AMBIVALENT AND NOSTALGIC ATTITUDES

IN SELECTED GOTHIC NOVELS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focusses chiefly on the sensibility underlying

selected gothic fiction published between 1764 and 1820. A preliminary

section deals with the history of the term "gothic" from the Renaissance

onwards, and in this section and elsewhere attention is given to the

revival of interest in gothic architecture as affording insights for the

critic of the novel. The general emphasis of the study is on attitudes

to postulated gothic ancestors, and how a recreated gothic world pro-

vides either a suitable environment for discovering an ideal social or

political system, or opportunities for exercising greater imaginative

freedom, especially in the treatment of sensational or erotic subjects.

Political thinkers of the post-Renaissance seeking an "Ancient

Constitution," as well as antiquaries indulging a taste for medieval

artifacts, supplied a factual basis for the gothic, but its main attrac-

tiveness lay in its imaginative richness, novelty, and potency as a

domain of art. In both literature and architecture, the vogue of the

gothic was part of an innovative reaction against the apparent limits of

harmonious, decorous, rational, balanced art. However, the innovation

usually took a subversive direction, employing familiar forms and atti-

tudes in order to conceal or palliate the strangeness of the gothic, in

order to link it with more acceptable tastes. This dissertation traces

the process of compromise with established styles in the literary and

architectural work of the first prominent gothic fantasist, Horace

Walpole, and contrasts his fictional techniques in *The Castle of Otranto*

(1764) with those of Clara Reeve in *The Old English Baron* (1777), in which the gothic world is made an improved, purified version of Reeve's own society.

Two distinct attitudes towards the gothic developed: ambivalence and nostalgia. The ambivalent attitude retained much of the modern contempt for the gothic while realizing its sensational potentialities; it combined amusement with a deeper source of fascination. The nostalgic attitude regarded the gothic world as an experimental site, where conservative and radical solutions to present problems might be imposed upon a loose historical framework.

Ambivalent gothicism tended to follow an increasingly sensational line, investigating the attraction of evil and power, the plight of the victim, and the psychological accompaniments of extreme situations. An aesthetic basis of the art of strong sensation or terror is outlined through reviewing the central arguments of Burke's *Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). It is suggested that they helped to engender a controversy over the proper balance between sensationalism and decorum. The psychological theories of the *Enquiry* and the ensuing controversy are examined for the light they shed on gothic fictional practices, and critics' observations are cited as evidence of the tensions between ambivalent and nostalgic attitudes towards the gothic. Although exoticism served both gothic ambivalence and nostalgia, it was especially valuable for facilitating the approach to sensational materials, by providing a protective degree of aesthetic distance.

The ambivalent attitude and the careful exploitation of exoticism permitted freer exploration of painful, disturbing subjects than was possible in "realistic" fiction. This is documented through close analysis of *The Monk* (1795) by M. G. Lewis; *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797) by Ann Radcliffe; and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), by Charles Maturin. It is shown that, while nostalgic elements occasionally intrude in these novels, the usefulness of gothic exoticism lies in the increased ability to concentrate on certain obsessive themes. Psychologically-threatening problems of identity, knowledge, education, and authority often appear through monastic models, and the figure of the criminal or outcast, who is usually a sexual aggressor, indirectly represents anxieties about relations between parents and children, rulers and subjects, men and women. It is argued that the ambivalent gothic became a dark medium on which were projected visions of psychic disintegration and oppression. The novels analyzed sought to realize the extraordinary crises of the soul, while offering varying amounts of relief from the pressures of the anarchic forces portrayed in conflict.

Professor Ian S. Ross
Supervisor

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CHAPTER I

CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL ANCESTORS

Revisions of the Past

Much of the appeal of the gothic novels began in a belief in the
superior imaginative potency of another world, unfamiliar enough to be
remote from the contemporary one. This basic belief often took on
political, social, artistic, and architectural, as well as literary,
forms. For that reason, we cannot regard it as an arbitrary, whimsical
or disconnected phenomenon in the history of taste. In all areas, it
involved a reworking of critical principles to accommodate a different
range of experiences, so that the whole vocabulary of cultural values
expanded. Critics threw down or took up models for emulation, and
examined the means by which such choices were made. The result·was a
revision of the past, at least as the past entered and influenced the
English imagination.

Terminological controversies over the gothic reflected the main
features of that revision. Before turning to the actual emergence of
the new gothic in fiction, we therefore need to pay attention to its
background, and particularly to patterns of usage: the appearance of the
word "gothic" in various contexts, the kinds of objects or qualities
which it labelled, and the complicated, overlapping connotations which
the word acquired. Such study of changing attitudes and practices will
demonstrate the intermingling of motives for praise and blame, the

ambivalence towards an era and its imagined characteristics that per-
vaded gothic fiction. It will also show that opinions which seemed
aesthetic, or which arose in aesthetic argument, carried political or
social overtones as important as their overt meaning. The lines of
partisanship, although hard to draw exactly, must be considered for a
full interpretation of the novels.

There are several large compilations offering detailed accounts of
the usage of gothic and the variety of opinions brought to bear upon the
term.[1] In many of these, however, the literary gothic is treated secon-
darily. This is hardly surprising. Germann and Frankl, for example,
write with the special viewpoint and purposes of the architectural
historian, and although most of their observations are accurate, they do
not go out of their way to address the problems of fiction. The applica-
tion of their findings to the literary gothic will be the chief goal in
the following discussion.

Terminological controversy over the gothic tended to fall into two
phases. The first was a version of the ongoing dispute between the
Ancients and the Moderns in which the putative barbarian creators of
gothic art contrasted unfavourably, at first, with the Greeks and Romans.
At the extreme of this phase, gothic came to be closely associated with
barbarous.[2] The second phase, often containing the typical arguments of
the first, concentrated upon the aesthetic qualities of gothic architec-
ture and medieval (or Renaissance) literature, and their defensibility
according to established or revised criteria. The first phase was more
concerned with the creators, the second with their creations.

Both phases of the controversy originated with the art critics and historians of the Italian Renaissance.[3] It is fairly clear why anti-gothic sentiment should have developed under those circumstances:

> . . . until the fifteenth century the influence of anti-
> quity was balanced by other influences, and no one thought
> of being a purist. Filippo Brunelleschi's researches into
> classical architecture . . . heralded a hardening of atti-
> tudes. An absolute standard of artistic excellence,
> consciously based on the authority of Greek and Roman
> antiquity, was proclaimed in Italy. By this standard all
> the artistic monuments of the post-classical age, that is,
> all the works in the "modern" as opposed to the good
> antique style, were judged and condemned.
>   . . . it became apparent that the impure "modern" style
> must have been forced upon unwilling Italy by invaders,
> first by the notorious Goths and Lombards, who in the fourth
> and fifth centuries had squatted on the wreck of Roman
> civilization, and in later centuries by their successors,
> the Germans.[4]

A typical and influential version of the Italian theory occurred in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters,* where he conflated the Gothic and Germanic stories, and made the crucial identification of the gothic with the *non-classical:*

> There are works of another sort that are called German,
> which differ greatly in ornament and proportion from the
> antique and the modern. Today they are not employed by
> distinguished architects but are avoided by them as mon-
> strous and barbarous, since they ignore every familiar
> idea or order; which one can rather call confusion and
> disorder, for in their buildings, of which there are so
> many that they have contaminated the whole world, they
> made portals adorned with thin columns twisted in cork-
> screw fashion (vine tendrils) etc. . . .[5]

After going on to describe these works in greater detail, building to a crescendo of disgust at their hideousness, Vasari proposed to explain their origin:

> This manner was invented by the Goths, who, after the
> destruction of the ancient buildings and the dying out of
> architects because of the wars, afterwards built . . .
> edifices in this manner: those men fashioned the vaults

with pointed arches of quarter circles, and filled all
Italy with these damnable buildings, so that their whole
method has been given up, in order not to let any more
be built.

Vasari took up this episode of mistaken building as an intrusion

into the perfect practice of the "antique" Greek and Roman architects,

and as a constant warning to the "modern" architects who, after Brunel-

leschi, were trying to recover that standard of excellence. His vitu-

peration had its precedents. Filarete (Antonio Averlino) in his treatise

on architecture written between 1460 and 1464 anticipated the connection

between medieval architecture and the Goths or historical barbarians.[6]

Although he was a partisan of the ancient manner of building and of its

recovery in full purity, Filarete's references to the *gente barbara*

still bears more of the historical sense of *barbaric* (pertaining to

certain tribes), than of the literary sense *barbarous* (pertaining to a

debased style).[7] In the life of Brunelleschi attributed to Antonio

Manetti appeared the theory of the bringing of German building methods

into Italy. Historically erroneous, like Vasari's later effort, this

version contained more detail and, therefore, seems more plausible.

De Beer has summarized the theory:

> The Vandals, Goths, Lombards, Huns, and others, being them-
> selves inexperienced in building technique, used German
> craftsmen who had skill in these matters, and buildings
> were erected all over Italy in the German manner. But when
> Charlemagne drove out the Lombards, and came to an under-
> standing with the Roman pontiffs, he used workmen from Rome,
> who though not very experienced in practical building,
> worked in the manner of the Romans whose monuments they saw
> around them. . . . Then Charlemagne's empire was overrun by
> the Germans who re-introduced the German manner of building
> which lasted until the times of Filippo Brunelleschi.[8]

This account was more sophisticated than Vasari's, since it included

German influences and allowed for a longer time-span; it did not make

medieval architecture the direct product of the Gothic tribes.

An epistle to Pope Leo X, written about 1518 or 1519 and attributed to Raphael or a member of his circle, also looked towards several of the points which would come up in Vasari's critique. The viewpoint in this case was Roman rather than Florentine, but the historical view was essentially the same: a sequence of degeneration and partial recovery of true artistic principles. Like Brunelleschi's biographer, this author differentiated between the earlier barbarians, the Goths, Vandals and Lombards, and the Germans:

> . . . when Rome was overrun by the barbarians not only were
> the buildings destroyed but the art of architecture itself
> was lost. With their liberty the Romans lost all genius
> and art. They broke up the beautiful ancient buildings
> around them and from them constructed their wretched dwell-
> ings. There arose a most ignorant and worthless type of
> architecture, painting and sculpture . . . later the Germans
> revived the art of architecture a little, but their orna-
> ments "furono goffi, e lontanissimi dalla bella maniera
> de'Romani."

The author "contrasts the beautiful parts and proportions of a classical building with the irrational treatment, the strange animal figures and leaf ornaments of a 'German' edifice. Here criticism is combined with history. It is evident that the author dislikes the medieval styles; but when he opposes the 'Architettura Romana' and 'la Barbara' it is not to be assumed that he is being merely abusive; the second term is pri- marily historical, whatever other implications it may contain."[9] But among those "other implications" was the ranking of cultures. "Barbara" cannot be merely an historical term (as de Beer claims) at a time when the works of classical antiquity were valued so highly, at a time when non-classical forms failed to satisfy the important artistic standards. For the whole convenience of the theory of barbarian origins for the

gothic, in Italy, lay in the fact that the barbarians were by definition
outsiders, who did not have the moral and intellectual abilities neces-
sary for civilization. Under the influence of artistic standards that
propose a cycle of excellence and degeneration, the former associated
with native, the latter with foreign, elements, it becomes hard to
separate aesthetic from moral judgments, the alien tribes from the
despoilers of culture.

None of the earlier statements reached the wide circulation of
Vasari's *Lives,* or matched its influence. "No one before him had written
with such sardonic asperity of medieval architecture, and in this respect
. . . he set the tone for ensuing centuries. . . . Vasari was the first
to make the definitive assertion that medieval architecture (and it is
clear from his description that he was thinking of Gothic and not
Romanesque architecture) was the invention of the Goths . . . this pas-
sage is without doubt the source from which subsequent writers were to
derive the term 'Gothic' as applied to later medieval architecture."[10]
The Italian theory set up an opposition which was not limited to archi-
tectural types. If the Goths and Germans had helped to spoil classical
architecture, that was only because they had undermined the whole cul-
tural and political order which produced it. Given the conscious
revivalism and the sense of a lost national heritage that moved through
Italian aesthetic thinking at this time, such scapegoating was quite
predictable. The common idea of the Three Ages of Art, which we have
already seen, in slight variations, in the Life of Brunelleschi and the
Pseudo-Raphael letter, encouraged blame against the barbarians and
intruders. For the Three Ages included the golden period of Greek and

Roman excellence, the period of decay under foreign influences, and the modern attempt to reach the original, ideal level again. Neutral historical or stylistic senses of gothic did not fit with an idea of history in which artistic modes were identified with political and social forces; in which order or civilization opposed anarchy or non-culture.[11] As a result, gothic art must have seemed disorderly for two reasons: it did not share any of the accepted aesthetic qualities, and its supposed originators were the defilers of the classical heritage and the bringers of political chaos.

The notion of gothic disorderliness and irrationality posed a special problem for the modern disciples of Vitruvius. During the sixteenth century in Italy the term *ordine* came to replace Vitruvius' *genere* in describing classical columns: hence the "classic orders" of architecture. *Ordine* also occurred, with a great deal of confusion, as a synonym for *maniera* or *opera*. Usage indicates that there was a measure of equality for the "foreign" style, for the phrase *ordine Tedesco* appeared frequently.[12] The nature of the buildings, however, made the phrase into a paradox, clearly illustrated in the definition of "Ordine Gottico" in Filippo Baldinucci's *Vocabolario Toscano dell'arte del desegno* (Florence: 1681):

> . . . the working method in vogue under the Goths, the
> German manner and a kind of proportion which has nothing
> in common with the five good orders of Antique architecture;
> on the contrary, it is a completely barbaric fashion involv-
> ing excessively slender, elongated, distorted and--in every
> sense of the word--enervated columns, imposed one on top of
> the other and cluttered with small tabernacles, pyramids,
> projections, disruptions, little consoles, crockets, animal
> carvings and tendrils, all one on top of the other, with no
> order, no rule, no proportion and no taste.[13]

Gothic was unique in that it was *an order without order*. Vitruvians alternated in their response to it: some persisted in efforts to find a way of including it within the canon, a labour which continued through the eighteenth century; others were occupied with using the canon to condemn the gothic altogether. Since Vitruvian doctrines, as elaborated by Renaissance theorists and architects, also provided for stylistic conformity, particularly in restorations, a certain amount of gothic, or non-classical, work was justified.[14] The key case, which generated great controversy, was the project to complete the Church of San Petronio in Bologna, for which designs were commissioned between 1521 and 1600. In the course of the dispute over the proper style Terribilia produced a version of the story of gothic intrusion in Italy which was in part dialectical, and which displayed the same concern for the lack of a definable order in the gothic:

> . . . in this extremely confused state of affairs the Germans, or the Goths as some people like to call them, continued to a certain extent to imitate the things that they had seen in Rome, especially the Corinthian Order. They mixed Greek characteristics with their own and so, in their own way, created a third kind of architecture and introduced this into Italy; it is the kind found in San Petronio, one which ought really to be designated as unorganized rather than organized, although the followers of a certain Cesariano, a commentator on Vitruvius, claim to have discovered its principles in triangles. . . . But since, to the best of my knowledge, we have no specific rules for the German order, we shall have to organize this German work within the framework of our natural and universal rules according to the guide-lines laid down by Vitruvius.[15]

By the eighteenth century the controversy over gothic continued in both its phases, touching the cultural deficiencies of its creators, whether believed to be Goths, Germans, Saracens, Saxons or Moors, and the outlandish qualities of their works. Much of the eighteenth-century

criticism was a throw-back to the Italian humanists' arguments, with

an additional element coming from Boileau's principles of Good and Bad

Taste. One passage which is interesting because it deals with literature

along with architecture comes from the treatise on poetry and rhetoric

by Johann Ulrich König (1727):

> The so-called Nordic peoples then flooded the whole of
> Europe with their ignorance and with that Bad Taste which
> clung permanently to their descendants; this can still be
> recognized today from the remains, among other things, of
> their badly composed writings, rambling romances, immod-
> erate passion for rhyming, clumsy monkish script, coarse-
> sounding speech, barbarous music, graceless costumes,
> badly-drawn paintings, and above all from their Gothic
> architecture. [16]

Kant, in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sub-*

lime (1764), joined those who believed that all things which offended

against Reason, Nature and Propriety were gothic, or similar to gothic.

His history of artistic development resembled the Italian account, with

reference to the Three Ages and a scheme which included general cultural

values.

In his encyclopedia of the arts, the *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen*

Künste (1771-74), which was widely known among German neo-classicists,

J. G. Sulzer turned back to Boileau for his vocabulary. For Sulzer

gothic was synonymous with Bad Taste and he applied it to works regard-

less of the exact generic, regional or historical category in which they

belonged; gothic was a catch-all label of derogation. Sulzer also applied

the term "to all nations which engage in cultural pursuits before their

taste has been adequately formed. Thus Gothic comes to mean something

very like *parvenu,* and one can talk of Gothic behaviour as well as Gothic

art. . . ."[17] Sulzer even perpetuated the historical misconceptions of

Vasari, for he believed that the term gothic "originated in the clumsy

imitations of ancient architecture perpetrated by the Goths who settled

in Italy." He conceded that gothic works were "lacking not in essential

qualities, nor even always in greatness and splendour, but in beauty,

charm, and delicacy." The Goths had made a travesty of the mimetic

process in art, having no clear idea of their subjects or their means of

imitation. It was obvious to Sulzer why their works seemed so grotesque,

and equally obvious that such grotesquery was inadvertent, the result of

incompetence not design.

Sulzer also took a clue from Shaftesbury's theories of taste and

personality in associating aesthetic with moral judgments. He emphasized

the causal link between a people's art and their spiritual well-being.

Since gothic art was defective in most important aesthetic areas, a taste

for it did not bode well for a person's general mental balance, and such

a taste multiplied meant that society itself had become debased. Although

the objects of contempt changed, the German organicists, Pugin and Ruskin

all followed a similar line of argument.

The two phases of the controversy over the gothic were easily mixed

so that, where arguments from aesthetic principles failed, they could be

turned with no great degree of subtlety into *ad hominem* arguments instead.

Vasari had begun this strategy by moving away from a detailed, if mis-

taken, critique of gothic aesthetics, and towards the barbarous origins

of the art and the barbarous character of its defenders. The usual

eighteenth-century procedure was a little more sophisticated. For example,

William Whitehead, writing in *The World* (No. 12, 1753), neatly associated

a taste for the gothic with disturbing political and social events:

> This, however odd it might seem, and however unworthy the
> name of Taste, was cultivated, was admired, and still has
> its professors in different parts of England. There is
> something in it, they say, congenial to our old Gothic
> constitution; I should rather think, to our modern idea
> of liberty, which allows everyone the privilege of playing
> the fool, and of making himself ridiculous in whatever way
> he pleases.[18]

In *The Goths in England* Kliger takes up the obverse side of White-

head's accusation, and looks for the positive political uses of the word

gothic. According to Kliger, "the term 'Gothic' came into extensive use

in the seventeenth century as an epithet employed by the Parliamentary

leaders to defend the prerogatives of Parliament against the pretensions

of the King to absolute right to govern England." The search for prece-

dents for this resistance stimulated a considerable antiquarian movement

in England. The antiquarians of the Parliamentary party believed that

the Goths, by whom they meant the ancestral Germanic peoples, had "founded

the institutions of public assemblies which, in its [sic] English parlia-

mentary form, the Stuarts were seeking to destroy." By careful reworking

of the depictions of northern tribes by Tacitus, Jordanes and Saint

Augustine, the political researchers manufactured the support they needed:

"The analysis of Gothic character found in these early texts described

the Goths as a Teutonic folk to whom political liberty was dear. Further-

more, the early texts offered a quasi-scientific explanation of the Gothic

propensity for liberty in a theory of climatic influence on character . . .

the frigid temperature of the Gothic habitat in the northern regions was

the physiological factor explaining Gothic vigor, hardiness, and zeal for

liberty."[19] Mingled with this reconstruction was the doctrine of gothic

moral and intellectual superiority, the *"translatio imperii ad Teutonicos,"*

which had been promulgated in the north since the Protestant Reformation,

and which connected the gothic with enlightenment, through an opposition

of racial characteristics: "the triumph of Gothic humanity, honor, and

simplicity over invertebrate Roman urbanism, effeminacy, and luxury.

The Gothicists pictured . . . a world rejuvenation or rebirth due to the

triumph of Gothic energy and moral purity over Roman torpor and depravity."[20]

Kliger is fairly cautious, however, about forming connections between

political and aesthetic attitudes. Although he argues that the ideali-

zation of ancient Gothic liberty was essentially a whiggish exercise in

creating historical precedents, he denies any firm link between political

Whiggery and admiration for gothic architecture. Addison, who was a Whig,

disapproved strongly of gothic architecture, while Horace Walpole, also

a Whig, moved through avid approval, lesser enthusiasm, and occasional

disapproval during his long career as connoisseur. Kliger also has to

admit that the favourable, ethnic connotation of gothic did not overcome

the unfavourable ones in practice, and that the favourable sense was not

"the main or even important cause of the actual building of Gothic struc-

tures." But he does go so far as to claim that "an association had been

formed in some eighteenth-century minds between Whig principles of popular

government and the freedom from neo-classical restraints displayed in the

Gothic building; *per contra,* from the opposing Tory point of view, the

symmetry and balance of the Grecian building apotheosized the Tory aim

of maintaining national stability through vested aristocratic interest

and a strong monarchy."[21]

Lovejoy suggests a quite different use of gothic, as a slur:

> It performed much the same necessary function that, in cer-
> tain circles, the adjective "Victorian" performs today. . . .
> The term also took on a certain political coloring; since it

> not only vaguely suggested "the old-fashioned" in general,
> but, more specifically, the political and social system of
> the Middle Ages, *i.e.*, feudalism, it sometimes served the
> progressives of the period as an unpleasant way of refer-
> ring to anything the Tories approved. . . .[22]

Unlike Kliger, Lovejoy proposes that the Whigs applied the label gothic

not to themselves or to the ancestral supporters of their parliamentary

cause, but to the Tory establishment, whenever they wanted to set forth

its regressive tendencies or to raise the spectre of tyranny restored.

These partisan uses of the gothic seem contradictory only because

they were part of the larger contradictions that had arisen in attitudes

towards ancestors and towards the value in aesthetic argument of various

kinds of traditional authority. There were Goths of the left and right,

self-proclaimed Goths and ridiculed Goths because the values of the medi-

eval and classical heritages were fluctuating. The conflict between the

two main cultural dispensations was the central fact behind the emergence

of a new gothicism. Kliger presents the opposition in terms of familiar

polarities, *nature* and *reason*, but it is plain from the evidence of his

examples that a case could be made for both properties belonging to both

traditions. Lovejoy concentrates instead on a succession of "returns to

Nature," each of which represents a reaction against some previous formu-

lation of what constitutes the "natural" in art. The reaction to the

gothic or to any of the other new tastes, such as the taste for the

rococo, the Chinese, or the Egyptian, with which the gothic often was

associated depended on the aesthetic qualities they were thought to

embody and on the current limits of the notion of creativity.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century uses of the word gothic were

various and undiscriminating; consequently, any attempt to determine what

kinds of objects were considered gothic must aim to be exhaustive rather than definitive. Aside from the multiplicity of political and social purposes which gothic could advance, a factor which contributed to this diversity was the variety of theories for the "invention" of the medieval styles.

In trying to sort out the meaning of the gothic, Lovejoy has noted three common patterns of usage. In the first, any structure which did not satisfy neo-classical norms was called gothic. Thus, we have the statement in Dryden's translation of Dufresnoy (1693): "All that is not in the ancient gust is called a barbarous or Gothic manner." Similarly, Batty Langley, in *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved,* etc. (1742), asserted that: "Every ancient building which is not in the Grecian mode is called a Gothic building."[23]

The second pattern of usage was more limited but equally inaccurate. This was the application of the label gothic to works which would now be called Romanesque. It is significant that Romanesque was the style that was actually believed, in Italy at least, to be of Gothic origin; the later "pointed" style was more likely to be thought German or Saracenic.

The third pattern was exemplified in John Evelyn's *Account of Architects and Architecture* which was prefixed to his edition of Fréart's *A Parallel of the Ancient Architecture with the Modern* (1697). Evelyn adhered to the recent theory of the double genesis of "modern" architecture, regarding the Goths and Vandals, and the Moors and Arabs, as originators of what he called "a certain fantastical and licentious Manner of Building." He lumped together and thoroughly confused the Romanesque or Norman "heavy" style with the later pointed style which

Wren would call Saracenic (that label also expressing a theory of "inven-

tion"). Early and late medieval buildings, buildings overly heavy,

ponderous, gloomy and overly light, frivolous, airy were condemned under

the same rubric and given the same designation, gothic.[24] For Evelyn

and his contemporaries, gothic referred to all architectural excesses.

It did not matter much if those excesses resulted from diametrically

opposite causes.

Failure to discriminate carefully among styles was understandably

common with critics of the gothic. Since they saw the gothic as merely

one among several subversive new tastes they were unlikely to look into

its finer divisions. Moreover, ignorance of an ignorant style was a form

of protection against its effects. So gothic was placed with rococo,

Chinese and Egyptian as an aberrant species, and the same objections

often were laid against all. This muddling of types was also encouraged

by the modern supporters and builders of non-classical architecture, who

felt no reluctance in introducing a mixture of elements into their

designs, producing strange, and not especially vigorous, hybrids.[25]

The critics' main target was the Saracenic or modern gothic of the

thirteenth to fifteenth century. Their singling out of the Saracenic

may have begun in "a valid aesthetic reaction against the excesses of

the English Late Perpendicular and the French Flamboyant styles; but the

attributes found in an extreme form in these were commonly ascribed to

'modern Gothic' as a whole."[26] Among those attributes were lack of

formal explicitness or rationality, and over-ornamentation, especially

where there was no functional or structural need.[27] The standards for

judging such deficiencies were sometimes translated into *magnitude* and

immediacy of impression. For example, in *Spectator* No. 415, one of the series on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," Addison contrasted the effects of a classical and a gothic building upon the beholder:

> Let any one reflect on the Disposition of Mind he
> finds in himself, at his first Entrance into the *Pantheon*
> at *Rome,* and how his Imagination is filled with something
> Great and Amazing; and, at the same time, consider how
> little, in proportion, he is affected with the Inside of
> a *Gothick Cathedral,* tho' it be five times larger than the
> other; which can arise from nothing else, but the Greatness
> of Manner in the one, and the Meanness in the other.

Addison borrowed a psychological explanation of this contrast from Fréart's *Parallel,* which made it clear that "Meanness of Manner" resulted from the distraction caused by superfluous, trivial details:

> I am observing . . . a thing which, in my Opinion, is very
> curious, whence it proceeds, that in the same quantity of
> Superficies, the one *Manner* seems great and magnificent,
> and the other poor and trifling; the Reason is fine and
> uncommon . . . to introduce into Architecture this Grandeur
> of Manner, we ought so to proceed, that the Division of the
> Principal Members of the Order may consist but of few Parts,
> that they be all great and of a bold and ample Relievo, and
> Swelling; and that the Eye, beholding nothing little and
> mean, the Imagination may be more vigorously touched and
> affected with the Work that stands before it . . . if we
> see none of that ordinary Confusion which is the Result of
> those little cavities, Quarter Rounds of the Astragal, and
> I know not how many other intermingled Particulars, which
> produce no effect in great and massy Works, and which very
> unprofitably take up Place to the prejudice of the Principal
> Member, it is most certain that this Manner will appear
> Solemn and Great; as on the contrary, that will have but a
> poor and mean Effect, where there is a Redundancy of those
> smaller Ornaments, which divide and scatter the Angles of
> the Sight into such a Multitude of Rays, so pressed together
> that the whole will appear but a Confusion.[28]

When we penetrate this pseudo-psychological language we see that Addison was describing the failure of the gothic to *concentrate* its effects. The combination of variety and disorder produced what Montesquieu called "a sort of enigma."[29] Addison found such obscurity a

barrier to strong impressions.

Addison brought this observation to bear on literary matters as well. In *Spectator* No. 62 he had proposed three categories of wit (poetical composition): *true, false,* and *"mixt."* True Wit, consisting in "the Resemblance of Ideas," was superior because it manipulated the simple elements of natute and avoided the trivial, the accidental and the superficial; therefore, it came closer to serving the mimetic purpose of poetry. In contrast, under False Wit Addison grouped all sorts of idle word-play, including puns, anagrams, acrostics, puzzles, figure-poems, riddles, and doggerel rhyme. Mixt Wit, partaking of both kinds, gave Addison occasion to attack the unrestrained working of *fancy* in poetry and, in particular, the legacy of excess and whimsical imagination left by the Metaphysical poets.

It becomes plain, as Addison's arugment fills out, that by True Wit he meant to encompass the essential properties of good poetry. Comparing the degrees of poetic sophistication, Addison made use of a suggestive architectural analogy:

> This is that natural Way of Writing, that beautiful Simpli-
> city, which we so much admire in the Compositions of the
> Ancients; and which no Body deviates from, but those who
> want Strength of Genius to make a Thought shine in its own
> natural Beauties. Poets who want this strength of Genius
> to give that Majestick Simplicity to Nature, which we so
> much admire in the Works of the Ancients, are forced to
> hunt after foreign Ornaments, and not to let any Piece of
> Wit of what kind soever escape them. I look upon these
> Writers as *Goths* in poetry, who, like those in Architecture,
> not being able to come up to the beautiful Simplicity of
> the old *Greeks* and *Romans,* have endeavoured to supply its
> place with all the Extravagances of an irregular Fancy . . .
> the Taste of most of our *English* Poets, as well as Readers,
> is extremely *Gothick.*[30]

Addison's comparison contained typical anti-gothic complaints. With

his emphasis on "Simplicity" and "natural Beauties," he pointed out that the gothic not only failed to *concentrate its effects* but also failed to *conform to nature*. These shortcomings were closely connected. The lack of formal or technical discipline in either gothic buildings or gothic poetry was a sign of their creators' carelessness and ignorance: Goths were those who would not recognize that imitation of nature was the proper end of art, or who could not achieve such imitation. Mechanically, rather than essentially, related elements were the materials for Addison's False and Mixt Wit; the patterns of nature, definable by universally valid rules, were replaced in this inferior sort of writing by the accidental quirks of language.

Simplicity referred not only to the obviousness or truth-to-nature of a building or poem but also to the means of its creation, and the remaining, visible signs of its creation. In Addison's critical vocabulary, gothic came to mean something like *artificial* or *contrived*. The hallmark of art was supposed to be its apparent effortlessness of execution, its blending of facility with genius. In contrast, the elaborateness of the gothic, whether in a "Saracenic" abbey or a vapid poetic conceit, indicated laboriousness, a striving after the spectacular, the unusual, when the natural could not be achieved. The gothic was unacceptable in art because it called forth unbridled energies in the artist, and required them from the beholder, wasting them in unnecessary exercises and fancies. In architecture, gothic continued to designate all types of non-classical buildings, from Saxon to Tudor, as various schemes for classifying them were tried out; Addison's literary usage, however, was an example of a general sense of the term gothic which was neither

historical (i.e., gothic means medieval) nor generic (i.e., gothic means romantic). In this sense, gothic stood as a catch-all term for the undisciplined, ignorant, formally extravagant art which obtruded upon the modern taste.

Another common source of objection to the gothic was its apparent lack of symmetry. And again there were literary analogues of the architectural defect. Like over-ornamentation or superficiality, this shortcoming was believed to originate in a failure of mimesis. Nature was inherently symmetrical as well as simple and distinct. Symmetry, however, had more to do with unity of total effect than with bilateral duplication. The artist's objective was to ensure immediate understanding of his work, and this required consistency in the relations of components and in their composition as a whole. "The demand for symmetry in architecture . . . expressed the same fundamental psychological theory as the insistence upon the unities in the drama and the disapproval of the mixture of *genres*. Bilateral repetition . . . was merely one of the principal means of producing this singleness of effect. . . ."[31] Since tediousness and obscurity were negative qualities in art (until Sterne and Burke, respectively), it was proper for the artist to remove distractions which might interfere with an almost automatic recognition of significant form.

An issue closely related to gothic asymmetry was regularity, observance of the laws of mathematical proportion. If symmetry was a recognizable aesthetic quality, regularity was the basis for that quality in geometry (or, in the case of poetry, in technical rules). That a building was regular meant that it accorded with the "uniform and exact

mathematical rules of proportion, such as had been laid down by Vitru-vius."[32] Concern for mathematically demonstrable regularity had grown

for several reasons: the need to provide practical guidance in construc-

tion to builders who were not engineers, the need to give theoretical

justification for the elaborate neo-Vitruvian scheme of architectural

"characters," the need to reduce human artifice and natural object alike

to first principles--which were assumed to be mathematical. Since the

Vitruvian term *ordine* had been interpreted as a qualitative, as well as

generic, measure which could be used to deprecate the gothic as an

"order without order," it was natural that any mathematical demonstration

would prove the essential inferiority of gothic design and proportion;

until the middle of the eighteenth century, there was no separate stan-

dard of *gothic* mathematical proportion.

Ignorance of the history of medieval building and its techniques

encouraged the belief that the gothic was irregular and asymmetrical.

Modern critics who had made no active study of such projects did not

realize that both regularity and symmetry were important considerations

in the drawing of the original plans for cathedrals, churches, abbeys,

and manor-houses. They did not suspect that most of the features that

they cited in their accusations against the gothic were, in fact, the

result of accidents and the gradual way in which the building had taken

place; they were not identifying, as they often thought, the outlandish

characteristics of some medieval system of aesthetics. Since the earli-

est medieval monuments still standing in England in the eighteenth

century were the products of centuries of sporadic work, destruction of

partly finished sections, and natural decay, it was hardly possible to

speak of "the architect" of any such project. It was likely that original intentions would have been ignored by succeeding generations of builders, that the first conception would have been muddled.

In order to take historical factors into account eighteenth-century critics needed access to medieval building records, plans, proposals and lists. Especially in England, however, where the dissolution of the monasteries and other religious institutions had dispersed their collections and libraries, those materials were not readily available. But it is doubtful whether many critics would have felt any differently toward the gothic even if they had been able to look into such documents, and had been moved to do so. They still could have attacked gothic art for its haphazard execution and casual composition--for the results if not the intentions. It was an inescapable aesthetic observation: in its effects, the gothic lacked symmetry and regularity. The antiquaries provided historical evidence which did not fit comfortably with neoclassical assumptions--and not all antiquaries' tastes were changed by the evidence.

Other reasons for dislike of the gothic included "a physical distaste for the angular and pointed. . . . The spikiness of Gothic--the infinite repetition of the pointed form in spikes, turrets, pinnacles, arches, doors, and windows--made the eighteenth-century observer feel positively uncomfortable."[33] One such observer was Goethe, who spoke of expecting Strasbourg Munster, which inspired his phase of admiration for the gothic, to appear as a "malformed bristly monster"; this sensitivity to gothic monstrosity was a typical, not an exaggerated, response.

Both Lovejoy and Robson-Scott also take note of the *argument from universal acceptability,* according to which the true test of the legitimacy of an artistic mode was its acceptance among civilized peoples.[34] Since there were various ways of calculating the degree of acceptance, the argument was liable to be quite hard to pin down with particulars; it was adopted, if at all, without regard to the evidence of European architectural history--and *recent* history at that. Universal acceptability now may seem as if it should be a statistical notion, because we are more accustomed to looking for statistical universes; in the eighteenth century the concept defined a much more limited universe of believers in the classical rules, the established criteria of excellence. Universal acceptability was in fact a disguise for the process by which a cultural community selected and identified its members. The whole argument must have derived some of its force from the enduring belief in the Three Ages of Art: the opinions of the "barbarians" of the middle age were obviously much less important than the examples of the first, classical age and the aspirations of the latest age.

Lovejoy does not find that the argument was very influential as a way of attacking the gothic, although the allied idea of universally valid aesthetic standards was the basis for much anti-gothic criticism. Lovejoy has offered the explanation that the argument originated in confusion over the meaning of "classic." Citing the example of Thomas Warton's *Verses on Sir Joshua Reynolds's Painted Window* (1782), Lovejoy contends that two connotations of classic often were mixed: one was the sense of "universal acceptability"; the other, of *Palladian style,* the current vogue in classical architecture. The gothic was certainly *not*

the latter, but that did not necessarily prevent it from being classic
in the former sense. Within the rationale of the new gothicism, it was
a point in favour of both architectural and literary gothic that they
were "classic" *English* modes.

The controversy over the gothic was a defensive action. Opponents
of gothic art were not only interested in deriding its flaws; they were
sensitive to those flaws because they believed in some other system,
whether the superiority of Palladian architecture or the propriety of
the dramatic unities, and they strove to defend that system against the
encroachment of inferior alternatives. At the same time they were enforc-
ing the rules for social standing, taste and knowledgeability. It was
natural that the range of objects considered gothic should be very wide,
including not only buildings and literary works but also various kinds
of political opinion, political action, and social behaviour--in general,
the *outré*. It is easy to see why the terminological controversy was so
often inconclusive, when its terms of reference were as ill-defined as
any in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century critical discourse. The pre-
judices which ascribed outlandish origins to medieval art, which caused
the term gothic to signify, on the level of ordinary usage, something
like "barbarous" or "ignorant," added a tone of personal acrimony to the
dispute over styles and values.

The controversy over the gothic was restricted in its distribution
because of differences in class interests and regional practices. An
important factor was the gap between traditional craftsmanship and the
realm of aesthetic disputes. It was not until the middle of the seven-
teenth century that a concept of competing styles, a necessary idea for

the maligning of the gothic, was established in England,[35] and even then

the impact of that concept was greater on one class of builders than

another.

> For men in the North the difference between Renaissance and
> medieval only became clear when pure Renaissance buildings
> were built there; up till then English architecture was a
> mixture of both styles, but accepted as classical. The
> difference between these buildings and Gothic was not very
> great and was not really appreciated. Only when Inigo Jones
> was building, did it become clear that the Italianate was
> radically different from the Gothic and that there were in
> fact two styles.[36]

This relatively late introduction of stylistic differentiation into

England finally gave rise to a sense of dissatisfaction with the native,

hybrid style. Builders and patrons who knew the "better" style began to

perceive the customary manner as vulgar and debased.

Even after this infiltration of neo-classical distaste, a belief in

the suitability, indeed the desirability, of native design and technique

persisted:

> In country districts with plenty of natural materials and a
> strong local tradition, domestic architecture remained
> untouched by Italian influences even in the eighteenth
> century. . . . Barns and farm buildings were still roofed
> and buttressed in the Gothic way; and country workmen fol-
> lowed Pugin's True Principles with a naturalness which he
> praised but could never attain. While medieval ornament
> was enjoying its modish revival in the town, medieval con-
> struction lived an unassuming country life, and Walpole
> little suspected that the average barn was more truly
> Gothic than his bepinnacled Strawberry.[37]

Here Clark presents the main characteristics of traditional gothic

building as it continued into the eighteenth century: its distribution

outside fashionable circles, its use in mundane, functional situations,

its emphasis upon proven practices, and its naïveté. Some further qual-

ifications make the account of this survivalism more accurate. Gothic

survival was more a provincial than a strictly rural phenomenon. Gothic

was used for ecclesiastical and collegiate work, in accord with the

generally accepted practice of conforming to the manner of existing

structures.[38] The occurrence of survivalism also varied with the rela-

tive power and influence of stonemasons, builders, and architects among

the construction trades.[39]

Controversy over the gothic was quite irrelevant to the traditional

builders. The nature of the work they usually did and their limited

opportunities for travel and architectural education insulated them from

the issues under dispute. If, as Clark and Colvin have indicated, the

traditional builders did most of their work either restoring and complet-

ing churches, or constructing farm and domestic buildings, they were

unlikely to have the chance to employ alternatives to the hybrid gothic

style--had alternatives been available to them. Moreover, their con-

tracts and contacts would have been with townspeople, merchants, parsons,

yeomen farmers, and the lesser gentry, among whom architectural contro-

versies and the changes of fashion were either unimportant or imperfectly

understood. Their involvement with such matters was at best delayed or

derivative. Builders, craftsmen, and most of their patrons did not have

the resources to undertake the Grand Tour, which had promoted the growth

of the neo-classical taste in England.[40] Their exposure to the principles

of neo-classical design came through academic study--if their fortune or

talent allowed it--or through association with the higher level of build-

ing practice, such as the Board of Trade where Wren and his pupils were

employed. As a result of these factors, a more or less passive advocacy

of the gothic continued unaffected by the critical disputes or the

preoccupation of connoisseurs and amateurs. On the other hand, this
kind of traditionalism gave little direction to the shifts in fashionable
taste that eventually defined the valid, native, gothic style in a
pseudo-historical way.

Before a taste for medieval things could reassert itself in the
eighteenth century, two new ideas had to gain a place: a sense of the
novelty of medieval art and literature, and a sense of their identity.[41]
The latter would be influential only imperfectly and indirectly, but
neither sense was to be found at the traditionalists' level. Given
their persistence in using the hybrid gothic mode, their usual lack of
formal academic training, their ignorance of architectural history and
theory, their isolation and reliance on local design models, it was
unlikely that traditionalist builders would be a source for understanding
the complexities and classifications of medieval art.[42] In addition,
since they treated the gothic as the natural, indigenous style, capable
of successfully assimilating the intrusive Renaissance styles, they
would not have seen the gothic, at the same time, as merely *one optional
style* among those available. Traditionalist builders *thought of the
gothic as "the style in which one builds."*

For the same reasons, they did not produce a sense of the gothic as
something novel or exotic; after all, they had been using it continuously
well into the eighteenth century. The revivalists drew that sense from
a set of cultural and historical associations from which the tradition-
alists were far removed, if only by their pedestrian, commonplace
practice of unspectacular imitation.

The sense of the novelty of gothic was more important for the revival of gothic architecture and the creation of gothic fiction; however, the development of that sense was encouraged by historical, as well as aesthetic or fantastic, interests. Paradoxically, much of the encouragement came from English antiquaries, who were immediately concerned not with the *novelty* of medieval art but with the process of *identifying* and differentiating its elements.[43] This was the indirect way in which a sense of the identity of gothic contributed to the new literary gothicism--although the literary goths themselves had only an *imperfect* sense of that identity.

The dissolution of the English monasteries and the dispersal or decay of their holdings stimulated antiquarian activity in England at an early date. The antiquary John Leland (1506?-1552) made a place for architectural antiquities in the history of Britain which he was planning, and which finally appeared as the *De Antiquitate Britannica* published by Thomas Hearne between 1710 and 1712. The *Britannica* of William Camden (1551-1623) included even more architectural materials; in Camden's time the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries was formed, with the purpose of gathering records and antiquities back to the Roman occupation.

> At the same time there developed considerable interest in church documents, frequently written in Anglo-Saxon, and hence an interest in Anglo-Saxon language and grammar. This concern with language and with legal and clerical documents led to an interest in mediaeval church history and eventually to the publication of the *Monasticon Anglicanum* with Hollar's illustrations; thus the English public could from 1655 on contemplate reproductions of English architecture, much of it Gothic, all of it mediaeval. No other country could boast a similar publication.[44]

The antiquaries' subject matter was not limited to gothic or medieval artifacts. Antiquaries were by no means universally convinced of

the value of the gothic. In 1736, for example, Sir John Clerk berated

Roger Gale for the misplaced loyalties of the members of the Society of

Antiquaries: "I am sorry to find that Gothicism prevails so much in your

Society. If your Antiquarians won't entertain a just opinion of it,

they won't believe it to be only the degeneracy of Greek and Roman Arts

and Sciences. In this view I myself have admired the laborious Dullness

and Stupidity which appear in all the Gothick contrivances of any kind.

These Barbarians had the originals in perfection and yet could discover

no beauties for their imitation, but Goths will always have a Gothick

taste."[45] Even William Stukeley, the most prominent antiquary of the

early eighteenth century, belonged to the Society of Roman Knights at

the same time as he was secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, and

spoke of "the abominable superstitions of the cloyster'd nuns and fryers"

and the harm they had done to the classical heritage.[46] Frankl has re-

marked that "the men of the eighteenth century . . . took their love for

two different styles as a sign of indecision and had to excuse them-

selves."[47] Ambivalence was bound to affect the antiquaries' judgment

whenever they had to deal with preference between styles, instead of

investigation and description. And such questions of preference inevi-

tably came up, in various areas of their interest: the conservation of

artifacts, the landscaping of country estates, the treatment of real and

artificial ruins. The antiquaries were not simply historical researchers.

They were involved in evaluating competing claims for cultural ancestry,

and they had to consider the aesthetic implications of that competition.

The antiquaries' activities concentrated in three areas: description,

identification, and conservation.[48] Description, consisting of the

discovery, collecting and presenting of artifacts, often through publication, was a natural continuation of the work of the topographers.[49] In its earliest stages, the antiquarian movement, like topography, had chauvinistic overtones and patriotic uses. Especially when they turned their attention from the monasteries to the monuments of chivalry, the baronial castles and manor-houses which already were being consciously imitated, Elizabethan antiquaries enlarged the sense of the nation's cultural richness and diversity. The glories of the past, vividly recalled, provided a suitable background for the glories of the present regime. Since the natural history and the human history of England were both enlisted in the service of the idea of British greatness, antiquarianism and topography became almost indistinguishable in their motives.[50]

The scope and texture of a topographical survey, like Michael Drayton's *Polyolbion* (1622), which magnified the whole nation, was matched by the minute attention that antiquaries gave to each region. The picturesque tourist coming to a strange county was also provided with a guide to its antiquities, its ruins, castles, cathedrals, and ancient homes. Antiquaries expressed regional, as well as national pride. Antiquarian societies existed mainly on the local level and became a new instrument for achieving social cohesion and for defining local interests. It is not surprising that antiquaries often delved into the very microcosm of historical research: their own family background. Thus, we have Horace Walpole writing to the Rev. William Cole:

> I am the first antiquary of my race [i.e., the Walpoles]
> --people don't know how entertaining a study it is. Who
> begot whom is a most amusing kind of hunting; one recovers
> a grandfather instead of breaking one's own neck--and then
> one grows so pious to the memory of a thousand persons one

never heard of before. One finds how Christian names came
into a family, with a world of other delectable erudition.
. . . --I had promised myself a whole crop of notable
ancestors--but I think I have pretty well unkennelled them
myself.[51]

If antiquarianism bordered on one side on topography, on the other it

bordered on genealogy. The common element was the need to complete the

pattern of native things--whether geographical, cultural, or familial.

The activity of identification set the antiquaries apart from the

descriptive topographers. Identification included the establishing of

regional, historical, generic or stylistic categories for artifacts; the

proposing of theories to explain their origins and to account for the

development of styles; and the analysing of artifacts, mainly for their

decorative features. These studies, although by nature purely theoreti-

cal and disinterested, were liable to lead antiquaries into the midst of

the controversy over the relative *value* of styles, a controversy with

both critical and practical implications.

The activity of conservation was a response to those practical

issues, of which the major one was the use and abuse of medieval arti-

facts, especially buildings and parts of buildings. The antiquaries'

conservatism had both secular and religious aspects. The original anti-

quarian attention to ecclesiastical subjects persisted, fixed there by

alarming developments. Antiquaries readily involved themselves in dis-

putes over the commercial use of churches and monasteries, or their

destruction for reasons of convenience. But the developers and specula-

tors were not the only opponents with whom the protectors of gothic

buildings had to cope. In 1778, when the new gothic taste had spread in

literature and design, Vicesimus Knox, one of the more rabid opponents

of the gothic, complained about the use of stained glass in church

windows, noting--rather contradictorily--the "glaring colours" of the

glass and the muted, gloomy interior lighting that it allowed. To Knox

"the dim interior suggested the tainted atmosphere of papacy and made an

appeal . . . to the ardent imagination, the activity of which the con-

genital classicist viewed with profound disgust." The objects of his

attack included both the affectation that was papish richness and the

superstitious ignorance which the painted windows represented to him.

Knox's use of the symbolic connection between light and religious belief

was remarkably similar to the literary gothicists':

> A religious dimness may, perhaps, be deemed necessary for
> the bigoted inhabitants of the convent and the cloyster,
> whose minds, it is to be feared, are often as dark as their
> habitations; but light is cheerful, and cheerfulness is the
> disposition of innocence.[52]

Similar feelings led to the substitution of clear glass for coloured and

attempts to brighten church interiors. A Low Church distaste for orna-

ment and for the sensuous accompaniments to religious ritual combined

with the more general distrust of emotional or irrational religious

experiences to advance such "reforms."

Antiquaries regarded them with mingled suspicion and horror. A

great deal of what passed for restoration or improvement of medieval

buildings really amounted to extensive rebuilding in the *better* (i.e.,

baroque or neo-classical) style. Antiquaries acted as guardians against

incompetent, careless or malicious restoration work; for the work of

rationalizing existing churches so that they would be free from papish

trappings was unlikely to fall into the hands of builders who had any

stake in the original style. Antiquaries--and not only those who had

developed a special affection for the gothic--feared that many objects

of historical importance and of considerable beauty would be relegated

to the trash heap indiscriminately. Although many antiquaries seemed to

edge toward a favouring of Roman Catholic institutions and ritual (or at

least an High Church position), it was also possible to argue for the

intact preservation of medieval churches and monasteries on purely con-

servational ground. For the antiquary, any evidence of English history

was worth saving, regardless of the doctrinal or political associations

which it bore.

Whatever their rationale, antiquaries practiced several kinds of

conservation. They salvaged old stained glass that had been discarded.

Where medieval buildings had fallen into irreparable ruin--and without

knowledge of, or interest in, the constructive principles of medieval

architecture, much of the damage was irreparable--they rescued whatever

artifacts were portable. As Horace Walpole's correspondence with Cole

and with his antiquarian adviser, John Chute, shows, it was common for

antiquaries to incorporate many of the rescued things into their new

buildings, usually with unfortunate aesthetic results.[53] In such cases,

the antiquary's motives went beyond conservation or the gathering of a

collection, and turned into the main force that directed the medieval

revival: the use of a romantic, earlier time to enrich contemporary life,

to give satisfactions that the culture of the mainstream could not give.

We can see that force working more directly if we look to other

aspects of the revived interest in past things than the architectural.

Besides, architectural antiquarianism was rarely separate from its pos-

sible *literary* uses, or, conversely, from its usual literary sources.

