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The Gothic Villain and His Context

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in

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ABSTRACT

The Gothic Villain and His Context

Nadia Skiredj

This paper shows continuity and connection in the Gothic villain. The Gothic villains are a prime example of their creator's instinctive feeling for psychologically interesting characters who yet merge with the pervading theme of the supernatural. We can distinguish three types of Gothic villain. These three main types are fluid concepts which continually interact, though not annihilating distinction, for the Gothic villain remains to the last not a bundle of characteristics, but a set of characters. For the most part he is all melodrama and extravagant emotion, designed to excite the last possible twinge of sensation. His gradual development illustrates increasing skill in the art of romance. In him we see also the emergence of the "Romantic" character-- an alien soul solacing itself in occult experiments with forbidden sciences or unscrupulous deeds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The word "Gothic" originally referred to the Northern
tribes that invaded Europe during the fourth, fifth, and
sixth centuries. The term was later applied by Renaissance
critics to the style of architecture that flourished in
the thirteenth century, because these critics thought that
the style had originated with the Goths. This architecture
was held in low esteem during the Renaissance, and the word
"Gothic" therefore developed pejorative connotations
suggesting the uncouth, ugly, barbaric, or archaic. It
implied the vast and the gloomy, and subsequently
denoted anything medieval. Later the word indicated
any period in history before the middle or even the end
of the seventeenth century. "Gothic" loosely referred
to anything old-fashioned or out of date. The ruins of
Gothic cathedrals and castles were naturally termed "Gothic",
and soon any ruins--the process of decay itself--became
associated with the Gothic as did wild landscapes and other
phenomena which inspired sublimity and terror.

The Gothic movement in literature began in England

during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and
because it encompassed a general interest in the past,
in archaeology, antiques, and ruins, particularly,
those of the Middle Ages, the label "Gothic" seemed
appropriate. This Gothic revival was a reaction against
earlier eighteenth-century order and formality, and it got
its inspiration from medieval Romantic literature. A
changing attitude toward nature and feeling evolved;
wilderness and boldness came into vogue. The Romantic
qualities of yearning, aspiration, mystery and wonder
nourished the roots of the Gothic movement.

Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and
Charles Maturin, as well as hundreds of lesser known Gothic
writers, established the conventions of the Gothic novel,
which were later drawn upon by Mary Shelley, Jane Austen,
Bram Stoker, William Beckford, Edgar Allan Poe, and
William Godwin, to name a few. The works of these authors
differ significantly; nonetheless, a basic orientation
to reality is apparent in all Gothic works. The standard
Gothic paraphernalia are only the trappings that may or
may not be present. More substantial characteristics
reappear from work to work, such as recurrent character
types, plot patterns, and themes, as well as common
psychological attitudes, similar treatments of fear, pain,

compulsion and disgust, and comparable views of religion.
Although the standard conventions for the Gothic novel
were developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, Gothicism itself is not restricted to a single
time and culture or even to a single style of writing.
The origins of the Gothic sensibility predate the eighteenth
century, and works that are essentially Gothic are being
produced today. New devices were of course added, but
the older conventions remained basically unchanged
because the need to materialize these concepts in fiction
did not change. In tracing the use of convention, we
will seek to show how the connections between one work
and another add to meaning.

   The purpose of this paper is to show continuity
and connection in the Gothic tradition with particular
attention to the Gothic villain. We will first discuss
the conditions, literary and philosophical, that gave
rise to the earliest Gothic tales. Then we will describe
the characterization and structure, which, with gradual growth,
have continued in use to this day. We will then focus on the
Gothic villain in several works: Lewis' The Monk, Radcliffe's The
Mysteries of Udolpho, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Beckford's
Vathek and Walpole's The Castle of Otranto.

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO GOTHIC LITERATURE

Gothic literature was a new literary form in the late eighteenth century. At that time, the purpose of Gothic fiction, like that of the Sentimental novel, to which it was closely allied, was to educate the reader's feelings through his iden-tification with the feelings of the characters; to arouse his "sympathy," as the aesthetics of Sensibility demanded, by evoking pity and fear; and to explore the mind of man and the causes of evil in it. The earliest Gothic romances are literary fantasies embodying ideas about man's psychology that were the culmination of a century of philosophical speculation on the subject. In them, good and evil were distinguished absolutes, but as succeeding works delved deeper into the idea of evil as psychological, evil quickly began to be seen as relative and, soon, its pleasures were being explored. All these works were based on accepted views about the human mind. Later authors, employing the same literary devices as in the early works, introduced changes that both reflected and

developed modifications of these views. As the tales of
the weird and horrid persisted through the nineteenth
century, using the same characters and settings again
and again, they gradually pieced together among them a
picture of evil as a form of psychological monstrosity.

The highly conventionalized nature of the settings
and characters, structures, and imagery of Gothic fiction
has always been recognized. However, these features
have been dubbed "Gothic machinery" because, like other
forms of popular literature, Gothic fiction has been seen
as fare for a sensation-seeking audience and not, therefore,
worth literary analysis.[1] As a result, the course of the
convention has not been traced. Instead, Gothic
fiction has been called escape literature intended
to inspire terror for terror's sake. Such descriptions
have concealed the important ideas these tales contain.
To say that early Gothic romances are just a form of
escape does not explain why they appeared when they did
or why their attraction was so strong and immediate.
Recent attempts to treat Gothic literature as an aspect
of Romanticism also failed to see its significance as
a convention.[2] When we see that Gothic novels have
continued to appear for two hundred years, and that the
convention has been put to use by major writers, all

different from one another, it is evident that something
more is involved than just a continuing taste for an evil
kind of bedside reading, and that these works are not
confined to a single period of literature.[3]

From Walpole's maddened and murderous princeling
in The Castle of Otranto to the self-tormented scientist
in Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the same conventional
features keep reappearing because ideas of the same kind
lie behind these works. That is, these and other Gothic
writers chose the Gothic tale as a vehicle for ideas about
psychological evil--evil not as a force exterior to
man, but as a distortion, a warping of the mind. Walpole's
slight romance yields such an interpretation, so does
Stevenson's novel, and so do the Gothic tales that
appeared in the long stretch of time between them.

This is not to say that both Walpole and Stevenson
held the same view of evil or of man's psychology in
general. On the contrary, their ideas on the subject
form a sharp contrast. The interest in tracing this
convention lies in the changes that take place within
it, which correspond to the changes in thought on the
subject that occurred after Locke, who was to the eighteenth
century what Freud has been to the twentieth, first set forth

his theory of the workings of the mind in the eighteenth century." His work dealt primarily with problems of perception and human knowledge; it is generally regarded as strictly empirical. His empiricism instigated a reorientation of thought in science, politics, religion, education and morality. Following Locke, however, eighteenth-century thinkers had devoted a great deal of their energies to the study of the mind, the nature of perception, the means to knowledge, expanding, adapting and modifying Locke's ideas. It was the first era in which the mind was studied inductively, and the changes in world view, especially in ideas about the moral nature of man, that such thinking reflected and also helped bring about were given literary expression in a number of different genres, but most directly in the Sentimental fiction of the time, of which Gothic literature is a part. It is within this general literary development that Gothic fiction first made its appearance when Horace Walpole awakened from a dream of which he could only remember a small part and under its influence wrote The Castle of Otranto. With his novel, he had given fictional treatment to some of the major preoccupations of his time that were also his own concerns and, after a while, others began to copy his work. Walpole's successors each took his devices and used them a little differently. Clara Reeve declared The Castle of Otranto too extravagant and confined herself wherever possible to the

"Natural"; William Beckford introduced the grotesque into the genre; and Matthew Lewis added the tormented monk, who was immediately picked up by Ann Radcliffe, whose villains had influenced Lewis in the first place. This process of making use of and modifying one another's devices continued throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne added twisted scientists to the mad monk of Lewis and Radcliffe. Among distorted human shapes inherited from the eighteenth century, monsters and demonic animals appeared in the nineteenth. The ghosts and devils of Walpole, Lewis and Radcliffe reappeared considerably modified in Maturin, Brontë and James, and to them and Beckford's Giouar were added vampires and witches. Settings were changed from medieval to contemporary, a man's house turned out to be still his Gothic castle, and his soul, already reflected in paintings and statues, began to look back at him from mirrors and, worse still, from his double, a living copy of himself.

Gradually, if we follow the course of the convention as it goes through the nineteenth century, we can trace changes in ideas about the place of evil in the mind. Soon Edgar Allan Poe is playing with ideas of evil and madness, and Henry James is placing evil in the eye of the moral arbiter.

Thus, within this literary convention, as in any
other, changes and developments have occurred while it has
retained its basically stable and recognizable outlines.
Individual works within the convention embody the particu-
larities of the author's thought in the devices common to the
whole convention and, in that way, reveal both the ideas
of the particular moment and the overall purpose of the con-
vention itself. That common purpose, which ties these works
together, emerges from the peculiar form of symbolism found
in Gothic tales. In this literature, the entire tale is symbolic.
In analyzing it, one has to speak of storms that 'stand for'
the villain's anger or heroines that represent more a concept
of virtue than 'flesh-and-blood' women. However, unlike the
artfully buried symbols customary to a realistic work, the
symbolism of a Gothic tale is almost, though not quite, alle-
gorical. This literature is not allegory because its references
are deliberately hazy. The surface fiction is full of
vague and unexplained horrors designed, not to render
a precise meaning, but to evoke the emotion of "terror."
Yet, these effects of "terror" in Gothic tales refer to
something beyond the fictional devices that produce them.
The quasi-allegorical effect derives from what lies behind
the terror-inspiring fictional devices. These tales make
use of the realization that monsters in fiction frighten
because they are already the inventions of dreaming imagination.

