

The Gothic Novel and the Lingering Appeal of Romance

While the origins of most literary genres are lost, either in scholarly controversy or the dark backward and abyss of time, those of the Gothic novel present an admirable clarity. Beneath the papier-mâché machicolations of Strawberry Hill, the antiquarian and aesthete Horace Walpole, inspired by a nightmare involving ‘a giant hand in armour,’ created at white heat the tale published Christmas 1764 as *The Castle of Otranto*. Not one but two genres were thus begun. The one established first was the historical romance, which derived from elements in both *Otranto* and an earlier romance by Thomas Leland, *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762). This form was pioneered by William Hutchinson's *The Hermitage* (1772), and developed by Clara Reeve (in *The Champion of Virtue*, 1777, retitled 1778 *The Old English Baron*) and Sophia Lee in *The Recess* (1783–85); it reached something like canonical status with the medieval romances of Walter Scott.

The second, the Gothic tale of supernatural terror, was slower to erupt. The *Otranto* seed has time to travel to Germany and bear fruit there in the *Räuber- und Ritter-romane* before being reengrafted onto its native English soil. It was not until the last decade of the eighteenth century that the Gothic became a major force in English fiction, so much so that tales set in Italian castles and Spanish monasteries began to crowd out those set in London houses and Hampshire mansions. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), by Ann Radcliffe, and *The Monk* (1796), by Matthew G. Lewis, spawned numberless imitators in a craze whose original impetus carried it into the next century. A very few were works of talent and genius, among which were Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). By then, the original impulse of the Gothic romance had played itself out, although the tale of terror was to survive as an element within and as an influence on mainstream realist fiction through the Victorian era and indeed beyond, and as a minor component of the house of fiction in both high and popular art up to the present.

Such is the story of the Gothic novel, and a narrative such as this one has been retold numerous times in the critical studies of the genre that began to appear in the 1920s, by Birkhead, Railo, Tompkins, Summers, and Varma.¹ But to make a necessary distinction, it is a story—or rather a chronicle, in Hayden White's terms—and not a history. It represents the important events and major happenings in order of occurrence, but makes no claim to understand why these events occurred when they did and why others did not occur in their place, nor does it try to understand the context and the backdrop against which they occurred. In the following essay we will briefly sketch out some of these underlying causes in an effort to understand why the Gothic developed when it did and what factors contributed to its decline as a separate genre and the absorption of some of its elements into the prose fiction of the early nineteenth century.

The Alexandrian Romance and Its Successors

Whether one agrees with Ian Watt that the English novel rises with Defoe, or with Ralph Rader that it began with Richardson's *Pamela*, there is no doubt that long form prose fiction goes back more than fifteen centuries to the Alexandrian romances of the first through third centuries A.D., texts that include *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, and the *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, fictions in which narrativity is generated by the separation of nobly-

born lovers, who are subjected to tremendous dangers by natural disasters and human adversaries before being finally reunited in erotic bliss. These romances circulated in the early modern period and were adapted, at full length, mixing prose and verse, by English poets such as Philip Sidney (*The New Arcadia* 1590) and Mary Wroth (*The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* 1621). Many shorter romances were also published, including Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590) and Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), known primarily today for having supplied plots for Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*. The Alexandrian romance is also the primary influence on the lengthy and intricate French romances of the seventeenth century, which were translated into English. The best-known of these are Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607-25; translated 1625) and Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* (1648-53, translated 1655). Scudéry's fictions, which often included veiled references to real ladies and gentlemen of the royal court, clearly inspired English romances *à clef* such as Aphra Behn's *Love Letters from a Nobleman to His Sister* (1685) and Delarivier Manley's *New Atlantis* (1710). The career of Eliza Haywood, who wrote enormously popular erotic/political romances like *Love in Excess* (1719), but broke off work in this genre after the 1720s, turning instead to the Richardsonian novel with *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), suggests that the vogue of the romance declined abruptly from 1730. The same point is made by comedies like Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), though it also proves that they were still consumed, or at least understood, a generation later, as female reading. Although a strong minority report has been filed by Margaret Doody², historians of the English novel generally agree that the romance was in eclipse during the half century that separated Haywood and Radcliffe, when Richardson, Fielding, and their successors were developing what they felt to be a new form of writing, more realistic and immediate, and capable of an enormous range of emotional affect from broad comedy to the heights of tragedy. The question is what brought back the romance.

Attitudes toward History

One key issue is history. In starting with *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic romance is already wed to a vision of history in ways that earlier genres of fiction, including the romances of the seventeenth century, generally were not. Realistic fiction (with exceptions like Thomas Deloney's *Thomas of Reading* or Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*) was generally set in the writer's own time and place, and such pastiches on history as had been occasionally produced earlier became increasingly rare in the two decades after *Pamela*. But starting in the 1760s and continuing for at least fifty years thereafter, romances based on history or at least set in the past, including those by Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee mentioned above, become a significant feature of English narrative. The Gothic novel of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin fits directly into this growing interest in exciting and melodramatic narratives set in the remote past. Should we speak of two genres or were they really one and the same? Certainly David Punter has argued that 'the reason why it is so difficult to draw a line between Gothic fiction and historical fiction is that Gothic itself seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it.'³