The interest in medieval architecture certainly had not been provoked by any sudden realization of either its aesthetic or its constructive advantages. Instead, W. H. Smith notes, "the first stage of the Gothic revival was . . . appreciation of Gothic architecture merely because of its antiquity and its historical associations."[54] Smith's list of motives for this appreciation makes no mention of some intrinsic value in the gothic: "People were interested in Gothic because it preserved ancestral traditions, because it adorned the landscape, because it inspired awe, because it induced melancholy reflections, because it gave them a congenial background. . . . It would be difficult to say that any one of these separate attitudes antedated any other, or that any one ever prevailed to the utter exclusion of any other."[55] Clark has noted that the favour shown medieval architecture by such early journal-writers as Pepys and Evelyn, and by many antiquaries, was expressed mainly through an appreciation of the massive scale of the buildings, the ingenuity of their ornamentation, and the labour which a relatively primitive people brought to their construction. In short, they were admired because they were impressive or because the fact of their being built was supposed to be impressive.

The awesomeness of the gothic helped to determine its literary value, and its political value, also; for Horace Walpole in his famous comparison of the effects of "Grecian" and "Gothic" buildings could not resist emphasizing that the gothic cathedral was a piece of propaganda meant to enrich the Roman Catholic Church:

> . . . the men who had not the happiness of lighting on the
> simplicity and proportion of the Greek orders, were however
> so lucky as to strike out a thousand graces and effects,

which rendered their buildings magnificent, yet genteel, vast, yet light, venerable and picturesque. It is difficult for the noblest Grecian temple to convey half so many impressions to the mind, as a cathedral does of the best Gothic taste--a proof of skill in the architects and of address in the priests who erected them. The latter exhausted their knowledge of the passions in composing edifices whose pomp, mechanism, vaults, tombs, painted windows, gloom and perspectives infused such sensations of romantic devotion; and they were happy in finding artists capable of executing such machinery. One must have taste to be sensible of the beauties of Grecian architecture; one only wants passions to feel Gothic. In St. Peter's one is convinced that it was built by great princes. In Westminster-abbey, one thinks not of the builder; the religion of the place makes the first impression--and though stripped of its altars and shrines, it is nearer converting one to popery than all the regular pageantry of Roman domes. Gothic churches infuse superstition; Grecian, admiration. The papal see amassed its wealth by Gothic cathedrals, and displays it in Grecian temples.[56]

The *meaning* of the objects that the antiquaries collected, preserved and analysed came from two *literary* sources: the activities of the literary antiquaries,[57] and the experiments in new modes of poetic sensitivity, particularly the melancholy, the sentimental, and the sublime.

Literary antiquarian activity can be traced back to Edmund Spenser's decision to revive chivalric subject matter and settings, and to affect an archaic vocabulary and spelling, in the *Faerie Queene*.[58] But the works which best illustrate the renewed interest in things medieval while pointing to the use of medieval life in fiction date from the middle of the eighteenth century. They are Richard Hurd's *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1759) and *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), and Thomas Warton's *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1754), and Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). These works are informative as much in their method of argument as in their substance, so that it becomes hard to separate the two.

In the third of the *Moral and Political Dialogues,* that "on the
Golden Age of Queen *Elisabeth* BETWEEN The Hon. Robert DIGBY, Dr. ARBUTHNOT,
and Mr. ADDISON,"[59] Hurd pretended to record the conversation of the
travellers during their excursion to "Kenelworth Castle" [sic] in 1716.
He supplied each with a different reason for the trip, suited to his
character and to the arguments he would present:

> These were matters of high entertainment to all of them;
> to Dr. ARBUTHNOT, for the pleasure of recollecting the
> ancient times; to Mr. ADDISON, on account of some political
> reflexions, he was fond of indulging on such occasions; and
> to Mr. DIGBY, from an ingenuous curiosity, and the love of
> seeing and observing whatever was most remarkable, whether
> in the past ages, or the present (p. 37).

The three behave like typical scenic tourists when they arrive at
the Castle:

> On their entrance into the *inner-court,* they were struck
> with the sight of many mouldering towers, which preserved
> a sort of magnificence even in their ruins. They amused
> themselves with observing the vast compass of the whole,
> with marking the uses, and tracing the dimensions, of the
> several parts. All of which it was easy for them to do,
> by the very distinct traces that remained of them, and
> especially by means of DUGDALE'S plans and descriptions,
> which they had taken care to consult (pp. 39-40).[60]

The visitors climb to a vantage-point in the ruins, whence they can look
out over the countryside: "The prospect of so many antique towers falling
into rubbish, contrasted to the various beauties of the landscape, struck
them with admiration and kept them silent for some time" (p. 40). Dr.
Arbuthnot is overcome by "a melancholy of so delightful a kind, that I
would not exchange it, methinks for any brisker sensation." And he won-
ders "how it is that the mind, even while it laments, finds so great a
pleasure in visiting these scenes of desolation" (pp. 40-41). Addison,
however, suffers no such mixed emotion, only pleasure, "a fiction of the

imagination, which makes me think I am taking revenge on the once pros-

perous and overshadowing height . . . of inordinate Greatness" (p. 41).

He observes with satisfaction the fact that humble farmers live in the

lodge once occupied by the overbearing porter of the Castle, while all

the trappings and ceremony of the overlords have dropped into oblivion.

This observation soon turns into an overtly political reading of the

scene. For Addison, the Castle

> awakens an indignation against the prosperous tyranny of
> those wretched times, and creates a generous pleasure in
> reflecting on the happiness we enjoy under a juster and
> more equal government. . . . I never see the remains of
> that greatness which arose in past ages on the ruins of
> public freedom and private property, but I congratulate with
> myself on living at a time, when the meanest subject is as
> free and independent as those royal minions; and when his
> property, whatever it be, is as secure from oppression, as
> that of the first minister (pp. 44-45).

The ensuing argument is almost entirely between Addison and Arbuth-

not; for Digby, although he mostly favours Dr. Arbuthnot's side, seldom

offers an opinion of his own. Throughout the discussion Arbuthnot is

the mouthpiece for Hurd's opinions.

The Dialogue deals in moral and political, not aesthetic, values;

therefore, the arguments which Addison is made to bring against non-

classical art and medieval customs are not the kind found in the real

Addison's papers on the Pleasures of the Imagination. These former

arguments are associative, whereas those in the *Spectator* often try to

give some psychological account of an object's effects. It is also

significant that the chivalry and romance (or the tyranny and pomp)

which are so much an issue in the Dialogue belong to the Tudor period;

they are the romance of Sidney, Shakespeare, or even the seventeenth-

century French romantic revival. Because the arguments do not directly

take in medieval things, it was possible to skirt religious problems in

the Dialogue, to delay treating the issue of "monkish superstition" that

always arose in eighteenth-century medievalism.

Arbuthnot defends Elizabethan culture by relating it to the culture

of the Greek and Roman golden ages. He compares the organized combat of

the tournaments to the Olympic Games and the spectacles staged in the

Roman arenas. He emphasizes the classical content of the Elizabethan

court masques. Through these means Hurd was trying to win a measure of

respectability for chivalric customs and romance literature, by stressing

their actual familiarity, their ability to fit within existing cultural

limits; thus far, he stayed away from heterodox aims and methods. There

is, for example, no attempt in the Dialogue to justify the romance or

the customs of chivalry according to their own rules or standards.

Instead Hurd relied on criteria about which there was already agreement.

In that way his work in the Dialogue resembled that of the popularizer

of gothic architecture, Batty Langley, of whom Walpole said that he had

"endeavoured to adapt Gothic architecture to Roman measures; as Philip

Sidney attempted to regulate English verse by Roman feet."[61]

Despite his desire to avoid flouting the prevailing aesthetic and

moral standards, Hurd showed one important change in his attitude toward

the gothic, a change signalled through his terminology. In the Third

Dialogue we meet, for the first time in critical discourse, a neutral

use of the term gothic, even if it does not properly apply to the sub-

jects under discussion. The degree of the change comes across clearly

in the contrast between Addison's reference, in the Dialogue, to "a

jumble of *Gothic* romance and pagan fable" (p. 65) and Arbuthnot's

"*Gothic* Tilts and Tournaments" (p. 54): Addison makes *Gothic* and "pagan"
roughly equivalent in meaning; Arbuthnot treats *Gothic* as the name for
a *period*. From this point we can see the equation "gothic equals *medieval*
or quaintly *archaic*" begin to compete with the derogatory equation "gothic
equals *barbarous*."

For Hurd the word gothic was a simple means of distinguishing
"classic" or "Grecian" objects from those which could be grouped loosely
under the heading medieval. By 1771, when James Beattie, in *The Minstrel,*
mentioned "my gothic lyre" and "gothic days," the relative neutrality of
the term showed even in its spelling: "the lower case 'g' indicates that
the term is losing its racial and linguistic affiliations."[62]

Compared with the earlier equation "gothic equals *barbarous*" Hurd's
neutrality must have seemed more like praise. As reaction to things
medieval became more sophisticated, the term gothic wavered in meaning
between neutrality (for the purpose of identifying artifacts) and out-
right idealization. This shift accompanied the development of the
concept of *le bon vieux temps* in eighteenth-century France, and its
English counterpart:

> . . . not only were the romances of the Middle Ages pretti-
> fied but the reading public derived from them and other
> second-hand sources a set of idealized notions concerning
> "Gothic" life. Writers and readers of the second half of
> the century lent to medieval men and women the virtues that
> Tacitus granted to the Germans in order to satirize the
> vices of Rome. . . . And because for a time nobody was
> conscious of racial or national distinctions, even less of
> chronological ones, all medieval men were pictured as cour-
> ageous, loyal, sober, chaste, honest and sincere.[63]

There is an undercurrent of skepticism about the quality of life in
earlier times, in the Third Dialogue, that saves Hurd from any charge of
idealization. Even on Arbuthnot's side of the fictitious discussion

lurks an acknowledgment that darkness and barbarity formed the background to the Elizabethan world; that the principal value of chivalric customs and romance literature was their power to lift people occasionally above those basic conditions.

Hurd carried the ambivalence of the Third Dialogue into his larger antiquarian work, the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762). The *Letters* do make a more definite claim for the independent value of the romances, but traces of less favourable attitudes and terminology remain:

> The spirit of Chivalry, was a fire which soon spent itself:
> But that of *Romance,* which was kindled at it, burnt long,
> and continued its light and heat even to politer ages.
> The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries
> . . . were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers;
> were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice
> and absurdity in them? Or, may there not be something in
> the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a
> genius, and to the ends of poetry? And may not the philoso-
> phic moderns have gone too far, in their perpetual ridicule
> and contempt of it? (pp. 80-81).

The rhetorical questions introduce a radically new defence of romance literature, but phrases like "politer ages" and "seduced by these bar-barities" betray ingrained attitudes, or at least Hurd's use of those attitudes to shield himself from accusations of "caprice and absurdity."

This passage from Letter I also sets out the main purpose of the *Letters:* to show in detail the reasons for the romances' suitability "to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry." The *Letters* go beyond the Third Dialogue as *literary* research; instead of aiming to modify the general reputation of an historical period, they urge that a specific range of subject matter, a specific imaginative power be used again in literary creation.

The first four Letters, however, are given over to a study of the chivalric code which Hurd regarded as the source for the romances. Here too the older prejudices show up. Hurd still could see that chivalric manners resembled madness, for they included fanaticism, recklessness and single-mindedness. Consequently, he had to relate these characteristics to the needs of heroic poetry, in order to connect them with art rather than barbarity.

Hurd's sources for his research were, at best, second-hand. He admits in the fourth Letter that he did not learn about chivalry from the old romances directly, for he had not "perused these barbarous volumes my self; much less would I impose the ungrateful attack upon you. . . . Thanks to the curiosity of certain painful collectors,[64] this knowledge may be obtained at a cheaper rate" (p. 94). Hurd thus evaded the question of why he did not consult the romances himself and of what effect this might have on the validity of his conclusions.

In Letter V Hurd returned to the idea of a correspondence between Homeric and romantic depictions of heroism, acknowledging that the idea originated with Sainte-Palaye (p. 95). This parallel recalls the strategy of the Third Dialogue: use of the similarities between the classical and the gothic in order to prove the value of the latter. Hurd pursued these resemblances further in Letter V, observing that the political organization of Homeric Greece was like the feudal system: "an infinite number of petty independent governments." His main conclusion was that similar social institutions and customs arose because of similar political arrangements, a "common corresponding *state*" (p. 104). He worked around the problem of different *religious* institutions by declaring that

"the religious character of the knight was an accident of the times, and no proper effect of his civil condition" (p. 104). This was a strange statement from a bishop of the Church of England, since it implied that politics were essential in forming the social order and religion merely contingent.

In Letter VI Hurd changed the force of his comparisons and began to demonstrate the *superiority* of romantic to classical literature. After supporting his preference with citations from classical and gothic writers, Hurd concluded that "the fancies of our modern bards [i.e., Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton] are not only more gallant, but . . . more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers . . . you will find that the *manners* they paint, and the *super-stitions* they adopt, are the more poetical for being Gothic" (p. 114). The gothic had the advantage of the classical "in producing the *sublime*" (p. 117). Early in the same Letter, Hurd imagined that Homer himself, given the chance to judge, would have preferred "the manners of the feudal ages": "And the grounds of this preference would, I suppose, have been *'The improved gallantry of the feudal times'*; and the *'superior solemnity of their superstitions'*" (p. 108; the 1788 edition has *"Gothic knights"* instead of *"feudal times")*.[65]

At this point in the *Letters* it is already clear that Hurd was not writing a mere antiquarian treatise, an analysis of forgotten documents with mild apologies for their strangeness. He had set out to re-introduce hitherto unacceptable, contemptible subject matter into poetry, but he was also presenting an alternative set of standards for judging the quality of poetry, standards which were based on its disturbing effects,

rather than its beauty. After all the habitual connecting of the gothic

with superstition in a negative way, Hurd had taken a new critical direc-

tion by suggesting that there were *kinds* of superstitions, and that some

could produce stronger effects in poetry than others. And if one was to

use superstitions in poetry, it was much better that they be Christian

rather than pagan superstitions; that was another reason for preferring

the gothic to the classical imagination—although the gothic was only

more Christian, not *truly* Christian.

Hurd's greatest accomplishment in Letter VI was his argument for the

flexibility of critical judgments, and his recognition that artistic

standards are founded on a framework which is not necessarily fixed.

Hurd demonstrated this idea in his defence of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

A kind of defence had been tried before, in Thomas Warton's *Obser-

vations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser,* the first edition of which

appeared in 1754, when Warton was only twenty-six years old. This work

would have been before Hurd's mind when he composed his own defence; a

second edition of the *Observations,* revised, came out in 1762, the same

year as the *Letters.* Comparing the defences, Arthur Johnston has noted

that "Warton's work is the more crabbed and detailed work of the scholar;

he had read the romances to which he traced Spenser's debt. It is there-

fore with Warton, and not with Hurd, that the romances themselves enter

the field of historical criticism of literature." Warton was equipped

to apply historicist techniques and ideas to his subject. Yet, he was

still beset by the lingering critical doubts and the rigid standards of

his time: "One half of Warton's mind still approved of these standards.

Even when allowing that the *Faerie Queene* should not be judged as a

classical epic, he could not divest himself of his preconceptions; he did not take the bold step of searching the poem for quite other principles of organization and design."[66]

Hurd took that step--the lesser scholar, with the more radical influence. He was sure that some other critical approach to the *Faerie Queene* would reveal the poem in a different light: "Under this idea then of a Gothic, not classical poem, the *Faery Queen* is to be read and criticized. And on these principles, it would not be difficult to unfold its merit in another way than has been hitherto attempted" (p. 115). Hurd exposed the problem of relativity in Letter VIII, through an architectural analogy, the force of which is all the more striking because Hurd's claims for the autonomous value of the gothic offered an alternative to the compromise invented by the neo-Vitruvians, like the Langley brothers, for gothic architecture:

> When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules, by which when it comes to be examined, it is seen to have its merit, as well as the Grecian. The question is not, which of the two is conducted in the simplest or truest taste: but, whether there be not sense and design in both, when scrutinized by the laws on which each is projected.
> The same observation holds of the two sorts of poetry. Judge of the *Faery Queen* by the classic models, and you are shocked with its disorder; consider it with an eye to it's [sic] Gothic original, and you find it regular. The unity and simplicity of the former are more complete: but the latter has that sort of unity and simplicity which results from its nature (pp. 118-119).

Despite the concession of more complete "unity and simplicity" to classical art and literature, the important feature of this analogy is the argument, like the one for superstitions, that there are *kinds* of "unity and simplicity," each suited to a particular style of work, and that

only against these should the work be judged. This idea allowed Hurd to attribute much of the contempt for romantic literature among critics to their misapplication of the classical criterion of *unity of action* to the gothic, whose corresponding proper criterion was *unity of design*.

In Letter IX Hurd asserted as a general principle *"the preeminence of the Gothic manners and fictions, as adapted to the ends of poetry, above the classic"* (p. 128). He explained the decline in esteem for the romances by referring to the unfamiliarity of the life they depicted. Since, according to Hurd, there was no adequate representation of chivalric manners before they had passed away and become strange, all the masterpieces of romance were retrospective, imitative, romantic in their *distance* from the subject. By the time romances were written, the conditions under which they could be appreciated had disappeared; it was hard to believe that they were anything more than extravagant, fictitious impositions. Classical heroic poetry had escaped a similar stigma, Hurd claimed, because Homeric manners were still recognizable in many primitive or natural societies; therefore, reality was still capable of verifying the fiction. Classical manners and subjects were considered universal, whereas gothic were not. No doubt this was because the resemblances between them had been overlooked.

Finally Hurd took up the test of truth, and its shortcomings when applied to fiction. Critics who had been trained to distinguish between deceitful, harmful fictions and true imitations of nature "suppose that the poets, who are lyars by profession, expect to have their lyes believed. Surely they are not so unreasonable. They think it enough, if they can but bring you to *imagine* the possibility of them. . . . Does

any capable reader trouble himself about the truth, or even the credibility of their fancies? Alas. no; he is best pleased when he is made to conceive . . . the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not, and were never likely to, exist" (pp. 135-136). Reason opposes the reader's deceiving himself, but is pacified temporarily when the romance assumes the protective guise of allegory, and with it an air of moral seriousness and intellectual complexity. In the end, however, "assisted . . . by party, and religious prejudices," reason "would endure these *lying wonders,* neither in their own proper shape, nor as masked in figures" (p. 154).

> Henceforth, the taste of wit and poetry took a new turn:
> And the *Muse,* who had wantoned it so long in the world of
> fiction, was now constrained, against her will, to ally
> herself with strict truth, if she would gain admittance
> into reasonable company.
>   What we have gotten by this revolution . . . is a great
> deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine
> fabling. (p. 154).

Hurd could not fully approve this exchange. Implicit in his doubts about it was the possibility that telling the truth was not a necessary feature of fiction or poetry. Hurd was much less troubled by the consequences of "lying" in fiction than were other mid-eighteenth-century critics and reviewers.

Although the *Letters* carry some marks of antiquarian scholarship, their overall effect is to bring out the *novelty* of gothic literature, not to *identify* its characteristics carefully and lay them out in a systematic way. By disregarding the claims of moral or mimetic truthfulness upon fiction, and by admitting that terror, sublimity and strong feeling were legitimate ends for it, Hurd left the way open to reverse the common attitude toward the gothic; for, if the pleasures of the

gothic and the fantastic were not innately inferior to the licit, rational pleasures of classical art, it no longer made sense to regard the makers of the gothic (whether ancient or contemporary) as barbarians.

No more than in the Third Dialogue did Hurd cross over in the *Letters* to idealize the age of chivalry or its products. The point of his study was to identify and remedy a deficiency in imaginative freedom which had affected the literature of his own time. Hurd was not optimistic, however, that it would be easy to recover that freedom. He believed that the efforts of Tasso, Ariosto, Spenser and Milton to revive chivalric subjects in poetry had been relatively futile; these poets had laboured under the influence of a classical tradition which was tightening its hold on literary convention, and they had felt obliged to respond to it. Hurd preferred to their hybrid works a (hypothetical) *unmixed* sort of romance, but, by his own admission, he was not certain where it existed. Nevertheless, if gothic values and subjects were to enter poetry again, Hurd believed that they had to come from the *original* sources, not from diluted *imitations*.

The discovery of gothic originals formed the background to Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). At the centre of Percy's work was the famous folio manuscript, "containing one hundred and ninety-five Sonnets, Ballads, Historical Songs, and Metrical Romances."[67] The authenticity and actual existence of this manuscript were subjects of controversy after the first edition of the *Reliques* appeared, so that Percy's nephew (also Thomas Percy) felt it was necessary to give an account of its whereabouts and physical condition when he edited the fourth edition of 1794. The important facts about Percy's source

materials, for the purposes of this study, are these: the manuscripts were likely to be physically decayed or mutilated (we are sure of the extent of the damage in the case of the main folio); in addition, both Percy and his nephew were convinced that the texts had been corrupted during the process of transmission and recording, through the ignorance or laziness of singers and scribes; and finally, both Bishop Percy's attitude toward his source materials—which varied between apology and condescension—and his use of them were a direct function of his belief that they were defective as transmitted.

In his own Preface, Percy gives some sign of the doubts which might have prevented him from compiling these poems—but did not—and offers a rationale for his work:

> The reader is here presented with select remains of our
> ancient English Bards and Minstrels, an order of men who
> were once greatly respected by our ancestors, and contri-
> buted to soften the roughness of a martial and unlettered
> people by their songs and their music. . . .
> As most of them [the poems] are of great simplicity, and
> seem to have been merely written for the people, [the editor]
> was long in doubt, whether, in the present state of improved
> literature, they could be deemed worthy of the attention of
> the public. At length the importunity of his friends pre-
> vailed, and he could refuse nothing to such judges as the
> author of *The Rambler,* and the late Mr. Shenstone.
> Accordingly such specimens of ancient poetry have been
> selected, as either show the gradation of our language,
> exhibit the progress of popular opinions, display the pecu-
> liar manners and customs of former ages, or throw light on
> our earlier classical poets.
> They are here distributed into VOLUMES . . . showing the
> gradual improvements of the English language and poetry,
> from the earliest ages down to the present. . . .
> In a polished age, like the present, I am sensible that
> many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allow-
> ances to be made for them. Yet have they, for the most part,
> a pleasing simplicity, and many artless graces, which in the
> opinion of no mean critics* have been thought to compensate

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*"Mr. Addison, Mr. Dryden, and the witty Lord Dorset, &c. See the *Spectator,* No. 70. To these might be added many eminent judges now

for the want of higher beauties, and, if they do not dazzle
the imagination, are frequently found to interest the heart
(I, xv-xvi).

Percy was a scholar, a student of languages, a translator, a liter-

ary historian, and a poet. Even more than Hurd, he was afraid of commit-

ting some outrage against the prevailing standards of taste, but the

weighty apparatus of his scholarship gave him the means of satisfying

the distinct needs of three groups: the antiquaries, the critical readers,

and the new literary Goths (of whom Percy could scarcely have been aware).

The *Reliques* contain a formidable array of documentation and explanation.

Three introductory essays, one for each volume, provide information about

Percy's sources,[68] the evolution of ballads and romances from an histor-

ical to a fictional purpose,[69] and the cultural milieu which produced

the poems and songs. The first treatise, the "Essay on the Ancient

Minstrels in England" (I, xxv-lx), is thoroughly larded with supplements:

the footnotes combined with the separate "Notes and Illustration" take

up as much space as the main body of the essay. Percy admitted that "the

desire of being accurate has perhaps seduced him into too minute and

trifling an exactness" (p. xix), but the defects of the ballads seemed

to justify this attention.

A sense of defective materials also determined Percy's editorial

policy, yet he remained able to reconcile various demands upon him:

> . . . the old copies . . . were often so defective or cor-
> rupted, that a scrupulous adherence to their wretched
> readings would only have exhibited unintelligible nonsense,
> or such poor meagre stuff as neither came from the bard nor
> was worthy the press; when, by a few slight corrections or

---

alive. The learned Selden appears also to have been fond of collecting
these old things." (Percy's note, p. xvi.)

additions, a most beautiful or interesting sense hath
started forth, and this so naturally and easily, that the
Editor could seldom prevail on himself to indulge the van-
ity of making a formal claim to the improvement. . . . Yet
it has been his design to give sufficient intimation where
any considerable liberties were taken with the old copies,
and to have retained, either in the text or margin, any
word which was antique, obsolete, unusual, or peculiar.
. . . His object was to please both the judicious antiquary
and the reader of taste; and he hath endeavoured to gratify
both, without offending either (I, xix-xx).

As Percy himself anticipated in his Preface, it was possible to

read the *Reliques* in several different ways, for several different reasons.

The antiquary found there important records of England's literary, lin-

guistic and cultural development, treated with due respect and care (as

Percy assured him). The critical reader could find there a poetic form

which he probably had not considered worth his interest before, but which

had some inherent attraction aside from its historical value. These two

ways of treating the *Reliques* tended to support each other: the antiquary

received some release from the usual charge that he dealt only in esoter-

ica from the fact that the ballads were pleasurable to read, and the

critical reader received a serious excuse for indulging in this out-of-

the-way form from the fact that it was historically significant. Of

course Percy's evident scholarship was reassuring to both groups, for it

promised the requisite purity of text and historical interpretations to

the one, while it considered the sensitive tastes and critical scruples

of the other. If Percy seems now less blatant an advocate of a new

position than was Hurd, that is partly because it is hard to tell whether

he meant the ballads to illustrate his commentary or his commentary to

justify his subject. Although Percy did not argue at any length for an

alternative to the poetry of his day, as Hurd had done, his discovery of

redeeming qualities in the old ballads and lyric poetry, and his evoca-
tion of the chivalric institutions and the minstrelsy, contributed to
the increasingly receptive attitude toward medieval things, and thus
satisfied the needs of that third group of readers: the new goths.

The *Reliques* helped to direct renewed attention to folk and popular
literature, to make these seem less distant and vulgar, and more deserv-
ing of serious study--even if it took Percy's "improvements" to bring
about this change. However, Percy not only elevated the ballads and
songs in linguistic or cultural significance; he also opened them as a
source of rich imagery and emotional power. He exposed the crudeness,
quaintness and strangeness of "ancient" poetry (though much of the poetry
in the *Reliques* was no more than a century old); he himself realized
(correctly) that these qualities needed apology and correction, since
contemporary taste demanded something better. But by making the strange
poetry accessible he made provision for that reaction to change, and for
a new emotional and thematic range to expand in modern poetry.

Antiquaries contributed a fund of tentative knowledge about the
cultural life of former ages, and preserved that life through the con-
servation of buildings and other physical remains, or through the
collecting of manuscripts which otherwise would have been relegated to
the oblivion of the university libraries and great private collections.
The antiquaries made English cultural and political history more readily
available and, therefore, potentially more influential on the popular
imagination. It is hard to estimate the value of this kind of work for
the writers of gothic fiction, however inept many antiquaries may seem
now as scholars, however little gothic fiction adhered to the pedestrian

facts that came out of antiquarian research. At least antiquaries gave

the basis in concrete detail which sometimes prevented gothic fiction

from consisting wholly of formulaic plots and vague atmospherics. The

antiquaries were mainly concerned with the *identity* of the gothic, the

fiction writers with its *novelty,* but the antiquaries had provided, per-

haps without intending to or realizing the consequences, an object lesson

in the latter: the past was enjoyable and exciting to visit, through the

intellect or through the imagination.

The strangeness of the gothic was balanced by its recognizable place

in English history. It held a racial and national affinity. It was a

central paradox of eighteenth-century medievalism that an object could

exert equal attraction because it was alien and because it was indigenous.

A prime example of this dual meaning comes from the interest in

ruins, which derived from both antiquarian and poetic sources. It

expressed itself in the building of artificial ruins to complete pic-

turesque landscapes, or in the including of real ruins in a scene.

Inevitably the question of the proper *style* for ruins arose. Antiquaries

had studied both Roman and medieval ruins in England, but the latter,

obviously, were more numerous. The idea that the gothic was a more

natural style gave some support to the preference for gothic ruins. The

naturalness of the gothic was based partly on analogies between gothic

buildings and the new manner of English gardening which had gained ground

since the late seventeenth century--both were supposed to share such

qualities as irregularity, surprise, rustication, and curvilinearity.[70]

In addition, the naturalness of gothic was based on the sheer abundance

of gothic building in England. Thus it also was *natural* in the sense of

being *native*. At least the new gothic could mimic traditional work
fairly well. William Mason, for example, preferred gothic to classical
ruins in gardens, reasoning that since classical ruins were much less
common in England than in Italy it was pretensious to use them to decor-
ate an English garden. Mason thus combined a concern for truthfulness
and consistency with a sense of what was properly English. (He might
also have pointed out that the gothic was related, through aesthetic
theory, to the new English manner of gardening of which he was a student.)
Lord Kames believed that classical ruins were less desirable because they
"depressed the beholder, reminding him of the tragic circumstance that
the barbarians had triumphed over the taste of the ancients. As the
condition of the Gothic ruin . . . represented merely the victory of
time over strength, it was on that account to be preferred. It did not
convey any painful ideas, but affected the spirit with a melancholy such
as was only a source of pleasure to a person of fine sensibility."[71]
Kames apparently chose not to link the gothic builders with the "barbar-
ians" who had "triumphed over the taste of the ancients"; at any rate,
that association did not affect the general significance he attributed
to the gothic, not because it was either alien or familiar, but because
it was symbolical. Kames looked at the gothic ruin which was becoming a
common fixture of the revived cult of mutability, and did not treat it
historically, as he did the classical ruin.

With the discourse on Kenilworth Castle in Hurd's Third Dialogue
we encounter arguments about the gothic that deal not with aesthetic
continuity or consistency (as with Mason), not with erosion by time (as
with Kames), but with social change and ancestry, with government and

culture. When the fictitious Addison inveighs against the "prosperous

tyranny" of the Elizabethan nobles and indulges a "generous pleasure in

reflecting on the happiness we enjoy under a juster and more equal

government," all this inspired by the sight of the Castle before him, he

is registering a complex of political responses. The gothic ruin--gothic

in the broader allowance of his time--is a symbol of a political and

social system alien from the contemporary one, and reassuringly inferior

to it. Addison's position is based on a parallel between bad government

and bad architecture. Both the gothic castle and gothic tyranny are

intrusive forms, alien to the true English spirit which was better served

by the reformation of architecture under neo-classicism and the securing

of political and religious freedom after the Revolution of 1688.

The various reactions to the gothic ruin[72] were merely symptomatic

of the conflicting motives of literary and architectural gothicists.

The new gothicists entertained a range of historical attitudes or per-

spectives which were not entirely consistent with each other, and which

brought an equal measure of complexity to gothic fiction. Frequently

they viewed English history in terms of antithetical social or religious

forces, and their literary works usually chose to approach these forces

at some point of confrontation and conflict.

The ambivalent historical perspectives of the gothicists showed

plainly in their treatment of religious matters, and especially in their

attitudes towards the Roman Catholic Church.

Three typical attitudes towards religion emerge in a letter from

Horace Walpole to his friend and protégé Richard Bentley. On his way to

visit Sir George Lyttleton at Hagley Park, Walpole stayed overnight at

Oxford, where "as soon as it was dark, I ventured out, and the moon rose

as I was wandering among the colleges, and gave me a charming venerable

Gothic scene, which was not lessened by the monkish appearance of the

old fellows stealing to their pleasures."[73]

The "monkish appearance" of the old scholars added to the charming

associations with which Walpole invested the moonlit scene. That they

were "stealing to their pleasures"--or that Walpole imagined they were--

gave to their venerability an overtone of mystery and lecherous hypocrisy

such as would become common in the gothic novels' depiction of monks and

nuns. Walpole's pleasure in this tableau derived from several sources:

his absorption in the melancholy (he seems to have awaited night-fall

before setting out on his walk), his sense of the mysteriousness, quaint-

ness and absurdity of the comparison between scholars and monks, and his

temporary indulgence of a fantasy which the censorship of consciousness

recognized was outlandish and somewhat contemptible. (I must also men-

tion that Walpole was a former Cantabrigian, not an Oxonian; this, of

course, aided the fantasizing.) Walpole was delighted in the same way

when a French visitor to Strawberry Hill mistook the Cabinet for a real

chapel and knelt to pray. Walpole was excited that the resemblance was

so convincing, that his imitation had succeeded, and that his guest was

briefly embarrassed. Even while entertaining medieval or Catholic

fantasies, Walpole maintained a sense of his own superiority--and his

time's superiority--to them.

Later in the same letter to Bentley, Walpole expressed contempt for

the dullness of many topographical surveys and hope that his projected

new edition of Camden's *Britannia* would avoid that pitfall. He then

mentioned a further danger in antiquarian activity: "Another promise I

make you is, that my love of abbeys shall not make me hate the Reforma-

tion till that makes me grow a Jacobite, like the rest of my antiquarian

predessors [sic]. . . ."[74] Although Walpole enjoyed playing with the

trappings and the ceremonial instruments of Roman Catholicism, this was

a matter of manipulating superficialities, while the essential elements

of Catholicism remained highly suspect, or wholly abhorrent. This bal-

ance of Walpole's loyalties, however, was not always duplicated among

other antiquaries. His fears that there was a connection between anti-

quaries and Jacobites had some justification. Antiquaries who studied

gothic churches or English ecclesiastical history had ample occasion to

lament the destructive effects of the Reformation in England upon their

subject matter. As conservators they felt that they were fighting a

rear-guard action against those who, for doctrinal reasons--whether deist

or Methodist--wanted to abolish church decoration, the emotional basis

for worship, the richness of gothic design. Armed with such feelings,

antiquaries made natural allies within any High Church movement. One of

Walpole's chief antiquarian correspondents, for example, the Rev. William

Cole, was himself a High Church Tory, a fact that Walpole sometimes had

to skirt diplomatically in order to preserve their valuable friendship.[75]

The correlation between antiquarianism and High Church affiliation was

fully evident during the nineteenth century in England, when High Church

members dominated the influential Ecclesiological Society.[76] That Wal-

pole usually realized the boundary line between his fantasies and his

overt allegiances to Church and party does not remove the importance of

Catholicism for other antiquaries, as a constant attraction, and as an

undeclared motivation for their interests and activities.

Walpole's letter to Bentley also suggests a third approach to religion and medievalism: apparent objectivity. Walpole described a visit to Malvern Abbey where "the woman who showed me the church would pester me with Christ and King David, when I was hunting for John of Gaunt and King Edward."[77] Walpole thus represented himself as being interested only in the historical associations of the place, not in its religious iconography. This preference seems consistent with his enduring fascination with English history, a fascination which produced such works as his *Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England* and his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*. It was also consistent with his practice in forming clerical literary characters. The friars in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysterious Mother* may be stereotyped figures, whose benevolence or viciousness bears some relation to Walpole's opinion of the Catholic Church and medieval religiosity, but he did not concern himself very much with the doctrines they professed, the nature of their creed. They were not essentially different from the other characters he placed in the same historical period. Walpole used the Church in his fiction as a part of the fantastical world of the Middle Ages, an important but not a supremely important part. He was interested in it for the colour it provided, for the scandals and hypocrisy and fanaticism which were attributed to it in Protestant legend, and not for any intrinsically theological reasons.

But his preference for secular--or non-doctrinal--studies was not exclusive. It did not affect his library acquisitions which, Lewis has learned, were "surprisingly strong in controversial theology"; for

"Walpole liked to read about the squabbles of clerics and the sort of thing that he found in Bayle--a statement by an abbot of Leicester that he had seen at Jerusalem a finger of the Holy Ghost and the snout of a seraphim. . . ."[78] It would appear that Walpole, who "called himself an infidel," confined his interest in religion to its value as a curious outlet for human behaviour or as a feature of the constitutional system in England. He cared no more about conventional religion in antiquity than he did in his own time.[79]

The complexity of the gothicists' historical outlook reflected the semantic confusion which still existed. The equation "gothic equals medieval" had not simply replaced the earlier equation "gothic equals barbarous."[80] The two meanings existed at the same time and acted upon each other. Since even in the eyes of its advocates like Warton, Hurd and Percy the gothic was a product of an age that was still basically *barbarous,* the ostensibly neutral sense of the gothic was "medieval" was framed by a mixture of admiration and contempt. Consequently, those advocates had several means of redeeming the gothic. The anti-goths, who were glad that they had been able to substitute a better taste for the gothic, accepted the fact that the gothic was the result of barbarous times because it confirmed their whole historical outlook. The advocates of the gothic started out with this difference in outlook: they were unsure that progress had been made, or that it had been made without cost. Historicists, like Thomas Warton and, to some extent, Percy and Hurd, could balance off the barbarity of the gothic by attempting to place it within the context of medieval society. When they managed to free themselves from the burden of prejudice, they were able to view

societies and cultures not as competing, but as different. One could

also overlook the crudeness or barbarity of the gothic in order to

further some chauvinistic or sentimental purpose, but the most promising

way to redeem the gothic--the way followed by the literary gothicists--

was to show that gothic barbarity itself had a positive aspect, that it

could yield up an ideal world or could offer alternatives to the conven-

tions of fiction.

The works and life of the Middle Ages had been seen through a filter

of rational standards and expectations. As a result, the reputation of

the Middle Ages had been very poor. Specific charges in this general

indictment originated in history, fantasy, and ideology. The following

outline of them will consist of deliberate over-simplifications, because

I am concerned here not with the best knowledge of medieval life that

was available to eighteenth-century scholars, but with the dubious know-

ledge, or image, of the medieval that influenced gothic fiction. Since

discussion of specific gothic novels in the succeeding parts of this

study will both depend upon and illustrate this system of assumption, I

have not supported it here with careful documentation. Such evidence

will be clear enough in the novels themselves.

Superstition

In the past, superstition explained many events which the modern

(i.e., enlightened) world could explain scientifically. Widespread

ignorance about the natural system was matched by belief in the existence

of supernatural agents, such as sprites, elves, demons, succubi, and

fairies, who wielded great power over human life and fortune. The cred-

ulous people were susceptible to almost any miraculous or fantastic

story, no matter how outlandish or improbable.

Religion

The Roman Catholic Church exercised control over the Christian world in matters of belief and in matters of education and government. The Church used its moral and doctrinal authority to secure, sometimes secretly, enormous temporal power and wealth. The Church hierarchy was better organized and more resistant to change from within than any secular government, and its influence was international. The Church manipulated the behaviour and ideas of its believers through entirely non-rational means, incorporating into its own rituals the superstitious beliefs of the people; it used superstitious threats to bully even kings and princes into carrying out its policies. Occasionally the Church masqueraded as an intellectual force, but its method of argument was sophistic, its philosophy convoluted and scholastic. In order to guarantee that its members would be open to manipulation, the Church made sure to monopolize the means of education and to prohibit members from interpreting religious texts or doctrines for themselves. The Church replaced reason with pomp, ceremony, and obedience to authority.

Social Order

The social order of the medieval period was the feudal system; its ethical code was chivalry. After the breakdown of Roman authority, people had to secure protection against the constant danger of murder, plunder and enslavement. The feudal system offered a certain measure of security but only at a terrible price in personal freedom. Property, dignity and privilege were distributed inequitably. Summary power over

life was not eliminated but legitimized, concentrated in the hands of the few who were warlords and landholders. A system of quasi-religious obligations and oaths put off the threat of violence, or directed it into a fanaticism which took for its most infamous outlet the brutality and absurdity of the Crusades. But such sublimations of power and violence did not disguise the fact that most people were chattels, without legal, political, economic or personal rights.

Culture and Cultural Authority

Although the mingling of religious and secular forces helped to determine the character of medieval art, the pre-Christian history of Europe was an equally powerful factor. Medieval culture bore the indelible mark of the barbarians who had assisted in dismantling Roman civilization and had inherited its chaotic remains. In their malicious resentment of the balance, harmony and technical excellence of Roman art, the barbarians used its forms merely as a skeleton on which to hang their wild, disordered, extravagant embellishments. When they tried to imitate Roman works, their own ignorance of the rules which governed their making, and the debased state into which the surviving Roman tradition had fallen prevented them from creating anything more than a gross distortion of the originals. The barbarians made a grotesque caricature of a culture which they were unable to assimilate. The most reprehensible feature of medieval culture--only partly offset during the Renaissance--was the gradual erosion of classical authority, the substitution of a tradition which was non-rational, outlandish, unregulated, superstitious, animistic, and pervaded by religious dogma.

The advocates of the gothic answered these charges without ration-
alizing or denying them. On the contrary, gothic fiction tended to
accept the charges, often seemed bent on proving them; at least gothic
fiction relied on the reader's belief that they were true. The prevail-
ing critique of medieval life kept its appeal, but the conclusions which
it generated for art, fantasy and literature changed as the possibilities
for exploiting the past were realized. The customary contempt for the
"primitive" stages of English history began to yield to an appreciation
of the danger, passion, and excitement they could hold for the imagina-
tion.

Hurd had made the crucial movement when he demonstrated that it was
possible to keep some measure of contempt for an era while admitting, at
the same time, its imaginative potentialities. Those potentialities
also existed by virtue of the expanded range of aesthetic experience.
Categories such as the picturesque (imported from painting), the sublime
(imported from rhetoric and psychology), the melancholy (imported from
homiletics), and the sentimental (imported from fiction and social
fashion) made up a new area of legitimacy where the gothic could be
accepted. They reconciled the apparent contradiction between contempt
for the Middle Ages and a taste for the gothic by making the necessary
leeway for the imagination and its covert affiliations. They allowed
for a separation between political or religious convictions and fantasy.

For example, while a nominal member of the Church of England might
believe without reservation that the Church of Rome was an evil and per-
fidious force--agreeing with the charges against "gothic" religiosity--
he might also believe, as a literary amateur, that Catholic liturgy,

institutions, and treachery were suitable materials for a writer of

fiction, because they lent themselves readily to the sublime, the senti-

mental, the picturesque, or the melancholy.

And strong convictions, or display of them, did not necessarily

lead to a suppression of gothic excess. The sheer indecency of the

gothic was its chief virtue, for one purpose or another. Building a

case against feudalism or the Catholic Church--the ostensible aim of

much gothic fiction--often required that the evils be depicted with

detailed thoroughness, so much so that it now seems that the moralistic

element was frequently an after-thought, the "evils" the true centre of

interest.

The impact of the gothic novel depended on the rawness, naturalness,

crudeness of its images. Although no one, perhaps, wanted to be trans-

ported permanently to the primitive environment which it recreated, the

writer could invite his readers to visit it temporarily in order to

recover a store of fantastic materials which had been purged too success-

fully from their own immediate experiences. Along with the opportunity

to indulge the fantastical came the opportunity to try out fantastic

solutions to very real problems.

The old derogatory image of the gothic could be transformed in two

ways, each corresponding to a different set of new, invigorating quali-

ties that were discovered in it.

The first way was nostalgic, elegiac--and later, utopian. Its

basic premise was that earlier in English history there had existed a

nobility of action, a heroism of endeavour, a genuine (if misguided)

religious faith, a sympathy with nature, a constant involvement with

ceremony, pageantry, and ritual, and a proper regard for social subor-

dination, which had disappeared since. All these qualities could be

inferred from the ruined buildings which remained the most impressive

symbols of the past. By arguing that separate, distinctive critical

standards should be applied to gothic art and literature, historicists

and antiquaries had laid a foundation for accepting gothic life as valu-

able in itself.

Its loss became a cause for regret and lamentation. The various

antiquarian activities--collecting, preserving, cataloguing, publishing--

the half-researches of Chatterton and Macpherson, the creation of modern

imitations, such as the mock ruins and castellated country homes--all

these were a means of supplying the loss, of finding some substitute

that would be acceptable to eighteenth-century tastes. The actual sense

of loss of a valuable heritage was captured in James Macpherson's

Ossianic poems;[81] these drew upon the melancholic, elegiac tradition

that had been re-established in the early and middle eighteenth century

by Young, Blair, Thomas Warton, and Thomas Gray[82] (the last of whom

Macpherson influenced in his study of folk poetry). From the melancholic

and contemplative poetry Macpherson had absorbed tone, theme and imagery:

overblown, diffuse, emotionally-charged description, emphasis on lost

heroic ancestors and the decay of ancient virtue, sympathetically

reflected in the wind-bleached landscape of the bard's world. Even the

antiquaries, who liked to think that they were interested in the gothic

as scholars, not as enthusiasts, who wanted to appear scientific in their

diligence, could not escape the elegiac sensibility and its social

implications in their work. Their evocation of lost grandeur had more

influence on the new literary gothic than the scholarship they sought to encourage; for, the literary gothic was more concerned with re-directing a sense of personal and artistic ancestry than with ordering and describing antiquities.

Considered for its lost splendour and vigour, the rawness of the gothic was made over, transformed into the quaintness of a culture which had not yet suffered the dubious improvements of sophistication, which had not yet substituted pragmatism for chivalry, cash value for honour, a mechanistic cosmos for the demons and spirits who intervened regularly in mundane events; which had kept a place for richness, extravagance, heroism, supernaturalism, the grotesque and the playful in its art, literature and architecture.

Such calculations of cultural loss and gain were very persuasive on the emotional, associational level, and, although there did not develop at this time the wider critique of modernity that was the product of nineteenth-century malaise and disaffection, there were discernible political overtones to the nostalgia. Depending on the virtues attributed to the imaginary Goths, the previous ages could take on a tory or a whig cast. Emphasis upon ancestral virtues such as fierce independence, respect for law and property, resistance to unjust authority, and defence of quasi-parliamentary political prerogatives amounted to a whiggish version of the gothic. Emphasis upon chivalry, the adventures of knights and princes, the gorgeousness of pomp and ceremony, and the benevolence or wisdom of the feudal lord or the priest made up a tory version of the gothic. In this way, strong convictions *did* act as a *positive* censorship on the gothic, by enlisting the past in service of contemporary ideology.

In either case, the *crudeness* of the gothic--the absence of modernity--
was its advantage; within this transformation of the gothic, defence of
modern progress was liable to fluctuate between mere lip-service and
the condescension of the casual player of the game of fantasy. Strict
anti-gothic moralism was unlikely in this revised version of the gothic,
however, since only favourable qualities survived the transformation.

The second way of transforming gothic barbarity into something
positive seems less favourable, because it involved a drastic change in
ideas about the pleasures of literature.

Its origins were in aesthetic and literary theory, with some secon-
dary references to Elizabethan and Jacobean spectacular theatre and to
the poetry of melancholy. It did not share the motives or the historical
outlook of the other kind of transformation--in particular, it did not
partake of the elegiac sensibility. The most significant feature of this
kind of transformation was that it concentrated on terror as an aesthetic
experience; on crime, criminals, victims, and abnormal psychology as
especially worthy subjects for fiction; and on the gothic as a limitless
source of both.

Within the terms of this transformation, the indictment against the
gothic was accepted as substantially correct, *as a political and social
assessment*. There was no dispute about the superiority of the present
to the past in material welfare and personal freedom. Gothic life was
indeed composed of all the horrors which an eighteenth-century Englishman
was quite glad to have put behind him. Yet many of those horrors still
held the power to provoke fear, and the reader of the gothic novel
became willingly vulnerable to a kind of half-artificial terror lest the

horrid conditions return.[83] The discovery that it was possible to accomplish this arousal through literary means, which were after all more transitory in their effects and more convenient than the sordid and dangerous practices of rumour-mongering and inventing conspiracies, inspired this second species of gothic.

The arousal of *political* anxieties, in the narrow sense, was not, however, its main aim, and the list of its more overtly political or religious targets, such as monasticism, the Inquisition, and feudal tyranny, none of which in reality posed much of an immediate threat to the British constitution, shows that these materials--so easily identified as objectionable, so automatic in eliciting response--were mere instruments. The gothic fiction writer brought forth familiar prejudices in order to set up a background of habitual belief against which other more fundamental, and painful, anxieties might appear. The ostensible targets were usually disguises or vehicles for such anxieties.

The elegiac sensibility succeeded in separating political revulsion from literary invention, by regarding the unpleasant features of medieval life--if at all--as atypical, intrusive, admittedly barbarous; by cultivating an image of the gothic which would lift, temporarily, the dullness and imperfection of the modern world, which would cure the sluggishness of the modern imagination. The non-elegiac gothic could contain this elegiac image, could use it for its own purposes, but in that event the image was changed, as if by a distorting lens, by the less wistful treatment that the novelists gave it. They held the nostalgic transformation under suspicion, because they were less selective in their regressions, because they were more actively skeptical about ideal

systems and the reliability of alien societies, and because they con-

sidered crudeness, superstition, and violence the *essential* character-

istics of the gothic world and their putative gothic ancestors. They

acknowledged the appeal of chivalry, nobility, grace, and simplicity--

and were ready to cite these qualities in support of their use of the

gothic, in order to associate it with the lighter romance--but they

finally viewed the positive aspect of the gothic as contingent or decep-

tive. The gothic novelists often practiced another form of primitivism,

holding the opinion that natural brutality, not natural virtue, was the

basis of the primitive society that was their subject. Such brutality

was valuable, even admirable, as a source of fictive situations and

figures, not because it confirmed some theory of historical progress (in

which many of them probably believed), but because it permitted a closer

approach to such sensitive topics as perverse sexuality, captivity and

oppression, and parental authority, than seemed feasible within the

conventions of the realistic novel.

The barbarity of the gothic was changed into a positive force for

liberating novelists from technical and thematic constraints. Both

means of transforming gothic barbarity met at one point of agreement:

the range of imaginative options had been constricted unnecessarily and

without advantage. The second means of transformation resembled the

first in that it too included a sense of loss; this was hardly an elegiac

sense, however, for it lamented the purgation from contemporary life not

of the possibility of grandeur, simplicity or chivalry, but of danger,

irrationality, miracles, supernatural occurrences, unrelieved malice--

and the unrestrained art that could embody all those possibilities.

The new gothic fiction could include the lighter, elegiac sensibility by bringing it into a complementary relationship with the primary, darker gothic, like the pastoral with the anti-pastoral. This conjunction was especially common in the works of Ann Radcliffe, where the contrasting tonalities, the linking of moments of exquisite sensibility with moments of panic, despair and abject terror, was not a matter of mere narrative variety or relief. On the contrary, this pairing contributed to the poignance of the victim's situation, to the sublimity of the criminal figures. But even with Radcliffe, whose lighter moments were executed with great attention to detail and painterly composition, who was known for her powers as a picturesque artist as much as for her powers as a maker of terrors, the lighter image was often only a false omen (and this was more consistently true with Monk Lewis and C. R. Maturin), a temporarily comforting facade behind which the darker aspect of the alien world (and by proxy, the familiar one) was lurking. In fictional confrontations, the lighter elegiac gothic was naturally identified with civility, decency, contemporary moral and ethical standards; the darker non-elegiac gothic was utterly alien and threatening, by comparison, and none the less for being unexpected and unprepared for.

