

**CLASS AND GENDER IDENTITY IN “MALE GOTHIC,”
FROM WALPOLE TO BYRON**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate works by major male writers of Gothic fiction—namely, Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis and Lord Byron—in the context of the changing social and cultural climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The “male Gothic,” as I will argue, represents a kind of social performance, and it is a subgenre of fiction in which there is a persistent engagement with questions of class and gender identity. Between around the 1760s and the 1820s, Britain started to witness the gradual decline of aristocratic cultural hegemony and a more vigorous self-assertion of the middle classes, which sought to regulate aristocratic “excess.” Examining the self representation of the authors in question, alongside their morally and sexually transgressive works, this thesis will consider the “male Gothic” as a literary category that made possible the performance of implicitly oppositional class and gender identities, and provided a means of resisting emergent “middle-class” ideologies and values. Such a notion of “resistance,” however, I will argue, also needs to be seen in the context of the writers’ various attempts to offer their works to the public as both legitimate and pleasurable, and hence takes the form of an often playful vacillation between the licensed and the subversive, rather than any more absolute and uncompromising form of cultural opposition. Concluding by looking at the diverse but increasingly hostile reception of Byron’s work in the 1820s and 1830s, this thesis will consider the backlash against the “male Gothic” more generally around this time, and it will suggest that Byron’s work marks the high-point and, perhaps, the end-point of the genre.

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of David Punter's seminal work, The Literature of Terror (1980), "a flood of critical material,"¹ to use Punter's words, has established Gothic fiction as a genre that not only embraces wide-ranging themes, features and functions, but also invites different, often competing theoretical approaches to analyse its development and transformation across history and cultures. As psychoanalysis and queer theory have increasingly gained momentum in literary studies, there has been an attempt to examine Gothic works written by male writers as a tradition in which the portrayal of protagonists' exploits is explained in terms of the authors' psychological experience, and in particular their deviation from a normative heterosexuality. Timothy Mowl's biography, Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider (1996), is perhaps the most obvious example of such an enthusiasm for "queering" the male Gothic.² Drawing the reader's attention to Walpole's private correspondence with his male friends, Mowl contends that Walpole was "a homosexual who consorted with other homosexuals and bisexuals of his class."³ The Castle of Otranto (1764), as Mowl puts it, reflects Walpole in "a state of febrile excitement" after William Guthrie's attack on his intimate relationship with Henry Seymour Conway—a public "outing" of Walpole, as Mowl calls it—in A Reply to the Counter Address; Being a Vindication of a Pamphlet Entitled, An Address to the

¹ David Punter, preface, The Literature of Terror, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Longman, 1996) viii.

² Other examples are Raymond Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York UP, 1997); Jill Campbell, "'I Am No Giant': Horace Walpole, Heterosexual Incest, and Love among Men," The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation, 39.3 (1998): 238-60; Max Fincher, "Guessing the Mould: Homosocial Sins and Identity in Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto," Gothic Studies 3.3 (2001): 229-45; Adam Potkay, "Beckford's Heaven of Boys," Raritan 13.1 (1993): 73-86; and Lauren Fitzgerald, "The Sexuality of Authorship in The Monk," Romanticism on the Net 36-37, Nov. 2004-Feb. 2005, 28 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2004/v/n36-37/011138ar.html>>.

³ Timothy Mowl, Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider (London: Murray, 1996) 4.

Public, on the Late Dismission of a General Officer (1764), which probably made Walpole consider it “expedient” to “bring out a rip-roaring, red-blooded romance that included threats of rape in gloomy cellars and portray[...] normally sexed young men falling in love, normally, with beautiful high-born maidens in distress.”⁴ While Mowl’s reference to homosexuality is anachronistic, so too is his description of Walpole as an “outsider” inaccurate: as a son of a former Prime Minister, Walpole was from his childhood a member of elite circles, serving in Parliament for twenty-seven years and maintaining connections with many illustrious social and political figures of his time.

Queer readings such as Mowl’s may offer new perspectives on Gothic fiction, but they often downplay the significance of other kinds of context. A more theoretically and historically informed criticism has been advanced by the literary scholar George Haggerty, whose recent book, Queer Gothic (2006), discusses the genre in the light of Michel Foucault’s history of sexuality and ideas articulated in psychoanalytical studies.⁵ Since Gothic fiction, in Haggerty’s words, “offered a testing ground for many unauthorised genders and sexualities,” it might be seen to function as “a historical model of queer theory and politics: transgressive, sexually coded, and resistant to dominant ideology.”⁶ Haggerty’s remark about the emergence of the literary Gothic in the late eighteenth century, coinciding with modern concepts of sexuality, is worth expanding to include other aspects of cultural transition in this period.⁷ Focusing on constructions of class and gender identity, my thesis will

⁴ Ibid. 186.

⁵ Haggerty’s earlier works on the subject are “Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis,” Studies in the Novel 18.4 (1986): 341-52; and Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia UP, 1999).

⁶ Haggerty, Queer Gothic (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2006) 2.

⁷ As Haggerty puts it, “It is no mere coincidence that the cult of gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture.” See Queer Gothic 2.

present “male Gothic” writing in the larger context of the changing social and cultural climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This categorisation of the “male Gothic,” it is worth noting, is done retrospectively. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the literary category of “Gothic” romance was itself yet to be decisively established, and readers did not necessarily gender different types of romance. In Northanger Abbey (1818), for instance, Isabella Thorpe is at ease to name Eliza Parsons’s The Castle of Wolfenbach (1793) and Regina Maria Roche’s Clermont (1798) alongside Francis Lathom’s The Midnight Bell (1798) and Peter Teuthold’s translation The Necromancer (1794) under her list of “horrid” novels.⁸ Isabella’s arrogant brother, John, however, distinguishes Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796) as the only “decent” novel that came out after Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1748).⁹ Since Lewis’s novel was criticised for its lurid sexual content and immorality, John’s praise of The Monk is constituted on the ground that it is more daring and provocative than other works, which he regards as “full of nonsense and stuff.”¹⁰ Though John does not put novels into categories, his remark shows that contemporary readers somehow recognised Lewis’s work as a different kind of fiction, distinct, at least, from Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic works that Austen’s heroine admires.

Similarly acknowledging the difference between Lewis and Radcliffe, several modern critics attempt to impose gendered paradigms of the Gothic, each comprising specific tropes and features. Kate Ferguson Ellis, for example, marks out “the masculine Gothic” as a male writers’ tradition, central to which are the male protagonist and the theme of exile and alienation from both domestic and public

⁸ Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, ed. Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin, 1995) 37.

⁹ Ibid. 45.

¹⁰ Ibid.

spheres.¹¹ Paying particular attention to The Monk in his analysis, Robert Miles views the male Gothic as offering a literary aesthetics of the visual where men are voyeuristic gazers and women, as Miles puts it, “become the convenient, stigmatised other, responsible for the fragility, and irrationality, of the masculine self.”¹² The most detailed characterisation of the male Gothic is perhaps Anne Williams’s Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic (1995), which argues for a male Gothic formula that features an overreaching villain-hero, explicit and unexplained supernatural agency, and horrifying crimes that revolve around female suffering and, sometimes, pleasure derived from female victimisation.¹³

This thesis takes into account the male-centred plot as a “self-evident” trope of the male Gothic. It also acknowledges motifs explored by the scholars above as dominant in male writing, all the while keeping in mind that there is no such thing as a simple and straightforward gendered classification of the genre. Recent studies of the female Gothic by E. J. Clery and Gary Kelly, for example, have emphasised the diversity of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women’s Gothic (which includes a tale of female sexual desire and violence like Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya, or The Moor [1806]), and such critics have disputed the monolithic categorisation of feminist academics in the 1970s and 1980s who saw the female Gothic as focusing on women’s physical and psychological oppression in a male-dominated society.¹⁴ There are likewise varieties of the male Gothic during this period. Apart from

¹¹ Kate Ferguson Ellis, The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1989) xii-xv.

¹² Robert Miles, Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 58.

¹³ Anne Williams, Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 99-107.

¹⁴ E. J. Clery, Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), and Varieties of Female Gothic, ed. Gary Kelly, 6 vols (London: Pickering, 2002). For discussion of the female Gothic by feminist critics, see Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London: Women’s P, 1976); Juliann Fleenor, The Female Gothic (Montreal: Eden, 1983); and Kate Ferguson Ellis, The Contested Castle.

Walpole and Lewis, numerous male authors in this period also wrote fictions that we might now classify as “Gothic” and that are varied in themes and features—works including William Godwin’s Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams (1794), Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Zastrozzi: A Romance (1810) and St. Irvyne: or, The Rosicrucian: A Romance (1811), Sir Walter Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor (1819), Charles Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), and James Hogg’s The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824).

What I mean when I refer to the “male Gothic” here is a subgenre of fiction particularly associated with four major writers: Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis and Lord Byron. Instead of attempting to pin down tropes of the “male Gothic,” what this thesis does is to investigate roles that these tropes played beyond their literary context so as to address the historical and cultural significance of the subgenre. As I will argue, “male Gothic” writing differs from other Gothic works written by men in its persistent engagement with questions of class and gender identity. The historical backdrop of my thesis will be a series of cultural shifts between around the 1760s and the 1820s, a period during which, as many historians have claimed, Britain started to witness the gradual decline of aristocratic cultural hegemony and a more vigorous self-assertion on the part of the middle classes, which sought to regulate aristocratic extravagance or excess, in all its manifestations.¹⁵ This thesis will be concerned to examine the different ways in which the “male Gothic” provided certain writers with a means of resisting these emergent “middle-class” ideologies and values. The “male Gothic,” as I would like

¹⁵ See, for example, Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, eds., The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820 (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002); Gerald Newman, The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830 (London: Weidenfeld, 1987); Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (London: Pimlico, 1992); and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 (London: Routledge, 1987).

to argue, therefore, is a literary category that is also a form of social production, making possible the performance of implicitly oppositional class and gender identities.

CLASS AND GENDER IDENTITY IN LATE-EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman describe the period between 1750 and 1820 as an era of “cultural revolutions.”¹⁶ In opposition to Marxist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm who mark the Industrial Revolution in Britain and the French Revolution in France as the key points in western history that engendered modern capitalist, bourgeois society, Jones and Wahrman claim that “these revolutionary developments can perhaps be thought of most fruitfully less as primarily social, economic, or political transformations than as cultural ones.”¹⁷ Instead of focusing on socioeconomic and political changes, they are interested in the role that language and representation played in shaping conceptions of modern society, pointing out how the categories of class, gender and race were discursively constructed. Along with a range of other cultural historians, they argue for “the shift of focus from supposedly ‘objective,’ anterior social reality, and the impersonally observable aspects of the social process, to their representations, to the historically specific constructions of the meanings attributed to such realities.”¹⁸

The idea that this was a period of “cultural revolutions” is a feature of numerous historical accounts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

¹⁶ The phrase is from Jones and Wahrman’s title of the book The Age of Cultural Revolutions.

¹⁷ Jones and Wahrman, “Introduction: An Age of Cultural Revolutions?” 3.

¹⁸ Ibid. 10.

over the past two decades or so, although these accounts vary sometimes in their periodisation and in their points of emphasis. Gerald Newman, for example, sees the period from 1740 to 1830 as giving birth to what he calls “the rise of English nationalism.”¹⁹ Britain in the eighteenth century, as Newman puts it, was a “monarch[y] of the ancien régime, dominated in church and state by hereditary or quasi-hereditary oligarchies”: this was a period in which the country still upheld an “aristocratic culture” which generally valued privilege by birth, rank and wealth; patronage; conspicuous consumption; a continental education; and the idea of cosmopolitanism, in particular the diffusion of languages, manners and customs from France and Italy.²⁰ However, Newman also observes that by the mid-1750s there began to emerge a counter discourse, a “nationalist philosophy, anti-French and anti-aristocratic, linked to sharpening moral, social and historical concerns.”²¹ As commercial growth made Britain a more prosperous society, social commentators became increasingly apprehensive of the negative consequences of such advancement. The adulation of foreign cultures was a subject that was widely discussed by moralists and critics, generating a growing dislike of aristocrats and those who imitated their lifestyle. John Brown, for example, famously described members of the nobility and gentry as living in a state of “*vain, luxurious, and selfish EFFEMINACY,*” censuring them as promoting “the general Habit of *refined indulgence*” rather than the “Spirit of *Religion, Honour, and public Love,*” in his Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (1757).²² Likewise, in An Essay on Modern Luxury (1765), Samuel Fawconer attacked luxury and French fashion as “eradicat[ing] ... patriotic affections” and causing the disappearance of “national

¹⁹ The phrase is from Newman’s title of his book The Rise of English Nationalism.

²⁰ Newman, Rise of English Nationalism 11-13.

²¹ Ibid. 73.

²² qtd. in David Spadafora, The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 215.

spirit.”²³ Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” (1770) laments how the pomp and extravagance of the upper strata and wealthy townsmen spread their influence and destroy “rural virtues” such as “[c]ontented toil,” “hospitable care,” “connubial tenderness,” and “piety.”²⁴ Representations of “macaronis,” profligate young men affected by continental manners and tastes after their return from the Grand Tour, were commonplace in 1770s caricatures, which, as Diana Donald puts it, “associated [them] with the extremes of contemporary male fashion—[the] high toupee and huge powdered ‘club’ of hair or bag wig, ultra-tight but lavishly patterned, coloured and ornamental dress, and often a large nosegay.”²⁵ Many other satirical prints, particularly in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, attacked aristocratic debauchery and decadence, and were conspicuously aimed at individuals such as the Prince of Wales and Lady Buckinghamshire, or at aristocratic groupings such as Carlton House, the Pic Nic Society and the Society of Dilettanti.²⁶

Similarly focusing on the heightened sense of British patriotism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Linda Colley elaborates further on the upper classes’ response to the emergent anti-aristocratic culture that Newman has identified. She stresses that the American War of Independence (1775-83) and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1789-1815) together provided the “main ideological threat” that “challenged the political and/or religious foundations upon which Great Britain was based, and threatened its internal security and its commercial and colonial power.”²⁷ To Colley, Britain’s defeat in America coupled with the threat posed by revolutionary France “called into question the competence

²³ qtd. in Diana Donald, The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 79.

²⁴ Oliver Goldsmith, “The Deserted Village,” The Complete Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Austin Dobson (London: Frowde, 1911) 36, lines 398, 403-05.

²⁵ Donald, Age of Caricature 80.

²⁶ See Donald, Age of Caricature 98-108.

²⁷ Colley, Britons 4.

of the British governing elite,” turning the last two decades of the eighteenth century into a crucial period that brought about what she terms a “cultural reconstruction” of the ruling class.²⁸ British elites, in other words, did not diminish in size in the late eighteenth century, but they “set about re-ordering their authority, their image, their ideas and their composition,” so that they not only “reshaped the exercise of power in Great Britain” but also “contributed to a substantial change in the content of British patriotism.”²⁹ Though anti-aristocratic feeling had been evident since the mid-eighteenth century, it was, according to Colley, only from the 1780s that the denunciation “enter[ed] the mainstream of political discourse in Britain, where it was popularised through the journalism of Thomas Paine, Joel Barlow, Thomas Spence and ... William Cobbett.”³⁰ To counter the criticism concerning their self-promotion and extravagance, British elites became more enthusiastic to present themselves as patriotic and socially responsible, to demonstrate, as Edmund Burke put it, that “a true natural aristocracy is *not* a separate interest in the state, or separable from it.”³¹

While aristocratic hedonism persisted well into the Regency period in certain circles of the nobility, more and more members of the elite were concerned to direct their behaviour and lifestyle towards the public good. An increasing number of aristocrats, as Boyd Hilton shows, engaged in local governmental administration, and the proportion of those involving themselves in military service steadily rose from 1780 to 1823.³² Many members of the upper classes also lent their support to local industries and manufactures,³³ and can therefore be seen increasingly to have

²⁸ Ibid. 148, 164. David Cannadine similarly refers to the period between the 1780s and the 1820s as one of the “renewal, re-creation and re-invention” of the British aristocracy in Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 10.

²⁹ Ibid. 149.

³⁰ Ibid. 152.

³¹ qtd. in Colley, Britons 155.

³² Boyd Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006) 137. Hilton’s statistics are taken from David Cannadine’s Aspects of Aristocracy 22.

³³ Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? 138.

merged with, rather than seeking to distinguish themselves from, the middle classes. Instead of taking a Grand Tour, they were inclined to practise domestic travel. Many turned their interest from continental to native art, acting as patrons of British artists in order “to assert,” as Colley puts it, their “status as arbiter[s] and guardian[s] of the national culture.”³⁴ Some prominent aristocratic officers commissioned distinguished painters to portray themselves as war heroes, while others became more obsessed with wearing military uniforms which exhibited their social position as well as their patriotic sentiment.³⁵ The new ethos that the ruling elite seemed to have adopted from this period onwards, Colley argues, is that of “[r]elentless hard work, complete professionalism, an uncompromising private virtue and an ostentatious patriotism.”³⁶ One index of this shift is the fundamental change in male fashion itself: wigs, luxurious trimmings and brightly coloured silks gave way to natural hair, regimental or simple, sombre frock coats. By the early nineteenth century, as Aileen Ribeiro and Valerie Cumming assert, “[t]he paradigm was no longer the male peacock, but a soberly dressed worker, a merchant, a banker, a professional man, whose calling was expressed in his understated, impeccably cut clothing.”³⁷

In parallel with this realignment of class relations in this period is the coalescence of more normative ideas of gender identity, similarly defined in exemplary terms. If, as Michael McKeon puts it, eighteenth-century British society presents “less an orderly taxonomy than a fluid continuum of male gender types,” it is fair to say that from about the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the conduct of the

³⁴ Colley, *Britons* 172.

³⁵ See Colley, *Britons* 177-87.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 192.

³⁷ Aileen Ribeiro and Valerie Cumming, *The Visual History of Costume* (London: Batsford, 1989) 22.

upper classes was subject to an increasingly moralistic scrutiny.³⁸ Many writers at this time claimed not only that the upper classes displayed a luxurious refinement but that they were in fact unmanly too. John Brown's criticism, mentioned earlier, associated the nobility with "selfish EFFEMINACY."³⁹ Samuel Fawconer's Essay on Modern Luxury likewise regarded an undue interest in dress and appearance as feminine, explaining how the widespread emulation of French fashion and manners deprived Britain of "national spirit" as well as destabilising its traditional gender roles: "For want of preserving a necessary decorum, we may observe one sex to advance in masculine assurance, as the other sinks into unmanly delicacy ... [becoming] effeminate fribbles."⁴⁰ Even when "male Gothic" writers such as Walpole and Beckford presented themselves as patriotic, their exhibitionism induced later critics, particularly in the nineteenth century, to view them as unmanly (though it has to be remarked that these criticisms no longer reflected on the nation as a whole in the same way as in the works of Brown and Fawconer in the 1750s and 1760s). Walpole's eclectic collections of curiosities in Strawberry Hill, for example, was criticised by the anonymous writer of Descriptions to the Plates of Thames Scenery (1818) as "proceed[ing] from the structure of his mind ... or his physical constitution, which was naturally weak ... [and] had little of masculine energy or mental capaciousness."⁴¹ Likewise, Beckford's passion for collecting trifling art objects such as dishes, Japanese lacquerware, painted enamels and porcelain, signaled a sort of unnatural consumption: William Hazlitt referred to Fonthill Abbey and its collections in The London Magazine for November 1822 as "a desert of

³⁸ Michael McKeon, "Historicising Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England 1660-1760," Eighteenth-Century Studies 28.3 (1995): 313.

³⁹ qtd. in Spadafora, The Idea of Progress 215.

⁴⁰ qtd. in Donald, Age of Caricature 79.

⁴¹ Unsigned account from Descriptions to the Plates of Thames Scenery Engraved by W. B. Cooke & G. Cooke (1818), Peter Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1987) 251.

magnificence, a glittering waste of laborious idleness, a cathedral turned into a toy-shop, an immense Museum of all that is most curious and costly, and, at the same time, most worthless, in the productions of art and nature.”⁴²

Just as certain forms of “aristocratic” display were viewed with increasing suspicion during this period, so too was private sexual conduct subject to public scrutiny. In early modern society, sodomy, according to Tim Hitchcock, was “a kind of elite libertinism particularly associated with the court,” and in the eighteenth century was widely practised among the lower and middling sorts, as can be seen from records of London molly houses.⁴³ In his study of the eighteenth-century discourse on male sexualities, Ed Cohen asserts that before the eighteenth century sodomy was classified as a religious violation alongside witchcraft, apostasy and blasphemy.⁴⁴ Accounts of legal proceedings in the second half of the eighteenth century, however, manifest that it became a major criminal offence, denoting not heresy but an “unnatural practice[...],” “a symptom of behavioural deviations,” and an act that could harm the “laws of manners” as well as the individual concerned.⁴⁵ Another factor that further contributed to this shift is the evangelical revival which began to develop from the 1780s onwards, and which reinforced the ideas of domesticity and monogamous, heterosexual relationships that would become normative during the nineteenth century. Building on E. P. Thompson’s study of the English working class, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out that the “evangelical revival, in which the home was central, made ‘the religious idiom the

⁴² qtd. in Boyd Alexander, England’s Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford (London: Centaur, 1962) 244.

⁴³ Tim Hitchcock, English Sexualities, 1700-1800 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) 65.

⁴⁴ Ed Cohen, Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities (New York: Routledge, 1993) 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 113-14.

cultural norm for the middle class.”⁴⁶ While men were expected to be impeccable as family leaders who were imbued with morality, love and sympathy, women had to be subordinated, serving them as wives, mothers and daughters.⁴⁷ Outside the family, this new mood of public moral earnestness led to the establishment of reform organisations such as the Society for Carrying into Effect His Majesty’s Proclamation against Vice and Immorality (1788) and the Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802), which in turn contributed to a larger culture of surveillance, scrutinising deviant practices.