That fascination with actual medieval history and with fictional versions of medieval history seems to have begun around 1760. History had become one of the chief literary genres, while literature itself had become historical. Horace Walpole was certainly one of the great British

medievalists, though his standards of accuracy were not high, even for his own time. He boasted of his ignorance: 'I know nothing of barrows and Danish entrenchments, and Saxon barbarisms and Phoenician characters—in short, I know nothing of those ages that knew nothing.'⁴ There was even a strain of Augustan contempt for the rude manners of earlier times, when those manners could not be elided by the imagination. After inspecting John Pinkerton's histories of medieval Scotland Walpole sneered that he himself had 'seldom wasted time on the origins of nations; unless for an opportunity of smiling at the gravity of the author; for absurdity and knavery compose almost all the anecdotes we have of them'.⁵ Like Thomas Warton, Walpole delighted in the Gothic taste, but unlike Warton, who insisted on keeping his medieval and modern cultural artifacts strictly separated, he thought little of combining them. Thus in *Otranto* Walpole produced a farrago of Enlightenment motivation with medieval detail, fabricating peculiar rituals and customs out of his baroque imagination, just as he had begun his restoration of Strawberry Hill by grafting battlements of the very best papier-mâché onto a Palladian framework. The political structure of the text has it both ways too: it is simultaneously a revanchist restoration, in which even the passing of four generations cannot keep the heir of Alonso from coming to his throne, and a progressive revolution, which replaces a tyrannical prince with a brave and intelligent shepherd-boy. The entail of landed property is attacked through Prince Manfred, whose warped feelings about his wife and daughter, whose hasty and cruel actions, are all driven by the need for a male heir, even as the supernatural manifestations insist, with literal violence, on the same law of male inheritance.

The Gothic successors of Walpole were also writing in a mode of history. But by the 1790s the appetite for the medieval that had been going on for a generation had filled it with people and institutions in the public mind, just as surely as the voyages of exploration of the sixteenth century had filled the blank spaces on the maps. The Gothic monsters thus had to find an Otherwhen in which to operate. Novelists adopted the course of representing history through atmosphere and period detail, while avoiding any specific names, places, and dates that would make the story falsifiable against a historical record that, through the efforts of the antiquarians, was losing its dark corners. The key shaper of the Gothic romance, Ann Radcliffe, was neither an antiquary like Walpole nor an unusually well-educated woman, like Clara Reeve or Sophia Lee. Lacking the information on which to base a historical tale, Radcliffe usually avoided being overly particular. Her first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), employs an explicitly medieval setting, but period is set only by the weaponry and the architecture, the two Gothic castles of the title, complete with moats, portcullis, sally ports, and deep and complex dungeons. Radcliffe was devoted, not to the Middle Ages as such, but to the picturesque, wherever it might be found. Her medieval and early modern settings demand the descriptions of scenery and architecture at which she excelled. The wife of the wicked Baron Malcolm of Dunbayne, for example, hails from Switzerland (an unlikely venue for a Highland chieftain's consort) in order to allow Radcliffe to paint 'one of those delightful vallies of the Swiss cantons' (*Castles* 143). Radcliffe's greatest success, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is set in the interstices of history. It begins with a chronotopic annotation ('On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert'), but there is no reference to the historical events of that period, which saw a momentous struggle known as the 'war of the three Henris,' between the king, Henri III; his overmighty subject Henri duc de Guise; and the Protestant heir to the French throne, Henri de Bourbon, later Henri IV. Rather than move the story into the paths of momentous events, Radcliffe steers away from them, even

assuring us that the military action that permanently ends Montoni's hold on Udolpho occurs with such 'celerity and ease' that it never finds 'a place in any of the published records of that time' (*Udolpho*, 522).⁶

Few of Radcliffe's successors and imitators worked any harder at establishing the authenticity of their portraits. Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* is set in Madrid but at no particular date; the Wandering Jew appears and speaks, but fails to mention how long his tormented eternal life has thus far lasted. Mary-Anne Radcliffe's *Manfroné; or, the One Handed Monk* is set in Italy during a remote but unspecified period in the past. Maria Regina Roche's *Clermont* is set in an equally vague France, although notable names such as 'De Seigné' and 'Montmorenci' suggest the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But there were exceptions, such as Eleanor Sleath's unusually witty romance *The Nocturnal Minstrel* (1810), which is set precisely after the period of the 'feigned boys'—the pretenders Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, who troubled the reign of Henry VII—and located in a barony in the north of England ruled by the widow of a Yorkist partisan. And Charles Robert Maturin's early novel, *The Fatal Revenge, or The Family of Montorio* (1807), is placed near Naples around the year 1690.

The Gothic novel thus begins with *The Castle of Otranto* set in medieval history, a history seen as nightmare landscape where the probabilistic strictures of the present day are absent and where anything can happen, but—partly as a result of helping to stimulate that interest in history—the Gothic of the 1790s finds the primitive past populated by genuine cultures and customs of its own. The genre is thus pushed out into a never-never land of vague otherness, elsewhere and elsewhere, where the drama of suffering can occur on its own terms.

