduction), the source for Matthew Lewis's legend of the bleeding nun. Adapted from earlier French and Germanic works, these tales also presented a number of garish and bloody scenes adapted from the chivalric tales of the medieval period. They relied heavily on German folklore and yet were clearly intended as didactic and moralistic fare for an educated bourgeois audience. Similarly, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) translated a selection of French fairy tales into German and published them in his Dschinnistan (1786–89), which in turn was translated and published in England in 1796. Famous for containing the source material that Mozart and his librettist Emmanuel Schikaneder adapted for Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute, 1791), Dschinnistan presents a number of tales that mock religious superstitions and reveal transcendent, anti-modern beliefs to be dangerously reactionary in a newly secular society. For instance, his “The Philosopher’s Stone” concerns the king of Cornwall, who falls prey to a charlatan (again, reminiscent of Count Cagliostro, the historical source for Schiller’s Ghost-Seer) who claims that he can create a philosopher’s stone if he is given all of the wealth in the kingdom. After much hocus pocus and rites in “the name of Hermes Trismegistus,” the charlatan disappears with said wealth, and the king is transformed into a donkey so that he will be forced to learn yet more hard lessons about greed and wise judgments before he can return to human form, not as a king but as a simple servant. Although Mozart presents the Temple of Isis and the worship of Osiris as serious matters in The Magic Flute, the same cannot be said for Wieland. The use of the cult of Hermes Trismegistus in this tale as well as others in the Dschinnistan can be seen as not simply a mockery of the Masonic rituals that were so popular during the period, but also as a not so veiled attack on the absurdities of traditional Catholic rituals and superstitions (“The Philosopher’s Stone,” trans. Zipes 1991, 233–57).

Considered to be one of the most accessible writers of German fairy tales, several of Wieland’s works were translated into English by at least two men who had strong ties to the gothic revival (Stockley, 100). The first, William Taylor of Norwich, translated some of Wieland’s works, including the satiric tale “KoxKox and Kikequetzel,” published in Taylor’s anonymously issued three-volume anthology Tales of Yore (1810). The second English translator of Wieland’s fairy tales was Robert Huish, who published Select Fairy Tales from the German of Wieland in two volumes (1796). Identified on the title page as “the Translator of the Sorcerer and the Black Valley of Weber,” Huish clearly positioned his translated collection of fairy tales
within the pulp gothic market, and in particular, the German-inflected, anti-Catholic gothics that were so popular during the 1790s. Horace Walpole’s *Hieroglyphic Tales* (privately printed in 1785 in only six copies, but reprinted in his *Works*, 1798) was a fairy-tale anthology that collected Arabian, Celtic, and Oriental tales. Most “British” fairy tales, however, were actually French or German translations, with versions of Charles Perrault’s tales appearing as early as 1729 and again in 1750, while an English translation of the tales of Mme d’Aulnoy was published as early as 1707.

Resolving his fairy tales with reasonable conclusions, or what we might recognize as the explained supernatural, Wieland blended Shakespearean plots, Milton, and orientalist themes and characters in a number of his works. In fact, Wieland was one of the earliest translators of Shakespeare’s works, which he made accessible to German audiences in prose translations, published between 1762 and 1766. But it has long been recognized that all but one of Wieland’s fairy tales (“The Philosopher’s Stone”) were adaptations from the earlier French fairy-tale collection, *Cabinet des Fées*, which had been translated into German and published between 1785–89 (see Farese). Certainly Wieland was well known and highly regarded by the major British romantic writers, as his most famous works were the novel *Agathon* (1766; read and admired by Mary Shelley) and the poem *Oberon* (1780; read by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Keats, and adapted in 1826 as an opera by Carl Maria von Weber and J. R. Planché).

We do know that lending libraries developed in Germany around the same time that they did in England and that they helped to popularize the gothic novel and tale with the upper class as well as the growing middle class there (Hall, 37). We also know that fairy tales continued to be read aloud in late eighteenth-century German households, and, although we do not know the exact psychology of the inhabitants in these homes, we can make some assumptions about the continued prevalence of superstitions in their everyday lives. From the popularity of the fairy tales it seems clear that at least a large proportion of the population appears to have continued to think that “demons, spirits, sprites and a host of evil-minded forces [were] believed to influence one’s existence . . . while the fairy tale reassured [its audience] that such forces can be overcome” (Buch, 45). Indeed, belief in the supernatural and fairies was so widespread in Germany at this time that the German author G. A. Keyser published a series of tales between 1785 and 1792 that sought to denounce such superstitions as dangerous (Hall, 52).

After the publication of the Grimm brothers’ collection, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*, 1812–15), the short tale was further developed by a number of German gothic writers, including most
famously E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) and Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853). Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” and “The Mines at Falun,” as well as Tieck’s “The Blonde Eckert” and “The Runenberg” (English translations by Thomas Carlyle in 1827) present the German gothic tale in its purest form. As Zipes has noted, the hero in each tale goes insane and then dies, while “the evil forces assume a social hue, for the witches and villains no longer are allegorical representations of evil in the Christian tradition but are symbolically associated with the philistine bourgeois society or the decadent aristocracy.” These Kunstmärchen (art tales) were not intended to amuse in any simple sense, but were in fact serious philosophical attempts by these writers to conduct discussions with their culture about the nature of art, love, education, and bodily versus spiritual existence (1991, xxiii). And so in addition to presenting what we could characterize as a progressive ideology, these stories, as well as their sources in the fairy tales, explore the realm of the transcendent, the darker side of the human mind and experience, and suggest yet another manifestation of the culture’s fascination with the gothic, the dream as nightmare, and the persistence and power of the folk-blood spirit, the “old ways.”

Finally, the “old ways” are precisely what may be at stake in the origins and dissemination of fairy tales, and by extension, the gothic tale. As Mircea Eliade has noted, myths are the tales that a culture tells itself in order to keep alive the life stories of exemplary supernatural beings. Although he goes to pains to deny the obvious, namely that fairy and folk tales are secularized or desacralized versions of myths, it is obvious that his description of myth points in that direction:

> Though in the West the tale has long since become a literature of diversion (for children and peasants) or of escape (for city dwellers), it still presents the structure of an infinitely serious and responsible adventure, for in the last analysis it is reducible to an initiatory scenario: again and again we find initiatory ordeals (battles with the monster, apparently insurmountable obstacles, riddles to be solved, impossible tasks, etc.), the descent to Hades or the ascent to Heaven (or—what amounts to the same thing—death and resurrection), marrying the princess. (196–97)

Scholars of fairy tales have long puzzled over the reasons why myths transmuted into folk and fairy tales, and Eliade himself suggests that it may have occurred when the traditional rites and cult practices were no longer believed in so that former practitioners were free to expose the formerly secret rites to public view. For Eliade, “the man of modern societies still benefits from the imaginary initiation supplied by tales. That being so, one
may wonder if the fairy tale did not very early become an ‘easy doublet’ for the initiation myth and rites, if it did not have the role of recreating the ‘initiatory ordeals’ on the plane of imagination and dream” (201–2).