The “male Gothic” writers I will be considering here can be seen in different ways to diverge from this emergent model of normative heterosexuality and masculinity. Beckford was involved in a notorious sexual scandal with the teenaged William Courtenay—“a Grammatical mistake ... in regard to the genders,” as the Morning Herald proclaimed in 1784⁴⁸—which resulted in his ostracism and the failure of his application for a peerage. The passionate language that Walpole used in his pamphlet to defend the reputation of his cousin Conway was seen by Guthrie as “c[oming] forth from a female quiver,” as if to suggest an ulterior motive to Walpole’s conduct.⁴⁹ Byron’s clandestine relationship with his half-sister and other women was later condemned by many sections of British society, and the rumours concerning his sexual involvement with men and boys, as Fiona MacCarthy observes, likewise spurred him to seek a voluntary exile abroad.⁵⁰

Another way of tracing the “cultural revolutions” that many historians have identified in this period, and which will illuminate my account of “male Gothic”

⁴⁶ Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes xviii.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 108-13.

⁴⁸ qtd. in Guy Chapman, Beckford (London: Hart-Davis, 1952) 185.

⁴⁹ William Guthrie, Reply to the Counter Address; Being a Vindication of a Pamphlet Entitled, An Address to the Public, on the Late Dismission of a General Officer (London, 1764). English Short Title Catalogue Microfilm: reel 3865, no. 5. 6-7.

⁵⁰ Fiona MacCarthy, Byron: Life and Legend (London: Murray, 2002) 275.

writers, is to consider the history of the masquerade. As urban entertainments, masquerades were usually organised in assembly rooms, private houses, or popular public sites such as Vauxhall or Ranelagh Gardens in London, where people socialised in disguise, dressing and wearing masks as members of different classes, professions, genders, races and even species. Mingling people of different sexes, the masquerade, as Terry Castle remarks, encouraged sexual freedom: while women could attend unaccompanied by their husbands or female chaperones, and be at liberty to get to know any male strangers, men could exploit this opportunity to seduce young ladies or make contact with prostitutes, who also frequented the scene.⁵¹ Costume and masks allowed participants to transgress normal gender and sexual codes. While some cross-dressed, others assumed liberatory styles of femininity and masculinity. Walpole himself was a regular attendant of masquerades, noting in one of his letters in 1742 that he dressed as “Aureng-zebe,” the leading character who is lusted after by his stepmother in John Dryden’s play, Aureng-Zebe, or the Great Mogul (1675).⁵² Byron was also fond of this public entertainment, and even once masqueraded as a woman at the Athens carnival in 1809.⁵³

The masquerade can be seen as a licensed space where men and women about town were able to indulge in potentially proscribed forms of gender and sexual performance. For Wahrman, the masquerade offers a perfect microcosm of what he has influentially termed “the *ancien régime* of identity,” in which gender and other social categories were “occasionally mutable” and “potentially unfixed.”⁵⁴ Wahrman’s study illustrates that away from the formal confines of the masquerade,

⁵¹ Terry Castle, Masquerades and Civilisation: the Canivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction (London: Methuen, 1986) 32-33.

⁵² Walpole to Horace Mann, 18 Feb. 1742, The Letters of Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford, ed. Peter Cunningham, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Grant, 1906) 132.

⁵³ MacCarthy, Byron 114.

⁵⁴ Dror Wahrman, The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004) xiii, 40-41.

the fluidity of gender and identity was also apparent in everyday life: actresses in “breeches parts” on stage, representations of gender-ambiguous men and women in paintings and caricatures, and famous living figures such as Hannah Snell, the female soldier, and the cross-dressing diplomat Chevalier D’Eon provide only a few examples.⁵⁵ The theatricality of society rendered the eighteenth century a period of “identity play,” according to Wahrman, where “alternatives to the prevalent norms” were “viable, tolerable, unthreatening, at times even appreciable.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, along with the declining popularity of the masquerade in the 1780s and 1790s, this kind of identity play gradually faded away from British society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While Wahrman attributes the cause of this change to the American crisis in the late 1770s, when the revolutionary colonists’ subversive use of the language of disguise rendered the former plasticity of identity too troubling,⁵⁷ the growing disapproval of identity play, as I will argue, was also generated by social circumstances within Britain, in which an advancing ideology began to foster the prioritisation of an individual’s moral quality over self-display.

A culture that ran against the “*ancien régime* of identity” and helped to fortify concepts of normative gender and sexual identity is the culture of sensibility, which, according to G. J. Barker-Benfield, was a specifically eighteenth-century phenomenon, “a culture of reform” that centred on “the aggrandisement of feeling and its investment with moral value.”⁵⁸ Deriving its meaning from philosophical and medico-physiological discourses, “sensibility,” as Janet Todd puts it, denoted “the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for

⁵⁵ See Wahrman, *Making of Modern Self*, Chapter 1: “Varieties of Gender in Eighteenth-Century England” 7-44, and Chapter 2: “Gender Identities and the Limit of Cultural History” 45-82.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 159, 14.

⁵⁷ See Wahrman, *Making of Modern Self*, Chapter 6: “The *Ancien Régime* and the Revolution” 218-64.

⁵⁸ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) xix, xxvi.

suffering.”⁵⁹ It celebrated a person’s innate virtue over external qualities such as appearance, rank and possessions.⁶⁰ The concept of sensibility, as McKeon asserts, affirmed the shift from the aristocratic “status assumption that birth automatically dictates worth” to “a class conviction that birth and worth are independent variables.”⁶¹ This emphasis on worth also helped redefine aspects of gender and gender relations, locating virtue primarily in women, who were believed to be more emotionally susceptible than men, and therefore possessed of a greater reformative power. In Pamela (1740-41), for instance, Samuel Richardson famously depicts his heroine’s moral distinction through her emotional sensitivity, which not only helps her escape being raped by her master but also to reform his libertine behaviour. Many writers, particularly women, followed Richardson, using the plot of a virtuous heroine pursued and endangered by malevolent, often aristocratic, men in their novels. In the 1760s and 1770s sensibility was also transferred to men in the figure of “the man of feeling,” exemplified by Dr. Primrose in Oliver Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) and Harley in Henry Mackenzie’s The Man of Feeling (1771)—emotional, benevolent and at odds with their hostile, selfish, materialist society. “Male Gothic” fiction was antagonistic to such sentimental novels, focusing much more on victimising villains rather than morally upright heroes, and, in Lewis’s case, in The Monk, even offering a libertine version of Ann Radcliffe’s heroine of sensibility. One of the things I want to consider in my thesis is the way in which “male Gothic” writing offered a site for the “identity play” that Wahrman associates with the early to mid-eighteenth century—a space in which writers were able to deviate from social and cultural norms that were becoming more and more established.

⁵⁹ Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction (London: Methuen, 1986) 7.

⁶⁰ McKeon, “Historicising Patriarchy” 314.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 303, 314.

THE “MALE GOTHIC”

Although the central claim of my thesis is that “male Gothic” writing might be seen as a form of resistance to the overlapping “cultural revolutions” I have just sketched out, a number of complicating factors also need to be considered at the outset. While I will go on to look at the “aristocratic” self-presentation of the writers discussed in this study, it is necessary to emphasise that they were not all born into aristocratic families: notwithstanding their titles, Walpole succeeded his nephew as the fourth Earl of Orford late in his life, and Byron acquired his lordship from his uncle at the age of ten, rather than at his birth; these writers in fact belonged to the new self-styled upper class whose affluence and social status enabled it to compete with the aristocracy by imitating its manners and habits. Whereas Beckford and Lewis were originally from middling families, and obtained vast fortunes from their West Indian plantations, Walpole’s and Byron’s parents were products of intermarriage and assimilation between the aristocracy and the middle classes. Sir Robert Walpole, from the landed gentry, married a wealthy Baltic timber merchant’s daughter, while Captain John Byron, a naval officer, married a young Scottish heiress. It is important to acknowledge too that many members of these families held prominent public roles, and expected future generations to do the same. While Sir Robert Walpole was the first prime minister, the most powerful statesman of his day, Lewis’s father was appointed Chief Clerk in the War Office and, later, Deputy-Secretary at War. Beckford’s father was twice elected as Lord Mayor of London and even presented the Grand Remonstrance in 1770 to counter George III’s political interference in the Wilkes affair. One of his most memorable speeches in the House of Commons, in November 1761, interestingly, sided with the emergent middle classes:

the middling people of England as the manufacturer, the yeoman, the merchant, the country gentleman, they who bear all the heat of the day. ... They have a right, Sir, to interfere in the condition and conduct of the nation. ... [They] are a good natured, well-intentioned and very sensible people who know better perhaps than any other nation under the sun whether they are well governed or not.⁶²

The sons of these men, however, can all be seen to have rebelled against the responsibility that their parents expected them to assume. After a brief spell in Parliament, they all retired from the political scene and spent most of their time pursuing other concerns. Though Walpole never lost his interest in politics, he assumed a detached role as a mentor of Conway, and an amateur writer of political memoirs; to his contemporaries, he presented himself as an arbiter of taste who built a “Gothic castle” at Strawberry Hill and published several works on art history and criticism. Beckford was primarily known as the writer of the wildly imaginative Oriental tale, Vathek (1786), and as a zealous art collector and self-promoting spendthrift, who planned to make his Fonthill Abbey a more extravagant Gothic monument than Walpole’s “bauble” at Strawberry Hill. During the period of conservative reaction against the French Revolution in Britain, Lewis, though the son of a Tory MP, aligned himself more with aristocratic liberal Whigs. While his first Gothic novel, The Monk, followed the tradition of French philosophical pornography, his dramas, many of which were outlined upon French and German works, deliberately pandered to the popular taste for spectacle and sensationalism, provoking censure from critics, many of whom thought that he violated both moral and aesthetic values. Byron was likewise a liberal Whig, particularly distinguished in Europe for his involvement with the revolutionary liberation movement in Italy and

⁶² Richard B. Sheridan, “Beckford, William (bap. 1709, d. 1770),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford UP, 2004. Online ed., May 2005. 14 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1903>>.

later the Greek War of Independence. In Britain, though, he was better known for his extra-marital affairs and incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, and for his writings, which playfully presented images of the author as a captivating, glamorous figure, critical of social and religious orthodoxy.

Reading these male writers' Gothic fictions, one will find protagonists who variously involve themselves in incest, adultery, rape, murder and homoerotic play. If novels in the "female Gothic" tradition tend to focus on the figure of the endangered heroine, "male Gothic" writers commonly appeal to the Faust myth, adapting its characterisation of the high-born protagonist who errs yet daringly refuses to give up, and readily faces the outcome of his criminal deeds. Despite the fact that these works punish their protagonists in the end, they tend to be sympathetic towards, sometimes even celebratory of, their characters' overreaching, transgressive energy. Like the masquerade, the Gothic might be seen as an arena in which writers were able to perform proscribed forms of social and sexual behaviours. These performances were complicated further, however, by the different attempts which writers made to offer their works to the public as both pleasurable and legitimate. Walpole, for example, disguised his first edition of The Castle of Otranto as a translation of a medieval Italian manuscript. The second edition, with its revelation of Walpole's authorial identity, proved the first a hoax, but at the same time made a claim to literary merit by presenting itself as a "new species of romance"⁶³ that combined elements from both the medieval romance and the novel, and which even paid tribute to Shakespearean tragedy in its tone and characterisation. Lewis similarly employed the pose of anonymity in the first edition of The Monk and later, after revealing his identity, disingenuously renounced the novel as a juvenile

⁶³ Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 70.

amusement. Beckford and Byron furnished their writings with footnotes which interwove their extravagant stories with historical realities and, in the case of Byron, with his travels in the East. These authors' various efforts to legitimise their work mean that the "male Gothic" should be seen to display not so much an absolute and uncompromising form of cultural "resistance," but more a vacillation between the serious and the playful, the licensed and the subversive.

Following Wahrman, we might say that writers of "male Gothic" were concerned to experiment with ways of remaining in the "*ancien régime* of identity." Nevertheless, it is necessary to discriminate between these different engagements with the Gothic and its conventions. This is not merely because their writings were produced in different socio-historical conditions, but because their individual agendas also prompted them to distinguish their works from those of other writers, including their "male Gothic" counterparts. The first chapter of the thesis will focus on Walpole and his "aristocratisation" of the Gothic as a recreational space. Walpole's "aristocratic" self-representation, I will argue, does not straightforwardly reject an emergent insistence on sobriety and public-spiritedness; instead, fundamental to Walpole's Gothic works is the conjunction of a desire for respect and approval from the public on the one hand, and a will to differentiate himself and his work on the other. My analysis of Walpole will build on Harriet Guest's notion of the Gothic as an "extrapolitical" realm that allowed eighteenth-century readers to delight in it because of its historical specificity, and thus not completely dissociate themselves from the rationality and superiority of the classical.⁶⁴ As an admirer of the "Augustan" revision of classical poets, Walpole's engagement with the Gothic did not automatically imply any antagonistic relation to the classical—an important

⁶⁴ Harriet Guest, "The Wanton Muse: Politics and Gender in Gothic Theory after 1760," Beyond Romanticism: New Approach to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832, ed. Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992) 123.

point that disputes modern critics' assumption that Walpole and other early Gothic writers were precursors of the Romantic movement which rebelled against the authoritative classical mode in British literature.⁶⁵ But while other Gothicists and medieval revivalists in the period were preoccupied with historical authenticity, Walpole was especially interested in playfulness and experimentation. His remodelling of his villa at Strawberry Hill, for instance, was presented as a private diversion, as Walpole combined Gothic style with modern methods of interior decoration, turning a simple country house into a fanciful and fashionable residence of a man of leisure. The first edition of The Castle of Otranto was also offered to the public as a spoof of a counterfeited medieval text. Walpole's portrayal of incest and family secrets can be seen as a satirical take on the culture of sensibility and the idea of domesticity—themes that he later returned to in a more provocative manner in The Mysterious Mother (1768). Part of this chapter will pay attention to the prefaces and postscripts of Walpole's novel and drama that functioned to legitimise his unconventional content with accompanying claims to literary merit, patriotic affiliation, and adherence to classical rules. Walpole's notion of "private" pleasure, I will argue here, following Guest, was made possible by the way that he displayed his familiarity with a recognised "public" standard of taste.

In contrast to Walpole, Beckford was more ambitious and less discreet in offering his works to the public. My second chapter will explore the trajectory of Beckford's works to see how they were shaped by events and pressures that Beckford encountered at different times in his life. It will start in the 1770s, during which Beckford produced his adolescent *jeux d'esprit*, Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters (1780) and The Vision (written 1777, published 1930), and it

⁶⁵ Robert Kiely, for example, sees Walpole and other male Gothic writers such as William Beckford, William Godwin and Charles Maturin as precursors of the Romantic tradition in the novel, in The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1979) 1-2.

will go on to focus on his Oriental tales of the 1780s, in the context of his concern with critical reception and the establishment of his distinctive authorial identity. Despite its moral framework and his contemporaries' face-value reading of it, I will argue, Vathek (1786) departs from other moralistic pseudo-Oriental writings in its depiction of its morally unrestrained hero, and in its playful engagement with the Oriental more generally; instead, Vathek perhaps shows more kinship with Anthony Hamilton's French burlesques of fantastic, Oriental fictions, thereby demonstrating Beckford's cultural ambition to establish himself as a literary avant-gardist who brought novelty to the genre. His Episodes of Vathek (written 1783-86, published 1912) explores more blatantly and extensively the theme of sexual transgression, presenting Beckford as antagonistic to the anti-aristocratic discourse that was advancing the values of moral probity and sexual restraint. At the same time, however, Beckford, like Walpole, was also concerned to safeguard his image and reputation. While his liberal politics and hostility to the culture of sensibility are still evident in his later anonymous satires, Modern Novel Writing (1796) and Azemia (1797), Beckford now turned his artistic interests to the presentation of Fonthill Abbey, also assuming a series of patriotic poses in an effort to rehabilitate himself.

Whereas Walpole and Beckford regarded writing as a recreation and distanced themselves from the market, Lewis was eager to establish himself as a professional writer. My third chapter will discuss Lewis's various works to see how his revision of the "male Gothic" ultimately transferred "male Gothic" writing from an exclusive and elite to a popular realm. Most of his early works were written as satires of contemporary women's writing, and his best-known work, The Monk, is a libertine reworking of Ann Radcliffe's celebrated Gothic romance, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). As well as revising a number of "Gothic" antecedents, Lewis also

worked in the tradition of “philosophical” pornography, but while The Monk clearly has a strong political resonance, as I will argue, it remains difficult to pin down its politics. After the scandal that The Monk caused, Lewis seemed to become steadily less engaged with politics, seeking instead to annoy critics and to pander to the popular taste for sensationalism and theatrical effects. In doing this, though, as I will show, he sought to keep alive the memory of the original scandal surrounding The Monk, continually revisiting features of or scenes from that work, and fashioning himself as a deliberately irresponsible writer, who embraced the nickname he was given—“Monk Lewis.”

Chapter four will examine Byron in the light of the “male Gothic” tradition I have discussed, a tradition which, I will argue, offers a more illuminating means of contextualising his work than regarding him as a “Romantic” writer. Byron transformed the figure of the Gothic villain-hero into the so-called Byronic hero, who embodies aspects of Byron’s personality and his liberal, oppositional stance. The interplay between his life and writing, I will argue, encouraged an identification with his heroes (albeit that Byron playfully denied this in his prefaces and notes), which, in turn, further reinforced the connection between him and his protagonists. I will read Byron’s early works such as the first two cantos of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812) and the Turkish tales (1813-14) alongside his travels in Southern Europe and the Levant, in order to consider the fictionalisation of the poet which these works offer. After his separation from his wife in 1816, Byron seemed to be less concerned with securing public favour, and his play, Manfred (1817), I will claim, might be seen to dramatise a sympathetic picture of Byron as a remorseful, self-exiled husband, at the same time as it provides a response to Caroline Lamb’s moralistically Faustian novel Glenarvon (1816). Involving himself in revolutionary

activities in Italy and Greece, Byron's writing became increasingly provocative, as he appeared to present himself as an icon of rebellion, not only against political and religious authority, but also conservative moral and sexual values. While Byron was highly esteemed in Europe as a supporter of independence movements, however, his writing and self-presentation met with less approval in the reactionary society of nineteenth-century Britain. As I will demonstrate towards the end of the chapter, contemporary responses to the works of Byron and Sir Walter Scott sometimes celebrated Scott's heroes as exhibiting a "healthy" masculinity in contrast to the "disease" exhibited in Byron's work.⁶⁶ I will conclude by investigating the posthumous reception of Byron alongside the severe backlash against other "male Gothic" writers such as Walpole and Beckford in the nineteenth century. While many contemporary readers of the writers I will be discussing took their works at face value, and did not interrogate the poses which they performed, it is fair to say that in later criticism the playful self-representation of these writers was viewed with increasing suspicion and disapproval.

⁶⁶ See Ina Ferris's discussion of reception of Scott and Byron in *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 242-43.

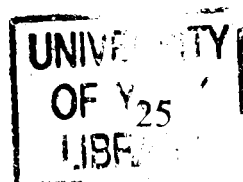
CHAPTER 1

HORACE WALPOLE AND THE “ARISTOCRATISATION” OF THE GOTHIC

In his history of the Gothic revival, Kenneth Clark pointed out that Walpole “did not so much popularise as aristocratise Gothic,” as he adapted his historical and architectural knowledge to the prevalent taste for flimsy, decorative Gothic and Chinoiserie styles, and presented the improvement of his villa at Strawberry Hill as the product of amusement rather than craftsmanship.¹ Central to Walpole’s interest, as James Watt similarly puts it, was “to fashion an ‘aristocratic’ identity—not simply reducible to his privileged *social* position—in all of the fields (architectural, antiquarian, literary) in which he operated.”² This chapter aims further to elaborate on the relation between Walpole’s “aristocratic” self-fashioning and artistic production, focusing particularly on The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother. Like his “aristocratisation” of the Gothic at Strawberry Hill, Walpole’s engagement with the Gothic in his fiction reveals an attempt on his part to create a licensed realm of playfulness and experimentation. This process of “licensing,” however, also involved Walpole in acknowledging and accommodating other current literary and cultural traditions. To defend his daring performance with Otranto, for example, Walpole aligned his novel with Shakespeare’s works, attacking contemporary French writer such as Voltaire, and thereby appealing to the national mood of patriotic fervour after Britain’s victory in the Seven Years War. In the

¹ Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste (London: Murray, 1974) 61.

² James Watt, Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 13.



postscript to his play, Walpole similarly allied himself with a “native” tradition of drama, while also asserting that his play had been composed according to the classical rule of dramatic unities. Fundamental to Walpole’s Gothic writing, therefore, is the sometimes incongruous conjunction of his desire for respect and acceptance from the public on one hand, and his appetite for innovation and novelty on the other. In the light of this, my analysis of Walpole’s engagement with the Gothic will seek to attend to his apparently ceaseless quest for social distinction, while at the same time challenging what historians such as Gerald Newman have presented as the rigid division between an aristocratic culture of self-promotion, hedonism and extravagance and a reactive, “middle-class” culture of restraint and responsibility.³

WALPOLE’S SENSE OF THE GOTHIC

The term “Gothic” was extensively used in the eighteenth century, and its meanings were various, depending on the context in which it was applied.⁴ Richard Terry has observed an apparent “rivalry” between the two literary traditions of the classical and the Gothic, the popularity of the latter being attributed by many scholars to the increasingly widespread reaction against the rules and rationality of classicism.⁵ In the case of Walpole, however, the relations between the Gothic and the classical are more complicated than this. Referring to Richard Hurd’s influential contribution to

³ See Newman, Rise of English Nationalism 73.

⁴ For the meaning and the application of the term “Gothic” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see, for example, Samuel Klinger, The Goths in England: A Study in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1952), and Alfred Longueil, “The Word ‘Gothic’ in Eighteenth Century Criticism,” Modern Language Notes 38.8 (1923): 453-60.