Attitudes toward Suffering

If the Gothic is the historical novel minus the details of the history, it might equally be thought to be a later, and more extreme version of the sentimental novel. This genre is treated elsewhere, so I will be brief. The mid-eighteenth century had witnessed a redefinition of the gentleman, who had once been defined in terms of the aristocratic and martial virtues, but now was defined by his restraint rather than by his powers, and by feelings tender to the point of weakness. At his most egotistically sublime, as J.M.S. Tompkins put it, 'the sensible man feels that he is an advanced type of being, of finer clay than the rest of the world, and though he pays for his superiority by weakness and anguish, he does not find the price too high, but regards with gentle scorn the low pleasures of the unthinking world.'⁷ This is a basic cultural shift and not merely a literary fashion, although literature was a significant part of the cultural pattern, not just its reflection. That is, the act of reading the texts of sensibility—sentimental novels like Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777), or Thomas Bridges's *Adventures of a Bank-Note* (1770–71) or Henry Brooke's *Fool of Quality* (1764–70)—was a sort of spiritual training camp: it taught the reader the proper objects and forms of feeling and trained his or her responses.

This was a crucial ideological step in the evolution of bourgeois society. The reform in manners that exalted sensibility as the key quality of the gentleman opened the doors to genteel behavior to those below. The cult of sensibility, as G.J. Barker-Benfield argues, was a way not only of reforming the aristocracy but of 'getting the monied interest to make itself more mannerly'.⁸ Sentimentality blurs traditional hierarchies, but at the same time the tableau in which the man of

feeling confronts the pain and suffering of others and attempts to relieve it, is one that only works *de haut en bas*. Suffering makes the poor visible to those well off, but only as emblematic individuals, symbols of an underclass that *as a class* cannot and need not be changed. Sterne's Parson Yorick relieves the distresses of the poor but betrays, according to Robert Markley, 'a generic lack of interest in the causes of poverty.'⁹

This becomes a significant issue when we ask how the sentimental evolved into the Gothic. In *Virtue in Distress*, R. F. Brissenden has suggested that the ultimate collapse of the cult of sensibility came out of the growing sense that widespread misery was a function of the proper working of the economic system.¹⁰ As the sentimental novel began to be parodied and to go out of fashion—the late 1770s—Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) authoritatively showed that wealth and poverty were the result not of virtue and wickedness (troped in Hogarth's industrious and idle apprentices) but the mechanical workings of an 'invisible hand' of supply and demand. Though John Mullan sees Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*—published 1759, just before the height of the cult of sensibility—as giving philosophical grounding to that cult by arguing that the social system depends upon the moral spectacle of suffering, Mullan argues that the wind had changed by 1776: "In *The Wealth of Nations*, the race may be the same still, but no such ... restraining spectatorial judgment is necessary to the workings of society.... Benevolence and sympathy have no place in this text. The relations enacted in patterns of exchange . . . are in excess of 'friendship' or 'benevolence....' Fellow-feeling might ornament such a society but would not be intrinsic to its proper functioning."¹¹ Smith's enormously influential vision of economic society as a system that worked amorally, without heroes and villains, implied that the innocent victims one saw—and the poor in their millions whom one did not see—were all produced by the same system that had rewarded with wealth and ease the man of sensibility. If one accepted this vision, the classic tableau of the sentimental novel became unviewable: What moral credit, what gentlemanly self-fashioning, could lie in assisting the very poverty that had made one rich? This is why Anna Barbauld sought desperately for what she called a 'new torture or nondescript calamity' that could re-create the tableau of pleasing distress.¹² After Adam Smith, the spectacle of distressed innocence required the complementary spectacle of guilt. To achieve that, one had to reinstate the villain that had been sidelined in sentimental fiction, a demonized version of the rake or the bully who had been demoted from the position of aristocratic hero.

'New Torture or Nondescript Calamity': The Psychological Power of the Gothic

The insertion of the villain in effect created the Gothic novel of Radcliffe in place of the sentimental novel of Mackenzie. Generically the forms are related but distinct. As David Denby put it in his study of French sentimentalism, 'The melodramatic and the Gothic are certainly inscribed as latent possibilities in sentimentalism: in contradistinction to sentimentalism they require, perhaps, an insistence on the threat to virtue posed by a strongly personified villain, or principle of villainy, and a heightening of the obfuscation of virtue by various narrative devices, namely peripety and deceit.'¹³ The result was melodramatic narrative, crude but effective, as we learn from typical addicts of the Gothic like Catherine Morland. But although the Gothic was popular literature, it was not esteemed, so that, as Michael Gamer has shown, authors like

Wordsworth and Scott, who aspired to inclusion in the canon, downplayed their Gothic productions or even associations.¹⁴

Gothic novels took two distinct forms depending on whether, structurally speaking, the protagonist is an exemplary woman (or man) or a morally reprehensible villain. The “female gothic” a serious action—like *Pamela*—a melodrama arousing sympathy and suspense through the unwarranted persecution of an innocent. The “male gothic” is a punitive tragedy—like Richard III or Macbeth—in which we are made both to desire and to expect the condign punishment of the central figure. The first subgenre includes *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, and countless imitators. The second includes the main plot of *The Monk*, sections of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. These may exist in relatively pure form, but some Gothic novels, including *The Castle of Otranto*, have incorporated both plots into a mixed form whose focus shifts in different parts of the narrative.