In a very similar manner, gothic tales also can be understood as textual practices that present abbreviated and secularized versions of the original “initiatory” story of the genre (the recovery of aristocratic property and the legitimating of the rightful heir in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*) so that the later tales seem only to dimly remember or abruptly and crudely trace in a large scrawling hand a version of the same story. Clearly, this is a culture that had a need to continue to present narratives about the challenges faced by and conduct required of exemplary beings (“aristocrats”) in extraordinarily challenging situations (the recovery of their estates or sacred places), but increasingly those “exemplary beings” became more and more “human” (middle class and subject to the immanent decay of the mortal human body) rather than “divine.” What we see here is the replacement of the “lottery” worldview of the earlier works by the later middle-class “investment” mentality. In these earlier works we can see that the lower classes felt that they inhabited a world where they were “porous selves” buffeted about by inscrutable gods and giants (read: aristocrats), while in the later chapbooks the middle-class author presents a manageable society that can be mastered by the skillful individual who has practiced those virtues demanded by the bourgeoisie: control of the emotions, reason, order, good judgment, and fidelity to one’s own inviolable conscience. “Religion” has moved here from “outside” of the individual to “inside” so that the line between familiar and strange, canny and uncanny, is drawn very clearly. It became the goal of the middle-class chapbooks to make the uncanny (that which is “strange” or foreign within us) modern, manageable, and secularized, as something that existed outside of us and was subject therefore to our own control.

**II.**

Take—An old castle, half of it ruinous.  
A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.  
Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.  
An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.  
Assassins and desperadoes, such as suffices.  
Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.  
Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering places, before going to bed.

—*The Spirit of the Public Journals* I (1798), 224–25
Clearly delimited as a genre that flourished between 1770 and 1820, the gothic chapbook has been discussed in largely accusatory tones by earlier critics who blame it for the eventual decline of the canonical gothic novel’s status and popularity. David Punter, for instance, observes that popular writers in the genre appear to have become increasingly able to turn out a formulaic product in a matter of weeks, and the eventual decline in Gothic’s popularity was clearly at least partially to do with a flooding of the market, and also with the way in which the hold of the early Gothic masters tended to stultify originality. (1996, 114)

As there are as many one thousand chapbooks currently extant in Britain alone,\(^5\) it is virtually impossible to provide anything other than a snapshot or freeze-frame portrait of the genre. I have chosen to look closely at a handful of representative types in order to suggest the tremendous range to be found in this mode of writing. Certainly by the time Edgar Allan Poe was writing his short tales of terror (e.g., “The Tell-Tale Heart” in 1843), he had mastered the formulae necessary to produce a taut and macabre study in gothic psychology and action. Any claim that the gothic tale was moribund by this date is patently false given the artistry that Poe brought to the genre, not to mention that developed by Maupassant in France or Hoffmann in Germany.\(^6\) Between Sarah Wilkinson’s chapbook “The Subterranean Passage: or Gothic Cell” (1803) and Poe, however, there is a considerable artistic gulf, and it is my intention to try to explain how that gap was bridged through an examination of the evolution and eventual refinement of the subjectivities presented in the gothic tale.

One cannot discuss the gothic chapbook phenomenon without also briefly addressing the development of the circulating library as a “front” so to speak for its own publishing house, William Lane’s Minerva Press being the most famous example. Lane’s Circulating Library opened in 1770 in London and had ten thousand items in circulation by 1794. We know that circulating libraries were widespread and viewed with more than a little class suspicion by 1775, because Sir Anthony Absolute in Richard Sheridan’s comedy The Rivals says to Mrs. Malaprop: “Madam, a circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year!—And depend on it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last” (1:2). This interesting metaphor suggests that the chapbooks may be the “leaves,” but the “fruit” is something much more valuable: the possession of a veneer of culture, class, and cultivation that cheap access to literacy provides. But just as circulating libraries were viewed with suspicion by the upper classes
for the easy access they provided to gaining a modicum of culture, so were they seen as important for the role they played as moral guardians to the working class. In the how-to pamphlet *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered* (1797), circulating libraries were specifically encouraged to avoid stocking too many chapbooks and pamphlets, but to have 79 percent of their stock in fiction. However, library proprietors were also urged to consider the following advice: “Reading and instruction should be universal—the humbler walks of life require much culture; for this purpose I would recommend to their perusal, books of authenticity, in preference to those of entertainment only.” From this advice we can infer that the preferable form of fiction was of the morally didactic variety (“the novel”) rather than of the “romance” (or gothic) type. The very existence of these libraries, though, was seen as playing a disruptive role in the distribution of cultural materials that were viewed by the upper classes as encouraging the working classes in their misguided and even dangerous social aspirations.

As literacy rates increased among the lower classes, the demand for reading materials for them proportionally increased as well. It is difficult to know exactly what proportion of the working class purchased their own chapbooks or opted instead to obtain them through a circulating library as either a subscriber or a day-borrower (the latter option would have been the much more economical route to borrowing). Either way, through the act of reading the chapbooks, the lower classes were participating in the ideological and intellectual struggles of their culture. If they could not afford to attend the opera or theater productions in even the “illegitimate” theaters of London, they could read highly condensed redactions and much simplified abridged versions of Walpole, Reeve, Radcliffe, or Lewis’s long novels. Doing so allowed the working classes, they thought, to have the same reading experience that the elite experienced and therefore the same access to and ownership of their culture’s luxury items. By the early to mid-nineteenth century, however, the tales were being collected into longer anthologies that frequently contained up to five previously published stories, while the popular Ladies’ periodicals began to reprint them in a bid to shore up their subscriptions (hence the *Lady’s Pocket Magazine* reprints a two-volume collection of 136 previously published gothic tales as *Legends of Terror!* [1826; 1830]).

I have selected one representative collection of anonymously produced gothic stories as an example of a mixed lower- and middle-class manifestation of the genre, *Tales of Wonder* (1801), although any number of collections could have been selected as representative. Its title page reveals in a stark visual manner why I have claimed that there are clear fairy tale origins for a number of these tales (see fig. 7):
TALES of WONDER

CONTAINING

The Castle of Enchantment.
The Mysterious Deception.
The Robbers Daughter.
The Phantom of the Crotto.
The Magic-Legacy &c

Printed for Ann Lemoine, White Rose C. Coleman st.
and
Sold by A. Hurst, Paternoster-row.
Price Six Pence.