⁵ See Richard Terry, Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past 1660-1781 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), Chapter 9: “Classicists and Gothicists: the Division of the Estate” 286-323.

the so-called romance revival, Letters on Chivalry and Romance (1762), for example, Harriet Guest has shown that the Gothic and the classical in this period were not always straightforwardly antithetical categories: glossing Hurd, Guest argues that the historical specificity of the Gothic in fact guaranteed the rationality and superiority of the modern reader, enabling him to delight in Gothic literature “because it [was] only true and real in relation to specific historical moments and circumstances.”⁶ In the 1760s and 1770s, as Guest argues, the Gothic signified—among other things—a licensed space in which there was “a complex of shadowed relations between the extrapolitical and the feminine, the trivial and the illicit, the corrupting and the pleasurable.”⁷ An habituated familiarity with the classical in many ways made possible an involvement with the Gothic, therefore, since it legitimised the pleasure that one could experience in the imaginative extravagance of historically distant fictions.

Guest’s analysis helps explain why Walpole’s dealing with the Gothic precluded any antagonism towards the classical. In his correspondence, Walpole showed little appreciation for medieval literature, affirming that he preferred “all arts when perfected” and that he “love[d] Chaucer better in Dryden and Baskerville, than in his own language and dress.”⁸ While admiring the Greeks and the Romans, Walpole’s literary taste privileged the neoclassical or “Augustan” revision of classical poets, as he asserted to John Pinkerton when he wrote that Nicolas Boileau’s The Lutrin (1674), Samuel Garth’s The Dispensary (1699) and Alexander Pope’s The Rape of the Lock (1712, 1714) provided “standards of grace and

⁶ Guest, “Wanton Muse” 123.

⁷ Ibid. 120.

⁸ Walpole to John Pinkerton, 26 June 1785, Selected Letters (London: Dent, 1926) 106-07. Here, Walpole is perhaps referring to Dryden’s reworking of Chaucer and other writers in Fables Ancient and Modern (1700), and to John Baskerville, the printer who introduced modern printing types to several old texts.

elegance, not to be paralleled by antiquity.”⁹ One of Walpole’s earliest writings, Aedes Walpolianae: or, A Description of the Collection of Pictures at Houghton-Hall in Norfolk, The Seat of the Right Honorable Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford (1743), is a panegyric on his father’s taste for Renaissance and neoclassical fine arts. The book is a catalogue of Sir Robert’s collection of pictures, mostly by Old Masters. Its Dedication exalts the magnificent construction of the Palladian Houghton Hall: the “grandeur of the whole building,” as Walpole stated, was an index of his father’s “wealth,” “power,” and, above all, “true nobility.”¹⁰

Walpole’s complex relationship with his father might be seen as the ground upon which his indulgence in the Gothic was built. At the outset, Walpole seemed to have followed his father’s footsteps. In 1741, he was elected an MP for the borough of Carlington in Cornwall, and then was re-elected for Castle Rising and King’s Lynn in 1754 and 1757. His political career, however, was, as W. S. Lewis has noted, “erratic.”¹¹ For one thing, his views and conducts were centred on his strong attachment to his father and his personal alliance with his cousin, Henry Seymour Conway. For another, he was not active in Parliament, making only a few speeches, the most memorable of which was probably his maiden speech in 1742 which expressed a vigorous opposition to a motion for an inquiry into his father’s administration. His passion for politics, though it never waned, was rather expressed in forms that, according to Archibald Foord, “absolved him from public accountability for his words,” since he gave his advice personally to Conway and

⁹ Walpole to Pinkerton, 26 June 1785, Selected Letters 219.

¹⁰ Horace Walpole, The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford, vol.2 (1798; Hildesheim: Verlag, 1975) 223.

¹¹ W. S. Lewis, Horace Walpole (London: Hart-Davis, 1961) 70.

voiced his political concerns mostly in private correspondence and memoirs, or occasionally in anonymous pamphlets.¹²

It is worth noting that the time when Walpole entered Parliament coincided with the decline of his father's power. After Sir Robert's resignation in 1742 and his death in 1745, Walpole witnessed the succession of Henry Pelham and his brother the duke of Newcastle, both of whom he disliked for what he believed to be their intrigues and betrayal of his father's ministry. At this point, Walpole seems to have started to divert his interests away from politics, boasting to Horace Mann in June 1747 of his "retir[ing] to a little new farm ... just out of Twickenham."¹³ The house, later named Strawberry Hill, was to become a preoccupation of Walpole, as he developed a lavish plan of improving it into a "Gothic castle," a process which took from 1749 to 1776.¹⁴ In his letter to Conway, he enthusiastically spoke of the place as "a little play-thing-house that I got out of Mrs. Chenevix's shop, ... the prettiest bauble you ever saw."¹⁵ Walpole's reference to the idea of "play" and to the diminutive dimensions of the house suggests that he regarded Strawberry Hill as a trifle or a sport, which provided him with a means of retirement from the supposedly corrupting political sphere. Walpole likewise presented his later involvement with the Gothic as an escape from his "public" political concerns. In the summer of 1764 when he composed Otranto, Walpole mentioned to William Cole that he "was very

¹² Archibald Foord, "The Only Unadulterated Whig," Horace Walpole: Writer, Politician, and Connoisseur: Essays on the 250th Anniversary of Walpole's Birth, ed. Warren Hunting Smith (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967): 34. Walpole's anonymous pamphlets include the satirical tract, A Letter from Xo Ho, A Chinese Philosopher at London, at his Friend Lien Chi, at Peking (1757) in which he attacked the government's brutal treatment of Admiral Byng on the loss of Minorca; A Counter-Address to the Public, on the Late Dismission of a General Officer (1764) in which he defended Conway upon his voting against the government's persecution of John Wilkes and its oppressive issuing of "the general warrants"; and his ironic Account of the Giants Lately Discovered (1766) which showed his opposition to the Stamp Act and Britain's colonial interest in America.

¹³ Walpole to Horace Mann, 5 June 1747, Letters, vol. 2, 85.

¹⁴ Walpole to George Montagu, 3 Sept. 1763, Letters, vol. 4, 111.

¹⁵ Walpole to Henry Conway, 8 June 1747, Letters, vol. 2, 86.

glad to think of anything rather than politics.”¹⁶ The Gothic, in this sense, is “extrapolitical” in that Walpole represented it as a sidestepping or liberation from his public responsibility. Walpole’s parliamentary occupation helped to license his private and sportive indulgence in the Gothic. The Gothic, in other words, is not straightforwardly opposed but, as Guest asserts, “supportive, complementary to the public seriousness of classical truth” and “political reality.”¹⁷

It is important here to distinguish Walpole from other Gothicists or romance and medieval revivalists in the period. In their writings, scholars such as Richard Hurd and Thomas Warton attempted to invest the Gothic with cultural significance by reviving the customs of chivalry and celebrating medieval romance as crucial to the development of English literature, hence presenting the Middle Ages as the fount of national culture.¹⁸ Warton, for example, discussed Spenser’s epic in Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser (1754) with a detailed analysis of the origin of romances—a project which was carried on and extended into a large-scale socio-historical account of ancient customs, manners and literature in the four-volume History of English Poetry (1774-81). Walpole, on the other hand, often expressed indifference towards this “national” sense of the Gothic. While regarding Spenser as “tedious,” “a John Bunyan in rhyme,”¹⁹ he was also contemptuous towards the pedantic approach of Warton, confiding to William Mason that he “never saw so many entertaining particulars crowded together with so little entertainment and vivacity” as in Warton’s History of English Poetry.²⁰ Before Letters on Chivalry and Romance, Hurd published Moral and Political Dialogues (1759), presenting a long

¹⁶ Walpole to William Cole, 9 Mar. 1765, Letters, vol. 4, 328.

¹⁷ Guest, “Wanton Muse” 127.

¹⁸ Arthur Johnston, Enchanted Ground: the Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century (London: Athlone, 1964) 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 173.

²⁰ Walpole to William Mason, 7 Apr. 1774, Selected Letters 193.

(and unresolved) debate between the figures of “Addison” and “Arbuthnot.” concerning the character of the present age. In this case, however, Walpole criticised Hurd for not being historically minded, censuring him in a letter to Henry Zouch in February 1760 as “a most disagreeable writer” whose Moral and Political Dialogues was “void of all veracity,” since Hurd did not “give himself the least trouble to counterfeit the style of any one [of his characters]” despite his affirmation that they were “the genuine productions of the speakers.”²¹

In his postscript to the Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors (1758), Walpole vehemently opposed any idealised conception of the medieval period. From the beginning, he claimed to “defraud my country of any sparkle of genius that glimmered in our ages of darkness,” drawing upon the horrific account of John Montacute, Earl of Salisbury in the fourteenth century to justify the reason why the earl was dropped out of his list of illustrious authors.²² Whereas Montacute was portrayed as a chivalric lover and a gallant knight in the poems of Christina of Pisan, his admirer, and in William Dugdale’s account, Walpole relied on historical evidence from Thomas Walsingham, who stated that Montacute was a confidential tool of King Richard II—an accomplice in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, the king’s uncle, and a treacherous soldier who subsequently attempted to assassinate Henry of Lancaster. Walpole, in his postscript, argued for a more careful reading of “the sublimated notions of chivalry” and the refined portrait of the Middle Ages “commonly conjured up by the pen of a romantic lady,” and instead persuaded his readers to pay closer attention to other “coarse evidence,” “devoid of sentiment,” like historical facts.²³ In contrast to those attempts to rewrite the past as an era of glory

²¹ Walpole to Henry Zouch, 4 Feb. 1760, Letters, vol. 3, 289-90.

²² Walpole, Works, vol. 1, 560.

²³ *Ibid.*

and heroism, Walpole can be seen to contend for a more soberly historical image of the Gothic, in all its vulgar detail.

Just as the term “Gothic” carried numerous meanings in the culture at large, then, so too did it mean different things for Walpole, depending on the context in which it was invoked. Although Walpole never presented himself as a historian, he often criticised others’ accounts of the past for their lack of historical authenticity. In the fields of art and literature, by contrast, Walpole saw the Gothic in more sportive terms, as a category signifying aesthetic freedom, creativity, and playfulness; in a letter to William Cole in July 1778, for example, Walpole admitted that he “like[d] chivalry and romance” since “[t]hey all furnish one with ideas and visions ... A Gothic church or convent fills one with romantic dreams.”²⁴ As I have already suggested, this sportiveness is most obviously evident in Walpole’s “Gothic castle” at Strawberry Hill. By the time that Walpole started redecorating his house in 1749, Gothic architecture was already in fashion, as an article in The World in 1753 attested: “[a] few years ago ... everything was Gothic; our house, our beds, our books, our couches were all copied from some parts or other of our old cathedrals.”²⁵ Indeed, as Clark observed, Walpole was not the innovator of Gothic style in architecture, but rather the first person who made use of the Gothic as a site of “aristocratic” frivolity and display.²⁶ “Strawberry Hill,” according to Paul Langford, “was to Horace what Houghton had been to Sir Robert.”²⁷ The difference between the architectural styles of Houghton Hall and Strawberry Hill was remarked on by Walpole in his letter to Mann in 1750: “The Grecian is only proper for magnificent

²⁴ Walpole to William Cole, 12 July 1778, Letters, vol. 7, 94.

²⁵ qtd. in Clark, Gothic Revival 53.

²⁶ See my reference to Clark earlier on page 23.

²⁷ Paul Langford, “Walpole, Horatio, fourth earl of Orford (1717–1797).” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford UP, 2004, Online ed. May 2005, 6 Aug. 2006. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28596>>.

and public buildings. Columns and all their beautiful ornaments, look ridiculous when crowded into a closet or a cheesecake-house. The variety is little, and admits no charming irregularities.”²⁸ While the classical design of Houghton confirmed Sir Robert’s status as a public, political icon, the “variety” and “irregularities” of Walpole’s Gothic “cheesecake” house were to be complementary to the self-image that he sought to project, of a man of taste and leisure.

Walpole presented the remodelling of Strawberry Hill as a private diversion. It started from Walpole’s and John Chute’s expeditions to copy details from ruins, castles, cathedrals and old manors. Later they invited Bentley to help with the design of the building and together formed the “Committee of Taste” that would transform an old country house into Walpole’s delightful Gothic villa. While Walpole admired the “gloomth”²⁹ of Gothic buildings, his house was not so dismal or ancient as it was assumed to be. As Walpole put it in his preface to A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford, at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex with an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c (1774), the house “was built to please my own taste” and “to realise my own visions.”³⁰ The copies and Gothic specimens that Walpole collected were newly combined and “applied to chimney-pieces, ceilings, windows, balustrades, loggias, & c.”³¹ Although most of Strawberry Hill’s interior designs were based on copies of Gothic architecture, Walpole used different materials such as wood, paper and plaster to imitate what had been originally done in stone. His adoption of the

²⁸ Walpole to Horace Mann, 25 Feb. 1750, Letters, vol. 2, 198.

²⁹ The term was first used in his letter of 27 April 1753 in which Walpole described to Horace Mann his “satisfaction in imprinting the gloomth of abbeys and cathedrals” on his “Gothic” house. Letters, vol. 2, 327.

³⁰ Horace Walpole, A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford, at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex with an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c (London: Gregg, 1964) iv.

³¹ Ibid. i.

French papier-maché, the use of paper and stucco for wall and ceiling decorations, was not only modern and innovative but also heterogenous—ranging from the stone-coloured wall with “Venetian prints” to the light, baronial balustrade similar to that of the staircase at Rouen Cathedral, and the fan-vaulted ceiling, based on Henry VII’s Chapel at Westminster Abbey.

Clark presents the eclecticism and frippery of Walpole’s Gothic as a “Rococo” style, a “purely decorative” and “disorderly” style in which attention was paid to small details rather than the whole architectural structure.³² Maintaining only a superficial connection between its Gothic decorations and their original models, Walpole’s sham Gothic castle amazed many uninitiated visitors far beyond their expectation. When the French “Duc de Nivernois” entered the Tribune, for example, he was reported to have “pull[ed] off his hat,” but was suddenly disappointed by the scene in front of him, exclaiming “Ce n’est pas une chapelle pourtant” after having realised that the room did not actually resemble a chapel.³³ Indeed, most of the chambers were not only embellished with modern, costly furniture, but also crowded with numerous collections of paintings, accessories and curiosities. Letitia-Matilda Hawkins, one of Walpole’s neighbours at Twickenham, observed that the house was “anything but habitable.”³⁴ Walpole himself admitted to his niece Mary Berry late in his life that “every true Goth must perceive that they [the rooms] are more the works of fancy than imitation.”³⁵

Walpole, nevertheless, did not present Strawberry Hill as a truly private residence. Later when the house was more fully furnished, Walpole offered it as a museum, issuing tickets, rules and catalogues for general visitors—though in so

³² Clark, *Gothic Revival* 50.

³³ Walpole to Horace Mann, 30 Apr. 1763, *Letters*, vol. 4, 73.

³⁴ Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, *Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches and Memoirs* (1822), Sabor, ed., *Horace Walpole* 253.

³⁵ qtd. in Clark, *Gothic Revival* 61.

doing he rather delighted in astounding his visitors (just as he did with the Duc de Nivernois) with his lavish, unconventional architectural style. At the beginning, Walpole seemed to rejoice in blending “sharawadgi” or the Chinese lack of symmetry in the construction of his house and garden. But, as David Porter has argued, when Chinoiserie in architecture began to go out of fashion in the late 1750s, Walpole was quickly to “repudiat[e] his earlier belief in the possibility of productive architectural synthesis between east and west” and, in his correspondence and other writings, attempted to purify the Gothic of any foreign influence and reestablish it as a substantial British style.³⁶ While taking Strawberry Hill as a site for architectural experimentation, Walpole was careful to protect his image as a man of taste with a strong sense of patriotism. This conjunction of experimentation and patriotism is also characteristic of Walpole’s literary Gothic works, in which patriotic protestations offered a licence to stake a claim to novelty.

THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

Walpole’s playful literary engagement with the Gothic is most obviously seen in the two prefaces to Otranto. In the frontispiece of the novel’s first edition, Walpole presented his work as a translation by “WILLIAM MARSHALL” of an Italian manuscript written by “ONUPHRIO MURALTO, CANON of the Church of St. NICHOLAS at OTRANTO.”³⁷ In the preface, the editor/translator states that the work, printed in 1529 in the “black letter,” was found “in the library of an ancient

³⁶ David Porter, “From Chinese to Goth: Walpole and the Gothic Repudiation of Chinoiserie,” Eighteenth-Century Life 23 (1999): 52.

³⁷ Walpole, The Castle of Otranto 57. Subsequent references to Otranto will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Catholic family in the north of England” (59). Suppositions about the time in which the story might have been written follow, along with an erudite but unresolved discussion concerning this historical background, the adoption of Spanish names for minor characters, the author’s writing style, and so on; subsequently suggesting that the work might have been composed during the Reformation, the editor/translator then states that “an artful priest” may have “avail[ed] himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions” (59).

Numerous writers in the 1760s expressed an interest in the recuperation of “ancient” literature. Between 1760 and 1763, for example, James Macpherson offered a series of translations of the Scottish Celtic epics of Ossian, while shortly afterwards Thomas Percy published his Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765. In 1769, Thomas Chatterton published his transcription of what he claimed to be a work by a fifteenth-century clergyman from Bristol named Thomas Rowley. Like the works of Macpherson and Chatterton, which were later proved to be counterfeits, Walpole’s pseudo-Gothic story exploits the idea of deep historical provenance as a mask for original composition. But as Nick Groom points out, writers such as Macpherson were also preoccupied with the “question of origins” of their poems, hence their antiquarian research into the cultural and historical context of their writings in copious notes, prefaces and accompanying dissertations.³⁸ Walpole, on the other hand, had little sympathy towards such works, expressing his scepticism about the authenticity of Ossian³⁹ and refusing to be Chatterton’s patron since he did not believe that Rowley’s poems were genuine fifteenth-century productions.

In Otranto, Walpole does not seem to pay serious attention to the antiquarian dimension of his writing; while presenting a text which purports to be “ancient,” he

³⁸ Nick Groom, The Making of Percy’s Reliques (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 67-68.

³⁹ As Walpole told George Montagu in his letter of 8 December 1761: “Fingal is come out ... I cannot believe it genuine ...” Selected Letters 187.

can instead be seen to mock or ridicule other contemporary forgeries. If Otranto is to be compared with anything, it is perhaps more fruitful to read it alongside his later publications such as Hieroglyphic Tales (written 1766-72, published 1785), in the context of his propensity for “private” diversion. Like the first preface of Otranto, Walpole’s preface to the Hieroglyphic Tales includes the editor’s descriptive observations on the tale’s origin, but here they are so blatantly exaggerated that they can only be regarded as a fantastic mockery of near-contemporary forgeries. His ascription of the tales to “Kemanlegorpikos, son of Quat,”⁴⁰ for example, heavily-handedly parodies Macpherson’s claim that his Gaelic poems are works of Ossian, son of Fingal. Since Macpherson’s Ossianic poems were revealed to have exploited themes and references from classical materials, Walpole playfully declared his tales to be of the same nature, stressing that his prose translation of Homer “shall make him [Homer] so unlike himself that nobody will think he could be an original writer,” and that it will eventually be “preferred to the Illiad” (107). The six tales, as Walpole put it in his letter, were initially written as a “private entertainment” for Caroline Campbell, the niece of Lady Ailesbury.⁴¹ The humour was largely based on Walpole’s exaggerated accounts of figures such as the loquacious and erudite princess Gronovia, who recounts “troubles that have agitated Europe for these last two hundred years, ... the doctrines of grace, free-will, predestination, reprobation, justification & c,” (112) to an emperor in “A New Arabian Night’s Entertainment,” a burlesque of Scheherazade’s narration in the original tale. “Mi Li. A Chinese Fairy Tale,” by contrast, is filled with references to people in Walpole’s circle such as Caroline Campbell and Lady Ailesbury, as well as to General Conway’s Chinese

⁴⁰ Horace Walpole, Hieroglyphic Tales, The Castle of Otranto and Hieroglyphic Tales, ed. Robert Mack (London: Everyman, 1993) 107. Subsequent references to Hieroglyphic Tales will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

⁴¹ qtd. in Frank, ed., “Horace Walpole: A Brief Chronology,” Otranto and Mysterious Mother 39. No description is given concerning the letter, except that it was written in August 1766.

garden. These tales, not surprisingly, perplexed those on the outside of this circle when they were first published; as Charles Burney noted in the Monthly Review (1785), they testified to their author's "*odd fancies*," with many allusions "extremely sarcastic, personal, and sometimes profane."⁴²

Like Hieroglyphic Tales, Otranto was not a translation but an amusing spoof of a counterfeited ancient text. As he confided in his letters to Joseph Warton and William Mason, the novel was "begun without any plan at all."⁴³ The origin of the tale, as he related to Cole, was "a dream" in which he imagined himself encountering "a gigantic hand in armour" on the "uppermost banister" of the staircase of his Gothic castle, and which prompted him to start writing and then become "so engrossed" in his work that he completed it "in less than two months."⁴⁴ Together with his emphasis on the novel as "a little story-book" and a "trifle,"⁴⁵ Walpole's allusion to its rapid composition and the dream set in his own house positions Otranto alongside Strawberry Hill as "a play-thing" or jeu d'esprit that Walpole indulged in during his leisure hours. The work, moreover, was initially circulated among Walpole's acquaintances, thereby becoming an entertaining subject of conversation among his "in-crowd." George James Williams, for example, told George Selwyn that after reading the novel he was dazzled by the grotesque "ghosts and enchantments" in the story and believed that Walpole must have written it "when he had some feverish disposition in him."⁴⁶ Knowing that the "extraordinary" book was Walpole's creation, Mason expressed his appreciation of the delightful spoof, asserting to Walpole that if "it proves me your dupe, I should be glad to be

⁴² qtd. in Mack, ed., "Walpole and His Critics," Otranto and Hieroglyphic Tales 162.

⁴³ Walpole to Joseph Warton, 16 Mar. 1765; and Walpole to William Mason, 17 Apr. 1765, Letters, vol. 4, 331, 343.