Confrontations between the two versions of the transformed gothic were the regular pattern in the gothic novels. Such confrontations determined two important features of them: the novels were subversive in their effects—though not for the reason their critics feared, and not always on purpose—and they managed to be subversive (or educative) through a strategy of compromise with the familiar reality from which

they departed. The nature of that strategy and the theoretical justi-
fication of the gothic novel will be the subjects of the next sections
of this study.

[1]See Georg Germann, "The Gothic in Vitruvianism," *Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain: Sources, Influences and Ideas,* trans. Gerald Onn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), pp. 9-52; Maurice Lévy, *Le Roman <<Gothique>> Anglais 1764-1824* (Toulouse: Association des publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Toulouse, 1968), pp. 9-76; Paul Frankl, "The Period of Reaction Against Gothic," *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 235-414; B. Sprague Allen, "The Challenge of the Middle Ages," *Tides in English Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937), II, Ch. 15; W. D. Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 4-25; Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," *MLN,* 27 (1932), 414-446, rpt. in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948; rpt. New York: Capricorn, 1960), pp. 136-165. (Subsequent references are to Capricorn edition.)

[2]A. E. Longueil, "The Word 'Gothic' in Eighteenth Century Criticism," *MLN,* 38, 8 (Dec., 1923), 453-460: ". . . in the early Renaissance . . . the term 'gothic' took on a new and coloured meaning, a meaning that masked a sneer. To the Renaissance, mediaeval or Gothic architecture was barbarous architecture. By a trope all things barbarous became 'Gothic'" (p. 453).

[3]Robson-Scott, p. 2. Germann also finds this the point of origin for anti-gothic feeling.

[4]George Henderson, *Gothic* (Harmondsworth & Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), pp. 179-180.

[5]The first edition was published in Florence in 1550, an enlarged edition in 1568. This translation is from Frankl, p. 290; also quoted in Germann, p. 38.

[6]See E. S. de Beer, "Gothic: Origin and Diffusion of the Term; The Idea of Style in Architecture," *JWCI,* 11 (1948), 143-149; Robson-Scott, pp. 4-5. Germann (p. 11) notes that Filarete was also the first theorist to use the term *stile* (style) as a synonym for *maniera* (mode of handling); he adopted the term from its former exclusively rhetorical usage.

[7]De Beer, p. 145. De Beer distinguishes between special and general uses of "gothic": to denote the Gothic people only, or all barbarians. He also separates these uses, which are still historical and more or less neutral from the pejorative literary use of "gothic." De Beer gives his account of the relation between literary and architectural terms: "This literary use [i.e., *gothic* equals *barbarous*] became common in France in the seventeenth century and in England also in the eighteenth. It affected the architectural term, so that some writers use the latter as meaning primarily tasteless. This literary usage and the special develop-

ment of it have produced the common view that the stylistic term origi-
nated as a term of abuse" (p. 144). De Beer cites Rabelais for an early
example of the literary abuse of "gothic." Longeuil concurs in the
direction of literary influence: from France to England (p. 455).

[8]De Beer, p. 145. See also Frankl, p. 257, Germann, p. 11.

[9]Robson-Scott, pp. 4-5; de Beer, pp. 146-147.

[10]Robson-Scott, p. 6. The term would have had to be adopted, espe-
cially outside Italy, despite its historical inaccuracy (which was not
concealed), if only for lack of a better one. De Beer points out that
the sixteenth-century Italian critics like Vasari or Sansovino had their
own term "Tedesco" (German) which had been in use since the fifteenth
century and which had almost superseded the only major alternative,
"moderne," by their time (p. 149). Germann suspects that Vasari was
aware of the relatively recent provenance of the buildings against which
he was reacting (p. 38). This would make him guilty of a deliberate
distortion for argumentative purposes; de Beer, however, believes that he
used the earlier criticisms ineptly rather than deliberately.

[11]See Samuel Kliger, *The Goths in England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
Univ. Press, 1952). Kliger is interested in tribal, libertarian and
whiggish connotations of gothic. His basic premise is that gothic was
always used for political or ideological purposes, of various kinds, and
his extensive list of the confusions which made gothic mean Celtic, Scan-
dinavian, Germanic or ancestral shows the potential usefulness of the
word.

[12]". . . the word 'ordine' acquires an authoritative significance
which makes it difficult to understand how the phrase 'ordine Tedesco',
which was quite common in the sixteenth century, could have been used in
a pejorative sense. Presumably, the situation will have been similar to
that obtaining around 1800 in respect of the words 'style' and 'taste',
for at that time, it was possible to negate the normally positive force
of these expressions by the mere addition of an adjective" (Germann,
p. 14). Thus, in Italy, the phrase *ordine Tedesco* could come to mean
"order as a German would understand it."

[13]Quoted in Germann, p. 15.

[14]"Vitruvius considered that structures evolved on a regional or
historical basis were part of the architect's stock in trade: they were
available to him and he used them as and when appropriate. His disciples
regarded German or Gothic structures in much the same light: they used
them because they were obliged to do so in order to complete Gothic
churches in a conformist style" (Germann, p. 15). In Vitruvian theory,
the five "antique" orders were generic types, *invented* for use only in
certain situations. A later development was the theory of "characters,"
according to which styles were especially suited to their uses (e.g.,
Church Gothic, Castle Gothic, etc.)(Germann, pp. 22-23).

[15]Germann, p. 13. Cesariano: Cesare Cesariano prepared an edition of Vitruvius' treatise (1521) in which he tried to show the validity of the theory by reference to a cross-sectional view of the original plans for Milan Cathedral.

[16]Quoted in Robson-Scott, pp. 10-11.

[17]Robson-Scott, p. 12.

[18]Quoted in Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival," p. 145.

[19]Kliger, pp. 1-2; see also pp. 7-33.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 3. "The *translatio* suggested forcefully an analogy between the breakup of the Roman empire by the Goths and the demands of the humanist-reformers of northern Europe for religious freedom, inter-preted as liberation from Roman priestcraft . . . the *translatio* crystal-lized the idea that humanity was twice ransomed from Roman tyranny and depravity--in antiquity by the Goths, in modern times by their descen-dants, the German reformers. . . . The epithet 'Gothic' became not only a polar term in political discussion, a trope for the 'free', but also in religious discussion a trope for all those spiritual, moral, and cultural values contained for the eighteenth century in the single word 'enlightenment'" (pp. 33-34).

[21]Kliger, pp. 4-6.

[22]Lovejoy, p. 136.

[23]Both quotations from Lovejoy, p. 137.

[24]Lovejoy, pp. 137-139. "In the middle and late eighteenth century this distinction [between 'gothic' and 'Saracenic'] became familiar, and the style which we call Gothic was commonly designated 'Saracenic', 'Arabic', or 'Arabesque'. . . . Nevertheless, the same writers who, on occasion, distinguish 'the Gothic' from 'the Saracenic', sometimes con-tinue to apply the former adjective to the latter style also, with or without the qualification 'modern'" (Lovejoy, p. 140).

[25]B. Sprague Allen, in Ch. XV of *Tides in English Taste* ("Classical Criticism of 'Gothic Taste'"), notes the ready association of gothic with *chinois* or rococo work. Robson-Scott does not agree, however, that their status in England was exactly equal. In Germany, he claims, the primary neo-classical target was the "baroque-rococo," and the recognized faults of the *old* gothic served to warn against the ultimate degeneracy of the "baroque-rococo." Here the assumed affinity was so close that the term gothic often referred to objects that were, more precisely, baroque or rococo. But Robson-Scott argues that no such use of the gothic as a negative example was possible in England "where the hostility to Gothic had nothing to do with a reaction against the baroque-rococo tradition. On the contrary, in its early stages the Gothic Revival in

England was itself an offshoot of that tradition." Robson-Scott's argument would appear to depend on the fact that there was little critical complaint against gothic survivalist building in England; the gothic that was maligned was the new imitative, eclectic gothic of Miller and Wyatt, which was treated as a successor to the worst of the rococo. If anything, in England the rococo gave occasion for criticizing the gothic, not the reverse. (See Robson-Scott, pp. 15-16.)

[26]Lovejoy, p. 141. See Warren Hunting Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction* (1934; rpt., Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms, 1966), pp. 36-40; and Virginia M. Hyde, "From the 'Last Judgment' to Kafka's World: A Study in Gothic Iconography," in *The Gothic Imagination: Studies in Dark Romanticism,* ed. G. R. Thompson (Pullman: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 134-138 for the *positive* influence of late gothic (Gothic Baroque or Perpendicular) architecture on literary images and associations. Both claim that the new gothic in literature related almost exclusively to these later concrete sources.

[27]The same complaint came full circle to form the cornerstone of "Gothic Revival" theory in England. Thus A. W. N. Pugin, in his *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), dictated: "There shall be no features of a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, and propriety" (p. 1). The first two terms are obvious, having to do with honesty in use of materials and common sense in use of space and design. Propriety, for Pugin, meant the reflection in architecture of proper hierarchical relations in society, through the connections among buildings in a community or among the units in a building. See Robert MacLeod, *Style and Society: Architectural Ideology in Britain 1835-1914* (London: RIBA, 1971), pp. 9-13 and *passim.*

[28]Joseph Addison, *The Spectator,* No. 415 (Thursday, 26 June 1712), in *Eighteenth-Century English Literature,* ed. Geoffrey Tillotson *et al.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 342.

[29]Lovejoy, p. 143.

[30]Joseph Addison, *The Spectator,* No. 62 (Friday, 11 May 1711), *Addison and Steele: Selections from* The Tatler *and* The Spectator, ed. Robert J. Allen (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), p. 109. Note also No. 70: "I know nothing which more shews the essential and inherent Perfection of Simplicity of Thought, above that which I call the Gothick Manner in Writing, than this, that the first pleases all Kinds of Palates, and the latter only such as have formed to themselves a wrong artificial Taste upon little fanciful Authors and Writers of Epigram" (p. 122). There was some inconsistency, however, for in this essay Addison was praising the simplicity of folk ballads like "Chevy-Chase," whose popular appeal and transparency he *opposes* to the "Gothick." Later, of course, such songs were gathered up as the epitome of the gothic taste.

[31]Lovejoy, p. 146.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[33] Robson-Scott, p. 16. The list of objectionable features indicates that the so-called "Saracenic" gave the clearest examples of excess.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 14; Lovejoy, p. 148.

[35] S. Lang, "The Principles of the Gothic Revival in England," *JSAH,* 25 (1966), 242; see also de Beer, "Gothic: Origin and Diffusion of the Term," p. 157, and "Gothic and Some Other Architectural Terms," appendix to *The Diary of John Evelyn,* ed. E. S. de Beer (Oxford: OUP, 1955), I, 1-3. Germann sets a relatively earlier date for the occurrence of "style" in English than in other languages, but he makes it clear that it usually referred to continuous, not radically conflicting, modes (*Gothic Revival,* p. 27).

[36] Lang, pp. 242-243. Also de Beer, "Origin and Diffusion," pp. 156-162.

[37] Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste,* 2nd edn. (London: Constable, 1950), pp. 28-29.

[38] H. M. Colvin, "Gothic Survival and Gothick Revival," *Architectural Review,* 104 (Oct., 1948), 91-92. This practice could overrule other considerations--under neo-Vitruvian doctrines, even the classical canon (Germann, p. 181). Clark differentiates between outright conservatism, which would have been more doctrinaire and self-conscious, and the feeling prevalent in the Oxford design community, that gothic was simply the natural mode for the type of building required. Colvin cites equally gothic projects outside Oxford, and lists masons from Yorkshire and London who worked at Oxford to show that Oxford did not "enjoy a monopoly of masons who worked in Gothic" (p. 92).

[39] See Colvin, p. 92, Lovejoy, p. 151.

[40] It would be unfair, however, to press too far with this connection. By no means all the results of the Grand Tour were unfavourable to gothic architecture. John Evelyn's outburst about the "Crincle-Crancle" of gothic appeared in the second, posthumously published edition of *An Account of Architects and Architecture,* an appendix to his translation of Fréart's *Parallel* (1707 edn.). Previous references to the gothic in his Diary were much more positive (see Lang, p. 245, n. 30, and de Beer, "Architectural Terms," *passim.*). Lang supposes that Evelyn changed his mind to conform to the change in fashion: "it is clear that about 1700 Gothic was 'out' and the Italianate was 'in'" (p. 245). Architects like Wren and Hawksmoor who were educated in the Italian styles and were sure of the inferiority of the gothic used it, nevertheless, when the occasion seemed to require it, both for the sake of conformity and conservation and, as Colvin points out (p. 92) for the sake of "structural experiment."

[41] Lang, pp. 240-243 and *passim.* Also de Beer, "Architectural Terms," p. 3.

[42] Lang, pp. 243-245; also Germann, Part I, Ch. 6, "The Concept of Historical Development."

[43] Robson-Scott notes that "though this interest is certainly anti-quarian rather than aesthetic in flavour, it does at least show that the Gothic buildings were not forgotten. For the most part these writers seem to have accepted the Gothic style as a matter of course and even in some cases to have evinced a definite liking for it" (pp. 18-19). And Maurice Lévy: "Les travaux des antiquaires . . . montrent, mieux que la construction de rares églises ou mieux que quelques témoignages oubliés, la persistance, tout au long de l'époque classique, d'un intérêt limité mais réal pour l'architecture médiévale. Grâce à ces érudits furent redécouverts les grands monuments nationaux d'un passé glorieux . . ." (*Le Roman <<Gothique>> Anglais,* p. 13).

[44] Lang, p. 248, citing T. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: 1950) and J. Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford: 1956). The *Monasticon* was the work of Sir William Dugdale (1605-1686) who col-laborated with Roger Dodsworth. Further editions were published in 1664 and 1673.

[45] Quoted in Lang, pp. 249-250, from S. Piggott, *William Stukeley* (Oxford: 1950), p. 56. The Society of Antiquaries had been rejuvenated in 1707.

[46] Lang, p. 250.

[47] Frankl, *The Gothic,* p. 395.

[48] See B. Sprague Allen, *Tides in English Taste,* II, Ch. XIV, "The Challenge of the Middle Ages," Part I, "The Persisting Interest in Gothic Architecture before Walpole"; Robson-Scott, pp. 18-24; Charles L. Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival,* ed. J. Mordaunt Crook (1872; rpt. and rev., Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press: 1970), pp. 6-19; Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival,* pp. 30-35; Frankl, pp. 396-414; Lionel Gossmann, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curne de Sainte-Palaye* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1968), p. 329 ff.

[49] The topographical work was also carried through by William Gilpin's *picturesque tours,* and his essay "On Picturesque Travel," in *Three Essays* (London: R. Blamire, 1792). The new vogue for tours produced a vast literature, including: William Hutchinson, *Excursion to the Lakes* (1776), Joseph Budworth, *Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes* (1792), William Thompson, *Tour of England and Scotland* (1788), and tour descriptions by Daniel Defoe, John Wilkes, Tobias Smollett, Joseph Warton, and Arthur Young, all of which contained detailed accounts of both natural scenery and archi-tecture. One of the most prolific successors to the topographers was John Britton who produced his series *The Beauties of England and Wales* in 18 vols. between 1800 and 1816, and four volumes of *The Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* in 1814, with a fifth in 1818, in addition

to *The Cathedral Antiquities of Great Britain* (series from 1814), and *Picturesque Views of English Cities* (1830). See Allen, II, 200-206.

[50]Clark, p. 31.

[51]HW to Cole, 5 June 1775. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with the Rev. William Cole,* ed. W. S. Lewis & A. Dayle Wallace (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1937), I, 375 (Vol. I of *HW's Correspondence*). For brevity's sake, subsequent references to Lewis' edition of the *Correspondence* will appear in this form: *Corr.,* Volume Number, page. The volume numbers are those running through the whole series, not those peculiar to the individual correspondences. Full information on dates of publication is presented in the Bibliography.

[52]Allen, II, 98-99.

[53]For Walpole's eclectic use of salvaged pieces, see Horace Walpole, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole . . . at Strawberry-Hill, etc.* (1784; facsimile rpt. Farnborough: Gregg, 1969).

[54]W. H. Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction,* p. 8.

[55]*Ibid.,* pp. 25-26.

[56]Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting,* in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford* (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, and J. Edwards, 1798), III, 94. Unfortunately, this passage has been read so as to yield an opinion more favourable to the gothic than Walpole meant to convey in the full context in which it occurs. Although he cited the cases of Inigo Jones, Wren, and Kent, who "blundered into the heaviest and clumsiest compositions whenever they aimed at imitations of the Gothic," in order to prove that it could not be a "despicable" style, Walpole was careful to qualify the force of his comparison (see daggered footnote, pp. 94-95). At the head of the paragraph immediately following this passage, he wrote: "I certainly do not mean by this little contrast to make any comparison between the rational beauties of regular architecture and the unrestrained licentiousness of that which is called Gothic." Walpole's recognition of the power of the gothic was important, nevertheless, for the kind of fiction he helped to create.

[57]For examination of important works of literary antiquarianism, see Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964). See also Clark, p. 35, pp. 41-43, and Joan Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 170-171. Clark and Pittock disagree over the connection between literary and architectural developments, Clark arguing that the allowances made for Shakespeare and Spenser in literary criticism opened the field for gothic taste in architecture, Pittock that antiquarian research was a more likely influence.

[58]J. Mordaunt Crook, in his introduction to the facsimile reprint of Eastlake's *History of the Gothic Revival,* discusses the revival of interest in medieval art and customs that had already started during the reign of Elizabeth (pp. <27-28>).

[59]Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance, with the Third Elizabethan Dialogue,* ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Henry Frowde, 1911). All later page references will be given within the text.

[60]The travellers would have consulted Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656).

[61]Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting, Works,* III, 485.

[62]Longueil, "The Word 'Gothic'," pp. 456-457.

[63]William C. Holbrook. "The Adjective *Gothique* in the XVIIIth Century," *MLN,* 56, 6 (Nov., 1941), 501.

[64]The most important of the "painful collectors" was Jean Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697-1781), whose *Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie* (1746; tom. xx of *Histoire de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*) was the major source-book for the *Letters.*

[65]In an interpolation in Letter VI made in the sixth edition of the *Letters* (1788), Hurd explained the superior richness of gothic superstition as literary material by pointing to its origins. Christian supernaturalism (which Hurd did *not* connect with the essential beliefs of Christianity) augmented the previous stock of fantastical images, so that the gothic writers had a more mature and heterogeneous mythology to work with.

[66]Johnston, pp. 100-107. See also Pittock, p. 190.

[67]Thomas Percy (Bishop of Dromore), *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,* ed. Thomas Percy, 4th edn.(1794; rpt. London: L. A. Lewis, 1839), I, xii. Percy believed the folio had been collected by Thomas Blount (1618-1679), the lawyer and antiquarian (pp. xx-xxi). Later page references will be given within the text.

[68]Percy's main sources for manuscripts or printed material were the Pepysian Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge (Pepys and Selden collections), the Ashmolean Library, Oxford (Anthony à Wood collection), the archives of the Antiquarian Society, London, and the British Museum.

[69]See Percy's "Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances," *Reliques,* III, 2-38.

[70]See Lovejoy, p. 159, pp. 152-158.

[71]Allen, II, 170-171 (Allen's paraphrase). Mason's concern for authenticity had its limits. He argued with William Gilpin over the use of purely decorative objects to complete a picturesque view, and saw nothing wrong with applying gothic facades to utilitarian buildings, such as barns, or with building artificial ruins, all of which Gilpin strongly disliked. See C. P. Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawing, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 117-120.

[72]See Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London: Arthur Barker, 1957), p. 19, and Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelly* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1947), p. 7.

[73]Horace Walpole to Richard Bentley, September, 1753, *Selected Letters of Horace Walpole*, W. S. Lewis (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 47.

[74]Walpole, *Selected Letters*, p. 47.

[75]W. S. Lewis, *Horace Walpole* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p. 46.

[76]Eastlake's reticence, in his *History of the Gothic Revival*, when discussing problems of doctrine or symbolism shows that he was uncomfortable with the already visible link between the gothic and Anglo-Catholicism (or Roman Catholicism, which A. W. Pugin openly professed); he was nervous lest all advocates of the gothic style be assumed to be Catholics, overt or covert.

[77]Walpole, *Selected Letters*, p. 50.

[78]Lewis, pp. 124, 127.

[79]*Ibid.*, p. 5. Lewis cites *Walpoliana*, ed. John Pinkerton (London: 1799), I, 74. "Fontenelle's Dialogues on the Plurality of Worlds, first rendered me an infidel. Christianity, and a plurality of worlds, are, in my opinion, irreconcileable. Indeed, one would be puzzled enough to reconcile modern discoveries on this globe alone, with any divine revelation. I never try to make converts; but expect and claim to enjoy my own opinion, and other people may enjoy theirs. . . . Intolerance is, *ipso facto*, a proof of falsehood. . . . Atheism I dislike. It is gloomy, uncomfortable; and, in my eye, unnatural and irrational. . . . I go to church sometimes, in order to induce my servants to go to church. I am no hypocrite. I do not go in order to persuade them to believe what I do not believe myself. A good moral sermon may instruct and benefit them. I only set them an example of listening, not believing (*Walpoliana*, 2nd ed. [1804], I, 74-76).

[80]Longueil, "The Word 'Gothic'," p. 458.

[81]Macpherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands*, 1760, *Fingal, An Ancient Epic*, 1761-62, *Temora, An Epic Poem*, 1763.

[82]Edward Young, *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts,* 1742-46, Robert Blair, *The Grave,* 1743, Thomas Warton, *The Pleasures of Melancholy,*1747, Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,* 1751.

[83]See Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique Anglais,* pp. 613-614, for an argument connecting the gothic sensibility with the Revolution of 1688. Lévy pushes past his discussion of the meditative and melancholic uses of the gothic (building) to suggest a political symbolism almost identical with what Hurd has Addison present in the Third Dialogue. The gothic ruin reminds the perceiver of past tyranny and present liberty; it is a memorial to the guarantees that support the religious and political establishment.

CHAPTER II

VITALITY IN FICTION

The Mixed Mode

Sir Walter Scott was the first critic to note the close connection

between Horace Walpole's work as an architect and his work as a writer,

and it is significant that Scott found that the chief characteristic of

both was Walpole's effort to strike a compromise between the fantastical

and the probable, between the antique and the modern:

> As, in his model of a Gothic modern mansion, our author had
> studiously endeavoured to fit to the purposes of modern con-
> venience, or luxury, the rich, varied, and complicated tracery
> and carving of the ancient cathedral, so, in *The Castle of
> Otranto,* it was his object to unite the marvellous turn of
> incident, and imposing tone of chivalry, exhibited in the
> ancient romance, with that accurate display of human character,
> and contrast of feelings and passions, which is, or ought to
> be delineated in the modern novel. . . . It was his object to
> draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the
> feudal times, as might actually have existed, and to paint it
> checkered and agitated by the action of supernatural machinery,
> such as the superstition of the period received as matter of
> devout credulity. The natural parts of the narrative are so
> contrived, that they associate themselves with the marvellous
> occurrences; and, by the force of that association, render
> those *speciosa miracula* striking and impressive, though our
> cooler reason admits their impossibility.

Comparing the evocative effects of the gothic story and the neo-gothic

building upon the modern sensibility, Scott concluded that:

> It is . . . almost impossible to build such a modern Gothic
> structure as shall impress us with the feelings we have
> endeavoured to describe. It may be grand, or it may be
> gloomy; it may excite magnificent or melancholy ideas; but
> it must fail in bringing forth the sensation of supernatural
> awe, connected with halls that have echoed to the sounds of
> remote generations. . . . Yet Horace Walpole has attained in

composition, what, as an architect, he must have felt beyond the power of his art.[1]

Scott's own experiences as a writer and a builder put him in a good position to realize the difficulty of reconciling old forms and themes with modern tastes. Like Walpole, he was aware of the pleasures of imitating antiquities and of the natural connection between literary and decorative impulses. At Abbotsford, "there was a fine spring of clear water, which Scott enclosed in a Gothic well-front made of some of the stones he had acquired from Melrose Abbey. With the lime carefully blackened and moss put between the joints, it looked, he boasted happily, at least three hundred years old. 'In honor of an old Melrose saint I have put an inscription in a gothic Latin verse, AVE, AVE, SANCTE. WALDAVE', 'and I intend that willows and weeping birches shall droop over it with a background of ever-greens'."[2] Most of the materials for this tableau were genuinely ancient, but the associative concept that governed it was strictly modern. The problem of forming a synthesis, and the temptation to apply literary and architectural solutions interchangeably, persisted from Walpole's time to Scott's.

Walpole himself saw his building and his fiction-writing as parts of a common project, and he invited comparison between them. Sometimes the connection that Walpole indicated was merely coincidental, as when he pointed out to the Rev. William Cole, who had been reading *The Castle of Otranto:*

> You will even have found some traits to put you in mind of this place [Strawberry Hill]. When you read of the picture quitting his panel, did you not recollect the portrait of Lord Falkland all in white in my gallery?[3]

Yet, there was a deeper, more fundamental connection between Strawberry Hill and *The Castle of Otranto,* for the methods and principles of creation were much the same in both cases. For this reason, an account of the assembling of the real "Castle" will help to explain the characteristics of *Otranto,* and will introduce the gothic sensibility which shaped both creations.

Walpole bought the original Strawberry Hill in 1749, when he was thirty-two years old.[4] He had held the lease on the property for the two years preceding. Between 1749 and 1790 the estate expanded from five acres to forty-six and underwent almost continual new construction, while Walpole collected in his home such a deluge of rare, curious or precious articles that the *Description* of 1781 was already obsolete when it came to the press and required several appendices for recent arrivals.

Walpole's earliest accounts of his property did not promise that he would make it into anything extraordinary. His description to Horace Mann, in the letter of 5 June 1747, was jokingly modest and demeaning:

> The house is so small, that I can send it to you in a letter to look at: the prospect is as delightful as possible, commanding the river, the town, and Richmond Park; and being situated on a hill descends to the Thames through two or three little meadows, where I have some Turkish sheep and two cows, all studied in their colours for becoming the view. . . .so I shall grow as much a shepherd as any swain in the *Astraea.*[5]

Walpole's letter to Henry Conway three days later repeated the comparison between Strawberry Hill and a tiny *"bijou"* (a previous occupant had been Mrs. Chevenix, "the toy-woman à *la mode"*):

> It is a little plaything house that I got out of Mrs. Chevenix's shop, and is the prettiest bauble you ever saw. It is set in enamelled meadows, with filigree hedges. . . . Dowagers as plenty as founders inhabit all around, and Pope's

>ghost is just now skimming under my window by a most poetical moonlight. I have about land enough to keep such a farm as Noah's, when he set up in the ark with a pair of each kind. . . .[6]

Walpole's intention was to have a refuge far enough away from London to provide an excuse for the frequent absences from Parliament which he desired. From here he could write to his political protégé Conway, with a mixture of feigned disinterest and real disillusionment, about an election campaign in which "all England, under some name or other, is just now to be bought and sold; though, whenever we become posterity and forefathers, we shall be in high repute for wisdom and virtue."[7] Although the original house at Strawberry Hill, built by the Earl of Bradford's coachman,[8] had nothing to recommend it architecturally, it did have advantages in location and associations: the neighbourhood was fashionable but not yet populous enough to disqualify it from being fashionably rural. With the property Walpole had also gained a pleasing list of antecedent neighbours: "Essex, Bacon, Lord Clarendon . . . Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Pope and Fielding."[9] And his fancy of Pope's ghost revisiting this part of Twickenham showed his poetic aspirations in a characteristically whimsical way.

The gothicism of Strawberry Hill was an adjunct to the more conventional pleasures of genteel farming, rural seclusion, and associations with the famous, and like them it was caught up in the paradox of studied casualness. Even if it was not whimsical, accidental, or spontaneous, the gothicism had to be shown as such. As an aid to this deception, there was little early hint of Walpole's dedication to a particular style to indicate what direction his building would take. There was, at first,

no thesis to demonstrate. Walpole did not draw up a comprehensive plan

until the work was virtually complete, describing it instead in letters

as it grew. The reference to Pope's ghostly, inspirational presence is

suggestive of his intentions, but vague. Similarly, Walpole's continued

use of secret "Persian" nicknames in writing to the other members of the

Quadruple Alliance[10] signalled a taste for the exotic, the fantastical,

the dramatic—but not necessarily the gothic. Thus, it was plain that

Walpole's creation would be an indulgence of fantasy before it was plain

what sort of fantasy would be indulged. In this apparent nonchalance and

randomness, the creation of Strawberry Hill resembled the creation of *The

Castle of Otranto*. As Walpole told Mason, in self-justification, *Otranto*

was

> . . . begun without any plan at all, for though in the short
> course of its progress I did conceive some views, it was so
> far from being sketched out with any design at all, that it
> was actually commenced one evening, from the very imperfect
> recollection of a dream with which I waked in the morning.[11]

Of the famous dream, more later. Whether or not Walpole actually

gave form to *Otranto* spontaneously, almost intuitively, as inspiration

and the force of his dream prompted him, what matters is that he pretended

to have done so, and that he seemed to have built Strawberry Hill simi-

larly, without a simple idea of its final shape to guide him. A further

resemblance will emerge in this discussion: like *Otranto,* Strawberry

Hill was the continuation of a dream and was the product of "very imper-

fect recollection."

Walpole's first improvements did not change the character of the

old cottage in any important way, and it is indicative of his motives

that, whatever size, shape or style of house he was imagining, his

initial attention was to comfort and practicality. He hired William

Robinson, Clerk of the Works at Greenwich Hospital, to design, but mostly

to supervise, some rudimentary work; it seems that Robinson's major job

was to move the kitchen.[12] Like many architects and builders of the time,

Robinson's involvement with the gothic was by contract more than by

inclination or professional training. Walpole valued him because he was

compliant and because "he knew how to build an eighteenth-century house

which, although it might wear out, would not fall down."[13] Robinson and

his successors occasionally influenced Walpole's stylistic choices;

mainly they gave him the kind of practical engineering skills he needed

in order to make his fantasies endure. Since he was not interested in

building mere "follies," this was an important consideration.

Walpole's conflicting motives for adopting the gothic style and his

uneven talents for understanding and using it affected all the friends

and architects whom he enlisted in carrying through the project.[14] Such

contradictory influences included his fascination with the details and

the associations of gothic buildings; his lack of knowledge of, and con-

cern for, the basic principles of medieval construction; and his wish

not to "make my house so Gothic as to exclude convenience, and modern

refinements in luxury." Walpole claimed that "the designs of the inside

and outside are strictly ancient, but the decorations are modern," and

called the mixture, quoting from Pope, *"A Gothic Vatican of Greece and

Rome."*[15] What Walpole meant by "decorations" were not the transplanted

tombs and portals which formed his bookcases and chimney-pieces, but the

books, paintings, sculpture, and china that he had collected. Walpole

defended the inconsistency between these objects and the rooms they

filled by asking a strange rhetorical question:

> Would our ancestors, before the reformation of architecture,
> not have deposited in their gloomy castles antique statues
> and fine pictures, beautiful vases and ornamental china, if
> they had possessed them?[16]

Walpole must have realized the feebleness of the suggestion that he was

somehow fulfilling the intention of his gothic ancestors, for he conceded

that he did not mean "to defend by argument a small capricious house"

which "was built to please my taste, and in some degree to realize my

own visions."[17]

More fundamental contrasts between the antique and the modern at

Strawberry Hill resulted from various factors: Walpole's limited know-

ledge of the gothic, his piecemeal building strategy, his deliberate

abandonment of a conventional ground-plan, and his placing of comfort

above purity of style. Walpole "loved comfort, and so we do not find

him erecting a desolate monastery like Fonthill Abbey. Strawberry Hill

is essentially a snug little manor-house, dressed up in Gothic clothes."[18]

One concession to the modern idea of a manor-house was the adapting

of ecclesiastical architecture, which gave most of the formal inspiration

for Strawberry Hill, to the normal cube-shaped room space. Walpole had

no use for other, more obviously domestic, gothic characters. He detested

the Tudor manner and the revival gothic of the time of James I, consider-

ing these "bastard" styles.[19] Castles, such as Vanbrugh and Sanderson

Miller had attempted, were picturesque but hard to heat, and spatially

either overwhelming or paltry, depending on the builder's ambition. The

sociable Walpole was not about to shut himself up in drafty monumental

halls; he aimed at the charming, the mysterious, the picturesque, but

not the sublime. He was left with ecclesiastical gothic models by
default.

Walpole laid a surface of gothic embellishments on the basic room-
as-box. Even the Tribune or Cabinet he described as a "square with a
semi-circular recess in the middle of each side . . . and with windows
and niches."[20] The construction method remained the usual post-and-
lintel. Perhaps Essex, who had spent time on the Continent studying
gothic building technique,[21] might have relieved Walpole's ignorance on
the subject of vaulting, but the only evidence that Walpole cared about
traditional workmanship was his employment of Thomas Gayfere, master
mason at Westminster Abbey, to build the garden chapel in 1772.[22] The
attempt at fanvaulting in the Gallery at Strawberry, "taken from one of
the side isles [sic] of Henry 7th's. chapel,"[23] gives a full illustration
of the limits of Walpole's architectural understanding; it consisted of
a rectangle of elaborate gothic tracery and pendants cut out to the
right size and fitted into place like a false ceiling, without structural
or formal relation to the rest of the room.

In assembling the gothic surface for his house, Walpole often used
bogus modern materials and mismatched elements. Strawberry Hill was
full of plaster mouldings, Portland cement, stucco, and wallpapers posing
as masonry. The main staircase, for example, which Walpole considered
the effective centre of the piece, was lined with a "paper painted in
perspective to represent Gothic fretwork."[24] Like the gothic garden
ruins which became popular in the 1720's--and which sometimes were mere
facades like stage sets--Strawberry Hill was meant to be visually impres-
sive and rich in delightful literary and historical associations but

Walpole did not expect to go through the trouble and expense of building

a cathedral in order to achieve such effects. One of his shortcuts was

to lift either the design of a church fixture or the fixture itself out

of its original context, and to turn it to some other use. Thus, the

pattern for the gothic wallpaper in the entrance hall and staircase was

taken from Prince Arthur's tomb in Worcester Cathedral; the ceiling of

the China Room was designed by Muntz after one in the Borghese villa at

Frascati; floor tiles were obtained from Gloucester Cathedral; the roof of

the Tribune imitated that of the Chapter House, York Minster; the ceiling

of the Holbein Room was after that of the royal dressing-room in Windsor

Castle; the entrance screen was copied from the choir of Rouen Cathedral.

The list of borrowings and transplantings continues with fairly open

acknowledgment throughout Walpole's *Description* of Strawberry Hill.

Walpole and Chute were not singularly ingenious in making these

adaptations. Their collecting was partly the result of the same acquisi-

tive passion that had made English tourists in Italy and France gullible,

voracious consumers of landscape and genre painting;[25] partly the result

of Walpole's desire to secure himself in the company of "old castles,

old pictures, old histories"; partly the result of the same eclectic

reaction against neo-classical purism that culminated in the architectural

confections of Vauxhall.

The ground-plan of Strawberry Hill reflected Walpole's divided

allegiance--to modernity and to historical fantasy--and also his gradual

way of completing the project. Strawberry Hill did not follow a geomet-

rically regular plan, like that of Robert Walpole's estate, Houghton

Hall, Norfolk.[26] Horace Walpole avoided the Palladian fashion and its

attendant aesthetic. He kept the "modern refinements in luxury" that ensured comfort for him and his frequent visitors. He kept the requisite social separations: the servants' work and living areas at Strawberry Hill were still "below stairs." But he was equally interested in other matters, balance and consistency *not* among them. The asymmetry of the house, for example, Walpole chose deliberately.[27] He inserted Essex's Beauclerc Tower between the existing Round Tower and the long south wing, whereas a more conventional plan would have placed it at an opposite corner, for balance. Walpole varied the size of his rooms, making them progressively larger; the early ones, he admitted, were quite small.[28] He sought to enhance the house's irregularity of profile, the picturesque beauty of its many vistas, its own value in completing vistas from the surrounding park, its elements of surprise, and its display of the haphazardness which was then supposed to be truly gothic. The long course of the construction and the variety of builders employed helped to lend Strawberry Hill a stylistic incoherence that was an adequate substitute for centuries of ruination and restoration, for the admirable irregularities of the barbarous architects.[29]

Walpole provided a recognizably gothic profile for Strawberry Hill by castellating its exterior. Although he did not choose to adopt fully the proportions of a castle for his modern plan, Walpole did think of his house as a sort of miniature castle and regularly referred to it as "Strawberry Castle" in his letters.[30] In this respect, he deviated from his ecclesiastical interests, but the facsimile of a castle, achieved with battlements, towers, and plain external decoration, was enough for him. It would have made as much sense for Walpole to have called his

creation "Strawberry Abbey," with its cloisters, Prior's Garden, and (later) its separate Chapel.

This elusiveness of Strawberry Hill's character was suited to Walpole's flexible ideas about the estate and its purpose. Strawberry Hill served two functions for him, one attached to the contemporary world and another to the past. Walpole saw in it both a place where he might live in comfort and seclusion and a stage setting where he might realize the play of his imagination. All the concessions to modernity, the expediencies upon which the gothicism depended, provided the first. In order to perform the second function, the house had to include all the props and backdrops necessary for the full repertoire of Walpole's fantasies, which tended to be either baronial or monastic. Thus, the mixture of styles and sources at Strawberry Hill, though it made for impure gothic architecture, supplied the appropriate materials and atmosphere for each vision, whether Walpole imagined himself as a hermit monk or as a noble descendant of Sir Terry Robsart.[31]

The gothicism of many nineteenth-century partisans, especially those who came out of the antiquarian line, was an earnest pursuit, originating in doctrine, or in social theory, or in a sense of stylistic integrity. Walpole's gothicism, on the other hand, was always related simply to satisfying personal, imaginative needs--and those were rarely obsessive or all-consuming. Walpole felt himself the victim of ennui, of the dullness and insipidity of his own age. Seeking relief, he tried to dramatize himself and his environment, in order to bring his vivid quasi-historical dreams to life.

Walpole has left evidence of the attraction that fantasies about

the past held for him. Thus, he wrote to George Montagu, on 5 January

1766, after some of the excitement immediately surrounding the publica-

tion of *The Castle of Otranto* had died down:

> Visions, you know, have always been my pasture; and so far
> from growing old enough to quarrel with their emptiness, I
> almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of
> exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams.
> Old castles, old pictures, old histories, and the babble of
> old people make one live back into centuries that cannot
> disappoint one. One holds fast and surely what is past.
> The dead have exhausted their power of deceiving--one can
> trust Catherine of Medicis now.[32]

There were, however, two important limitations upon Walpole's indul-

gence in such attractive, secure, regressive fantasies. First, his

gothicism was more subversive than overt and reactionary: he preferred to

revitalize and enrich modern taste, to reconcile it to the exotic and the

unfamiliar, rather than to rebel against it altogether. And second,

because he was subversive and because his retreat from the mundane was

only temporary, not doctrinaire, it did not matter so much that his

gothicism often consisted of sham and theatricality--veneer and fretwork

wallpaper. Even if he had known how to build an authentic gothic struc-

ture, the stage setting, the house-as-theatrical-machine, would have

sufficed for his divided purposes.

Walpole was unwilling to exchange the "realities of life" for

dreams, except in a temporary, controlled way. His status and his

important connections were valuable enough to overcome his disillusion-

ment and to prevent him from becoming entirely reclusive. Instead, he

discovered the means of combining the natural pleasures of both realms--

the familiar and the fantastical. After all, one of the "modern refine-

ments in luxury" which Walpole valued most was the luxury of being able

to summon his visions and to mix them with a comforting measure of

familiar reality, of being able to choose how much of the past he wanted

around him. By thus disguising the strangeness of his fantasies, he

disarmed some of the resistance to them.

But not all. Walpole was provoked, nevertheless, by a certain sense

of not being appreciated for his talents as an innovator. Offering Mme.

du Deffand his own assessment of *Otranto*, he treated it as the masterwork

of his personal *avante-garde:*

> I have not written the book for the present age, which will
> endure nothing but *cold common sense*. I confess to you, my
> dear friend, (and you will think me madder than ever,) that
> this is the only one of my works with which I am myself
> pleased; I have given reins to my imagination till I became
> on fire with the visions and feelings which it excited. I
> have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of
> philosophers; and it seems to me just so much the better
> for that very reason.[33]

The bitterness and aggressiveness evident here were his response to

Mmë. du Deffand's lack of enthusiasm for *Otranto*--and something more.

Walpole's defiance of all short-sighted critics was equally an expression

of his hope that he might be seen as a leader in some area; for his

vicarious political career had already hit a large snag even as his

literary career began. This fact helps to explain why he had undertaken

his excursions into the "centuries that cannot disappoint one." In 1765

he had arranged to bring together the new Rockingham ministry, in which

Conway was secretary of state, but Conway did not secure for him the

"considerable employment" which he declared his vanity "would have been

gratified in refusing."[34] Although politics alternately bored and

attracted him, he felt that they were his proper concern, more a part of

his birthright than was literature. To some extent, his activities as
builder, writer and antiquary compensated him for his inability to reach
and maintain the level of political importance that his father had
enjoyed. It was a source of both chagrin and amusement to Walpole that
he had to digress from political business in order to assert himself, and
in order to avoid the betrayals to which he believed he was so susceptible.

But Walpole's idea of his role as an innovator did not originate
simply in pique. There were particular reasons why his social standing
might give him the influence as a writer and taste-maker that he had
missed as a politician. Foremost were the limits he placed upon his
disaffection, reclusiveness, and eccentricity. He did move away from
certain realities, willingly; he did seek to insulate himself--physically
at Strawberry Hill, intellectually and emotionally through his gothicism
in general. On the other hand, he was well-suited to the task of accom-
modating his exotic visions to the views of the more pedestrian world,
of reconciling the unconventional with the conventional. He never
appeared outlandish in his gothicism, like Batty Langley, whom he joined
in ridiculing. Although his own designs were perhaps as outrageous and
fantastic as Langley's, he at least managed not to advocate them with
such earnestness. When throngs of visitors eventually came to see Straw-
berry Hill--so many that Walpole had to control them with rules and
admission tickets--they came to marvel at the richness of his unique
collection, at the miniature perfection of his Castle, not to patronize
a mere curiosity. Walpole was beyond patronage. His social position
gave him an important advantage, and he used it conservatively. As Ken-
neth Clark has observed, Walpole "did not so much popularise as aristo-

cratise Gothic."

> In 1750 the taste for pinnacles was associated with parvenus
> and Chesterfield could dismiss it as such. But when the
> exquisite, cultivated Walpole took up Gothic, society began
> to feel that there might be something in it.[35]

Moreover, Walpole's motives for favouring the gothic were relatively

pure. Since he was neither a professional builder nor a professional

writer, he did not have to obey his training, his patrons' voguish

tastes, or the critics' strictures. Like Sanderson Miller, whose work

at Hagley Park he admired,[36] Walpole undertook projects for his friends

and soon became a famous source of advice about gothic artifacts, but

this work was never a matter of necessity for him. Both Walpole and

Miller may have suffered from superficiality and a dearth of hard know-

ledge; yet, they remained enthusiasts, not cool performers of someone

else's bidding like Kent or Wyatt, who attempted the gothic because their

patrons demanded it. Walpole was among the first generation of real

gothic amateurs who were neither builders, by profession or tradition,

nor antiquarian purists; whose interest in the gothic had strongly

literary motives and direction.[37] He made a worthy successor to Hurd,

for he seemed ready to fulfil Hurd's pessimistic suggestion that the

vital images of the past should enter actively into modern poetry. Wal-

pole shared with Hurd a direct, personal sense of the banality which had

overcome literature and a belief that a new balance could not be achieved

through radical means.

Like Strawberry Hill, *The Castle of Otranto* was a manifestation of

Horace Walpole's dream life. Walpole promoted this connection, by claim-

ing that the house, which was itself a dream-fulfilment, had also inspired

the dream that prompted him to write:

> Shall I even confess to you what was the origin of this
> romance? I waked one morning in the beginning of last June
> from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had
> thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream
> for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on
> the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic
> hand in armour.[38]

The "Gothic story" that made his dream seem "very natural" was com-

posed of the fantasies suggested by his collection and house--of these

as much as any medieval works of *literary* fantasy. The correspondence

between Walpole's dream and his chosen environment was obvious. On the

"great staircase" of Strawberry Hill was a niche which contained a full

suit of armour,[39] and there was a separate Armoury at the head of those

stairs, furnished with two suits of armour, two helmets, a gauntlet, and

many other items of that kind.[40]

For Cole, Walpole described his reaction to the dream as if it had

inspired him, so that the circumstances under which he subsequently wrote

his novel appeared quite dramatic:

> In the evening I sat down and began to write, without know-
> ing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work
> grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it--add that I was very
> glad to think of anything rather than politics--In short I
> was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than
> two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had
> drunk my tea, about six o'clock, till half an hour after one
> in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that
> I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left
> Matilda and Isabella talking, in the middle of a paragraph.
> You will laugh at my earnestness, but if I have amused you
> by retracing with any fidelity the manners of ancient days,
> I am content, and give you leave to think me as idle as you
> please.[41]

Perhaps it is tempting to take Walpole's account of *Otranto's* dream

origin at face value, but there is good reason to suspect it. This

story was convenient, for it allowed Walpole to protect himself against criticism and to prepare his readers for the kind of fiction he had created. It agreed rather too well with Walpole's comparison of his work with "inspired writings," a comparison which--as I shall show-- Walpole used in the second Preface to *Otranto* in order to defend his treatment of the marvellous. The dream story suggested the author's lack of responsibility and his work's freedom from conventional restraints. According to this explanation, since Walpole had been driven by his dream, he was not entirely in control of the results. Moreover, by claiming that he had written hastily, Walpole could excuse the plainness or artlessness of diction into which he thought he had fallen. Because his romance followed the method of a dream, the marvellous events and monstrous figures might be expected to occur naturally, without elaborate justification. At the same time, the dream story permitted Walpole to maintain the diffidence appropriate to his dubious, mainly personal achievement. His hope that "fidelity" in "retracing . . . the manners of ancient days" might excuse his self-indulgence came as a sort of afterthought--the keynote of the dream story is *amusement,* idle fancy. And the net result of the dream story, whatever its veracity, was to clarify the relation of *The Castle of Otranto* to everyday reality, giving the reader comforting assurance of Walpole's real attitude toward his work.

Walpole used another, more extensive story to introduce *The Castle of Otranto* when it was first published in 1764.[42] This imposture too shows Walpole's concern for indicating, in advance, how his fiction should be read, and his impulse towards self-defence. For this reason,

the story is worth examining in some detail.

When it appeared, *The Castle of Otranto* masqueraded as a translation "from the original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto," the English version supposedly having been made by one "William Marshal, Gent." The Translator's Preface to the first edition informed the reader that "the following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of *England*. It was printed at *Naples,* in the black letter, in the year 1529. . . . The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism" (p. 5). The reader was thus forewarned that he should take care to separate the tale's content, which was suspect, from the manner in which it was told, which was familiar and acceptable. Citing internal evidence, particularly the "beauty of the diction, and the zeal of the author (moderated, however, by singular judgment)," the "translator" concluded that "the date of the composition was little antecedent to that of the impression." This approximate date persuaded him to adduce the likely motivation for the author of the original:

> Letters were then in their most flourishing state in *Italy,*
> and contributed to dispel the empire of superstition, at
> that time so forcibly attacked by the reformers. It is not
> unlikely, that an artful priest might endeavour to turn
> their own arms on the innovators; and might avail himself
> of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in
> their ancient errors and superstitions. If this was his
> view, he has certainly acted with signal address. Such a
> work as the following would enslave a hundred vulgar minds;
> beyond half the books of controversy that have been written
> from the days of *Luther* to the present hour (pp. 5-6).

This explanation, other suppositions about the tale's origin, and the translation device itself were convenient in several ways.

"Marshal's" speculation about motives--which, in effect, made the orig-
inal into a piece of Counter-Reformation propaganda of the most insidious
kind--he offered as "a mere conjecture," though later in the Preface he
seemed to take its truth for granted. But for Walpole's genteel readers
the signals were quite clear: a work which "would enslave a hundred vul-
gar minds" would not enslave theirs, especially not a work which had
been discovered "in the library of an ancient Catholic family." Having
introduced the reference to sectarian controversy, "Marshal" could have
counted on his readers to summon up the proper measure of Protestant
skepticism, to regard with dispassionate amusement the extreme measures,
like this propaganda, used by wild religious partisans.

An advantage in keeping all this explanatory material in the realm
of conjecture was that it remained possible that some other account of
Otranto's creation would turn out to be correct. Thus, Walpole made
provision for stepping into the author's role should his work receive a
kinder reception than he anticipated. Such coyness was, of course, con-
ventional. Devices similar to the translation device had already been
used for some time in order to protect authors from ridicule--and from
the charge of being mere authors (i.e., hacks).

Aside from dissociating the author from his work, a translation or
documentary device also could lend credibility to the fiction (or satire),
by connecting it with found manuscripts, real memoirs, journals or letters,
by making it resemble the adventures and scandals that were the favourite
subject of popular journalism. The relationship between fictional and
pseudo-factual elements added to the ironic complexity of the work.

Walpole used the translation device to ensure the credibility of his narrative—or, at least, to locate it among real types (i.e., Roman Catholic propaganda); however, he also used it to ensure the tale's incredibility, to show that he was not directly responsible for its more egregious qualities. The translation device pointed to a fact that his readers were quite ready to acknowledge: that the absurdities in *Otranto*—though none the less absurd—were true to the conditions of popular belief at the time when the "manuscript" was composed (c. 1529), or at the time of the story's setting, which "Marshal" placed "between 1095, the aera of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards" (p. 5). Since the supposed translator was simply making available a document that was characteristic of a certain historical period, without trying to conceal its despicable purpose, he could not be blamed for preserving its outlandish mannerisms and blatant lies. If miracles and supernatural events were not to be believed in themselves, they were, nevertheless, credible features in a piece of medieval Catholic fantasy:

> Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams and other preternatural
> events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not
> the case when our author wrote; much less when the story
> itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind
> of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an
> author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times,
> who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to
> believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as
> believing them (p. 6).