They are the shapes into which our fears are projected and so can be used in literature to explore the mind. Terror is evoked when the ghost, the double, or the assassin corresponds to something that is actually feared, known or unknown. The fictional beings of Gothic fiction, whether they be human or animal, symbolize real but vague fears that the reader recognizes as his own and all men's. Beneath the surface fiction there is a probing of humanity's basic psychological forces, an exploration of the subconscious, and the symbols correspond to psychological phenomena that yield to literary analysis. Yet it is probably this quasi-allegorical nature of Gothic symbolism, with its meaning lying almost entirely outside the fictional surface, that has caused this convention to be read only for its surface fiction, about which, it is true, little more can be said than that it evokes fear for fear's sake.

The authors of Gothic fiction, in writing their symbolic fantasies, necessarily chose a deliberately artificial form, for which they took their materials from earlier literature. The Castle of Otranto has several immediate antecedents, works that show an early use of historical setting, a ghost here and there, occasional sinister and supernatural happenings, and it

has remote ancestors in Shakespeare and medieval romance.
These and other predecessors have, of course, been traced.
Thorough studies have been made of the relationship
of Gothic fiction to the "graveyard" poets, to Shakespeare
and Spenser, and to the combination of antiquarianism
and the movement of Sentimentalism that swept the eighteenth
century.[4] But all this is not important unless it shows
how Gothic fiction does something new.[5] Since Gothic
fiction was, as has been generally recognized, a new genre,
it follows that it was doing something different with the
materials of its predecessors. To discover what that is,
it is necessary to uncover the ideas and principles
that gave rise to these works by analyzing them as symbolic
constructs and to trace the convention with all its accretions
through time and space. When this is done, the heritage on
which Gothic authors drew throws further light on the meaning
and purposes of their works.

The source and fountainhead of the entire Gothic
tradition, Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, appeared in
1764, twelve years before its first important successor,
Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron (1771), twenty-two years
before William Beckford's Vathek (1786); and nearly
thirty before the first works of Ann Radcliffe. It is
a rather trifling little romance, so crammed with events

and relationships that it reads like a plot summary of
itself. Otranto is peopled with two-dimensional characters
embodying virtue and vice; its setting constitutes a
representation of the villain's character (the central device
in the novel became the most famous of all Gothic devices:
the identity of the castle or house with its owner); it is an
indirect narration, a story mediated through two voices before it
reaches the reader; and its imagery and supernatural events
lead to an interpretation of its meaning as an eighteenth-
century psychological tale. All these features reappear in
later works.

Although Walpole and his contemporaries cannot have
known his work would establish a literary convention,
they were aware of the nature of the work itself. We can
already see in the preface to the second edition of
The Castle of Otranto what Walpole saw himself as having
achieved in the novel. He states explicitly that when he
blended "the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the
modern," the ancient, which was fantasy, freed his
imagination, while the modern, reflecting the real world,
lent reality to his characters.[6] The characters are not
very convincingly real, of course, but they are recognizable
eighteenth-century figures embodying current ideas about
the human mind. By placing them in the world of dreams

and fairy tales, Walpole was able to present his age's concept of human evil--pride, hatred, violence, cruelty, incest--as part of man's psychology. The one kind of romance enabled him to delve into his own subconscious; the other helped him to relate what he found there to the human condition in general.

In reawakening the imaginative world within himself by setting his tale in the dark, irrational past, Walpole started an enduring tradition. The inevitable doubts that arise about applying a complex psychological interpretation to his work seem far less bothersome when recognized in others. For example, Poe's tales, which have received an abundance of symbolic analysis, have much in common with Walpole's novel. Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" shows remarkable resemblances to The Castle of Otranto in both theme and device, which seem not to be either mere coincidence or simple imitation on Poe's part.

The Castle of Otranto is just the first of many a fictional plunge into the subconscious mind. Some later Gothic novels owe their origins, as it does, to actual dreams. Others result from their authors' conscious dredging up of dream symbols from their own minds. The

later authors added new devices to fit their particular
needs, but all these works are set up as revelations
of horror. They present as psychological evil a
sexual obsession, overwhelming guilt, or pride that defies
the limits God has set for man, and they seek to arouse
fear and sickening horror in the reader. These tales may
see evil as an aberration in man or as an inherent part
of his nature, they may question the value judgments
placed on the phenomena they are symbolizing, but they all
show the world its own dreams, drawing the reader into
their closed worlds, playing on his emotions and preventing
him from denying that what he experiences in the novel may also
be within himself.

It seems almost paradoxical that this depiction
of man's nightmares should have grown out of the gentle
tenets of Benevolism and the Sentimentalist movement.[7]
Yet the works of the first Gothic authors are based on .
the Benevolist view of man. The central belief of that
view is that man, though fallen indeed, still has the po-
tential for Good. An infinitely benevolent Creator has not
abandoned his creature to inevitable depravity; man is born,
not inherently evil, but with a nature that, if he is properly
nurtured, enables him to live the virtuous life and so be happy.
These ideas, held by the Sentimentalists, have been traced back

to a group of theologians at Cambridge University in the late
seventeenth century. Their followers, the Latitudinarians,
were active in both Church and State during and after the
Restoration period, preaching religious tolerance and an
active charity, and were highly influential., With help from
the deists, they were primarily responsible for the widespread
acceptance of Benevolism, as Louis Bredvold, among others,
has shown. The Platonists, as Bredvold notes, were explicit
about man's natural goodness. He quotes Henry More as saying,
"Virtue is the health of the soul, its natural state of well-
being," and Benjamin Whichcote as writing: "Nothing is more
certainly true than that all Vice is unnatural and contrary
to the nature of Man. A depraved and vicious Mind is as
really the Sickness and Deformity thereof, as any foul and
loathsome disease is to the body . . . The good Man is an
Instrument in Tune."[8]

The Sentimental movement was a system of thought that
makes "virtue" manifest in "good feelings," in pleasurable,
inward sensations. The protagonists of the Sentimental
novels, the man and woman of feeling, are repositories
of such virtuous feelings and the inner content that goes
with them. Demonstrating, through the emotions they express
and through their occasional actions, a natural benevolence
uncorrupted by a faulty upbringing, they are oversimplified

as characters. Objections were made, in the eighteenth century, as they are today, to the self-indulgent effusions and apparent smugness of these characters. Even those who admired Sentimental literature did so for the "fine feelings" to which it gave expression. It was the didactic duty of literature to direct the passions toward the good ends for which God implanted them in man by drawing models of refined sensibility.[9] The Sentimental novel educates the reader's emotions by embodying in these characters correctly cultivated feeling, which the reader shares as he reads.

Evil, in this system of thought, is that which mars the harmony of the universe. It is the twisting and dis-tortion of the potentially good feelings into destructive impulses that render the individual unhappy by setting him at war with God's harmony within and outside himself. Both good and evil are inner states of man's mind and, since beauty lies in God's order, the good and the beautiful are one, and evil is monstrous.[10] These equations of goodness with beauty and wrongdoing with ugliness were put to use by the authors of Sentimental and Gothic literature. They made their good characters physically lovely and gave the evil ones twisted bodies and ugly faces. The Gothic novel, in making mon-strosity the outward show of the terrible inner distortion of man's innate good nature into evil, is thus an expression

of the other side of the benevolist ideas reflected in the
Sentimental novel. It forms a variant of the Sentimental
genre, with related structures, forms, and devices. Sentimen-
tal novels reflect an ideal that, coming from God, is
possibly realizable; the Gothic represents the distortion
of that ideal.

Sentimental and Gothic literature is, as a result,
highly paradigmatic. The characters are more nearly represen-
tations of the general human state than depictions of indivi-
dual human beings. They are not personifications of good
and evil nor yet either type characters or highly individualized
portrayals. Occupying the hazy no-man's land between the
abstraction of allegory and the "reality" of social and
comic novels, they are manifestations of the semi-abstract,
semi-real area occupied by concepts of the place of good and
evil in the human mind. The characters are strictly limited
portrayals, and their reference beyond themselves to the
ideas they embody makes their outlines fuzzy. Plot, setting
and structure in this literature are also determined by such
outside reference to Sentimentalist concepts, lending an
insubstantiality to the whole work that is desirable because
it is conductive to evocation of the sublime, and so a
prime means for catching the reader up in the work.[11] These
characteristics bring about the special kind of symbolism found

in Gothic tales, which, directed to the reader's feelings,
put him in touch with known aspects of his own nature.

Sentimental and Gothic tales have their own rules
and methods. They share common methods of characterization,
structural and narrative systems, devices and images,
and a common aesthetic because they share underlying
ideas and pursue a common purpose--to present representations
of the human mind in a fiction directed at its reader's
feelings. The aesthetic principles on which they are
written developed parallel to the development in thought
expressed in Sentimental and Gothic fiction. The Sentimental
and Gothic novels are very au courant in putting into
practice the theories of their day and accord with the
new ideas both in subject matter and form. If they are
effusive, it is part of the new emotionalism; if they
are melodramatic, melodrama was the coming thing. They put
the sublime and the picturesque to special uses, and these
were very much the modes of the time.

The sublime was an important aesthetic concept
throughout the eighteenth century, as Samuel Monk
shows in his study of the subject. He quotes critics of
the time who list certain physical phenomena or human
actions that are the means of creating a sublime effect--

tall cliffs, vast seas, noble deeds. Sights and sounds
of great magnitude fill the mind with wonder and amazement.
If an idea of danger is involved, the result will be a
terror that is pleasing because the viewer knows he is
himself safe.[12]

    The sublime character presented an even greater
problem than the distractions of Sentiment. In one of
his essays, James Beattie, the poet, declares that ideal
characters as well as villains can be sublime. He
remarks that "sympathy as the means of conveying certain
feelings from one breast to another, might be made a
powerful instrument of moral discipline, if poets,
and other writers of fable, were careful to call forth
our sensibility towards those emotions only that
favor virtue, and invigorate the human mind." These
virtuous emotions respond to the sublime, and the reader's
mind is elevated. Thus, Beattie says in another essay:
"Our taste for the sublime, cherished into a habit, and
directed to proper objects, may, by preserving us from
vice, which is the vilest of all things, and by
recommending virtue for its intrinsic dignity, be
useful in promoting our moral improvement."[13]

The features of the Gothic villain, which, to the
eighteenth century, made him a sublime character, result
in the compounding of good and evil in him, the creation
of a mixed character, and a frightening vision of a world
of relative moral values.