⁴⁴ Walpole to William Cole, 9 Mar. 1765, Letters, vol. 4, 328.

⁴⁵ Walpole to William Cole, 28 Feb. 1765; and Walpole to Joseph Warton, 16 Mar. 1765. Letters, vol. 4, 327, 331.

⁴⁶ George James Williams to George Selwyn, 19 Mar. 1765, Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 66.

duped again every year of my life.”⁴⁷ Otranto, in this sense, was contrived by Walpole in order to advance his “aristocratic” self-fashioning, by appealing to a small clique of knowledgeable readers, while at the same time confusing all others.

In the novel’s second edition in April 1765, Walpole revealed his authorial identity and supplied another preface to defend his earlier performance. The subtitle “A Gothic Story” that he added to the new edition refers to the novel’s broadly medieval setting, but it also suggests further nuances of meaning, as the first part of this chapter has shown, in connection to Walpole’s particular conception of the Gothic. Like his “Gothic castle” at Strawberry Hill, Walpole’s “Gothic” novel might be seen to function as a locale for eclecticism and experimentalism—a space in which he could deviate from and even subvert what was held to be conventional in literature. As he stated in his preface to the second edition,

It [Otranto] was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if, in the latter species, Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. (65)

As in Samuel Johnson’s The Rambler (No. 4, 1750), prose fiction was often divided into the “old” and “new” styles of romance. The latter, better known now as the novel, was explained by Johnson to “exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen, in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind.”⁴⁸ The verisimilitude of the novel, according to Johnson, helps fortify the reader’s knowledge of nature and life,

⁴⁷ Walpole to William Mason, 17 Apr. 1765, Letters, vol. 4, 343.

⁴⁸ Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969) 19.

and is therefore preferable to the old romance, which, containing “wonders” and “incredibilities,” is “the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas” and is suitable only for “the young, the ignorant, and the idle.”⁴⁹ Whereas Johnson maintained a clear-cut division between fancy and realism, Walpole saw the possibility to reconcile the two opposing elements in his Gothic work, proclaiming in his preface that he had created “a new species of romance” (70).

As I have already mentioned, the term “Gothic” in the work’s subtitle carries potentially patriotic meanings. In his second preface, Walpole claimed that he aligned his narrative with Shakespeare’s tragedies, Hamlet and Julius Caesar, in which there was a tonal mixture of buffoonery in the domestics and solemnity in the main protagonists. He attacked Voltaire’s criticism of Shakespeare in his new commentary on Pierre Corneille’s tragedies. While Voltaire censured Shakespeare’s combination of the comic and the tragic as unrefined and “intolerable” (67), Walpole pointed out that Voltaire himself had earlier defeated his own principle in his comedy, L’Enfant Prodigue (1736), and in the prefatory letter to Scipione Maffei which was prefixed to his translation of Maffei’s Mérope (1743). For Walpole, Voltaire’s erroneous judgement of Shakespeare not only itself disproved the allegedly superior taste of the French in drama, but would also “reduce poetry from the lofty effort of imagination, to the puerile and most contemptible labour” (69). In this sense, Walpole presented his Gothic romance as a domain in which British literary creativity was battling against the constrained imagination of the French. Publishing Otranto only a year after the end of the Seven Years War, Walpole capitalised on the widespread patriotic sentiment in Britain, and further legitimised his jeu d’esprit, as upholding a national tradition of writing.

⁴⁹ Johnson, Rambler 19-21.

Despite his apparent explanation of the motives behind the first edition of Otranto, however, Walpole's second preface arguably seeks to confound readers as much as the first. Whereas the second preface speaks of harmonising the supernatural and the probable, for example, the tale itself clearly undercuts any such sense of harmonious balance, such that in the work's opening scene the wedding ceremony of Prince Conrad and Isabella is interrupted by an ancient, gigantic helmet which crushes Conrad to pieces. The narrator's account of the "enormous helmet" offers a grotesque description of it being "an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black features" (74). The helmet, which resembles the one on the statue of Alfonso the Good in the church of St. Nicholas, is to Manfred the symbol of legitimacy, representing the rightful owner of Otranto who now vengefully claims the castle back from him and his grandfather, who had usurped it in Alfonso's time. To ensure the continuation of his lineage, Manfred decides to divorce his wife and to marry Isabella. He pursues Isabella along the labyrinthine passages of the castle, and is obstructed by his grandfather's portrait which "utter[s] a deep sigh and heave[s] its breast" (81), before quitting the panel and marching along the gallery to escort Isabella out of Manfred's hands. In a similarly preposterous manner, the narrative ends with the colossal Alfonso bursting the castle into ruins, ascending towards heaven and announcing that Theodore, the hero, is Otranto's true heir.

The marvellous looms large in Walpole's text. It is so essential to the plot that without the help of it, the story could not be resolved. Walpole's supernatural romance pioneers the use of a "dark," medieval setting, and themes of family secrets from the past, in Gothic fiction; as Walpole himself indicated in his first preface, his story was built upon the moral assumption that "*the sins of fathers are visited on*

their children to the third and fourth generation” (61). However, instead of consisting of what Hurd called “solemn fancies” or the “machinery to produce the sublime,”⁵⁰ Walpole’s highly distinctive brand of the supernatural tends towards the ludicrous; despite his stated attempt to induce “pity” and “terror” (60), his blatantly extravagant romance, as Watt asserts, “constantly hovers on the verge of bathos.”⁵¹ Walpole not only presents the supernatural in an apparently flippant manner, but also makes characters who encounter its effects seem ridiculous, thereby undercutting what he had claimed in his second preface about making them “think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions” (65). The villainous protagonist, Manfred, in particular, often comes across as a comic character. When Theodore points out the resemblance between the lost helmet on Alfonso’s statue and the gigantic one in the courtyard, Manfred instantly accuses him of being a necromancer and orders him to be imprisoned in the helmet itself. The domestics, who enthusiastically echo Manfred’s words, make the situation more comic still, as the narrator explains how they, like Manfred, “never reflected how enormous the disproportion was between the marble helmet that had been in the church, and that of steel before their eyes; nor how impossible it was for a youth, seemingly not twenty, to wield a piece of armour of so prodigious a weight” (77). Persistently asking his servants during the search for Isabella whether “all the pictures [are] in their places” (89) and whether they have seen or heard anything unnatural, Manfred is less a threatening sexual predator than an absurd, cowardly figure desperate for a wife who will produce him an heir.

The themes of feudal tyranny and the reestablishment of the legitimate line of inheritance were commonplace in both old and new styles of romance. Before

⁵⁰ Richard Hurd, *The Works of Richard Hurd, D.D. Lord Bishop of Worcester*, 1811, vol. 4 (New York: AMS, 1967) 283, 295.

⁵¹ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic* 34.

Otranto, Thomas Leland had published Longsword, Earl of Salisbury in 1762. The narrative, based on ancient English history, recounts the misfortunes of Lord William, Earl of Salisbury, the second son of Henry II, and his return from France to England to claim his title and estate back from the usurping Lord Raymond. While Leland apologised for the freedom he took in “altering or enlarging” the historical account in the Advertisement,⁵² his imaginary romance is thoroughly void of any fabulous or supernatural element. His medieval background was commensurate with the increasingly approved concept of chivalry, as the story repeatedly celebrates Lord William’s knightly courage as well as his “magnanimity and generous humanity.”⁵³ Hence, the book was well received by the public, with one reviewer stating that it was “a new and agreeable species of writing, in which the beauties of poetry and the advantages of history are happily united.”⁵⁴ Walpole’s fabricated historical framework of Otranto, on the contrary, was more problematic than this since it heavily relied on the marvellous. Whereas Walpole’s acquaintances understood the humour and triviality of the novel, other readers were rather bewildered by it as they tended to take his novel at face-value alone. John Langhorne, for example, changed his attitude towards Walpole’s work after learning that the extraordinary novel was not a product of the past, but a modern invention. Whereas he commended the depiction of “human manners, passions, and pursuits” in his unsigned review of the first edition of Otranto in the Monthly Review of February 1765, his second review in May condemned the novel as inculcating “a false taste in a cultivated period of learning” as well as “re-establishing the barbarous

⁵² Thomas Leland, Advertisement, Longsword, Earl of Salisbury: An Historical Romance, vol. 1 (London, 1762), English Short Title Catalogue, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, 8 May 2006 <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>. No pag.

⁵³ Leland, Longsword 35.

⁵⁴ qtd. in E. J. Clery, The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 60.

superstitions of Gothic devilism!”⁵⁵ Later, John Dunlop denounced Walpole’s Gothic novel in History of Fiction (1814): “What analogy have skulls or skeletons—sliding panels—damp vaults—trap doors—and dismal apartments, to the tented fields of chivalry and its airy enchantments?”⁵⁶ For Dunlop, the only satisfactory answer was to see Otranto as a parody or an anti-romance, like “*Don Quixote*,” which “was written to expose the romances of chivalry, by an aggravated representation of their absurdities.”⁵⁷

In addition to the marvels of old romances, the emphasis on morality and probability in modern novels is also an object of Walpole’s jest and ridicule. Otranto, as he told Madame du Deffand in March 1767, was not “the book for the present age, which seeks only *cold reason*.”⁵⁸ Indeed, Walpole had a rather low opinion of contemporary fiction. Though it is now arguable whether or not the “rise of the novel” specifically resulted from the expansion of the middle class (as Ian Watt influentially suggested⁵⁹), Walpole’s correspondence shows how he saw the genre as well as other current types of writing as being increasingly dominated by “middling writers” for whom, as he told the Countess of Ossory in September 1787, he had “great contempt.”⁶⁰ Walpole found Johnson’s overt concern with moral and intellectual values as well as his scholarly literary style especially irritating, calling Johnson’s writing “absurd bombast” and describing him as an author with “neither

⁵⁵ Monthly Review (1765), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 71-72.

⁵⁶ John Dunlop, The History of Fiction (1814), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 99.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 100.

⁵⁸ Walpole to Madame du Deffand, 13 Mar. 1767, Frank, ed., Appendix A, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 262.

⁵⁹ See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (London: Hogarth, 1987), Chapter 2: “The Reading Public and the Rise of the Novel” 35-59. In this influential study, Watt argues that “[t]he novel in the eighteenth century was closer to the economic capacity of the middle-class additions to the reading public than were many of the established and respectable forms of literature and scholarship” (42).

⁶⁰ Walpole to the Countess of Ossory, 15 Sept. 1787, Letters, vol. 9, 110.

taste nor ear, [and no] criterion of judgement, but his old woman's prejudices."⁶¹ As for the renowned novelist, Samuel Richardson, Walpole was disdainful of the sentimentalism and didacticism of his works, viewing Clarissa (1747-48) and Sir Charles Grandison (1753-54) as "pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller, and romances as they would be spiritualised by a Methodist teacher."⁶² Though Walpole was pleased with Laurence Sterne's Sentimental Journey (1768), he thought that the bawdy Tristram Shandy (1759-67) was "tiresome" as it "makes one smile two or three times at the beginning, but in recompense makes one yawn for two hours. The characters are tolerably kept up, but the humour is for ever attempted and missed."⁶³

Referring to contemporary fiction as a whole, Walpole lamented to Monsieur de Beaumont in a letter in March 1765 that "[t]he world is apt to wear out any plan whatever."⁶⁴ "Richardson," he added, had made the novel "insupportable" and this was why "a god, at least a ghost, was absolutely necessary to frighten us out of too much senses," hence his composition of Otranto.⁶⁵ The marvellous, however, is not the only index by which Walpole defined his work against other mid-eighteenth-century novels. His story fixes on the domestic crises of forced marriage and even incest, and thus carries a shock-value that clearly sets it apart from other novels published around the same time, works which pay tribute to an advancing morality of companionate marriage and virtuous family life. Richardson's Pamela, though it begins as a fiction about a heroine pursued by a malevolent gentleman, ends with the reformation of the latter and the happy marriage of the couple. Richardson's

⁶¹ Walpole to William Mason, 19 Feb. 1781, Selected Letters 201-02.

⁶² Walpole to Horace Mann, 20 Dec. 1764, Selected Letters 196-97. Here, Walpole slightly misrepresented Richardson, for he was not a bookseller, but a printer.

⁶³ Walpole to George Montagu, 12 Mar. 1768; and Walpole to David Dalrymple, 4 Apr. 1760, Selected Letters 180, 198.

⁶⁴ Walpole to Monsieur de Beaumont, 18 Mar. 1765, Letters, vol. 4, 333.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

emphasis on his heroine's virtue, as the subtitle of "Virtue Rewarded" attests, embodies what Michael Mckeon terms the "progressive ideology" which sought to transform the age-old aristocratic value of honour as (pre)determined by external factors such as rank and pedigree.⁶⁶ The novels's focus on the heroines's moral distinction and emotional sensitivity also participated in "the culture of sensibility" which, as G. J. Barker-Benfield explains, purported to reform the immoral, and libertine behaviour especially associated with men from the upper classes.⁶⁷ Female virtue and sensibility, in this sense, did not only smooth over class difference but also gave women reformatory power—even in Clarissa, the heroine's virtue and her death eventually result in her seducer's grief and repentance.

Walpole's Otranto, in contrast, turns women into two-dimensional characters who largely occupy the subordinate role of victims. While a novel such as Pamela intended to "*set forth in the most exemplary Lights, the Parental, the Filial, and the Social Duties,*"⁶⁸ Walpole's narrative seems to adopt a similar plan only to use the sentimental language of love and loyalty so as to make the relationship between family members absurd and unconvincing. Hippolita, for example, could be a mock version of the submissive wife, as she willingly consents to Manfred's malicious scheme of divorce and incestuous marriage, asserting to her daughter, Matilda, that "[i]t is not ours to make election for ourselves; heaven, our fathers, and our husbands, must decide for us" (142). Matilda, in her dying speech, is also a parody of the dutiful daughter. Being stabbed by Manfred who mistakes her for Isabella, she reprimands Theodore for cursing her father, calling him a "[c]ruel man!" who "aggravate[s] the woes of a parent!," and praying to heaven to "bless my father and

⁶⁶ Michael Mckeon, The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 131, 153.

⁶⁷ Barker-Benfield, Culture of Sensibility xxvi.

⁶⁸ Samuel Richardson, Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 3.

forgive him as I do!” (159). The marriage between Theodore and Isabella at the end, moreover, is somehow a “forced” one since it is the death of Matilda that brings the couple together rather than love and companionship, as Theodore persuades himself that “he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken the possession of his soul” (165).

In contrast to the heroine-centred world of Richardson’s Pamela, Walpole’s Otranto focuses almost entirely on the overreaching villain, Manfred. Whereas Johnson insisted that “vice...should always disgust”⁶⁹ and Richardson professed to make “Vice...deservedly Odious” in his preface to Pamela,⁷⁰ Walpole seemed to base his villain upon the tragic hero of the Renaissance Faust myth. Like Faust, who aspires beyond the limits of his knowledge, Manfred endeavours to transcend the fate imposed on him by Alfonso the Good’s curse attempting to marry his daughter-in-law in order to preserve his lineage. Within the basic narrative structure of a tragic drama (consisting of five chapters rather than acts), Walpole presented the downfall of his protagonist in eccentric detail. Unlike Beckford and Byron, however, Walpole did not seem to be much concerned to investigate transgressive criminality or antinomian individualism. Despite the fact that Manfred is at times portrayed as a suffering figure and a mixture of good and evil,⁷¹ he is also an absurd and pantomimic character. He is no less a dignified villain than Theodore a chivalric hero, for Theodore virtually has no chance to demonstrate his valour and even commits a fatal error in wounding Isabella’s father whom he mistakes for one of Manfred’s servants. His conduct is more like an echo of Don Quixote’s, especially when he attempts to assume the role of a knight-errant: “I will die in your defence;

⁶⁹ Johnson, Rambler 24.

⁷⁰ Richardson, Pamela 3.

⁷¹ As Walpole explains, though Manfred is “[a]shamed ... of his inhuman treatment” of Hippolita, “who returned every injury with new marks of tenderness and duty,” he “curbed the yearnings of his heart, and did not dare to lean towards pity.” The Castle of Otranto 93.

but I am unacquainted with the castle,” as he told Isabella (84). As the story shows, the only means to prove Theodore the hero and the rightful heir of Otranto is genealogy.

Despite its bizarreness, Walpole’s Gothic novel was well-received by eighteenth-century readers. Its first publication, in particular, elicited a favourable response from most reviewers. While the Critical Review (January 1765) doubted whether the editor “speaks seriously or ironically” in the preface and whether the novel was a “modern fabrick,” it was willing to dispense with all the playfulness and extravagance, and concluded that “the characters are well marked, and the narrative kept up with surprising spirit and propriety.”⁷² In the Monthly Review (February 1765), John Langhorne similarly noted “the absurdities of Gothic fiction” but at the same time commended the “accurate and elegant” language and the “highly finished” characters as evidence of the author’s “keenest penetration” and “most perfect knowledge of mankind.”⁷³ His second review, as I mentioned earlier, focused only on the problem of the supernatural as a modern fabrication, which was disturbing to contemporary critics who strove to maintain a strict boundary between fancy and realism. Over three decades later, T. J. Mathias considered the longer-run popularity of Walpole’s work, observing in The Pursuits of Literature (1796) that “Otranto Ghosts have propagated their species with unequalled fecundity. The spawn is in every novel shop.”⁷⁴ Indeed, Walpole’s use of the marvellous, the historical setting and the theme of the legacy of the past provided a ground upon which many later writers were to create their Gothic fictions. Reeve and Jephson, especially, claimed to have founded their works upon Otranto, and in doing so shed further light on Walpole’s attempt to construct an “aristocratic” identity.

⁷² Critical Review (1765), Frank, ed., Appendix B, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 289.

⁷³ Monthly Review (1764), Frank, ed., Appendix B, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 290.

⁷⁴ qtd. in Fred Botting, Gothic (London: Routledge, 1996) 45.

In 1777, Reeve anonymously published The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story and reintroduced it, with her name on the title page, as The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story in 1778. Though calling her novel “the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto,” Reeve criticised Walpole’s supernatural in her preface, pointing out that it “palls upon the mind” because “the machinery is so violent that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite.”⁷⁵ The absurdity and improbability of Walpole’s romance, as she observed, “destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter” (3). Her revision of Otranto would therefore entice the reader to remain “within the utmost *verge* of probability” and the depiction of the supernatural would be directed towards “good and useful purposes” (2-3). The outline of the story chiefly concerns the mysterious death of Arthur, Lord Lovel, and the usurpation of his title and property by his brother, Sir Walter Lovel. The true heir of Lord Lovel and the hero of the tale, Edmund, is a servant of Baron Fitz-Owen, the new tenant of Castle Lovel. Rumours about the haunted apartment spread among the domestics and Edmund courageously spends three nights in the chamber, in which he dreams of the former Lord Lovel and his wife, who inform him of the crimes of the past and of his own true nobility. When Edmund’s identity is disclosed and the criminal punished, the castle is restored to Edmund who then becomes the next Lord Lovel, and marries Baron Fitz-Owen’s daughter.

Reeve’s Gothic work transports Walpole’s medieval Italy to the closer and more familiar setting of western England in the reign of Henry VI. Like Leland’s Longsword, Reeve’s novel does not pay much attention to historical accuracy, but in portraying the exercise of justice, gallantry and benevolence, it advocates a patriotic view of Britain’s glorious past, in contrast to Walpole’s representation of a more

⁷⁵ Clara Reeve, The Old English Baron, ed. James Trainer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 3. Subsequent references to the novel will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

disturbing—if also less specific—history. Supernatural agency is kept within the realm of reason and probability in Reeve’s work, for it manifests itself only in dreams, which are endowed with the useful function of uncovering the past and assisting the hero to restore his family. Reeve’s reiteration of Edmund’s outstanding attributes and moral decency also underscores the concept of virtue and its reward, suggesting that Edmund’s nobility is not only the product of genealogy but also his innate goodness. As Watt has argued, in accordance with Gary Kelly, “Reeve soberly asserted the potentially reformist agency of romance,” making The Old English Baron “project both an ideology of merit and a polished masculinity back into the past, so as to prefigure and endorse the future ascendancy of ‘bourgeois’ or ‘feminised’ values and virtues.”⁷⁶

In April 1778 the Critical Review acknowledged The Old English Baron to have “claim[ed] a place upon the same shelf with The Castle of Otranto.”⁷⁷ Indeed, to Walpole, Reeve clearly presented herself as a competitor; as he wrote to Cole in August 1778, Reeve’s preface “directly attacks the visionary part” of his novel.⁷⁸ Though not having “the smallest inclination to return that attack,” Walpole vigorously remarked to Cole how the work was “stripped of the marvellous; and so entirely stripped, except in one awkward attempt at a ghost or two, that it is the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw.”⁷⁹ Whereas Reeve affirmed that Otranto only “makes one laugh,” Walpole retorted that her novel “certainly does not make one laugh, for what makes one doze, seldom makes one merry.”⁸⁰ In his letter to Mason, he similarly condemned The Old English Baron for “reduc[ing]” his romance “to

⁷⁶ Reeve, Introduction, Old English Baron xxiii-iv.

⁷⁷ qtd. in E. J. Clery, Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000) 30.

⁷⁸ Walpole to William Cole, 22 Aug. 1778, Frank, ed., Appendix A, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 264.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

reason and probability!”⁸¹ Walpole offered his earlier Anecdotes of Painting in England (1760) as a collection of “curious trifles,” presenting himself as an editor who assembled the materials of the antiquarian George Vertue, placed them in order, and organised them in a more “polished” manner, thereby transforming Vertue’s scholarly history of English art into the work of a connoisseur, an object for the reader’s leisure rather than serious study.⁸² In offering The Old English Baron as a revision of Otranto, Reeve arguably performed a similar kind of trick on Walpole himself: Reeve can be seen as an interloper who did not merely thrust herself into the sphere of Gothic romance, which Walpole implied belonged solely to himself, but also meddled with the identity he sought to project by converting its playfulness and fluidity to rigidity and seriousness.