This last distinction illustrates Walpole's basic attitude toward the historical materials which he employed in his fantasies: one need not fully re-enter the past in order to exploit its stylistic resources. Sham was enough, for *Otranto* as for Strawberry Hill, and the successful imposition was a pleasure in itself.

Walpole's translation device managed to deceive some of his readers,
but not all. Thomas Gray wrote to him from Cambridge, where *Otranto* had
caused only a minor sensation in Gray's circle:

> I have received *The Castle of Otranto,* and return you my
> thanks for it. It engages our attention here, makes some
> of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed
> o' nights. We take it for a translation, and should believe
> it to be a true story, if it were not for St. Nicholas.[43]

Since Gray had been a party to Walpole's secret, had read the manu-
script before Walpole decided to publish it, he was able to avoid being
fooled and to report on the work's reception with some detachment.[44] A
more typical sort of reaction came from Mason:

> . . . I will not omit thanking you for a more extraordinary
> thing in its kind, which though it comes not from your press,
> yet I have episcopal evidence is written by your hand. And
> indeed less than such evidence would scarce have contented me.
> For when a friend of mine to whom I had recommended *The Castle
> of Otranto* returned it to me with some doubts of its origin-
> ality, I laughed him to scorn, and wondered he could be so
> absurd as to think that anybody nowadays had imagination
> enough to invent such a story. He replied that his suspicions
> arose merely from some parts of familiar dialogue in it, which
> he thought of too modern a cast. Still sure of my point, I
> affirmed this objection, if there was anything in it, was
> merely owing to its not being translated a century ago. All
> this I make it a point of conscience to tell you, for though
> it proves me your dupe, I should be glad to be so duped
> again every year of my life.[45]

Mason's pleasure at being duped reflects three features of his
reaction: his lack of critical acumen (his unnamed friend seems the more
perceptive reader), his desire to ingratiate himself further with Walpole,
and his acceptance of the whole false framework as something of more than
passing interest. Indeed, deception was essential to the artistry, since
the enjoyment of it depended upon simultaneously observing and ignoring
that the fiction (or the new-gothic building) was a sham. The case of

Walpole's French visitor who mistook the Cabinet at Strawberry Hill for

a real chapel demonstrates the actual working of the gothic sensibility:

whether one was fooled or not, what was important was that the sham be

impressive enough to excite the requisite associative fervor, that the

sham transport the beholder, or the reader, temporarily away from his

modern scruples, while leaving him the chance to exercise them in the

end. In *Otranto* the translation device was the chief means of accom-

plishing this, and it is significant that, even after he had claimed the

work as his own openly, in the Preface to the Second Edition (1765),

Walpole retained the Translator's Preface in subsequent editions. It

was an integral part of the romance.

I have already suggested that, beyond showing the reader that *Otranto*

had to be considered at several ironic levels, the translation device

indicated Walpole's reluctance to think of himself as a fiction-writer--

or to be presented as one in public. That is why he continued to place

so much emphasis, whenever he discussed the making of *Otranto,* upon his

spontaneous, uncalculated and rapid method of composition. W. S. Lewis

notes that Walpole "was bored with the insipidity of Richardson and the

coarseness of Fielding and Smollett," but these were mainly objections

against their literary qualities, not their personal characteristics or

those of authors in general. According to the *Walpoliana,* however, he

also had no tolerance for authors as social creatures:

> I have always rather tried to escape the acquaintance,
> and conversation, of authors. An author talking of his own
> works, or censuring those of others, is to me a dose of
> hypecacuana. I like only a few, who can in company forget
> their authorship, and remember plain sense. [46]

Aside from such a direct expression of his dislike, Walpole showed

his uneasiness with the idea of authorship in two other ways: through

his copious apologies for *Otranto,* filled with references to his care-

lessness and lack of technical skill; and through his half-hearted

defence of the moralizing in the romance. In both cases, he was primarily

interested in showing that, while he had (reluctantly) become an author,

he was still a gentleman; and, as a corollary, that his social position

should earn special allowances for his literary production.

Walpole was anxious about the public reception of *Otranto.* His

anxieties originated in his belief that fiction-writing was a risky occu-

pation for a gentleman, but that only a gentleman could afford to take

the risks necessary to rejuvenate fiction. His more explicit comments on

the subject appeared soon after *Otranto* was published. For example, he

replied to Mason's adulatory letter with a fair degree of apparent humil-

ity:

> . . . I published *The Castle of Otranto* with the utmost dif-
> fidence and doubt of its success. Yet though it has been
> received much more favourably than I could flatter myself it
> would be, I must say your approbation is of another sort than
> general opinion . . . your praise is so likely to make me
> vain, that I oblige myself to recollect all the circumstances
> that can abate it, such as the fear I had of producing it at
> all (for it is not everybody that may in this country play
> the fool with impunity); the hurry in which it was composed;
> and its being begun without any plan at all . . . I think
> your friend judged rightly in pronouncing part of the dia-
> logue too modern. I had the same idea of it, and I could,
> but such a trifle does not deserve it, point out other defects,
> besides some to which most probably I am not [sic] insensible.[47]

The parenthetical reference to the difficulty of playing the fool

"with impunity" neatly outlines Walpole's position. Because he was

neither a professional writer nor a professional builder, he did not

have to align his works strictly with contemporary critical values. As

a gentleman he could claim a certain licence to write--or to build--

exclusively for his own amusement, following his own fashion, "in defi-

ance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers." Once he had sent his

creations into the public realm, however, the situation changed somewhat.

The literary amateur's privilege, if abused or flaunted, might have

undermined the reputation on which it was founded. Moreover, Walpole must

have believed that the kind of fiction that he had written (or invented)

required the author "to play the fool"--that his gothic tastes, in that

sense, were potentially dangerous. This belief did not stop him from

flouting convention (his dissatisfaction with conventional fiction ensured

that he would take the risk involved), but it did make him cautious enough

to appease conventional expectations occasionally. After the second

edition of *Otranto* came out, with Walpole the acknowledged author, the

Translator's Preface still may have offered the reader a context in which

to read the romance, but it no longer protected Walpole from the dangers

of innovation (and Mason's letter makes one wonder how well it ever had).

Consequently, Walpole took care to define the limits of his work and to

explain exactly what he thought he had accomplished.

The defence and explanation had begun, in fact, in that part of the

Translator's Preface where "Marshal" was supposed to be criticizing the

"original manuscript." He observed that, if the *"air* of the *miraculous"*

were accepted, no other unnatural or outlandish element would be found.

> Allow the possibility of the facts, and all the actors com-
> port themselves as persons would do in their situation.
> There is no bombast, no similes, flowers, digressions, or
> unnecessary descriptions. Every thing tends directly to
> the catastrophe. Never is the reader's attention relaxed.

> The rules of the drama are almost observed throughout the
> conduct of the piece. The characters are well drawn, and
> still better maintained. Terror, the author's principal
> engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it
> is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up
> in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions (pp. 6-7).

Here were the familiar restraints upon Walpole's imagination. He

had to respect the demands of probability--if *possibility* were admitted--

especially in matters of characterization.[48] He had to avoid elevated or

heavily embellished language. He had to sustain a high level of tension

and arousal: by concentrating the action, by alternating the reader's

immersion in terror and pity, by constantly confronting the reader with

the emotional crises of his characters. This argument had the effect of

making the romance seem more normal than it really was, by subjecting it

to many of the basic rules of fiction and drama.

After defending the depiction of the servants in *Otranto,* the

Translator's Preface turned to another area where Walpole may have anti-

cipated controversy: the moral lesson which the romance pretended to

convey. "Marshal" regretted that his "author" had not founded his story:

> . . . on a more useful moral than this: that *the sins of
> fathers are visited on their children to the third and
> fourth generation.* I doubt whether, in his time, any more
> than at present, ambition curbed its appetite of dominion
> from the dread of so remote a punishment. And yet this
> moral is weakened by that less direct insinuation, that
> even such anathema may be diverted, by devotion to *St.
> Nicholas.* Here, the interest of the Monk plainly gets the
> better of the judgment of the Author.

The "translator" hoped, nevertheless, that the romance would satisfy the

modern critics' preference that fiction have a didactic purpose in addi-

tion to its entertainment value:[49] "The piety that reigns throughout,

the lessons of virtue that are inculcated, and the rigid purity of the

sentiments, exempt this work from the censure to which romances are but too liable" (pp. 7-8).

Having correctly identified the moral muddiness of the tale, "Marshal" threw a sop to the more rabid moralists with his lame affirmations about its "piety," "lessons of virtue," and "rigid purity of sentiments." Since he had already invited his readers to cast the full light of their modern Protestant discernment upon the devious mind that had fabricated the romance (i.e., the hypothetical propagandist's), he was unlikely to impress them with the solemnity or profundity of the fiction. At any rate, those were not the qualities which attracted most readers to *The Castle of Otranto*. There remained one good reason for the moral issue to arise here, and that was Walpole's desire to seem duly concerned with conventional notions of decency and serious didactic intentions, while, in fact, having no real concern for them at all. Only "Monk" Lewis, among the other gothic novelists, matched Walpole's ability to treat the common proprieties so casually, and that was largely a measure of his confidence in the power of social standing to win exemption from moral scruples. (In addition, Lewis was much more independently wealthy than Walpole.)

In the second edition of *Otranto,* Walpole continued to justify and criticize his work, but first he apologized to his readers for "having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator," again attributing the need for concealment to his modest expectations:

> As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the
> attempt, were the sole inducements to assume that disguise,
> he flatters himself he shall appear excusable. He resigned
> his performance to the impartial judgment of the public;
> determined to let it perish in obscurity, if disapproved;

nor meaning to avow such a trifle, unless better judges
should pronounce that he might own it without a blush
(p. 13).

The project of self-justification and explanation became more urgent now

that Walpole's anonymity was gone. A further incentive was the romance's

dubious success: despite the fact that the first edition of five hundred

copies had sold out within three months, there was no overnight fame, and

Walpole probably exaggerated *Otranto's* favourable reception--outside his

own circle.[50] Consequently, he wrote more directly about the guiding

principles of the romance in the second preface, seeking to "explain the

grounds on which he composed" it.[51] These principles included both per-

sonal motives and ideas about the relationship between traditional

romances and novels. He described the inception of *Otranto* as an occasion

for experiment and compromise:

> It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the
> ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination
> and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended
> to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Inven-
> tion has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy
> have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life.
> But if, in the latter species, Nature has cramped imagination,
> she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded
> from the old romances. The actions, sentiments, and conver-
> sations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days, were as
> unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.
> The author . . . thought it possible to reconcile the two
> kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to
> expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and
> thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to
> conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules
> of probability; in short, to make them think, speak, and act,
> as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extra-
> ordinary positions. He had observed, that, in all inspired
> writings, the personages under the dispensation of miracles,
> and witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena, never lose
> sight of their human character: whereas, in the productions
> of romantic story, an improbable event never fails to be
> attended by an absurd dialogue. The actors seem to lose
> their sense, the moment the laws of Nature have lost their
> tone (pp. 13-14).

Walpole carried over some of the important points from the Translator's Preface: the promise to depict *probable* behaviour, the supposed avoidance of overblown rhetoric, the reference to fiction as if it were drama (in the earlier Preface, Walpole had submitted his work to "the rules of the drama"). But Walpole added to these a comparison of the "two kinds of Romance," which was implicit in the first Preface but undeveloped. The idea of such a comparison had not originated with Walpole. The immediate precedent--if not influence--came from Hurd, who had shown the trade-off between fancy and reason almost three years earlier, in the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*. Hurd was not writing as a practitioner of fiction, however, and remained skeptical that modern inventions could match the originals.

It is plain that Walpole did not share this skepticism. One reason why he did not may have been the fact that he did not disagree strongly with the common line of attack against the medieval romances and their modern descendants; therefore, he could anticipate what form a modern version of the romance would have to assume in order to be accepted. His own hybrid romance depended upon, and reinforced, the prejudice against romances that was widespread among critics of fiction. An example of such prejudice in action occurs in Tobias Smollett's Preface to *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) where he offers a short pseudo-historical condemnation of the romance, in order to connect his own picaresque use of the romantic types and subjects with that of Cervantes:

> . . . when the minds of men were debauched, by the imposi-
> tion of priestcraft, to the most absurd pitch of credulity,
> the authors of romance arose, and, losing sight of proba-
> bility, filled their performances with the most monstrous
> hyperboles. If they could not equal the ancient poets in

> point of genius, they were resolved to excel them in fiction,
> and apply to the wonder rather than the judgement of their
> readers. . . . Although nothing could be more ludicrous and
> unnatural than the figures they drew, they did not want
> patrons and admirers, and the world actually began to be
> infected with the spirit of knight-errantry, when Cervantes,
> by an inimitable piece of ridicule, reformed the taste of
> mankind . . . converting romance to purposes far more useful
> and entertaining, by making it assume the sock, and point
> out the follies of ordinary life.[52]

Smollett's polemical history touches upon three major complaints

against the romance: (1) it did not follow, imitate, or concern itself

with Nature (ideal or mundane), but instead took up unrealities and

illusory images; (2) it was the product of a barbarous era, when a lying,

power-hungry priesthood propagated marvels and superstitions; (3) as a

result of both these defects, it had no educative value. On the contrary,

the romance might lead modern children, especially those of the newly-

literate lower-middle class, to believe that their lives were too stable,

sane, and dull.[53]

Walpole exploited exactly such assumptions in order to reconcile

his readers to the idea that the romances had their own licit pleasures,

which they might enjoy without losing entirely their contempt for the

era and the mentality that had produced them. It was the readers' shar-

ing of these assumptions that allowed them to understand how *Otranto*

should be read, and to trust that its outlook was, after all, reassuringly

novelistic, not romantic. The translation device, for example, only

worked properly if the second complaint (given above) was generally

advanced; the association of extravagances and marvels with a particular

historical period made the device's pretense plausible. And, of course,

the thought that the romances were somehow a dangerous or a barbarous

entertainment did not reduce their attractiveness--when danger and bar-
barity began to seem an antidote against the banality of civilization.
On the other hand, the frequent note of narrative sarcasm and condescen-
sion implied a voice outside the credulous time of the story and its
original telling, a voice which expressed the modern attitude toward
such fables: amused indulgence.

By assimilating, instead of resisting, the novelists' criticism of
romance, Walpole ensured that *The Castle of Otranto* could be appreciated
on at least two levels: as an exciting alternative to the dull common
run of fiction; and as a brief excursion into the quaint romantic terri-
tory, with modern critical equipment brought along. These levels were
not so much discrete as complementary. Certainly for Walpole's contem-
poraries, especially for those who became gothic enthusiasts, the former
was more important, since it represented his real innovation and distin-
guished him from other fiction-writers. But here again the case of
Otranto resembled that of Strawberry Hill. In both creations, the fact
that Walpole made allowance for more familiar tastes or attitudes gave
him the freedom to introduce the unfamiliar without appearing to deviate
from the conventional mode. Thus, he could not have "given reins" to
his imagination, unless he was confident that the reins could be grasped
again, that the imagination could be subdued as well as freed. Excessive
common sense justified, for Walpole, the flight into the realm of visions,
but the excesses of fantasy, in turn, invited reasonable controls.

As a gentleman and an amateur, Walpole of course had more liberty
than most builders or writers to choose a balance between the conventional
and the unconventional. At Strawberry Hill, as I have shown already, the

reasonable controls were various: convenience and luxury, availability of materials, technical skill, eclectic tastes, and concern for social position--all restrained Walpole's architectural gothicism and, in so doing, made sure that it could not be dismissed simply as an affectation. The resulting gothic hybrid had the advantage of influencing the wider audience who were not liable to sympathize with either antiquarian or doctrinal gothicism, but who were able to react to Strawberry Hill in terms of the picturesque, or of associative effects, or of the exotic collection.

Similarly, in *Otranto* the two levels of appreciation enhanced the romance's acceptability by providing complementary experiences of its fictional subject: one that relieved the dullness and insipidity of "common life" with an interlude in "the boundless realms of invention," another that rationalized the strange characters, scenes and themes by referring to accepted tastes and attitudes. Again, the advantage of this compromise was that it made Walpole appear to be exercising a sort of self-censorship, whereas in fact he was reintroducing to fiction an interest in irrationality, violence, sexual deviance, and emotional excess that would not have been as palatable if he had not offered his readers a way of explaining it. After all, these were the themes that might be expected to interest a Roman Catholic propagandist, or that might have arisen naturally in barbarous times.

Walpole wanted to use the romance--or a hybrid form of it--to convert the fiction of his day. In order to understand how he hoped to do this, it is necessary to have a clearer idea of his attitudes toward the romance and the novel. Unlike the reformer Cervantes who figures in

Smollett's history of the romance, Walpole was not mainly worried about

the dangerous, deluding effects of romance--though he was sensitive to

them. Instead, he was disappointed by the limitations which he felt had

been set upon the scope of fiction. Since Cervantes had held the romantic

ideal up to ridicule, the evolution of fiction had come full circle, so

that the pallor of the modern novel was as undesirable as the luridness

of the ancient romance. In objecting to "a strict adherence to common

life," in the Preface to the second edition of *Otranto,* Walpole was

referring to two different things: life confined within the common defi-

nition of what is *natural;* and low life, populated by vulgar characters

and depicted in a vulgar manner. The first sense required that fiction

be dull, the second that it be ungainly and disgusting. Walpole's claim

that "the great resources of fancy have been dammed up," his desire to

observe the probable behaviour of "mere men and women . . . in extra-

ordinary positions," were measures of his dissatisfaction with the

faithful recording of life at its most circumstantial level.

His sense of the shortcomings of conventional fiction affected the

character of his own work in ways that he did not note in his Prefaces.

Much of the strangeness of his technique in *Otranto* can be explained

through the values which he did not hold, the conventions which he did

not choose to observe.

The new psychological realism did not appeal to him. He thought

Richardson's works boring,[54] and he did not linger over the psychological

condition of his own characters except when it overflowed in some strik-

ing external act, some exaggerated gesture of passion or grief. He was

interested in the spectacle in which his characters figured, not the

intricacies of personality. In the *Walpoliana* he is reported to have

complained of the contemporary French tragedy that "it is not *dramatic,*

not pity and terror moved by incident and *action*--but an interest created

by perplexity, mental conflict, and situation."[55] The tools he employed

in psychological analysis were rather blunt; for example, he laid the

background for Manfred's competing feelings of rage and compassion with

reference to abstract forces:

> *Manfred* was not one of those savage tyrants, who wanton in
> cruelty unprovoked. The circumstances of his fortune had
> given an asperity to his temper, which was naturally humane;
> and his virtues were always ready to operate, when his pas-
> sions did not obscure his reason (p. 42).

Although such general terms were a common means of abbreviating more

complex motives, Walpole, unlike many of his contemporaries, seemed con-

tent not to penetrate much further into the origins of malice and revenge--

indeed, he established the precedent for later gothicists, that such dark

forces should be made more and more mysterious. This relative superfi-

ciality, this reluctance to mull over causation and the minute sparks of

feeling was convenient for Walpole, because it permitted him to make his

figures from a very malleable substance, to put them through rapid changes

from one mask to another, without elaborate preparations to make this seem

plausible to the reader.

The characterization of Manfred again furnishes the best example of

the advantages of such flexibility. While his wife, Hippolita, glosses

over the fact that the giant apparition is real, Manfred is depicted as

going through various mental states:

> *Manfred,* though persuaded, like his wife, that the vision
> had been no work of fancy, recovered a little from the
> tempest of mind into which so many strange events had thrown

> him. Ashamed too, of his inhuman treatment of a Princess,
> who returned every injury with new marks of tenderness and
> duty; he felt returning love forcing itself into his eyes--
> but not less ashamed of feeling remorse towards one, against
> whom he was inwardly meditating a yet more bitter outrage,
> he curbed the yearnings of his heart, and did not dare to
> lean even towards pity. The next transition of his soul
> was to exquisite villainy (pp. 48-49).

While the reader has the *suggestion* of a tempestuous mind, the minute

features of Manfred's sufferings and anxieties remain unstudied. The

shallowness of the psychological penetration guarantees that dialogue,

like the characters' other actions, will stay at the level of gesture

and exhibition, yielding few revelations about personality, emotion, or

motivation. The unpredictability of the characters, however, lends them

the illusion of texture; Walpole thus avoided the error which he com-

plained of finding in Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*--that of "continually

letting out" a character's "ruling passion."[56] The fact that it seems

normal, within the romance, for the characters to split off abruptly

on some new course also excuses their apparently motiveless changes of

heart, such as Manfred's eventual acquiescence in entering the neighbour-

ing monastery, which otherwise would seem arbitrary and mechanical.

However, since the motivational basis for Manfred's earlier malignity

is so thinly defined, the basis for his repentance does not have to be

any more substantial--not, at least, in order to be consistent.

While Walpole wrote as if psychological subtlety were an encumbrance,

he was equally impatient with the accumulation of circumstantial details

required by realistic narration. In this respect, his fiction, like the

traditional ballads which began to reappear at this time, has its own

austere economy of representation. He does not immerse the reader in

the associative richness, or the mysteriousness, or the exoticism of
the setting *for its own sake*. Instead, the setting is instrumental in
serving his more fundamental interests, and he uses it schematically,
symbolically, and suggestively. These are all uses which tend to dis-
pense with minute description and superficial, historical accuracy.

The encounters, discoveries, threats, captures, and escapes that
make up the whole plot of *The Castle of Otranto* occur in a maze through
which the main characters hurtle, drawing along the reader at the same
precipitous speed, refusing him the chance to situate them within their
environment, or even to realize that environment. For this reason, the
Castle assumes a *schematic,* rather than a circumstantial, reality: it
consists of the various routes the characters follow in their flights,
pursuits, and fatal encounters. We become aware of its layout, of the
subterranean passages that link it with the nearby places of refuge, of
its galleries, chambers and corridors above ground, but this awareness
provides little more than an outline, in which objects become incidental
to the rapid action.

And as that action hurries toward its peak of violence and recogni-
tion, the *symbolic* use of the setting becomes more evident as well. The
symbolism depends mainly on the intrusive element in the scene: the
giant, whose armour and burgeoning limbs throw Manfred's household into
chaos, by appearing with disturbingly appropriate frequency and effect.
From the very opening incident, when the great plumed casque crushes out
the life of Manfred's son and heir, Conrad ("a homely youth, sickly, and
of no promising disposition"), on his wedding day, the giant apparition
enters into a contest with Manfred for occupancy of the Castle and for

the power which it represents. The helmet deprives Manfred not only of

his son but also of free use of the Castle. The enormous weight of the

"enchanted casque" breaks through the courtyard floor into the vault

below, enabling the "sorcerer" Theodore to escape captivity and to aid

Isabella in her flight (pp. 37-40). When Manfred finally discovers him,

Theodore points to the helmet as his "accomplice," in order to show the

ridiculousness of the tyrant's accusations. But the connection between

Theodore and the giant is more accurate than either he or Manfred sup-

poses; for the armed figure is the most visible symbol of Theodore's

legitimate claim to power, and of his true, noble lineage. As the figure

grows beyond the capacity of the Castle, so Theodore's rights become

obvious, beyond Manfred's capacity to deny them. The fact that the giant,

once reassembled, turns out to be the venerable Alfonso's spiritual form

clarifies the symbolic pattern, which is further extended when Manfred,

seeing Theodore dressed in armour, mistakes him for Alfonso's ghost

(pp. 106-7). As the giant enlarges, it helps to fulfil Manfred's family

curse, which eventually destroys his children and revokes his power. It

is appropriate that Alfonso should return in "dilated" scale, a change

which indicates the vigor of his line (in contrast to Manfred's), the

enormity of the crimes against him, the heavy burden of conscience upon

Manfred, and the potency of the supernatural forces that guarantee jus-

tice in the mortal realm. Manfred's loss of control over the Castle, as

well as the Castle's inability to contain the giant, proves the fragility

of his system of self-deception; the Castle is as puny as Manfred's

attempts to deny his inherited guilt or to avert his family's doom. The

full extent of the symbolic pattern appears with the apotheosis of

Alfonso:

> . . . a clap of thunder . . . shook the castle to its foun-
> dations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal
> armour was heard behind. *Frederic* and *Jerome* thought the
> last day was at hand. The latter, forcing *Theodore* along
> with them, rushed into the court. The moment *Theodore*
> appeared, the walls of the castle behind *Manfred* were thrown
> down with a mighty force, and the form of *Alfonso*, dilated
> to an immense magnitude, appeared in the center of the ruins.
> Behold in *Theodore* the true heir of *Alfonso!* said the vision:
> and having pronounced these words, accompanied by a clap of
> thunder, it ascended solemnly towards Heaven, where, the
> clouds parting asunder, the form of *St. Nicholas* was seen,
> and, receiving *Alfonso's* shade, they were soon wrapt from
> mortal eyes in a blaze of glory (pp. 144-45).

Having witnessed this baroque spectacle, Hippolita provides the

proper, sententious interpretation of its symbols: "My Lord, said she,

to the desponding *Manfred,* behold the vanity of human greatness! *Conrad*

is gone! *Matilda* is no more! in *Theodore* we view the true Prince of

Otranto" (p. 145). Here the symbolic value of the Castle is duly sum-

marized. Although the modern reader might not have brought the same

degree of moral seriousness to his interpretation, he still might have

seen the significance of the Castle, not in terms of the "vanity of human

greatness," but of the vanity of self-delusion. In any case, it is

important to note that the Castle's symbolic function does not require

that it be carefully described.

And exact description would have destroyed the suggestiveness of the

setting, the vague sense that the Castle is an animate object as well as

a symbolic one. In addition, the obscurity of the setting, which is a

result of its hazy depiction, suggests the mystery which surrounds its

inhabitants, a mystery which is fully explained only when Manfred and

Jerome tell the true story of Alfonso and his descendants--and only after

the Castle is ruined (pp. 146-48).

Since the schematic, symbolic, and suggestive uses of the setting
do not need a supporting fabric of detail, Walpole's desire to indulge
personal, gothic fantasies determines the *choice* of a setting more than
its *treatment*. There is scarcely any sign in ·The Castle of Otranto of
the plenitude of artifacts, decoration, familiar associations, of the
delight in an historical period vividly imagined, that Walpole maintained
so diligently at Strawberry Hill. He did not collect observations about
costume, language, customs, or attitudes in *The Castle of Otranto* as he
collected paintings, books, china, armour, and other items of *virtú* at
Strawberry Hill. In architecture, Walpole's gothicism naturally took the
form of a fascination with *objects and their associations,* but in fiction
he was not similarly bound to use the evocative power of historical things.
At Strawberry Hill the gothic veneer--the collection of *recherché* objects,
the facile imitation of antiquity--*was* the whole gothic experience; in
The Castle of Otranto, whatever attention was given to historical authen-
ticity and description served a purpose beyond the mere evocation of
ancient times. Walpole's claim that he was "retracing with . . . fidelity
the manners of ancient days" must be studied with reference to his ulti-
mate, actual subject--and that was not the "quality of life" or the
"customs" of medieval men and women.

In *Otranto* exotic atmosphere is more important than historical
accuracy. Although the plot might have been based, to some extent, on
real events and persons,[57] Walpole's efforts at lending an archaic flavour
to the fiction were limited. He did try to affect a false medieval dic-
tion and vocabulary (using the older pronoun forms), and to introduce the
terms of chivalry and feudalism, but there is such a thorough mixture of

elements and idioms that the result has no particular historical character, and cannot be identified with any period. Its main distinction is that it is antique and quaintly formal. Considering language only, we have the following specimen, spoken by Matilda to Theodore:

> Stranger . . . if thy misfortunes have not been occasioned by thy own fault, and are within the compass of the Princess *Hippolita's* power to redress, I will take upon me to answer that she will be thy protectress. When thou art dismissed from this castle, repair to holy father *Jerome,* at the convent adjoining to the church of *St. Nicholas,* and make thy story known to him, as far as thou thinkest meet: he will not fail to inform the Princess, who is the mother of all that want her assistance (p. 56).

The importance of exoticism in the gothic novels will be discussed in detail in the next section of this study; here it is enough to observe two major factors. An exotic atmosphere was of prime importance in *Otranto,* in part because it gave the reader the superficial thrill of escape, but mainly because it granted a certain measure of thematic licence. When examining the translation device and Walpole's acceptance of the common critique of romances, I suggested the advantages of Walpole's ostensible self-censorship and of his allowance of two levels of interpretation for *Otranto* (pp. 98-100 *supra*). The reading which can accommodate all themes comfortably, by dismissing those which seem *predictably barbarous,* and therefore outlandish, complements the reading which seizes upon the same themes precisely *because* they are barbarous and dangerous. The net effect is that the fiction appears simultaneously safe, moderate, or conventional, and subversive, excessive, or strange.[58] In both cases, exoticism, not historical scholarship, provoked the appropriate responses. For those readers who entertained a proper respect for their own time and a proper contempt for all others, the mere whiff of

the alien or the antique was sufficient to signal "barbarity." For
those readers who saw in the exotic (whether historical or geographical)
a respite from contemporary dullness, the goal was sensational novelty,
not meticulous lessons in cultural history.

In the critical passage with which this section began, Sir Walter
Scott would appear to overrate the historical fidelity of *The Castle of
Otranto,* since, as I have argued above, it was hardly Walpole's object
"to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal
times, as might actually have existed." It would almost seem as if Scott
had projected upon *Otranto* his own bias, for he himself preferred to
display historical authenticity prominently in his fiction. In *Ivanhoe*
(1819), for example, he took care to point out the differences in lan-
guage and dress between the Anglo-Saxons and their Norman overlords,
following the distinction through their oaths and vocabulary, their
customs, political relations, national characteristics and religion.[59]
Scott certainly could not have found any similar depiction of the actual
texture of the past in *The Castle of Otranto,* and his admiration for the
romance appears misguided, until one notices that the eventual emphasis
in Scott's critique of *Otranto* falls upon its excellence "in bringing
forth the sensation of supernatural awe, connected with halls that have
echoed to the sounds of remote generations," an excellence which he
believed unattainable in new-gothic buildings. Scott correctly identi-
fied the true strength--and the true subject--of *The Castle of Otranto,*
which gives it its own kind of authenticity: the evocation of an unfamil-
iar, but impressive, state of emotional arousal and irrational belief.

The striving for strong emotional effects, and for dramatic themes
which might occasion such effects, determined many of the peculiar char-
acteristics of *The Castle of Otranto*: its unusual literary models, for
instance.

Given his interest in exploiting the display of strong emotions, it
was natural that Walpole should turn for inspiration, guidance, and jus-
tification to a genre where excess of emotion and sentiment was a normal,
conventional feature. Classical and Renaissance tragedy seemed the
appropriate type. Thus, in the critical apparatus with which he sur-
rounded *Otranto* Walpole liked to cite Shakespeare as his precedent and
exemplar. He went so far as to revive the jaded dispute between French
critics, who valued the Rules, and English poets, who valued their genius
and liberty, in order to defend Shakespeare's work and connect it--in
some obscure way--with his own.[60] But this was only a pretended affinity,
a way of placating respectable critical opinion and Walpole's own sense
of literary tradition. In practice, his real models came from another
source: the spectacular theatre of Webster and Ford, the theatre of
revenge and dark villainy--the melodrama, not the tragedy. This sort of
theatre had already put out roots in more recent times, reappearing in
Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682), for example.[61]

The elements of spectacle--hyperbole, sentiments stretched to the
extreme, irresistible cruel impulses--affected the dialogue in *Otranto,*
and the whole method of dramatic presentation, structure, and character-
ization. The characters, particularly the noble or "high" characters,
tend to speak and act as if they were constantly aware of an unseen
audience, for whom they were playing the climax of a dramatic performance

which consists of nothing but climaxes. Contrary to the purpose that
Walpole stated in the second Preface, they do not "think, speak, and act,
as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary
positions."

There are several reasons for this apparent discrepancy, aside from
Walpole's desire for self-justification. First, and most important, is
the matter of his innovative territory. Despite Walpole's careful
exposition, in the second Preface, of his new fictional synthesis--an
analysis which was so influential that Scott almost duplicated it sixty
years later--the evidence of the romance itself shows what Scott also
noticed: a stronger interest in "extraordinary positions" than in prob-
ability. The veneer of conventional elements--the familiar patterns of
locution, the decorum and sentimentality of the sympathetic characters--
made this interest somehow "safer," by qualifying it, but did not reduce
the essential, attractive novelty of the "extraordinary situations."

Second, there is the matter of *Otranto's* relative value and its
context. The deliberately cultivated strangeness of the gothic context
explains the characters' artificiality. Since the situations into which
they were cast were unusual, it was not to be expected that their prob-
able behaviour would be the same as the probable behaviour of the "mere
men and women" in ordinary, bourgeois, realistic fiction. On the other
hand, the implied distinctions between the old romances and Walpole's
new mixed mode in the second Preface signal a shift in the notion of
probability, to make allowance for differences in theme and approach.
Although the claim in the Translator's Preface that *Otranto* contained
"no bombast, no similes, flowers, digressions, or unnecessary descrip-

tions" was untrue in all except the last item, Walpole did manage to

avoid what he considered the major defect of previous "productions of

romantic story": the invariable association of improbable events with

"absurd dialogue" and absurd behaviour. He did not bring to his charac-

terizations the psychological penetration of Richardson or the wide-

ranging insight of Fielding, but he did introduce some sense of motiva-

tional and ethical patterns, of the interweaving of guilt and responsi-

bility, a sense that he felt was badly lacking in the old romances. If

the "actions, sentiments, and conversations" of Walpole's characters were

not exactly natural, frequently anti-natural by the standards of the

modern novel, they were at least more probable and less whimsical than

those of the "heroes and heroines of ancient days," and as natural as

might be expected in a strange realm of miracles and supernaturalism.

Moreover, the context of *The Castle of Otranto* was not only gothic

and alien, but also tragic. At any rate, Walpole treated the romance as

if it had been composed according to the principles of tragedy--as he

understood them.[62] The Translator's Preface invoked these by claiming

"terror" as "the author's principal engine . . . so often contrasted by

pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting

passions." Although these terms ("terror" and "pity") were dropped in

the second Preface, in favour of the phrase "extraordinary positions,"

the same sense of high dramatic purpose remained to exercise an influence

over criticism of the romance. For example, in defending his introduction

of comic servants in *Otranto,* Walpole carefully distinguished between the

chief qualities of the "high" and "low" characters: "the contrast between

the sublime of the one and the naiveté of the other, sets the pathetic of

the former in a stronger light" (p. 15). The main characters' involvement with the sublime and the pathetic, or with the conventions of tragedy, implies that they are acting at a level of elevated feeling, sentiment and language; defining this context helps to excuse their frequently artificial, anti-natural speech and behaviour. Even if we substitute a more accurate identification of the generic affinities (i.e., "melodrama" instead of "tragedy"), we diminish the apparent artificiality somewhat when we see it against a conventional background that includes excessive emotion, heightened sensibility and sentimentality, and overblown rhetoric as standard features. As with the excuse provided by *Otranto's* alien setting, this means of redefining what is artificial or natural relies on the reader's expectations for various literary genres and types.

Having greatly reduced the psychological and descriptive aspects of the narrative, Walpole was left with two main areas for dramatic development: action and rhetoric. In both areas he managed to advance his interest in the excessive, the extraordinary, the sensational, and the sublime, while qualifying its extent and seriousness. He successfully imitated the pious Catholic propagandist or the medieval romancer, but retained the cooler critical intelligence and taste of the modern, genteel, Protestant skeptic.

The action of *Otranto* is centred on the downfall of Manfred's house and the catastrophic fulfilment of the prophetic curse against it. This basic plot line includes various subsidiary stories and problems: the extent and nature of Manfred's inherited guilt; the actual fate of Alfonso's descendants and the true familial connections among the charac-

ters; the romantic triangle of Theodore, Matilda and Isabella; and the

fate of the loyal Hippolita. The reader's desire to discover the resolu-

tion of all these interwoven matters--even if the resolution be more or

less mechanical--provides the impetus in *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole

depended upon this desire, and sought to make the reader conscious of it

by occasionally frustrating it. This, he explained in the second Preface,

was an advantage of the comic interludes:

> The very impatience which a reader feels, while delayed, by
> the coarse pleasantries of vulgar actors, from arriving at
> the knowledge of the important catastrophe he expects, per-
> haps heightens, certainly proves that he has been artfully
> interested in, the depending event (p. 15).

One cannot reach that "depending event," however, until the characters

have clashed with each other, pursued, captured, concealed, suspected,

misunderstood, and discovered each other, and until they have unfolded

the meaning of the events in which they are caught up.

The action is often punctuated by violence and spectacle. It opens

with the death of Conrad under the gigantic helmet, and culminates with

Manfred's blundering murder of his own daughter, Matilda, an act which,

as Jerome observes with pious satisfaction, rounds out the cycle of blood

vengeance:

> Now, tyrant! behold the completion of woe fulfilled on thy
> impious and devoted head! The blood of *Alfonso* cried to
> Heaven for vengeance, and Heaven has permitted its altar
> to be polluted by assassination, that thou mightest shed
> thy own blood at the foot of that Prince's sepulchre!
> (p. 140).

The intervening events lay a marked stress upon violence or the

threat of violence. Indeed, this seems to be a fictional world in which

animosity and force control all relations among people. Theodore is

twice imprisoned--the first time, in a particularly bizarre fashion,
under the helmet that killed Conrad, merely for daring to link Alfonso
with the helmet. Manfred claps his chamber door shut against Matilda,
crying: "Begone! I do not want a daughter" (p. 29). Theodore mistakenly
fights with Frederic, the Marquis of Vicenza, his eventual father-in-law,
and wounds him grievously. Isabella flees from the Castle not simply
because the illicit and unnatural lechery of Manfred offends her delicate
sensibility, but also because she has good reason to fear that he will
extort her compliance (see pp. 30-33: "Heaven nor hell shall impede my
designs! said *Manfred,* advancing again to seize the Princess"). Even
the servant who brings Manfred the news of Conrad's death does not merely
report, but comes "running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes
staring, and foaming at the mouth," whereupon Hippolita "without knowing
what was the matter, but anxious for her son, swooned away" (p. 22).

Allied with the element of violence is Walpole's avid taste for the
spectacular and the extraordinary, which permeates both incident and
speech, consistently revealing the vast distance between the fictional
world, with its dangerous, freely-indulged passions and its supernatural
agents, and the normal, familiar world of repressed desire, commercial
advantage, and dull, conventional religion, which only occasionally
intrudes. The romance is crammed with ominous, ghostly visitors, with
signs that comment upon, and magnify, the human concerns of the charac-
ters. The giant's casque is, of course, the first of these that we
encounter, and its enormity does partially account for the panic that it
inspires. Like all the other spectacular apparitions, it is awesome
because its strangeness overwhelms the beholders. In addition, the

apparitions are all related in some way to the primary, ancient prophecy

upon Manfred's family fortunes, which has declared "*that the Castle and*

Lordship of Otranto *should pass from the present family whenever the real*

owner should be grown too large to inhabit it" (p. 22). Thus, when Man-

fred makes plain his designs upon Isabella, the plume of the great helmet

waves significantly at window-level, and the portrait of his grandfather,

which hangs in the gallery, puts on an even more astonishing performance:

> At that instant, the portrait of his grandfather . . . uttered
> a deep sigh, and heaved its breast. . . . *Manfred,* distracted
> between the flight of *Isabella,* who had now reached the stairs,
> and yet unable to keep his eyes from the picture, which began
> to move, had, however, advanced some steps after her, still
> looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its
> panel, and descend on the floor, with a grave and melancholy
> air. Do I dream? cried *Manfred,* returning; or are the devils
> themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal spectre! or,
> if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against
> thy wretched descendant, who too dearly pays for--e'er he
> could finish the sentence, the vision sighed again, and made
> a sign to *Manfred* to follow him. Lead on! cried *Manfred,* I
> will follow thee to the gulph of perdition! The spectre
> marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery, and
> turned into a chamber on the right-hand. *Manfred* accompanied
> him at a little distance, full of anxiety and horror, but
> resolved. As he would have entered the chamber, the door was
> clapped to with violence by an invisible hand (pp. 32-33).

If the sophisticated eighteenth-century reader did not entirely

believe that the apparitions were real, he at least had the chance to

discover *what such a belief would have been like*--and many readers were

willing to be immersed in that receptive atmosphere, and deceived by it,

temporarily. The success of the illusion results from Walpole's setting

aside of rational explanations for the numerous strange and spectacular

occurrences. Paradoxically, when natural causes are adduced for these

occurrences, they seem less credible than supernatural ones. Having made

allowance for the actual intervention of spirits in moral affairs, as

the price of admission into the alien, fictional world, we come to

suspect that any character's attempt at rationality is self-delusion,
especially since reactions and interpretations in *Otranto* typically rely
upon faith, superstition, or passion, not intellect. At least, the
prevalent attitudes of credulity and near-paranoia indicate that rational
explanations for events should be taken ironically. Such is the case
when, in Chapter III, Theodore, overcome with his passionate devotion to
Matilda, exclaims: "from this moment, my injuries are buried deep in
oblivion." As usual, the response of the spiritual forces, who are
Theodore's guardians and monitors, is immediate: "A deep and hollow
groan, which seemed to come from above, startled the Princess and *Theo-
dore*. Good heaven! we are overheard! said the Princess. They listened,
but perceiving no further noise, they both concluded it the effect of
pent-up vapours" (p. 95). In the version of the gothic that, following
Walpole's practice, did not permit the luxury of rational discourse for
its characters, such a conclusion was a sign of naiveté, innocence, or
complacency, for the guiding principle was that all events are portentous.

Although the violent, spectacular elements in *Otranto* serve to
reinforce both the favourable and the condescending images of its vaguely-
defined, medieval, foreign setting (i.e., to evoke responses based on the
two main kinds of gothicism; see above, pp. 62-68), there is yet another
dimension to their importance. For violence and spectacle are the basic
materials of Walpole's thematic and psychological preoccupation with
unrestrained criminal or sentimental passions and their display through
action and speech.

In the fictional environment of *The Castle of Otranto,* moderation is
almost unknown. Yet, its absence--the preponderance of overblown rhetoric,

formulaic exchanges of insult or affection, exaggerated responses to
events--is not simply a matter of literary mannerism. On the contrary,
these excessive qualities are perfectly consistent with the motive forces
within the romance, Manfred's *lust* and *greed,* which are, after all, sins
of excess, of ambition or desire indulged immoderately. Whereas the
action of *Otranto* mainly concerns the downfall of Manfred's household,
the real centre of interest remains the *crime* which has brought about the
downfall--the crime and its effects on both the criminal and his victims.
During the course of the gothic novel's development, the focus of atten-
tion shifted progressively further and further from punishment and retri-
bution toward the mysterious, fatally attractive, often noble character
of the criminal himself.[63]

Excess, in its various forms and manifestations, is the endemic
disease of *Otranto,* affecting all its social levels in some way. Man-
fred's servants appear by nature incapable of giving him a straight
answer; they are stubbornly loquacious, refusing to tell a story or give
a report in anything other than their own speed and fashion. They have
not learned to discipline their tongues, their superstitious credulity,
or their powers of observation, though in one scene Matilda's maid,
Bianca, suggests that it is her superior who is deficient:

> A bystander often sees more of the game than those that play.
> . . . Does your highness think, madam, that his question
> about my Lady Isabella was the result of mere curiosity?
> No, no, madam; there is more in it than you great folks are
> aware of (pp. 57-8).

This example of impertinence follows immediately after another. An
unseen speaker, who turns out to be Theodore, asks Matilda, after the
exchange of appropriate courtesies, whether it is true, as he has heard

from the servants, that Isabella has fled from the Castle. Since the

young man is supposed to be merely a peasant and Matilda's pious humility

does not prevent her from paying strict attention to social distinctions,

she replies disdainfully:

> What imports it to thee to know? . . . Thy first words be-
> spoke a prudent and becoming gravity. Dost thou come hither
> to pry into the secrets of *Manfred*? Adieu. I have been
> mistaken in thee. Saying these words, she shut the casement
> hastily, without giving the young man time to reply (p. 57).

If Theodore's curiosity exceeds what is proper in his social station,

Matilda's suspiciousness, apparently picked up from her father, exceeds

necessary caution, temporarily keeping her from meeting, and aiding,

Theodore.

When they finally do meet, and Matilda assists him in escaping the

Castle, Walpole presents their parting in a delirium of sentiment and

magnified gesture:

> Go; heaven be thy guide!--and sometimes in thy prayers
> remember--*Matilda! Theodore* flung himself at her feet, and
> seizing her lily hand, which with struggles she suffered
> him to kiss, he vowed, on the earliest opportunity, to get
> himself knighted, and fervently entreated her permission to
> swear himself eternally her Knight.--Ere the Princess could
> reply, a clap of thunder was suddenly heard, that shook the
> battlements. *Theodore,* regardless of the tempest, would
> have urged his suit; but the Princess, dismayed, retreated
> hastily into the castle, and commanded the youth to be gone,
> with an air that would not be disobeyed. He sighed, and
> retired, but with eyes fixed on the gate, until *Matilda,*
> closing it, put an end to an interview, in which the hearts
> of both had drunk so deeply of a passion, which both now
> tasted for the first time (pp. 95-96).

Walpole, of course, was historian and genealogist enough to know

that a young man, no matter how earnest, could not simply "get himself

knighted" at will; presumably Theodore's peasant upbringing has left him

ignorant of such matters. The point of his vows and declarations,

however, is to exhibit his greatness of spirit and his robust innocence.
Here, as elsewhere in *The Castle of Otranto* (and as in Walpole's verse
tragedy, *The Mysterious Mother*), there is not only flamboyant gesture,
high sentiment, and intense passion, but also a self-conscious display,
a parading of these dramatic colorations.

This sense of self-dramatization is activated with particular force
in Matilda's death scene, much of which seems to be conceived as a suc-
cession of tableaux, each somehow more lurid than the preceding one.
Thus, when Manfred stabs her, instead of Isabella, some of the monks
nearby rush to aid "the afflicted *Theodore*" in trying to stanch her
wound, while "the rest prevented *Manfred* from laying violent hands on
himself" (p. 140). As Matilda is borne from the church back to the
Castle, "*Theodore* supporting her head with his arm, and hanging over her
in an agony of despairing love, still endeavoured to inspire her with
hopes of life. *Jerome*, on the other side, comforted her with discourses
of Heaven, and, holding a crucifix before her, which she bathed with
innocent tears, prepared her for her passage to immortality. *Manfred*,
plunged in the deepest affliction, followed the litter in despair"
(p. 141). At the sight of "the afflicted procession" Hippolita is over-
come by "the mightiness of her grief" and swoons. Matilda, who has
already argued with her father over who should forgive whom, calls him
to her side and "seizing his hand and her mother's, locked them in her
own, and then clasped them to her heart. *Manfred* could not support this
act of pathetic piety. He dashed himself on the ground, and cursed the
day he was born" (p. 142). For fear of subjecting Matilda to an excess
of passionate grief, Hippolita orders that he be taken to his chamber,

but she herself refuses to be separated from her daughter. Theodore

wildly insists that Jerome marry him to Matilda, while there is still

time, continuing his demands even when Frederic, prompted no doubt by

his own claim upon Matilda, rebukes him: "Young man, thou art too

unadvised. . . . Dost thou think we are to listen to thy fond transports

in this hour of fate?" (p. 143). But we *are* to listen to them, for

"fond transports" are the main material of which this scene is composed.

When Matilda, at last, expires, in an atmosphere permeated with teary

sentimentality, piety and forgiveness, the reactions are predictably and

impressively violent: "*Isabella* and her women tore *Hippolita* from the

corpse; but *Theodore* threatened destruction to all who attempted to

remove him from it. He printed a thousand kisses on her clay-cold hands,

and uttered every expression that despairing love could dictate" (p. 144).

It is appropriate that the love between Theodore and Matilda, having

scarcely begun, should end in this embrace, with its hint of necrophilia;

for the basic excesses in *The Castle of Otranto* are all sexual. Manfred's

own crime, for which he is personally culpable, is his outrageous desire

to use Isabella to perpetuate his line; since she has been entrusted to

his guardianship, and has become a daughter in his household, this

desire is something between a breach of hospitality and outright incest.

In addition, it causes him to disregard the absurdity of the proposed

match and Isabella's revulsion, and to cast off Hippolita, despite her

faithfulness, simply because she is infertile. He is not alone in this

lustful blindness; though Walpole does not emphasize the Marquis' degree

of criminality, Frederic is quite willing, nevertheless, to exchange

Isabella's happiness for his own sexual interest. He has fallen prey to

Manfred's scheme for winning consent to his plan, having developed a

singleminded passion of his own--for Matilda. The daughters are almost

sacrificed in this bargain, and Matilda is at last sacrificed outside it,

while Isabella must settle for a love-by-proxy, sharing Theodore's grief

for his dead, true lover. Even Matilda, whose abstinence becomes the

subject of her maid's banter (pp. 51-53), speculates, on her deathbed,

that her meeting with Theodore, breaking her vow never to see him again,

"has drawn down this calamity" upon her (p. 144). Finally, the mystery

surrounding Theodore's ancestry originates, we learn from Jerome, with

Alfonso's wish to conceal his marriage to the "fair virgin . . . *Victoria*"

which, though lawful, he deems "incongruous with the holy vow of arms by

which he was bound" (p. 147). It is the fate of Theodore, like most

"gothic" children, to be betrayed, denied or abandoned by his parents,

only to discover his identity much later in life; but the whole pattern

is governed by sexual error.

Walpole's interests in erotic impulses, the spectacular results of

crime, and magnificently excessive gesture and speech, coupled with his

casual attitude toward punishment, were not liable to please the next

major writer of new-gothic fiction, Clara Reeve. In the preface to her

romance, *The Old English Baron* (1778), she stated that her idea of the

gothic novel was the same as Walpole's, but that his example had shown

her certain faults which she had attempted to avoid. Reeve listed the

requirements for excellence in the gothic novel: "a sufficient degree of

the marvellous, to excite the attention; enough of the manners of real

life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the

pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf."[64] While agreeing that *The*

Castle of Otranto fulfilled the last two requirements, Reeve claimed

that it suffered from a "redundancy" in the first. She complained that,

in *Otranto,* "the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it

is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost *verge*

of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least

circumstance that excites or detains the attention." Reeve listed

various excesses of "the marvellous" in *Otranto,* and tried to account for

their adverse influence: "when your expectation is wound up to the high-

est pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness, destroy the

work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter" (p. 5).