The power of the female gothic resides in the situation of the heroine, which duplicated that of the family romance of its readers. Many of Mrs. Radcliffe's readers began their postadolescent lives, like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, at the mercy of a powerful and coldly incomprehensible older man who had shaped without conscious intention their notions of sexual desire. The most successful Gothic villains, the Montonis and Schedonis, are dark fathers, images of the demon lover or the destroying angel. Within the plot structure of the romance, these figures are frequently the heroine's uncle—a displacement from literal fatherhood that underlines the incestuous basis of the fear and love they exact while making more probable the heroine's terrors of violation or murder. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Count Murano, attempting to account for the dismissal of his suit, accuses Emily of rejecting him because she hopes to replace her aunt in Montoni's bed. The accusation is repulsive and ludicrous but, as the reader recognizes, not irrelevant. This is not to say that the Gothic novel explicitly figures the female Oedipus complex. On the contrary, as Coral Ann Howells has noted, ‘There is no overt acknowledgement of sexual feeling in the novel at all; there is merely the recognition of a nameless power which is a frightening, potentially destructive force capable of assaulting both the body and the will.’¹⁵ In Gothic romances like *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, written by and largely for men, the Oedipal agon often takes the appropriately opposite form, with the male victim in thrall to a maternal woman. The female equivalent of the demon lover is found in Ambrosio's Matilda—whose description significantly highlights her voluptuous breasts—and that of the destroying angel in Juan de Monçada's mother, who, trading on his filial devotion, coldly consigns her son to be buried alive in a monastery to expiate her sins.

There are other significant psychological sources of narrative power in the Gothic. One stems from the perplexity and subsequent revelation of secrets and mysteries—a sort of rudimentary version of the pleasure we seek and find today in the detective story, which stems from the so-called phallic phase of the pre-Oedipal period. Another rather perverse pleasure has to do with the motif of imprisonment that runs through most of the important Gothic texts. The motif of confinement in the pleasurable anticipation of release, the intolerable pressures of being held in, and the incomparable pleasure of being let go, seems to be a defended form of anal eroticism.

Probably the least well-understood and most embarrassing source of power in the Gothic romance is the stimulation it gives to the sadomasochistic desires of the implied reader. Like

some of the more decadent works of the later nineteenth century, the Gothic stands in what Mario Praz once called 'the shadow of the divine Marquis.'¹⁶ Some Gothic writers included within their tales a hint about the source and significance of the pleasure they were providing. As the parricide monk in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, for example, tells Juan de Monçada:

I was anxious to witness misery that might perhaps equal or exceed my own, and this is a curiosity not easily satisfied. It is actually possible to become *amateurs in suffering*. I have heard of men who have travelled into countries where horrible executions were to be daily witnessed, for the sake of that excitement which the sight of suffering never fails to give, from the spectacle of a tragedy, or an *auto da fe*, down to the writhings of the meanest reptile on whom you can inflict torture, and feel that torture is the result of your own power. It is a species of feeling of which we never can divest ourselves,—a triumph over those whose sufferings have placed them below us.¹⁷

We distance ourselves from the parricide monk who recounts his joy in the suffering of others, but it is harder to distance ourselves from the feelings of Juan de Monçada, the narrator, as he describes his sensations watching a Spanish mob beat that same monk to death: 'It is a fact, Sir,' he tells John Melmoth, 'that while witnessing this horrible execution, I felt all the effects vulgarly ascribed to fascination.... I echoed the screams of the thing that seemed no longer to live, but still could scream.... I actually...believed myself the object of their cruelty.' And he concludes: 'The drama of terror has the irresistible power of converting the audience into its victims' (*Melmoth*, 256–57). This is the psychological key to *Melmoth*, and one of the keys to horror Gothic as a whole.

But perhaps the most strongly marked source of pleasure in the Gothic romance, particularly the female Gothic, is the pleasure of passivity and irresponsibility. Gothic novels tend to be filled with events, but the events *happen* to the protagonist; they are seldom ones in which characters *choose* one course of action over another. If the traditional Gothic heroine is a passive creature, this passivity does not take the form of immobility but of indecisiveness; her choices tend less to be decisions than abdications of the right to decide. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the heroine's only decision comes at the end of volume 1, when she declines to elope with her lover, Valancourt, despite her aunt's decision to carry her away from him into Italy and despite her suspicions of her aunt's new husband, Montoni. With eminent propriety, Emily decides that elopement would be precipitate and imprudent, since her aunt, though vulgar and selfish, is in loco parentis, and Montoni, however suspicious, has not yet been proved a villain. Emily, in acceding, has in effect decided not to decide. This pattern Emily continues to follow: When her chateau at La Vallée is rented out, she thinks of protesting, mentions 'some prejudices . . . which still linger in my heart' (*Udolpho* 196), but again accedes. To further Montoni's plans for Emily, she is removed to Venice, then to Udolpho. There indeed she, like Pamela, resists all attempts made against her person, her virtue, and her fortune. This resistance is overlaid, however, onto a sense of her own powerlessness that is almost total, and an equally exaggerated sense of the omnipotence of her captor, Montoni. During the central section of the novel, Emily is not immobile: nightly she explores the castle, finding other prisoners, coming upon bloody weapons that convince her (mistakenly) of the violent death of her aunt, and most memorably uncovering the horrendously, hideously anticlimactic mystery of the black veil. But she never takes

responsibility for herself or her predicament.