Robert Jephson’s dramatic adaptation of Otranto, The Count of Narbonne (1781), on the other hand, shows how Walpole’s Gothic extravagance could be rewritten as a probable story without jeopardising the author’s self-representation. When Jephson gave the draft of his work to Walpole in January 1780, Walpole complimented him on “having made so rational a play” out of his “wild tale.”⁸³ Jephson “had the address to make it coherent,” as Walpole put it, “without the marvellous, though so much depended on that part.”⁸⁴ Indeed, Jephson left out all the supernatural spectacle, implying to the reader that Edmund (or Conrad in the novel) dies because he accidentally falls from a cliff and that the deposition of Count Raymond (Manfred) results from Godfrey’s battle for a just inheritance, not from the divine interference of the gigantic Alfonso. Characters were based upon those in Walpole’s original version but were given new names, some of which were

⁸¹ Walpole to William Mason, 8 Apr. 1778, Letters, vol. 7, 51.

⁸² Walpole, Works, vol. 3, 5.

⁸³ Walpole to Robert Jephson, 27 Jan. 1780, Letters, vol. 7, 318.

⁸⁴ Walpole to Robert Jephson, 25 Jan. 1780, Letters, vol. 7, 316.

borrowed from Walpole's The Mysterious Mother. The connection that these two works share is the idea of family secrets and domestic tragedy, with children as victims of parental crimes of incest and murder. While Walpole himself intended to keep The Mysterious Mother unstaged, the permission that he gave Jephson to use his characters' names suggests that Walpole might be indirectly promoting his closet play to a wider audience—it is worth noting that Jephson's drama was produced in the same year that Walpole published his play for the second time, after his limited fifty-copy edition in 1768. Though Walpole tried to distance himself from the commercialism of the theatre, he was also impatient to see the success of the play, assuming the role of Jephson's patron, dealing with the Covent Garden manager over its production, attending rehearsals, and lending a suit of armour for the performance.⁸⁵ Jephson's play, in this respect, became a channel for Walpole's self-promotion, helping him maintain his authority as the writer of both The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother.

THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER

A few years after the first publication of Otranto, Walpole revisited the theme of domestic trauma in his tragedy, The Mysterious Mother. As soon as he finished writing the play, he wrote a letter to Montagu in April 1768, warning his friend that he “would not bear the subject,” although, he added, “Mr. Chute, who is not easily pleased, likes it, and Gray, who is still more difficult, approves it.”⁸⁶ The story is that of a mysterious, guilt-ridden Countess of Narbonne, who, upon the return of her long

⁸⁵ Paul Baines, “Jephson, Robert (1736/7-1803),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford UP, 2004, 7 July 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14768>>.

⁸⁶ Walpole to George Montagu, 15 Apr. 1768, Letters, vol. 5, 95.

banished son, Edmund, and his marriage with her ward, Adeliza, becomes delirious, confesses to them her past crime and in agony stabs herself to death. The Countess's confession in the last scene reveals that sixteen years earlier on the night of her husband's death she had tricked her son by substituting herself for his beloved damsel to gratify her sexual appetite. Adeliza, as the wretched mother relates to Edmund, is the "[f]ruit of that monstrous night!"—"thy daughter, sister, wife!"⁸⁷ The crux of Walpole's tragedy is therefore centred on the double incest that turns the simple consanguineous relationship between the Countess and her son into a more complicated "picture of domestic woes" (31), as Walpole indicated in the prologue.

The theme of incest would not have been unfamiliar to eighteenth-century British audiences. Sophocles's Oedipus Tyrannus, which Walpole referred to in his prologue, had pervaded the literary and theatrical spheres for centuries. Walpole's allusion to this classical Greek precedent might be seen as an attempt to legitimise his dealing with the potentially dangerous and transgressive subject of family romance. In Oedipus, however, the incest of Jocasta and her son is unintentional. Earlier in 1675, Dryden staged his play, Aureng-Zebe, or the Great Mogul, in which the stepmother's incestuous lust for Aureng-Zebe is not only denounced by the virtuous Aureng-Zebe himself but is also shown to be entangled with the political issue of Aureng-Zebe's succession to the throne. In 1677 Racine revised the classical story of Phèdre in which Phèdre's passion for her stepson, Hippolyte, is, as Richard McCabe points out, similarly intensified by "[t]he prospect of power," since "Phèdre plans to use the crown as bait apparently legalising incest through royal

⁸⁷ Horace Walpole, The Mysterious Mother, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 245-46; Act 5, scene 6, lines 75 and 12. Subsequent references to the play will be given (with act, scene and line numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text. Line numbers are provided for references to the prologue.

prerogative—although her husband’s death does not, in itself, alter her kinship to his son.”⁸⁸

The Countess’s crime of incest in Walpole’s play, on the other hand, is purely motivated by her insatiable sexual desire. As Paul Baines has argued, The Mysterious Mother is “an Oedipal drama which out-Hamlets Hamlet by rendering the desire for incestuous union between son and mother a conscious and consummated wish (at least on the mother’s part).”⁸⁹ In the second preface to Otranto Walpole had referred to the influence of Hamlet. While he seems to have based the apparition of Manfred’s grandfather upon Hamlet’s encounter with his father’s ghost, Walpole exceeded Shakespeare by making his supernatural machinery more extravagant and grotesque, for example with Ricardo’s walking portrait. In the prologue to The Mysterious Mother, he again celebrated Shakespeare’s presentation of “Hamlet’s spectre” (7) on stage. Unlike his novel, however, Walpole did not delineate any ghost in his play, but made it more shocking than Shakespeare’s in his portrayal of the desiring female character. The claim that he had followed canonical writers, therefore, functioned to vindicate his deviation from regular or “standard” practices, including those of Shakespeare. By exploring the psychosexual dimension of the Countess’s character, Walpole made it clear to his readers that her horrendous crime was a deliberate one. As the Countess relates to Edmund, the “eighteen months” (5.6.43) that her fond Count is away from her causes her to be in a fit of sexual frustration. As soon as the report of the Count’s return reaches her, her passionate longing for her husband is “in all its warmest colours,” and her “impatience” increases “almost to sickness” (5.6.47-48). When the dead body of the

⁸⁸ Richard McCabe, Incest, Drama and Nature’s Law 1550-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 270.

⁸⁹ Paul Baines, “‘This Theatre of Monstrous Guilt’: Horace Walpole and the Drama of Incest.” Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 28 (1999): 291.

Count is delivered instead on the next day, the Countess becomes, in effect, so frantic that when her attendant discloses her secret meeting with Edmund that night, the Countess, with “such a tumult” in her “madding blood” (5.6.68), takes the opportunity and replaces herself as the damsel to appease her unsatiated lust.

Walpole’s choice of tragedy might again be seen as a product of his class-consciousness. Instead of privileging the “middle-class” concepts of repentance and reformation, Walpole prioritised the classical tragic figure of the erring, yet noble, protagonist. Unlike the comic and grotesque Manfred, the Countess is much more realistic and human. If there was to be any literary ideal that Walpole looked up to, it was, perhaps even more than the work of Shakespeare, Racine’s *Phèdre* (a play that Walpole highly regarded as “the finest tragedy in my opinion of the French Theatre”⁹⁰), in which the heroine is presented not as a moral exemplar but an individual with passions, emotional conflicts, guilt, and remorse—all of which make her sympathetic and, as Racine put it, “neither entirely guilty nor altogether innocent.”⁹¹ Indeed, the Countess’s rationality and righteousness are presented as redeeming features that elevate her above common criminals. From the outset, the Countess is depicted as a pious queen who regularly prays for her dead husband in the abbey and gives food and money to monks and the poor; as a peasant affirms to Florian, Edmund’s friend and attendant, “I never knew a woman/ But lov’d our bodies and our souls too well” (1.1.33-34). If Walpole’s play deals with politics, it is not within the family, but between the Countess and the two Catholic monks who attempt to instill superstitious beliefs in the Countess and aim to make her repent her mysterious past deeds as a means to weaken her ruling power. The Countess, on the other hand, indignantly refuses to give in to their ministrations via confession.

⁹⁰ Walpole to William Mason, 19 Feb. 1781, *Selected Letters* 202.

⁹¹ qtd. in McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature’s Law* 269.

Mocking their credulity and rejecting all religious practices, she defiantly declares that her crime is too immense for any penance, and that the only way left for her is to suffer until death will free her from her woes. The anti-Catholic sentiment that Walpole ascribed to the Countess, together with her benevolence, courage and rationality, makes her a more attractive character than others in the play, despite her crime.

The Mysterious Mother can be seen to subvert increasingly “normative” notions of the family. As John Ramsbottom explains, this understanding of the family “required that wives be economically dependent, confined to the home, and committed intellectually and spiritually to their own subordination.”⁹² The role of women in the family at the same time became more important, though, as they came to be valued for their ability to foster love and stronger emotional attachments between family members, thereby helping to create what Lawrence Stone has famously described as the affectionate nuclear family.⁹³ In Walpole’s play, on the other hand, there is no father figure, and an estranged relationship between mother and son. In place of a submissive wife and tender-hearted mother, Walpole created a rather hybridised character of a commanding and virile female protagonist, who tells Edmund: “This state is mine./ Learn to command, by learning to obey./ Tho’ frail my sex, I have a soul as masculine/ As any of thy race.” (3.3.166-69) Like Manfred whose tyrannical power causes him to transgress the conventional role of the protective father, the Countess’s incestuous deed, as Clery observes, “deranges all stable kinship identities” and creates a dysfunctional family, as she announces to

⁹² John Ramsbottom, “Women and the Family,” A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain, ed. H. T. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 209.

⁹³ Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, Abridged ed. (London: Penguin, 1977) 149.

Edmund: “Lo! Where this monster stands! thy mother! mistress!/ The mother of thy daughter, sister, wife!” (5.6.11-12).⁹⁴

In her article on The Mysterious Mother, Clery elucidates how Walpole’s play engages with two apparently contradictory models of femininity in the eighteenth century. The self-conscious, sexual desire of the Countess, as Clery asserts, implicitly endorses the pre-modern sexual concept that the desire for sexual pleasure is a fundamental physical attribute of both men and women.⁹⁵ In the eighteenth century, this model was accompanied by a growing medical interest in female psychology, from which emerged the claim that continued sexual deprivation in women could lead to frustration and insanity, a condition called nymphomania.⁹⁶ Walpole’s illustration of the Countess’s hysterical, sexual frenzy was commensurate with this kind of speculation: it reasserted the notion that female sexual desire was normal, but also demonstrated how it could endanger the traditional patriarchal structure and kinship system within the family. At the same time, another coexistent, puritanical version of femininity and female sexuality held that women were “naturally passionless,” and celebrated “timidity, modesty, refinement, passivity,”⁹⁷ qualities which were to be further valorised during the evangelical revival that began in the 1780s and 1790s, and which were to become normative during the nineteenth century. It is not surprising that Walpole’s play, written in the transitional period between the decline of the old belief and the emergence of the new, normative model of femininity, elicited disapproval rather than praise from contemporary readers. Frances Burney, for example, felt an “indignant aversion” against the play.⁹⁸ She

⁹⁴ E. J. Clery, “Horace Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother and the Impossibility of Female Desire,” Essays and Studies: The Gothic (2001): 37.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 34-35.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 39.

⁹⁸ Fanny Burney’s diary, 28 Nov. 1786, Frank, ed., Appendix B, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 303.

noted in her diary in November 1786: “Dreadful was the whole! truly dreadful! a story of so much horror, from atrocious and voluntary guilt, never did I hear!”⁹⁹ Mason, who had read the play in 1769, was astonished by the subject-matter and proposed an alternative version of the play by having the Countess commit incest as a result of “ill-grounded jealousy” rather than deliberate intent, something which would merely raise, as Mason put it, “disgust and indignation” towards the character.¹⁰⁰ Walpole, however, refused to accept Mason’s proposed alteration, insisting on the Countess’s volition, which he said constituted “the singularity” of the play.¹⁰¹ Jealousy would show the weak constitution of the Countess and would weaken the appeal of her character. It would also reduce Walpole’s tragedy to a distinctly un-Walpolean moral narrative of misconduct and punishment.

In March 1768, Walpole wrote to Madame du Deffand that his tragedy “does not resemble this century’s prim and conventional tone”: “[t]here is nothing but unveiled passions, crimes, repentance, and horrors.”¹⁰² Because of its shocking theme and narration, Walpole kept his work unpublished and circulated it only among his close acquaintances. News of a pirated edition of The Mysterious Mother reached Walpole in 1781 and he took the opportunity to publish an authorised version of the play. To reassert his self-image as an at once “aristocratic” and respectable author, and to defend the potentially transgressive subject of the play, Walpole employed multiple forms of legitimisation. In his preface, he directly presented the work as a private possession: “[i]t was written several years ago; and to prevent the trouble of

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ William Mason to Walpole, 8 May 1769, Frank, ed., Appendix A, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 270.

¹⁰¹ Walpole to William Mason, 11 May 1769, Letters, vol. 5, 165.

¹⁰² Walpole to Madame du Deffand, 11 Mar. 1768, Frank, ed., Appendix A, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 268.

reading, or having it transcribed, a few copies were printed and given away” (169).¹⁰³ Because of the “disgusting” and “disagreeable” story, he had “done everything in his power to suppress the publication” (169). However, he claimed, once the copies were circulated and “different editions ... advertised,” he resolved to offer it to the public from his own original text for fear that more “surreptitious” publications might worsen the reputation of his play (169). As with Otranto, Walpole first presented The Mysterious Mother as a private amusement, and thus staked a claim to innovation without having to involve himself in the precarious and indecent business of theatrical production.

When Lady Diana Beauclerk gave him seven drawings from his tragedy, he kept them in a cabinet in the Beauclerk Tower at Strawberry Hill inaccessible to other people except his close friends and distinguished visitors. As he told Mason in a letter in July 1777, the cabinet was especially “hung on Indian blue damask” with gilt “ceiling, door and surbase” and a window of “two brave *fleur de lis* and a lion of England, all royally crowned in painted glass.”¹⁰⁴ “The cabinet,” Walpole stated further, “is to be sacred and not shown to the profane, as the drawings are not for the eyes of the vulgar.”¹⁰⁵ This emphasis on the exclusivity of the drawings is continuous with Walpole’s reference to his playtext in his letter to Montagu in October 1769, when he told Montagu to secure his copy of the play “under lock and key” since “it is not at all food for the public,” who reflected “a total extinction of all taste.”¹⁰⁶ In Walpole’s correspondence, the language of class distinction is especially evident, for

¹⁰³ Here I refer to the page number as appeared in Otranto and Mysterious Mother. Subsequent references to Walpole’s preface and postscript of The Mysterious Mother are from this source and will be similarly given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

¹⁰⁴ Walpole to William Mason, 6 July 1777, Letters, vol. 6, 452.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Walpole to George Montagu, 16 Oct. 1769, Letters, vol. 5, 197.

Walpole made it clear that his play belonged only to people of good taste, not the masses.

When the work was offered for public view, however, it was also necessary for Walpole to make his play agreeable to readers at large. His postscript, accordingly, offers an earnest defence of the play. While admitting that the subject was “more truly horrid than even that of Oedipus,” and that it “should never be practicable” to present it in a theatre, Walpole maintained that the “terror and pity” that his play afforded also made him unable to “resist the impulse of adapting it to the scene” (251). The tension between Walpole’s distancing himself from his offensive subject-matter and his attempt to legitimise that subject-matter recurs throughout the postscript, and these two poses, I would like to argue, are indispensable to Walpole’s presentation of the play. They are, like his two prefaces to Otranto, complementary to each other: while his “aristocratic” self-projection allowed him to deal with potentially transgressive matters, his stated adherence to recognised or “public” standards of taste, in turn, gave him a licence to offer his “private,” “recreational” work to the public. In the postscript, therefore, Walpole authenticated the story by vaguely arguing that the play’s incest plot was based on a real circumstance that happened to a female confessor of the Archbishop John Tillotson in the seventeenth century—an account that he had heard “when very young” (252). Clery observes that the incest account had been commonplace since the thirteenth century, especially in the French verse called “dits” which served as “pro-Church propaganda” to encourage the idea of salvation through confession, that is, subjection to religious authority.¹⁰⁷ Walpole’s drama, on the other hand, was more in accordance with the Queen of Navarre’s thirtieth tale of the Heptameron (1558),

¹⁰⁷ Clery, “Horace Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother ” 30.

which Walpole briefly acknowledged as having a coincidental parallel with his narrative setting, but which, as Clery points out, appeared to bear a more significant resemblance to Walpole's tale in its secular emphasis on the passion and emotion of the mother.¹⁰⁸ While protecting Walpole against any critic's charge of plagiarism, the brief reference to the Queen of Navarre's tale served to encourage the reader to view his play in the religious, moral context of Tillotson's anecdote, thereby more safely sheltering Walpole's subversive content.

In the postscript, Walpole also introduced the character of the Countess as "certainly new" for the stage (254). As he elaborated, he was careful to associate "sense, unbigotted [sic] piety, and interesting contrition" with the Countess, before unravelling the horrifying mystery at the end, "in hopes that some degree of pity would linger in the breasts of the audience...and that a whole life of virtue and penance might in some measure atone for a moment, though a most odious moment of a depraved imagination" (253). The contrast of vice and virtue in the Countess, along with the "prejudice[...]" that the audience should have "in her favour" (253), was generated from Walpole's desire to "strick[e] a little out of the common road, and to introduce some novelty on our stage" (255). He further justified this innovative performance, asserting that he had delineated the play according to Aristotle's dramatic unities of time, place and action. The potentiality of staging the play was hence reiterated, with Walpole's affirmation that it should take "not above two or three hours" of representation with only one shift of scene, and that all actions "tend[...] to bring on the catastrophe," the story never being "interrupted or diverted from its course" (255).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 30.

Towards the end of the postscript, Walpole attacked French dramas as “[e]nslaved ... to rules and modes” (255); their growing influence on the British theatre, he stated, would make the British stage “cramped by the rigorous forms of composition” (255). As he told Madame du Deffand, his play was “a kind of Gothic which would not be found in your [French] theatre,”¹⁰⁹ for, indeed, Walpole’s Gothic represents the commingling of different—and sometimes controversial—elements. In effect, Walpole allied himself with earlier British dramatists such as Shakespeare, Dryden, Thomas Otway and Nicholas Rowe, who were, to him, more liberal in their dramatisation of dangerous passions and tragic incidents. Walpole expressed a similar patriotic sentiment in his prologue, in which he championed native literature over French neoclassical drama, denouncing French tragedies as “drowsy tale[s]” (21) that “seldom startle” (16), since they never staged deaths or other such striking events, unlike Shakespeare’s theatrical representation of the murder of Banquo or the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet’s father. As in the second preface to *Otranto*, Walpole appealed to this national dramatic tradition in order to license his work: “Free as your country, Britons, be your scene!/ Be Nature now, and now Invention, queen!” (9-10).

As I have argued in this chapter, then, Walpole had a facility with different registers, which he moved between in order to appeal to different audiences. While striving to maintain his position among the social and cultural elite, he also assumed a number of patriotic and socially responsible poses in order to elicit favourable responses from other readers. Timothy Mowl’s designation of Walpole as “The Great Outsider”¹¹⁰ therefore over-simplifies his position, and over-exaggerates the extent to which he occupied this marginal and maverick position throughout his

¹⁰⁹ Walpole to Madame du Deffand, 11 Mar. 1768, Frank, ed., Appendix A, *Otranto and Mysterious Mother* 268.

¹¹⁰ The phrase is from Mowl’s title of his book *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider*.

lifetime. Walpole's experiment with unconventional architectural styles and literary themes appears for the most part to be limited to the 1750s and the 1760s, and, by the 1790s, the terrifying consequences of the French Revolution caused him to revise his former liberal Whiggism. His correspondence with Hannah More, in particular, shows Walpole's admiration of More's charitable activities and her fervent evangelicalism. In a letter of August 1792, for example, he contrasted "Saint Hannah" with the radical Mary Wollstonecraft whose writing, Walpole stated, was to be "excommunicated from the pale of my library."¹¹¹ To see Walpole as a straightforwardly "anti-bourgeois" writer is therefore to overlook some of the nuances of his self-representation, and perhaps in particular the trajectory of his works as a whole.

After Walpole's 1781 authorised edition, The Mysterious Mother appeared again in 1791 in pirated versions (based on the 1781 edition) in London and Dublin, and in 1798 in Mary Berry's edition of The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford. The play received two reviews from The Monthly Review in 1797 and 1798, both of which expressed a high opinion of Walpole as a noble and respectable author. The 1797 review, for instance, attributed the pirated edition to the late "Earl of Orford, better known as the Hon. Horace Walpole; under which designation all his literary labours were accomplished, and all that portion of life passed which can be desirable to man."¹¹² Walpole's legitimisation of the play seemed to be successful, for both reviewers were able to ignore the incest theme and to privilege the work's other literary merits that Walpole indicated in his postscript. The 1797 Monthly Review praised the play as an example of "an excellence nearly unimpeachable" that "will convince the English public how very possible it is to unite all the energies of

¹¹¹ Walpole to Hannah More, 21 Aug. 1792, Letters, vol. 9, 383, 385.