Whereas Reeve thought that she had perfected the formula that Walpole

had been able to follow only clumsily, Walpole was not convinced by her

evidence. He wrote to Cole, on 22 August 1778, that *The Old English*

Baron was "a professed imitation of mine, only stripped of the marvellous,

and so entirely stripped, except in one awkward attempt at a ghost or two,

that it is the most insipid dull nothing you can read. It certainly does

not make me laugh: for what makes one doze, seldom makes one merry." In

a similar vein, he remarked:

> I cannot compliment *The Old English Baron*. It was totally
> void of imagination and interest; had scarce any incidents;
> and though it condemned the marvellous admitted a ghost. I
> suppose the author thought a tame ghost might come within
> the laws of probability.[65]

Although controversy over the relative merit of the two works continued,

as subsequent critics tried to define the true gothic method, it is also

important to note a point of agreement between Walpole and Reeve: in her

preface to *The Old English Baron,* at least, Reeve admitted that the

gothic romance should be entertaining and emotionally involving, as well

as probable.

In her later, full critical work, *The Progress of Romance* (1785),[66] Reeve avoided controversial judgments by choosing not to discuss any works published after 1770. Because she simply let her previous treatment of *The Castle of Otranto* stand unchanged, *The Progress of Romance* contains no reaction to gothic fiction as such, although she did offer praise to Thomas Leland's *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762), mainly for its accurate depiction of chivalric manners and for its avoidance of violence and supernaturalism. Even *The Old English Baron* escaped comment, though modesty had not stopped her from having her fictional disputants admire her own translation of Barclay's *Argenis* (*The Phoenix,* 1772).

It was unlikely, at any rate, that Reeve would have been willing to treat the gothic as a significantly new, separate phenomenon, for her chief purpose, in *The Progress of Romance,* was to rescue the romance, of which the gothic was merely a sub-type, from its dangerous position on the periphery of decorum and moral seriousness. She sought to place it within the legitimate literary tradition, to counteract the common innuendo to the effect that it was a sub-literary form, suitable only for a barbarous people or an unwisely governed nursery. Her definitions of terms were sometimes self-contradictory,[67] but her basic method was clear enough. Like Walpole, she argued for the legitimacy of a taste somewhat beyond the conventional by connecting a disreputable with a reputable genre. Just as Walpole had conceived of *The Castle of Otranto* in tragic terms, so Reeve traced the origins of the romance to the epic and demonstrated their formal and thematic correspondences.

While believing that new romances could be made compatible with the taste of modern readers, Reeve was more concerned with the readers' moral welfare. Consequently, she felt obliged to show that romances could have the same degree of moral seriousness or educative value that was assigned customarily to the epic or chronicle--or at least, that they could be relatively harmless.

Within the dialogue format of *The Progress of Romance,* Hortensio, the disputant least convinced of the romances' value, subscribes to a severe doctrine: there are no gradations of quality in fiction; all fiction is morally indefensible, because it purveys lies and seductive half-truths, under the guise of entertainment. Although this hysterical view was already fading from the periodical reviews,[68] it was also gaining support among Methodists and Evangelicals, who added to their indictment a distaste for fiction's strictly materialistic outlook.[69] What is most interesting, however, for an understanding of Clara Reeve's own practice as a writer, is the outcome of the moral aspect of the argument. Hortensio's friendly opponents finally lead him to ease his outright ban against fiction, but not without sharing his condescending attitude toward children and members of the "lower orders," whose intellectual capacities and moral tendencies did not enable them to choose what was fit to read.

It would appear that, between the writing of the preface to *The Old English Baron* and the writing of *The Progress of Romance,* Clara Reeve had lost most of her earlier, minimal interest in "the marvellous" and had become more willing to make concessions to the moralists. Her idea of accommodating the romance to modern tastes was to strike a balance

between its sheer entertainment value and some (fabricated) serious pur-
pose. But in *The Old English Baron* itself we can see the increasing
importance of conventional, bourgeois moralism in determining the themes
of the gothic novel and their treatment.

The motto of *The Old English Baron,* underscored repeatedly by the
more self-righteous characters and the narrator, is the omnipotence of
the "over-ruling hand of Providence" and the "certainty of RETRIBUTION."
Although the ostensible setting for the novel (during "the minority of
Henry the Sixth, King of England") makes the characters' belief in such
divine intervention seem plausible, this recurrent emphasis upon faith
and piety is misleading, as an indicator of the novel's significance; for
purely *human* actions and concerns control its outcome and mark the limits
of its religiosity. The actual attitude toward piety is not the overt
one: ultimately it is shown to be a natural accompaniment to material
goods, possessed by those who deserve them--a luxury afforded by security
and seasoned with complacency. In the scheme of power and interests that
dominates the narrator's attention, prayer and moral persuasion are
admirable, but secondary, instruments, and any idea of higher justice
becomes inextricably confused with commercial advantage. Litigation,
negotiation, calculation, and force of arms are the serviceable tools
that bring the criminal to punishment, arrange the exceedingly happy fate
of the principals, and confer a just settlement upon the deserving
(strictly according to rank). Providence and retribution are earthly,
direct, nonmysterious, and essentially rational.

For the exotic, passionate, sometimes ludicrous forces with which
Walpole had imbued *The Castle of Otranto,* Reeve substituted the canny

play of modern commercial instincts. This substitution shows nowhere

more clearly than in the consistent flattening of potentially romantic

elements in *The Old English Baron,* and of those the issue of courtship

and marriage is the most noticeably affected.

Courtship here involves repressing or concealing passion, while

proving to the bride's family one's solvency and rank. Marriage like-

wise is more a matter of economic than romantic or erotic attachment,

although the contrary notion occasionally, and briefly, appears for the

sake of sentimental interest. But in such matters Edmund is, above all

else, the prudent hero. In compliance with the commercial mores, he

postpones declaring his own real affection for Lady Emma until he has

settled the question of his birth and estate. For this he is later

admired; however, as a result, he must resort to indirection in wooing

her, by describing his own plight as if it were a friend's:

> My friend is so particularly circumstanced that he cannot
> at present with propriety ask for Lady Emma's favour; but
> as soon as he has gained a cause that is yet in suspence,
> he will openly declare his pretensions, and if he is unsuc-
> cessful he will then condemn himself to eternal silence.
> . . . His birth is noble, his degree and fortune uncertain.
> . . . It is utterly impossible . . . for any man of inferior
> degree to aspire to Lady Emma's favour; her noble birth, the
> dignity of her beauty and virtues, must awe and keep at
> their proper distance, all men of inferior degree and merit;
> they may admire, they may revere; but they must not presume
> to approach too near, lest their presumption should meet
> with its punishment (p. 68).

Reeve makes this discretion seem both comic and masochistic, for Emma,

playing upon Edmund's temporary disability, succeeds in humiliating him

with questions and jibes, while amusing herself (pp. 66-69).

The anti-romantic version of courtship and marriage, as transaction

and prize, persists in the actual wedding negotiations. In the midst of

celebrations over Edmund's good fortune, Baron Fitz-Owen suggests that

he and Edmund "retire from this croud" for they have "business of a more

private nature to transact" (p. 142). That business is, of course, the

marriage agreement, and the following scene, in which Emma is asked to

lend her approval to the match, clearly exhibits the contrast between

passion and business upon which the very technique of the novel is based.

Emma approaches her father, "with tears on her cheek, sweetly blushing

like the damask rose." Baron Fitz-Owen explains to her his need for her

consent:

> I have promised to all this company to give you to him;
> but upon condition that you approve him: I think him worthy
> of you; and, whether you accept him or not, he shall ever
> be to me a son; but Heaven forbid that I should compel my
> child to give her hand where she cannot bestow her heart
> (p. 143).

Emma's reply emphasizes the fitness of her relationship with her father,

her obedience and propriety; it is rather self-congratulatory, but dwells

very little upon the condition of her heart except in an almost legalis-

tic way. Such emotional spectacle as there is, is abruptly curtailed,

and summarized by the narrator:

> A fresh scene of congratulation ensued; and the hearts of
> all the auditors were too much engaged to be able soon to
> return to the ease and tranquillity of common life (p. 144).

It is this idea of a "common life" that distinguishes so sharply

between the gothicism of Walpole and that of Clara Reeve. Whereas in

The Castle of Otranto the characters, living constantly on the edge of

crisis, never enjoy anything resembling "ease and tranquillity"--except,

perhaps, through death or seclusion from the world--the attainment of

such peace and security is the chief goal, and the common lot, of Reeve's

characters. The narrator of *The Old English Baron* scrupulously records

not only the major alliance between Edmund and Emma, but also the lesser

alliances, among the various sons and daughters of the lords who have

brought Walter Lovel to justice and Edmund to his rightful position.

Reeve is evidently most comfortable when dealing with the equitable

exchange of property, or with the private, discreet, bloodless punishment

of the murderer, or with the elaborate calculus needed to compute the

cash-value of Edmund's noble upbringing. She is least comfortable, and

capable, when dealing with the spectacular, the supernatural, the exces-

sive, the violent--anything that distracts her from a certain ideal

transformation of the past. Unlike Walpole, she has no relish for

extravagant display of strong scenes, nor for close scrutiny of the

criminal psyche. Even the sentimentality which helps to nourish the

reader's imagination through more sterile, business-like passages, she

governs with the strict rule of decorum.[70]

Reeve's preoccupation with normalcy accounts for several strikingly

non-romantic features of *The Old English Baron*. The narration of the

combat between Sir Philip Harclay and Walter Lovel, for example, seems

mild and colourless, small compensation for the intricate legal and emo-

tional preparations for it (pp. 100-101). The episode in which Walter

Lovel tries to escape from his captors is similarly abridged (p. 134),

so as to add to the general impression that he makes a mediocre criminal.

Reeve consistently avoids using suspenseful devices, which might arouse

the reader to a state of tense alertness. Finally, "ease and tranquil-

lity" give the moral theme to the prolonged coda that follows the cir-

cumstances of the main characters and their descendants into the third

generation (pp. 151-53).

Sir Walter Scott attempted to explain these features, which he regarded as signs of the failure of her imagination, through the limitations of Clara Reeve's life. "In her secluded situation, and with acquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone," he argued, she could not avoid following "a certain creeping and low line of narrative and sentiment." Isolated from the great world of masculine activity, she had to resort to "prolix, minute and unnecessary details" which at least offered "a secret mode of securing a certain necessary degree of credulity from the hearers of a ghost-story."[71]

While this is a valid, useful explanation, it is incomplete; for it misses the real sense in which Reeve's limited thematic and emotional range was an advantage. Her details may have been prolix and minute, but were rarely unnecessary, since they not only secured her story's credibility (scarcely in danger) but also clearly associated its supposed historical setting with a whole set of familiar bourgeois values, by evoking the texture of late-eighteenth-century ethical and practical life.

For Reeve, unlike Walpole, the historical setting was not a theatrical setting, where excessive, strange passions and behaviour might be indulged with exceptional fictional licence, under the supervening protection of apparently conventional prejudices. For Reeve, the controlling metaphor for romance was more likely the classroom than the theatre. I have already noted how Reeve's didactic preoccupation increased between *The Old English Baron* and *The Progress of Romance* (see pp. 132-136 above); in a still later work, her *Memoirs of Sir Roger de*

Clarendon (1793) both the didacticism and its effect on the treatment of historical subjects are plain. In the *Memoirs* Reeve turned away entirely from the purposes and techniques of gothic fiction in order to use history as a source of ethical education:

> She saw in the fourteenth century the heroic days of pristine morality, and as such she described them, to rebuke her own degenerate age, to stimulate its ideals and to counteract the debilitating influence of pessimists and levellers.[72]

Even in the earlier work, however, the historical setting was, in effect, non-historical. Inasmuch as history yielded up exotic, strange, exciting, or forbidden images, it was harmful—at best trivial. Reeve's view of gothic life was confined to models of superior conduct, to the ethical excellence of the putative gothic ancestors. In *The Old English Baron,* consequently, there is room neither for chauvinistic invocations of Old England (despite the title), nor for speculative interweavings of history and fiction (as in Sophia Lee's *The Recess*), nor for contemptuous dismissal of vicious anachronisms. Instead, Reeve's historical setting is a relatively neutral territory where the victory of positive ethical forces may be enacted. Thus, in *The Old English Baron* history was idealized, paradoxically, by being made recognizable, and, in that sense, realistic; it was transformed into an extension, or a moralist's dream, of the present.

This conjunction of bourgeois aspirations and historical isolation produces, not surprisingly, certain exemplars of the "pristine morality." Such is the old retainer Joseph's description of the elevation of Edmund into his new position:

He closed the tale with praise to Heaven for the happy
discovery, that gave such an heir to the house of Lovel;
to his dependants such a Lord and Master; to mankind a
friend and benefactor. There was truly a house of joy; not
that false kind, in the midst of which there is heaviness,
but that of rational creatures grateful to the supreme
benefactor, raising their minds by a due enjoyment of
earthly blessings to a more perfect state hereafter (p. 150).

The "house of joy" is the exact opposite of Manfred's Castle, just
as the gothic method and sense of history that it reflects are the oppo-
site of Walpole's. This we can tell even from such key words as this
brief, pious account gives us: *rational, grateful, enjoyment.* Rationality,
gratitude, and enjoyment (especially of "earthly blessings") are alien
factors in *The Castle of Otranto,* where they all would detract from the
romance's sheer impressiveness and from its emphasis on depravity and
fatality. This is a matter of historical perspective as much as tech-
nique. *Otranto* evokes the (not very specific) fictional realm that
corresponds to the enlightened, condescending eighteenth-century view of
the Middle Ages that was outlined in the first part of this study (see
pp. 65-68 above). Though cursorily, Walpole touches upon all the impor-
tant elements of that image: devious priests, tyranny, superstition,
excessive power, ignorance, and barbarous behaviour. The manner of
narration becomes part of the matter narrated, for the novel stands at
two removes from the reader: it is the work both of Walpole, the modern
skeptic and dilettante, and of his fictitious Counter-Reformation propa-
gandist. Walpole succeeds in balancing critical and imaginative responses
to *Otranto,* by playing the reader's sense that the gothic is impressive,
spectacular, or delightfully disturbing, against his sense that it cannot
be admirable, politically. But the former sense is insinuated despite
the latter.

Reeve's treatment of the historical setting is much less compli-
cated; it illustrates a variant of that kind of gothicism which I have
called elegiac or utopian (see p. 62 above). She does not recognize any
vicious or contemptible features in gothic life--as she conceives of it.
The alleged barbarity of the gothic holds no appeal for her, either as a
source of unaccustomed, primitive excitement or as an object of derision
and wonderment mixed. The unrepentant malice of Walter Lovel, for example,
and the juvenile spitefulness of such unsavoury followers as Wenlock and
Markham, are not supposed to be typical of some darker aspect of gothic
behaviour. These are mere intrusions. Moreover, Reeve does not try to
make perversity or malevolence interesting, as Walpole at least starts to
do with Manfred in *Otranto*. In contrast, Walter Lovel, having "entered
into the service of the Greek emperor, John Paleologus," becomes moder-
ately successful and respectable, in exile in the dying empire (p. 153).

Reeve discovers, however, no inherent advantages in gothic life,
beyond its convenient neutrality and its ancestral overtones, which
facilitate her educative purposes. The lives of her gothic characters
are indistinguishable from purified, simplified modern lives; they are
no more particularized in their common setting than in their personali-
ties. In her adaptation of historical materials to serve as templates
for didactic tools, Reeve shows a significant impulse in late-eighteenth-
century gothicism: the origin of elegiac gothic in bourgeois complacency
and moralism, rather than radical disillusionment.

In thus transforming the age of the gothic ancestors, it is obvious
that Clara Reeve had little use, or tolerance, for sensationalism or
exoticism, for she did not read these as primary qualities in history.

In addition, as her discussion in *The Progress of Romance* shows, these were qualities which embarrassed her when she came to defend the old and new romances: they were likewise not primary qualities in literature. In examining gothic fiction and related critical writings we will find a constant tension between the elegiac mode--particularly Reeve's variety-- and the darker, ambivalent mode, which exploits the otherness of the gothic. We will also find that this tension is often expressed through the presence or absence of sensational and exotic elements in the novels,[73] and through attitudes towards sensationalism and exoticism in theoretical works.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Sir Walter Scott, "Life of Walpole," *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction,* ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 85-88.

[2]Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970), I, 396; for the application of Scott's associative habits to Abbotsford, see also p. 372. Alice Chandler, in "Sir Walter Scott and the Medieval Revival," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 19 (1964), 315-332, shows the relationship between Scott's medievalism and his view of the contemporary world.

[3]Walpole to Cole, *Corr.,* 1, 88.

[4]Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* p. 98.

[5]Walpole to Horace Mann, 5 June 1747 OS, *Corr.,* 19, 414; see also *Selected Letters,* pp. 43-46 (Walpole to Mann, 12 June 1753).

[6]Walpole to Henry Seymour Conway, 8 June 1747, *SL,* p. 22.

[7]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[8]Walpole, *Description,* p. 1, asterisked note.

[9]Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* p. 98.

[10]The "Quadruple Alliance" consisted of Walpole, Thomas Gray, Richard West, and Thomas Ashton. See Lewis, pp. 46-47.

[11]Walpole to William Mason, *Corr.,* 28, 6-7.

[12]W. S. Lewis, "The Genesis of Strawberry Hill," *Metropolitan Museum Studies,* 5 (1936), 62.

[13]Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* p. 107.

[14]Among the friends were John Chute and Richard Bentley who made up, with Walpole, the "Committee of Taste at Strawberry Hill." Chute and Walpole dominated the trio--Chute as architect, Walpole as antiquary--for Bentley, the draughtsman, was conventiently out of sight in Jersey until 1761. When he came to live with Walpole they quarreled and ended the relationship. (See Lewis, "Genesis," p. 64.) Mann, Montagu and Mason also contributed advice. James Essex designed the Beauclerc Tower and the New Offices, and probably exerted some influence on Walpole's choice of styles, drawing him away from his early preference for the Perpendicular gothic. Essex died before the Offices were built, and James Wyatt executed them.

[15]Walpole, *Description,* p. iii.

[16]Ibid., pp. iii-iv.

[17]Ibid., p. iv.

[18]W. H. Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction,* p. 41.

[19]Ibid., pp. 36-39.

[20]Walpole, *Description,* p. 55. See Agnes Addison, *Romanticism and the Gothic Revival* (1938; reprint, New York: Gordian Press, 1967), p. 41: "the post-Viollet-le-Duc mediaevalists shuddered when they found buildings which pretended to be in the Gothic manner and yet were not stone vaulted, but were constructed in the simplest manner like a cardboard box and then plastered over with pinnacles and crockets and a few pointed arches." Michael Sadleir, "'All Horrid?' Jane Austen and the Gothic Romance," in *Things Past* (London: Constable, 1944), relates the architectural and the literary superimpositions of exotic elements upon a familiar base: "the sound of a strange language allured the ear, but its grammar (and indeed much of its meaning) were ignored" (p. 178).

[21]James Essex, *Journal of a Tour Through Part of Flandres and France in August* [and Sept.], *1773,* ed. W. M. Fawcett (Cambridge: 1888).

[22]Lewis, "Genesis," p. 83. Walpole wrote to Thomas Barret (5 June 1788): ". . . neither Mr. Bentley nor my workmen had *studied* the science, and I was always too desultory and impatient to consider that I should please myself more by allowing time, than by hurrying my plans into expectation before they were ripe. My house therefore is but a sketch by beginners."

[23] Walpole, *Description,* p. 47.

[24]Walpole to Mann, *Selected Letters,* p. 44.

[25]For an account of the new connoisseurs' purchasing habits, see Elizabeth Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth-Century England* (1925; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1965), pp. 14-34.

[26]For plans see Walpole, *Aedes Walpolianae* (1747), reprinted in *Works* (1798); plans for Strawberry Hill appeared in the *Description* and are reproduced in Lewis, *Horace Walpole.*

[27]Walpole wrote to Mann (12 June 1753): "This view of the castle is what I have just finished, and is the only side that will be at all regular" (*SL,* p. 43). This would suggest that Walpole had a particular external effect in mind even at this early stage.

[28]Ibid., p. 45: ". . . it is really incredible how small most of the rooms are. The only two good chambers I shall have, are not yet built; they will be an eating-room and a library, each 20 by 30, and the latter 15 feet high." W. S. Lewis associates the increase in room size with Walpole's "larger income and expanding knowledge" of the gothic, after 1762. See Preface to *Correspondence with Cole,* p. xxxii.

[29]Allen, *Tides in English Taste,* II, p. 75.

[30]Walpole to Mann, *SL,* pp. 43-45; Walpole to Montagu, *Corr.,* 9, 102.

[31]Sir Terry Robsart, according to Walpole, was "an ancestor of Sir R.W. [Robert Walpole], who was Knight of the Garter." (Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* pp. 104-105, quoting Walpole's note to his letter to Mann, 12 June 1753.) Sir Terry symbolized Walpole's romantic and noble ancestry.

[32]Walpole to George Montagu, *Corr.,* 10, 192.

[33]Walpole to Deffand, quoted in Scott, "Life of Walpole," *On Novelists and Fiction,* p. 86.

[34]*Memoirs of George III,* II, 149, quoted by Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* p. 74; for an assessment of Walpole's political career, see Lewis, pp. 69-95. For an account of Walpole's actual, considerable political influence, even *after* his disappointment in Conway, see John Brooke's entry for "Hon. Horatio Walpole of Strawberry Hill," in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790,* iii (Members K-Y), eds. Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke (London: History of Parliament Trust, 1964), 595-597. The reality of this power did not necessarily detract from the reality of Walpole's disappointment and disillusionment with political life.

[35]Clark, *Gothic Revival,* pp. 81-82; Agnes Addison, p. 42.

[36]Walpole to Richard Bentley, *Selected Letters,* p. 48. For an account of Miller's works, see Eastlake, pp. <41-43> (Introduction).

[37]Clark, p. 35, pp. 41-42.

[38]Walpole to Cole, 9 March 1765, *Corr.,* 1, 88.

[39]The armour had belonged to King Francis I of France, and Walpole bought it in 1772, after his dream. See Walpole, *Description,* p. 31 and figure opposite.

[40]Ibid., p. 32.

[41]Walpole to Cole, 9 March 1765; Walpole repeated the story to Mason, in briefer form, without mentioning the details of the dream. He continued to claim that the writing took two months, adding that he had decided

to publish his work only after Gray encouraged him (Walpole to Mason, 17 April 1765, *Corr.*, 28, 7). In the *Walpoliana* is the conflicting claim that he "wrote the *'Castle of Otranto'* in eight days, or rather eight nights" (*Walpoliana,* 2nd edn., London: for R. Philips, 1804, I, 22). The conflict probably arises from the difference between the time necessary for a first draft versus that for a completed draft. "HW showed the MS to Gray in August [1764], and Gray encouraged HW to print it. . . . 'At first it was universally believed to be Mr. Gray's' (HW to Hertford, 26 March 1765)." (*Corr.*, 14, 137, editor's note 1.)

[42] The publisher's imprint for the first edition reads: "LONDON: Printed for Tho. Lownds in Fleet-Street, MDCCLXV," but Montague Summers records the actual date of publication as 24 December 1764. See Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother,* ed. Montague Summers (London: Constable & Co., 1924), p. xxv. Summers' edition combines the various editions published under Walpole's supervision. Subsequent page references will appear within text, and will be to this edition. In the first edition (1764), the romance is subtitled "A Story"; in the *Works* (1798) it appeared as "A Gothic Story." Sir Walter Scott, in his "Life of Walpole," pointed out that "Onuphrio Muralto" was "a sort of anagram, or translation, of the author's own name"--and, I would add, a deliberately transparent one. (See Scott, p. 85.)

[43] Gray to Walpole, 30 December 1764, *Corr.*, 14, 137.

[44] Although it was a friendly detachment, Gray's report was lighter and less enthusiastic than it would have been had he been more of a flatterer. Walpole had also sent copies of the romance to other friends: Elie de Beaumont, Hertford, Montagu, Cole, Thomas Warton, and Mason.

[45] Mason to Walpole, 14 April 1765, *Corr.*, 28, 5-6. The "episcopal evidence" is supposed to be from William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester (p. 5, n. 2). Mason here notes in passing one of Walpole's other precautions, that of committing his MS to another printer rather than issuing it through the Strawberry Hill Press. Apparently the hoax had some enduring appeal, for Peter Burra attests: "I have seen a publisher's catalogue which as late as 1801 advertised *The Castle of Otranto* as by Muralto, although Walpole had admitted his authorship in 1765," a deception which he attributes to the usefulness of such "non-existent creatures" in making "the productions seem more strange." ("Baroque and Gothic Sentimentalism," *Farrago,* 3 [Oct. 1930], 168.)

[46] *Walpoliana,* I, 23. See also L. B. Seeley, *Horace Walpole and His World* (London: Seeley & Co., 1895), pp. 24-25; Lewis, *Horace Walpole,* p. 161. Before presenting "Two Unpublished Fairy Tales by Horace Walpole," in *Horace Walpole: Writer, Politician, and Connoisseur,* ed. W. H. Smith (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 241, A. Dayle Wallace notes that "it is significant that Walpole made no collection of fiction comparable to his collection of the plays, poems, and tracts of the reigns of George II and George III," citing this as evidence that he "took comparatively little interest" in the development

of the novel. Wallace attributes this to "a preference for imagination as against invention." For corroboration of this lack of interest, see Allen T. Hazen, *Catalogue of Horace Walpole's Library* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 1-96 (Press I) and p. 97 ff. (Press K).

[47]Walpole to Mason, 17 April 1765, *Corr.*, 28, 6-7. The second edition of Otranto, bearing Walpole's name as author, appeared 11 April 1765 (see Summers, p. xxvi).

[48]This notion of a balance between impossibility and probability had already been put forth in John Hawkesworth's essays on narratives in the *Adventurer*, No. 4, Saturday, 18 November 1752. See *Eighteenth-Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George L. Barnett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), p. 100.

[49]K. K. Mehrotra, in *Horace Walpole and the English Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934; reprinted New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), and J. M. S. Tompkins, in *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (London: Constable & Co., 1932) provide ample evidence from contemporary periodical reviews, of the moral scrutiny that was applied to novels and novelists in general. Anyone without Walpole's status might have had to worry about writing a novel with such unconvincing moral sentiments and such interesting evilness. On the other hand, Tompkins notes that the "didactic prepossession" applied most often to mediocre novels (of which there were many) without redeeming qualities. Excellent moral principles, however, were not enough to excuse a lack of entertainment, and Tompkins finds evidence of a declining devotion to the didactic standards towards the 1770's (p. 72; see Ch. III "Didacticism and Sensibility," p. 70 ff.).

[50]Mehrotra, pp. 22-37. Also see J. B. Heidler, *The History, from 1700-1800, of English Criticism of Prose Fiction* (Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 12, 2 [May 1928]), pp. 134-135; and Malcolm Ware, *Sublimity in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe* (Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, Upsala Univ. English Instit., XXV; Lund: Carl Blom, 1963), p. 13. The reception for *Otranto* in France was generally as cool as Mme du Deffand's. Harold Streeter noted that "it does not seem to have excited much comment in France despite its author's social prestige. The *Mercure de France* noted it indifferently as a novel 'qui nous a paru propre à faire passer agréablement quelques heures de loisir.' Grimm regarded with approval this 'série d'apparitions surnaturelles réunies sous la forme la plus agréable qu'on puisse voir'." (*The Eighteenth Century English Novel in French Translation* [New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1970; Doctoral dissertation, Columbia Univ., 1936], pp. 117-118.)

[51]Mehrotra is suspicious of this explanation, preferring the shorter section of the Translator's Preface that is not taken up with the translation device: "Here he is not puffed up with his success, propounding inflated theories, or manipulating motives to place his tale in the best light possible" (Mehrotra, pp. 10-11). Mehrotra is too generous to the first Preface, too harsh toward the second. Although he could not have

anticipated all the attacks which would be made upon his work when he wrote the first, Walpole also used this opportunity to put it "in the best light possible." In addition, however unrelated his theories may be to his actual achievement, they exerted a strong influence, nevertheless, upon later critics' (e.g. Scott's, the Aikins') views on *Otranto* and the gothic genre.

[52]Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random,* in *Miscellaneous Works* (London: Mundell, 1796), I, lxviii.

[53]Lévy, *Le Roman <<Gothique>>,* pp. 47-53.

[54]For Walpole's criticism of the dullness of Richardson, see Heidler, p. 131.

[55]*Walpoliana,* I, 46-47.

[56]Ibid., p. 39.

[57]Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 184. Summers notes several parallels between the infamous career of the fictional Manfred and that of Manfred or Manfroi, "a natural son of the Emperor Frederick II." The parallels include usurpation and the mysterious disappearance of a rightful heir, but Summers remains relatively unmoved by them; moreover, he does not provide any evidence that Walpole knew about the historical Manfred, or had him in mind when he composed *The Castle of Otranto.*

[58]In *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley,* Evans notes that "*Otranto* and the genre it initiated erupted from two related ideas: first, medieval life was dark, gloomy, and barbarous; second, it would be terrifying if enlightened gentlemen and 'sensible' ladies were transported from contemporary society and suddenly thrust into that earlier time" (p. 8). The first idea was a source of reassurance, the second, of excitement and imaginative stimulation.

[59]Alice Chandler, "Sir Walter Scott and the Medieval Revival," pp. 324-326.

[60]See Walpole's argument against Voltaire, *Otranto,* pp. 15-20.

[61]Clara McIntyre, "Were the Gothic Novels Gothic?" *PMLA,* 36 (1921), 644-667; *Ann Radcliffe in Relation to Her Time* (New Haven: Yale Studies in English, 1920); "The Later Career of the Elizabethan Villain Hero," *PMLA,* 40 (1925), 874-880. McIntyre argues that the label gothic was misapplied to the novels, most of whose fantasies were not at all located in the Middle Ages, but in "the artificial period constructed by Elizabethan dramatists out of Renaissance Italy" (*PMLA,* 36, 666). Evans argues that the influence upon the gothic both of the Elizabethan stage and of Richardsonian sensibility was merely accretive, since both were chosen only because they offered appropriate materials for the larger

gothic plan. Masao Miyoshi treats the connection between the Eliza-
bethan and the gothic hero in *The Divided Self* (New York: NYU Press,
1969), pp. 7-8, suggesting the uniqueness of the gothic variety. Other
critics who have resisted an influence-based theory, in favour of a
gothic "core" have included Eino Railo, in *The Haunted Castle* (London:
Geo. Routledge, 1927), Edith Birkhead, in *The Tale of Terror* (London:
Constable, 1921) and Varma, to some extent, in *The Gothic Flame*.

[62]For evidence of Walpole's dramatic impulses, I would cite his own
The Mysterious Mother (1768; 1778) and Jephson's stage adaptation of
Otranto, The Count of Narbonne (1780), over which Walpole exercised some
rights of supervision (*Otranto*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii). Examination of Wal-
pole's defence of his own, unacted play shows the extent to which he
believed that he had cast it in tragic form (see *Otranto*, pp. 253-260,
272-277). For the history of *Otranto* on stage, and its relationship to
the tragic or melodramatic modes, see Evans, pp. 52-53; *Otranto*, p. xxiii ff;
Charles Beecher Hogan, "The 'Theatre of Geo. 3'," *Horace Walpole*, ed.
W. H. Smith, pp. 228-240; and Willard Thorp, "The Stage Adventures of
Some Gothic Novels," *PMLA*, 43 (1928), 476-478. In a note in his 1777
edition of Pope's *Works*, Bishop Warburton praises the gothic romance, and
specifically *Otranto*, for conformity to the aims of classical tragedy, to
the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, which Walpole himself had invoked
in his Translator's Preface. This line of criticism, however, remained
undeveloped, either for support or attack. See Arthur L. Cooke, "Some
Side Lights on the Theory of the Gothic Romance," *MLQ*, 12 (1951), 430
and n. 4.

[63]Evans, pp. 81-89; Evans relates the transformation of the gothic
villain to the disintegration of the gothic hero (pp. 56-59).

[64]Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron* (London: Oxford Univ. Press,
1967), p. 4. Another form of the work appeared anonymously under the
title *The Champion of Virtue* (1777), but this version was less well-
known. Further references will be indicated within the text.

[65]Quoted in Summers edn. of *Otranto*, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

[66]Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (Colchester: 1785; reprint,
New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1930).

[67]Reeve's mouthpiece, Euphrasia, begins the discussion by trying to
make certain key distinctions. She divides the novel from the romance,
tracing the origin and technique of each to a corresponding established
form--history and epic, respectively. But the clarity breaks down.
After declaring that "romances, have been written, both in prose and
verse," Euphrasia also states that "a Romance, is nothing but an Epic in
prose" (p. 51). Her chronological division of romances into "ancient,"
"old," and "modern" is further distracting.

[68]Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England,* pp. 70-72: "in 1770 the *Critical* found itself unable to follow Bancroft in his logical contention that, since the main business of a novel is to teach, it had better not be too interesting," and the *Monthly* remarks in a review of 1772: "'The excellent lessons of morality which this work inculcates will not be able to save it from oblivion'" (p. 72).

[69]See M. J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude, A History of English Manners 1700-1830* (1941; reprint, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965), and André Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk* (Paris: Lib. Marcel Didier, 1960). Quinlan is somewhat more interested in the political views of both groups during the Napoleonic period, Parreaux win their actions to enforce moral standards.

[70]Typical of this restraint is the sequel to Emma's learning that Edmund is also "the man in whose behalf I once presumed to speak," that his fortune and lineage might permit them to marry: "From this period, the young pair behaved with solemn respect to each other, but with apparent reserve" (p. 134). When Sir Robert, "with tears on his cheeks" and filial obedience on his lips, seeks reconciliation with his father, the witnesses to the scene respond mildly, impersonally, decorously, as if to a dramatic piece: "The company rose, and congratulated both father and son" (p. 139). Sir Robert is promptly matched with Lord Clifford's daughter.

[71]Scott, "Life of Reeve," *On Novelists and Fiction,* p. 100.

[72]Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England,* p. 231. Cooke ("Side Lights," p. 433) goes further in drawing a political meaning from the *Memoirs:*

> Miss Reeve . . . hoped her narrative would stimulate a few readers to imitate the virtues of olden days, and would convince them that the new ideas of the French Revolutionists were not as well founded as many people believed. Thus she attempted to convert the Gothic romance into a weapon of propaganda against the doctrines of the French Revolution and to make it the conservative and romantic counterpart of the contemporary, realistic novel of purpose, which was being currently used to propagandize the new radical ideas.

The lead was not followed, Cooke claims, because "the romance writers of the 1790's were more interested in terrifying their readers than in glorifying the old order of things." I do not believe that these two purposes are necessarily distinct.

[73]This tension evidently affected Clara Reeve herself. In *The English Novel* (London: Constable, 1960), Lionel Stevenson notes that Reeve's next novel, *The Exiles, or Memoirs of Count de Cronstadt,* "departed from the placidity of her *Old English Baron* in favour of emotional despair and terrifying perils" (p. 163). This was not, however, her ultimate technical or critical preference.

CHAPTER III

"IMPENDING DANGERS, HIDDEN GUILT, SUPERNATURAL VISITINGS"

The Sensational, the Exotic, and the Gothic

Sensational and exotic elements were not the sole property of gothic

novels but the common stock of many kinds of popular fiction and sub-

literature. Modern influence-studies of the gothic have reinforced this

view by connecting the gothic novel with various precursors and parallel

types which include sensationalism or exoticism in some way: the Italian-

ate revenge drama of the Renaissance,[1] the Oriental fantasy,[2] the

sentimental novel,[3] the domestic persecution tragedy of Richardson,

Prévost, Arnaud, and Kotzebue,[4] even the pastoral.[5] Sensationalism and

 exoticism entered into discussions of larger issues, such as the dan-

gers of novel-reading[6] or of escapism. It is not my aim here to search

out the "essence" of the gothic;[7] gothic literature and architecture are

far too eclectic and synthetic to make that a reasonable task. However,

I do propose to set forth the special usefulness of sensationalism and

exoticism for the two main gothic strategies that I have already iden-

tified: the ambivalent and the nostalgic. Though sensationalism and

exoticism do not define precisely what is gothic, those devices were

exploited in singular, characteristic ways by the gothicists.

Sir Walter Scott, who paid the first serious, comprehensive,

critical attention to gothic fiction, confirms the central place of the

sensational and the exotic within it. Scott's remarks in the Prefatory

Memoir which he contributed to the Ballantyne's Novelist's Library

edition of Ann Radcliffe's novels (1824), might apply equally well to

the gothicists as a group:

> The species of romance which Mrs. Radcliffe introduced,
> bears nearly the same relationship to the novel that the modern
> anomaly entitled a Melo-drame does to the proper drama. It
> does not appeal to the judgment by deep delineations of human
> feeling, or stir the passions by scenes of deep pathos, or
> awaken the fancy by tracing out, with spirit and vivacity, the
> lighter traces of life and manners, or excite mirth by strong
> representations of the ludicrous or humorous. In other words,
> it attains its interest neither by the path of comedy nor of
> tragedy; and yet it has, notwithstanding, a deep, decided, and
> powerful effect, gained by means independent of both--by an
> appeal, in one word, to the passion of fear, whether excited
> by natural dangers, or by the suggestions of superstition.[8]

Later in the Memoir, while discussing the role of exotic settings, Scott

again stresses the primacy of sensationalism and terror in the gothic:

> The materials of these celebrated romances, and the means
> employed in conducting the narrative, are all selected with a
> view to the author's primary object, of moving the reader by
> ideas of impending danger, hidden guilt, supernatural visitings,
> --by all that is terrible, in short, combined with much that is
> wonderful.

According to Scott, there is only minor relief from this purpose; comedy

or novelty can scarcely detract from it, nor exoticism alienate it

entirely. The heroine "is continually struggling with the tide of

adversity, and hurried downwards by its torrent; and if any more gay

description is occasionally introduced, it is only as a contrast, not a

relief, to the melancholy and gloomy tenor of the narrative."[9]

In all his critical works on the gothic, Scott returns to the idea

that manipulation of strong feelings, and of terror in particular, is

characteristic of the genre. In doing so, he expresses not only his

individual response but the common opinion on the subject, based upon

an interest in the psychology of terror and sensationalism that had been followed since the late seventeenth century.

The study of terror that was closest in time to the birth of the new gothic sensibility was Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The fact of the *Enquiry's* potential literary influence has been satisfactorily demonstrated,[10] but the degree or extent of that influence does not matter here. After all, appreciation of terror as an aesthetic experience was available from several earlier sources, most notably John Dennis' *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704); and the principles of a psychological method of enquiry, as employed by Burke, had been progressively sharpened by Hobbes, Locke, Addison, Hutcheson, and Hume-- the last three of these philosophers having also attacked many of the same problems as Burke. Burke's treatise simply had the advantage of respectability and currency over Dennis' when gothicism was being formed.[11]

The *Enquiry*, therefore, is worth examining in great detail not because it significantly influenced the gothic novel--there is too little evidence of that--but because it helps to explain what the gothic sensibility was. So much of what it lays down in theory coincides with the practice of gothic dramatists and novelists that it serves as an accurate guidebook through this particular branch of sensationalist fiction. It is fair to assume that the frequent repetitions of Burke's language and ideas throughout the period when the gothic flourished is an index of the *Enquiry's* value in revealing the grounds of an increasingly common experience--the willing enjoyment of terror.

The principles of a psychology of terror are set out early in the
Enquiry. The basic principle, shared with Hume,[12] is that *pain* is a
source of stronger sensations than *pleasure*. In the sixth section of
Part I Burke concludes that "the passions . . . which are conversant
about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on *pain* and
danger, and they are the most powerful of all the passions."[13] Hume
used this comparison to account for the favoured subjects in poetry:
"But nothing can furnish to the poet a variety of scenes, and incidents,
and sentiments, except distress, terror, or anxiety. Complete joy and
satisfaction is attended with security and leaves no further room for
action."[14] Burke maintains this concern with measuring the strength of
sensations and of the corresponding pleasure, and it shapes his func-
tional definition of the sublime:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and
> danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is
> conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner
> analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it
> is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable
> of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied
> the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter
> on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which
> we may be made to suffer, are much greater in their effect on
> the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned
> voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination,
> and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body could enjoy.
> . . . But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure,
> so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain
> (pp. 58-60).

The link between terror and sublimity is strengthened through repetition:

> Whatever therefore is terrible . . . is sublime too . . . for
> it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contempt-
> ible, that may be dangerous. . . . Indeed terror is in all
> cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling
> principle of the sublime (pp. 96-97).

Burke even goes so far as to try to show a linguistic connection between

"terror" and "sublimity" (pp. 97-98).

Burke's description of the effects of the sublime upon the mind is highly relevant to gothic techniques. The most powerful degree of sublimity causes the passion of *astonishment,*

> and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its
> motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this
> case the mind is so entirely filled with its object that it
> cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that
> object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the
> sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates
> our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force
> (pp. 95-96).

Thus Burke describes a condition of complete arousal and preoccupation and, most important, a condition which is somehow non-rational or suprarational. The enjoyer of the sublime must assume a posture of intellectual surrender akin to the gothic victim's and the gothic reader's.

In the fourth part of the *Enquiry,* devoted to efficient causes, Burke provides a second explanation of this state of submission, this time in physiological terms. The crucial problem is this: how can astonishment, the highest level of sublime emotion, which depends upon pain and terror for its stimulation, be experienced as delight?[15] Burke argues that the tonic effect of the "exercise of the finer parts of the system" (i.e., the nervous system) through "a mode of terror" is analogous to the beneficial, bracing effect of manual labour, "which is a mode of pain," on the grosser organs (i.e., the muscles and tendons). The sublime has a therapeutic effect on the nerves and the faculties of sensation; by seeking the sublime, one literally *practices* (pp. 254-258).

The practice, however, requires moderate conditions. It most stop short of real pain or torture. At several points Burke emphasizes that

actual safety and security are as necessary to the enjoyment of the

sublime as is artificial terror:

> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of
> giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at distances,
> and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are
> delightful, as we everyday experience (p. 60).
>
> Terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does
> not press too close (pp. 73-74).
>
> If the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually
> noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the ter-
> ror is not conversant about the present destruction of the
> person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or
> gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are
> capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of
> delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror.
> (p. 257).[16]

As we shall see later, the *modifications* of terror were as important to

the gothic as the sensationalism that produces terror. Burke's thera-

peutic exercise of the nerves is parallel to the *temporary* entry into

the gothic world with modern prejudices and values as a sort of lifeline.

Although the physiology of terror was the least plausible part of

the *Enquiry*,[17] it did generate some long-lived metaphors for gothic

theorists. For example, in her essay "On the Pleasure Derived from

Objects of Terror," Anna Laetitia Aikin (later Mrs. Barbauld) echoes the

Burkean nerve theory: "A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind,

and keeps it on stretch. . . . Passion and fancy co-operating elevate

the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amaze-

ment."[18] The survival of such ideas as the aesthetic self-sufficiency

of shock and the transformation of tension into enjoyment was quite

natural, because they helped to justify the attractions of the gothic

and to explain the fascination of excess in quasi-scientific terms.

At any rate, the physiology of terror need not be taken very seriously, as long as we recognize that it was symptomatic of the approaching literary storm. The key point is the defining of a category of literary (and real-life) experience that departs from rational considerations and relies upon sensationalism pushed toward an artificial limit. Since one kind of gothic--the ambivalent--also takes simulated pain, terror, and awe as its principal components, the process of defining that category automatically amounts to an analysis of the gothic.

The real substance of the analysis is Burke's examination of the sources for the sublime in the second and third parts of the *Enquiry*. Foremost among them is what Burke calls *obscurity*. It encompasses not only darkness, shadow, or concealment, as might be expected, but secretiveness and deliberate mystification. Burke's illustration of this non-physical sense of obscurity is suggestive of typical gothic themes. He refers to "those despotic governments, which are founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear." For such governments, he observes, sublimity is a matter of coercive policy, and they "keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye." Furthermore, "the policy has been much the same in many cases of religion" (pp. 101-102).

Burke's emphasis upon the effect of the obscure and the hidden agent of terror evidently coincided with the gothic novelists' and was understood by them in relation to their own practices. In the posthumous extract "On the Supernatural in Poetry," Ann Radcliffe has one of her scenic travellers refer specifically to this part of the *Enquiry*,

using Burke's notion of obscurity in order to clarify a new distinction

between terror and horror: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that

the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree

of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.

. . . And where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but

in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting

the dreaded evil?"[19] The terminology is certainly Burke's, but the

problem addressed--of decorum and effectiveness--is peculiarly gothic.

Burkean theory and gothic experiment agree in finding that what is

supplied by the imagination is more terrifying than what is depicted

plainly.

This does not diminish the importance of actual force, or the

threat of force. Burke affirms that, aside from objects which are them-

selves dangerous, or which are associated with danger, "I know of

nothing sublime which is not some modification of power" (p. 110).

However, this source of the sublime is particularly associative and

indirect; power is sublime because it represents the *potential* of the

object to inflict pain upon the perceiver. That a *potential* for power

should be sufficient agrees nicely with the requirements of obscurity;

for the gothic novelist this means that an exact outlining of a powerful,

threatening figure may be delayed almost indefinitely, for maximum

terrifying effect. The high ranking of power as a source of the sublime

coincides with prominent gothic motifs--the noble rapist, filial sub-

mission, the corruption of authority, imprisonment, mental torture--and

with prominent gothic symbols, which all represent the power of authority

over the individual victim--the castle, the monastery, the prison, and

the madhouse. Considering the primary role of pain and power in Burke's

theory, it is surprising to find a modern student of sadistic literature

like Mario Praz missing the point of the *Enquiry* entirely and failing to

include Burke in his summary of "the aesthetic theory of the Horrid and

the Terrible which had gradually developed during the course of the

eighteenth century."[20]

Burke's treatise becomes especially useful for understanding the

gothic when it turns to an application of his principles to literature.

For example, Burke measures the *standard* level of obscurity in different

arts in order to rank their ability to elicit strong emotions. His

axiom is simple: "It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to

make it *affecting* to the imagination. . . . A clear idea is . . . another

name for a little idea" (pp. 101, 108).[21] Inasmuch as poetry *is* an

image-making art, "the images raised by poetry are always of this

obscure kind" (p. 106). For this reason, poetry is superior to painting,

for instance, in producing the sublime; painting tends to strive for

accuracy and clarity of imitation, instead of "a judicious obscurity."

This preference for poetry (i.e., literature) over the visual and

plastic arts is more than a vindication of the literary imagination by

a literary man. Through this argument Burke gives an alternative to the

mimetic standard of art, which, as I have indicated in Chapter One, was

unsuited to the new gothicism. Burke demonstrates that the *less* accurate

and complete the artist's rendition of his subject, the *stronger* its

impact; and strength of sensation is equal, in aesthetic validity, to

truth or harmony. Kiely comments on the literary sections of the

Enquiry:

> . . . the greater effect of the *Enquiry* was to enlarge the
> possibilities of art rather than to restrict and schematize
> them. Burke's discussion of language, though brief, points
> the way to further considerations of words as suggestive and
> evocative rather than strictly imitative. Extending his own
> argument that the sublime passions depend, to some degree, on
> an incompleteness of knowledge, he asserts that the business
> of poetry and rhetoric is "to affect rather by sympathy than
> imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind
> of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of
> the things themselves."[22]

The connection with the gothic is twofold. In arguing that the

sublime must be judged according to standards adapted to it, Burke puts

forth the same sort of claim as Hurd does for the gothic, in the Third

Dialogue and the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*.[23] It should be noted,

in addition, that Hurd's defence of the stylistic superiority of the

gothic was partly based on its greater capacity to "produce the sublime."

Moreover, the movement in Burke that Kiely has identified, from

imitation and image-making to evocation and exploring internal responses,

is the same as the movement of the gothic away from circumstantial

reality and the drama of action towards psychological reality and the

drama of feeling--a movement we have already seen under way with Wal-

pole's *Castle of Otranto*. That movement required devices specified

under Burke's concept of obscurity: suggestion, rich and wild imagery,

carefully managed disorder, and suspense.

Other items on Burke's list of sources for the sublime help to

define the aesthetics of the gothic. Among the "*general* privations,"

for example, Burke names "*Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude* and *Silence*,"

(p. 125) which also happen to be the conditions of that central exper-

ience of gothic fiction, the protagonist's imprisonment. These condi-

tions are also present in the graphic monument of what Lévy calls the

"claustral," Piranesi's series of etchings of the *Carceri d'Invenzione*.[24]

Speaking of the sublime effect of suddenly alternating brightness and darkness, Burke observes: "And this is not the only instance wherein the opposite extremes operate equally in favour of the sublime, which in all things abhors mediocrity" (pp. 146-147). We encounter the same abhorrence in gothic fiction, where both scene-painting and characterization elevate the taste for juxtaposed extremes almost to a theory of personality. Burke makes this taste consistent with his philosophical technique: "He attempts to describe the *strongest* of emotions, the *most* engrossing of ideas, the *greatest* of pleasures, the *most* dreadful pains, in an effort to ascertain what inventions of the imagination might produce them. The ultimate art should stimulate the ultimate response."[25] Although the effort sometimes yields trivial results, such as Burke's exhaustive treatment of intermittent sounds and flashing lights, the desire for the ultimate and the excessive--the basic impulse of the gothic sensibility--is set by Burke on an empirical foundation which makes it appear more credible and legitimate.

The final source of the sublime worth considering here is "the artificial infinite," a concept which we meet in connection with architecture. Burke's plain opinion of gothic architecture was unfavourable:

> Burke himself never recognized in Gothic architecture the out-
> standing illustration of the sublime he advocated: magnitude,
> apparent disorder, magnificent profusion of detail, the expres-
> sion of immense energy, the suggestion of infinity through
> ornamental traceries, the awful gloom of the interior . . . his
> sole reference to Gothicism reveals the common Augustan preju-
> dices.[26]

Yet, when we examine the concept of the artificial infinite closely, we shall see how it might be interpreted to support gothicism, in architec-

ture and in fiction, against Burke's avowed lack of sympathy.

The artificial infinite is a distillation of various factors: the mind's passive attitude before the sublime, the mind's acquiescence in its own deception by the sublime, the appeal of the sublime to irrational and mechanical mental processes, and the positive value of power, terror, and ignorance in furthering the sublime. The crucial fact about impressions of the infinite--whether it is real or artificial--is the mind's inability to conceive of boundaries or limits to the supposedly infinite object. The mind is overwhelmed, its reasoning faculties rendered useless. Often this is a matter of illusion, and Burke offers the example of "succession and uniformity" in order to describe the process. The repetition of identical objects in sequence, such as the columns of a rotunda or a colonnade or an oblong Grecian temple, tends to persuade the viewer's mind to supply mechanically an infinite progression where, in reality, none exists. On these grounds, Burke complains against the profusion of right-angles and broken visual planes in the cruciform gothic cathedral plan, which distracts the perceiver's attention and spoils any possible illusion (pp. 134-135).