The reader spends three hundred pages participating anxiously in Emily's hesitations, observing her nocturnal explorations around the castle, fearing rape and murder at every noise, always looking for an escape until finally, in chapter 9 of book 3, she and her fellow prisoner Du Pont, together with assorted servants, simply walk out into the Tuscan countryside. 'Emily was so much astonished by this sudden departure,' Radcliffe tells us, 'that she scarcely dared to believe herself awake' (*Udolpho* 452). If *Udolpho* was an dream-prison, so is Montoni a paper tiger, whose downfall does not make even a ripple in history (522). This is another regressive aspect of the Gothic. Neither the moral nor the pragmatic vision of the focal characters is trustworthy; like children they tend to exaggerate enormously the power of their opposition, and like children they tend to see adults in black and white. The pleasures of the Gothic novel thus include a return journey to childhood, to a simpler if occasionally terrifying world.

The Role of the Gothic Reader: The Shift to *Aisthesis*

More generally, the Gothic novel sits astride a major shift in the response of the English reader to literature, a shift, in the terminology of reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss, from *catharsis* to *aisthesis*, or in basic English, a shift from reading for information, and for the sake of entry into a verisimilar world otherwise inaccessible to the reader, toward reading as an escape from the world one inhabits into an inner site of fantasy.¹⁸ Q.D. Leavis, in *Fiction and the Reading Public*, had posited a shift from active to passive reading at the end of the eighteenth century,¹⁹ and we can see this exemplified in the contrast between two reviews of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, one by the anonymous critic for the *Monthly Review* for 1794 and the other by Thomas Noon Talfourd in the *New Monthly Review* for 1820. In the former, Radcliffe is praised for her 'correctness of sentiment and elegance of style,' for her 'admirable ingenuity of contrivance to awaken [the reader's] curiosity, and to bind him in the chains of suspense,' and for 'a vigour of conception and a delicacy of feeling which are capable of producing the strongest sympathetic emotions, whether of pity or of terror' (279). These very same criteria of excellence are applied to *Udolpho* by the *Analytical Review* and *British Critic*, which praised the novel, as well as by the *Critical Review*, where the young Coleridge attacked it for hyperingenuity of contrivance.²⁰ Contrast Talfourd: 'When we read [Mrs. Radcliffe's romances], the world seems shut out, and we breathe only in an enchanted region where . . . the sad voices of the past echo through deep vaults and lonely galleries' (8). With Talfourd stands William Hazlitt, who in 1818 stated that Radcliffe 'makes her readers twice children, and from the dim and shadowy veil which she draws over the objects of her fancy, forces us to believe all that is strange and next to impossible. . . . All the fascination that links the world of passion to the world unknown is hers, and she plays with it at her pleasure; she has all the poetry of romance, all that is obscure, visionary and objectless in the imagination.'²¹ It is not just the style of writing that is different here: the reviewers of 1794 are standing outside and evaluating a pretty fiction, while the later Talfourd and Hazlitt have entered inwardly into an imagined world.

Their notion that the objective of literary art might be to move the reader to a state of ecstatic transport had been announced considerably earlier than *Udolpho*, when the Gothic vogue was just getting under way. In 'On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror' (1773), Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld explains the effect of the tale of horror in the following terms: 'A strange

and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced . . . our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy, co-operating, elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.' (Aikin, 125) Years later, in 1810, Barbauld makes such claims in favor of reading for the sake of escape and imaginative play, not merely for the Gothic but for novels in general:

The humble novel is always ready to enliven the gloom of solitude, . . . to take man from himself (at many seasons the worst company he can be in,) and, while the moving picture of life passes before him, to make him forget the subject of his own complaints. It is pleasant to the mind to sport in the boundless regions of possibility; to find relief from the sameness of everyday occurrences by expatiating amidst brighter skies and fairer fields; to exhibit love that is always happy, valour that is always successful; to feed the appetite for wonder by a quick succession of marvellous events.²²