¹¹² Monthly Review (1797), Frank, ed., Appendix B, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 293.

genius with all the graces of art.”¹¹³ Despite its subject-matter which “excites more disgust and horror than pathos,” the 1798 review took Walpole’s postscript into account and concluded that it “will perhaps sufficiently apologise for some of the most objectional parts,” stating that “the intrinsic merit of the work itself seems not only to preclude cavil, but to extort applause.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, in the eighteenth century, Walpole’s extravagant and eccentric literary production seems to have been for the most part acceptable to critics and readers—a very different response from that of critics in the nineteenth century, as I will go on to show in my concluding section.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY RESPONSES TO WALPOLE’S WORK

In his preface to the tragedy Marino Faliero (1820), Lord Byron honoured Walpole as “the father of the first romance [Otranto] and of the last tragedy [The Mysterious Mother] in our language.”¹¹⁵ Since Byron also exploited the theme of incest and rejected the romance and novelistic convention of companionate, heterosexual relations in his works, he regarded Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother as an ideal of drama, describing it as “a tragedy of the highest order, and not a puling love-play.”¹¹⁶ Byron’s praise of Walpole’s tragedy is particularly striking in the gendered language that he used. Admiring the powerful scenes of love and guilt, Byron classified The Mysterious Mother as a manly performance, in contrast to other “puling”—whining, flimsy, nonsensical, and therefore effeminate—“love-play[s].” In the same preface, Byron drew attention to Walpole’s social position (hence asserting his own) by

¹¹³ Ibid. 295.

¹¹⁴ Monthly Review (1798), Frank, ed., Appendix B, Otranto and Mysterious Mother 296.

¹¹⁵ George Gordon Byron, Preface to Marino Faliero, Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works, ed. Jerome McGann, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 305.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

pinpointing the literary merits of Walpole's works and arguing that Walpole deserved "a higher place than any living writer, be he who he may."¹¹⁷ Coleridge, on the other hand, severely criticised The Mysterious Mother in The Table Talk in March 1834. He condemned the play as "the most disgusting, detestable, vile composition that ever came from the hand of man," and, in turn, marginalised it as a manifestation of deviant masculinity, affirming that "[n]o one with a spark of true manliness, of which Horace Walpole had none, could have written it."¹¹⁸

Besides Byron, there were other admirers of Walpole in the nineteenth century. Walter Scott, for instance, preferred the marvel and miracle of Walpole's Otranto to the "explained supernatural" mode of subsequent Gothic writers such as Ann Radcliffe, and extolled Walpole's "poetical talent" in The Mysterious Mother, despite his acknowledgement of the "radical defect" of the "unnaturally horrid" double incest theme.¹¹⁹ Many other responses, however, concurred with Coleridge's in their prioritisation of the serious, moral, and practical ends of artistic works. Especially after some of Walpole's private correspondence was published (first in Mary Berry's 1798 edition of Walpole's works and later in several collections and editions of his letters), critics and readers increasingly viewed Walpole in the context of his "aristocratic" frivolity, and the language that they used often employed the anti-aristocratic vocabulary that I discussed in my Introduction. This backlash against Walpole and his work presented him as an unmanly figure motivated by a highly suspect desire for attention. In the nineteenth century, almost every branch of Walpole's artistic achievements was received negatively. An 1818 unsigned account of Strawberry Hill in Descriptions to the Plates of Thames Scenery, for example,

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Coleridge, Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Coleridge, (1835), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 148.

¹¹⁹ See Scott's Introduction to The Castle of Otranto (1811), and his "Remarks on English Tragedy" in The Modern British Drama, vol. 1, in Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 88-99, 147.

maintained that Walpole's Gothic villa was not only built to exhibit "taste" and "superior polish and amusement" but also to solicit "flattery."¹²⁰ Naming the place "a cabinet of curious prettiness," the writer interpreted Walpole's ostentation as an index of his character, proclaiming how "little of masculine energy or mental capaciousness" his house contained, since it "proceeded from the structure of his mind ... or his physical constitution, which was naturally weak."¹²¹ Such a feminisation of Walpole's Gothic style was similarly evident in Hawkins's Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches and Memoirs in 1822. Condemning "the incongruity of the material with the style of the building," Hawkins equated Walpole's modern, artificial Gothic work with feminine weakness, as she described how "his external decorations"—"so childish and so little able to face injury"—"frequently provoked the wanton malice of the lower classes, who, almost as certainly as new pinnacles were put to a pretty Gothic entrance, broke them off."¹²²

The Castle of Otranto also began to lose its appeal among the nineteenth-century public. The novel was reprinted and twice included in library series, and in 1834 it was published along with Beckford's Vathek and Lewis's The Bravo of Venice, a fact which suggests that Walpole was still acknowledged as a literary pioneer who contributed to the development of Gothic fiction. The number of individual publications of Otranto dramatically decreased, nonetheless, from eleven editions between 1764 and 1800 to three editions in the nineteenth century. Attitudes towards the novel became more hostile, too, particularly regarding its treatment of the supernatural. William Hazlitt, for example, thought the novel "dry, meagre, and without effect," calling its supernatural effects "the pasteboard machinery of a

¹²⁰ Unsigned account from Descriptions to the Plates of Thames Scenery Engraved by W. B. Cooke & G. Cooke (1818), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 251.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 250-51.

¹²² Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches and Memoirs (1822), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 253.

pantomime,” “a matter-of-fact impossibility,” and “a fixture” that could only “shock the senses, and have no purchase upon the imagination.”¹²³ Hazlitt’s comment anticipated the only two dramatic adaptations of Otranto in the nineteenth century: Gilbert A’Beckett’s “Grand Romantic Extravaganza” at the Haymarket (April 1848), and the unperformed The Castle of Otranto; or, Harlequin and the Giant Helmet. A New Romantic Comic Pantomime (1854).¹²⁴ Unlike Jephson’s The Count of Narbonne, these adaptations reflected the low opinion of the public towards Walpole’s novel, downgrading his original tragedy to tawdry comic pantomime.

While admiring the novelty of Walpole’s Gothic romance, Scott noted in the Quarterly Review in April 1818 that it “cannot surely be termed a work of much power.”¹²⁵ In reading Walpole’s letters, Scott remarked, “we perpetually discover a laborious effort to introduce the lightness of the French *badinage*, into a masculine and somewhat rough language.”¹²⁶ All his writings, as Scott put it, were of “a French marquis ... to whom it might be permitted to take up a pen for an idle hour, but not to retain it until it soiled his fingers.”¹²⁷ The marginalisation of Walpole’s mode of performance is obvious here, as Scott opposed “French” frivolity and effeminacy to British sobriety, simplicity and manliness. In the same manner, Thomas Green wrote in his diary in February 1799 of Walpole’s “playful ease” with his writings, betraying “a sickly fastidious delicacy, on the very verge of affectation.”¹²⁸ Like several other critics, Green deployed the rhetoric of disease which, notwithstanding Walpole’s displays of patriotism, portrayed his playfulness and “aristocratic” self-representation as corrupting of British masculinity. Isaac D’Israeli saw Walpole’s

¹²³ William Hazlitt, Lectures on the Comic Writers (1819), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 101.

¹²⁴ Frank, ed., “Publication History of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother,” Otranto and Mysterious Mother, 46.

¹²⁵ Quarterly Review (1818), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 178-79.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 179.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Thomas Green’s diary, 28 Feb. 1799, Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 170.

dilettantish literary works as evidence of luxury and effeminacy, referring to them as “plants of sickly delicacy, which could never endure the open air, and only lived in the artificial atmosphere of a private collection.”¹²⁹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his review of Walpole’s letters to Sir Horace Mann in 1833, even compared Walpole’s writings to “*pâté-de-fois-gras*” which “owes it[s] excellence to the diseases of the wretched animal which furnishes it, and would be good for nothing if it were not made of livers preternaturally swollen.”¹³⁰ Macaulay ridiculed Walpole’s multiple forms of self-representation, which he claimed were a function of Walpole’s exhibitionism. Like Madame du Deffand who named her friend “l’hiéroglyphe Walpole,”¹³¹ Macaulay castigated Walpole’s protean, undecipherable character. As he put it, Walpole was “the most eccentric, the most artificial, the most fastidious, the most capricious of men ... His features were covered by mask within mask. When the outer disguise of obvious affectation was removed, you were still as far as ever from seeing the real man.”¹³²

In a changing society in which the middling ranks and their more rigid moral and sexual precepts were increasingly gaining hold over society at large, Walpole’s penchant for fluid, plural and, sometimes, subversive forms of representation could not but provoke a sharp reaction. Walpole was not alone in appealing to the Gothic as a means of asserting an “aristocratic” identity, however. Later in the 1780s, William Beckford transformed Walpolean Gothic into extravagant Oriental romance. His *Vathek* and its accompanying “Episodes,” as I will argue in the next chapter, dramatically reworked the norms and conventions of the eighteenth-century Oriental tale, and in the process glorified the “old regime” of aristocratic excess, highlighting

¹²⁹ Isaac D’Israeli, *Calamities of Authors* (1812), Sabor, ed., *Horace Walpole* 283-84.

¹³⁰ *Edinburgh Review* (1833), Sabor, ed., *Horace Walpole* 312.

¹³¹ qtd. in Morris R. Brownell, *The Prime Minister of Taste: A Portrait of Horace Walpole* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001) 303.

¹³² *Edinburgh Review* (1833), Sabor, ed., *Horace Walpole* 312.

their protagonists' transgressive conduct, and thereby taking the rebellious, subversive potential of the Gothic to a new extreme.

CHAPTER 2

WILLIAM BECKFORD: “ÉPATER LE BOURGEOIS”¹

I fear I shall never be half so sapient, nor good for anything in this world, but composing airs, building towers, forming gardens, collecting old Japan, and writing a journey to China or the moon.²

So Beckford wrote to Lady Catherine Hamilton from Paris, during his return to England from the Grand Tour in 1781. As is also true of Walpole, Beckford’s artistic interests were bound up with his desire to divert from, if not to rebel against, the responsible, parliamentary life that his family had set out for him. From a very early age, Beckford’s imaginative works were deemed by his elders as illicit. At 11 he was compelled to burn what his tutor called his “splendid heaps of Oriental drawings, &c.”³ His romantic and fanciful travel diary, Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents, was also suppressed by his family in 1783 as incompatible with his future political occupation. After Beckford entered Parliament as an MP for Wells in 1784, his passion for the arts did not wane but, on the contrary, developed into a full-blown pursuit of reputation. During this time, he regularly corresponded with Samuel Henley upon his writing of a series of Oriental tales, Vathek and its episodes, which, Beckford hoped, would establish him as a distinguished author of Oriental fiction. Beckford’s involvement in politics was therefore not much different from Walpole’s in that it helped to license his more trifling and sportive engagement with literary composition—though it has to be noted that his parliamentary career was abruptly

¹ The phrase is from Herbert Grimsditch’s Introduction to the 1958 edition of Vathek, qtd. in Dan J. McNutt, The Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Selected Texts (Folkstone, Kent: Dawson, 1975) 286.

² qtd. in Brian Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill (Stroud: Nonsuch, 1979) 96.

³ Ibid. 40.

ended by the scandal of his sexual affair with William Courtenay, the event that resulted in Beckford's ostracism, and meant that for the rest of his life he was never quite integrated in English society.

In his introduction to Vathek in 1958, Herbert Grimsditch remarked that Beckford's Oriental romance reflected the author's propensity to shock or "épater le bourgeois."⁴ It is worth noting here that Beckford's father was a Whig merchant who inherited a vast fortune from West Indian plantations and, as many contemporaries believed, entered Parliament mainly to guard his interest in the price of sugar;⁵ Beckford's mother, on the other hand, was a committed evangelical, mocked by her son as a member of the "Methodistical dowagers."⁶ In what follows, I will argue that Beckford's "aristocratic" self-fashioning might be read as a product of his upbringing, since he at once sought to efface his family's mercantile background and defined himself in his writings against emergent conceptions of morality, sobriety and restraint. This chapter will explore the trajectory of Beckford's works to see how they were shaped by events and pressures that Beckford encountered at different times in his life. It will start from the 1770s, in which Beckford produced his adolescent *jeux d'esprit*, Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters and The Vision, and it will go on to concentrate on his Oriental tales of the 1780s during which time Beckford became more concerned with reader reception and the establishment of his distinctive authorial identity. Following his preoccupation with his social rehabilitation in England after the Courtenay scandal, Beckford's bourgeois-baiting inclinations seem to be less obvious in his works from the 1790s onwards. While his liberal political position is still evident in his anonymous satires,

⁴ Herbert Grimsditch, Introduction to Vathek (1958), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 286.

⁵ Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 15.

⁶ qtd. in Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 37.

Modern Novel Writing and Azemia, Beckford also turned his attention to the presentation of Fonthill Abbey, and assumed a number of striking if idiosyncratic patriotic poses.

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS AND THE VISION

Beckford claimed to have written Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters (1780) as early as 1777, when he was 17.⁷ It originated as a private diversion, with Beckford telling Cyrus Redding that he aimed partly to parody “the ridiculous memoirs and criticisms on certain Dutch painters of whom he had read in ‘Vies des Peintres Flamands,’” and partly to mock his housekeeper’s improvised and absurd explanations of paintings to Fonthill visitors.⁸ Among Beckford’s juvenilia, Biographical Memoirs was probably the work most approved by his family, since it reflected Beckford’s precocious knowledge of art and literature, and also his social status as a member of the upper class who had an easy familiarity with well-known paintings as a result of his education and his father’s collection of Old Masters. This work established Beckford’s position as an amateur writer for whom writing was a recreation rather than an occupation or a serious mission to win public favour. John Lettice, Beckford’s tutor, admired the memoirs’ “beauties of no common sort” and,

⁷ Philip Ward, Introduction, Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters (1780), by William Beckford (Cambridge: Oleander, 1977). No pag.

⁸ Cyrus Redding, Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill, Author of “Vathek” (1859), vol. 1., Beckfordiana: The William Beckford Website, 2005, Centre international d’étude du XVIIIe siècle, Ferney-Voltaire, 18 Oct. 2006 <<http://beckford.c18.net/beckfordiana.html>>.

with the plan of their publication in mind, delightedly remarked that he did not “imagine common readers entirely competent to [judge] them.”⁹

The book is divided into five mini-biographies of different painters. All the main five characters are fictitious, but in all his narratives Beckford also introduced real figures such as Gerrit Dou, Hans Memling and Francis van Cuyck van Mierhop,¹⁰ hence producing a ludicrous burlesque of artists and painting schools, especially Flemish realism, and of the standard, biographical approach to art. The artist of his second story, Og of Basan, for example, is said to be so absorbed in wild, picturesque landscape painting that he decides to live a primitive life in a cavern. In the fifth story, Watersouchy, friend of the still life painter Francis van Cuyck van Mierhop, is said to have mastered the same branch of painting, portraying “the most perfect fillet of veal that ever made the mouth of man to water,” and writing essays that take more than fifty pages to “describe exactly the masterly group of the gossips, the demureness of the maiden aunts, the puling infant of its swading-cloths, the gloss of its ribbons, the fringe of the table-cloth, and the effect of light and shade on a salver adorned with custard-cups and jelly-glasses.”¹¹

Biographical Memoirs is Walpolean in its playfulness and in the obvious pleasure that the writer takes in confounding his readers’ expectations. Beckford inserted an editor’s advertisement, which praises the anonymous author’s depiction of “nature and art, together with some sketches of human life and manners,” which, in the biographical form, is more reliable and convincing than that in novels and romances.¹² Far from being a realistic representation of painters and their works, however, the book is an art spoof or satire, central to which is, as Malcolm Jack

⁹ qtd. in Lewis Melville, The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill (London: Heinemann, 1910) 69.

¹⁰ Ward, Introduction, Biographical Memoirs.

¹¹ Beckford, Biographical Memoirs 124-25, 128.

¹² *Ibid.*, “The Editor’s Advertisement.” No pag.

notes, Beckford's juvenile, "high-spirited sense of fun" and desire to "mock all that is held serious by his elders."¹³ To Beckford, it was a "laughable book."¹⁴ Many of his contemporaries, though, were not only perplexed by but also hostile towards the work, as is evident in the Monthly Review's notice of it in 1780:

On the first view of this performance, it naturally occurs that the Author meant to draw some modern or living characters; but if such was his intention, we confess that we are not [among] that class of readers who can identify any one of them in this mingled mass of true and fictitious history. The Author, however, is by no means a bad or uninformed Writer. In his performance the Reader will meet with some good descriptions, and some humour; which last however, loses its effect, through the 'ill humour' into which the Reader is continually thrown, by the vexatious obscurity that pervades the whole work.¹⁵

Like Walpole's Otranto hoax, Beckford's attempt to dupe his readers met with some critical disapproval. While the reviewer here might be seen to acknowledge the satirical agenda of Beckford's work, he also refused to endorse or acquiesce in Beckford's project, defiantly proclaiming himself "not of that class of readers" who would be amused with the writer's playfulness, which he diagnosed as the effect of "ill humour."

Unlike the frivolous and archly sophisticated Biographical Memoirs, The Vision, also written in 1777, might be read as a product of Beckford's naïve and personal imaginative investment in the Orient. It was dedicated to his art teacher, Alexander Cozens, and considered by Beckford as a confidential work, with Beckford warning Cozens not to show his writing to anybody, since "the greatest number of readers would despise, ridicule or make neither head nor Tail of it."¹⁶ In The Vision, the Orient can be seen to offer Beckford an ideal world and a means of

¹³ Malcolm Jack, Introduction, Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader, by William Beckford (London: Pickering, 1993) xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁴ qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 72.

¹⁵ Monthly Review (Dec. 1780): 469.

¹⁶ Chapman, Beckford 46-47.

escape from his future adult responsibilities. His fancy was inspired by bizarre, fantastic stories about the East that Cozens often related, as well as by the wild landscape of Switzerland that he was exposed to during his Grand Tour in 1777-78. As Beckford told his sister Elizabeth in April 1778, this was a period in which he was “enraptured with the orientals,” an indulgence that he classified as an “amusement” opposed to the “occupation” represented by his studies.¹⁷ His letters of this period, particularly to Cozens, are filled with exotic names and characters, and relate how Beckford immersed himself in “phantastic visions,” imagining himself, for instance, wandering “in Africa, on the brink of the *Nile* beneath the Mountains of *Amara*,”¹⁸ while declaring how “firmly” he “resolved to be a Child forever.”¹⁹

When Beckford wrote The Vision, different kinds of Oriental fictions, both translations and imitations, would already have been familiar to contemporary readers. At the start of the century, many writers adopted exotic, fabulous and supernatural elements from “original,” translated narratives, but at the same time subordinated those elements to a moralistic or philosophical function.²⁰ Joseph Addison’s “The Vision of Mirzah,” No. 159 of The Spectator (1 September 1711), for example, relates the story of the Egyptian Mirzah who, under the guidance of a “genius,” meditates upon the vision of people crossing a bridge above a river, and is enlightened by its allegory of human misery, mortality, and eternal life after death. Richard Steele’s “The History of Santon Barsisa” in The Guardian, No. 148 (31 August 1713) employs the Faustian framework of the devil’s temptation of Santon Barsisa to seduce a princess in order to illustrate the Santon’s moral weakness and subsequent punishment—the framework that Matthew Lewis later used to legitimise

¹⁷ qtd. in Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 67.

²⁰ See Martha Pike Conant, The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia UP, 1908) xxvi.

his sexually explicit Gothic novel, The Monk (1796). Like Addison and Steele, Samuel Johnson wrote instructive Oriental tales in The Rambler and The Idler. His famous History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759), which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter, focuses on the theme of the inescapability of discontent. John Hawkesworth, an editor of and major contributor to The Adventurer, later reworked Johnson's philosophical fiction into a moral, domestic tale of rivalry between two brothers, and the triumph of virtue over vice, in Almorán and Hamet (1761).

By the time that Beckford wrote his Vision, then, didactic Oriental tales had for some time been advancing both the consolations of religion and the moral values of sobriety and restraint. As Ros Ballaster has argued, the idea of Oriental despotism proved especially fruitful to eighteenth-century writers, as it allowed them further to develop "plots, structures, [and] themes from the 'English' novel," above all perhaps the "models of 'reformed' masculinity and heroic femininity."²¹ In The History of Nourjahad (1765), for example, Frances Sheridan had her female characters reform the despotic protagonist, who, after being granted wealth and immortality by a genius, "gave himself up to pleasures, ... threw off all restraint, ... [and] plunged at once into a tide of luxurious enjoyments."²² Clara Reeve, in her preface to The Progress of Romance (1785), argued that narratives of a marvellous nature could provide as much "useful instruction" and "rational and elegant amusement" as modern novels,²³ and her revision of The Castle of Otranto sought to transform

²¹ Ros Ballaster, "Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain," A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 76.

²² Frances Sheridan, The History of Nourjahad, Oriental Tales, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 131.

²³ Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners; With Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of it, on them Respectively; In a Course of Evening Conversations (Dublin, 1785), English Short Title Catalogue Microfilm: reel 19512, no. 03, xvi.

Walpole's extravagant Gothic fiction into a didactic tale of virtue rewarded and domestic felicity re-established. In The Progress of Romance, Reeve suggested, through the character of Euphrasia, a list of meritorious modern tales, which included Rasselas, Almorán and Hamet, and Nourjahad.²⁴ She also published as an appendix to this work "The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt," which celebrates the courageous Charoba, who, with the help of her maidservant, succeeds in defending herself and her people against the tyrannical king Gebirus.

Beckford's The Vision, however, is markedly different from previous Oriental tales written in English. To begin with, it revolves around a figure that we are encouraged to read as Beckford himself. In the form of a first-person narrative, the work relates how the young hero, named William, steals out of his house one night to wander in some woods, when he suddenly enters a very different realm; initially, the description of William's wandering alternates between realistic pictures of his natural surroundings and his surreal, dreamlike vision of them. The autobiographical resonance of the tale is clear, as the hero contemplates the future which is mapped out for him, consisting of "cabinets and councils," "debates," and "watchful consultations," and determines that he will "resist them," and will not let them deprive him of "the midnight moon" or the pleasures of the imagination.²⁵ The narrator then meets Moisasour, a Bramin, and the "emerald-eyed" (9) Indian, Nouronihar, in a grotto. As an intruder in this hidden world, William accepts the Bramin's challenge to go through an initiation rite in exchange for a secret knowledge of remote, Eastern antiquity. Despite knowing that the "purification" (12) will involve acute, though momentary, sufferings—that he has to encounter "flames," "severe shocks," and "dreadful suspense" (12)—William is firm in his

²⁴ Ibid. 60-61.

