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# From Gothic to Gothicism: A Theory of Reading Gothic Rhetoric

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FROM GOTHIC TO GOTHICISM:  
A THEORY OF READING GOTHIC RHETORIC

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Patrick Thomas McAleer

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2012

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

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Title: From Gothic to Gothicism: A Theory of Reading Gothic Rhetoric

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This study begins with an analysis of the Gothic genre, a genre of writing that often appears to be little more than a collection of grotesque content haphazardly collected by writers seeking to create purely Gothic texts. However, this study aims to show how understanding and examining the core values of the Gothic—namely subversion, terror, and a resistance to stable definition—are of greater use and importance for reading a Gothic text than merely identifying the Gothic content.

My contention is that traditionally (and non-traditionally) Gothic writers of various times and ages selectively borrow the shocking and traumatic elements of the Gothic to establish lasting impressions upon their readers rather than solely seeking temporary fright. These impressions are intended to promote and provoke awareness and even action regarding forgotten or dismissed cultural problems. Therefore, I propose a theory of reading the Gothic—Gothicism. This theory and practice of reading Gothic, and putatively non-Gothic, texts is predicated upon the resistance to observing repetitive Gothic themes and tropes in art and literature so as to critically and carefully examine the functions and uses, or the *rhetoric*, of the Gothic rather than merely observing the presence of Gothic content.