Burke's theory, however, including the artificial infinite, was adapted to support the contrary argument, in favour of the gothic. Chief among the adaptors were Uvedale Price, who built also upon Vanbrugh's and Reynolds' ideas, and the Rev. John Milner, who claimed that the superiority of the gothic for ecclesiastical buildings was authorized by Burke and asserted that gothic churches "are more conducive to 'prayer and contemplation'."[27] Only twenty years after the *Enquiry* appeared Mrs. Thrale was able to cite Burke in support of a favourable

opinion of gothic things, his original attitude having merged somehow

with Horace Walpole's: "I observed it was in Manners as in Architecture,

the Gothick struck one most forcibly, the Grecian delighted one more

sensibly. 'Tis the Sublime & beautiful of Burke over again."[28]

The reversal of architectural attitude becomes less puzzling when

we take into account a feature of the artificial infinite, as Burke

describes it, which is perfectly attuned to neo-gothic tastes in build-

ing. I am referring to the *orientation* of the infinite, and hence, the

sublime. Burke considers the question of whether the illusion of

infinity operates more powerfully in one direction than another, and he

concludes that the sublime is, above all else, an experience of vertical

or perpendicular infinity.[29] The sublime affects the whole conscious-

ness with vertigo. It is logical that, in comparison, horizontal

infinity--viewing an expansive panorama--gives an inferior thrill, for

it bears no immediate sign of power relationships, of potential identi-

fication with the superior or the inferior. I have already referred

(Chapter One, note 26) to Virginia Hyde's observation that neo-gothic

taste was greatly affected by the Perpendicular style, favouring exag-

gerated, soaring vertical lines, and I believe it a fair generalization.

We find the epitome of this taste for verticality in William Beckford's

reconstructed Fonthill Abbey, with its soaring, structurally unsound

octagon tower, its twelve-foot-high park wall, and its cavernous,

inhuman interior spaces.[30] If Beckford was not striving for terror, he

was at least looking to create very strong impressions, impressions that

seem to demand a kind of perceptual submission that is part of the sub-

lime.

Burke spends relatively little time dealing directly with this aspect of gothic taste, but the remainder of his theory gives a satisfactory psychological account of it, in which verticality is not merely of optical significance. Maurice Lévy, for example, believes that the common element in neo-gothic architecture and gothic fiction is the replacement of a horizontal by a vertical axis of imagination. Lévy combines the ideas of obscurity and infinity to extend the range of sublime objects, so that they include difficult or arcane knowledge, of the self or of ultimate things. The vertical infinite is the line of dreaming, of initiation, of questing, of descent into deeper levels of consciousness. Lévy suggests that the recurrent vertical arrangement of architecture and of narrative layers in the gothic novels symbolizes the arrangement of the personality and the dreamer's penetration through it, a movement which is both illuminating and terrifying. He also links the idea of vertical infinity to the historical preoccupations in the novels:

> C'est encore par un mouvement de descente verticale dans un passé national qu'on explique le mieux le retour a l'époque des Croisades, de la Reine Elisabeth, ou du roi Charles 1er. Collectivement . . . la société anglaise s'enfonce dans son histoire pour y trouver obscurement sa verité, peut-être aussi pour y puiser des images susceptibles de l'aider a intégrer, en les fixant à un niveau rassurant de son propre passé national, les événements de 89.[31]

Inasmuch as it can be adapted to the creation of fictional scenes, characters, and plots, the idea of the artificial infinite also provides a simple model of gothic technique. Just as the viewer of a sublime object, limited to a monotonous yet suggestive set of images, builds his sensation of being overwhelmed (i.e., of the sublime) on the *extension* of those images, so the reader of gothic fiction, held in ignorance

except for a few disturbing impressions constantly reinforced--of

potential danger, for instance--imagines terrifying events, gruesome

personal histories, unseen peril, through the aid of his own conspiring

invention.[32]

The artificial infinite and the vertical orientation were not new

features in the literature of the sublime. Both the Longinian and the

topographical sublime employ the concept of elevation, either literal or

metaphorical, and Burke introduces most of the key objects that would

have been familiar from either branch of the theory: mountains, storms,

seas, chasms, awesome buildings, limitless space, evocative language.

Burke's real innovation, however, is his dissociation of the vertical

axis of imagination, and the sublime experience in general, from

religious beliefs.

Other enthusiasts of the sublime saw religious significance in

their experiences, religious symbols in sublime objects. For them, the

sublime was a confrontation between man with his meagre capabilities and

the immensity of the divine presence in the physical world. Admiration

for sublime scenery was a form of worship well-suited to Christian or

Deistic piety.[33]

Without denying all religious implications, Burke describes a sub-

limity which is not necessarily or primarily religious in meaning. The

vertical line extends from man to God, perhaps, but also from man to

whatever is rendered mysterious, potent and terrible by art. The divine

power may be the ultimate instance of such potentialities, but Burke

does not refer all terror to it. Instead, Burke secularizes the sublime

experience by concentrating on the psychological basis for it. For this

reason, we must differ with W. F. Wright's contention that Burke's sub-

lime "arose from a philosophical realization of the divine in nature"

and that it had little in common with Walpole's supernatural awe, a

claim which leads him to conclude that "the appearance of terror in the

English novel had been prepared for scarcely at all."[34] To counter this,

I would return to an analogy with architecture. Burke founds a system

of terror on psychological, rather than religious, principles at the

same time that Walpole and other gothicists are starting to blend

ecclesiastical designs freely into their own dramatic structures in

order to evoke not only conventional piety but its parody. In both

cases the movement is away from previous associations, towards more

sensational, flexible practices.[35] Although the terror of the gothic

kept its basically religious, authoritarian character, acting as an

extension of the strictest Protestant visions of guilt and punishment,[36]

the *Enquiry* shows how different powers and agents may be substituted for

the customary ones according to scientific principles—how the stock of

terror may be expanded. The main interest in the *Enquiry* is reserved

for the art of pure terror, such as Scott believed that Ann Radcliffe

was practicing.

In following that interest, the *Enquiry* reaches certain conclusions

which help to illuminate the difference between ambivalent and nostalgic

gothicism.

1. The *Enquiry* establishes a category of art whose aim is not

mimesis but the stimulation of strong feelings. Burke does not treat

this as an inferior purpose.

2. The *Enquiry* demonstrates how the spectacle of pain, or the threat of personal injury, may be the source of a mixed, modified pleasure.

3. In analyzing those qualities of objects which lend them sublimity, the *Enquiry* arrives at an account of the core of ambivalent gothicism, which seeks to evoke an imaginary yet quasi-historical age of ruthless power, without sentimentality or nostalgia intervening.

4. The common factor in all sublime properties is extremity. The degree of excellence of a sublime object depends upon the intensity and purity of the terror that it induces. Thus, the criterion of aesthetic value shifts away from the usual tests: moral value, educative value, formal perfection—all yield to the strength of the reader's or viewer's sensations.

5. The *Enquiry* presents surprise, suspense, shock, suggestiveness, and terror as legitimate literary devices, and, of course, these are also the chief instruments of ambivalent gothicism.

6. The *Enquiry* defines sublimity as whatever draws the imagination and the senses beyond usual limits, including the extraordinary and the unknowable. Though analyzed rationally by Burke, the sublime operates non-rationally. The terror of the sublime originates in the spectator's sense of vulnerability and helplessness, in his delight at a threat survived, at a superior power encountered and withstood. The willing victim, like many gothic protagonists, meets a facsimile of death or of inner darkness which, because it is only a facsimile, can be vanquished.

Pamela Kaufman has interpreted this conquest in terms of the Freudian dualism of *eros* and *thanatos*. In effect, within the art of

terror the "fantasies symbolize a preoccupation with survival. . . . Both Burke and Freud agree that the fundamental human desire is to survive and to live as individuals. . . . They differ over which 'passion' expresses this will for self-preservation." Kaufman then draws a connection between Burke's interest in surviving dangers and the gothic: "In Freudian terms, the Gothic fantasy is counter-phobic, that is, it embraces the very terror that it fears."[37] The last phrase is a fine rendition of the ambivalence of the gothic.

The direct thrust of the *Enquiry* is away from conventional literary experiences and towards the exploitation of shock for its own sake—for the imaginative exercise—and for the sake of revealing the darker aspects of the psyche. Yet, if the *Enquiry* does give a rationale for gothic sensationalism, at the same time it also gives, in its very definition of the sublime, the means of opposing excessive sensationalism. Along with the more radical statements we discover a concern for decorum and taste. Or, as Kiely has summarized the relationship between Burke's sublime and the gothic: "One finds in Walpole, Radcliffe, Reeve, and Lewis not only Burke's ideas but Burke's problems."[38]

The most persistent problem was setting out boundaries for the sensational, balancing freedom of exploration against disgust and moral revulsion. For the gothic, this problem coincides with the central conflict between nostalgia and ambivalence. In general, we will find that nostalgia militates for more severe limits upon sensationalism, because, as we have seen in Chapter One, the nostalgic version of the gothic world is more selective. Ambivalence requires the techniques of sensationalism in order to depict the excesses of gothic power that it both

admires and condemns.

Burke approached the problem by trying to indicate exactly what
kind and what degree of terror were bearable, and by trying to account
for the reaction to real, as well as artificially-depicted, scenes of
distress. Burke recognizes that there is a difference between delight-
ful horror and disgust, or actual pain; therefore, he favours a surro-
gate danger, made up of associations with potent objects, suggestions
of unnamed threats, and substitutions of symbolic figures for ultimate
sources of power.

To his successors this solution was more provocative than conclu-
sive. After all, they had immediate realities like the gothic novel
and gothic drama to consider. Mrs. Barbauld (Anna Laetitia Aikin), in
a work specifically devoted to the problem, shows with her essentially
anti-sensationalist position how sensitive the issue of propriety had
become and how many negative cases she saw around her:

> It is undoubtedly true . . . that the representation of dis-
> tress frequently gives pleasure; from which general observa-
> tion many of our modern writers of tragedy and romance seem
> to have drawn this inference,--that in order to please, they
> have nothing more to do than to paint distress in natural and
> striking colours. With this view, they heap together all the
> afflicting events and dismal accidents their imagination can
> furnish; and when they have half broke the reader's heart,
> they expect he should thank them for his agreeable entertain-
> ment. An author of this class sits down, pretty much like an
> inquisitor, to compute how much suffering he can inflict upon
> the hero of his tale before he makes an end of him.[39]

At first it appears as if Mrs. Barbauld were merely questioning the
more extravagant uses of the sensational, but as she continues her dis-
cussion it becomes clear that she is identifying a failure of what Hume
called "conversion"--the accommodation of distinct, and often contrary,

passions. In the process, she implies that painful sensations cannot be converted or modified toward anything like Burke's surrogate pain, and that pity--the preferable emotion--operates quite independently:

> The view or relation of mere misery can never be pleasing. We have, indeed, a strong sympathy with all kinds of misery; but it is a feeling of pure unmixed pain, similar in kind, though not equal in degree, to what we feel for ourselves in the like occasions; and never produces that melting sorrow, that thrill of tenderness, to which we give the name of pity. They are two distinct sensations, marked by very different external expression. One causes the nerves to tingle, the flesh to shudder, and the whole countenance to be thrown into strong contradictions; the other relaxes the frame, opens the features, and produces tears.[40]

This final contrast is equal to the worst of Burke's physiology, yet the prevailing contrast is that between pain, which is neither an aesthetic nor a controllable sensation, and pity, which is both aesthetic and decorous. It was not the painful subject but the painful treatment of it that Mrs. Barbauld disliked, the dropping of *pity* from the classic *terror* and *pity* of tragedy.

This criticism had justification, at least as far as the gothic was concerned. The internal struggle within the gothic centred on questions of excessive sensationalism (i.e., terror-mongering) and the excessive sentimentality usually associated with nostalgia. In 1757 Burke set aside pity as the chief source of our interest in distressing events and placed terror at the core of a prospective literary genre. In 1764 Horace Walpole's translator persona claimed terror as his "author's principal engine" in *Otranto*. And in 1824 Scott would make terror the characteristic instrument of the gothic. But it is not Mrs. Barbauld's favoured instrument, and her criticism represents the countervailing, censorious voice which required moral elevation, sympathy, and restraint

rather than spectacle.

Mrs. Barbauld is exact in advising how painful subjects are to be managed. Her recommendations comprise a survey of anti-sensationalist opinion:

> . . . no scenes of misery ought to be exhibited which are not connected with the display of some moral excellence or agreeable quality. . . . The misfortunes which excite pity must not be too horrid and overwhelming. . . . A judicious author will never attempt to raise pity by any thing mean or disgusting. . ... there must be a degree of complacence mixed with our sorrows to produce an agreeable sympathy; nothing, therefore, must be admitted which destroys the grace and dignity of suffering. . . . Scenes of distress should not be too long continued. All our finer feelings are in a manner momentary, and no art can carry them beyond a certain point, either in intenseness or duration. Constant suffering deadens the heart to tender impressions. . . . It is therefore necessary, in a long work, to relieve the mind by scenes of pleasure and gaiety . . . provided care be taken not to check the passions while they are flowing.[41]

However, Mrs. Barbauld further complicates her position in her essay "On Romances: An Imitation."[42] Here she inquires into the reasons for our paradoxical delight in "the groans of misery" and "complicated anguish," and dismisses as simplistic and mistaken two previous lines of argument which Burke had also dismissed: that the spectacle of fictional sufferings aids the reader in bearing his own real ones;[43] and that the sense of commiseration arising from fictional sufferings gives the reader a chance to congratulate himself on his sensitivity and magnanimity. Unfortunately, Mrs. Barbauld does not present her own positive views on the subject. Nevertheless, scanning her critical writings we find a measure of consistency in her suspicion of strong scenes and shock techniques.

Another moderating voice is Dr. Nathan Drake's. In his *Literary*

Hours, Drake regards literary fantasy as a refuge from real horrors, in

particular from those of the Napoleonic Wars:

> Long . . . as our eyes have been now turned on scenes of tur-
> bulence and anarchy, long as we have listened with horror to
> the storm which has swept over Europe with such ungovernable
> fury, it must prove highly grateful, highly soothing to the
> wearied mind, occasionally to repose on such topics as liter-
> ature and imagination are willing to afford.[44]

This should not suggest, however, that Drake was attracted to

literature only as a means of escape and relaxation. Such motivation

would have prejudiced him against gothic sensationalism, which offered

escape, perhaps, but not of a kind "highly soothing to the wearied mind."

In fact, Drake was drawn to "gothic superstition" (this included all

forms of supernaturalism), which he felt was an enduring imaginative

influence, "even in the present polished period of society."[45] Else-

where Drake made it clear that his contemporaries could only be expected

to produce, and to understand, replicas of a past belief which was no

longer emotionally or intellectually available to them:

> In this age, when science and literature have spread so
> extensively, the heavy clouds of superstition have been dis-
> persed, and have assumed a lighter and less formidable hue;
> for though the tales of Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe, or
> the poetry of Weiland, Burger, and Lewis, still powerfully
> arrest attention, and keep an ardent curiosity alive, yet is
> their machinery by no means an object of popular belief, nor
> can it now lead to dangerous credulity, as when in the times
> of Tasso, Shakspeare,, and even Milton, witches and wizards,
> spectres and fairies, were nearly as important subjects of
> faith as the most serious doctrines of religion.[46]

Drake valued gothic superstition as a "source of imagery," capable

of bringing about "a grateful astonishment, a welcome sensation of

fear."[47] He feared that attempts to discredit and expunge from poetry

even the simplest and most popular superstitions would cause "our

national poetry" to "degenerate into mere morality, criticism, and

satire . . . the sublime, the terrible, and the fanciful in poetry,

will no longer exist."[48] Drake's loyalties were close to Hurd's,

Walpole's, and Burke's. There is the same delight in fantasy, the same

dread of banality and mere common-sense, the same enthusiasm for gothic

vitality. But, like Hurd in his cultural defence of gothicism and

Walpole in his architectural fantasies, Drake insisted on adding a

"sportive" element to the more sombre concept of terror-inspired

imagination described by Burke. His gothicism was more eclectic yet

low-keyed. Thus he was able to skirt the problem of sensationalism and

its limits by identifying two complementary aspects of gothic super-

stition:

> . . . although this kind of superstition be able to arrest
> every faculty of the human mind, and to shake, as it were,
> all nature with horror, yet does it also delight in the
> most sportive and elegant imagery. . . . The vulgar Gothic
> . . . turns chiefly on the awful ministration of the Spectre,
> or the innocent gambols of the Faery.[49]

Drake carried over this distinction in his analysis of folklore and

popular beliefs, and was evidently interested enough in advancing the

cause of the lighter, "sportive" gothic and its compatibility with the

more terrifying kind to compose his own short fiction as a demonstra-

tion piece. The resulting story of the knight Henry Fitzowen has

negligible literary value, since Drake has had to overlook any principle

of dramatic pacing or skilful plot construction for the sake of cramming

as many diverse incidents and effects into the story as possible. That

he should have bothered with such an inconclusive experiment seems less

surprising when we look at his essay "On Objects of Terror."[50] With no

great originality Drake here concluded that "objects of terror may . . .

be divided into those which owe their origin to the agency of superhuman

beings, and form a part of every system of mythology, and into those

which depend upon natural causes and events for their production."[51]

Examining the latter category, Drake came upon the danger of sensation-

alism which Mrs. Barbauld had also recognized. Because no supernatural

agents were involved in causing them, natural terrors were more probable

and familiar. There was no distance provided by condescension and

rationalization to make them less personal for the enlightened reader.

Therefore, they remained a potential source of shock, disgust, and

indecency unless carefully managed. The story of Henry Fitzowen should

be regarded as an exercise in the counterbalancing of sensationalism.

For this purpose Drake recommended the use of picturesque description,

the evocation of conventionally sublime or pathetic sentiments, and the

contrivance of suspense devices:

> No efforts of genius . . . are so truly great as those
> which, approaching the brink of horror, have yet, by the art
> of the poet or painter, by adjunctive and picturesque embel-
> lishment, by pathetic or sublime emotion, been rendered
> powerful in creating the most delightful and fascinating
> sensations.

Drake's examples of disgusting and pleasing horror are interesting

because they exhibit the tension between subject and treatment:

> A poem, a novel, or a picture, may . . . notwithstanding its
> accurate imitation of nature and beauty of execution, unfold
> a scene so horrid, or so cruel, that the art of the painter
> or the poet is unable to render it communicative of the
> smallest pleasurable emotion. . . . *The Mysterious Mother*
> . . . a tragedy by the late celebrated Lord Orford [Horace
> Walpole], labours under an insuperable defect of this kind.
> The plot turns upon a mother's premeditated incest with
> her own son, a catastrophe productive only of horror and
> aversion, and for which the many well-written scenes intro-
> ductory to this monstrous event cannot atone.[52]

Drake commends Dante's story of Ugolino in the *Inferno* as an instance of

a painful subject tastefully handled, and applies the same standard to

the other founder of a gothic "school":

> In the production of Mrs. Radcliffe, the Shakspeare of Romance
> Writers, . . . may be found many scenes truly terrific in
> their conception, yet so softened down, and the mind so much
> relieved, by the intermixture of beautiful description, or
> pathetic incident, that the impression of the whole never
> becomes too strong, never degenerates into horror, but plea-
> surable emotion is ever the predominating result.[53]

Even Scott, with his full appreciation of terror and the sensa-

tional, adopts the "familiarity breeds contempt" argument with regard to

the explicitness of horror, correctly employing Burke's doctrine of

obscurity in support of his position.[54]

From Burke through Scott, the advocacy of a manipulative, sensa-

tional literature was counterbalanced by a reticence that was sometimes

moral, sometimes aesthetic. Ideas of limitation merged with ideas of

effectiveness and impressiveness. Burke had defined the general limit.

The reader's sufferings had to be aesthetically distanced, not authentic

or personal; they had to be felt in some way different from actual pain,

fear, and horror. That is the point of Mrs. Radcliffe's distinction

between terror and horror—the separation of personal and aesthetic

passions. This requirement that terror be moderated and distanced was

particularly applicable to the gothic, because the conviction persisted

that gothic exuberance and inventiveness were insidious forces which

might become dangerous, morally and imaginatively.

Of course, the danger, like the imaginary gothic world, was both

appalling and attractive, a paradox upon which gothic ambivalence was

founded. In considering anxieties over sensationalism and the pressure

to limit it, the different versions of "gothic barbarity"--the ambiva-
lent and the nostalgic--become very important. Underlying desires for
restorative fantasy, fears of strong passions, attraction to power and
evil or revulsion against them--these competing impulses affected the
degree to which sensational elements were accepted and exploited in the
gothic novels.

Various shadings of disgust, interest and enthusiasm are discern-
ible among writers and critics: (1) disapproval and avoidance (e.g.,
Clara Reeve, antiquaries), (2) disapproval yet interest (e.g., A. L.
Barbauld, Nathan Drake), (3) qualified approval and moderate use (e.g.,
Ann Radcliffe, Sophia Lee), (4) open approval yet moderate use (e.g.,
Horace Walpole, most gothic dramatists[55]), (5) qualified critical
approval (e.g., Burke, Scott, Coleridge), and (6) open approval and
full use (e.g., Lewis, Maturin, le Fanu, Lovecraft). However, when we
study the occurrence of sensationalism in the gothic with attention to
the main gothic aims and strategies, this list reduces to two basic
positions.

Uneasiness with sensationalism is typical of the nostalgic mode of
the gothic. Because that mode concentrates on the heroism and senti-
mentality which it distills from gothic barbarity, it can accommodate
terrifying figures only as intruders into an ideal setting. It will not
make them too prominent or attractive. The tendency of the nostalgic
mode is to become decorous and conservative. It converts the imaginary
gothic world into an ideal extension of the ethical climate of the
1780's and '90's, or into an ideal corrective for it. As we have seen
in the case of *The Old English Baron,* this process of idealization--

whatever the discontent with present realities from which it arises--
simply improves upon conventional values by purifying them in fantasy.
In serving this end the fantasy is purged of disturbing themes and
characters. The emphasis falls on chivalric adventure, rationalized
supernaturalism, and a pallid version of romantic love, conducted in
an atmosphere which encourages the expression of certain fashionable
emotions--melancholy, melting sensibility, pathos, filial piety--and
discourages other less governable ones--lust, ambition, jealousy,
malevolence, and fear. It is the influence of the nostalgic mode that
resists the depiction in gothic novels of sexual rapacity, violence,
real supernaturalism, and the dissolution of the family, even in works
which are not fundamentally nostalgic. For example, W. F. Wright notes
how Mrs. Radcliffe was guided in some matters by the nostalgic mode.
Though she did not shrink from depicting physical sufferings and tor-
tures quite graphically, she was careful not to allow any such events
to befall her protagonists: "Mrs. Radcliffe treated herself and her
readers to the chill experience of horror and, at the same time,
preserved her worthy characters free from all stain which would prevent
their ultimate happiness and the joyful termination of the story."[56]

The ambivalent mode of gothicism, on the other hand, is fascinated
with, and dependent upon, those features of the imaginary gothic world
which the nostalgic mode avoids. The ambivalence originates with atti-
tudes towards the putative gothic ancestors and their environment. The
gothic is attractive and repellent for the same reasons: its violence,
its rampant sexual and material aggressiveness, its dedication to
extremes of feeling, action, and belief, its alienation from contemporary

life. The gothic is exciting and tantalizing, yet ambivalence makes one

grateful to encounter it only in imagination.

Because the ambivalence concerns terror, force, and power, sensa-

tionalism pervades this mode of the gothic. The central experience of

this mode is not, as in the nostalgic, a delightful suspension of

banality and common-sense; instead, it is an experience of being over-

whelmed--by strong, disturbing sensations, by political or religious

tyranny, by mystification, by an oppressive sense of the alien. The

reader's resistance lies in his enlightened contempt for the gothic

world, which does not permit him to lend too much credence to the fanta-

sies set within it. Nevertheless, he willingly suffers manipulation of

his fears, expectations and prejudices, in an exotic atmosphere which

both verifies and limits the reality of his terror.

The reader's reward--parallel to the psychological exercise that

Burke describes--is the thematic expansiveness of the mode. The ambiv-

alent mode uses sensationalism so freely, not only in line with Burke's

discovery that sensationalism can move an audience irrationally, but

also in line with its preoccupation, which is irrationality itself. The

ambivalent mode concentrates on the fate of victims in extreme situa-

tions, sufferers of extraordinary sensations--situations and sensations

readily disposed in the imaginary gothic world. The reader shares in

the extremity from a safe distance, so that he is, simultaneously,

disturbed and reassured by it.

The distance is largely achieved through exoticism, and in this

matter, too, nostalgia and ambivalence differ. In the nostalgic mode,

the gothic world is exotic in direct proportion to the gothicist's

antiquarian interests or disaffection with the present. The ideal world

may be more or less historical, more or less insistently alien, but the

exoticism is never a mask for threatening subjects since those are

rarely present. Scott has explained the value of the exotic for ambiva-

lent gothicism in his preface to Radcliffe's novels:

> She has uniformly selected the south of Europe for her places
> of action, whose passions, like the weeds of the climate, are
> supposed to attain portentous growth under the fostering sun;
> which abounds with ruined monuments of antiquity, as well as
> the more massive remnants of the middle ages; and where feudal
> tyranny and Catholic superstition still continue to exercise
> their sway over the slave and bigot, and to indulge to the
> haughty lord, or more haughty priest, that sort of despotic
> power, the exercise of which seldom fails to deprave the heart,
> and disorder the judgment. These circumstances are skilfully
> selected, to give probability to events which could not, with-
> out great violation of truth, be represented as having taken
> place in England.[57]

The exotic settings and characters not only prevent the violation

of truth but also the violation of the modern reader's confidence that

his own time is essentially *different* from the gothic. Such confidence

is a crucial part of the ambivalent position, and it is expressed in

that configuration typical of the ambivalent mode, the confrontation

pattern.

Bertrand Evans has used the study of confrontation patterns to

extend the idea of exoticism beyond the geographical. Evans sees the

relationship between gothic protagonists and their persecutors as a case

of different cultures brought together by apparent historical accident.

The source of terror is the friction between their mutually incomprehen-

sible systems of moral and aesthetic values:

> Walpole's Isabel [sic] and Mrs. Radcliffe's Adeline, Emily,
> and Ellena were no more born to the medieval scene than were
> Pamela and Evelina. Enlightened, virtuous, and "sensible,"

they had been uprooted from their proper society and, with
contemporary emotional and intellectual patterns intact,
thrust into that era which was "barbarous." Subjected to the
various menaces of the Dark Ages, they served as projections
of the nervous system of their own time, as sensitive regis-
ters of emotional reaction to horrors, and, clearly, as
transmitters of the thrills of their exposure. When they
shuddered, their home-bound contemporaries shuddered.[58]

According to Evans, the persecutor is the representative of the

barbarous, dangerous gothic era. His lair (castle, palace, chateau,

monastery) is the physical symbol of that era--specifically, of its

endurance or decay--and from the style of its construction and its state

of repair we may infer much about the time and place that we, and the

protagonists, have entered. The placing of ruined castles and abbeys in

medieval settings, against all chronological probability, was not always

a novelist's oversight. Ruins bore significances which we have already

noted in some detail. They were melancholy reminders of mutability or

cheerful reminders that tyrannical political and religious institutions

had been replaced. In addition, however, given the more pejorative

connotation of gothic as *anachronistic,* these ruins and their occupants

also represent the presence of outmoded tastes and manners in the midst

of modern society. Thus, the presentation of the conflict between

gothic protagonist and gothic villain in historical or inter-cultural

terms is a way of isolating aberrant forces *within contemporary society.*

Safely removed from immediate reality, such gothic barbarities may be

rendered contemptible and, at the same time, may be admired for their

sheer brutality and magnificence.

The convenient notion of "gothic manners" is as adaptable within

the gothic novel as in common usage; in the novel, it serves to mark off

the various gradations of villainy and the lines of conflict.

A striking example of conflict which shows the effect of ambivalence on gothic characterization occurs in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The heroine, Emily St. Aubert, and her aunt, who has just become Mme. Montoni, are crossing the Alps into Italy. This particular journey had been the testing ground for picturesque and sublime sensibility at least since John Dennis made it in 1688, and the two women react in ways characteristic of their different positions on the scale of taste. While Emily's soul rises in fashionable accord with the sublimity of cliffs and gorges and bursts forth regularly in poetic effusions of sensibility, Mme. Montoni's response is recognizably old-fashioned, and perhaps more realistic: she is agitated by the dangers of the passage and disgusted by the chaos of rock and snow around her. This throwback to older ideas of order and security offends Emily because it is stodgy and insensitive, but there is evidence from outside the novel that Radcliffe was not wholly in sympathy with this opinion. Writing in her travel journals of her trip down the Rhine, she reports that the cliffs, the high wind, the roar of the river and the force of its currents "were circumstances of the true sublime, inspiring terror in some and admiration in a high degree."[59] Yet, later during the ascent of Skiddaw she has trouble enjoying the sublime fully: "But our situation was too critical, or too unusual, to permit the just impressions of such sublimity. . . . We followed the guide in silence, and, till we regained the more open wild, had no leisure for exclamation."[60]

Mme. Montoni's ethical, as well as aesthetic, insensitivity is rewarded through her marriage to the ruthless Montoni, whose tastes are as superficial as his moral code. Since Montoni is truly a denizen of

the gothic world (decadent Venice, the terrifying Apennine stronghold),
Emily seems entrapped in the usual pattern of confrontation. But, as I
have suggested, much of the conflict is displaced, and Emily's side is
by no means vindicated at once. If she is a representative of a certain
time or of a certain recognizable character type--the youth of exquisite
sensibility--she also must bear the weaknesses of that time and the type.
So the confrontation's meaning cuts both ways. Although both the aunt
and Montoni are unsympathetic characters--the latter an alien--they
effectively question the usefulness of Emily's emotionalism. A good
part of the terror in Emily's encounter with Montoni comes from the
realization that violence does not require an active imagination like
hers in order to be successful and magnificent. Montoni is pitiless and
tasteless, but in his world Emily's passions and appreciation of natural
beauty and sublimity are rendered rather silly. They will not save her
from him; for a time they prevent her from thinking inventively of her
own safety. The pattern of confrontation in *Udolpho* both confirms the
conventional, reassuring assumptions about gothic dangers and presents
a feature of contemporary culture--excessive sensibility and the need
for fresh terrors--in a less flattering light.[61]

Confrontation is the natural pattern for ambivalence to assume in
the gothic because it reflects divisions within society and the person-
ality. The battleground of the personality requires exotic distancing
more than the battleground of customs and mores, because it is so much
closer to individual fears and revulsions, and is therefore more liable
to repel the reader. The exotic trappings--castles, ruins, foreign
stereotypes, archaic language and manners--are necessary because they

permit the setting apart of threatening yet fascinating potentialities within society and within the self. It is as if such things were merely, exclusively gothic, and consequently denatured. Exoticism amounts to a compromise with the reader's internal and cultural censorship very much like Walpole's compromise with prevailing architectural taste. The advantage gained is the same: a new area is claimed for the exploring imagination.

In the case of ambivalent gothicism, the area prepared for freer exploration is the realm of terror, extremity and abnormal personality. That preoccupation explains why Burke's psychological theories reveal so lucidly the basis of the gothic sensibility in fiction; for, as we shall see in the detailed study of selected gothic novels in the next chapter, ambivalence, with its characteristic themes and methods, dominates gothic fiction. It incorporates the nostalgic mode only to corrupt it, showing its idealism to be a delusory myth. Instead of *gothic ideals,* the ambivalence of the fiction results in an *obsession with dualities,* of which the typical pattern of confrontation is merely the most obvious case. In the gothic novels we will discover sexual aggression juxtaposed with sexual passivity, brutality with gentility, insensitivity with sensibility, selfishness with selflessness, coercion with justice, ambition with humility, and blasphemy with piety.

FOOTNOTES

[1] McIntyre, "Were the Gothic Novels Gothic?" and "The Later Career of the Elizabethan Villain Hero"; for a counter-argument see Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama,* pp. 11-12.

[2] Diana Spearman, *The Novel and Society* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), Ch. 4, "The Rise of the Far Eastern Novel and the Beginnings of Romance in Europe"; see B. Sprague Allen on gothic and "Chinois"; Lovejoy, "On the Chinese Origin of a Romanticism," *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Capricorn edit.), pp. 99-135; Varma, *Gothic Quest,* Ch. 2, "The Background: Origins and Cross Currents" (p. 23 ff.); Harrison R. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), Ch. 25.

[3] Walter Francis Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction, 1760-1814: A Reinterpretation*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Illinois, 1935; *Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature,* 22, 3-4 (1937); Nelson C. Smith, "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe," *Studies in English Literature,* 13, 4 (1973), 577-590.

[4] James R. Foster, *History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1949).

[5] Randolph Hoyt Hunt, "Hence, vain deluding joys . . . ," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1962.

[6] Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1974), pp. 3-11; Tompkins, *The Popular Novel,* pp. 72-84, 129, 209 ff.; Spearman, pp. 221-223; John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1943), pp. 101-114; Michael Hadley, "A Critical Puzzle: A Search for the German Gothic Novel," paper presented to the Samuel Johnson Society of the Northwest in Seattle, Washington, 12 October 1974.

[7] W. E. Coleman, "On the Discrimination of Gothicisms," Ph.D. Dissertation, City University of New York, 1970; Francis R. Hart, "Limits of the Gothic: The Scottish Example," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* Vol. 3, *Racism in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland & London: Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1973), pp. 137-153; Robert D. Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel," *PMLA,* 84 (March 1969), 282-290; Robert D. Hume and Robert L. Platner, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Rejoinder," *PMLA,* 86 (March 1971), 266-274.

[8] Sir Walter Scott, "Prefatory Memoir," *The Novels of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe* (1824; rpt., Hildesheim & New York: Georg Olm Verlag, 1974), p. xviii.

[9] Ibid., p. xxiii.

[10]J. T. Boulton, ed., *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. lxxxi-cxxvii; Walter J. Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 83-98; Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 12-17; Pamela Kaufman, "Burke, Freud, and the Gothic," *Studies in Burke and his Time*, 13, 44 (1972), 2179-2192; Lévy, pp. 68-69.

[11]Ian Ross, "A Bluestocking Over the Border: Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu's Aesthetic Adventures in Scotland, 1766," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 28, 3 (1965), 225-227.

[12]David Hume, "Of Tragedy," *Four Dissertations* (1757); rpt. *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. W. J. Bate (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952), pp. 193-195.

[13]Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2nd edn. (1759; rpt., Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1970), p. 58. Subsequent references to the *Enquiry* will be to this facsimile edition and will be given within the text.

[14]Hume, p. 195, n. 4 (Hume's note).

[15]Compare Hume, p. 193: "It seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy."

[16]This follows Hume's doctrine (pp. 196-197) of *conversion*, by which the force of the imagination dominates over the normal effect of the passion, converting it to its own direction.

[17]Hipple, pp. 91-92.

[18]*Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* by J. and A. L. Aikin, 2nd edn. (London: J. Johnson, 1775), p. 125.

[19]"On the Supernatural in Poetry. By the late Mrs. Radcliffe," *New Monthly Magazine*, 16, 62 (1826), 149-150. As the editor explains, this is not really an essay but an extract from the introduction to Radcliffe's last published work, the novel *Gaston De Blondeville*, which also appeared in 1826.

[20]Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (1933; 2nd edn. rpt., New York: Meridian, 1956), trans. Angus Davidson, p. 27. The only direct reference to Burke comes in the Introduction, p. 20, n. 15.

[21]See Boulton, p. lviii; Kiely, pp. 12-13.

[22]Kiely, p. 13.

[23]Ibid., p. 15.

[24]Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) published the second, greatly revised edition of the *Carceri* in 1765. See *Drawings and Etchings at Columbia University* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1972); Aldous Huxley, *Prisons with the "Carceri" Etchings by G. B. Piranesi* (London: Trianon Press, 1949); for a response to Piranesi from within the neo-gothic period, see the "Pains of Opium" section of Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* 1st edn. (1821; rpt., ed. Alethea Hayter, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 105-107. It is significant that De Quincey mistakenly calls Piranesi's architectural fantasies "Gothic halls."

[25]Kiely, p. 13; also see W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (1946; rpt., New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961), pp. 153-156.

[26]Boulton, p. cvii.

[27]Ibid., p. cvii. Boulton quotes from Milner's introductory letter, "Means necessary for further illustrating the Ecclesiastical Architecture of the Middle Ages," contained in the symposium, *Essays on Gothic Architecture* (1800).

[28]*Thraliana,* quoted in Boulton, p. xcii.

[29]The actual discussion of horizontal and vertical comes in Part Two, Section VII of the *Enquiry* under *"vastness."* The difference between vastness and infinity is negligible.

[30]Peter Quennell, *Romantic England: Writing and Painting, 1717-1851* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), pp. 28-32; John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and Its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: privately printed, 1823).

[31]Lévy, pp. 641-642.

[32]Radcliffe describes this process in "On the Supernatural," pp. 149-150.

[33]Samuel Holt Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1935; rpt., Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960), Chs. I, IV, & X; Hipple, pp. 13-24; Henry V. S. & Margaret S. Ogden, *English Taste in Landscape in the 17th Century* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1955), pp. 134-167; Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1959); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1960).

[34]W. F. Wright, p. 96.

[35] In architecture, at least, sensationalism and flexibility were to become important issues. In his *History of the Gothic Revival,* Eastlake condemns virtually all neo-gothic building before Milner for excessively free adaptation of traditional gothic features, yet, at the other end of his historical period, he defends Street's and Butterfield's experiments with modern materials and "imported" styles.

[36] Joel Porte, "In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction," in *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism,* ed. G. R. Thompson (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 42-64; Peter Brooks, "Virtue and Terror: *The Monk,*" *ELH,* 40, 2 (1973), 249-263.

[37] Kaufman, pp. 2190-2191.

[38] Kiely, p. 17.

[39] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, "An Inquiry into Those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations," *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld,* ed. with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), II, 214. This essay also appeared in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose.*

[40] Ibid., II, 215-216.

[41] Ibid., II, 217-225.

[42] "On Romances: An Imitation," *Works,* II, 171-175.

[43] Compare Addison, *Spectator,* #418.

[44] Nathan Drake, M.D., *Literary Hours: or Sketches, Critical, Narrative, and Poetical,* 4th edn. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), I, vi (preface). The preface is dated August 1798.

[45] Drake, "On Gothic Superstition," with "Henry Fitzowen, a Gothic Tale," *Literary Hours,* I, 105.

[46] Drake, "On the Government of the Imagination: On the Frenzy of Tasso and Collins," *Literary Hours,* I, 12-13.

[47] "On Gothic Superstition," p. 108. Note the close paraphrase of Burke.

[48] Ibid., p. 112.

[49] Ibid., p. 106.

[50] *Literary Hours,* I, 269-275.

[51] Ibid., p. 269.

[52] Ibid., p. 271.

[53] Ibid., pp. 273-274.

[54] Sir Walter Scott, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann," originally published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review,* collected in *On Novelists and Fiction,* pp. 312-353.

[55] Thorp, "Stage Adventures"; compare Robert D. Mayo, "Gothic Romance in the Magazines," *PMLA,* 65 (1950), 762-789, "The Gothic Short Story in the Magazines," *MLR,* 37 (1942), 448-454, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1962); Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press: 1790-1820* (London: Printed for the Bibliographical Society by Oxford Univ. Press, 1939).

[56] W. F. Wright, pp. 107-108; see also Tompkins, pp. 258-259.

[57] Scott, "Prefatory Memoir," p. xxiii.

[58] Evans, *Gothic Drama,* pp. 8-9.

[59] Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, Through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany, etc.* (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1795), p. 294.

[60] Ibid., pp. 456-457.

[61] Nelson C. Smith, "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe," demonstrates, contrary to usual opinion, a strain of criticism of sensibility in Radcliffe's novels, which makes her position closer to such satirists of the gothic cult as Peacock and Jane Austen.

CHAPTER IV

EROTIC DANGERS, MONASTIC TYRANNY, AND FAMILY SECRETS

Themes in the Ambivalent Gothic

If nostalgia for gothic ancestors results in the creation of an

idyllic realm in fiction and fantasy which they may populate, ambivalence

towards the gothic produces a radically different pattern. Permeated

with danger, violence and strange magnificence, the imaginary world of

the ambivalent mode is often sustained by erotic themes. Power is won

through sexual crimes or is used to commit them. Persecutions are

mounted in order to gain sexual prey. The villain-hero suffers from,

and is compelled by, his perverted erotic passions, abetted by his

stunted emotional growth. The over-reaching that is characteristic of

his career usually has sexual overtones and consequences. The thwarting

of full erotic expression becomes, in gothic fiction, the mark of all

destructive educational regimes, the source and instrument of all author-

ity, including the parental. Victims who enter this gothic world assume

that the expected assault against them will be sexual--at least in part--

or that it will try to block their own sexual impulses, about which,

however, they may be confused. Whatever learning arises from their

predicament concerns the erotic aspect of their character.

In this concentration on erotic violence and depredations the

gothic novel follows a wider interest. In a survey of the sexual mores

reflected in eighteenth-century fiction, Harrison Steeves has suggested

that a preoccupation with "libertinism, callous intrigue, and even

sexual violence" was generalized, and that such a preoccupation arose

from real problems and anxieties:

> Love in the modern sense; that is, sexual interest associ-
> ated more or less closely with other spiritual and intellectual
> relations, is, to be sure, the romantic theme of most eighteenth-
> century fictions, but sinister sexual complication is a charac-
> teristic adjunct of the standard theme. In the whole breadth of
> that fiction we see sex in all its fluctuating lights and shadows,
> but very commonly as a road to misery of one sort or another.
> . . . In the eighteenth century its material effects could be
> . . . hopelessly tragic. Perhaps with this picture before us we
> can understand why the moralists of the century spoke of seduc-
> tion or sexual surrender as "worse than death." In the merely
> physical sense it often was. Morally, it might in the end result
> in the utter annihilation of personality and self-respect. The
> fears and compunctions of the heroines of fiction were not illu-
> sions and not mere pietistic sentiments; they were practical
> wisdom.[1]

While the reality of sexual danger and the effects of class anta-

gonism help to explain some features of the gothic novels—such as their

great appeal to female readers—gothic fiction remains, nevertheless, a

special case. Gothic fiction treats power, violence, and sexuality not

as adjuncts of the standard, romantic theme but as a counterpoint to it.

The nostalgic use of putative gothic ancestors requires that they be

moral superiors; therefore, the nostalgic mode acquires a taste for

romantic, chivalric love, for fine ceremony, for stylized eroticism at

the most. The ambivalent view of the gothic period requires, for poli-

tical as well as psychological reasons,[2] a strong, disturbing undercur-

rent of violence and sexual rapacity, which gradually overcomes any

pretense of historical accuracy or idealization. As the ambivalent mode

resists the nostalgic, the gothic novel becomes as concerned with the

psychology of the persecutor as with that of the victim. Mrs. Barbauld's

prescription--that only the sufferings of the just should be depicted

sympathetically--does not apply. Moreover, although the gothic novel

includes, and relies upon, the tension generated by real sexual aggres-

sion, it is not much taken up with redressing real grievances, teaching

prudent behaviour, or proposing realistic solutions to problems. It is

more an exploratory than a didactic kind of literature, and its natural

field of operation is the landscape of extremity, which is mainly inter-

nal, whose denizens are the inflicters and sufferers of torture--

frequently interchangeable pairs.

From the time of its inception, with Otranto, the ambivalent mode

seeks to present "mere men and women . . . in extraordinary positions,"

and to put its audience, as nearly as possible, in the same positions,

under the influence of terror and persecution. In doing so, its purpose

is to investigate the esoteric regions of the psyche, by pursuing dis-

turbing facts--abnormal sexuality, abuse of power, the attraction of evil,

the internal warfare of the mind--to their extreme manifestations.

Because the ambivalent mode succeeds in conducting this pursuit under

cover of certain prejudices about the historical or geographical setting

of its activities, it both censors and insinuates subjects which would

be horribly painful if approached directly and realistically.

As Scott observed, the setting of gothic novels is mainly adapted

to this purpose, and the more a particular setting is normally associated

with extremes of behaviour and feeling the better suited it is for gothic

use. Existing prejudices and fantasy-images are most serviceable, and

none more so for gothic fiction than the conventional wisdom to the

effect that monasteries and convents were havens for criminals and

sexual deviants. This basic tenet of religious nationalism in England

and of anti-clericalism on the Continent was perhaps supported by what

were perceived in the North to be Counter-Reformation crimes against

rationality and freedom, but the animus brought to bear against Catholic

institutions in gothic fiction, where they are an absorbing, regular

subject, is on account of their *unnaturalness,* and hence, their perfect

representation of forces that also strongly affect the non-monastic

society. In particular, the ability of monks and nuns, in fiction, to

shape, control, and distort the individual character is an exaggerated

account of the whole process of education, told only in extreme, dialec-

tical terms. The recurrent monkish villains and monastic settings of

gothic novels provide an exaggerated model of personality development

and the abuse of power by authorities and institutions.

Some examples will make clear how nearly theoretical this notion of

monasticism becomes, an unusual trend for a literary type which is so

notoriously non-didactic. The first example involves a comparison with

Denis Diderot's *The Nun* (*La Religieuse,* 1760), a novel based on a real

case of conventual tyranny and meant to expose and combat the genuine

evils of the monastic system. It is remarkable that the serious indict-

ment contained in the first memorandum of defence drafted by M. Manouri,

advocate for the heroine Suzanne, raises many of the same objections

that are commonplace in gothic fiction:

> Are convents so essential to the constitution of a state? . . . .
> What need has the Bridegroom of so many foolish virgins? And
> the human race of so many victims? . . . Does God, who made man
> sociable, approve of his hiding himself away? Can God, who made
> man so inconstant and frail, authorize such rash vows? Can
> these vows, which run counter to our natural inclinations, ever
> be properly observed except by a few abnormal creatures in whom

the seeds of passion are dried up, and whom we should rightly
classify as freaks of nature if the state of our knowledge
allowed us to understand the internal structure of man as
well as we understand his external appearance? Do all these
lugubrious ceremonies played out at the taking of the habit
or the profession, when a man or woman is set apart for the
monastic life and for woe, suspend the animal functions? On
the contrary, do not these instincts awaken in silence, con-
straint and idleness with a violence unknown to the people
in the world who are busy with countless other things?
Where do we see minds obsessed by impure visions which haunt
them and drive them on? Where do we see that fathomless
boredom, that pallor, that emaciation which are all symptoms
of wasting and self-consuming nature?[3]

The tirade drags on further, but the questions are rhetorical,

given Diderot's evident purpose. Similarly, no one is exposed to the

ambivalent gothic vision for long without learning that all the answers

point to the monastic target. There is nothing in Manouri's memorandum,

or in Diderot's narrative, that is not a confirmation--albeit in sensa-

tionalized form--of popular beliefs, that is not echoed in gothic fic-

tion.

Thus characterized, the monastic system is truly *gothic,* in several

senses of the term. It is outmoded, an anachronism within the prevailing

political and intellectual order. It is tyrannical, maintained by mental

and physical brutality. It is barbarous and irrational. Having decayed

like the gothic ruin it usually inhabits, it avidly promotes the decay

of its unwilling members.

Belief in monastic perfidy, or at least in the unnaturalness of the

monastic way of life, penetrates even less rabid depictions of monks and

nuns. There are numerous reversions to this belief in Ann Radcliffe's

novels,[4] each adhering fairly well to the standard line.

In *The Romance of the Forest,* for example, Adeline, the extremely

emotional female protagonist, confides in Mme. La Motte, the wife of her

temporary guardian, some details of her education in a convent. Like

many helpless young women in gothic novels she is pressured to take the

veil, but she is sensible and reluctant:

> Too long had I been immured in the walls of a cloister, and
> too much had I seen of the sullen misery of its votaries,
> not to feel horror and disgust at the prospect of being
> added to their numbers.

The "Lady Abbess" uses the typical propagandistic and coercive approach

of the unscrupulous pursuer of novices:

> It was her method, when she wanted to make converts to her
> order, to denounce and terrify rather than to persuade and
> allure. Here were the arts of cunning practiced upon fear,
> not those of sophistication upon reason [but it is clear
> that Radcliffe does not approve of either technique]. She
> employed numberless strategems to gain me to her purpose,
> and they all wore the complexion of her character. But in
> the life to which she would have devoted me, I saw too many
> forms of real terror, to be overcome by the influence of
> her ideal host, and was resolute in rejecting the veil.
> Here I passed several years of miserable resistance against
> cruelty and superstition.