Just because the Gothic villain is "sublimely" wicked,
the terror he arouses fills the reader with "pleasurable
astonishment" and causes him to feel with the villains.
Consequently, the reader cannot condemn him entirely.
The sublime in Gothic novels "calls forth our sensibility"
toward emotions that do not "favor virtue," as Beattie
warned it would. In attempting to set forth the nature
of human good and evil, the Gothic novelists are like
Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel. They
create monsters, which force an unwilling recognition
of the dread blend of good and bad to be found in themselves
and the rest of mankind. The reader, sharing the characters'
feelings, partially suspends his moral judgments of the
villain and, thereby, an understanding of the evil in
him is opened up. Authors and readers alike are faced
with the fact that they have accepted imaginatively
an unexpected moral relativity, an unlooked-for consequence
of the adage that "to understand is to forgive."[14]

That is, having imaginatively inhabited the tortured mind
of the evil character, they see the potential for such
evil in all minds, and experiencing compassion for it
through an understanding of its psychological causes, they
can no longer look on good and evil as absolute or as
forces outside the human psyche.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1] Even major studies have hampered themselves by
this characterization. J. M. S. Tompkins, in
The Popular Novel in England (Lincoln: University
Press, 1961), seems to equate popular and bad; Devendra
Varma and Montague Summers in their studies of Gothic
literature try to supply plot summaries of novels
which their readers would not themselves read. It is
a small wonder that these chroniclers of the genre
should as a result indulge in a good deal of pained
sarcasm at the expense of their own subject.

[2] A collection of essays specifically discussing
Gothic literature as Romantic art is G. R. Thompson,
ed., The Gothic Imagination (Pullman: Washington
State University Press, 1974). Northrop Frye also
treats Gothic literature as part of Romanticism
in A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random
Gouse, 1968), as well as alluding to it in The Secular
Scripture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).
That it has important links with Romanticism is undeniable,
and the above works are useful explorations of them.
Although related to Romanticism, Gothic works differ
from those of the Romantic mainstream in their concern
with human psychology in this world, as opposed to
Romanticism's primary interest in a transcendental,
mystic view of Nature and mankind's yearning for things
not of this world.

[3] Lowry Nelson, "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel"
(Yale Review (1963), 52:236-57), and Robert D. Hume,
"Gothic versus Romantic" (PMLA (March 1969), 84:282-90),
discuss the need to see Gothic literature as a "kind"
of its own. Hume's statement that, unlike Romanticism,
Gothicism is not transcendent, is, despite Robert
Platzner's denial of it, an important one (see Note 5).

[4] See Dan J. McNutt, The Eighteenth-Century Novel
(New York and London: Garland, 1975). The major
early studies combine a history of the Gothic novels
and a tracing of their literary origins. These are:
Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror (London: Constable, 1921);
Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle (New York:
Gordon Press, 1974); Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest
(New York: Russell and Russell, 1964); Devendra Varma,
The Gothic Flame (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966).

[5] Some important treatments of Gothic literature:
Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic
Novel" (Yale Review (1963), 52: 236-57); Robert
D. Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic" (PMLA (March 1969),
84: 282-90); Platzner, "'Gothic versus Romantic':
A Rejoinder" (PMLA (March 1971), 86: 266-74); and James
M. Keech, "The Survival of the Gothic Response"
(Studies in the Novel (1974), 6: 130-44).

[6] See "Preface of the Second Edition," Walpole,
The Castle of Otranto, p. 7.

[7] For extended discussion of "Sentimental" and
related terms see, in particular, Edith Birkhead,
"Sentiment and Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century
Novel," and R. F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress.

[8] Louis Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility
(Detroit: Wayne State Univerrsity Press, 1962), pp. 9-10.

[9] Earnest Lee Tuveson, "The Origins of the Moral
Sense," HLQ (May 1948), 11: 241-59.

[10] Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background
(London: Beacon, 1961), pp. 108-9, 121.

[11] Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the
Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp.
60-4.

[12] Samuel Monk, The Sublime (Ann Arbor: University
of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 54.

[13] James Beattie, <u>Dissertations Moral and Critical</u> (New York: Garland Press, 1971), p. 655.

[14] Hume discusses the moral relativity of the Gothic in "Gothic versus Romantic."

CHAPTER TWO

· THE REFLECTED SELF

Between the 1760's and the 1890's, the characters
in Gothic fiction underwent some major changes.
Principally, some new types, such as doubles and
monsters, were added. The heroes and heroines did not
change much, however. Instead, they tended to fade
gradually away. When good and evil became more and more
closely intertwined and the moral outlook of Gothic
fiction became increasingly relative, there was less
place for the beautiful characters representing the
Good. They, nevertheless, did not vanish entirely.
As late as Bram Stoker's _Dracula_, a heroine appears
whose only function is to be beautiful and passively
innocent.

Lucy, in _Dracula_, and her predecessors appear at first
to be rather silly embodiments of an inhibited, puritanical
notion of female virtue, and the heroes seem no better.
They, in fact, play a fairly complex role in Sentimental

and Gothic fiction. As bearers of ideas, moral, psychological, and mythic, they are necessarily simplified figures of humanity. They are sensitive, passive, and interestingly pale. They are frequently defeated in the course of the plot to demonstrate that virtue is its own reward. Thus far, they are characters who bid fair to irritate the readers and, because they talk a lot and act very little, to bore him too. In other respects, however, they are fairy-tale, mythic figures. They have a child-like quality and often stand in a quasi-incestuous relationship to one another. The heroines, in particular, are also frequently equated with Nature as earth-mother figures, and they embody a dilemma which is important in Gothic fiction: the question of what true innocence is and how it can be guarded.

As early as Lewis' The Monk, these characters become highly ambiguous. The Sentimental hero and the Gothic villain begin to merge into one character torn by terrible conflict, while the gentle earth-mother figure may reappear as a wicked witch. These changes barely increase their mimetic qualities but, because they are ambiguous, mixed figures, they are more acceptable as characters. A myth-bearing figure need not, indeed must not, display great individual complexity, for the

more nearly a character is made to represent an individual
human being such as we meet in everyday life, the less
it will, in fact, appear mythic.

Sentimental novels tend to confine themselves and
their "teachings" to inner states. They are more concerned
with psychology than society.[1] They draw ideal figures,
virtuous characters with some slight weakneses to make
them believable. These characters are designed to
appeal to the reader's moral sense and to refine it.
They portray the inner self as in a mirror through which
the reader may recognize and develop his own best
feelings. It is perhaps this psychologizing impulse
that leads the Sentimental novelists into the realm of
myth, where their most interesting themes are found.

The reflection of the virtuous self in the equally
virtuous beloved has the same sort of symbolic function
as other features, such as setting in these novels.
Because the virtuous love virtue positively, they also
love the virtuous. But they are each also made to see
their own virtue reflected in the other because to look
at the mind in general--as opposed to examining the
peculiarities of a particular, individual mind--one must
look in upon oneself. Just as Theodore in The Castle of

Otranto is truly and exactly reflected in the statue
of Alfonso, so the mutual reflection of Sentimental characters
is also a true image.

When the mutually reflecting Sentimental characters
appear in a remote and idyllic setting, they are true
children of Nature. It is here that they appear in a quasi-
incestuous relationship. They are children who have
grown up together like brother and sister, although
they are not related by blood. Then, when they reach
a suitable age, their feeling for each other develops
into sexual love--naturally, it is said--and they wish
to marry. This pattern is to be found in Mackenzie's
Julia de Rubigné (1777) and in Bernadin de St. Pierre's
Paul and Virginia (1787).

The brother-sister relationships strangely trans-
formed into adult sexual love indicate an at least intuitive
understanding of basic patterns of development that
authors transpose into their fictions, putting them to
the service of their particular ideas. The childhood
companionship that turns into adult love is a means
of showing these kindred delicate souls as uncorrupted
figures in a harsh and wicked world. It emphasizes
the delicacy of their feelings by first showing their

childhood love, as a pure emotion unclouded by adult
passion. Thus, when evil is introduced into the picture,
the sense of it as the corruption of human nature--
and therefore unnatural--is increased. This quasi-incest
is only peripherally connected with real incest and,
in expressing the idea of evil as unnatural, it takes
on a mythic quality related to what Northrop Frye
describes as "the Romantic redemption myth."[2] In
both Sentimental and Gothic literature the relationship
of the hero and heroine brings this myth down to earth
to convey psychological concepts. In Sentimental novels
the relationship is combined with the equation of the
protagonists with Nature and their oneness with the
natural setting to which they belong. This adds up to
a vision of man's natural state as an inner one which,
ideally, is harmonious within the individual and makes
him a part of Nature's harmony as well. The Gothic uses
the same theme to express its concern with aberration and
the absence of harmony.

The failure of the Sentimental characters to achieve
complete spiritual union with one like themselves is
as inherently a part of the novels of sensibility as
their initial attempt to achieve such a union.
Mackenzie's Harley goes into a "decline" and dies. His

Julia de Rubigné is poisoned. Virginia is drowned. Such
chronic failure, however, does not detract from the ideal
itself.   These novels affirm the Sentimental concept
of virtue by showing that to know oneself virtuous,
to develop one's sensibility to the full, is more important
than worldly "success" and even than life itself. ,
As the figure of the heroine demonstrates that perfect
virtue is a delicate flower, so the disastrous endings
of these novels reflect its evanescence and
vulnerability. As R. F. Brissenden has pointed ou the
term "sensibility" often reflected "the fear that . . .
to be endowed with a delicate sensibility was to be cast
inevitably into the role of victim."[3] Such a natural
tendency to be victims makes the delicate characters
of Sentimentalism suitable to be transported bodily
into the world of Gothic fiction.

