

**Writing and Reading Women/Women Writing  
and Reading—The Female Gothic and  
*Frankenstein***

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the development of the English female gothic from roughly 1760 to 1820, and examines the development of the genre from cultural, political, and economic perspectives with a specific focus on women's role in the production, reproduction, and transmission in the early gothic tradition. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the socio-political background behind the "rise" of the English gothic novel and how the act of writing and that of reading the female gothic could potentially undermine the bourgeois ideology of domesticity. Moreover, I argue that the female gothic provides an alternative narrative of *Bildung* for women since women writers and readers are able to negotiate a release of their "veiled" or repressed desires and encode a possible construction of female subjectivity within the textual space. The second part consists of a close reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Through reading the multiple narratives of *Bildung* in the novel, I explore the ways in which Shelley deploys the strategy of cross-dressing writing to highlight the gendered roles of women in a traditional society and to reinterpret and reinvent the genre as a whole. As revealed in the different editions of the novel, however, we can also come to understand the increasingly conservative attitude of Shelley, which embodies intimate and inevitable interactions

10 歐美研究

of social forces and cultural production.

**Key Words:** the female gothic, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, cultural production