FIGURE 7: Title page from Anon., Tales of Wonder (London: 1801).
Courtesy of the Huntington Library
The title story, “The Castle of Enchantment, or The Mysterious Deception” is a virtual plagiarism of Wieland’s fairy tale “The Druid,” published a few years earlier in Select Fairy Tales (above) and which Wieland himself plagiarized from Voyages de Zulma dans le Pais des Fées (vol. 16 of Cabinet des Fées). This anonymously published version of the tale changes the names and also uses a flashback device to enable the Egyptian Osmondy, a student of “Eleusinian and other mysteries” (6), to tell his life story to Claudio, a traveling stranger who has come upon his decayed gothic tower in France. The tale centers on his quest to find the real-life analogue to a full-sized statue of a “virgin” kept by his father Lasiris in a “magic cabinet.” As any reader of the longer gothic novels will recognize, the virgin’s description strongly recalls Antonia’s famous bath scene in The Monk: “a virgin of most divine beauty, who was sitting on a couch and playing with a dove, that seemed to nestle in her bosom. She was dressed in a long robe, which hung from her right shoulder, and was bound beneath her half-revealed bosom with a golden zone” (6). During the festival of Isis, Osmondy becomes convinced that he sees a real-life version of this statue marching in a procession of virgins and is increasingly certain that the statue is based on an actual woman: “My father, I am convinced that there is something extraordinary in this statue. Either it is a real virgin reduced to this state by magic or, if it be an inanimate mass, there exists somewhere the original of this beautiful form” (9).

The recourse to orientalizing, platonic, Egyptian, and Greek traditions is historically revealing, as the Rosetta Stone had been discovered in 1799 by Napoleon’s armies and had come into British possession in 1801, the year that this collection was published. There had been throughout Europe for at least a decade an intense antiquarian interest in the Eleusinian Mysteries (the worship of Demeter and the Magna Mater) and, in fact, in all things Eastern, Egyptian, and Oriental. The cult of Isis had dominated the first and second centuries CE, and its popularity was thought to have been derived from the secret rituals practiced by its adherents in contrast to the public rites demanded by the earlier Osirian religion. As we saw in Wieland’s “Philosopher’s Stone,” there is frequently in these works the presentation of “lost” religions as forms of superstition that rational and civilized Europeans should reject. For Wieland, the ostensible target was the Mysteries of Hermes, a cult popular in the Middle Ages and one that promised secret knowledge of alchemical principles that would accompany the power to transform base metals into gold. Wieland is clearly mocking the worship of Hermes, but the same attitude does not appear in “The Castle of Enchantment.” The discussion of the power of Isis in this work is not ridiculed; rather, its serious presentation suggests the residual
FIGURE 8: Frontispiece to *The Tales of Wonder* (London, 1801).
Courtesy of the Huntington Library
power of myth in these chapbooks. The confused similarity between the real and its facsimile, the woman and the statue of the woman, also reveals how thoroughly these tales sought to secularize the uncanny through the device of doubling. The uncanny fully reveals itself when Claudio learns that the woman that Osmondy has been pursuing is, in fact, a statue of his own sister Matilda that his father had sent to his friend Lasiris, Osmondy's father, in Egypt. At the same time Osmondy learns that Claudio has fallen in love with his sister Naomi, whom he had seen in the forest and mistaken for the divine goddess Diana (19). This encounter between Naomi (as the supposedly divine goddess) and Claudio serves as the highly stylized and romantic frontispiece to the volume (see fig. 8).

The doubling of brother/sister pairs and the (supposedly) rational explanation provided at the end of the tale suggest a persistent pattern in the gothic imaginary: a recourse to the uncanniness of doubling, the use of a mechanical doll or virginal statue as a love object, but resolved not in tragedy (as in Hoffmann's “The Sandman”), but in comedy and the commonsense explanation of mistaken identities. What is most interesting in this story is how closely it mirrors the need to keep alive the belief that there are divinities on earth (the residual mythic component of the genre, discussed above). This is a culture where the “virgin/whore” dichotomy is just below the surface, as both male heroes profess a general contempt for all women except the virgin or divinity that each has chosen to pursue obsessively. It is indeed a short step from this position to the Victorian “Angel in the House” ideology that would become so prevalent by 1850.

And in Claudio's pursuit of the goddess Diana in the forest we can certainly hear faint (albeit crude) traces of what would become Keats's *Endymion* (1816).

The second story in the collection, “The Robbers Daughter; or The Phantom of the Grotto,” reads like an amalgam of “Cinderella,” “Donkey-Skin,” and “Sleeping Beauty.” Set in the Black Forest of Germany on the “free-booter’s hold” of a knight named Wilibald, we are initially introduced to his wife Matilda and their three daughters (20–21). Their “hold” also happens to possess an enchanted fountain presided over by a “white nymph” who appears to the wife in order to claim “god-mother” status to the newest daughter, also named Matilda, on whom she bestows a magical “musk-ball” (22). The mother soon dies and is replaced by a selfish stepmother and a new set of children, so that the abused daughter Matilda seeks out her nymph-godmother who tells her that the magical musk-ball will grant her three wishes. Matilda is forced to use her first wish when her father is killed and her home is assaulted by neighboring ruffians. Rather
than save her family, she saves herself and passes invisibly out of the house. She next uses her musk-ball to wish for a beautiful gown in order to attend a great banquet given by the woman-hating Count Conrad, who promptly falls in love with her: “I pledge my knightly honour, and engage my soul's salvation to boot, were you the meanest man's daughter, and but a pure and undefiled virgin, I will receive you for my wedded wife” (29). The usual complications must occur before Conrad is reunited with Matilda in the guise of a “dark gypsy” who insists that he marry her as she is. When he consents, she magically returns to her beautiful form and they have two sons who both die mysteriously as infants. Only after returning to the magic fountain and using her last wish does Matilda learn that her mother-in-law has sought to kill her sons, who have been safely preserved by the nymph of the fountain: “[T]he marriage of her son proved a dagger to the heart of that proud woman, who imagined he had stained the honour of his house by taking a kitchen-wench to his bed” (36). Again, although we are in the realm of “fairy,” we are also in the domain of reasonable solutions to apparent mysteries (class pride is the motive behind the mysterious “deaths” of Matilda’s sons). Whereas the earlier tale had foregrounded the paradoxical nature of women as its theme (are they human or divine?), this tale focuses on class issues and validates the aspirations of virginal but lower-class women who marry above their class status, in fact, suggesting that they are innately superior to aristocratic women.

The third tale in the volume, “The Magic Legacy,” concerns King Alindor who, on his deathbed, tells his son about a treasure that is buried in front of their palace: “an empty leather purse, a horn of metal, a girdle of coarse hair, and a roll of parchment” (38). The parchment informs Prince Alindor that the purse will supply him all the gold he needs, the horn will deliver all the soldiers he can use, and the girdle will allow him to travel instantly between distant places. His wealth quickly attracts the attention of the beautiful Zenomia, who arrives with her parents and a scheme to fleece him of said wealth. Very similar to Wieland’s “Philosopher's Stone,” this tale uses familiar fairy-tale and orientalist elements to instruct its readers on the values of honesty and the need to be wary of the beauty and treacherous seductions of women.