This sense of the Gothic as demanding an inward projection, as carrying the reader toward states of transport and escape, appears not only in writers who favor and relish the state but in those who do not. Novel-reading in the late eighteenth century was gendered female, and those attacking it shifted their focus during the vogue of the Gothic. In the 1760s and 1770s it was implied that indiscriminate reading was likely to erode women's moral principles by providing poor examples of conduct, but in the period after 1795 the anti-fiction editorial was more likely to attack reading as sapping strength of mind, wasting precious time, and calling the reader into a world whose attractions would lead her to neglect the duties and pleasures of her sublunary existence. Moralists like John Bennett warn as early as 1789 that the passion for literature 'is dangerous to a woman. It . . . inspires such a romantic turn of mind, as is utterly inconsistent with the solid duties and proprieties of life.'²³ But at the height of the Gothic, 'castle-building,' the use of literature as material for fantasy, becomes the moralist's chief complaint. For example, one 'Arietta,' a self-styled castle-builder, writes in to *Literary Leisure* to confess that she was in her youth 'a great reader . . . , so, what between studying Novels and inventing Moral tales for Magazines, my head was stored with marvellous adventures and hair-breadth 'scapes, such as I trusted to become the heroine of myself when time should have matured the grains still folded up in the bud of youth.' Now having wasted that youth, she finds herself 'at forty-seven, filling presently the same situation in the same family.' T.H., in *Lady's Monthly Museum*, writes that her daughter 'reads nothing in the world but novels. I am afraid she will read herself into a consumption. . . . These time-killing companions monopolize every hour that is not devoted to dress or sleep. . . . I am afraid,' she concludes, 'that the girl will never get a husband,' and she asks the editor for the name of a man willing to wed a beautiful and well-off young lady with an addiction to romance. On a more hysterical note, a 'Letter' in the *Sylph* for 6 October 1795 claims to have 'actually seen mothers, in miserable garrets, *crying for the imaginary distress of an heroine*, while their children were *crying for bread*.' And one 'Rimelli,' writing on 'Novels and Romances' for the *Monthly Mirror*, insists that 'Romances . . . serve only to estrange the minds of youth (specially of females) from their own affairs and transmit them to those of which they read: so that, while totally absorbed with... the melancholy situation of... a Matilda, they neglect both their own interests and the several duties which they owe to parent, friend or brother.'²⁴

The notion of such seduction by fiction appears, naturally enough, in the fiction of the period as well. The most famous fictional victim of the Gothic novel is Catherine Morland, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (written in some form by 1803, though revised much later and not published until 1817, after Austen's death). It is Catherine who, after reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, mistakes a laundry list for a fragmentary manuscript and takes General Tilney for a wife-murderer, when he is in fact only a snobbish and mercenary man of the world. Other victims include Sophia Beauclerc, of Mary Charlton's novel *Rosella, or Modern Occurrences*, published in 1799 by the same Minerva Press that furnished such Sophias and Catherines with their favorite reading. Still other gothic parodies include *Self-Controul* (1810), by Mary Brunton and *The Heroine, or the Adventures of Cherubina*, by Eaton Stannard Barrett (1813), both read by Jane Austen. These exaggerated portraits must have been based on something real or the satire could not have been so common or current.

One reason why, around the turn of the nineteenth century, the female Quixote reappears again and again as a reader of the Gothic novel has to do with the feelings demanded of readers by the Gothic itself. The implied reader of the Gothic novel is a somewhat different being than the implied reader of Fielding or Sterne, because the Gothic demands for its full effects—effects not only of terror but of sublimity—a more empathetic and less skeptical attitude. These demands are implicit in the structure of suspense in Gothic novels. The implied reader of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, is expected to retain strong suspense about the secret concealed by the celebrated Black Veil, despite the fact that Emily, after her initial swoon, is not actively threatened by it. The implied reader of *The Monk* is expected to develop strong tension over the fate of Raymond at the hands of the Bleeding Nun—despite the fact that Raymond himself is narrating his experience in a self-conscious fashion that reminds us that he has lived to tell the tale. And they are also implicit in the verbal texture and point of view typical of the Gothic novel. Coral Ann Howells has finely analyzed a passage from volume 3, chapter 6 of *Udolpho*, showing how the objective narrator, technically always present, disappears from view so that the reader is forced to accept the ultimately vacuous imaginings and suppositions of Emily at face value. And even Radcliffe's style contributes to the effect: 'While the passage is cast in the form of reasoned argument, with one sentence depending on and balancing the other, it has really only the *appearance* of judiciousness; what we have in effect is the dramatisation of a process very close to obsession, going round and round the same point and finding no escape or release from the central anxiety' (Howells, 54-55).

An empathic mind-set tightly focused upon a heroine's fears was nothing new: it had been demanded of readers by *Pamela* and by the sentimental novel, out of which the female Gothic developed. And yet if differences in quantity eventually make for differences in quality, the Gothic novel may have had such an impact on a major segment of the British reading public. That there was something like an addiction among the Gothic readers is suggested, not only by cautionary letters to women's magazines but by the receipts from circulating libraries, which show one celebrated bluestocking going through fifty-five volumes of romance in the space of a month.²⁵

To conclude, there were in the 1790s two very different implied readers: the first, whom clergymen and journalists of the age personified as older and male, read primarily for factual

information, for the reinforcement of ethical values, and for the pleasure of recognizing the persons and things of his world; the second was personified as younger and female, receptive rather than critical, and eager to indulge in the pleasures of the imagination. And the Gothic vogue was partly self-reinforcing, in that its popularity began to draw in new classes of reader who had not formerly been a significant part of the market for literature. One major result was to pave the way for the reception of Romanticism in poetry as well as fiction, with the result that English bards—Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott, at least—despite a bit of rough handling from Scotch reviewers, were able to stir without conspicuous resistance a public that already looked to literature for the play of fantasy, dream, and desire.. The second result was in the Gothic itself, which after 1810 tended to abandon the historical themes of Radcliffe for the more explicitly fantastic imaginative worlds of Mary Shelley and Charles Robert Maturin. By then the Gothic wave itself had already begun to recede, leaving in its ebb two masterpieces, *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). While the Gothic was to rise again, first with the Brontes, and later, at the end of the nineteenth century, with the supernatural tales of Stevenson, James, Wilde, and Stoker, the romance of Radcliffe was at an end, destroyed ironically by that arch-romantic poet, Walter Scott.