Adeline goes on to describe the tedium of her existence:

> . . . at length the horrors of the monastic life rose so
> fully to my view that fortitude gave way before them.
> Excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society--from the
> pleasant view of nature--almost from the light of day--
> condemned to silence--rigid formality--abstinence and pen-
> ance--condemned to forego the delights of a world, which
> imagination painted in the gayest and most alluring colors,
> and whose hues were, perhaps, not the less captivating
> because they were only ideal--such was the state to which
> I was destined.[5]

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily takes refuge in a monastic com-

munity after her father's death, and she is treated well there, but she--

or rather Radcliffe--cannot resist criticizing the unhealthy lassitude

of the monks, who lead a secluded, quiet life contemplating the same

natural beauty that Emily herself admires so much, without her opportun-

ity to re-enter active society.[6]

Radcliffe is less violently anti-Catholic than some gothic novel-
ists, but her most charitable depictions of monasticism are tinged with
the same conventional suspicions. In *The Italian* she imagines an ideal
house, the convent of the *Santa della Pieta,* which is run according to
the principles of Shaftesburian benevolence instead of the regular
discipline. Radcliffe makes the abbess and sisters exceptionally com-
passionate and virtuous, while emphasizing that "the society of *Our
Lady of Pity* was such as a convent does not often shroud." In fact, the
goodness of the Abbess lies in her less-than-perfect observance of the
letter of Church law and her improved, but heretical, grounds for belief:

> Her religion was neither gloomy, nor bigotted; it was the
> sentiment of a grateful heart offering itself up to a Deity,
> who delights in the happiness of his creatures; and she con-
> formed to the customs of the Roman church, without supposing
> a faith in all of them to be necessary to salvation. This
> opinion, however, she was obliged to conceal, lest her very
> virtue should draw upon her the punishment of a crime, from
> some fierce ecclesiastics, who contradicted in their prac-
> tice the very essential *principles,* which the christianity
> they professed would have taught them.[7]

Radcliffe contrasts the mild, equable rule and demeanor of the
Abbess with the treachery and ruthlessness of the Ursaline abbess from
whose dubious protection the heroine Ellena is later abducted. This
running comparison sets in proper perspective Radcliffe's creation of an
idealized female community very much like the most successful *real* con-
vents. The convent of the *Santa della Pieta* is an authentic matriarchy,
and it is easy to see why Ellena succumbs to its attractiveness. She is
a helpless orphan--like most gothic "innocents"--who has lost her sole
guardian and is searching desperately for real, or even surrogate, par-
ents. The Abbess of the *Santa della Pieta* temporarily fills the place

of mother until Ellena can meet her real mother (Sister Olivia of the

Ursalines, who remains unknown to her through most of the novel, and who

is persecuted by the evil "mother" of the order). The motherliness of

the good Abbess originates in universal qualities of humane leadership

and active virtue. Like the ideal characteristics of Clara Reeve's

protagonists in *The Old English Baron,* these are backward projections of

values that definitely are *not* gothic:

> In her lectures to the nuns she seldom touched upon
> points of faith, but explained and enforced the moral duties,
> particularly such as were most practicable in the society to
> which she belonged; such as tended to soften and harmonize
> the affections, to impart that repose of mind, which per-
> suades to the practice of sisterly kindness, universal charity,
> and the most pure and elevated devotion. When she spoke of
> religion, it appeared so interesting, so beautiful, that her
> attentive auditors revered and loved it as a friend, a refiner
> of the heart, a sublime consoler. . . .
> The society appeared like a large family, of which the
> Lady abbess was the mother, rather than an assemblage of
> strangers.[8]

By means of such benign figures, the nostalgic attitude towards the

gothic occasionally appears against the darker, more threatening back-

ground. But it is the "assemblage of strangers," not the ideal community,

to which the gothic novel returns with greatest interest. Here is the

subject of the novelists' deepest psychological penetration. Here are

their most disturbing revelations of the desolation of souls. Monasti-

cism is made to provide a complete pattern of the distorted society and

the fragmented psyche. Full exploitation of its potential to represent

the decay of normal feelings and attachments begins with M. G. Lewis'

The Monk.[9] Lewis offers the most consistently erotic interpretation of

"monkish malignancy" in any gothic novel, an interpretation which, once

noticed and misunderstood, made both novel and novelist infamous.[10] In

fact, *The Monk* is an odd mixture of voices and techniques. Its frequent,
lurid sadism connects it with the sub-literature of excess and titilla-
tion, yet the flagrancy of its sexual imagery is deceptive; for, beneath
the lurid surface where Ambrosio's utter ruination is avidly described,
there is a level of acute, subtle observation of motives and compulsions.
At this level, *The Monk* progresses beyond the mere stimulation of fear
and excitement, and it would be fairer to associate it with the minute
internal analysis of Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* than the blandish-
ments of sensationalism.

The *Monk* is worth examining closely for its successful transforma-
tion of stereotypes and stock figures into a repellent yet fascinating
image of human viciousness and self-deception. Many of the sardonic
comments with which the narrative is laced seem to reinforce the stereo-
types, as if to suggest—and the contemporary reader would probably
agree—that crudeness, violence and duplicity are what one should expect
of barbarous times and a barbarous people. Despite such reassurances,
however, the threatening implications of the "gothic manners" displayed
in *The Monk* are not restricted to the alien environment.

In *The Monk* the familiar elements of monastic evil—persecution,
hypocrisy, lasciviousness, power-hunger—are put in service to a peculiar
vision of human disease. Starting with caustic but rather juvenile
satire, based on immediately recognizable comic types, Lewis gradually
builds a darker, more hysterical account of the division and destruction
of the personality. Although the emotional centre of the narrative is a
single, extended catastrophe—the temptation and surrender of Ambrosio—
Lewis persists in linking Ambrosio's vulnerability, his pride and his

compulsions, with the weaknesses of the ostensible representatives of

normality in the fictional world. The master stroke of Lewis' technique

is his insistence on tracing the various dualities of personality

involved in Ambrosio's downfall in the sympathetic characters as well,

his delight in subjecting them to the same satanic, chaotic, subcon-

scious forces, on a minor scale. The corruption of the "villain" finds

a reflection in the innocent faces of the other male figures, rendering

their heroism much less certain. Lewis even raises the possibility that

they do not have the courage, or the desperation arising from accidental

circumstances, to follow through with their own obsessions, that a fail-

ure of will and imagination, more than a triumph of virtue, separates

them from Ambrosio's circle of damnation. The subversive—because the

attractive—line is the one the mob and the "heroic" figures take, the

one that Lewis invites the reader to take, only to be trapped by it: a

confidence in one's self-righteousness before Ambrosio's example, as if

there were no identification with him and no vicarious enjoyment of his

career.

The Monk opens with references to many useful stereotypes: Spanish

lustfulness, hypocrisy coupled with devoutness, cunning Catholic propa-

ganda. The reader is not allowed to lend any credence to the trappings

of piety, nor to develop any nostalgic interest in them, for they are

made ridiculous as soon as they are introduced. To alert our suspicions,

Lewis sets the first scene in the Abbey Church of the Capuchins where a

large crowd has pressed in, apparently to witness the sermon of the

famous abbot, Ambrosio. The spiritual bankruptcy of this throng is a

fitting complement to that which Ambrosio has so far managed to conceal,

even from himself:

> Do not encourage the idea that the Crowd was assembled
> either from motives of piety or thirst of information. But
> very few were influenced by those reasons; and in a city
> where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in
> Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless at-
> tempt. The Audience now assembled in the Capuchin Church
> was collected by various causes, but all of them were
> foreign to the ostensible motive. The Women came to show
> themselves, the Men to see the Women: Some were attracted
> by curiosity to hear an Orator so celebrated; Some came
> because they had not better means of employing their time
> till the play began; Some from being assured that it would
> be impossible to find places in the Church; and one half of
> Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other
> half. The only persons truly anxious to hear the Preacher
> were a few antiquated devotees, and half a dozen rival
> Orators, determined to find fault with and ridicule the
> discourse. As to the remainder of the Audience, the Sermon
> might have been omitted altogether, certainly without their
> being disappointed, and very probably without their per-
> ceiving the omission (p. 7).

Lewis reverts to this cynical, flippant voice whenever he needs to

reaffirm the correctness of his reader's expectations, to remind the

reader that the curious behaviour of the Spaniards should not surprise

him. Yet, as the cynicism wears thin, we come to realize that the

opening scene serves another purpose: this is the first of several

attempts to reduce the motivation for all actions, including the pro-

tagonists', to the lowest common denominator. Lewis appears to delight

in revealing the ambiguous meaning of normally "pure" actions--prayer,

courtship, heroism, charity. For this reason the somewhat unwieldy

comedy of the initial Church scene does not dilute the menace flowing

beneath it. Innocent gestures and intentions may be registered for

later reconsideration.

One example of such cultivated ambiguities will be especially use-

ful later in this discussion when we look at the significance of peri-

pheral characters and plot-lines. It is an apparently comic incident in

the opening scene. The young cavalier Lorenzo insists on removing

Antonia's veil in order better to observe her charms (p. 11). The

obvious reading of the incident emphasizes Antonia's virgin modesty and

Lorenzo's flirtatious boldness. Subsequently, however, this unmasking

is incorporated into a more sinister pattern. Antonia's physical beau-

ties are progressively exposed, literally laid bare, not only in the

self-seductive dreams of Ambrosio and the magical spectacle arranged by

Matilda, but also in the ominous dream of Lorenzo himself. As Antonia,

like the image of the Virgin, is transformed from chaste maiden into

"Medicean Venus," becoming the stimulus for Ambrosio's lustful fascina-

tion, the encounter with Lorenzo and its dream-sequel seem less innocuous

than at first. The confused erotic motives in Lorenzo are complemented

by the sexual misadventures of the other "heroic" figure, Raymond de las

Cisternas, whose subterranean surname is significant.

The sense of impending sexual disaster is evoked at once. Leonella,

Antonia's foolish aunt and companion, offers to explain the niece's shy-

ness and provincial ways by telling the story of her parents' unfortunate

marriage. The mother, Elvira, had fallen in love with a young nobleman

whose father, the former Marquis de las Cisternas, violently opposed the

match and finally drove the couple into exile in the West Indies. The

outcast nobleman succumbed to homesickness and tropical fever, leaving

his family in a state of utter dependency (p. 13).

This exposition is important on three different levels. The history

of Elvira's suffering supplies us with the background for one of the

major plot-lines--the unsuccessful effort to secure Raymond's protection

for Elvira and Antonia. Lewis develops this fairly conventional melo-

dramatic theme of familial reconciliation very little beyond the impli-
cation that assistance is always tantalizingly close yet strangely
unavailable, a failure due to accidents and miscues. At a second level,
the story hints at the eventual solution to the mystery of Ambrosio's
origin, for Leonella mentions the presumed death of Elvira's infant son
after he was taken away by the angry grandfather.

Despite her overly earnest treatment of it, the greatest importance
of Leonella's tale is thematic, for her burden, the tragic perversion of
love through rebellion and repression, becomes the principal subject of
The Monk. The various tangential episodes and plot-lines are all elabor-
ations of this theme, and it is similarly carried through successive
generations. As if by a perverse logic of inheritance, Elvira's unhappy
union brings not only Antonia into the world but also her ravisher and
murderer, and Elvira's hard-earned wisdom enforces the priggish moralism
that helps give the one control over the other. Elvira is the victim of
an interfering parent, yet she too intervenes--though on the side of
purity and goodness--with equally disastrous results. She deliberately
fails to arm her daughter's innocence with discernment, deriving from
her own misfortunes the extreme remedy of censorship. The remedy in-
flames the illness; innocence is as seductive as wantonness. In return
for her devotion, Elvira is strangled while trying to stop Ambrosio's
illicit "marriage" with his sister. This is a highly complicated revi-
sion of Elvira's own story. As is characteristic of *The Monk,* motives
and moral positions are freely substituted. The structure of *The Monk*
is founded upon exactly such repetitions-with-variations. The attentive
reader soon discovers that he must read a story like Leonella's both for

exposition and for warning.

When Ambrosio finally appears, he is clothed in such a glowing

reputation that his virtue, like the hubris of the hero of classical

tragedy, demands reduction. At this point the reader learns another

principle of the novel's process which closely resembles the magnetic

principle of the attraction of opposite poles. For Lewis there is a

necessity--psychological as well as dramatic--that compels the possessors

of perfect virtues or vices to encounter their opposites. The encounter

often produces a conversion in which the energy devoted to one extreme

position is transferred to the other.

Under questioning from Leonella, Lorenzo paints a portrait of

Ambrosio which sets him forth as just such a perfect being, but at the

same time it is clear that he has paid the price of unnaturalness for

his perfection:

> "He is now thirty years old, every hour of which period has
> been passed in study, total seclusion from the world, and
> mortification of the flesh. Till these last three weeks,
> when He was chosen superior of the Society to which He
> belongs, He has never been on the outside of the Abbey-
> walls. . . . His knowledge is said to be the most profound,
> his eloquence the most persuasive. In the whole course of
> his life He has never been known to transgress a single rule
> of his order; The smallest stain is not to be discovered
> upon his character; and He is reported to be so strict an
> observer of Chastity, that He knows not in what consists
> the difference of Man and Woman. The common People there-
> fore esteem him to be a Saint" (p. 17).

In accord with this report, after his sermon the congregation scramble

to honour Ambrosio as if he were indeed a living saint.

Lewis' sardonic tone throughout the scene renders the religiosity

contemptible, giving his readers the outlet of their own superiority to

"goths" and ignorant Spanish Catholics. The credulity and misplaced

loyalty of the congregation *deserves* to be betrayed through Ambrosio's depravity, and the trust of the community is partly responsible for his boldness in embarking upon his career of sexual adventure. In fact, Lewis makes sport of the pliability of the matrons of Madrid and the ease with which Ambrosio may lose his virtue. Where there are no saints, it is folly to believe in them, but Lewis also recognizes that groundless faith is positively dangerous. He allows the usual ambivalent view of the problem. On the one hand, excessive credulity may be dismissed as a characteristic of gothic times or gothic manners, and may be approached solely in terms of certain prejudices and expectations. Yet, on the other hand, the problem of duality, of public morality and inner compulsions, is made so real and immediate that it cannot be relegated entirely to the alien realm of fantasy. After all, Ambrosio's predicament is psychologically plausible *outside* the preconceived limits of monastic evil. The epigraph of *The Monk* is drawn from *Measure for Measure,*[11] and Ambrosio in many respects resembles the regent Angelo, who is a type of secular, governmental saint.

From the moment when Ambrosio's sainthood is invoked, *The Monk* moves toward his exposure and ruination. As John Berryman has observed, "the point is to conduct a remarkable man utterly to damnation." The speed of the movement is governed by what Berryman identifies as Lewis' "main insight": "It is surprising, after all, how *long* it takes—how *difficult* it is—to be certain of damnation."[12] It is the search for certainty, at the subjectively accurate pace, that requires the novelist's painstaking attention, that keeps the reader perched on the edge of spiritual hopefulness, willing, perhaps, to follow either to salvation

or to damnation, but preferring the latter. As Ambrosio withdraws into

the Abbey, Antonia exclaims, ironically and prophetically: "'He is

separated from the world! . . . Perhaps I shall never see him more!'"

(p. 20). Of course she is wrong, and it is the spectacle of Ambrosio's

immersion in the world and befoulment by it that occupies the bulk of the

novel.

After the requisite physiognomic description of Ambrosio (whose

face "seemed to announce the Man equally unacquainted with cares and

crimes") with its suggestive equivocations, we are shown the source of

his self-destructionn with little delay. Lewis points it out almost too

insistently, as if, caught up in the importance of his psychological

enterprise, he does not always know how best to use his enthusiasm and

his real analytical powers. In a long foreshadowing speech, Lorenzo

accurately assesses Ambrosio's likely behaviour:

> . . . a Man who has passed the whole of his life within the
> walls of a Convent, cannot have found the opportunity to be
> guilty, even were He possessed of the inclination. But now,
> when, obliged by the duties of his situation, He must enter
> occasionally into the world, and be thrown into the way of
> temptation, it is now that it behoves him to show the bril-
> liance of his virtue. The trial is dangerous; He is just at
> that period of life when the passions are most vigorous,
> unbridled, and despotic; His established reputation will
> mark him out to Seduction as an illustrious Victim; Novelty
> will give additional charms to the allurements of pleasure;
> and even the Talents with which Nature has endowed him will
> contribute to his ruin, by facilitating the means of obtain-
> ing his object. Very few would return victorious from a
> contest so severe (p. 21).

Without much conviction Lorenzo adds: "'By all accounts He is an excep-

tion to mankind in general, and Envy would seek in vain for a blot upon

his character'" (p. 22). Leonella fears that Ambrosio's intolerance of

sin will make him an unmerciful confessor, and Christobal agrees:

>"Too great severity is said to be Ambrosio's only fault.
>Exempted himself from human feelings, He is not sufficiently
>indulgent to those of others; and though strictly just and
>disinterested in his decisions, his government of the Monks
>has already shown some proofs of his inflexibility" (p. 22).

For Ambrosio, as for his counterpart in Mrs. Radcliffe's work, Schedoni,

the insistence on an inflexible regime for the community is an over-

compensation for the anarchy of personal desires. That Lorenzo should

suspect vulnerability to temptation in the monk without later heeding

his own suspicion is less surprising if we notice the applicability of

his remarks about Ambrosio to himself. In particular, it must be seen

that Lorenzo is also "at that period of life when the passions are most

vigorous, unbridled, and despotic," and, though he is more resistant to

temptation than Ambrosio, simply because he is more familiar with it, he

too is on trial.

It is a failure to realize and acknowledge the complexity of his

own motives and desires that prevents Lorenzo from using fully the warn-

ings he receives about Ambrosio and Antonia. Not only does he ignore

his rational misgivings, but he is unable to integrate with them the

clues that the irrational, including his own subconscious mind, sends up

to him. He is so attached to the image of his essential decency that he

cannot read any contrary message.

After the meeting with Antonia and Leonella and an interview during

which Christobal blunders by implying that Lorenzo has gained financially

from his sister Agnes' confinement in the convent of St. Clare, Christo-

bal takes his leave, while Lorenzo remains in the "gothic obscurity of

the Church." There he falls into a melancholy reverie:

He thought of his union with Antonia; He thought of the
obstacles which might oppose his wishes; and a thousand
changing visions floated before his fancy, sad 'tis true,
but not unpleasing (p. 27).

The mixture of sadness and pleasure is a fair description of melancholy

itself and, though Lewis' inexactness in assigning each feeling to the

corresponding train of thought is disturbing, there is the fashionable

emotion to account for it. Soon, however, the ambiguities become unavoid-

able. The reverie deepens into sleep, and Lorenzo dreams of subjects

suggested by "the tranquil solemnity of his mind when awake." He recog-

nizes the setting of the dream as the Church of the Capuchins where all

is ready for a wedding feast:

[The Altar] was surrounded by a brilliant Company; and near
it stood Antonia arrayed in bridal white, and blushing with
all the charms of Virgin Modesty.
    Half hoping, half fearing, Lorenzo gazed upon the
scene before him. Sudden the door leading to the Abbey
unclosed, and He saw, attended by a long train of Monks,
the Preacher advance to whom He had just listened with so
much admiration. He drew near Antonia.
    'And where is the Bridegroom,' said the imaginary
Friar.
    Antonia seemed to look round the Church with anxiety.
Involuntarily the Youth advanced a few steps from his con-
cealment. She saw him; The blush of pleasure glowed upon
her cheek; With a graceful motion of her hand She beckoned
to him to advance. He disobeyed not the command. . . .
    She retreated for a moment; Then gazing upon him with
unutterable delight;--'Yes!' She exclaimed, 'My Bridegroom!
My destined Bridegroom!'

Destiny is disrupted by the appearance of "an Unknown," a huge, "swarthy"

figure with "fierce and terrible" eyes. He breathes fire "and on his

forehead was written in legible characters--'Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!'"

The monster attempts to ravish Antonia upon the altar, but before Lorenzo

can spring to her aid the Church crumbles and the altar sinks, to be

replaced by "an abyss vomiting forth clouds of flame." The monster

tries to drag Antonia with him into the pit; however, she is "animated

by supernatural powers" and ascends angelically (though minus her gown)

in a glorious apotheosis complete with heavenly choir and overwhelming

radiance.

The most obvious function of this dream is to warn against a crime

which, in this case, has not even been thought of by its perpetrator.

Similar warning-dreams occur in *The Romance of the Forest* (where Adeline

receives three of them at one time) and in *The Old English Baron*--for

all its lack of interest in the irrational. Typically the warning is

not very useful to the recipient because it is cryptic or incomplete or

untimely. Lorenzo's dream presents another kind of difficulty, on

account of its resemblance to real, rather than fictional, dreams. In

real dreams, the dreamer may obtain knowledge he wants, but often this

is mixed with awareness of painful things unacceptable to the conscious

mind; the dream-process does not carefully distinguish between good

advice and self-revelation. In Lorenzo's dream there is one prudential

message: Take care of Antonia or she may be swept away. A more pene-

trating intelligence might even notice the clues that link "the Preacher"

and "the Monster": the swarthy complexion, the burning eyes, the vicious-

ness that Lorenzo has already foreseen as a trap set before the monk.

The prudential message, however, is blocked by the disturbing mes-

sage of the unconscious. This second message concerns Lorenzo's

confused desires. In dream as in waking, Lorenzo is unsure how to

prosecute, whether to prosecute, his suit for Antonia's hand. The

obstacles are as much internal and emotional as financial. His instinct

is to hide. As in reality he is obliged to undertake complicated

negotiations before he dares to court Antonia, so in dream he hesitates

to declare that he is her bridegroom. The circumstances are seconded by

Lorenzo's mixed feelings, and the complexity of the latter is all the

more remarkable because Lorenzo has not yet had a chance to form any

serious doubts about Antonia.

In his dream he discovers the same emotional law that Ambrosio

invokes to cast off Matilda, and to murder Antonia. This is the pattern

of desire and revulsion with which Lewis is fascinated, the pattern that

conjoins eros and death.[13] According to this law of masculine rapacity,

the virgin who has been "spoiled" (i.e., raped, in reality or in the

mind) is suited only for death. If she was perfect before, she must be

again perfected, and death is the means, the appropriate complement to

the degradation of sex. Ambrosio imagines himself provoked by Antonia's

angelic features, which he takes as a challenge; in Lorenzo's dream,

Antonia becomes an angel in order to escape further debasement at the

hands of a dark power. In both cases, however, the same assumptions

run through the fantasies: there are whores and angels, they are trea-

cherously yet conveniently interchangeable, there is no salvation--or

normal sexual fulfilment--for ordinary women, or with ordinary women.

If we assume, as the early part of the sequence certainly invites

us to do, that the dream represents latent wishes as well as fears

(i.e., the whole range of internal possibilities), we understand why all

Lorenzo's heroic measures to save Antonia are belated and ineffectual.

This is not to say that Lorenzo would also like to rape her[14] (the

identification of the Monster is not quite so tenuous). Nevertheless,

it is important to see how Lorenzo's dream exposes potentialities for

action and desire which Lorenzo, despite his claims to worldly exper-

ience, cannot admit in *any* man. To protect his confidence in the

natural decency of human motives he must dismiss both dream-messages:

> When He woke, He found himself extended upon the pavement
> of the Church. . . . For a while Lorenzo could not persuade
> himself that what He had just witnessed had been a dream,
> so strong an impression had it made upon his fancy. A
> little recollection convinced him of its fallacy (p. 29).

But his mind is still "fully occupied by the singularity of his dream"

when he encounters the "Man wrapped up in his Cloak" who turns out to be

Raymond. The dream's significance and its compelling reality are soon

lost in the intrigues between Raymond and Lorenzo's sister, Agnes.

Only rarely do Lewis' characters learn to appreciate the control

that irrational forces exercise over their lives. It is easier for

them, and for Lewis' audience, to objectify and externalize such forces--

to turn them into supernatural agents, for example, than to confront

their presence within the personality. In fact, in *The Monk* the super-

natural tends to have little real, intrinsic importance. Demons, ghosts

and witches are superfluous mechanisms, sensational projections of

internal struggles. They may deceive us temporarily into supposing that

responsibility for the conflict lies elsewhere, but the supernatural

trappings, though highly entertaining most of the time, are mainly a

means of excusing the narrowness of the repressive mind. Thus, when

Matilda uses witchcraft to entrap her jaded lover with the sight of

Antonia at her bath, the voyeuristic image is only slightly more vivid

and enticing than what the monk has already imagined without her aid.

The external demons are unnecessary; the demons of the self are suffi-

cient.

Yet, they are regularly denied. The obliviousness of life on the normal surface to the irrational, like the closely related idea of sexual calamity, is an idea that is multiplied continually in *The Monk*. For example, when Antonia receives from a gypsy fortune-teller an utterly transparent warning against "one more virtuous . . . than belongs to Man to be" (p. 38), she suspects nothing: "The Gypsy's prediction had also considerably affected Antonia; But the impression soon wore off, and in a few hours She had forgotten the adventure, as totally as had it never taken place" (p. 39). Familiar gothic conventions make this omission natural: a gypsy witch may tell the truth, but an innocent, sensible, unimaginative girl is not supposed to listen. This supposition agrees with the inverse relations of Lewis' psychology: the more truth is spoken and the more urgent the need for it, the more quickly it must be ignored.

A similarly fatal obliviousness to the promptings of the irrational is the basis of the long tale of the Bleeding Nun which Raymond tells Lorenzo. The tale is interpolated at precisely the moment when Ambrosio is about to enjoy sex with Matilda for the first time. Tension between the two and within the monk has been building toward this moment, the atmosphere is heated with expectation of the "crime"; therefore, the interpolated episode creates a suspense which some readers have found tedious and puzzling.[15] But the story of the Bleeding Nun has a positive value which is usually overlooked in the search for its sources and its flaws. It is, simultaneously, a parable of the shortcomings of modern enlightenment, a prolonged joke about the fulfilment of desire, and a morbid reflection upon the closeness of desire and death.

Faced with the hardened opposition of the Baroness Lindenberg, who has mistaken Raymond's love for Agnes for an interest in herself, the lovers must turn, like all victims of gothic parental interference, to unusual measures. Neither of them believes in the local legend of the Bleeding Nun, which contains the requisite elements of a "haunting" superstition modified to suit the themes of *The Monk*—monastic anomie, hypocrisy, lust, and treachery. But the legend does provide a convenient occasion for their elopement. This purely instrumental use of superstition resembles its treatment in gothic fiction itself, where folklore and pseudo-historical settings are employed for the sake of evoking *artificial* terror. Sometimes the old beliefs suddenly regain their vitality; that is how the lovers' plan turns into a sinister joke. Instead of Agnes, masquerading as the Bleeding Nun, the genuine Nun joins Raymond in his carriage and drives him on a terrifying flight across country. The hideous, rotten crone is the embodiment of erotic impulses gone wrong, and her nightly visits to Raymond's sick-bed where, vampire-like, she drains him of his physical and spiritual strength, indicate the persistence of sexual excess, not only as a curse against Agnes' family but as a debilitating force in Raymond's life. The necrophilic overtones of this odious union foreshadow the end of two love affairs in the crypt: Ambrosio's rape and murder of Antonia, and Agnes' horrific sufferings, with the child Raymond has given her. The magical and religious hocus-pocus with which the Wandering Jew exorcises the succubus cannot gloss over the basic sexual dilemma with false symbolism or sentimentality. Raymond must help remove the curse, but in his own generation he reinforces it with a new "crime." Even while he tells his

tale to Lorenzo he has set in motion the cycle of fatality which requires Agnes, in turn, to be enslaved. The meaning of the elaborate joke, of the Nun's example, of the pattern of sexual disaster, is lost on Raymond.[16]

Lewis does not give an explanation for Raymond's and Lorenzo's lack of awareness of the irrational. The technical demands of a suspenseful plot, complicated with dramatic ironies, do not permit their ignorance to be relieved, and their lack of insight is consistent with the general trend in gothic writing to diminish the conventionally heroic figures to manniquins.[17] Moreover, we must suspect Lewis of a delight in luring the reader into a judgmental trap. Raymond and Lorenzo, inasmuch as we think of them at all, are fairly sympathetic characters, whereas Ambrosio, for all his self-delusion and victimization, is a criminal. The reader is forced to overlook in Lorenzo and Raymond the same denial of self that he condemns in Ambrosio.

Lewis reserves close analysis for the extreme counterpart of the decent average men--for Ambrosio, "the Man of Holiness." Because Ambrosio's suffering, like Raymond's, finally is referred to natural, psychological causes, Lewis wastes little time in delaying our awareness of his duplicity. It is not the mere fact of Ambrosio's fragmented consciousness that concerns him--though he plays upon it with a heavy hand at first--but the history of the monk's flawed personality, the growth of his obsession and its fulfilment. The drama of temptation and surrender is, in a sense, a secondary matter, for it is superimposed on the examination, conducted almost from within, of a desolate soul. As *The Italian* and *Melmoth the Wanderer* were to demonstrate, such an examination

has its own fascination, outside the framework of Faustian bargaining
and theatrical spectacle.

As a lull in the painful scenes of antipathy between Ambrosio and
Matilda, Lewis interjects a lengthy account of the perversion of the
monk's character (p. 235 ff.). The account meshes well enough with
earlier ones for us to be able to detect the dangers of matricide and
incest towards which Ambrosio is about to rush. Ambrosio undergoes the
kind of monastic miseducation already familiar from lurid anti-clerical
fiction and from immediate, non-monastic experience. That the description
of this system is fallacious or inaccurate[18] is irrelevant, for the
touching of conventional responses simply makes the acceptance of sensa-
tional, disturbing material easier by permitting that material to be
regarded as alien. The essential problem in *The Monk* is neither reli-
gious nor political, but psychological.

Abandoned by an uncaring relation, Ambrosio is handed over to the
monks, who will also betray him by refusing to give him proper emotional
nourishment. He is educated in fear, through fear; he is made victim of
all the devices of intimidation and persuasion which are traditionally
at the monks' disposal, in order to become master of those tools himself.
His natural virtues are plentiful, but those which are unnecessary for
his duties in the Order, such as compassion and mercy, are suppressed,
while vices, such as pride and envy, though not nurtured, are overlooked.
His passionate nature is harnessed to the involuted routine of the monas-
tery. He is converted into a perfect monk, and, therefore, a perfect
goth.

Although many of the features of this account are part of the usual
anti-clerical formula, Lewis elevates the whole pattern to the plane of
personal tragedy. For this reason Ambrosio cannot be dismissed as a mere
criminal, and Lewis retains the ability to play upon our uncertain feel-
ings for him. Enumerating Ambrosio's strengths--his keen intellect, his
impressive physique and bearing, his active and aggressive instincts--
Lewis shows how they have been wasted. His upbringing by the Capuchins
has inculcated a false concern for discipline, yet it has left his active
faculties with no suitable outlet. Tremendous energy has been confined
within an extremely limited sphere. The narcissistic life of the monas-
tery precludes any socially useful pursuit and requires instead that the
monks devote themselves to a spiritual regime which is an imposition upon
the believer. The oppressive awareness of severe limitations, which is
rendered even more terrifying in *Melmoth,* here turns the supernaturalism
and the Faustian crises into an empty show; for the Church has stolen
Ambrosio's soul before he can deal it away to Matilda or Satan. Thus
there is established a pattern of self-destruction that is not as common
as the Faustian bargain in gothic fiction but is a much stronger source
of horrible irony: the false parent (the Church) so corrupts the child's
soul that he can kill his true parent (Elvira) without feeling much
remorse. The irony is accentuated by the child's eagerness for his own
corruption and for the rewards of the eventual crime. By the time
Ambrosio strangles Elvira, we are convinced that he would do so even if
he knew her real identity, so powerful is his fascination with Antonia
and his fear of detection.

The corruption of Ambrosio involves more than emotional impoverish-
ment. In the world of *The Monk* sexual fatality is accompanied by sexual
confusion which assumes three forms: object is confused with subject,
masculine is confused with feminine, and health is confused with mor-
bidity.

As is usual in his treatment of serious matters, Lewis first
approaches the issue of sexual confusion through a joke. In the banter
among Lorenzo, Christobal, and Leonella, it is alleged that Ambrosio is
so pure of mind that he does not know the difference between man and
woman; Leonella adds that Antonia too is uninformed, and there is some
argument about whether she should be. Yet, even when Ambrosio has seen
the difference, in the form of Matilda's bare breast, and has partaken
of its advantages, his sexual preferences remain muddled. Citing evi-
dence of "homoerotic emotions" in biographies of Lewis, his letters, and
his writings, Elliott Gose argues that in *The Monk* "we shall find a
study of the disintegration of an 'undecided character',"[19] and nowhere
is the undecidedness more pronounced than in Ambrosio's relations with
Rosario/Matilda.

Here it is hard to keep genders and roles in order. Ambrosio is at
first flattered by the admiration and charmed by the sweet manner of the
gentle novice, Rosario, for whom he begins to feel something more than
benign fellowship. Though highly sentimentalized, the affection is
clearly homosexual as well as filial; Ambrosio imagines the "boy" as his
son, but the main attraction is Rosario's effeminacy. Yet, when Rosario
reveals herself to be Matilda (hers is a stock story of impossible infat-
uation), the reversals are compounded. Matilda is bold, enterprising,

ruthless; she is unmistakably female and desirable, but her behaviour is

not feminine. As she scorns Ambrosio's womanish fears of the demonic

and his hesitancy, the monk's misgivings grow; he regrets the disappear-

ance of the quiet, subservient, chaste Rosario and the substitution of

the aggressive, domineering, sexually potent Matilda, who actually

desires the same pleasure that Ambrosio cannot quite justify for himself.

Like Lorenzo, Ambrosio appears to have no middle choice between the

whore and the angel; only the shifting, blending opposites are left for

him in his world of extremes. That Lewis manages to delve beneath that

appearance--as well as to affirm it--is a sign both of his own divided

affinities and of the dual perspective common to the ambivalent mode of

the gothic. The dark inner life with its uncomfortably recognizable

fantasies and obsessions is enjoyed and dismissively analyzed at the

same time.

Ambrosio feels compelled to loathe the very object on which he

stakes his reputation and his prospects for salvation--psychical and

theological. Once in his possession, the dazzling prize immediately

becomes a corrupt thing. Lewis further aggravates the dilemma, under

the guise of anti-Catholic ridicule, by identifying Matilda with the

image of the Madonna that has been the object of the monk's constant

adoration. But since Ambrosio's worship is a sublimation of physical

love, an attachment to the symbolic image, not the idea symbolized, he

is unable to distinguish the icon from the fleshly model. And, given

the monastic context, Lewis' readers would be satisfied, even pleased,

with Ambrosio's confusion. However, for Ambrosio, the treachery of his

delusion is the real, intolerable fact. Now incarnate, the Virgin is

"the Prostitute" Matilda. Lewis' narrative voice, however, cannot resist commenting on the unreasonableness of Ambrosio's submission to such fantastic reversals as the monk rips the icon from the wall of his cell and spurns it, the narrator remarks:

> Unfortunate Matilda. Her Paramour forgot, that for his sake alône She had forfeited her claim to virtue; and his only reason for despising her was, that She had loved him much too well (p. 244).

That is not the only reason, but it is the primary one. Compliant and victimized alike, women are associated with the uncleanness, the unholiness of Ambrosio's passion; if they accede to his wishes--which hardly can be satisfied--they condemn themselves.

This disjunction of desire and esteem is a classic subject of psychoanalytical inquiry,[20] but Lewis is mainly interested in its pathology for the tortuous fantasy life that it leads to. Lewis' evident delight in sudden reversals, identification of opposites, and gender ambiguities is more consistent with the methods of sexual fantasy than case history,[21] and most of Ambrosio's assumptions, delusions, or fantasies are those of a male protagonist in erotic fiction.

The prevalent delusion results from the practical impossibility, especially for a man who has denied his irrational, instinctual side, of distinguishing between seduction and projection. This problem arises, in particular, in trying to assess the motives and behaviour of Matilda, and the reader must share it with Ambrosio because Lewis himself is so undecided on this point. Ambrosio and the narrator regularly bring up certain questions: Is Matilda's magic at the service of erotic mastery or destruction? Is it real magic, or is it the prompting of Ambrosio's starved imagination? If Matilda is a witch or an agent of Satan, does

that release Ambrosio from blame for whatever crimes she causes him to

commit? And does she really cause him to do anything or does she simply

abet his crimes?

Lewis supplies inconsistent, equivocal answers. The accusation

that Matilda is the lure in a great demonic plan, for example, comes

after all from the devil's lips as he tortures Ambrosio with the thought

of his own foolishness. For most of the narrative, Matilda's thinly

concealed autobiography--the story of Rosario's sister Julia and her

desperate passion for a man betrothed to another--is equally plausible.

The facts of Ambrosio's experience, and of his career as we follow it,

fit either explanation. And in either case, great expertise, almost

prescience, is apparent. The snares that Matilda throws in the way of

Ambrosio are numerous, and they are fashioned as if with his weaknesses

and his secret internal life in mind. First Matilda carefully plays on

the mystique surrounding Rosario because it piques the curiosity of the

monk. When she has revealed her true identity, the sophistical arguments

with which she urges their union depend upon the defects in his character,

particularly his pride and vanity, which Matilda, like his monkish

teachers, persists in treating as if they were virtues. The whole inci-

dent of the snake-bite, with Matilda's sacrifice and threatened suicide,

culminates in the "accidental" baring of her breast, exploiting the most

important of Ambrosio's fetishes.[22] On her deathbed she places his hand

on her bosom, which is still "the seat of honour, truth, and chastity,"

and the monk, "confused, embarrassed, and fascinated . . . withdrew it

not, and felt her heart throb under it" (p. 90). So great is Matilda's

allure, so thorough her familiarity with even his unacknowledged

impulses, that Ambrosio seems justified in believing that she controls

the circumstances of temptation, that she is the instigator, not the

convenient object, of his dangerous obsession.

The reader might be forced to concur in that belief if Ambrosio did

not transfer it to Antonia. Lewis invites us to consider Matilda as a

femme fatale, but Antonia is so perfectly guileless that the projective

nature of Ambrosio's loathing is self-evident. In addition, the accu-

rately duplicated cycle of conversion—the Madonna to the Prostitute,

the angelic, chaste Antonia to the Venus of the bath—is symptomatic of

a tendency that is peculiar to Ambrosio.

The fantasy that women compel his desire dominates the monk's very

diction. Notice, for example, the verbs of coercion or entrapment in

this comparison of Matilda and Antonia:

> Matilda gluts me with enjoyment even to loathing, forces me
> to her arms, apes the Harlot, and glories in her prostitu-
> tion. Disgusting! Did she know the inexpressible charm of
> Modesty, how irresistibly it enthralls the heart of Man, how
> firmly it chains him to the Throne of Beauty, She never
> would have thrown it off (pp. 242-243.).

Matilda's "lustful favours" and Antonia's "inexpressible charm of Modesty"

are thus equated, not contrasted, through a common capacity for mastering

Ambrosio's imagination.

The pattern of sharp, ironic reversals prepares us for the trans-

ference of Ambrosio's aggression to its objects. Once again it is a

cultural stereotype, sharpened by the cynical narrative voice, that

supplies the first element of the pattern. The narrator examines the

monk's chances for varying his steady diet of Matilda, and finds him

both fortunate and unfortunate:

> Above all the Women sang forth his praises loudly, less
> influenced by devotion than by his noble countenance,
> majestic air, and well-turned graceful figure. The Abbey-
> door was thronged with Carriages from morning to night; and
> the noblest and fairest Dames of Madrid confessed to the
> Abbot their secret peccadilloes. The eyes of the luxurious
> Friar devoured their charms: Had his Penitents consulted
> those Interpreters, He would have needed no other means of
> expressing his desires. For his misfortune, they were so
> strongly persuaded of his continence, that the possibility
> of his harbouring indecent thoughts never once entered their
> imaginations. The climate's heat, 'tis well known, operates
> with no small influence upon the constitutions of the Span-
> ish Ladies . . . the Friar was little acquainted with the
> depravity of the world; He suspected not, that but few of
> his Penitents would have rejected his addresses (pp. 239-
> 240).[23]

Once Ambrosio loses the innocent belief in the exclusiveness of his

lustful thoughts, his suspicions surpass the narrator's. All women

become fair game for his imagination. Rather than face the real extent

of his passion and the real process of dream fulfilment by which his

imagination tries to serve it, Ambrosio reverses the subject-object rela-

tion, and supposes that the women he most desires seek to provoke him.

After one sight of Antonia, he is stricken with desire for her--as was

Lorenzo--and, in his cell, he is "pursued by Antonia's image" (p. 242);

already it is she who has turned the hunter. When Antonia, accompanied

by a reluctant Leonella, comes to beg that Ambrosio bring comfort to her

pious mother, who is desperately ill, the monk's immediate reaction

derives from this rationalization and from his experience with Matilda:

> "So!" thought the Monk; "Here we have a second Vincen-
> tio della Ronda. Rosario's adventure began thus," and He
> wished secretly, that this might have the same conclusion
> (p. 241).[24]

Lewis promotes this confusion of subject and object, especially as

applied to Antonia, with the effect that the reader is placed discon-

certingly close to the monk's state of extreme arousal. He presents

Antonia's innocent beauty with an odd combination of sentimentality and prurience--perhaps not so odd in light of the events in Ambrosio's mind. It is Ambrosio's active dreaming imagination that converts Antonia from innocent to whore, yet the reader shares in the final, explicit image of her, the maddening purity of her form. This is a trick of pornographic sensationalism--making the reader an eager witness of what he might otherwise condemn--but it is also a key to Lewis' vision of the elusiveness, and pervasiveness, of the darker impulses in men, and a symptom of the deep split in ambivalent gothicism between a sympathetic and a narrowly moralistic treatment of problems of evil and irrationality.[25]

For Lewis, and for his characters, all the sexual confusions end in the tomb. Not only is this the imaginative terminus for sensationalism (as Burke foresaw), but it is the appropriate realization of the obsessions and denials on which the emotional life of *The Monk* is based. If, as in most pornography, desire does not conclude with any single event or succession of events, if there is in fact *no* satiation, then the body appears a tyrant which may be indulged or rebelled against. Lewis pursues the horror of this perception beyond the monotony it produces in pornography, and his treatment of its implications is considerably more complex. Sometimes indulgence and rebellion are contained in the same working out of the problem. Sex becomes a process of mastery and of extending power, a process which may culminate with the death, and thus the perfect possession, of the partner; or it becomes a continuing occasion for self-punishment, for embracing that which, like the Bleeding Nun, is born of desire and is capable of destroying desire by laying waste to the body.

In either case, death and disease are shown as necessary comple-
ments, and instruments, of passion. It is logical, therefore, that the
union of Agnes and Raymond should produce a putrid, loathsome thing,
scarcely an infant (another complete transformation), and that Agnes
should have to watch it starve to death and decompose. Having come as
close to this fact as he can, to the point of avid interest in decay,
Lewis imbues Ambrosio with the same fascination as a last desperate
protection. Ambrosio thinks of the site of his rape of Antonia (in the
crypts beneath the convent and monastery) as an additional prop for his
resolution. Here they are removed from the surface world of reputations
and decorum. Here they are safe from interference, but only because
they are surrounded by the deathly and unlovely. When all reassurance
fails, the monk takes his cue from the nature of the place, which is
also the nature of his soul.

What is more disturbing than Lewis' predeliction for gruesome
detail (e.g., his prolonging of the death of Ambrosio) is the sense of
blind doom. The morbid association of sex and death includes both pas-
sion and the denial of passion; they are indifferently rewarded, and
Lewis does not suggest any way out of the impasse he has created.

Evidence of the impasse, however, is everywhere in *The Monk*. The
reader searches in vain for some emotional or moral still point, such as
a nostalgic goth would readily provide, for some point where the endless
joking is suspended. Instead, Lewis gives only the empty forms of
sentimentality, stability, and heroism. This might appear to indicate a
lack of seriousness or concentration in Lewis' method, and indeed the
frivolous, sportive tone of *The Monk* is unmistakeable. But the tone is

also characteristic of the whole gothic fictional enterprise, and particularly of its divided purposes. Like Walpole's several self-censorship devices in *Otranto,* what Drake called the "sportive gothic" becomes in Lewis' hands a means of distancing the pain inherent in his sensational treatment of gothic themes. Yet, despite such marginal allowances for dismissing the central experience of *The Monk,* there is no settled, comforting idea of what the imaginary past should mean. Lewis parodies romantic fictional conventions, including the notion of gothic barbarity, while exploiting them. He contrasts gothic adventure and colour with gothic bleakness, balancing the foreignness and absurdity of his characters with the desolation of their familiar *inner* world.

The events of the novel's "resolution" make this technique plain. For example, the mission that frees Agnes is accompanied by mob sadism of a typically gothic brutality, intensity and obscenity. Lewis sets our satisfaction with the rescue and sympathy with the happiness of the reunited lovers against the background of the mob's irrationality and the protagonists' inability to restrain it. Even our well-founded contempt for the Prioress of St. Clare's cannot quite justify the manner of her murder.

Lewis similarly undercuts the romantic plot-lines. Antonia's death in the arms of Lorenzo is heightened by sentimental, melodramatic touches, but these do not conceal a haste to get rid of her in order to simplify the system of alliances, in which she can have no part. In accord with her image of purity and selflessness, Antonia greets death with graceful acceptance; she understands the rules of courtship well enough to realize that she is "damaged goods" and cannot marry Lorenzo. However, Lewis'

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declaration that, "deprived of honour and branded with shame, Death was
to her a blessing" (p. 392), is disturbingly similar to the rationaliza-
tions that might occur to Ambrosio, or even to Lorenzo. Having been
tainted by the lower world of sexual violence, Antonia is no longer fit
to live on the surface.

After Matilda and Ambrosio have been captured, there is a spate of
match-making and realigning of affections that requires an embarrassing
amount of exposition and contrivance. The beautiful Virginia is elevated
from the ludicrous band of nuns whom Lorenzo had discovered trapped in
the crypts. She will replace Antonia as Lorenzo's bride. The match has
been promoted by Agnes and the Duke de Medina, and Virginia's name dis-
plays her principal qualification. In effect, she is a cure for
Lorenzo's love-sickness and grief, just as the return of Agnes, who is
flattered to learn that her lover has nearly pined away for her sake,
immediately leads to Raymond's recovery. Justice is meted out to the
nuns, marriages are concluded, and Lorenzo's love is transferred, in
short order. We are told that "Antonia's image was gradually effaced
from his bosom; and Virginia became sole Mistress of that heart, which
She well deserved to possess without a Partner"; the fluidity and super-
ficiality of Lorenzo's feelings makes the persecution and murder of
Antonia seem trivial. After we have been drawn to the depths of deprav-
ity and disintegration, the contentment of marriage is an unconvincing
prospect, and those who are satisfied with it suddenly appear shallow.

Unlike Reeve or Radcliffe, Lewis does not rest when the felicitous
arrangements have been made. He continues the degradation of Ambrosio
to the utmost point, so that it is the spectacle of his hopeless

suffering with which we are left. Even the meagre consolation of fame

is gone; while the devil bears Ambrosio away, his reputation, his crimes,

his satanic rescue fade from public interest and he is soon forgotten.

The gorgeous boyish demon who first appeared to Ambrosio, at Matilda's

summons, now stands forth as the jaded, hideous Lucifer and exposes the

actual extent of Ambrosio's crimes: incest and the murder of his mother

and sister. Lucifer's version of the testing of Ambrosio is suspect,

since it may be intended to aggravate Ambrosio's mental tortures, and

the ironies which the devil unravels are rather mechanical and super-

fluous. The landscape in which this final scene occurs, however, sug-

gests the means of interpreting it. Ambrosio has exchanged the lush,

perfumed garden of the Capuchin Abbey, where he courted Rosario/Matilda,

for a sterile wilderness, broken by cliffs and dry ravines. In such a

place, the devil's jesting commentary is hardly necessary. Incapable of

recognizing the aridity and treachery of his inner life, Ambrosio has

been overtaken by its outward manifestation.

Thus, the scene of Ambrosio's suffering serves as a lucid, concrete

representation of the tendency of his whole career and of the ultimate

condition of his soul. However, by depicting the final agonies in nearly

mythic terms (there are obvious allusions to Prometheus and the Creation),

Lewis reminds us that Ambrosio's story, though of immediate, compelling

interest, is also a means of gaining access to disturbing, painful

themes.

In most of Ann Radcliffe's novels we discover themes that overlap

the themes of *The Monk:* the misuse of the irrational, the conflict

between feeling and common sense, the oppressive exercise of authority,

the destructive power of the erotic. On the other hand, two character-
istics of Radcliffe's *method* distinguish it from Lewis'.

First, as we noted in the previous chapter, Radcliffe expresses her
ambivalence toward the imaginary gothic world through a pattern of con-
frontation in which familiar values are not totally vindicated nor are
alien values totally condemned. In *The Monk* the narrative voice occa-
sionally gives enlightened commentary--or what passes for it--but there
is no real sense of conflict between mismatched cultures; on the contrary,
the narrator eventually presents the *whole* world of *The Monk* as atavistic.
For Radcliffe the meeting with the gothic ancestors must be dramatic;
the confrontational pattern requires the active participation of a
visitor or representative from the reader's environment. Often the
visitor is a representative of a familiar *fictional* type as well; she is,
for example, a sentimental heroine transported to a realm where brutality
is as much appreciated as fine sentiment.

Because the female protagonist usually is a creature of exquisite
sensibility, Radcliffe's work shows an understanding of the nostalgic
mode and includes many of its common elements. This additional latitude
also separates Radcliffe from Lewis. For Lewis, sensationalism is mainly
an interest in forbidden psychic territory and the grosser features of
physical suffering. Damnation is universal, the ideal merely an illu-
sion. In this climate there is no object for nostalgic recollection.
In contrast, Radcliffe approaches her darker perceptions more by sugges-
tion than by sensationalism, and her palette of strong feelings consists
not only of imaginary fear and erotic compulsion but also of nature
worship, filial piety, and love of the sublime, feelings consistent with

a nostalgic rendition of the gothic.[26] Consequently, there are long

idyllic interludes in many of Radcliffe's novels, such as Adeline's stay

with the family of La Luc in *The Romance of the Forest*, Ellena's period

of refuge at the Convent of the *Santa della Pieta* in *The Italian*, and

Emily's early domestic routine in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.[27] For a time

the heroines seem to have found a way back from the terror that encircles

them, but the idyll ends and the figures within it are altered: La Luc's

son is imprisoned, the Abbess turns out to have little protective power,

Emily's parents die and she is left to the guardianship of her foolish,

unfeeling aunt. Nostalgic attitudes have some play in the novels, but

they remain a limited, secondary mode, because they are the raw material

for the victims' misapprehensions.

Nostalgia helps to account for the prudential moralism, the exten-

sive scenic descriptions, and the sporadic attempts at pseudo-historical

detail,[28] elements of the novels which are less accessible to the

present-day reader.

What is still accessible is the central problem within the novels,

for which the solutions that nostalgia offers are inadequate. It is

natural, however, that one mode of response should be nostalgic, for the

problem is a loss of identity and of family connection, the disruption

of the secure boundaries of childhood, and any means that may restore

the old situation must be tried. For Clara Reeve, as we have seen,

return to the past is a way of redressing present grievances by imposing

an ideal structure on the loose historical framework. For Radcliffe,

ideal structures are fragile at best; return to the alien past is a way

of creating personal reality and developing resistance to an evil which

is not restricted to the past, and which cannot be easily evaded.

Recognizing the true nature of that evil is the ultimate difficulty for the protagonists; they must follow a process of detection in which some of the suspenseful devices are entirely gratuitous, like the famous veiled "portrait" in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,[29] and others are the result of manipulation, like Schedoni's deception of the credulous Vivaldi in *The Italian*.[30] But the most immediate emotional need is for parents and protection. Fathers and mothers die, or are lost, or prove false. In any event, the children are thrown back on their own slim resources of fortitude and wisdom, in a setting which they suddenly perceive to be hostile.