The fourth and final short tale in the collection, “The Enchanted Knight; or, Phebe,” concerns a curse that has been placed on Oron, knight of the castle, by the “authority of daemons”: “A young virgin alone can vanquish the daemons, and extinguish the enchanted flame of the Dead or Glorious Hand; for a good and beauteous virgin is of more power than a host of spirits” (48). Phebe is led by an “apparition” holding up “the remains of its
left-arm” to a “gothic castle, surrounded by a moat” (49). Amid the sound of “clinking chains” and “painful and dismal groans,” Phebe discovers the couch of Oron, where “over him hung suspended in the air the Glorious Hand; that is to say, a dead man’s hand prepared by Necromancy, dipt in magical oil, and each finger lighted up” (50). By breathing on the hand, Phebe “purifies the air” and the curse is broken; she marries Oron and becomes “the lady of the castle.” The volume concludes with the moral addenda: “perserverance in goodness must at last conduct to happiness” (50). One senses in this truncated tale less a plot or characters than an assemblage of stock gothic tropes: the castle, the chains, the groans, the “dead man’s hand prepared by Necromancy.” Telegraphing the gothic as the exotic and supernatural has become in these tales a way of conveying in a few quick strokes the larger parameters of the discourse in its most popular form: the mysterious world of fairy and folktale has been condensed to a few simple moral lessons that are applicable to the daily lives of both lower- and middle-class readers.

This particular volume of tales presents some interesting issues for the literary historian, although I would claim that any number of collections would reveal the same emphasis on the evolution of core bourgeois values: the “preservation of goodness” in the face of persecution and the emphasis on female “purity.” Clearly, virginity is fetishized in a blatant manner in all these tales, suggesting (as we saw in Opie’s *Father and Daughter*, chap. 1) that the culture has reified the notion that the stability and indeed the very existence of bourgeois society and “human flourishing” is dependent on a wife’s ability to prove the legitimacy of her children. But even when that legitimacy is certain, as in “The Robber’s Daughter,” yet another impediment emerges, the class-based prejudice that the middle class continues to experience in their attempts to establish themselves as the deserving heirs of fortune. The fairy-tale residue (the “evil” aristocratic mother-in-law) in these tales suggests the persistence of a “lottery” or lower-class mentality that has to be overcome before the protagonists in these works can move into the promised land of an “investment” mentality or control over the vagaries of “fate.” Each of these tales has been examined fairly closely in order to demonstrate that the extended gothic tale did not originate solely in street literature or broadside ballads, but in the fairy tale traditions of France and Germany, and that such an origin suggests that unresolved class and religious issues continued to be a source of conflict and confusion for a reading audience whose allegiances were still very much in flux. Whether lower or middle class, these readers did not yet feel fully invested in the brave new world that the Enlightenment was preparing for its citizens and the tales’ frequent recourse to the continuing power of “ill-fated stars” suggests as much.
III.

It has been the fashion to make terror the order of the day, by confining heroes and heroines in old gloomy castles, full of specters, apparitions, ghosts, and dead men's bones.

—“The Terrorist Novel Writing,” *The Spirit of the Public Journals* I (1798), 223

Literary critics have been slighting if not downright hostile to the popularity and prevalence of the gothic chapbooks during the early nineteenth century in Britain, France, and Germany. We know, for instance, that Percy Shelley, Robert Southey, and Walter Scott read them as children (Potter, 37), and there is a certain appeal in their childlike simplicity, their distillation of plot, and their flattening of character. More interesting, however, is the confused spiritual ideology they promulgated for their reading audience: alternately advocating either a bourgeois, moralistic, and “investment” mentality (the “buffered self”) or a “lottery,” lower-class, and fatalistic attitude toward life (the “porous self”). By examining the works of one particular gothic chapbook author, it is possible to see the sometimes confused struggle between these two attitudes. Along with Isaac Crokenden (1777–1820), Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson (1779–1831) was one of the most prolific writers of gothic chapbooks, the author of some twenty-nine volumes of fiction and more than one hundred short works, at least half of which are gothic. Working at times as a writer (and perhaps editor) for Ann Lemoine’s *Tell-Tale Magazine*, or independently trying to support her mother and (possibly illegitimate) daughter, Amelia, Wilkinson scratched along as a “scribbler” and owner of a circulating library until she was forced on more than one occasion to apply for financial assistance to the Royal Literary Fund, a form of welfare for indigent and worthy authors. This section will examine a few of her best-known works, “Albert of Werdendorff; or The Midnight Embrace” (based on Lewis’s ballad “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imigne”); “The Spectres” (an amalgamation of Reeve’s *Old English Baron*, Radcliffe’s *Sicilian Romance*, and Parsons’s *Castle of Wolfenbach*); “The White Pilgrim” (based on Pixérécourt’s drama *Le Pèlerin Blanc* [1802]); and “The Castle Spectre, An Ancient Baronial Romance” (based on Lewis’s drama), as representatives of the genre. What is most interesting in these works is their confused and at times frantic heteroglossia, their parasitic grasping after every known gothic mode in the attempt to produce yet another new and marketable genre, the gothic tale of terror.9

Wilkinson has received a certain amount of critical attention recently, largely because of attempts to recover “lost” female writers and to place the chapbook tradition itself into its larger cultural and literary context. As
one of the only female “hack” writers that we know by name, Wilkinson’s works and career can be fruitfully examined as a case study of middling to lower-class female authorship during the early nineteenth century. In fact, her very prolific publishing profile recalls Bradford Mudge’s observation that the development of mass culture during this period was linked to the dominance of women as the authors as well as readers of circulating library materials. But this female-inflected mass culture was increasingly figured at least by the Regency and the early-Victorian periods as a diseased, meta-static type of female reproduction because it challenged the hegemonic model of the realistic novel (1992, 92).

Wilkinson’s biography is bleak reading indeed (Potter, 109–15), and it illustrates that the high point of the gothic trade occurred roughly between 1800 and 1815, its decline causing Wilkinson to turn to writing children’s books by 1820 in order to survive. Within five years, however, that market had also shrunk to such an extent that she was again appealing to the Royal Literary Fund: “I need not point out to you that the depression in the Book trade and consequently scantiness of employ in Juvenile works has been great. . . . Forsake me and I perish” (RLF, December 12, 1825; emphasis in original). Casting herself as the gothic heroine of her own life story, Wilkinson was, unfortunately, prescient. But before the very bleak death she suffered in 1831 at St. Margaret’s Workhouse, Westminster, she was determined to produce gothic chapbooks that would appeal to a growing reading audience of literate lower-class females. As she herself observed in the Preface to her last gothic novel, The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey; or, The Mystery of the Blue and Silver Bag: A Romance (1820):

Authors are, proverbially, poor; and therefore under the necessity of racking their wits for a bare subsistence. Perhaps, this is my case, and knowing how eager the fair sex are for something new and romantic, I determined on an attempt to please my fair sisterhood, hoping to profit myself thereby. If the following volumes tend to that effect, I shall be gratified; but if they meet with a rapid sale, and fill my pockets, I shall be elated. (qtd. Potter, 12; emphasis in original)

It would seem that whatever “elation” Wilkinson had as an author of gothic chapbooks was short-lived, while her claim to be producing “new” works is a bit disingenuous. Before her sad end, however, she did write a number of works that disseminated the major gothic tropes to a very wide, lower-class reading public and helped to codify the lower classes’ understanding of “romantic” as “gothic.”