There is an interesting difference between those
works that use the brother-sister relationship and those
that do not.   In Beckford's Vathek, Lewis' The Monk, and
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, we find variations of the theme.
In The Castle of Otranto and Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries
of Udolpho and The Italian, it does appear.

In The Castle of Otranto the relationships are

all of parents and children--the dire effect on the
children when parents are evil and the beneficial effects
when they are good. The threat of real incest is the
precipitating force for the action. The twin heroines
are both models of virtue as a result of their Sentimental
upbringing. Matilda, having grown up in the shelter
of her mother, Hippolyta (also a model), is perfection
itself. She is also, however, a victim of her father's
evil. Isabella and Matilda presage a long period of paired
female figures in the Victorian novel.[4] There, they
are usually contrasted, one dark, lively, willing to
risk action, the other a blonde descendant of the
Sentimental heroine, very passive and very good.

In Walpole's novel both are Sentimental heroines,
and there is only the slightest shade of difference between
them. Isabella is more worldly than Matilda but
only to the extent that she wishes to live in the world
and to marry. She represents the strength Manfred hopes
to infuse into his line. Matilda is a saint, not of this
world. In her relationship to Theodore, she is a clear
example of the self-reflecting virtue embodied in
these characters. She first sets eyes on Theodore
as Manfred is condemning him to death, and she instantly
recognizes in him the living image of Alfonso, before

whose statue she habitually offers her most fervent
prayers. She falls in love at first sight with this
image of the figure of goodness before which she has
always prayed, and he with her. When the evil in her own
father, whom she loves, threatens to overwhelm this
goodness, she cries out and faints. In later releasing
Theodore from his prison she is freeing the goodness that
is no longer a representation, the statue, but a living,
moving force in the world. She frees it to do its work.
When finally she is immolated at the foot of Alfonso's
statue, it is this evil act that brings about the final
restoration of justice and the triumph of virtue. Matilda
dies, but virtue and order are restored.

When, in the final sentence of the novel, Walpole's
chronicler avers that Isabella will marry Theodore and
share with him the sorrowful memory of Matilda, his dead
love and her companion, we may see Matilda as a feminine
ideal, the spirit of virtue itself, which raises love to
a higher plane. She then becomes an idealization of love
that could not live in this world but that ennobles
Theodore and Isabella, who are virtuous but human.

A childhood attachment in The Castle of Otranto
would not have suited the presentation of its characters.

An early love between Theodore and either Isabella or Matilda would have diminished Isabella's role as a figure of strength brought in to fulfill first a false role through the projected marriages to Conrad and Manfred, then a true one in marrying a true heir.

When the quasi-incestuous relationship does reappear in Gothic fiction the results are strange and wonderful. It introduces a major theme: the quality of innocence that is based on ignorance of the world and the involvement of virtuous characters in the causes of evil. In William Beckford's <u>Vathek</u>, the little princess and her cousin, Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz, are another Paul and Virginia except that they are actually children and are related by blood. The identity between them is almost complete:

> The two brothers had mutually
> engaged their children to
> each other; and Nouronihar
> loved her cousin more than her
> own beautiful eyes. Both had
> the same tastes and amusements;
> the same long, languishing looks;
> the same tresses; the same fair
> complexions; and when Gulchenrouz
> appeared in the dress of his
> cousin, he seemed to be more
> feminine than even herself.[5]

The description of Gulchenrouz here as a mirrored reflection of Nouronihar points up her narcissism. This in turn

explains her desertion of her cousin. It is her childhood
self she is leaving. Here, Sentimental narcissism
takes on a darker tone, just as there is a hint of real
incest. For Nouronihar does not mature. She simply
turns to evil.

The girl, again, is the stronger of the two Sentimental
figures. Gulchenrouz follows her lead in everything
as they play and nestle together in a childhood idyll
that is interrupted by the arrival of the caliph Vathek.
A sensualist, Vathek is enchanted by the innocent natural-
ness of Nouronihar. And she is fascinated by him. Gulchen-
rouz is abandoned and Nouronihar joins Vathek. But it is not
love that has caused her to desert her cousin. She sees
Vathek as the way to forbidden knowledge. Urged on
by his mother, the witch Carathis, he is on a
journey in search of the halls of Eblis. To his mother's
disgust, sensuality has diverted Vathek from this
quest, and he is content to dally with Nouronihar in the
beautiful valley. It is Nouronihar who persuades
him to take up the journey again. She is thus,
beneath her Sentimental heroine's exterior, a little
witch figure seducing the Caliph into the abyss. Her
interest is identical with Carathis', although in
everything else they appear to be contrasted. Eventually

all three attain their goal and find themselves among the damned, whose hearts burn in their chests.

Gulchenrouz, on the other hand, remains an eternal child, living in a roc's nest, "remote from the inquietudes of the world, the impertinence of harms, the brutality of eunuchs, and the inconstancy of women."[6] He is cared for by a "genius". This unearthly childhood is contrasted with the equally unearthly torments of Hell where "unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds" are punished:

> Such shall be the chastisement
> of that blind curiosity, which
> would transgress those bounds
> the wisdom of the Creator has
> prescribed to human knowledge;
> and such the dreadful
> disappointment of that
> restless ambition, which,
> aiming at discoveries
> reserved for beings of a
> supernatural order, perceives
> not through its infatuated pride,
> that the condition of man upon
> earth is to be--humble and ignorant.[7]

Thus, Beckford's Eastern tale introduces a second major theme that appears again and again in nineteenth-century Gothic novels--the pursuit of forbidden knowledge. The novel introduces the recurring exploration, in Gothic fiction, of the dilemma of innocence that

relies on ignorance and also establishes the use of
such startlingly symbolic imagery as the burning hearts
of the damned. Vathek suggests the innocence of man's
natural state, the vanity and danger of his pursuit of
knowledge, and the corruptions of civilization--the
sexual transgressions and worldly crimes of ambition
and the misuse of power, which bring men to a Hell that
is a spiritual state.

Although Vathek is the central figure, these themes
are first manifested in the Sentimental relationship
of Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz and her later desertion of
it. Matthew Lewis in The Monk joins the ignorance/
innocence theme to that of real incest between
brother and sister, integrating the figures of the
Sentimental hero and heroine, the Gothic villain, and
the witch. His novel has two self-reflecting Sentimental
pairs--Lorenzo and Antonia, and Raymond and Agnes. In
both cases love occurs at first sight; the men are
all goodness and nobility, the women sweetness and
virtue. Agnes, it is true, transgresses sexual propriety,
but Antonia is a carefully guarded innocent who knows
nothing of the world. Both couples undergo
extravagant Gothic horrors. The interesting development
that Lewis adds, however, is another pair. Ambrosio, the

monk of the title, is Antonia's brother and their likeness
to each other is emphatic. Like his sister, he has
started out innocent, but he has been betrayed by pride
into extending the human limits of virtue. In setting
himself up as a chaste adherent of all Christian virtues,
he first behaves with a lack of compassion when faced
with human weakness and then succumbs to a lust as fierce
as his chastity was severe. Matilda is a witch figure
who turns out to be an agent of the devil. Once she has
seduced him from his strait and narrow path, his instantaneous
passion for Antonia is an evil desire for self-gratification
that knows no bounds, stops at nothing, and entirely lacks
that delicate feeling for the beloved that makes the Senti-
mental hero incapable of doing her the smallest harm.
By making Ambrosio and Antonia brother and sister and
making them alike in their innocence, Lewis presents their
total ignorance of the world as a trap. She remains pure
to the last, but she is victimized and destroyed. He becomes
a torrent of evil desires and actions that are worse in
proportion to the stringent virtuousness from which they arise.

Ambrosio and his crimes are as glaring and strident
as everything else in Lewis' novel, but Victor
Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is a more
ordinary human figure. Here, the quasi-incestuous

childhood relationship appears again.[8]

Elizabeth, like others of her kind, has been brought up in seclusion by Frankenstein's benevolent and gentle parents. The marriage of the parents themselves is based on virtue. "There was a sense of justice in my father's upright mind," Frankenstein recalls, "which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love strongly."[9] Here, we find virtue loving virtue. When the parents first set eyes on Elizabeth, they recognize her at once as an angel-child of a quality quite different from the little peasants with whom she lives.

Elizabeth is described in extravagant terms and allowed very little action in the novel because action would make her too "real" and detract from her function. She is Frankenstein's "more than sister--the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and my pleasures." She is, in life and death, the same sort of inspiration as Walpole's Matilda is in death. Frankenstein says of her:

> The saintly soul of Elizabeth
> shone like a shrine-dedicated
> lamp in our peaceful home. Her
> sympathy was ours; her smile, her
> soft voice, the sweet glance of
> her celestial eyes, were ever

> there to bless and animate us. She
> was the living spirit of love to
> soften and attract; I might have
> become sullen in my study, rough
> through the ardour of my nature,
> but that she was there to subdue
> me to a semblance of her own
> gentleness. And Clerval--could
> aught ill entrench on the noble spirit
> of Clerval? Yet he might not have
> been so perfectly humane, so
> thoughtful in his generosity, so
> full of kindness and tenderness
> amidst his passion for adventurous
> exploit, had she not unfolded to
> him the real loveliness of beneficence
> and made the doing good the end and
> aim of soaring ambition.[10]

The novel thus presents the ideas of nature and

nurture that the Sentimental novels posit and that are

the center of "education" novels. Elizabeth remains

angelic and herself enhances the good effects of such

a childhood in Henry and Victor, for Victor, too, grows

up with "bright visions of extensive usefulness". It is

true that both boys seem to have an innate personality

that is not all virtue and goodness. Both, however,

under Elizabeth's influence, wish to dedicate their

lives to the good of mankind. Victor's degeneration

from this state is carefully accounted for and is reflected

in his monster. Our sense of the cause and nature of

his evil is conveyed by the initial establishment of

his character as one of Sentimentalist virtue in a setting

far removed from "civilization."

