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### Gendering Furness or Fashioning the Grotesque in Philadelphia

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#### Abstract

Long after the death of the architect Frank Furness, the voice of the damn-all-else, self-reliant, hyper-masculine poet-hero who claimed he wished to gather all of his clients together to tell them “to go to hell” still resonates. While this vision of Furness still holds currency, it is often understood as divorced from the culture of 19th-century Philadelphia. Why was Furness overtly aggressive in dress and manner? Why were his buildings acceptable to his contemporary Philadelphians? Can his dress and architecture be understood in relation to complexities of 19th-century gender identification? The intent of this short paper is not to fully unpack Furness’s ornamental practices in fashion or building but to act as a sort of prolegomena to how his work can be interpreted. The paper introduces the complicated relationship between gender construction and aesthetics in the 19th century through on two well-known moral guides for young men that would have been readily available to Furness. First, the aesthetics and ethics are examined in two essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Heroism” and “Manners.” In these essays the queering of men’s gender identity toward feminine qualities of intellect and abstraction is fundamental to ethical behavior. Second, unethical masculinity, as a form of the grotesque, is explored in George Lippard’s American Gothic novel, *Quaker City or the Monks of Monk Hall*. To conclude, I examine one of Furness’s built works, an ornamental gate for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, and propose that Furness’s architecture follows his own gender construction in merging Emerson’s abstract philosophical position with Lippard’s conventional popular taste. I aim to demonstrate that Furness’ ornamental practice sets in opposition two modes of ornamentation of both building and self—one abstract and one sensational—in order to establish a queer aesthetic practice within society, as a reflection of an ethically fashioned man.