Wilkinson’s “Albert of Werdendorff, or The Midnight Embrace” (1812)
is a prose adaptation of Lewis's gothic ballad “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imagine,” originally published in *The Monk* and then again in his *Tales of Wonder* (1801; Lewis’s volume shares the same title as the anonymously authored collection of tales just discussed), and itself based on Bürger’s “Lenora” (see chapter 5). As Potter has noted in his introduction to the reprinted edition, this bluebook “is extremely sensational, presenting unbridled supernaturalism to shock and horrify the reader; yet on the other hand, it is profoundly didactic and moral, emphasizing the necessity of honor, respect, virtue and the sanctity of the marriage contract” (6). In other words, this text presents an amalgamation of transcendent and immanent concerns, as well as an abbreviated and interesting mix of conflicted class concerns, with a seduced and abandoned lower-class heroine wreaking vengeance on her aristocratic suitor and his “haughty” bride. Wilkinson’s tale is also interesting in that the female subjectivity presented in the work conforms to lower-class prejudices about the nature of women: the lower-class Josephine is “the ill-fated maiden,” selfless, innocent, duped, and fated to be destroyed by her upper-class seducer, while her aristocratic rival Guimilda is persistently described as “proud,” “revengeful,” and capable of “haughty caprice and tyranny” (18, 19, 22, 23). The access that we have into the subjectivities of both women allows us to see the pain that the worthy Josephine suffers when she realizes that she has been betrayed and deserted by her lover of six months, the wealthy Albert.

We can also be privy to the psychic machinations that run through the mind of Guimilda when she learns that she has a discarded rival in the artless and sweet-tempered Josephine. Not content to merely win her husband, Guimilda wants Josephine dead and she demands that Albert do the deed himself or she refuses to allow him into their bridal bed. Agreeing all too readily to Guimilda’s demands, Albert steals away from his own marriage feast to spread a mock wedding banquet for Josephine, poisoning her food and wine (a reversal of the wedding banquet scene that Keats was to use in “The Eve of St. Agnes”). When she naively asks when he will return to her, Albert replies “that he would return at the dark hour of midnight, and again clasp her in his arms” (22). But this thoughtless rejoinder actually functions as a binding oath in this oral-based community, and commits the two to a “midnight embrace” from which Albert will not emerge alive. Recalling J. L. Austin’s theory of speech “performativity,” that is, acts of speech which cannot be considered true or false but which none the less are meaningful, this oath is an example of what Austin calls “promising,” a phrase that performs its own meaning (Miles 2008, 15). One breaks a promissory oath only at one’s own peril in the gothic imaginary. Realizing
his error too late, Albert quickly repents his deed and curses Guimilda as “an agent of infernal malice, sent to plunge his soul into an irremediable abyss of guilt” (25).

A day passes and, interestingly, we are not provided with a description of the nuptial bliss of Albert and Guimilda. This elision of their marital consummation stands in stark contrast to the descriptions we have had of the passionate affair between Albert and Josephine. In some ways, then, the two women are doubles of each other in Albert's bed, or perhaps we are intended to think that the sexual colonization of the lower-class woman occurs because of aristocratic female complicity as well as male action. Thunder and lightening flash above the Werdendorff castle as, at the stroke of midnight the next night, the ghastly Josephine appears in the guise of an avenging spirit: “In a hollow, deep-toned voice, she addressed her perjured lover: ‘Thou. false one! Base assassin of her who thou lured from the flowery paths of virtue; her whom thou had sworn to cherish and protect while life was left thee. Thou hast cut short the thread of my existence: but think not to escape the punishment due to thy crimes. ’Tis midnight’s dark hour: the hour by thyself appointed: delay no, therefore, thy promised embrace’” (26). Reminiscent of the dark ladies in Anne Bannerman’s gothic ballads (see Hoeveler 2000), Josephine takes revenge on her aristocratic betrayer by kissing him with “her clammy lips” and holding him in a “noisome icy embrace” (27). Three times he raises his eyes to gaze on his uncanny “supernatural visitant” before he drops dead “as if [in the act] of imploring the mercy of offended heaven.” Guimilda makes a hasty retreat to a convent and the castle falls into ruins that serve as a backdrop for tourists to the area. Every year on the anniversary of this awful event, the hall lights up and the same scene is enacted again “by supernatural beings”: “the groans of the specter lord can be heard afar, while he is clasped in the arms of Josephine’s implacable ghost” (28). The final paragraph of the text presents the reader with pious comments on the importance of virginity, the sanctity of marriage, and a simple moral: “virtue is a female’s firmest protector” (29).

It is interesting that the lower-class victim, the dead Josephine, returns from the dead with the power to act as a direct agent of God, not just someone seeking her own personal revenge. The lower class, in other words, has divine sanction to seek restitution against its aristocratic oppressors, and such a sentiment would not have been lost on the lower-class readership of Wilkinson’s bluebooks. We have seen other versions of this tale of betrayal and seduction throughout the gothic, and frequently we have seen it supernaturalized, as it is in Lewis’s The Monk and here in Wilkinson’s adaptation. I want to suggest, however, that this tale can
be read as yet another variation on the secularization of virtue we have seen in so many earlier works in this period. From Paisiello's *Nina*, to Wordsworth's "The Thorn," to Opie's *Father and Daughter*, we have seen the virgin/whore representation privileged in uncanny ways, but increasingly in the bluebooks it is the issue of class envy and anger that begins to emerge most blatantly. Guimilda as aristocratic viper is the sort of female monster the reading public had seen earlier in Dacre's *Victoria* (*Zofloya*, 1806), a woman who sells her soul to the devil for power and the fulfillment of her lusts. The male aristocrat is equally corrupt and his doom, according to lower-class opinion, is justified, but note the persistence in this work of the power of orality, the privilege that is given to the oath Albert promises to his doomed mistress. By writing a tale that continues to promulgate the primacy of oral culture, the lower-class bluebook participated in preserving lower-class cultural values: the belief that the transcendent and the immanent can work together in concert, that natural elements will avenge a human crime in order to restore moral order, and that a female supernatural visitant has the ability to claim divine power in order to exact material revenge on her lover.

In addition to their origin in fairy tales, gothic tales can also be understood as rewriting *The affecting history of the Duchess of C***, the most notorious episode in the novelized "letters on education," *Adèle et Théodore* (1782; trans. English 1783), produced by the prolific French author Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746–1830). By excerpting and then focusing on the horror of a wife imprisoned by her husband for nine years, female gothic novelists found the ideal subplot for a longer novel (i.e., Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance*, Eliza Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach*, and numerous others). This inset tale initially served as the source for the explained supernatural of a long gothic novel, the material cause for all the mysterious lights and noises at night. In fact, the imprisoned wife becomes in the female gothic genre the *deus ex machina*, the explanatory first cause brought back to life, much like a lost female matriarch restored to power. As the gothic chapbook evolved, it appropriated these intense episodes of suffering as its only content so that the genre, much like gothic drama, was a potent distillation of natural and supernatural, minus the more extended descriptions of scenery, characterizations, and subjectivity that the middle- or upper-class reader had come to expect in a novel identified as "gothic."