There are numerous surrogate parents but they invariably fail to perform their duties satisfactorily; many of them have villainous aims for their young charges, while others reverse the relationship between parent and child. Mme. Cheron, later Mme. Montoni, in *Udolpho*, is an example of the latter sort of false parent. A lack of discernment delivers both herself and her niece, Emily, into Montoni's power; when he imprisons her for refusing to relinquish her fortune, she becomes increasingly dependent on Emily's cheerfulness for consolation; she herself has no strength to share.

In *The Romance of the Forest* treacherous false parents multiply; Adeline is given over to a succession of them. First there is D'Aunoy, whom she believes during most of the narrative to be her real father but who has been given custody of Adeline by the Marquis de Montalt, her real father's murderer. D'Aunoy consigns her to a convent; there she is subjected to the tyrannical designs of a false mother, the Abbess (see

pp. 195-196 above). From the convent Adeline is taken to D'Aunoy's lair

where she is eventually handed over to the outlaw La Motte over whom

Montalt has control. La Motte develops genuine fatherly feelings for

Adeline, yet he is insecure and powerless; the Marquis holds the threat

of blackmail over La Motte,[31] and reluctantly he plays procurer for

Montalt, delivering Adeline to him, ostensibly for rape, in fact for

murder. For a while it also appears that the Marquis is Adeline's real

father, and if Adeline is confused by D'Aunoy's motives, when she

believes *him* to be her father, we are even more puzzled by the Marquis'

intentions until we discover the mistake that has concealed his identity.

Adeline is hampered in penetrating this maze of substitutions by her

overly trusting nature. We learn that "confidence in the sincerity and

goodness of others was her weakness" and receive an example of this con-

fidence from her own account of her first sight of Paris:

> "Every countenance was here animated either by business or
> pleasure, every step was airy, and every smile was gay.
> All the people appeared like friends; they looked and
> smiled at me; I smiled again, and wished to have told them
> how pleased I was. How delightful, said I, to live sur-
> rounded by friends!"[32]

But friends are scarcer than Adeline thinks at first. It is the

fate of Radcliffe's heroines to be denied friendship as often as they

are denied parental care. Sometimes, indeed, these losses are combined,

as when Ellena, in *The Italian*, is separated from her new-found friend

Olivia before she can discover that the delightful woman, who has suf-

fered in order to defend her, is her real mother. Of course, the loss

of friendship provides another occasion for the expressions of fashion-

able melancholy in which the female protagonists love to indulge. On a

less superficial level, however, the loss is part of the general pattern

of isolation which sets up the conditions necessary for persecuting the
heroine.

The parent-as-persecutor is the darkest, most complex figure in
Radcliffe's gothic complement. Certainly the *type* had been established
in Richardson's *Clarissa* and in the contemporary French domestic melo-
drama with which Radcliffe was undoubtedly familiar, but her development
of it is remarkable for depth of sympathetic psychological insight and
for balance maintained between the persecutor's and the victim's sense
of being trapped in the situation. With the cruel Marquis of *The Sicil-
ian Romance,* of whom Catherine Morland is presumably thinking when she
spins her fantasies about General Tilney,[33] Radcliffe begins a series of
parental tyrants which culminates in *The Italian*. Here she attempts her
fullest, most mature treatment of the relations between parents and
children; the novel is centred on the subject, the various episodes and
relationships reflecting various aspects of the conflict.

But Radcliffe's sense of decorum, which is an instrument of the
nostalgic mode in the forming of her novels, prevents her from represent-
ing the conflict directly. There is an evident reluctance to depict
parents as actual persecutors, if some means of deflecting their respon-
sibility can be found.[34] In *The Romance of the Forest* this is another
reason for the multiplication of false fathers who, in some fashion,
turn out to be involved in the persecution of the heroine. The reader
is brought to the edge of a disturbing recognition--that parents may
resent, thwart, destroy their children--only to be stopped short by the
same ironic reversals that save Adeline from utter disappointment.[35]
In *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* the fallibility of a father is similarly

tendered and then withdrawn: misconstruing certain relics which her

father has asked her to destroy after his death, Emily suspects that he

has had a disastrous love affair, that he too is a sexual being, and we

share that growing, uncomfortable suspicion until we learn with Emily

the innocuous truth.[36]

In *The Italian* there is also an evasion of the domestic conflicts.

Parallels between the power of parents and the power of the Church

define the natural obligations of subjects (e.g., children) and author-

ity figures, but they also transfer the idea of crimes against sexuality

from one conventional area--the family--where the fact of persecution is

harder to confront, to another area--the monastery--where such crimes are

popularly supposed to be common.

The transfer is so successful that it is liable to cause readers to

overlook the connection between Vivaldi's parents and the lovers' mis-

fortunes. We forget that the haughtiness and vindictiveness of the

Marchesa set in motion the scheme against Ellena because Schedoni appro-

priates the scheme, and its rewards, for himself. The monumental scale

of his ambition, power, criminality, and final suffering sustains our

emotional tension and our interest. We are released only when the last

obscurity lifts, only when the cycle of self-destruction ends with the

detection and trial of Schedoni.

Radcliffe aids this concentration on Schedoni not only by magnifying

his proportions and deepening the mystery that surrounds him, but also

by diminishing the effective opposition. Though somewhat more resilient

than her typical gothic sisters, Ellena remains a passive object for

others to manipulate--a fugitive or a prisoner. Vivaldi is as ineffec-

tual and credulous as Schedoni thinks he is, hardly capable of saving

himself, let alone acting heroically.[37]

The process of diminishment affects Vivaldi's parents even more.

The Marchese scarcely appears until his miserable wife dies of chagrin,

somehow reconciled with her son without need for repentance; even then,

he merely serves to dispense material rewards to the survivors. Rad-

cliffe implies that it was an imbalance between husband and wife that

gave the Marchesa scope for her interference, thus diffusing responsi-

bility for her maliciousness. If only the man would take his proper

place, it seems, the domestic conflict would be smoothed over.

There is good reason for weakening the parents' role as persecutors.

The Vivaldis are deprived of magnitude, but also of culpability. They

are not genuine criminals, as Schedoni undoubtedly is. They must be

saved, with moral standing relatively unhurt, for the mechanical niceties

of the resolution, when, like Clara Reeve, Radcliffe tries to climb out

of the gothic darkness into the bright circle of domesticity. The nos-

talgic impulse is to purify the parents, as it is to idealize the past;

in both cases there is a securing of identity. Thus, the awful fate of

Schedoni is almost left behind, except that it looms larger than any-

thing else in *The Italian*. In this matter of proportion and impressive-

ness, at least, Radcliffe does not improve upon Lewis' practice.[38]

In effect, all potential for criminal tyranny in parenthood is con-

ferred upon Schedoni. There is a literal representation of the transfer,

in the form of the Marchesa's commission to Schedoni. At first she

simply consults with her confessor, sharing anxieties about her son's

welfare. As the extent of those anxieties becomes plain, as Schedoni

feeds her fears and antagonism, the necessary solution appears.

Radcliffe's insight into the developing alliance is subtle. It is
a measure of the degree to which Schedoni stands for the evil latent
within his patroness that the early planning is a mutual affair. Already
complicit in one murder and greedy for the power that the Marchesa can
give him, Schedoni draws on a ready supply of evil to advise her. What
he shows her, however, is the image of her own desire. It does not
matter—except for the Marchesa's sense of righteousness—that she does
not know, or care to know, what shape the conspiracy will eventually
assume. Once her dark purpose has been given over to a will that is not
opposed by the usual decent restraints (i.e., a truly *gothic* will), it
is set free in the world with a tremendous power of its own.

But the process does not stop with *projection,* with the monk taking
up wishes which the lady does not acknowledge. The real terror of the
novel arises from the *exaggeration* or enlargement of those wishes in
their fulfilment. As the conspiracy gains momentum, the measures needed
to keep it going become more and more extreme, until the crime turns
against Schedoni and is too enormous for him to handle. This process of
enlargement and exaggeration explains the relationship between Schedoni
and the Marchesa: the more purely gothic figure is a distorted, magnified
image of the more familiar, less barbarous one. At the same time, the
more purely gothic figure is an *outlet* for the unrealized forces in the
more familiar, less barbarous world.

That relationship is compounded in *The Italian;* successive tyrants
are themselves tyrannized. If Schedoni acts out an exaggerated version
of the Marchesa's evil impulses, beyond her effective control, the Church

hierarchy of which he is a part acts out an even more severely exagger-

ated version of his own dreams of power. The Church, and particularly

the Inquisition, is the ultimate locus of extreme parental oppression.

It is both a parody and an extension of the family, but of the frag-

mented family, the family as an "assemblage of strangers."

Envy and malice are the unnatural principles of life in such a

family, and even a good daughter of the Church like Ellena cannot help

but recognize them. As she approaches the convent of *San Stefano,* even

the gothic architecture of the place seems significant:

> . . . the tall west window of the cathedral with the spires
> that overtopped it; the narrow pointed roofs of the clois-
> ters; angles of the insurmountable walls, which fenced the
> garden from the precipices below, and the dark portal lead-
> ing into the chief court; each of these, seen at intervals
> beneath the gloom of cypress and spreading cedar, seemed as
> if menacing the unhappy Ellena with hints of future suffer-
> ing.[39]

The darkness and narrowness of the building corresponds exactly to the

qualities of the life within. Hearing the strains of the vesper-service

wafting over the silent air, Ellena tries to summon up an image of

sisterly harmony:

> She indulged a hope that they would not be wholly insen-
> sible to her sufferings, and that she should receive some
> consolation from sympathy as soft as these tender-breathing
> strains appeared to indicate.[40]

But her hope is destroyed by the "symbols of the disposition of the

inhabitants." The disposition itself, the desolate inner life, is

especially threatening:

> . . . as she passed through the refectory where the nuns,
> just returned from vespers, were assembled, their inquisi-
> tive glances, their smiles and busy whispers, told her, that
> she was not only an object of curiosity, but of suspicion,
> and that little sympathy could be expected from hearts which

> even the offices of hourly devotion had not purified from
> the malignant envy, that taught them to exalt themselves
> upon the humiliation of others.[41]

With mention of humiliation and "malignant envy" we return to the

conventional gothic wisdom about monastic psychology: a community of

frustrated, sexually neutral narcissists cannot bear the sight of any

vestiges of freedom or sexual potency in new arrivals; everyone must be

reduced to the same ghostly state.[42] For all its triteness, this notion

has a wider importance. If the Abbess usually acts *in loco parentis,*

here she does so explicitly; for the Abbess of *San Stefano* is in league

with the Marchesa like Schedoni, and her efforts to bully Ellena into

taking the veil are simply an answer to the Marchesa's desire that the

girl be eliminated as a sexual object.

The connection between the ascetic mentality of the monastic and

the repressive mentality of the parent-tyrant is shown most clearly in

Schedoni. Like Ambrosio, he is unable to accept the fact of his own

sensuality; Schedoni, however, has better justification, for sensuality

has led him to ruin. For the sake of his brother's power and his wife,

he has plotted and murdered, yet he has gained little except grinding

remorse and a need for seclusion.[43] As a result, he too develops a

belief that only extreme positions exist: there is the life of sensual-

ity and passion, which is disastrous, and there is the life without

those pressures, which is equally insufferable because it is without

delight.

It is logical that Schedoni become a monk, for he has cut himself

off as much as possible from the physical world. There are several out-

ward signs of this retreat. Schedoni resembles an earlier Radcliffean

outcast, Montoni, in his total lack of sensitivity to natural beauty

or sublimity. The reaction to scenery is an index of the vigour of the

imagination, and the contrast between the monk and Ellena, as they ride

toward Spalatro's hideout, is remarkable:

> To the harassed spirits of Ellena the changing scenery was
> refreshing, and she frequently yielded her cares to the
> influence of majestic nature. Over the gloom of Schedoni,
> no scenery had, at any moment, power; the shape and paint
> of external imagery gave neither impression or colour to
> his fancy. He contemned the sweet illusions, to which
> other spirits are liable, and which often confer a delight
> more exquisite, and not less innocent, than any, which
> deliberate reason can bestow. [44]

It is as a devotee of "deliberate reason"--in the sense of self-control--

that Schedoni wants to appear. He is singularly observant of the rules

of his order, and does not spare himself any occasion for confession and

mortification. The other monks watch this last peculiarity of his con-

duct with mingled awe and suspicion, for his severity makes him both a

rigorous and an intolerant "father" of the house. He seeks to extirpate

the minor weaknesses around him that remind him of the great torturing

weakness within.

He cannot succeed because, like the Marchesa, he has performed a

deed whose consequences he does not fully control. He is as much a ser-

vant as a master of passion. Paradoxically, it is when Schedoni seems

most like a parent, and, therefore, most capable of controlling the child,

that his nerve fails and the powers of reason and detection lead him

astray. Entering Ellena's bedroom in Spalatro's hideout with the intent

of murdering her, Schedoni discovers, just as his dagger is about to

pierce her breast, a locket which would declare Ellena his own daughter.

He recoils at the sign and spares her.

The scene is dramatically impressive, the sequel psychologically
skilful. Circumstances of the most terrible kind invite a strong emo-
tional response: a father has almost murdered his daughter to satisfy a
wicked, cold woman's vendetta; in addition, certain features of the
scene--Schedoni's dagger, Ellena's recumbent, fragile innocence--suggest
that the monk has narrowly avoided a sexual attack. We have been
brought to the edge of an unbearable spectacle. Yet, Radcliffe refrains
from making Schedoni's revulsion a matter of conscience or an occasion
for an abrupt change of heart. Schedoni is a secretly power-mad man,
and a conscience, though he cannot evade it entirely, is mainly an
encumbrance for him. What horrifies him is that he has nearly destroyed
his best chance for securing the influence that he desires. He saves
Ellena, not for the sake of compassion, but for the sake of greed; he is
eager to see her married to young Vivaldi in order to exploit his con-
nection with her. In abetting one unnatural parent (i.e., the Marchesa)
he has unwittingly worked against his own unnatural parental feelings--
or lack of feelings.

The rather ponderous ironies of the third volume of the novel
originate in this strange reversal. Schedoni's peasant guide acts as
if he were aware of the monk's secrets, as if he were playing an elabor-
ate game of cat-and-mouse with his master, but his most stinging remarks
are probably inadvertent. The monk believes himself exposed as a child-
murderer by this underling;[45] however, there is no safe way of testing
the man's knowledge without further giving himself away. A harsher
torture is Ellena's puzzled yet genuine gratitude for Schedoni's aid.
The more forcefully she expresses this natural, filial affection, the

more Schedoni is compelled to admit his unworthiness to receive it.

It is from the obscure region of memory and buried deeds, a region partly restored to mind by mistaken recognition of Ellena, that Schedoni's nemesis comes. Nemesis is aided by a false sense of security, a failure of perception. Schedoni does not believe in forces that are greater, more obscure, more inscrutible than his own, he does not expect to be victimized; therefore, when he finally *is* made a victim, he suffers because he is emotionally unprepared for fear. In the chain of oppressors and controllers, he has power over Ellena and Vivaldi and the monks of his order, but he does not have as much power or awareness as he needs. It is appropriate that he be detected by the agents of the Inquisition. Not only is it the severe parental authority within the Church, but its secret workings and manipulations are even more devious than Schedoni's. The same lack of susceptibility to the sublime that we notice in his response to nature prevents Schedoni from realizing the impending danger.

Radcliffe shows that lack of imagination and sensibility is as dangerous as excessive sensibility, and she uses the main antagonists, Vivaldi and Schedoni, to prove the point. Her depiction of the Inquisition, for example, is vague, in comparison to later uses of the institution in gothic fiction, but the vagueness is deliberate, for it gives us the opportunity to watch Radcliffe demonstrate what she has discovered about artificial terror.

Schedoni is impressed with the Inquisitors, of course, but he also underestimates the extent of their network: he is a reasonable man, who does not exaggerate dangers in order to obtain the artificial thrill of

fear.

In contrast, Vivaldi, as we learn in the first volume, is a fol-
lower of Burke's principles. In her understanding of his vulnerable
sensibility, Radcliffe exhibits an understanding of the process of
reading gothic fiction. Thus she accounts for Vivaldi's decision to
continue his search at Paluzzi:

> . . . he once more determined to ascertain, if possible,
> the true nature of this portentous visitant. . . . He
> was awed by the circumstances which had attended the
> visitations of the monk . . . by the suddenness of his
> appearance, and departure; by the truth of his prophecies;
> and, above all, by the solemn event which had verified his
> last warning; and his imagination, thus elevated by wonder
> and painful curiosity, was prepared for something above
> the reach of common conjecture, and beyond the accomplish-
> ment of human agency. His understanding was sufficiently
> strong and clear to teach him to detest many errors of
> opinion, that prevailed about him . . . and, in the usual
> state of mind, he probably would not have paused for a
> moment on the subject before him; but his passions were
> now interested and his fancy awakened, and, though he was
> unconscious of this propensity, he would, perhaps, have
> been somewhat disappointed, to have descended suddenly
> from the region of fearful sublimity, to which he had
> soared--the world of terrible shadows--to the earth, on
> which he daily walked, and to an explanation simply
> natural.[46]

Radcliffe purveys simply natural explanations. That is her way of
reducing the gothic darkness to a system, of returning her protagonists
and her readers fairly unscathed to the immediate realm of common sense.
For the most part the result is supposed to be educational: Vivaldi
loses some of his useless gallantry and paralyzing credulity; Emily
discovers the correctness of her father's lectures on the pitfalls of
sensibility. However, at the same time, the allure of the irrational,
which delights in exploring and magnifying obscurity, is none the less
real. The protagonists are eventually removed from the influence of the

irrational, but they are not forever released from it. The capacity of the imagination to *choose* and to *create* terror still exists after the gothic enemy seems vanquished. Both Radcliffe and her readers are required to compare the feebleness of the final reassurances with the internal reality of terror.

In Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), the study of the victims' mentality is intense, unrelieved by anything except the most fragile moments of nostalgia. The fictional events which, thanks to the Chinese-box-like structure of the narrative, stretch out in apparently infinite regression, are a continual source of pain and disillusionment. Despite the close attention to the psychology of extremity in *Melmoth,* which often reveals how fear and pain are self-made, obscurity and terror assume for Maturin an independent reality, beyond the reach of mere projection or masochistic invention. When the delights of sublimity are endless, they cease to be delightful and the complicity of the imagination becomes irrelevant. Drawn by the impressiveness of Maturin's objects of terror, the reader is sucked inward by the cycle of narrators, each of whom has less relief to promise. Maturin establishes a plausible, alternative gothic world of pain that is shared by persecutors and persecuted. The latter, perhaps, are vindicated in Heaven, but the novel holds out no firm evidence of that, speaking mainly of Hell.

In *Melmoth* obscurity and terror are institutionalized; they are the chief instruments of the unhappy tyrants and the conspiratorial tyrannies. This is a logical extension of previous gothic preoccupations. It is as if Maturin had decided to pursue to the farthest point the

isolated reference in Burke's *Enquiry* to the usefulness of sublimity in religion and politics. At that point aesthetic enjoyment—the cult of the sublime—passes away, and persecution begins, without relief for victim or vicarious sufferer.

The breadth of the vision makes *Melmoth* more menacing, disturbing and desolate than stories of gothic villainy based on monastic, criminal or national stereotypes—though many of those are invoked in *Melmoth* as well. Maturin restricts the number of rationalizations or evasions; as a result, his fantasies and excursions into history are less susceptible to nostalgic interpretation. What distinguishes *Melmoth* and gives it enduring value is the choice of settings, situations, and incidents from outside the usual gothic repertoire. In addition, many of its observations about the perversity of institutional authority are still pertinent, because the same institutional targets have survived.

Unless the principle of organization is found, Maturin's rummaging through history and geography seems tiresome, random and pointless. There is an extraordinary chronological range: from a roughly contemporary "present" the narrative reaches back to the time of the Wanderer's original pact, over four centuries earlier. The Wanderer's travels extend—in reverse order—from Ireland to England to Spain to Germany to the Indian Ocean—and those are only the encounters we are told about. Maturin abandons any real pretense of order or sequence. Articulation between levels of narration is often mechanical or haphazard. For example, Maturin relies on the worn-out device of the testamonial document, like St. Aubert's accidental "message" to Emily or the account that Adeline discovers, in order to introduce the crucial tale of the

accused madman Staunton.[47] Similarly, in the middle of the anti-idyll
on Immalee's island, Maturin interjects the gratuitous bit of informa-
tion that the Wanderer is conducting his campaign against Staunton's
soul in the intervals of his love-making with Immalee; except for remind-
ing us of the Wanderer's true nature, a fact that is ironically over-
emphasized anyway, the coincidence is empty.

There is no accounting for such clumsiness except by noting that
the actual unifying principle in *Melmoth* is psychological, and that the
plot has to bend in some odd ways to accommodate it. What ties together
the various levels of narration is a state of mind that Maturin fixes
before our attention through repetition and reflection: it is the exper-
ience of utter alienation, the conviction that suffering, once prolonged
past a certain personal limit, is a mark of damnation.

This experience occupies all of Melmoth's consciousness, and the
shape of the narrative is determined by the Wanderer's desperate search
for someone who will take over his burden. Lewis takes a man who is
already cut off from the world and drives him deeper into it in order
to present the spectacle of his damnation. Maturin, on the other hand,
takes a man who has set himself adrift from the world--with the purpose,
paradoxically, of enjoying it longer--and refuses to let him re-enter
the world on his own terms. Melmoth can save himself (i.e., die in
peace) only by luring someone else to the same damnation-through-immor-
tality. Melmoth's singular, prolonged existence is the curse that he
longs to transfer, its pain and loneliness the contagion that he sheds
on those he comes into contact with. Like Ambrosio, he is trapped in a
terrible, irreconcilable dilemma: his greatest desire is for human

contact, which his unnatural history, although it has allowed him a wide
view of life, has denied him; yet, he undertakes each contact with the
knowledge beforehand that he must turn diabolical agent in order to save
himself--that he must blight what he starts to love. The rule that
prevailed in *The Monk* prevails in *Melmoth:* the erotic impulse is ulti-
mately destructive.

Maturin traces the pattern of alienated souls who attract the great
outcast from the opening of *Melmoth*. The circumstances by which the
Wanderer again appears in the fictional world are especially significant.
The whole assemblage of stories is received by young John Melmoth, a
descendant of the Wanderer, from the shipwrecked Spaniard Moncada, one
of the Wanderer's chief victims. John Melmoth tries to save the Spaniard
from the tumultuous sea, but he is incapable and almost drowns, until
the Spaniard saves *him*. John Melmoth is unprepared to battle with the
chaotic, drowning element; he is rescued by a man who is particularly
well-equipped to bring him word from that element, however, for Moncada
has survived isolation, blind persecution, and irrational hatred.

Need, as well as accident, has brought the two young men together.
John Melmoth has arrived at the western Irish coast to await the death
of his wealthy uncle; he is an orphan whose only connection with his
uncle has been financial dependency--and the uncle is a mean provider.
Melmoth feels no pity at the old man's death. Indeed, emotional barren-
ness seems to be the family heritage, for the uncle has a reputation for
cruelty and coldness in the neighbourhood. John Melmoth is edging
towards the emotional condition that made possible his ancestor's fatal
bargain; Moncada is "sent" to warn him.[48]

The tremendous catastrophe in which the Wanderer is consumed pre-
cludes our finding out whether John Melmoth has been moved or educated
by the long recitation of Moncada, but the lesson is delivered with
unremitting force. As narrative unfolds from narrative, the same
elements are varied and compounded. The constant theme is the perver-
sion and destruction of family relations. Staunton's family commits
him to an insane asylum full of religious and political fanatics in
order to seize his wealth. Moncada is consigned to a monastery which is
a veritable dungeon by the fatuous, superstitious fears of his parents,
fears encouraged by the ministers of the Church. More than any other
gothic novelist Maturin succeeds in representing the Church as a model
of the perfect, impenetrable, conspiratorial organization,[49] and as a
monstrous distortion of the natural family. The Church is the evil
genius of power raised to magnificent yet terrible proportions; it acts
out a parody of parental anxieties about the independence and erotic
potency of children, and its answer to the anxieties is to capture and
desexualize everyone. Its blighting influence descends on figures in
the other narratives: on the Jewish magician Adonijah in the form of the
Inquisition, on Isidora/Immalee through the agency of her pious, imbe-
cilic parents. Religion, as a kind of anti-erotic tyranny, also destroys
the lives of the English lovers, who are plagued by sectarian differences
and religious war.

The Wanderer, always hopeful for release, aggravates each miserable
situation. Like the mysterious Armenian in Schiller's *Ghost-Seer*[50] he
keeps himself and his purposes deliberately obscure.[51]

Yet Maturin will not permit us the luxury of simply detesting him. The divided attitudes characteristic of the ambivalent mode of gothicism show plainly in Maturin's treatment of the Wanderer, and in his general appreciation of suffering as a means of sensational stimulation.[52]

It would have been relatively easy for Maturin to have made Melmoth some sort of gothic demon and to have elicited our total sympathy for the poor victims whom the Wanderer tries to tempt into changing places with him. Instead, Maturin renders the anguish of the Wanderer as real as that of the victims--perhaps more real, for the Wanderer is not given the chance to present his situation in sentimental terms, as the various narrators often do. Unlike the different story-tellers, whose information Moncada and John Melmoth are busy putting together, the Wanderer is aware of all the ironies of his position, but, though he does not suffer from the normal victim's paralysis and fear (equivalent to an exaggerated sublime response), he is unable to save himself.

It is natural, given his combined impotence and awareness, that he should respond with grisly humour and a teasing of his prey. That process becomes especially painful during his relationship with Immalee, whom he dares to love him, while warning her indirectly about the consequences, and cursing himself for the game he must play with her. Maturin goes to some length to disclaim any identification with Melmoth's blasphemies,[53] yet his most forceful writing is devoted to an examination of Melmoth's sentiments and opinions, including his dark thoughts about human love and heavenly salvation. We learn rather little about Melmoth until Maturin allows him to meditate on the value of his existence.

The remainder of Maturin's considerable skill as a psychological observer goes into his description of the victims' mental conditions. The psychology of those who are placed in "extraordinary positions" becomes such a strong sustaining factor in *Melmoth* that the unending account of suffering seems *necessary,* if the narrative is not to dissolve in a mass of moralistic conclusions wrenched from its basic tone of unbelief.

Many of the images in *Melmoth* are exceedingly repulsive. There is, for example, the extended agony of Moncada's hopeless attempt to tunnel out of monastic captivity, a night-long crawl through cold and darkness, with a murderer for his guide. There is the midnight mock wedding ceremony that binds Isidora/Immalee to Melmoth, a ceremony presided over by the animated corpse of a monk.

Moreover, many of Maturin's fundamental interests have a questionable tendency. *Melmoth* is a misogynistic fiction, rich in details of the torture of women's minds, in particular. Maturin's extremely close scrutiny of the sufferer's mentality pushes sensationalism beyond the decorous range described by Burke and his critical successors, although his psychological experiments are, in fact, dedicated to the objectives that Burke laid out for the art of terror.

What is most uncomfortable about *Melmoth* as a work of ambivalent gothicism is that it provides the reader with relatively little protection, in the form of exoticism or assimilated nostalgic elements, and, in that sense, less ambivalence. Maturin brings before us most of the usual gothic stock of character types and incidents--the fiendish monks, the naive female victims, the subterranean adventures, the reversals and

confusions of identity, the blasted love affairs—yet all of these are
merely instrumental in furthering his sensationalist purposes, none of
them sufficiently convincing so as to explain away Maturin's vision of
what the gothic world means. Maturin is unable to offer us any satis-
factory means of distancing his objects of terror because they are not
distant in his imagination, and because he wants to maintain their
impressiveness and their capacity to demand our admiration. Melmoth,
for example, must be made to suffer more magnificently than we think he
deserves; his fate must be spectacular, not, in the end, contemptible.
Maturin cannot demonstrate very convincingly that the fantasies he
superimposes upon historical or foreign settings are simply matters of
gothic barbarity, in a diminuitive sense. He cannot suggest that what
he represents are the manners of the gothic ancestors who tortured their
children and murdered each other out of passion, who ignored their
inherent irrationality, yet succumbed to it. The system of power-
through-terror that Maturin analyses in such minute detail is tangible,
and Maturin refrains from attributing any response to that system to
accidents of an alien time or place. The ambivalence of Maturin's gothi-
cism lies in this: he makes damnation real, psychologically if not
theologically, yet he also makes the view of it, from the inside, spec-
tacular and strangely attractive.

In this treatment of terrifying objects, Maturin's method depends
on the typical ambivalent attitude towards the gothic. It remains now
to examine the essential differences between gothic ambivalence and
nostalgia as shown in the selected gothic novels that have been con-
sidered here.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Harrison R. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen,* pp. 98-99.

[2]Identification of the gothic period as a time when individual power was excessive (i.e., the whiggish application of "goth" as an insult against tory authoritarianism) is strengthened by the inclusion of sexual rapacity among the gothic abuses.

[3]Denis Diderot, *The Nun (La Religieuse),* tr. Leonard Tancock (London: The Folio Society, 1972), pp. 91-92.

[4]W. F. Wright, however, denies the contention (found in the work of Alice Killen and Jacob Brauchli) that Mrs. Radcliffe's attitude toward monasticism is purely anti-clerical, claiming instead that "the novelist's interest in the religious houses was that of a sentimental artist" (p. 107) and that the monastery was simply another exotic setting, so imperfectly known as to be highly adaptable. For a partisan critique of gothic anti-monasticism, see Sister Mary Muriel Tarr, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1946). Compare A. L. Barbauld, "On Monastic Institutions," *Works,* II, 195-213.

[5]Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1904), pp. 45-47.

[6]Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 639-640. Percy Shelley, who was, as Peacock represents him in *Nightmare Abbey,* intimately familiar with the conventions of gothic fiction, links monastic miseducation with the excessive, romantic sensibility that destroys his heroine, Eloise de St. Irvyne, by rendering her overly vulnerable and giving her a mind *"comparatively* imbecile." See *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian* in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), V, 162. The novel was originally published 10 December 1810.

[7]Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 299.

[8]Ibid., pp. 299-300.

[9]Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance,* ed. Howard Anderson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973). Anderson follows the text of the manuscript version of *The Monk* in the collection of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, a version which comes closer to the first published editions (1795, 1796) than to subsequent editions that Lewis was compelled to expurgate. Original orthography is preserved. All citations refer to this edition and will be given within the text.

[10]For divergent views on Lewis' notoriety, see Mrs. Cornwall Baron-Wilson, *The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis* (London: Henry Colburn, 1839) and Louis F. Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961). The general background given in Quinlan's *Victorian Prelude* and the detailed analysis of Lewis' legal harassment in Parreaux's study of the publication of *The Monk* indicate that the indecency or blasphemy of the novel was magnified by the author's announcement that he was a Member of Parliament.

[11]The epigraph also ironically connects carnality and the inanimate:
      ---Lord Angelo is precise;
      Stands at a guard with envy; Scarce confesses,
      That his blood flows, or that his appetite
      Is more to bread than stone.
               (*Measure for Measure,* I.iii.50-53)

[12]John Berryman, "*The Monk* and Its Author," *The Freedom of the Poet* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), p. 131. This essay appeared originally as the introduction to the Grove Press edition of the novel (1952).

[13]Pamela Kaufman places this conjunction at the centre of the gothic vision (pp. 2190-2192). Compare Lowry Nelson Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," *Yale Review,* 52, 2 (Winter 1963), 238.

[14]Nevertheless, the desire to unmask Antonia in the preceding scene is here more than fulfilled, and it is Lorenzo's dream-imagination that divests her of her bridal gown. Earlier, in his argument with Christobal, Lorenzo inadvertently names the latent alternative to his superficial decency, when he declares: "'I should be a Villain, could I think of her on any other terms than marriage'"(p. 85).

[15]Berryman complains: "I have scarcely ever read an excellent novel which for so long fails to declare its quality. Up to the sixth chapter, or halfway through the book, it is charming and interesting in varying degrees, eminently readable, but hardly remarkable" (p. 130).

[16]The same kind of warning against sexual dangers, and particularly against deceptive lovers, occurs in the song which Raymond's spy, Theodore, uses to try to tell Agnes of his presence in the convent, "The Water-King: a Danish Ballad." The element of the Water-King is the fluid of sexual experience, and the gradual immersion of the song's female victim represents a dangerous initiation. The song is perfectly suited to Agnes' situation, for it warns in a refrain: "Believe not every handsome Knight" (p. 291).

[17]Evans, pp. 56-59.

[18]Tarr lists these solecisms at great length and seems to regard them as a sufficiently damning comment on gothic techniques; Berryman notes some of them too (p. 133), but does not consider them major flaws.

[19]Elliott B. Gose, Jr., *Imagination Indulged: The Irrational in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1972),

p. 28. The phrase "undecided character" is from B.-W.'s biography of
Lewis.

[20]Sigmund Freud, "A Special Choice of Object Made by Men (Contribu-
tions to the Psychology of Love I)," "On the Universal Tendency to
Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of
Love II)," and "The Taboo of Virginity (Contributions to the Psychology
of Love III)," *Complete Psychological Works,* ed. James Strachey, et al.
(London: Hogarth Press, 1957), XI, 163-208.

[21]Taylor Stoehr, "Pornography, Masturbation, and the Novel,"
Salmagundi, 2,2 (1967-68), 28-56; Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagin-
ation," *Styles of Radical Will* (1969; rpt. New York: Delta, 1970),
pp. 35-73.

[22]Lewis appears to share this fascination; he is especially metic-
ulous in detailing Ambrosio's "captivation" by Matilda and in presenting
Antonia at her bath, not only to Ambrosio but to the reader. The play-
ful adventure of the pet linnet at Antonia's breasts is a sight too much
for the monk to bear, and Lewis makes the mixture of coyness and sexual
ripeness extremely attractive.

[23]"Had his Penitents consulted those Interpreters": see John Graham,
"Character Description and Meaning in the Romantic Novel," *Studies in
Romanticism,* 5, 4 (1966), 208-218, for a discussion of physiognomic prac-
tices in the novel and their supposed value. This deception has a more
sinister reflection in Antonia's cry "Oh! I was not deceived in him"
which precedes another rape attempt (p. 250). Ironically, Ambrosio's
chief access to Antonia--his holiness--sets him apart from far easier
and safer prey.

[24]Vincentio della Ronda: This fictitious ill friend supplies the
pretext for Rosario/Matilda to visit Ambrosio in his cell.

[25]Nelson asserts that "*The Monk,* with other novels of the school,
presented under the license of sensationalism significant and basic
traits of human nature that elsewhere, in 'polite' fiction, went unex-
pressed" (p. 242). Nelson notes that the apparent sensationalism (or
pornography) is the means by which "the gothic novel seems to have freed
the minds of readers from direct involvement of their superegos and
allowed them to pursue daydreams and wish fulfilment in regions where
inhibitions and guilt could be suspended" (p. 238). Compare Railo,
Haunted Castle, p. 280.

[26]Lévy argues that the principal difference between the novels of
Radcliffe and *The Monk* is that in the former the protagonists are able
to emerge from their vision of hell, to regain a level of relative con-
sciousness and rationality, to explain away what has happened to them;
for the protagonists of Lewis or Maturin, "le rêveur est allé si profond
qu'il ne peut plus remonter" (p. 640).

[27] Tompkins, *Popular Novel,* p. 131.

[28] Radcliffe pretends to assign each novel a specific historical setting; in *The Romance of the Forest,* for example, she adopts an elaborate and irrelevant editorial device in order to suggest that the fiction is based on plausible fact derived from documentary sources. Such efforts have little effect on the actual conduct of the novels, nor do Radcliffe's historical interests produce more than superficial knowledge of other times and places.

[29] *Udolpho,* pp. 662-663. The deception continued to prey on the gullible. In Chapter 6 of *Northanger Abbey,* Catherine Morland, reading *Udolpho* for the first time, exclaims to her new friend Miss Thorpe, a more experienced reader of the gothic: "Oh! the dreadful black veil! My dear Isabella, I am sure there must be Laurentina's skeleton behind it" (Penguin edn., 1972, p. 62).

[30] Schedoni rather contemptuously explains to Vivaldi how he has relied on the young man's superstitious fear in his schemes to keep Vivaldi away from Ellena (*Italian,* p. 397).

[31] La Motte "knew himself to be in the power of the Marquis, and he dreaded that power more than the sure, though distant punishment that awaits upon guilt" (*Romance of the Forest,* p. 247).

[32] Ibid., p. 49.

[33] In Chapter 23 of *Northanger Abbey,* Catherine cannot quite accept General Tilney's explanation for his wakefulness while she goes to bed—that he has many political pamphlets to read. Her own ideas are typically gothic: "There must be some deeper cause: something was to be done which could be done only while the household slept; and the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nighly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed" (p. 191). The fantasy is lifted directly from *The Sicilian Romance.*

[34] Tompkins, p. 84 ff., pp. 147-148.

[35] The coyness of Radcliffe's technique is a direct product of ambivalent attitudes. During most of *The Romance of the Forest* Radcliffe suggests a measure of incestuous, aggressive intent in the succession of false fathers, and the suggestion is made explicit when the Marquis de Montalt is identified as Adeline's real father. Radcliffe leaves the puzzle of his motives unsolved only long enough to impress Adeline—and the reader—with the pain of mistaken connection; when Adeline's distress has been sufficiently aggravated, she retracts the threatening information.

[36] Nelson C. Smith, "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe," p. 590. The idea of an education in erotic realities is carefully examined in

R. W. Mise, "The Gothic Heroine and the Nature of the Gothic Novel," Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Washington, 1970.

[37]The *Abate* who pretends to aid Ellena and Vivaldi speaks of the young man's heroic pretensions as an anachronism: "'You are a knight of chivalry, who would go about the earth fighting with every body by way of proving your right to do good; it is unfortunate that you are born somewhat too late'" (*Italian*, p. 122).

[38]There have been frequent, usually unsupported claims that Radcliffe wrote *The Italian* in outrage against the excesses of *The Monk*. Tompkins, for example, argues that *The Italian* was an "attempt to redeem the subject of monastic tyranny, and to treat it in a manner that should be quite terrible and yet consistent with perfect delicacy. In *The Italian* there is no lust and no luxurious cruelty; in place of them there is bigotry and ambition" (p. 278). This last contrast is particularly inaccurate.

[39]Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 64.

[40]Ibid., p. 65.

[41]Ibid., p. 68.

[42]Ellena's imagination, as she watches one of the nuns, makes this transformation explicit: she sees "the countenance of the nun characterised by gloomy malignity, which seemed ready to inflict upon others some portion of the unhappiness she herself suffered. As she glided forward with soundless steps, her white drapery, floating along these solemn avenues, and her hollow features touched with the mingled light and shadow which the partial rays of a taper she held occasioned, she seemed like a spectre newly risen from the grave, rather than a living being" (*Italian*, pp. 66-67).

[43]For a comparison of the monastic recluse and the noble hermit, see Tompkins, p. 286.

[44]Radcliffe, *The Italian*, pp. 62-63.

[45]Schedoni, Ellena and the peasant guide enter a village where Carnival is being celebrated. Part of the festivities is a performance of John Webster's *Appius and Virginia*. Schedoni is disturbed by two remarks from the guide. First he delights in the skill of a juggler who "'has turned a monk into a devil already, in the twinkling of an eye.'" At the climax of the dramatic performance, the guide exclaims, as if in accusation against Schedoni's contemplated deed: "'Look! Signor, see! Signor, what a scoundrel! What a villain! See! he has murdered his own daughter!'" (p. 274).

[46]Ibid., p. 58.

[47]Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 28 ff. (Vol. I, Chapter 3).

[48]A similar pattern has been noted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus;* see L. J. Swingle, "Frankenstein's Monster and Its Romantic Relations: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 15, 1 (Spring 1973), 51-65; Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley's Monster: The Story of* Frankenstein (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976). The relationship between Walton and Victor Frankenstein, however, is considerably more complex and equivocal.

[49]Tompkins, pp. 281-285; compare the Marquis von Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries,* tr. Peter Will (1796; rpt. London: Folio Press, 1968).

[50]Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, "The Ghost-Seer: or Apparitionist," *Schiller's Complete Works,* tr. and ed. Charles J. Hemple (Philadelphia: Kohler, 1861), II, 294.

[51]As Burke's theory would predict, Melmoth's intermittent appearances and the obscurity of his purposes increase his impressiveness and the terror associated with him. A good deal of the reader's tension originates in the *expectation* that he will intervene in the succeeding episodes and in the *uncertainty* of how he will do so.

[52]Mario Praz, *Romantic Agony,* pp. 116-120.

[53]Maturin, *Melmoth,* p. 342 ff.

CONCLUSION

This study began by considering various images of the gothic,

arising from historical fact and folk tradition, and by assessing their

potential usefulness for the creative imagination and popular art.

Through examples drawn from critical theory and selected gothic fiction,

it has shown that, once the imaginative value of the gothic had been

recognized, there were two possible attitudes towards it, each support-

ing a radically different kind of gothic fiction.

The nostalgic attitude, first expressed through the work of anti-

quaries, such as Hurd, Warton and Percy, and poetic revivers of folklore,

such as Gray, Macpherson and Chatterton, transformed the essential bar-

barity and crudeness of the gothic world into a vision of a more primi-

tive, simple existence, elevated by ceremony and dignity, purified of

the most disturbing effects of modern life. The imaginary era embodied

the ideals that the present age had failed to preserve. As the short-

comings of sophistication and "improvement" became increasingly evident,

it was natural that this selective perception of the past should have

become more appealing and convenient. For both conservative and radical

reformers of the nineteenth century, like Carlyle and Ruskin, identifi-

cation with the gothic ancestors exemplified an heroic resistance to

the encroachments of modernity.[1]

We have seen the adaptability of the nostalgic attitude to conserv-

ative, pietistic ends in Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron* (1777). Her

dedication, in fiction and theory, to bourgeois moralism, and her

opposition to revolutionary ideas produced a relatively bland, rational-
istic, reassuring sort of gothic story, in which dissatisfactions with
the existing order, particularly with changes in family life, were
redressed through the power of nostalgic idealization. For Reeve, as
for other nostalgic gothicists, the gothic world ultimately offered a
refuge from violence and revolution. For some it also lifted the banal-
ity of everyday life.[2]

We can derive a sense of the nostalgic attitude from works that
are not simply, exclusively nostalgic, as *The Old English Baron*, *The
Recess* (1785), or *Longsword* (1762) undoubtedly are. Though her outlook
is less tinged with middle-class aspirations than Reeve's, a degree of
nostalgia affects Ann Radcliffe's fiction. There are, after all, the
scenic and emotional idylls which her early readers enjoyed so much: at
La Vallée and in the Alps (*Udolpho,* 1794), at the convent of *Santa della
Pieta* (*Italian,* 1797), in La Luc's pastoral cottage (*Romance of the
Forest,* 1791). The pleasures of sentiment and sensibility associated
with a nostalgic version of the gothic are a constant source of delight
for protagonist and reader.

In many gothic novels there is a rejection of certain aspects of
modernity that has a nostalgic overtone. In *Udolpho,* for example, St.
Aubert warns repeatedly against the empty temptations of city life. His
wisdom is corroborated by the attractiveness of the rural alternative,
by the nearly ruinous career of Valancourt in Paris, and by Emily's own
experience with Venetian luxury and degeneracy.

Occasionally a similar criticism of modernity forms a part of
gothic ambivalence, but the criticism has no nostalgic effect, since no

positive alternative to modern life is presented or intended. A prime

example occurs in *The Monk* (1795) where Lewis exhibits a delight in

emphasizing the inadequacy of rationalism and skepticism when confronted

by objects of ancient, primitive belief or by irrational forces. Having

conjured her up as a trick, Raymond almost succumbs to the Bleeding Nun.

Lorenzo, Antonia and Elvira all ignore the promptings of their ominous

dreams until it is too late. The obtuseness of these characters repre-

sents, in extreme form, the enlightened reader's weakness of imagination:

like them he supposes himself above superstition, only to discover the

disastrous consequences of complacency. The failure of rationalism

shows most clearly in Ambrosio, whose strict external discipline can

neither aid nor control the internal, demonic chaos.

The fully nostalgic attitude pushes the critique of rationalism one

step further, and makes the gothic openness to the irrational, spiritual

and supernatural a point of superiority. This judgment is interwoven in

critical defences of the gothic from Hurd's "fine fabling" through

Drake's "sportive gothic." For antiquaries, poets, novelists and build-

ers, expansiveness is the imaginative reward of the gothic taste, but

the nostalgic treatment usually selects outlets for it which are not

threatening or sensational.

In its architectural and social manifestations, the nostalgic atti-

tude advocates a return to more splendid forms of religious ritual,

design, and social order, such as are supplied by Roman Catholicism,

gothic styles, chivalric manners, and gothic libertarianism. However,

there is also a strong nostalgic component in the central psychological

interest of many gothic novels—the problem of identity and authority.

The working out of the problem invariably requires a fulfilment obtained from the past, which is the result of a more complete awareness of the past.

It is the perfect parent, and hence the perfect childhood, that the protagonist-victim in gothic fiction wants to recover. Adeline in *Romance of the Forest* and Ellena in *The Italian* are mystified and frustrated by their uncertain parentage; their eventual happiness depends on their histories being set straight. In *Udolpho* Emily is distracted by the question of her father's faithfulness and her own origins. Parallel anxieties about lineage and parental sexual conduct appear in overtly nostalgic works (viz. Edmund's vigil and his parents' ghostly assistance in *Old English Baron*), and in works which are not nostalgic. In *The Monk*, for example, personal histories play a very important part in the whole ironic pattern, exacting a terrible price from those who are ignorant of them. The discovery of the past brings no satisfaction to Ambrosio, only greater agony.

The pathos and tension inherent in the search for origins registers on a personal level, of course, but it also has a wider social significance. The quest for authentic, protective, sexually neutral parents draws the protagonist further and further into an archaic region whose features are compounded from equal parts of personal anxiety, fantasy, and cultural history. Under the guise of domestic adventure and conflict (i.e., the solving of family mysteries), the gothic novelists often pursued a collective, nostalgic desire for a more protective, more secure, less violent reality, a goal which could only be reached by penetrating a labyrinth of dangers and threats--by breaching the

chambers of Udolpho, by exposing Schedoni's machinations—or by purging

the danger from the gothic world altogether, as Clara Reeve tried to do.

The dangers are all the more treacherous because they are attrac-

tive and impressive—like Montoni's arrogance and sexual potency, or

Manfred's defiance of certain doom in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The

nostalgic attitude locates the essence of the gothic safely beyond the

ring of dangers, and it is not much interested in them. For ambivalent

gothicists the reverse is true.

The ambivalent gothicists remained skeptical about the actual

superiority of gothic manners, because they endowed the gothic with a

different set of characteristics. They accepted, and exploited in their

art, much of the received wisdom about the gothic world, cultivating the

image of it as a realm of barbarity, violence, superstition, tyranny,

and sexual aggression. The excitement and terror generated by *Otranto,*

The Monk, The Italian, or *Melmoth* (1820) drew support from the belief

that such features were truly gothic.

For the ambivalent gothicists, the superiority of the gothic lay

not in its receptivity to imposed social, political or religious ideals,

but in its unlimited imaginative potency, its value as a place where

sensational, extraordinary subjects might be examined intensively, where

unusual forms and techniques might be adopted freely. The cues which

key gothic objects—such as castles, convents, hermits, monks, nuns, or

outlaws—gave the reader established immediate, predictable responses

which, in turn, provided the gothic novelist or builder with a great

deal of creative leeway. Builders could rely on such responses because

the imaginary effect of neo-gothic buildings arose from literary

associations of the same kind. When Lewis raised the old spectre of monasticism, or Radcliffe that of the Inquisition, when Walpole wrote in amusement of tyrant kings and eligible daughters, the reader knew what degree of violence and licence to expect. Once the basic premise of gothic barbarity was acknowledged, the ambivalent gothicist was able to explore psychic territory and to evoke sensational responses which were otherwise forbidden, under the protection of his persistent ambivalence towards the entertaining, terrifying, strange objects themselves: Walpole's contempt for Manfred and sympathy for his sexual dilemma, Lewis' diminishment of Ambrosio and identification with him.

To different degrees the gothic novelists followed a process of compromise with established tastes that was a direct function of their ambivalence towards the gothic itself. This was the same process that Walpole, Miller and Knight brought to neo-gothic building.[3] This was a means of ensuring the reader's comfort by proving that the gothic was, at the same time, alien, exotic, dangerous, and controllable. It was also a means of excusing the reader's fascination with the terrifying experiences that he had eagerly sought out. Each ambivalent gothicist found some method of making the fiction open to ambivalent readings: editorial devices (Walpole, Radcliffe, even Clara Reeve), narrative tone (Walpole, Lewis), narrative commentary (Lewis, Radcliffe, Maturin), superficial moralism (Radcliffe). We have already noticed, however, in the discussion of *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer,* how the reassuring aspect of the ambivalent attitude gradually faded and became less convincing, less necessary, as gothic barbarity, violence, eroticism, and sensationalism assumed a positive value and a compulsive attractiveness

of their own.

My aim in distinguishing between the two attitudes towards the gothic has not been to devise yet another system for categorizing the gothic novel. I believe that an understanding of these attitudes helps to reveal the complex mixture of historical, dramatic, political, and psychological elements that entered into the composition of gothic fiction. The tension between nostalgic and ambivalent attitudes has enabled some account to be given of many features of tone, structure, and characterization which are so unusual that they tempt one to dismiss gothic fiction as merely chaotic or technically incompetent.

More important, a realization of the various impulses behind the gothic taste evinced in the novels studied makes clearer its connection with later cultural developments: the growth of Anglo-Catholicism and High Anglicanism, the rise of the historical novel, the revived interest in medieval institutions as social and political models, and the controversy over the proper style for the Victorian English city. The gothic novels do not contain, of course, coherent explanations of such phenomena, but they do offer a vivid impression of the sensibility which gave birth to them.

FOOTNOTES

[1]See, for example, John Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic*, with preface by William Morris (London: George Allen, 1899).

[2]For various opinions on the relationship between real violence and revolution (i.e., the French Revolution) and the gothic novel, see Parreaux, p. 36 ff. Parreaux cites Sade's essay on the gothic in *Idées sur les Romans*, in which Sade argues that the violence of contemporary life forced the gothic novelists to outdo reality.

[3]Duncan Simpson, "Introductory Essay," *Gothick* (Catalogue) (Brighton: Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1975), pp. 14-15.

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