²⁵ William Beckford, The Vision, Vathek and Other Stories 5. Subsequent references to The Vision will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

decision. After the initiation, he is rapidly transported to the splendid subterranean “halls of the glorious” (21), which, in contrast to the hell-like Hall of Eblis in Vathek, welcome the young narrator into a paradisiacal realm. The rest of the narrative meticulously depicts William’s sensual (though not sexual) pleasures, as he is invited by Moisasour and Nouronihar to view a variety of wonderful, secret grottos; to see magnificent valleys of ancient Africa; to taste exquisite juices of exotic fruits and vegetables; and to hear the unknown mysteries of the Bramins who live in the centre of the earth. At times, the narrator’s penetration into these forbidden secrets is described along with his sense of guilt—“a strange mixture of pleasure and pain” (6)—and fear that he may have to face another initiation, which, according to Moisasour, could be “Death” itself.²⁶ Nevertheless, William’s pact with the Bramin secures his innocence rather than damnation. Ecstatic sensation, not the prospect of imminent ruin, is what sustains his narration. The story breaks off at the point where William happily reunites with Nouronihar in a grotto, in which both delight themselves in music and sumptuous food—a promise of further voluptuous pleasure that Beckford’s tale might have embellished had he finished it.

Though not written for publication, The Vision is a groundbreaking work. Instead of presenting his characters as entirely Oriental, or portraying his hero as a prisoner of his barbarous Eastern counterparts as earlier captivity narratives had done, Beckford introduced the theme of a European’s pact with an Oriental, who, in the story, is intellectually superior to the young protagonist. Rather than separating the Occidental from the Oriental, Beckford seemed to be interested in the blending of the two: though there is no sexual relationship between William and Nouronihar in the story, the intimacy between the two suggests that such a relationship might

²⁶ Here I quote from Beckford, The Vision (1777), Beckfordiana: The William Beckford Website, 2005, Centre international d’étude du XVIIIe siècle, Ferney-Voltaire. 19 Oct. 2006 <<http://beckford.c18.net/beckfordiana.html>>.

have been developed had Beckford continued the narrative. While Beckford broached the Faustian theme of the overreacher's quest for secret knowledge, he did not give any hint of the punishment—or moral reformation—in which such a process might culminate. Beckford's youthful Orientalism, moreover, is distinctive in its visionariness, which continually draws the reader's attention to various exotic and fanciful images of the subterranean halls, enchanting grottos, and so on. Whether satirical or experimental, Beckford's first works were defined against current literary convention. In the 1780s, as my next section will demonstrate, Beckford revised this distinctively adolescent method in turn, his work at once paying tribute to the didactic framework of the Oriental tale and more insistently exploring the transgressions of its protagonists.

VATHEK

In his notes to The Giaour (1813), Byron praised Vathek for its “correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination” and viewed it alongside Johnson's Rasselas, stating that the latter's “‘Happy Valley’ will not bear a comparison with the ‘Hall of Eblis.’”²⁷ Byron's eulogy of Vathek distinguishes Beckford's elaborate Oriental description from the generalised exoticism of other tales, and his contrast between Johnson's “Happy Valley” and Beckford's “Hall of Eblis” also draws attention to the role of didacticism and the metaphor of the journey in the two tales, as the former marks the beginning of Rasselas's search for a purpose in life while the latter the punishment of Vathek and the end of his quest. In this

²⁷ George Gordon Byron, The Giaour, Lord Byron: The Major Works, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 246-47.

section, I will argue that the renowned eccentricity of Beckford's tale is best understood by considering both its literary predecessors and its contemporary reception.

Byron's juxtaposition of Johnson's tale and Beckford's is worth exploring further. In Rasselas, Johnson's fabular framework is evident from the start, as his first paragraph entreats the reader to "attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia" as a lesson for those "who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow."²⁸ The Happy Valley is the luxurious place where all Abissinian princes and princesses reside but where Rasselas finds himself trapped in a state of ennui. After conversing with Imlac, a man of learning, he is curious to see the world outside and decides to leave the valley to make his "choice of life" (56), as he tells Imlac, hoping that in the choice he makes he will be better contented. The journey allows Rasselas to witness various conditions of men and it finally disabuses him of his illusions, making him realise that discontent is an inevitable and inescapable fact of human life.

Vathek's journey, on the other hand, is of a totally different nature from that of Rasselas. While Rasselas's thirst for knowledge is motivated by his desire for a contentment beyond the transient, worldly pleasure of the Happy Valley, Vathek's curiosity is grounded solely upon his ignoble, insatiable need for sensual gratification. In Beckford's tale, Johnson's Happy Valley is rewritten as the complex of Palaces of the Five Senses, offering Vathek infinite pleasures from music, perfume, women, food and expensive curiosities. Vathek's belief is that of a

²⁸ Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, Rasselas and Other Tales, ed. Gwin J. Kolb (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 7. Subsequent references to Rasselas will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

hedonist who rejects Islamic precepts and thinks that it is unnecessary “to make a hell of this world to enjoy paradise in the next.”²⁹ While living his life in extreme decadence, Vathek is tempted, not by deep, enlightened conversation with a wise man, but by the allure of the black merchant, or Giaour, who presents him dazzling, curious objects, and later persuades him to abjure Mahomet in exchange for the promise of treasures in the Palace of Subterranean Fire. Vathek’s journey to Istakhar encompasses blasphemous and vicious acts to prove him an absolute hedonist and an enemy of Mahomet. The highbrow, philosophic, and spiritual quest of Johnson’s *Rasselas* was therefore transformed by Beckford into the sensational adventure of Vathek which ends with the severe punishment of the caliph’s “unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds” (120) in the Hall of Eblis.

The figure of Vathek seems to derive in large part from the cultural stereotype of the Oriental despot. Since the seventeenth century, historical accounts such as Paul Rycaut’s Present State of the Ottoman Empire (1668) and History of the Turkish Empire (1678) portrayed, according to Ballaster, eastern emperors’ “degeneracy in the seraglio, in the shape of sexual excess, the influence of favourites ... and a retreat from political and domestic concerns.”³⁰ Schahriar, the sultan in the frame tale of the Arabian Nights, is also a brutal and oppressive monarch who marries a different woman every night and has her executed in the morning. In English Oriental tales, portraits of Oriental despotism were pervasive, but they were subordinated to the moralising purposes of the writers concerned. *Rasselas*, as Srinivas Aravamudan puts it, is “the Enlightenment’s benevolent counterpart to the Oriental antitype,” since “the prince’s curiosity is that of the scholar’s disinterested

²⁹ William Beckford, *Vathek*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 1. Subsequent references to *Vathek* will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

³⁰ Ballaster, Fabulous Orient 47.

equanimity or the enlightened despot's urge to use his absolute power to do good."³¹ In Sheridan's tale, Nourjahad's decadence and Faustian aspiration for eternal life and riches are finally checked, as he repents and becomes a philanthropist. While the political and sexual tyrants in Hawkesworth's Almorán and Hamet and Reeve's "History of Charoba" are punished, their wickedness is counterbalanced and subdued by the virtue of good characters.

Beckford's Oriental despot looms large in the text. Virtuous and pious characters such as reverend santons and mullahs are introduced in the narrative, but they serve primarily as victims of the caliph's mischief. While he is presented as an evil tyrant, Vathek is also a source of entertainment and laughter. His character was drawn in part from Barthélémy D'Herbelot's Bibliothèque Orientale in which the terrifying historical Caliph Vathek was described as possessing "a baleful eye" with which "even on his deathbed he directed an angry glare at one of his attendants," making the man instantly "los[e] consciousness and collapse[...] on another attendant near him."³² Beckford's opening paragraph similarly focuses on the "baleful eye" of the caliph, but the way in which this is described reduces the supposedly sublime character of Vathek to the level of absurdity:

His figure was pleasing and majestic; but when he was angry, one of his eyes became so terrible, that no person could bear to behold it; and the wretch upon whom it was fixed, instantly fell backward, and sometimes expired. For fear, however, of depopulating his dominions and making his palace desolate, he but rarely gave way to his anger. (1)

Vathek's overreaching aspiration—"he wished to know everything; even sciences that did not exist" (3)—points to the Faustian framework that Beckford earlier

³¹ Srinivas Aravamudan, Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804 (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) 205, 206.

³² qtd. in Aravamudan, Tropicopolitans 214.

alluded to in The Vision. The structure of Vathek, however, is more complete in its presentation of the protagonist's transgressive behaviour and his punishment. While The Vision's "William" represents Beckford's adolescent wish to escape from his future public responsibility, and is only a naïve intruder on Moissasour's secret (but also seemingly benign) world, the Caliph is a considerably more complicated figure. Through his character, there are obvious ways in which Beckford transformed the archetypal narrative of Faust. As Aravamudan asserts, Vathek obviously lacks those noble qualities such as stoicism, "[c]onsistency," or even "honor" that would identify him as a Faustian tragic hero.³³ In the story, he proves an unrestrained, infantile and impulsive character whose aspiration is dominated solely by his base appetite for sensual gratification. As Beckford's hyperbolic narration attests, Vathek is capable of consuming "three hundred" exquisite dishes daily (7), and is unabashed at grovelling upon the ground to lap water from a fountain when plagued with tormented thirst. While the Giaour's mention of subterranean treasures extracts Vathek's earnest promise to take a journey to Istakhar, the voluptuous life with Nouronihar at Fakreddin's palace equally diverts the caliph's attention, retaining him at the Emir's until Carathis comes to remind him of his deal with the Giaour.

Beckford can be seen to take pleasure in confounding and toying with his readers' expectations. The general conception of Oriental sexual despotism, evident in images of female slaves in seraglios, is reversed in the comical scene when Vathek's carriage catches fire and "one of his Ethiopian wives" rescues him by "clasp[ing] him in her arms" and "thr[owing] him upon her shoulder, like a sack of dates" (48). The effects of effeminacy in Beckford's tale are also presented without any moralistic gloss. Gulchenrouz, for instance, is described as "the most delicate

³³ Ibid. 217.

and lovely creature in the world” (65) who spends most of his time in the harem dancing, playing music, writing verses and occasionally wearing a woman’s dress that makes him even “more feminine” (66) than his cousin, Nouronihar. Though he is despised by his elder relatives, Gulchenrouz’s innocence is preserved to the end of the story, as Beckford had him saved from Carathis by the good old genius who confers upon him happiness and “the boon of perpetual childhood” (98). Homoeroticism in Vathek is likewise so exuberantly delineated that the work appears to be celebrating such sexual excess. When the caliph lures fifty “lovely innocents” (25) to be the Giaour’s sacrificial victims, in particular, his pederastic preferences become a hilarious entertainment, as he commands the boys to undress so as to reveal “the suppleness and grace of their delicate limbs” (26), while he himself gradually strips off his expensive, glittering clothes and accessories, and offers them as prizes to the naked boys to fetch and simultaneously fall into the gulph where the Giaour is awaiting. Beckford, furthermore, seemed to revise the figure of Nouronihar as she had appeared in The Vision. Instead of being a representative of exotic charm and delight, Nouronihar in Vathek is “full of wanton gaiety” (57), conspiring with her servants to tease Bababalouk, Vathek’s chief eunuch, and make him fall from his swing into the bath and slip and “dance like a jack-pudding” (59). Far from being an agent of moral reform like heroines in so many other Oriental tales, Nouronihar is a negative influence that leads Vathek to his ruin, as her desire for the beautiful carbuncle of Giamschid compels her to press Vathek to resume his journey and search for the treasures of the pre-adamite sultans.

Functioning as the tempter who offers Vathek moral choices, the Giaour seems to be modelled upon the Oriental supernatural agent of the genie who possesses magical powers, a figure who would have been familiar to readers brought

up on the Arabian Nights. At the outset, the Giaour presents himself as an Indian merchant whose bizarre appearance is as irresistibly curious and attractive to Vathek as his splendid merchandise. As Beckford put it, the caliph is astounded by his “blacker than ebony” body, his “huge eyes, which glowed like firebrands,” and his “hideous” laugh revealing “long amber-coloured teeth, bestreaked with green” (6). Beckford’s grotesque representation of the Giaour is, indeed, an exaggerated version of Eastern tales’ marvel and miracle: when Vathek is irritated by his “horrid grimaces” and “loud shouts of laughter” (18), and starts to kick him down the steps of his throne, for example, the Giaour is ludicrously described as collecting himself into a ball, drawing the caliph and other people to follow and repeat their kicking:

[B]eing both short and plump, he [the Giaour] collected himself into a ball, and rolled round on all sides, at the blows of his assailants, who pressed after him, wherever he turned, with an eagerness beyond conception, whilst their numbers were every moment increasing. The ball indeed, in passing from one apartment to another, drew every person after it that came in its way; insomuch, that the whole palace was thrown into confusion and resounded with a tremendous clamour. (18)

Vathek was originally written in French, and the extravagance of the work, its veering between the sublime and the ridiculous, seems to have much more in common with a French tradition of satirical Orientalism than with its more earnest and moralistic English counterpart. French Oriental fiction, most famously represented by the works of Montesquieu and Voltaire, as Jack explains, “had always served the satirical purpose of mocking society and its institutions and debunking all that was held precious by the political elite.”³⁴ As for Vathek and the Episodes of Vathek, Beckford was particularly influenced by his uncle Anthony Hamilton’s Oriental tales, such as Fleur d’Epine and Les Quatres Facardins, which

³⁴ Jack, Introduction, Vathek and Other Stories xix.

satirise, according to Roger Lonsdale, “the vogue for the Arabian Nights and their imitators at the French court.”³⁵ During his composition of the tales, Beckford himself jokingly stated to William Henley in a letter of April 1782 that “I think Count Hamilton will smile upon me when we are introduced to each other in paradise [sic].”³⁶ Hamilton’s Les Quatres Facardins (translated as The History of the Four Facardins in 1760), for instance, includes marvellous figures such as a hairy giant and an old man with a three-foot beard, as well as the severed arms of a fair princess spinning on a wheel of ebony, and the adventures of one of its heroes to find shoes that fit her tiny feet. Like Vathek, Hamilton’s tale seems to embody a simultaneous fascination with and disdain for Oriental fiction. In Britain, where critics tended to focus more on the moral and philosophical merits of Oriental tales, this kind of playfulness was commonly stigmatised as unmeaning French frivolity. When Matthew Lewis translated and revised the Four Facardins in 1808, the Critical Review categorised it as “a farrago of nonsense,” referring to Count Hamilton’s original version as a “whimsical species of composition” which “abounded in some Parisian coteries during the time of Louis the fourteenth” and “must have furnished very pleasant pastime to the particular societies for whose amusement they were immediately composed.”³⁷ The review further compared Hamilton’s work to Walpole’s burlesques of Oriental fiction, the Hieroglyphic Tales, which were acceptable only on the grounds that they were written as a private recreation on the part of the author: “these trifles,” the reviewer asserted, “we believe were merely intended by him [Walpole] for the Christmas amusement of some young ladies who

³⁵ Lonsdale, Introduction, Vathek xxvi-vii.

³⁶ qtd. in Lonsdale, Introduction, Vathek xxvi.

³⁷ Critical Review (Dec. 1808): 355-66, British Fiction 1800-1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception, 2004, Cardiff U, 25 Sept. 2006 <http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/title/Details.asp?title=1808_A071>.

honoured him with their company and good-humour, and were brought to light only by the aid of editorial industry.”³⁸

Vathek, however, was not written exclusively for a French audience. When Beckford was still writing the episodes, he told Henley in March 1785 how he hoped that the latter would “one day or other introduce” his “plants,” his Oriental tales, to the “English soil.”³⁹ As Beckford’s correspondence with Henley shows, his plan was to publish first the original French Vathek and its episodes, and then their English translations. These Oriental tales were thus part of Beckford’s cultural ambition to establish himself, not only as an author, but also a literary avant-gardist who brought novelty to English fiction. As I have already suggested, though, Beckford experimented within what would have been to readers an already recognisable literary form. While Beckford indulged his readers in the comic and preposterous adventures of Vathek, he attempted to familiarise the tale’s conclusion by appearing to uphold the didacticism that characterises most eighteenth-century tales written in English. The final pages of the novel are filled with sublime, terrifying images: Istakhar and the Halls of Eblis, the tale reveals, are where Vathek and Nouronihar, like the pre-adamite Kings before them, meet their final damnation, “plunge[d] ... into the accursed multitude, there to wander in an eternity of unabating anguish” (119-20). The story ends with a moralising closure: “Such was, and such should be, the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds! Such shall be, the chastisement of that blind curiosity...and such the dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition ... ” (120).

Beckford’s warning to the reader to curb their “curiosity” and “ambition” echoes Johnson’s principal moral in Rasselas which, from the start, similarly

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 128.

cautions its readers to avoid “listen[ing] with credulity to the whisper of fancy, and pursu[ing] with eagerness the phantoms of hope” (7). At the same time, though, Beckford can be seen to invoke Johnson’s didacticism in order to undercut it. He reminds the reader that “the condition of man upon earth is to be—humble and ignorant” (120), but while the debauched and voracious caliph is punished as “a prey to grief without end and remorse without mitigation,” the languid, ignorant and effeminate Gulchenrouz is safe in “undisturbed tranquillity” and the “pure happiness of childhood” (120). In contrast to his collaborator Henley, Beckford seems not to have taken the moralisation of his Oriental narrative entirely seriously. It is striking nonetheless that many if not most of the early reviews of Vathek took its conclusion at face-value, and read the work as if it were a moral Oriental tale: The European Magazine (1786), for example, commended the novel as imparting a “moral of the greatest importance,”⁴⁰ while The Gentleman’s Magazine (1786) also praised “the morality of the design, and the excellence of the execution” which “entitle it [Vathek] to universal attention.”⁴¹

For other contemporary critics as well as for later generations of readers, however, Vathek’s closing tableau did not contain the distinctive and indeed bizarre features of the rest of the work. Along with its “sublime” conclusion, another feature that Beckford’s contemporaries distinguished in the novel was his often elaborate Oriental description, authenticated (though not always reliably so) by the copious notes that accompany the tale: while the European Magazine (1786) praised the author for being so “well acquainted with the customs of the East,”⁴² the Gentleman’s Magazine (1786) commented on the writer’s “most extensive erudition” in the work’s annotations, and the Critical Review (1786) pointed out the

⁴⁰ European Magazine (1786), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 305.

⁴¹ Gentleman’s Magazine (1786), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 305.

⁴² European Magazine (1786), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 305.

“intimate knowledge of oriental customs” which made the reviewer suspect that the work was not a translation at all.⁴³ Unlike his imaginative Vision and other earlier and contemporary Oriental romances, Beckford’s visionary style in Vathek incorporated a great deal of historical and cultural detail about the East. While his main character was built upon the historical figure of the Cailph Vathek described by D’Herbelot, other descriptions in the tale were supported by learned, factual accounts collected from Oriental tales, scholarly essays, dissertations and travel books. As meticulously referenced in the explanatory notes, Beckford’s Oriental representations include minute details of eastern geography, religion, customs and manners. It is an Orientalism that induced Byron to extol it (as I have already shown) for its “correctness of costume,”⁴⁴ and which made Vathek a pioneering pseudo-Oriental fiction that featured, according to Nigel Leask, “cultural typicality,” specific and authentic detail, rather than the generalised exoticism of other Oriental romances written in English.⁴⁵

In a survey article on literature and empire in the long eighteenth century, Saree Makdisi writes that Vathek is a transitional work that “signalled a momentous shift in British attitudes towards non-European cultures.”⁴⁶ The Oriental tale after Vathek, Makdisi puts it, “would ... not be something merely to be enjoyed for the sake of it, not a form that one could innocently take advantage of in order to impart moral and intellectual precepts,” but instead would be “drafted to the cause of British national and imperial self-definition,” as knowledge of the East came to

⁴³ Gentleman’s Magazine (1786) and Critical Review (1786), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 304-05.

⁴⁴ Byron, The Giaour 247.

⁴⁵ Nigel Leask, “‘Wandering in Eblis’: Absorption and Containment in Romantic Exoticism,” Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 180.

⁴⁶ Saree Makdisi, “Literature, national identity, and empire,” The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 65.

signify imperial power, an essential factor that differentiated the educated Western (British) reader from their uncivilised Eastern subjects.⁴⁷ Leask similarly stresses that the dense footnotes which so often accompanied British Orientalist representation from Beckford's Vathek onwards marked a new aesthetic treatment of the East, since they functioned to prevent the reader from being absorbed in the exotic by translating the Oriental otherness of the fictional narrative into a familiar Western "ethnological or historiographical discourse" that guaranteed the reader's positional and intellectual superiority.⁴⁸

Beckford's work, however, complicates any straightforward opposition between absorptive imaginative content on the one hand and serious scholarly containment on the other. Many annotations to Vathek, I would argue, might be read as extensions of the bizarreness of Beckford's fiction. Though some of Henley's notes were based on historical anecdotes, they were themselves sometimes as extraordinary as Beckford's imaginary tale. While relying on Elias Habesci's State of the Ottoman Empire, Henley's note on dwarfs, for example, seems as much a trifle to amuse the reader as a piece of scholarly investigation: "If a dwarf happen to be a mute," as Henley put it, "he is much esteemed; but if he be also an eunuch, he is regarded as a prodigy; and no pains or expense are spared to obtain him" (139). Elsewhere, however, Henley incorporated into his Orientalist research extensive parallels with Biblical, classical, and Renaissance texts, turning Beckford's Oriental romance into a compendium of universal history and culture. Beckford, in the 1816 edition of Vathek, substantially reduced Henley's classical and English references, while in some notes providing instead Hebrew etymologies that added a further level of information. Although Henley suggested to Beckford that he should have

⁴⁷ Ibid. 65.

⁴⁸ Leask, "'Wandering in Eblis'" 180-81.

punished Carathis more severely, Beckford refused to make any such change, explaining in his 1816 note that her peculiar punishment—she is “glanced off in a rapid whirl that rendered her invisible” (119)—was “very applicable” for her. There seem to be no specific principles underpinning the annotation of Vathek, and some of the notes, including those written by Henley as well as Beckford, confound readers as much as the narrative itself.