Wilkinson's "The Spectres; or Lord Oswald and Lady Rosa" advertises its connection to the "Duchess C" subplot in its own extended title: "Including an account of the Marchioness of Civetti, who was basely consigned to a Dungeon beneath her Castle. By her eldest Son, whose cruel Avarice plunged him into the Commission of the worst of Crimes, that
stain the Annals of the Human Race.” Using the *in medias res* device, the chapbook begins with the arrival of a young stranger, Rudolpho, to an Italian castle inhabited only by a pair of elderly servants. After an uneasy night in which he learns that he looks uncannily like the dead owner of the castle, Rudolpho persuades the pair to tell him its history. As in so many fairy/folk tales, not to mention Genesis, the original dispute is between an older brother, Francisco, who envies his younger and worthy brother Oswald because Oswald has inherited a vast estate on their mother’s death (this occurrence, of course, undercuts the aristocratic practice of primogeniture and recalls Schiller’s *Die Rauber*). After marriage to the beautiful Lady Rosa and the birth of their daughter Malvina, Oswald dies shortly after his brother comes to visit. Francisco inherits his brother’s property and the pregnant Rosa is declared to have been a mistress, not a legal wife. Held prisoner by Francisco for sixteen years, Rosa dies swearing “retributive vengeance” on her fratricidal brother-in-law. The hints dropped to the reader are numerous and broad during this exposition, such as “Lady Rosa could never be persuaded out of an opinion that her second child was not still born; she would persist that she heard it cry” (298), or “Rudolpho started up, and the room was filled with a supernatural blaze of light, and the spirits of Lord Oswald and Lady Rosa (for as such he recognised them by the pictures he had seen) stood by his couch. They waved their hands over him, as if in the act of giving him their benediction” (298). The second passage is a virtual plagiarism from Reeve’s *Old English Baron*, while the kidnapped child stolen at birth had been used in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*. The writing in “The Spectres” is not polished, nor is there control of plot devices, suspense, or motivations. With the appearance of the spirits of the dead parents, the plot quickly moves to its dénouement: Rudolpho is told by his parents to “save a sister’s honor, and forgive thy father’s murderer. Leave his punition [punishment] to heaven” (299). As Francisco attempts to rape Malvina, Rudolpho arrives to save her and in the process is revealed to be Oswald and Rosa’s long-lost son, adopted by a Pisan apothecary who had recently disinherited Rudolpho in favor of his brother, the apothecary’s biological son. On his journey to inform said brother of these events, Rudolpho had managed to stumble on the family castle just in time to save his sister from incestuous rape (also an act that is threatened in *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *The Castle Spectre*).

Once he is exposed, Francisco begs to be allowed to make a full “confession” (302) in which he admits his crimes, begs forgiveness, and arranges a marriage between Rudolpho and Eltruda, Francisco’s only daughter (thereby reuniting and preserving the family’s ancestral estates) all in fairly short order. His final act is to reveal that envy and greed caused him to stage
the death of his mother, so that he buried another woman in her place, and kept her prisoner in a dungeon below the castle for the past twenty years (all of this is extremely reminiscent of Radcliffe’s *Sicilian Romance*). After ordering the release of his mother, Francisco promptly dies after receiving her “gracious” pardon (305). This chapbook is, as I have suggested, a virtual catalogue of female gothic clichés, but it presents an interesting mix of lower-class and bourgeois spiritual agendas. Lord Oswald and his wife, for all their aristocratic wealth and privilege, are presented as helpless victims of the scheming and evil Francisco. Like the lower-classes, they are unlucky enough to have drawn a very evil brother in the lottery of familial relations. In addition to this fatalistic subtext, the work presents a spirituality that is a mix of Catholic and Protestant tropes. On one hand, Francisco needs to relieve his conscience through the act of “confession,” while prophetic dreams enable Rudolpho to see and hear the spirits of his parents. All of this residual Catholic “superstition,” on the other hand, is contrasted with the bourgeois command to protect virginity at all costs. Also confused is Lady Rosa’s dying prayer for “retributive vengeance,” contradicted later when she and Oswald instruct Rudolpho to leave their uncle to heaven, a decidedly more modern and “civilized” attitude.

The confused and contradictory ideological issues found in chapbooks have been identified by Potter as “dual plots, the horrific and the moralistic” (84), but this distinction can also be understood as caused by unresolved class and religious issues as well. The “horrific” recalls the lower-class, transcendent, and Catholic components of the work, while the “moralistic” suggests a middle-class, immanent, Protestant agenda at work. It is revealing to note that commentators during the period recognized the persistence of the tropes and even commented on their continued power. In 1826 the editor of *Legends of Terror!* a collection of 136 tales that claimed to be “a complete collection of Legendary Tales, National Romances, & Traditional Relics of Every Country, and of the most intense interest,” observed:

A few centuries back, superstition gave rise to a general belief that the spirits of murdered persons wandered about the earth, until the perpetrator was either, by revenge or justice, punished for the foul deed he had committed; and that they would appear to their relatives and others, to point out the means by which their violent deaths might be avenged. Such superstitious feelings, though now seldom called into action, are probably not so completely extinguished, even in this enlightened era, as is generally imagined, but are yet cherished by a large portion of mankind. (210–11; qtd. Potter, 89, 83)
A chapbook like “The Spectres” gives further evidence of the fact that uncanny, animistic beliefs are not eliminated in the lower-class imaginary, but in fact are placed before the reading public as but one choice among many in the pursuit of “human flourishing.”

The same ideological ambivalence can be seen in Wilkinson’s “The White Pilgrim; or, Castle of Olival.” Based on the earlier Pixérécourt drama as translated into English in 1817 by Henry R. Bishop as “The Wandering Boys; or The Castle of Olival,” Wilkinson’s version suggests that she was adapting and publishing gothic chapbooks at least as late as 1818. As the story begins we are introduced to the Count of Castelli, “the truly amiable and liberal” Horatio, living with his beautiful wife Amabel and their two sons in a castle in Berne, Switzerland (311). Devoted to their sons and the welfare of their tenants and dependents, the young couple has made their domain “a second Eden,” unaware that there are serpents lurking in the guise of attendants, namely the Chevalier Roland, Seneschal of the castle, and his assistant Otho, Captain of the Guard. Pregnant again, Amabel has a “fearful dream” the night before her husband is to make a short trip to settle some legal affairs with his friend Count Vassali. When she informs her husband of her forebodings, he responds, “What Amabel superstitious? This is indeed a novelty, for which I was unprepared” (313). Mocking his wife’s primitive “superstitions,” Horatio next ignores the warning cries of “screech-owls and crows” as he begins his journey with his servant Claude, who warns him that the cries of the birds are “ill-omens” (313). The consummately rational man, Horatio ignores all of these warnings only to leave his family defenseless to the schemes of Roland.