Scott and the End of the Gothic

Beginning with *Waverley* (1814) and continuing for two decades, Scott began to explore a vein of romantic fiction that abutted onto the Gothic novel—it even featured the superstitions and legends of the border country between Scotland and England. But within all the romance of Scott's fiction, the banditti, the Highland chiefs, and their clans, there was always an attention to concrete and accurate detail, to probability, to historical forces, that was designed to appeal to a different sort of public. As Ina Ferris has shown, the reviewers of *Waverley* in contemporary magazines told its potential audience quite explicitly that the novel was designed for a *masculine* fancy, as opposed to the *feminine* reading demanded by the Gothic²⁶.

Scott's relation to the romantic and fantastic tenor of the Gothic novel is complex and not easy to define. Relative to the national novels of Maria Edgeworth, Scott's main plots tend to be more adventurous and stirring while still keeping within the broad framework of probability. One reason the main action may seem realistic is that, within the novels, intruded as digressions, are short narratives constructed like Gothic tales, and it is by comparison with these that the main plot appears naturalistic and probable. In fact the reader is the more willing to excuse Scott's heavy use of coincidence in the main plot because we are spared the far grosser suspension of disbelief that would be required to credit the supernatural digressions.

Scott's characteristic employment of romance themes and structures of probability can be seen in one of his typical historical novels, *Redgauntlet* (1824), Scott's third novel about the Jacobite rebellions. As in *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, it is about a romantic English gentleman, here named Darsie Latimer, who is accidentally caught up in a treasonous plot to put the Pretender on the throne. Unlike the Fifteen in *Rob Roy* and the Forty-Five in *Waverley*, the Jacobite plot in *Redgauntlet*, set in the summer of 1765, has no basis in fact²⁷. The events of the main plot are—abstractly considered—precisely what one might expect in a Radcliffe novel. The protagonist is kidnapped by a nobleman of enormous power and ambiguous morality. The nobleman's identity seems to shift as he moves furtively but easily around the picturesque

landscape, linking up with outlaws and condemned traitors at every turn. The protagonist is becoming inexorably inveigled into a treasonous plot that could easily lead to a violent and ignominious death. At the same time, the prospect is broached of a romantic attachment to an enormously attractive character of the opposite sex who makes what seem to be unambiguous sexual advances, to the protagonist's shame and disgust. Ultimately the relationship between them is revealed (with a shudder at the incestuous feelings the protagonist harbored) to be that of brother and sister.

But the tone of Scott's novel entirely belies this Gothic summary. The fact that the kidnapped protagonist is a young and adventurous male running away from the longueurs of legal education (and getting a bit more adventure than he had bargained for) suggests at once that the emotional keynote of the Gothic—terror—is significant here. Even the romance of Darsie Latimer's involvement in the Jacobite plot, and his attraction to the mysterious woman of the Green Mantle is tempered by the jocular realism of Scott's narration, and the serious, almost melodramatic pursuit of Darsie by his friend Alan Fairford is balanced by the counter-pursuit of solicitor Fairford by his ubiquitous legal client Peter Peebles, which gives the romance an undertone of farce.

The forms of feeling of the Gothic appear instead in a single interpolated narrative, the justly famous 'Wandering Willie's Tale' of Steenie Steenson's encounter with the ghost of Sir Robert Redgauntlet.¹⁴ Briefly, Steenie, who has fallen behind in his rent, borrows the necessary cash on the last possible day, and brings it to the laird, who is thought to have a pact with the devil. In the midst of a carouse with his familiar (a malevolent pet ape), Redgauntlet takes the silver but suddenly dies in a fit, screaming and wailing, before he can give Steenie a receipt. When the heir, Sir John Redgauntlet, takes over the estate, he finds no record of Steenie's payment, and is incredulous because Steenie has neither receipt nor human witness. About to be evicted, Steenie is desolated until he encounters in a forest a strange horseman who offers to help him. Immediately Steenie finds himself at the door of Castle Redgauntlet (though the house is miles away). He enters, and finds his late master carousing once more, this time with a host of dead Scottish patriots (from Lauderdale to Claverhouse). Following the horseman's advice, Steenie refuses food and drink, and he also evades playing on the bagpipes in homage to the demon (Steenie notices just in time that the chanter is white-hot with hellfire). He escapes with his receipt, which he takes to Sir John, who is amazed to see its genuine signature dated the previous day; he gives Steenie full credit after finding his silver in a disused turret of the castle, where Sir Robert's ape had been hiding objects he had purloined in the hall.

But 'Wandering Willie's Tale' is not merely intruded into the main action of *Redgauntlet*; it recapitulates all its themes. Sir Robert, like the Young Pretender, is determined to have his own again; like Charles Edward Stuart, he has an unbreakable attachment to drink and women that ultimately proves his undoing; and he is associated with the whole band of Scottish patriots whose private immorality clashed with their stern devotion to Scottish independence. Even the national fixation with papers, receipts, and dry legalities appears both in 'Wandering Willie's Tale'—as the central nexus of the story—and in the main plot, with the Peebles case, and with Alan Fairford's legalistic efforts to discover his friend Darsie. Formally, then, *Redgauntlet* inverts the situation of *Northanger Abbey*: instead of presenting a pseudo-Gothic situation whose absurdity is demonstrated by exposure to quotidian life, here the Gothic tale—in its chilling

apparent plausibility—exposes the absurd otherworldliness underlying Scottish revanchism.