As the Gothic novels explore the nature of evil, their villains follow a line of development. At first they are isolated and tormented "giants" at war with themselves. But then they are combined with the Sentimental characters and become men of more ordinary, less villainous stature. As the human in them is stressed, their inner conflicts split them in two. Then, in the doubles figures, two separate characters appear, an ordinary but basically good man who is confronted with his own evil self. With this development the characters of the Gothic grow more complicated, but they are hardly more realistically portrayed. The changes in characterization reflect a deepening confusion over moral absolutes in their application in human nature and a growing awareness of the depth and complexities of the human psyche.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1] Walter Francis Wright, <u>Sensibility in English Prose Fiction 1760-1814: A Reinterpretation</u> (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1937), Vol. 22, nos 3-4.

[2] Northrop Frye, <u>A Study of English Romanticism</u> (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 18.

[3] R. F. Brissenden, <u>Virtue in Distress</u> (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. 270.

[4] Susan R. Gorsky and Elizabeth MacAndrew, "Why Do They Faint and Die? The Birth of the Delicate Heroine." <u>Journal of Popular Culture</u> (Spring 1975), pp. 735-45.

[5] William Beckford, <u>Vathek</u> (New York: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1972), p. 207.

[6] Ibid., p. 235.

[7] Ibid., p. 254.

[8] Leonard Wolf notes in <u>The Annotated Frankenstein</u> (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1977), p. vi, that in the original edition of 1818 Elizabeth <u>was</u> Victor's cousin. This was changed in the 1831 edition "to avoid the slightest suggestion of incest."

[9] Mary W. Shelley, <u>Frankenstein</u> in <u>Three Gothic Novels</u> (New York: The Penguin English Library, 1968), p. 290.

[10] Ibid., pp. 293 and 297.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GOTHIC VILLAIN

The Gothic villain is a mythic, symbolic figure. He
is presented through techniques that show not frail
humans but the nature of human frailty. These villains
are symbolically, not literally, diabolical, and they
appear along with ghosts and monsters to reproduce evil,
madness, and torment located in the human mind. The vices are
presented as distortions of human nature and as essentially
unnatural. Their monstrosity lies in their being embodiments
of spiritually deformed, misshapen humanity with the unfulfilled
potential to have shared natural grace and beauty. Their sense
of this lack in themselves and the struggle between their
good nature and evil tendencies is what awakens echoes of
real nightmare in the reader, however extravagantly the
manifestation of evil is portrayed.

Villains fall into three principal types. Villains/
heroes, whose madness and evil derive from the conflict
within them, have a close affinity with the Sentimental

hero, and give rise to the "double," or "doppelganger".
Manfred, Ambrosio and Frankenstein belong to this
type. Manfred is a reluctant villain, Ambrosio is a
contrasting villain, and Frankenstein so much the
hero that his villainy appears in a separate character.
In contrast, a second type has little of the Sentimental
hero about him because it is his function to be
the "darkness" opposing light. Ann Radcliffe's Montoni
in The Mysteries of Udolpho figures among these.
Finally, the villain as a figure of grotesque is
demonic, confronting the reader with evil. Such is
Vathek. These categories overlap, of course. Manfred,
as an ancestor of them all, shows only a little of
Ambrosio's torment. Frankenstein is portrayed sympathetically,
but the evil he causes is as horrible as the corruptions
of Manfred and Ambrosio. And his monster is a grotesque
as well as a double figure. Montoni, by his very
impenetrability, veers toward the grotesque at the same time
that the Sentimental premises of Ann Radcliffe's novels
contradict this view of them. These premises imply that
her villains must really have started out good at heart
and assert that the diabolical features are unreal. Vathek,
because he is weak and less intent upon evil than his mother,
is not entirely a grotesque. Thus, the three types are
variants giving different emphasis to the common idea they
portray.

They are packed with characteristics that symbolize
the varied implications of Sentimentalism regarding evil.
And their obscure personalities often express the
confusing dilemmas of moral relativism. The Gothic
villains have twisted natures and are full of unnatural
lusts and passions. They suffer the torments of the
damned while committing their wicked deeds because they
must fight with themselves to commit them and must often
also repress their own feelings. Yet, we, the readers,
are invited to feel with and for them in the conflicts
from which they suffer.

The attempt to arouse our sympathy is adopted from
the Sentimental novels. Since these works seek to show
that no amount of suffering through lacerated sensibility
is as intolerable as the spiritual emptiness of worldly
vanity, they invite us to have compassion for misguided
worldly characters. Unfeeling and incapable of the deep
joys of virtuous conduct, the worldly characters gain
nothing in opposing the hero and heroine, and they destroy
their own happiness. The Gothic villain, too, is ultimately
more to be pitied than his victims.

At first sight, he seems to be a more substantial figure
than they, just as the worldly characters of the Sentimental

novel are more mimetic (make-believe) than the hero and
heroine, because they are less idealized. The Gothic
villain is a complex "battleground" where evil fights
against Nature. He is consequently less passive than the
hero and heroine. Necessarily, he is the aggressor,
the oppressor of his innocent victims, and can be involved
in action without detracting from the structure of the
novel as a reflection of the mind.

As a consequence of this kind of complexity, Gothic
novels occupy a "middle-ground" where concepts of general
human psychology can be portrayed. Their characters
fall between the abstract and the concrete, between the
everyday and the supernatural, and even between the mimetic
and the allegorical or symbolical. As Walpole puts it,
they "think, speak, and act as it might be supposed men
and women would do in extraordinary positions."[1]

It is known that characters yield their full meaning
only when they are analyzed in relation to the special
narrative structures set up for them. Their place in their
own settings, however, is explained by an analysis of the
characters themselves. The characterization of the Gothic
villain has clear boundaries and separations. The actions
he takes are the expression of the violent emotions

that move through him and he must be kept clear of minor,
everyday doings. He must not, for example, be caught
shaving or doing the dishes, for his effect will be
lost.

In The Castle of Otranto, Manfred is presented as not
intrinsically wicked but as ruled by passions aroused by
his obsession with the prophecy that his line will not retain
its unlawful rule over the princedom. He was, we are told,
naturally humane; "when his passion did not obscure his reason,"[2]
but it does, in fact, obscure his reason throughout the novel.
Like the classical Oedipus, he tries to prevent the prophecy
from coming true, and his own evil deeds and his downfall
are the result of his desperate effort to maintain the position
he holds through his grandfather's crimes. The awareness that
his deeds are wrong and the sense that he is forced farther
and farther down the path of evil madden him and are actually
the cause of his crimes. He has more substance than the
other characters, because he is a figure torn by the conflict
of good and evil within himself, but he is still a villain.

When Manfred's son, Conrad, is crushed by the helmet--
the first sign that Manfred's unlawful claim is to be wrested
from him--Manfred becomes more frantic than ever and so more
villainous, showing how he continues to spin the web of evil

out of himself. Because this leaves him without a heir

he sets in train dire events of the novel, all of which

ultimately add strokes to the central portrait of Manfred

himself. Other features of the tale also serve to characterize

him. Theodore, the hero, for instance, embodies not merely

nobility in the abstract but that noble sense of honor

that Manfred has had to repress in himself to commit

his evil deeds. It makes sense, consequently, that the villain

should try to imprison the hero under the same giant helmet;

that is, the threat of retribution makes Manfred aware of

the unlawfulness of his position. This, in turn, awakens his

sense of honor, which he immediately tries to repress. Theodore

escapes temporarily through the hole the helmet has made in the

paving of the courtyard, bringing him into the subterranean

passages. In other words, as Manfred's honor, he is confined

in the dark recesses of the castle or Manfred's mind. And here

he helps Isabella, the heroine, to escape from Manfred's

lustful and incestuous pursuit, Manfred's sense of honor being,

indeed, the only impulse that might lead him to spare her. The

evil in Manfred, however, is more powerful than his honor, as

we see when he angrily imprisons Theodore again, or in other

words, again shuts up, represses, his sense of honor.

The rest of the novel also lends itself to this sort of

interpretation. In summary, the characters of Otranto, moving

through improbable supernatural events, tell us that Manfred, a good character at heart, has been driven and twisted into evil in his attempt to maintain his inheritance.

Manfred finally realizes the extent of his own evil, but with that realization, the evil is stripped from him. He has been broken under its weight, but he does not go any further and destroy himself. Now that he is no longer at war with himself, he can retire to the monastic life. His former exasperation came from inner conflict, driving him to commit misdeeds. He is not only a usurper, but he is cruel to his wife. He tries to make an incestuous marriage and finally commits murder in killing his own daughter. Nevertheless, to do these things he constantly fights against his own nature, and the more he feels guilty, the worse he behaves. We are told that

> ashamed . . . of his unhuman treatment
> of a princess (Hippolyta), who
> returned every injury with
> new marks of tenderness ...
> 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.[3]

Therefore, we can say that the first characteristic of such a villain is his isolation. He cuts himself off from virtue,

and this divides him from his fellow man. The evil in him causes him to suffer a continual psychomachia.

At the end of the novel the realization of what has happened to him and his family brings collapse of the castle and the movement of the giant figure of Alfonso to Heaven. Retribution is therefore completed not by the destruction of Manfred, but of the wicked manifestation of Manfred's evil mind--the castle. Manfred, purged of evil, retires to a pious life in the convent.