Upon his return, Horatio is informed that his wife has fled the castle, her maid Theresa asserting that she has absconded with a paramour (“a near relation of her own, whom you had forbid the castle”) seen lurking around the grounds. When all the evidence points to the truth of this story, Horatio resigns himself to caring for his sons until he grows restless for travel and a change of scene. Leaving his sons with a tutor, Horatio sets out for England, where he coincidentally discovers the missing maid Theresa, who tells him that she and her father had been bribed by Roland to stage the disappearance of Amabel during Horatio’s absence. Horatio further learns that Amabel has in fact been held captive these past three years in a “subterranean cavity” (326) on the castle grounds, and so he begins to plot his revenge by letting it be known that he has perished in a shipwreck during the channel crossing. The resolution of the story occurs when the reader is informed that Roland is the illegitimate half-brother of Horatio, the son of the former Count and a woman who was “of obscure birth and illiterate manners” (325). When he learns that Horatio has died
at sea, Roland now produces a will that allows him to claim all of Horatio’s estates (327). At this very moment, the reading of the suspicious will, a pilgrim, “clad in white, his robes, his hat, and staff were all of that virgin hue,” appears asking for refuge “after performing his vow of pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Loretto” (327). The appearance of this man is almost atavistic, antediluvian, suggesting the uncanniness of the Catholic past, its ability to erupt as the not-quite repressed force that still figures on the edges of this culture. But the white pilgrim is also a melodramatic figure because he is introduced by Roland as “deaf,” reminiscent of the “deaf and dumb” characters at the melodramatic core of Holcroft’s gothicized adaptations (see chapter 4).

Thinking that he can safely discuss his plans in the presence of the white pilgrim, Roland reveals to Otho that he intends to poison the orphan boys and kill their mother: “she had long since become an object of disgust and hatred to her betrayer, for she had nobly resisted every attempt to despoil her of her honor and fidelity” (328). The servant Ruffo enables Amabel to escape her dungeon and she tells an abbreviated tale of abuse and misery that recalls the fate of Agnes, the pregnant and imprisoned nun in Lewis’s *The Monk*: “she was delivered prematurely of a child, who died the same night; she was allowed no assistance, and having wept many days over her dear blossom, she buried it with her own hands in one corner of the damp dungeon” (334). Whereas her story recalls a literary source, the intended fates of her sons recall a particularly gothic moment in British history, the murder of the two princes in the Tower of London by Richard III in 1483. In an almost-repetition of that crime, this text instead allows the white pilgrim to save the children in the nick of time by substituting a safe potion for the intended poison. We learn later that all of these actions have been orchestrated by the white pilgrim, the avenging husband and father Horatio in disguise. Vassali brings the king’s troops to storm the castle, and at the decisive moment, the white pilgrim strips himself of his robes and appears as “the real Count Olival” (335) to denounce the evil machinations of his illegitimate half-brother.

Similar to “The Spectres” in many ways, “The White Pilgrim” positions religious as well as class ideologies front and center. The lower class is pandered to in the privileging of premonitions and ill-omened birds, while bourgeois attitudes can be detected in the descent of Roland from an “illiterate” mother. There are clearly “lottery” elements in this work, as Horatio, an aristocrat, is frequently saved by the most chancelike occurrences (literally running into Theresa on a street in London). There are also bourgeois attitudes present, as Horatio rescues his family through cunning, skill, and what we would almost call omniscience. Originally written
as a melodrama in France in 1801 and then recast as a British chapbook by Wilkinson in 1818, the text suggests the revenant power of Catholicism and the persistence of superstitions among lower-class readers. In fact, John Kerr’s 1820 dramatic version of the work, titled “The Wandering Boys,” continued to be so popular that it was performed in the British repertory and published as late as 1894.

Wilkinson’s “The Castle Spectre: An Ancient Baronial Romance” (182?) is actually her second attempt to capitalize on the popularity of Lewis’s 1797 drama The Castle Spectre (see chapter 3). The other version, called “The Castle Spectre: or, Family Horrors, a Gothic Story,” had been published by Hughes in 1807. The two works are virtually identical and indicate how authors as well as publishers had no qualms about “borrowing” literary texts from others as well as themselves (in this case, was Wilkinson plagiarizing herself?). Set in Castle Conway on the border of Wales, the action once again concerns fratricidal envy, usurpation, attempted rape and murder, and vengeance by a maternal specter that appears at just the right moments to expose evil and protect virginity. A two-paragraph frame places the tale in superstitious territory when it describes the “supernatural visitants” to the Castle Conway: Lord Hubert, we are told, continues to be seen “riding over his dominions on the first of every moon, mounted on a milk white steed, clad in glittering armor,” while his faithless wife, Lady Bertha, is still heard shrieking from the western tower, “where he had immured her for incontinence while he was at Palestine.” The third ghost haunting this castle is the unlucky Baron Hildebrand, who stalks around the great hall “every night, with his head under his arm” (2). While the author claims that she cannot assert to the truth of these earlier legends, she does assure the reader that the tale of “the Spectre Lady Evelina and the base Earl Osmond” is indeed true. Interestingly, the frame revisits the Germanic ballad material of Bürger’s “Der Wilde Jäger,” made popular in England by Walter Scott’s translation of it as “The Chase” or “The Wild Huntsman.”

Beginning in medias res, we are initially introduced to two young peasants, Angela and Edwy, inhabiting a sort of pastoral idyll that is rudely interrupted when Angela is mysteriously taken to Castle Conway as the long-lost daughter of Sir Malcolm Mowbray, deceased, and now under the guardianship of his best friend, Earl Osmond. Edwy, however, is not who he seems. He is actually Lord Percy, heir to Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, who has chosen to assume the disguise of a peasant in order to court the lovely Angela and discover if she can love him for himself and not his wealth. After her disappearance he comes to realize that she also is not who she appears and is, in fact, the missing and presumed dead
daughter of Earl Reginald, the lawful owner of Conway Castle and the elder brother of Earl Osmond, the usurper. The bulk of the text consists of positioning the principals in the castle in various threatened postures. Angela is twice the target of her murderous uncle’s attempts at incestuous rape; Percy is imprisoned in a tower only to escape and attempt a rescue of Angela; and two black slaves, Hassan and Saib, alternately hurt or help the “white folks” (11).

