



## **TIME TO THINK, TIME TO FEAR:**

### **BRITISH LITERATURE'S GOTHIC BOREDOM**

Boredom's function in British culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be tracked and charted through its varying depictions in texts ranging from ladylike domestic novels to breathless gothic page-turners. Characters' experiences of boredom can offer critiques of social institutions, cultural mores, and gender roles, but they can also generate spaces for introspection, inspiration, and self-determination. My talk will not only explore the primary forms boredom takes in the texts of this time period and their psychological underpinnings but also specifically interrogate boredom's presence and negative potential in gothic and proto-gothic novels such as M.G. Lewis's "The Monk" (1796) and Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa" (1747-48). Boredom – which sometimes equates with time to think – is a state especially linked to certain degrees of social class and the lives of the women depicted in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels. As an upper-class and often imperiled woman is frequently the focus of gothic novels, boredom's inclusion in gothic literature seems almost unavoidable. Since boredom is both a socioeconomic accomplishment (this woman has the leisure to be bored) and a sometimes culturally-suspect state (what will that woman contrive to alleviate her boredom?), gothic novels' women characters must navigate a difficult course between approbation and condemnation. Often, these characters are situated in constrained environments that insist upon boredom, such as strictly-governed nunneries, isolated estates, and genteel house-arrest. My presentation will assess the effects and significance of boredom as imposed on these famous gothic and proto-gothic heroines.