In contrast, Lewis' The Monk ends in total disaster for Ambrosio. He has been imprisoned all his life in the monastery and finally finds himself in the prison of the Inquisition. These buildings will not collapse like Manfred's castle because they represent the prison of the self. Ambrosio has spent his life locked up and, to the end, is unable to free himself. The life of lust and crime he leads is even more enslaving than the life of piety. Even his pact with Lucifer does not release him as he thought it would. Lucifer effects his escape from the prison only to destroy him. In The Castle of Otranto, the spirit of Alfonso soars up into Heaven. In The Monk, Ambrosio is carried up into the sky alive to be punished pitilessly. To a greater extent than Manfred he

is exasperated into greater evil by his knowledge that he has
betrayed and brought to nothing his high standard of purity.
In his plunge into crime, Ambrosio loses control over him-
self. He watches his own descent into evil.

A number of characteristics of the Gothic villain
are sketched in Ambrosio. As Hart says,

> He is an embodiment of virtue,
> purity, and sensibility such as
> makes the perfect Sentimental
> hero, until pride pushes him to
> exceed the human limits of his
> nature, a trait found in the
> Faustian scientists among his
> successors. This inability to
> accept human limitation is an
> aberration. Eighteen-century
> optimism saw the bounds set for
> humans as a happy state. The view
> that Man when true to his own
> nature was in harmony with all
> Nature meant that he could find
> self fulfillment along the via
> media.[4]

In the Gothic tales the characters all pay for their
refusal to accept limitation as the price of happiness.

Lewis' portrayal of Ambrosio as sexually repressed,
although it seems quite "modern" at first, is typical of
the genre. Sexual crimes as caused by a distortion of
natural drives are a major Gothic theme. Lewis is quite
clear about the repression itself, about the sexual dreams
that torment Ambrosio once Matilda has aroused his desires.

Ambrosio is guilty of sexual crimes as a direct consequence
of his repression of his natural sexuality. He, therefore,,
reflects the "Benevolist" view that all man's faculties
and feelings, including sexual feelings, are God-given and
should neither be denied nor over-indulged. This can be seen
in what we are told of Ambrosio's upbringing.

Both he and Antonia have reached adulthood in a state,
of innocence because they have been brought up ignorant
of the world. She grows up isolated from the corruptions
of civilization. He is confined to the forbidding imprison-
ment of the monastery. He is isolated from the world's corrup-
tion but also from Nature. As a result, he first denies his
own nature and then drives his natural impulses to unnatural
extremes. At first himself seduced into abandoning his
chastity, he is then swept by lust into attempted seduction
and from there into murder, rape, and another murder. This
slide into crime has taken him into depths of evil beyond
what he knows. By making him unaware that his victims
are his mother and his sister, Lewis emphasizes the moral
morass which is the paradox of sensibility: Ambrosio's
blindness symbolizes the inability of his native "goodness"
to recognize evil.

Everything in Lewis' novel is like a distortion of
the devices of the Sentimental novel. Ambrosio's

unnatural upbringing travesties the natural upbringing
of the Sentimental heroes and heroines. His lust
for his sister ending in rape and murder travesties
the natural love of Sentimental characters. The beauty
of Matilda as the Virgin in the portrait and as the
novice, Rosario, instead of reflecting her spiritual
state, is a cruel disguise to bring Ambrosio down.
Lucifer's appearance as a beautiful young man is also a
deception. When he carries Ambrosio away at the end of
the novel and literally hurls him into the abyss,
he appears in all his ugly ferocity. Even the subplot of
Raymond and Agnes is a caricature of the Sentimental. Its
heroine's trials and ordeals are exaggerated and its
hero's adventures, with dark forests and bandits, for example,
pure fairy tale. There is little reason to suppose,
though, that the work is parody. Rather, these distortions
indicate the belief that evil in the human mind makes a
travesty of what the mind should be in its natural beauty.

Ambrosio's fall from virtue is a version of the original
Fall in Eden, and his self-abandonment to sin is portrayed
as the selling of his soul. Early on in the novel, when
Matilda throws off her novice's disguise and reveals
herself to be a woman, Lewis uses symbolic foreshadowing
to equate the sexual seduction with the Fall. In the

garden scene, when Ambrosio tries to make Matilda leave the monastery, she asks him to pluck her a rose. He does so and is stung by a serpent. The scene suggests the Fall of man through woman, and the beginning of lust in the world. Similarly, to suggest the loss of spiritual peace, the novel is full of real devils. Matilda herself goes from Virgin Mary, to a young man, to woman, to witch, to devil. And there are such incidental figures of the sub-plot as the bleeding nun, who is a ghost, and the Wandering Jew.

Ambrosio is initially described as the innocent person cut off from reality, especially as he is paralleled by and reflected in the other characters: Antonia, Lorenzo, Raymond and Agnes. As a result he is later seen as in con-flict with himself; his natural goodness is poisoned and cor-rupted. The education he received in the monastery has made the expression of his nature in true love and normal sexuality impossible. Normally, the result would be a struggle with the evil outer force, i.e., the devil bringing to life the evil in every man. When, however, evil is inter-nal, the "devil" is not always necessarily present. It is an alien presence within the self from which the self shrinks in horror. Paradoxically, such a view brings about the characterization of the villain. In The Monk, it is the

deceptive, self-metamorphosing devils (represented by

Matilda) who have Ambrosio in their grip.

Matthew Lewis' and Ann Radcliffe's novels are expres-
sions of the respective temperaments of each author, and the
differences between them are mostly important as revealing
their different purposes. This in turn makes for different
villains.

In the 1790's, with the appearance of Ann Radcliffe's
novels, the ideas of virtue embodied in Sentimental
heroines were employed in the development of the character.
The heroine is the central character in The Mysteries
of Udolpho. The villain's assault on her is more sustained,
and Emily St. Aubert, along with the other heroines,
does more moving about, voluntary and involuntary, and
takes decisions, right and wrong. The beauty of virtue is
still personified in her beauteous forms, and the hero
falls instantly in love with her. These heroes are important
to the novels, of course, and they fit the Sentimental
pattern. As characters, however, they are secondary to the
heroines. As in many romances, the hero and heroine are
separated by cruel fate, and before they are reunited, the
heroine must conduct a struggle with only her virtue to set
against a wicked villain. Therefore, we can say that in Ann

Radcliffe's novels, the Sentimental character is a
virtuous contrast to villainy, with the added feature
of some character development in the heroine as a result
of her experience of evil.

In _The Mysteries of Udolpho_, therefore, we have a
novel of development of the heroine. In it, the world of
Montoni is contrasted with the world of sensibility in
which Emily has grown up. Like many eighteenth-century
heroines, she has to learn the prudence by which the vir-
tuous are to live in the real world without being corrupted.
She learns it by passing through the "Gothic" world. Even
less than Schedoni in _The Italian_ is Montoni a diabolic
figure. The possibility of taking him this way is undercut
when it is revealed that he is not in reality the embodiment
of evil that he has seemed to Emily's eyes. The "monster"
that she sees is a mere bandit. He is a wicked bandit but
neither as evil as she thinks, nor, once all is revealed, a
symbolization of psychological aberration. Montoni is a bad
man of this world, well aware of what he is doing. _The
Mysteries of Udoilpho_ makes its villains part of the character-
ization of their heroines.

Emily's travels in the novel are symbolic journeys

between different worlds that represent different states of mind she must confront and understand, whether they are in herself or in others. The St. Aubert estate represents naive Sentimentalism. The Pyrenees display benevolent sublimity, drawing the mind out of the self into more spiritual realms. The social milieux of Emily's aunt, first in France, then in Italy, signify worldly vanity. The Alps are a range as sinister in its sublimity as the Pyrenees were benign, and Italy beyond them is a land of contrasts. The happy peasants lead the idyllic life; the worldly Venetians add ferocity to their worldliness. Similarly, the Appenines, which harbor the castle of Udolpho, have sublimity in both its good and evil aspects. It is at Montoni's castle that Emily is to learn what evil is really like, her notions of it being as naive as her understanding of the Sentimental idea. The landscape throughout is thus used symbolically.

The section in which Emily and her aunt are imprisoned in the castle, the aunt dies, and Emily struggles in terror with inexplicable events, recalls the atmosphere of Manfred's castle in The Castle of Otranto. The castle is the character of Montoni presented at his most diabolical, and the two women exist with it. This effect is actually increased by the beginning of Ann Radcliffe's

rational explanations of the supernatural and of the real nature of Montoni's evil. Brought up surrounded by goodness and human nature, Emily makes out of human wickedness, cruelty, greed, and desperation a "nightmare Gothic world" of supernatural evil. This Gothic is hers, not Ann Radcliffe's.[5] Before Emily can escape, she must first recognize that Montoni is not a monster but a bandit. The castle would therefore be a place for brigands in a land torn by political problems.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is probably the Gothic novel with the greatest claim to fame because it has become a modern myth. It also has a hero/villain, Victor Frankenstein, and makes use of the doubles figure to establish the relativity of moral values with great complexity. Mary Shelley makes Victor Frankenstein a despairing human being by symbolically projecting the evil in him into the monstrous exterior of his creation. Victor Frankenstein is an ordinary man throughout. His charm, his sensibility, and his intelligence are not presented in images that set him apart. He has no supernatural powers, nor diabolical passions. Unlike so many Gothic figures, he is not identified with a house, castle or any other building that may serve to make a villain threatening. Throughout the terrible story he tells, Victor is an ordinary man in all but the extent of his sufferings. His hold on us is

inescapable because the consequences of his deeds are
horrible out of all proportion to his intent in performing
them. It is just so that we look on the possibility of
evil in ourselves, knowing as we do so many mitigating
circumstances, convinced as we are that we are indeed
compassionate beings. To the extent that our identification
with Frankenstein is close, our fear of the evil that comes
from him will be great.