Anti-Catholic markers and appeals to the lower class appear in this work in a number of ways. First, Gilbert describes Father Philip to Percy as “that immense walking tomb of fish, flesh and fowl . . . no more fit to be a monk, than I to be maid of hour to the Queen of Sheba” (12). The humorous mockery of the clergy in this work suggests the anticlericalism at the heart of so much gothic textuality, but in this work Father Philip is not a murderous, greedy, lecherous hypocrite, but merely a misogynistic meddler looking for his next meal. It is the ambivalent depiction of the characters of the black slaves, in fact, that bears the ideological ire of the lower-class reading audience. Saib is described as the “good” black, “the untutored child of nature,” who balks when he is ordered by Osmond to murder Kenrick, one of Osmond’s trusted henchmen (13), and the man who had delivered the baby Angela to her foster parents. Osmond does not want any witnesses to his earlier crimes against his brother and his family, so he thinks that killing Kenrick will protect his reputation. Saib instead warns Kenrick so that he does not drink the poisoned wine that Osmond has prepared for him, and he is at the conclusion of the work “rewarded with a comfortable asylum for the remainder of his days” (24). In contrast, Wilkinson presents Hassan as the “evil” black slave, a man embittered because he has been stolen from his “Samba and our infant son . . . here my sooty hue renders me an object of contempt and disdain. O memory, torturing memory! But since the tyrants forced me from Afric’s valued shore, I have vowed hatred; yes, hatred eternal to all mankind!” (11). Hassan participates in the murderous assault on the Lady Evelina and remains loyal to the evil Osmond to the end, attempting to kill Reginald. Not surprisingly, we learn at the conclusion of the text that Hassan dies along with the “other blacks [who] met the fate their crimes deserved” (24).

But Earl Osmond has not been sleeping well of late, plagued with “dreams of the most appalling nature, in which he beheld the specters of the murdered persons threatening him with everlasting perdition” (18). Believing in the truth of visions, hallucinations, and supernaturally charged dreams is, according to Jan Vansina, a common characteristic of oral societies, and continued to persist in the popular imagination well into the early modern period (7). Similarly, Theo Brown has argued that the con-
continued prevalence of ghost stories during this period actually functioned in a number of different ways: as a form of social correction, as an externalizing of a collective bad conscience about the Reformation, as nostalgia for medieval Catholicism, and as indignation at the manner of its dissolution (41; also see Aston). In a similar manner, the text shifts here from being one that had earlier laughed at ghostly legends and superstitions to one that makes increasing recourse to the reality of the transcendent realm and the unexplained supernatural. At the point when Angela is once again threatened with rape by Osmond, the specter of her mother appears: “a flowing drapery, or veil, expanding over her head and shoulders, leaving her bosom bare, on which was seen a ghastly wound, and the blood still appeared, as if flowing from it, over her white garments” (20). This is the moment that lower-class readers would have been waiting for, the horrific and supernatural reappearance of the undead bloody mother. It may be too much to ask so slight a text to bear so much ideological freight, but in this scene (as well as its source in Lewis’s drama) it is possible to detect the traces of the dead/undead Virgin Mary, the “mother” of Catholicism, the spirit who will not die no matter how vehemently bourgeois Protestantism works to eradicate her image. I make this claim because Wilkinson’s text clearly presents the Specter of Lady Evelina as something more than a mortal mother to Angela: “Our heroine sunk on her knees, the Spectre bended over her, and seemed to bless her, but spoke not. She then, with a slow solemn pace, and soundless footstep, returned to the Oratory, stopping a short time before the picture of Reginald, on which she seemed to gaze with interest. The doors then closed, music was heard, with a chorus of heavenly voices chaunting songs of triumph, and then silence reigned” (20).

The climax of the work occurs when Angela, assisted by Saib, is reunited with her undead father, held captive in an underground dungeon in the southern tower of the castle by Osmond these past sixteen years. In a desperate last bid to assassinate his brother, Osmond orders Hassan to do the deed, but at that very moment “thunder rolled, and all the elements seemed in commotion: a shock, as if from an earthquake, seemed to rend the building to its centre, and a part of the southern tower fell” (22). Again, we can see the continued prevalence of magical thinking in the lower-class imaginary, with the natural world believed to possess the ability to respond immediately to unnatural human designs. Amid the devastation that the earthquake has wrought, Angela finds her father stumbling out of his dungeon only to be assaulted by Hassan: “The slave lifted his dagger, when our heroine rushed forward with a loud shriek, and her father started up” (23). This scene is a virtual repetition of the earlier attempt on Reginald’s life,
the one that ended with the fatal blow given to Evelina. This time the scene abruptly stops as Osmond attempts to barter with Reginald for Angela's hand in marriage (“Osmond then offered his brother life and liberty, and one half of his possessions for the hand of Angela”). Reginald promptly repulses the notion of “an incestuous marriage: never shall the bosom of my child be made a pillow for the head of her mother’s murderer” (23) and the fight is on yet again, with Angela on the verge of agreeing to the marriage in order to save her father's life. Just at the point when Angela would have “terminated the oath,” the Specter of Lady Evelina appears again, Hassan drops his dagger in fright, and Angela plunges hers into her uncle (24).

The Specter of Lady Evelina departs to “solemn music,” declaring that her work is completed. Osmond lives long enough to receive his brother’s “merciful” forgiveness and Angela and Percy marry amid the strains of “the minstrel's harp” (24). Oaths and music have been foregrounded in this text in ways that suggest the continuing power of and attraction to an oral-based community. But the text closes on a discussion of what is to become of Angela's lower-class foster parents, the Allans. Angela wants to “raise them to a superior station in life,” but it is their choice to remain in their humble cottage and to receive as gifts the many presents that Angela sends to them “to soothe their advanced years, and ameliorate the pains and infirmities of their old age” (24). The work concludes in validating the status and goodness of the lower classes, suggesting that their moral superiority and self-chosen rural isolation protect them from the evils that have characterized the life of the aristocratic Osmond. The work is nostalgic for a lower-class pastoral culture that was increasingly under siege by the early nineteenth century, while at the same time middle-class anxieties about the nature of marriage and religious beliefs emerge in a fairly chaotic manner.

The question that is most frequently begged in so many discussions of the gothic chapbooks is the reason for their popularity. Fred Frank claimed that they appealed to “the type of reader who had neither the time nor the taste for a leisurely Gothic experience. That there were many such readers during the Gothic craze is a well-documented fact” (1987, 420). But this is just another way of saying that you will always have the poor with you. A more important question might be to ask, why were the gothic chapbooks so fractured by both class and religious issues? One possible explanation is offered by McWhir, who notes that “in the very process of rejecting superstition, one suspects that these authors take pleasure in it, though their genre prevents them from completing the transition from shocked incredulity to imaginative suspension of disbelief. The completion
of the movement towards suspension of a disbelief that can be assumed and therefore deliberately transgressed moves us from superstitious anecdote or supernatural tale to Gothic fiction” (McWhir, 36). As part of its secularizing and modernizing agenda, this culture saw a dramatic rise of literacy among the lower class, and the circulating library emerged as an important component of the public sphere in which commercial interests would ideally be complemented by secularizing and moralizing trends (see Thomas 1986). In a culture in which literacy was seen as advancing the bourgeois cause of promulgating moral and civic responsibilities and inculcating “investment” values, the library and its publication arm, even one as lowly as the Minerva Press, produced works that would attempt to accomplish important civilizing work at the same time they made a profit. But finally, the gothic chapbook presented its lower-class readers with yet another instance of ambivalent secularization. It was a literary technology that was predicated on the notion that many different belief systems could coexist, and that the mixing of traditional spirituality with newer rationalistic approaches to life would allow them to remake themselves as effective citizens of the new nation-state.