The popularity of Scott and historical romances like his was immense, because in effect Scott had, by his use of realistic detail, licensed male readers to enjoy the romance, which otherwise they had despised—or pretended to despise—as feminine aesthetic experience. But even as males were joining enthusiastically the ranks of the readers of romance, romance itself had been forced to change, to leave the realms of fantasy for the concrete and the historical. Publishers would reject the outworn Gothic novel, with its principally female readership, for the historical romance, whose mixed appeal was broader and therefore more profitable. But in generating a new and even larger audience for romance, Scott had given the Gothic novel of the Radcliffe era its deathblow.

¹See Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror* (London: Constable, 1921); Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle* (London: Routledge, 1927); J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Routledge, 1932); Montagu Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (London: Fortune, 1938); Devendra Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England, Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences*. (London: Arthur Barker, 1957).

² Margaret Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). For Watt, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); for Rader, see Ralph W. Rader, 'Defoe, Richardson, Joyce and the Concept of Form in the Novel,' in *Autobiography, Biography, and The Novel* (Los Angeles: Clark Library, 1973), 31-72, also in *Fact, Fiction and Form: Selected Essays of Ralph W. Rader*, ed. James Phelan and David H. Richter (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).

³ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1980), 59.

⁴ Walpole to John Cole, 27 April 1773.

⁵Quoted in Thomas Preston Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760-1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 144.

⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789; New York: Arno Press, 1972), 143; *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794; New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1, 522. Radcliffe's final novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (London: Henry Colbourn, 1826)—unpublished during her lifetime and pretty much forgotten since—attempts a more robust confrontation with medieval history, but has a dismally weak narrative.

⁷ Tompkins, 102.

⁸G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 146.

⁹Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue." in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (London: Methuen, 1987), 225.

¹⁰R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 82: 'As the spirit of humanitarianism spread . . . , it was accompanied by a deepening realisation . . . that individual acts of benevolence could not alter a general social condition that was fundamentally unjust; and also that there was perhaps something suspect in being able to derive pleasure from feeling pity and acting charitably in a situation which was irremediable; indeed that real pleasure—one with which sadness was inextricably blended—came from the awareness of the final hopelessness of it all.'

¹¹; see Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 53–54.

¹²Anna Aikin Barbauld, 'An Inquiry into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations,' in Aikin and Aikin, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (London: J. Johnson, 1773; 3rd edition 1792), 192. Barbauld argues that "Poverty, if truly represented, shocks our nicer feelings...; the rags, the dirt, the squalid appearance and mean employments incident to that state must be kept out of sight, and the distress must arise from... the shock of falling from higher fortunes" (203).

¹³David J. Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 87.

¹⁴*Romanticism and the Gothic: Reception and Canon-Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁵Coral Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Athlone, 1978), 52.

¹⁶Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Trans. Angus Davidson. 2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹⁷Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer: A Tale* (1820; London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 207; emphasis in text.

¹⁸See Hans Robert Jauss, "Sketch of a Theory and a History of Aesthetic Experience." *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 3–51.

¹⁹Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), 135–50.

²⁰Reviews of *Udolpho*: William Enfield in the *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 15 (1794): 278–83; Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Critical Review* 2nd series, 11 (August 1794): 361–72; *Analytical*

Review 19 (June 1794): 140-45; *British Critic*, 4 (August 1794): 110-21; T. Noon Talfourd, *New Monthly Review*, 14 (June 1820), quoted from *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings* (London: T. Bell, 1852), 195.

²¹William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1818; London: J. M. Dent, 1890), 195.

²²Anna Aikin Barbauld, 'On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing,' *The British Novelists*. London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1810), I, 58.

²³John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789; Philadelphia: Anthony Finley, 1818), 136.

²⁴ For 'Arietta,' see *Literary Leisure, or The Recreations of Solomon Saunter, Esq.* 1, no. 42 (10 July 1800): 129-40; for 'T.H.,' see *Ladies' Monthly Museum* 2 (March 1799): 218-220; for the starving babies, see "Letter" in *Sylph*, no. 5 (6 October 1795): 35-38; for 'Rimelli' see "Novels and Romances," *Monthly Mirror* 14 (August 1802): 81.

²⁵A.G.K. Lestrangle, *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford* (New York: Harper, 1870), I, 15.

²⁶ Ina Ferris, 'Re-Positioning the Novel: *Waverley* and the Gender of Fiction.' *Studies in Romanticism* 28 (1989): 291-301; see also Ferris's *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

²⁷ For *Redgauntlet*, see *The Waverley Novels* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1842-47). The historical events that most resemble Scott's fantasy of a renewed attempt to set Charles Edward Stuart on the throne occurred around 1750-52; the displacement to the 1760s may reflect Scott's attempt to bridge the gap between the Jacobite adventure and his own youth as an Edinburgh law student in the late 1780s and early 1790s.