The monster Frankenstein creates is his spiritual
mirror image. With its yearning for love and companionship,
it is a Sentimental character hidden within its own
monstrous form, just as Victor is a Sentimental hero
formed with evil of false scientific pride. The "man"
made in Frankenstein's image is an ugly monster with a
Sentimental "core" as gentle as Frankenstein's own.

Frankenstein's early upbringing is typically
that of the sentimental hero, and early in the novel
Mary Shelley carefully accounts for his corruption.
Victor himself says that "the birth of that passion
which afterwards ruled my destiny arose from ignoble
and almost forgotten sources."[6] He protests that if his
father had explained to him the dangerous falsity of
renaissance and medieval occultism, "it is even

possible that the train of my ideas would never have received
the fatal impulse that led to my ruin."[7] The destruction
of a tree by lightning, and his resultant "enlightment",
lead him to abandom occultism in favor of "mathematics and the
branches of study appertaining to that science", and he sees
this as

> the last effort made by the spirit
> of preservation to avert the
> storm that was even then hanging in
> the stars and ready to envelope
> me . . . It was a strong effort
> of the spirit of good to save him
> from utter and terrible destruction.[8]

Once the original corruption has set in through the
pursuit of the occult, however, it breeds further evil.
It has turned Victor's passionate desire to use his
science for the benefit of mankind into pride. It makes
him twist every opportunity and fly from everyone. For
instance, Professor Waldman, whom Frankenstein meets at the
university, is a good man, but his words to Victor concerning
the power of "natural philosophy" produce terrible consequences:
"As I went on I felt as if my soul was grappling with a palpable
enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed
the mechanism of my being."[9] Here, Mary Shelley's metaphors
represent the progression of Frankenstein's degeneracy:
from a spiritual being, to an instrument played upon, to
a machine that is not its own master but must act on

impulse supplied from outside.

Once embarked upon his experiment, Frankenstein
cuts himself off from everyone, acting on a "resistless
and almost frantic impulse" and voluntarily putting
himseslf into the isolation characteristic of Gothic
villains. Forgetful of home, blind of the beauty of
nature, he pursues his end singlemindedly. Later he
sees this very ardor as a symptom of evil:

> A human being in perfection ought
> always to preserve a calm and
> peaceful mind. If the study to
> which you apply yourself has a
> tendency to weaken your affections
> and to destroy your taste for
> those simple pleasures, ... then
> that study is certainly unlawful
> . . . not the human mind.10

Frankenstein tells Walton: "Often did my human nature
turn with loathing from my occupation."[11] As he
works on his creation he becomes actually feverish and, he
says, "I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty
of a crime."[12]

Like his predecessors among the Gothic villains,
Frankenstein's self-isolation comes from a sense of guilt
that finally becomes insupportable. His crude creation is
shaped from the rotting remains of the charnel house.

It is a monstrous being created by a "mock"-god. Created

full-grown, the monster goes through a foggy period

as its senses awaken and its understanding of the outside

world increases. It learns language while hidden in the shed

attached to the DeLacey's cottage. With language, it also

learns the natural state of man. It is only when it is

rejected by man and sees that it has been abandoned by his

"father," that is, by Frankenstein, that it turns evil. And

in this change from good to evil it reflects its creator. Even

this creature may arouse some sympathy in the reader, but it is,

nevertheless, a purely symbolic figure of fantasy and not

a representation of a man. Mary Shelley is trying to make

the point that Frankenstein could not create a man and that

his attempt was bound to produce only a monster. And, in fact,

it is himself that he has made into a monster. The monster

is Frankenstein's double, representing not only the evil side

of Frankenstein but his whole spiritual state. Lowry

Nelson in "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel" says

that "Frankenstein and his monster have much in common

. . . . they are objectified parts of a single sensibility,

and represent the intimate good and bad struggle in the human

personality."[13]

Elizabeth, the heroine of the novel, also reflects

Frankenstein. She does so as a separate being. She is

a character in her own right, not a symbolical embodiment of a part of Frankenstein's personality. But she also reflects the good in him, so that in the beginning of the novel, it holds sway over his passionate character, directing it to good ends. She eventually loses her influence, but it is still her spirit that follows him in his final pursuit of the monster.

Here, we have the heroine reflecting only the good part of Frankenstein, while the double reflects both good and bad. Mary Shelley, however, seems more interested in keeping the idea of the basic goodness of human nature, than in portraying the double. Frankenstein, therefore, does not split into good and evil parts. He suffers because he has become a monster. He first refuses to face this fact; that is, he flees the monster. Then, when forced to recognize it, when the monster confronts him and tells its tale, he still cannot bear to deal with the consequences. That is, he cannot make the right decision about creating a mate for the monster. With each refusal to recognize his own monstrosity, a new disaster occurs. It is only when all that he loves has been destroyed that Frankenstein changes from pursued to pursuer and, at last, tries to track down and destroy the monster. That is, he finally attempts to understand himself

and to do away with the evil within. It is as he comes
to the end of this journey of self-discovery that he
comes upon Walton. At this point, he tells his story,
explaining, in effect, what he has now understood. He
dies still unsure in his advice to Walton. But, sym-
bolically, the monster's false "father" or "god" is dead.
So we may see Frankenstein, too, as remaining outwardly
monstrous because what he has done cannot be undone.

The monster as a symbolic figure tells us several
things. It is only outwardly misshapen until its
efforts to win human love and friendship are rejected.
When it turns to destructive violence it manifests
a complicated concept of the origin of human evil.
First, because the virtuous DeLaceys reject it, we see
symbolically that Frankenstein's plunge over the border
of the permissible makes him a monster that goodness
and virtue find entirely inimical--for the DeLaceys
see only the monster's exterior, a point that is emphasized
by the old man's being blind. This rejection is consonant
with the general Sentimentalist idea that virtue
cannot love vice and that vice is a distortion of the
natural being. It, in turn, makes it possible to
interpret the monster's ravages as also symbolic.
Frankenstein's family is destroyed by the monster he has

created. That creation can be seen to be the monster he
has made himself into by pursuing false science and
arrogating God's province to himself. Thus, we may
say that his pride and self-isolation have cut him off
from his own humanity. They have destroyed the fine-tuned
relationship of love and sensibility which made his family
more than just a group of people related by blood. It
is not the descent into crime of an individual that is
depicted here. Rather, it is the idea that the human
mind that gives way to pride and vanity locks up its
finer nature in a monstrous shell. In doing so, it
destroys those it loves by cutting itself off from
them.

Many themes of Sentimentalism are represented in
Frankenstein, who can retain our sympathy throughout
the novel since the monster commits all the violent
deeds.

In the same period, the gloomy view reflected in the
use of the grotesque is represented in Vathek. The
grotesque is a way of facing absolute evil. When it is
used to characterize a Gothic villain, Man's evil
comes to seem inherent and inevitable. As in Vathek,
for example, works in the grotesque genre often

incorporate comic features in their characters.

Vathek uses the grotesque to evoke horror and a sense
of unexplained, inevitable evil. To establish the grotesque
convention, it adopts the forms of the Eastern tale,
opening up its weird world through the devices of the —
Arabian Nights. In Beckford's novel, there are several
contrasted worlds. We are first plunged into the witch's
world of Vathek's mother Carathis and the wicked city.
Then Vathek travels away from it into the idyllic world
of Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz, only to take the little
princess away from her father, home and shelter, into
the caverns of the underworld itself.

Beckford's presentation of his sinister, but also
comic, fairy-tale landscape in direct narrative brings
us face to face with his grotesque. Optimism vanishes
like the little boys Vathek throws into the abyss to
feed the Giaour. Unlike them, it does not reappear.
It is said that Beckford seems to have drawn an
uncomfortable possible conclusion from Sentimentalism.
As R. F. Brissenden has suggested in discussing de Sade,
"Man may be seen not as endowed with good sentiments
which become twisted into bad, but simply as a repository
of feelings of all kinds."[14]   We can say, therefore,

that sensuality, greed for knowledge, or any feeling driven to its extreme may result in grotesque horror.

Pure Gothic is seen as reaching its culmination in Frankenstein. The heroes and heroines of Sentimentalism were defeated and destroyed by the worldly characters, but for them the world was lost. Then, in Gothic novels, such villains as Manfred and Ambrosio were presented as evil distortions of their own good potential. When they go down to defeat, evil itself is shown to be self-destructive. In Ann Radcliffe's novels, evil is overcome, and sensibility and good-sense are restored. In Mary Shelley's novels, however, the defeat is almost complete. All the members of Frankenstein's family are killed, and he himself dies in his attempt to run down his monster. The only spark of hope lies in the fact that that evil thing, hating itself and still loving its creator, sacrifices itself. This "improbable" ending can suggest that if man turns from his own evil and reaffirms his natural goodness, the evil will burn out and a new generation--in this case Walton--will turn away from vain pursuits. For most of the novel we have lived with a despairing belief in the frailty of goodness and the overwhelming power of evil.

It is difficult to say when the disintegration of
pure Gothic began; however, it was the beginning of a new
fiction influenced by the pure Gothic novels. The disinte-
gration of the genre provided stones for the extensive building
of later "Gothic" romances, detectives and thrillers. The
books that flood the market today reveal the same romanticism,
the same blend of probability and horror which characterized
the Gothic novel. The tradition that once was Horace Walpole,
Mary Shelley and Matthew Lewis, to name a few, is now Edgar
Allan Poe, Conrad and many others.

As the Gothic novel encompassed a wider range of
human experience, it lost its individuality and merged
into other forms; however, the story of "Gothic" disintegra-
tion and the obscure underground channels of Gothic romance,
is by itself a subject for independent research.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1] Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, W. S. Lewis, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 8.

[2] Ibid., p. 67.

[3] Ibid., p. 35.

[4] Francis Russell Hart, "The Experience of Character," Experience in the Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 76.

[5] Robert Kiely, The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 74.

[6] Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), pp. 297-9

[7] Ibid., pp. 297-98.

[8] Ibid., pp. 300-1.

[9] Ibid., pp. 307-8.

[10] Ibid., p. 316.

[11] Ibid., p. 315.

[12] Ibid., p. 317.

[13] Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Yale Review, 1963, Vol., 52, p. 238.

[14] R. F. Brissenden, _Virtue in Distress_ (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. 258.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRENDS AND INFLUENCES OF THE GOTHIC IN LATER WORKS

In the Gothic fiction of writers such as James and Stevenson and Poe, we can see a high degree of awareness of psychological phenomena and a deliberate use of Gothic imagery to embody them in literature. This awareness was, of course, the consequence of advances in psychology itself, which, with the writings of Freud, was shortly to become a subject of general knowledge. Born in 1856, Freud belonged to the same generation as James (b. 1843), Stoker (b. 1847), Stevenson (b. 1850), and Wilde (also born in 1850), and his researches and literary works belong to the same cultural era.

The development of the study of the mind into the science of psychology has continued to affect concepts of human nature and their reflection in Gothic literature. The course of the Gothic tradition in the twentieth century merits a study of its own for this reason alone. In addition, there has been a great proliferation of

forms as a result of the upsurge in popular literature,
the introduction into our culture of films, television,
and comic books, and the appearance of a "youth culture."
These together change the nature of the study needed.
A glance at the kind of Gothic tales that have
appeared in our century and half of the nineteenth
reveals, nonetheless, something of the direction the
tradition has taken in its expression of man's fears
and fancies.

The widespread general knowledge of psychology
is reflected in the melding of Gothic fantasy and
realistic fiction that can already be seen in the late
nineteenth century. The tales and novels of Joseph
Conrad, a contemporary of James, Stevenson, Stoker,
Wilde, and Poe, are an example of the amalgam. Conrad
regularly sets up a closed world, for instance, by
isolating his characters on board ship, but because,
in real life, a ship forms a small world of its own, he
presents it as a miniature of the larger society on
land, using realistic techniques. In this way, in The
Nigger of the Narcissus, for example, Conrad deals with
the relations of man-to-man and man-to-society,
encompassing both external social and internal psychological
reality. Even his most famous doubles story, The Secret

Sharer, portrays both the captain's mind and the social
problems of responsibility and leadership by making
the two figures embody the conflict in the captain
over his dual role--as captain and as man.

When, on the other hand, Conrad turns to a direct
symbolization of the mind in Heart of Darkness, he chooses
to build his story with the narrative structure that we
have found in Frankenstein. It is a frame story, one
of those told by Marlow, who recounts it to a group of
hearers among whom the reader finds himself. Conrad also
uses other Gothic devices. His heroine is a typically
pale and simplified Sentimental figure, kept out
of the action so that she can be an embodiment of ignorance
identified as innocence. The tale, like so many of
its Gothic predecessors, is one of vague horrors taking
place in a closed and impenetrable world--darkest Africa.
All is unspecified evil and dread, which becomes an inner
dread for the reader as well as the characters. Conrad
could touch the innermost springs of fear. His romantic
imagination displays a fine command over the possibilities
and powers of terror. A note of inexpressible mystery and
unknown dread is struck in his novels.

In modern times the marvellous has become more

scientific and for this reason even more frightening.
The fantasy of H. G. Wells, as also of C. S. Lewis, shows
us worlds unknown, monstrous and horrible.

Charles Brockden Brown, the first Gothic novelist of
America, penned stories of sleep-walkers and ventriloquists,
and shows an unmistakable resemblance to Mrs. Radcliffe
and her techniques. Brown has a deep interest in morbid
psychology, and his novels illustrate the workings of
the human brain under great emotional stress. Psycholo-
gical interest produces a hypnotic effect, and creates in
the readers a mood of awestruck horror.

Among other American writers, Hawthorne and Poe are
"Gothic" in their treatment of the supernatural and
mysterious. These writers show that the walls dividing the
seen and the unseen world are often very thin. Hawthorne
creates a mysterious atmosphere of foreboding and evokes
the terrors of an invisible world, utilizing soul-shaking
embodiments of mortal dread. The mystery of Death exerts
a strong fascination over his mind, yet on the whole he
is melancholic, not morbid. He does not extend his art
to the domain of physical horrors. His pictures are
neither harsh nor crude, rather they are shadowy and
subdued.

Edgar Allen Poe exploited the "gothic" power of suggestion, and cast a hypnotic spell over his readers to comply with his fantastical themes. He made full use of the power of words and tricks of style. In an article published in 1845, James Russell Lowell wrote that in raising images of horror, Poe had a strange success, conveying to us sometimes a dusky hint, some terrible doubt, which is the secret of all horror. He goes on to say that Poe leaves to imagination the task of finishing the picture, a __ task to which only he is competent.

Poe raised terror to tragic heights, and produced dramatic and powerful effects by a rigid economy of effort without any extravagant or superflous touches. The successfully diffused atmosphere of creepiness in "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Masque of Red Death," or the dreary pictorial effects in "The Fall of the House of Usher," were definitely inspired by Mrs. Radcliffe's deserted abbeys. The outline of Poe's tales is distinct, the impressions swift and deep. He added psychology to the old "gothic" raw material, and captured the airy and light filaments of sensations by touching upon obscure feelings of psychic dread.

Gothic techniques also appear in works depicting the

psychological aspects of alienation, the most prevalent
of human conditions in an Absurd universe. Carson McCullers,
for instance, uses them in "The Ballad of the Sad Café," a
tale of the nature of human love and the destructiveness of
self-isolation. The closed world of a small town into
which we are led by the narrator; the cross-eyed, man-
nish female giant, Miss Amelia, and the small and womanish
crook-back dwarf, Cousin Lymon--these are Gothic devices;
and the café itself, for all its fragile and delapidated
state, is a recognizable Gothic "castle" that becomes the
center of warmth and caring when Miss Amelia opens herself
out to others, and gray and shuttered when she closes
herself off from the world.

McCuller's discussion of her writing could well
describe the techniques of Gothic writers ever since Walpole.
"Writing," she says, "is a wandering, dreaming occupation.
The intellect is submerged beneath the unconscious--the
thinking mind is best controlled by the imagination."
And speaking of one of her major themes, she explains that
"love, and especially love of a person who is incapable
of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my
selection of grotesque figures to write about--people whose
physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapa-
city to love or receive love--their spiritual isolation."[1]

This kind of symbolism is the same as that used by ealier authors in portraying Gothic villains as stormy giants on embodying a sense of guilt in the deformed figure of a double. McCullers' "The Ballad of the Sad Café" uses its Gothic devices to explore the nature of human love and the self-isolation which is its opposite.

Twentieth-century explorations of human nature and the nature of human sexuality form a natural extension of the themes of the earlier Gothic tradition. They use Gothic devices to turn our eyes inward in the continued exploration of the self. But the view of the universe as absurd threatens such explorations with meaninglessness. Science fiction, horror stories and films have filled the modern consciousness with monsters, mutants, and creatures from outer space, all designed to represent, not the self, but the alien Other, the altogether different, alien presence.[2] Such figures are in themselves difficult for the human imagination to devise, and their creators draw on the long tradition of the grotesque to delineate them.

Leonard Wolf, who edited The Annotated Frankenstein,

has traveled from research into the real Dracula of medieval Hungary to a search for living vampires in contemporary San Francisco, which brought a case that might be described as "psychological vampirism" to his living room.[3]

The vampire presented realistically, as one of us, also appears in Anne Rice's novel Interview with the Vampire, a work that again explores the forms of human love and the nature of its relationships, in a first-person, mediated account from the mouth of the vampire himself. The Otherness of this figure, which is beyond human nature in that it does not die and feeds and finds its satisfations in nonhuman ways, is dissolved in the "reality" of the living, breathing creature sitting quietly and talking into the tape recorder, recounting a tale of passions that we recognize. But this novel leaves us, as so many earlier Gothic tales do, on the edge of a quicksand of uncertainty. What kind of credence is demanded of a realistic account transmitted by one whom we know to be a creature of the fancy only? Is this vampire, like James's governess in The Turn of the Screw, seeing evil where there is only the natural? Having experienced his story and learned what it is to a vampire, we cannot dismiss him, any more than we could dismiss Frankenstein's monster, as a narrator. Throughout the novel we have given imaginative assent to the vampire's account. We have been

in the position of the boy who has taken his tape recorder
and interviewed the very figure of the threatening evil within,
but now that boy has himself taken on the nature of a
vampire and gone to seek further. Do we wish to follow
him? Perhaps he is another Frankenstein, pursuing forbidden
knowledge to the destruction of himself and others? Or is
no knowledge forbidden? The novel uses the supernatural,
as the Gothic tradition has always done, to present new
views of human nature ambiguously, so that we are forced
to ask questions about it. Because the twentieth century
is not yet in a position to answer those questions and
others concerning the inner self, Gothic literature will
continue to appear.

Gothic fiction symbolizes the unresolvable, shifting,
but perpetual paradox of human nature. Until the human
condition changes, we will need such fantasies to embody
the dilemma of our existence, to face us with it, so that
we, too, may face the dark.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Carson McCullers, "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," The Mortgaged Heart (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 315 and 311.

[2] Much of the literature concerning this aspect of our culture is itself strange. The attempt to depict Otherness appears in many forms, including elaborate editions, which are part of the "cults" that have grown up aroung the literature of the strange. Cult literature seems to hover in a realm that is at once intense and non-serious, satirizing and accepting. This strange coexistence of attitudes that have usually tended to squeeze each other out is probably a key to understanding the culture of the 1980's. It may be that, under the threat of meaninglessness, the borderlines between reality and fantasy lose significance, giving fantasy a new dimension.

[3] See Leonard Wolf, A Dream of Dracula (New York: Clarkson N. Potter), 1977.

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