Through Vathek’s epicurean devotion, Beckford’s tale continuously dazzles its readers with a variety of sumptuous Oriental objects. As Andrew Elfenbein argues, Vathek can be seen to represent Beckford’s “brilliance as a collector.”⁴⁹ In real life, Beckford’s wealth allowed him to become, in Elfenbein’s words, “the champion collector of his day,” known for his consumption of luxurious products such as China dishes, Japanese lacquer, ebony furniture, porcelain, Old Master paintings, prints, and metalwork.⁵⁰ Throughout Beckford’s novel, Vathek is likewise presented as a consumer. Exquisite delicacies such as “lamb à la crème” (55), “cakes baked in silver ovens,” and “grapes from the banks of Tigris” (49) are elaborately described in the notes and explained as examples of the most splendid Eastern food. Like his account of the “balm of Mecca,” consisting of “oils perfumed with the odours of flowers” (142), Beckford’s detailed description of “baths of rose water,” the perfume of which “breathes a richer fragrance than is known” to the “more humid climates” of the West (141), accentuates the sensuality of Oriental luxury for the reader. Earlier Oriental tales illustrated the excessive consumption of Eastern rulers, but often with a critical or moralistic gloss. Johnson’s Happy Valley, for example, is described as a palace of “blissful captivity” (3) that confines Rasselas in the illusive bounds of pleasure and hence in a state of discontent. Nourjahad’s

⁴⁹ Andrew Elfenbein, Romantic Genius: the Prehistory of a Homosexual Role (New York: Columbia UP, 1999) 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 41.

preoccupation with “the beauties of...seraglios; the delicacies of ... table; and the excellence of ... musicians” is portrayed by Sheridan as “lazy and effeminate,” a behaviour that is later reformed with Nourjahad’s return to a more simple lifestyle and his distribution of his wealth to help the poor.⁵¹ Beckford’s account of a stereotypical “Eastern” sensuality, by contrast, carries little in the way of accompanying critique, appearing instead to extol, rather than reprobate, the culture of conspicuous consumption and libertinism, in opposition to other Oriental writings which are more moralistic and anti-aristocratic in their agenda.

As well as accentuating a stereotypical “Oriental” sensuality, however, Beckford also dealt in a much less familiar or digestible register of exotic detail: when the caliph’s carriage catches fire en route to Istakhar, for example, Vathek has to endure execrable food such as “a roasted wolf; vultures à la daube; aromatic herbs of the most acrid poignancy; rotten truffles; boiled thistles: and such other wild plants, as must ulcerate the throat and parch up the tongue” (49). This kind of detail further testifies to Beckford’s sense of his work as a fabulous Oriental fiction rather than a serious, moralised romance or the product of research alone. Beckford was clearly concerned to maintain this idea of his work, noting in his copy of Stanhope’s Greece in 1823-24 that he wrote Vathek in “two days and a night;”⁵² ten years later he told Redding that he composed Vathek “at one sitting” and that it took him “three days and two nights of hard labour” (“I never took off my clothes the whole time”).⁵³ Although his correspondence with Henley shows in detail their collaboration on Vathek from 1782 to 1786, Beckford’s overstatement of his rapid composition of Vathek reiterated his concern not to be associated with anything resembling hard work; Beckford’s reference to his “hard labour” ironically suggested that the tale

⁵¹ Sheridan, History of Nourjahad 127, 131.

⁵² qtd. in Lonsdale, Introduction, Vathek xiii.

⁵³ qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 124.

had been dashed off and carried out, as Robert Kiely puts it, “in a passionate fit of genius,”⁵⁴ rather than with the intellectual outlook of a scholar or the view to pecuniary interest of a professional writer. When Henley appeared to be engrossed in annotation, Beckford reminded him in his letter in April 1786 that “[n]otes are certainly necessary, and the diss[ertation] I myself should very much approve but fear the world might imagine I fancied myself the Author, not of an Arabian Tale, but an Epic Poem.”⁵⁵ Beckford, in other words, did not want to be pinned down as a specific kind of author. If he had to be labelled as anything, he would prefer to be considered a writer of imaginative Oriental fiction, not an editor, who, like Henley, made use of Oriental narrative as a site for the display of professional scholarship.

As I suggested at the outset, one way of explaining Beckford’s complex relation to his work is to consider its autobiographical resonance. There seems to be a personal connection between Beckford and his best-known Oriental tale, as Lady Hamilton noted when she stated that “Vathek was his favourite”: “To abuse Vathek he deemed a personal insult.”⁵⁶ During his lifetime, Beckford seemed to encourage the identification between himself and the caliph. His lavish lifestyle at Fonthill Abbey, for example, was seen as an enactment of the life of his luxurious Oriental hero; as Byron called Beckford “Vathek! England’s wealthiest son” in his first canto of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812),⁵⁷ and the reviewer of Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal in the Quarterly Review (1834) similarly observed that Beckford’s “voluptuousness of temperament” and “capricious recklessness of self-indulgence” would “lead the world to identify him henceforth with his Vathek.”⁵⁸ Even when Beckford moved to Bath, his Oriental-like Lansdown Tower, the exotic

⁵⁴ Kiely, Romantic Novel in England 50.

⁵⁵ qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 135.

⁵⁶ qtd. in Alexander, England’s Wealthiest Son 94.

⁵⁷ George Gordon Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Major Works 31; Canto 1, stanza 22, line 275.

⁵⁸ Quarterly Review 51 (1834): 429.

specimens of trees that he planted, and his habit of travelling, in Fothergill's words, "*en prince*" or with a train of servants and carriages, continued to maintain the association between the Caliph and himself.⁵⁹

Later in 1838 Beckford wrote on the fly-leaves of one of his books that "I wrote V[athek] immediately upon my return to London at the close of this romantic villegiatura,"⁶⁰ referring to the Christmas party in 1781 where Beckford, his close friends and relatives indulged themselves at Fonthill Splendens. This private spectacle was specifically designed by Philippe de Louthembourg, then a scenographer at Drury Lane, who transformed the Egyptian Hall of Fonthill into what Beckford called "a realm of Fairy, or rather, perhaps, a Demon Temple deep beneath the earth set apart for tremendous mysteries."⁶¹ Experimenting with optical illusions and artificial light, Louthembourg produced a theatrical effect that absorbed spectators into the scenery, with Beckford noting how "[t]he glowing haze investing every object, the mystic look, the vastness, the intricacy of this vaulted labyrinth occasioned so bewildering an effect that it became impossible for any one to define."⁶² Referring to "strains of music" and the "vapour of wood aloes ascending in wreaths from cassolettes placed low on the silken carpets in porcelain salvers of the richest japan," Beckford remarked on the "delirium of delight" and "combination of seductive influences" that he and his friends "conceived but too easily."⁶³ As Iain McCalman observes, this represents a *mise-en-scène* of "sensual intoxication" not far removed from the exquisite pleasures that Beckford's protagonist experiences in

⁵⁹ Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* 323.

⁶⁰ qtd. in Chapman, *Beckford* 102.

⁶¹ qtd. in Lonsdale, Introduction, *Vathek* xi.

⁶² *Ibid.* xii.

⁶³ *Ibid.* xi.

The Vision.⁶⁴ Like Beckford's Oriental fiction, Louterbourg's spectacle served as a licensed space in which he could deviate from social convention. Beckford's account of the 1781 Christmas party, though probably exaggerated, induced twentieth-century biographers such as Boyd Alexander, Guy Chapman, and Brian Fothergill to identify him with Vathek, who, as they point out, is similar to the author in his impetuosity and general unorthodoxy (as well as his love of towers).⁶⁵ Characters such as Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz, numerous critics have pointed out, are also reminiscent of his cousin Louisa and William Courtenay.⁶⁶

THE EPISODES OF VATHEK

Although Vathek's journey ends with his eternal damnation in Istakhar, Beckford did not actually complete his best-known work. Beckford returned to the theme of Faustian transgression in his Episodes to Vathek, the three shorter tales that Beckford initially imagined would be incorporated into the original French version of Vathek, had Henley not published his English translation in June 1786 (causing Beckford to hastily publish his French edition in France in the same year and to revise Henley's English version and publish it in London in 1816). Even more than Vathek, Beckford's Episodes display his libidinal investment in the East.

These tales seem to tone down the playfulness and the jocular air of Vathek, except perhaps in the last episode which contains grotesque figures such as the lean,

⁶⁴ Iain McCalman, "The Virtual Infernal: Philippe de Louterbourg, William Beckford and the Spectacle of the Sublime," Romanticism on the Net 46, May 2007, 27 Nov. 2007 <[http:// www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2007/v/n46/016129ar.html](http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2007/v/n46/016129ar.html)>.

⁶⁵ See Alexander, England's Wealthiest Son 92; Chapman, Beckford 109; and Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 126-28.

⁶⁶ See Chapman, Beckford 109; and Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 128-29.

eight-feet-high “hermit of the Great Sandy Desert,” and the “Palm-tree-climber” on the Ostrich Isle who “refused to come down [the tree] without knowing why he was summoned.”⁶⁷ This tale, titled “The History of the Princess Zulkais and the Prince Kalilah,” however, is unfinished, and the protagonists also develop an incestuous relationship and are strongly determined to rebel against the authority of their father and the rigid precepts of Islam. The remainder of this section will primarily examine the first two tales, also the most complete, of the Episodes. Presenting their characters’ ultimate condition as similar to that of Vathek and Nouronihar, these narratives omit the concluding moral statement and either drop out or compress the characters’ punishment to only a few sentences. These tales focus almost entirely on their characters’ sensational crimes and adventures. Beckford here revived the first-person narration with which he had experimented in The Vision, and these tales appear similarly autobiographical, allowing him once again to play out transgressive identities.

Central to the first episode, “The History of the Two Princes and Friends, Alasi and Firouz,” is the homoerotic relationship between the two title characters, whose crimes, the narrator (Alasi) states, are not engendered by “ambition” (like Vathek’s), but by the “sweet sentiments of friendship” (151) that he feels for the 13-year-old boy, Firouz. Like Beckford himself and “William” in The Vision, Alasi, at the age of 19, ignores his elders’ instruction and his future public duties as the king of Kharezme: “You lack neither wit nor judgement,” Alasi’s father tells him, as he urges him to “use them to suppress your desires when they draw you too much toward frivolous designs that are not without danger” (151). But whereas William’s exploration leads to his innocent pursuit of Moissasour’s exotic, subterranean world,

⁶⁷ William Beckford, Episodes of Vathek, Vathek with The Episodes of Vathek, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001) 300, 321. Subsequent references to the Episodes will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Alasi's "desires" are more destructive, as they are more clearly opposed to social convention, thereby rendering the first episode darker and more disturbing than The Vision and Vathek. Alasi's transgression is the love that he has for Firouz, who is influenced by an evil spirit called Magus, a worshipper of the religion of Zoroaster; as Graham notes, the term "giaour" also means a follower of Zoroastrianism.⁶⁸ Beckford's use of the theme of the Faustian pact with the devil again serves to liberate his protagonists from the restriction of dominating religious and social mores. In The Vision it allows William to indulge in supernatural Oriental visions, and in Vathek it promises the caliph possession of the pre-adamite treasures.

In his first "Episode," by contrast, Beckford made Zoroastrianism an ideal world that sanctions same-sex relationships, and that would enable the princes to live in eternal bliss together. Firouz's love not only frees Alasi from his state duties, but also causes him to reject Princess Roudabah, his betrothed match. Under Firouz's malicious spell, Roudabah commits adultery with Amni, the son of a vizir. Roudabah's speech to Alasi depicts her as an enemy of the domestic ideology of the dutiful, subservient wife: "As Firouz is to Alasi, so my lover is to me. I am Alasi's equal. I may be permitted as well to have a favourite" (169). Roudabah's "brazen discourse" (169), as Alasi puts it, prompts him to separate from her and to take his revenge on her by destroying her village and people. Alasi's dissatisfaction with his heterosexual match thereby offers him a licence to turn to a homosexual alternative and to place his faith in Zoroastrianism. When the Magus tempts him to embrace the religion of Zoroaster in order to enjoy "a happy eternity" with Firouz in the Palace of Subterranean Fire (182-83), Alasi does not hesitate to accomplish criminal deeds as sacrifices to his new god. Through the love of Alasi and Firouz, Beckford's tale

⁶⁸ Graham, Introduction, Vathek with The Episodes of Vathek 26 (note 2).

can be seen to subvert those ideas of morality, domesticity and companionate heterosexual relations that were often promoted in contemporary novels and Oriental fictions. As custodians of social and religious propriety, aged, pious and learned men are no longer a laughing stock as in Vathek, but hapless and pitiful victims of his protagonists. The mullah who teaches the Koran to Alasi is transformed into an ass, and later killed by Firouz, while the old santon, who provides food and lodging to Firouz, is also cruelly massacred by a furious mob which believes the two princes' false accusation concerning his apparent impieties.

The story of Alasi and Firouz that I am here referring to was recently translated and published by Kenneth Graham in his 2001 edition of Vathek and The Episodes of Vathek. As Graham asserts, it derives from what he believes to be the original, suppressed manuscript which has long been ignored, since Beckford also produced a revised version of the same story—a version which was published by Lewis Melville in the first edition of the Episodes to be published, in 1912.⁶⁹ Juxtaposing the suppressed and revised versions, Graham's publication has shown a significant alteration that Beckford made to his original story. In the middle of his revised version, Beckford revealed the malicious, seductive Firouz to be Princess Firouzkah, the disguised daughter of Filanshaw, King of Shirvan and friend of Alasi's father, hence recasting his characters' transgressive, same-sex relationship to a conventional, heterosexual one. This alteration may have been calculated to protect Beckford's reputation after the Courtenay scandal, but, for Graham, it supplied only "weak motivations for [the couple's] rebellion and atrocity."⁷⁰ Beckford's suppressed version may be more outrageous in its overtly homosexual content, but the trope of transvestism should not be regarded as simply defective and

⁶⁹ Ibid. 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 23-24.

unconvincing, since Beckford's display of the passionate love between Alasi and the disguised Firouz subtly and wittily entertained homoerotic episodes within a heterosexual framework. In other words, it toyed with the reader by suggesting the possibility for gender play and sexual transgression, thus undermining sexual decorum without breaking it—employing a “male Gothic” strategy similarly found in works such as Lewis's The Monk and Byron's Turkish tales (1813-14).

Beckford's second episode, “The History of Prince Barkiarokh,” concerns the overreaching Barkiarokh, who exploits the innocent and benign Peri Homaïouna and works his way to become the king of Daghestan before being eventually punished by Eblis. The interwoven narratives of Barkiarokh and Homaïouna, according to Graham, are constructed upon two popular novelistic plots: while Barkiarokh's roguish adventures match the picaresque form of the novel, the education of the naïve, inexperienced Homaïouna follows the format of the *Bildungsroman*.⁷¹ What Beckford did, however, was to experiment with these already recognisable literary forms so as further to explore proscribed sexual behaviours. Barkiarokh's narrative starts with a contest that his father holds among his three sons to find a good wife for them. With the help of the innocent Homaïouna, Barkiarokh wins his father's favour and obtains a magic ring, which he uses to deceive morally upright characters, trampling on them and becoming the most evil character in the story (he lures Princess Gazahidé into marriage after murdering her father, for example). Barkiarokh's sexual appetite is especially startling, since he not merely neglects his first wife Homaïouna to marry Gazahidé, but also commits adultery with statesmen's wives, indulges in an act of necrophilia with the dying and heartbroken Gazahidé, and unashamedly shows an incestuous

⁷¹ Ibid. 29.

desire for his own daughter, Leilah. Unlike in other picaresque novels, which usually end with the reformation of the hero and his marriage to a virtuous woman, Barkiarokh remains unreformed.

At the same time, Beckford's narrative provides no reward for meritorious deeds. The tale's Bildungsroman narrative portrays the celestial Peri Homaïouna as an apprentice with the determination to do good to mankind on earth. Her interventions in human matters, however, turn out either to deepen misery or to benefit the wrong person, as she admits that her "acts of benevolence" have "often be[en] much misplaced" (216-17). Her most misplaced benevolence of all, apart from her love and kindness towards Barkiarokh, is the guidance that she gives to Queen Gulzara, who, having promised her father never to marry, follows Homaïouna's advice by rejecting her lover but later dies of grief. What the reader learns from Homaïouna's narrative is the inconstancy and unreliability of the human condition. Such a "moral" can, perhaps, be read as Beckford's ironic response to Johnson's philosophical claims about the inescapability of discontent in Rasselas. If Homaïouna's rigid adherence to righteousness and morality results in self-inflicted pain and sorrow, in other words, it might perversely seem reasonable for Barkiarokh to choose to live his life in an entirely contrary way.

Barkiarokh, indeed, pays no attention to the concepts of virtue and benevolence that govern Homaïouna's life. His violent acts can be seen as a rebellion against, and hence liberation from, the moral and sexual probity that constrains human beings. Instead of following Islamic precepts, Barkiarokh worships "Babek Horremi," a supporter of Zoroastrianism, "surnamed the Impious, because he believed in no religion at all, and preached a universal subservience to enjoyment, and to every conceivable kind of pleasure" (279). Throughout the story

Barkiarokh is fully aware of his hypocrisy and vice, yet still wants to prove himself an absolute and thorough villain, taking advantage of Homaïouna's generosity and even planning to destroy her in order that he can further satisfy his insatiable, lustful ambition without her obstruction. Departing from the Bildungsroman framework, Beckford destabilised the idea of "virtue rewarded" which was prevalent in most eighteenth-century English Oriental fictions. His use of the picaresque, on the other hand, allowed him to toy with the reader's hope for Barkiarokh's reform and instead throw in increasingly brutal, sensational crimes, hence taking Barkiarokh's hedonism to extremes until the final scene when Homaïouna saves Leilah and lets Barkiarokh fall into the subterranean palace of Istakhar.

As I have shown, the Episodes of Vathek reworks constituent features of The Vision and Vathek, such as the overreaching protagonist and the idea of the Faustian pact with the devil, in order to explore proscribed forms of gender and sexual behaviour. The sympathetic, though sometimes also ludicrous, depiction of Beckford's protagonists is distinctively different from illustrations of Oriental despotism in other contemporary writings. Instead of endorsing any idea of reform, Beckford's Oriental tales—along with their sheer, amoral energy—can be seen implicitly to celebrate the "aristocratic" culture of hedonism, epicureanism and libertinism. The fabular framework of Vathek and the Episodes further enabled Beckford to publish his narratives, making them to some extent a legitimate imaginary site that enabled deviation from the increasingly rigid moral and sexual "standards" of the time.

Following Byron's praise of his Oriental description in the notes to The Giaour, which reinvigorated the sale of Vathek, Beckford published his 1816 edition of the tale. Throughout his life Beckford prized Vathek and the Episodes, and

considered them as carriers of his literary reputation. In his conversation with Redding in 1838, Beckford boasted that he intended to publish the Episodes and to have his manuscripts sold for over 1,000.⁷² Despite Byron's admittance of his being "a strenuous and public admirer" of Vathek, Beckford regarded him as a competitor and second-rate writer, confiding to the bookseller George Clarke in 1834 that his Episodes, "if ever [they] emerge from Hades into daylight, will reduce Byron's Corsairs ... to insignificance."⁷³

In spite of his bold assertion of his superiority over Byron, however, Beckford did not publish the Episodes. Neither did he entrust himself solely to the revival of Vathek's reputation, which rather became increasingly negative in the more rigid moral climate of the 1790s and the early nineteenth century. While Vathek was admired by younger writers such as Byron and Benjamin Disraeli (whose eastern romance, Alroy, was influenced by Beckford, and who confessed to the latter in 1834 how he had been "very much ... obliged" to him⁷⁴), many critics and readers rejected the work altogether as morally harmful. Hester Thrale, for example, noted in her diary in January 1791 that Vathek was "a mad Book ... written by a mad Author," and censured Beckford's "luscious descriptions" of the effeminate Gulchenrouz, before changing subject to take in the gossip about the author's life after the Courtenay scandal.⁷⁵ Henry Crabb Robinson called Vathek "one of the most odious books I ever laid eyes on" in his diary in 1834.⁷⁶ The Southern Literary Messenger observed in the same year that the author, though of "extraordinary genius," delineated such "[o]bscene," "blasphemous," and "shocking

⁷² Melville, Life and Letters 145.

⁷³ qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 146, 333.

⁷⁴ qtd. in Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 345.

⁷⁵ Hester Lynch Thrale, Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (1942). McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 304.

⁷⁶ Henry Crabb Robinson, Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers (1938), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 303.

pictures” that they “are in no wise redeemed by the beauty and simplicity of oriental fiction.”⁷⁷ In 1835 the magazine endorsed its earlier criticism of Vathek, also agreeing with the verdict of the Western Monthly Magazine, which stated that the tale was “extravagant,” “the sentiment pernicious, and the moral bad.”⁷⁸ Back in Britain, however, with Beckford increasingly concerned with his social rehabilitation after the Courtenay scandal, he seemed to modify his self-representation somewhat, as I will argue in my final section.

THE 1790S AND AFTER

Throughout his life, Beckford seemed to be reluctant to align himself with any politically oppositional constituency. In his early days, he was a friend of and educated alongside William Pitt the Younger, an alliance that seemed to augur well for Beckford’s parliamentary career. During his period of exile, Beckford attempted to become an English ambassador to Portugal, and offered himself as a negotiator for peace between France and Britain when the war broke out in 1793. Both diplomatic efforts were unavailing, however, since his request to be presented to Maria I of Portugal was declined by the British Minister, Robert Walpole; his proposal of a peace agreement between France and Britain was also rejected by Pitt.⁷⁹

Beckford’s writings of the 1790s seem more overtly politicised than his earlier Oriental tales, as is evident in his attacks on Pitt in his satires, Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast (1796) and Azemia: A Descriptive and

⁷⁷ Southern Literary Messenger (1834), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 306.

⁷⁸ Southern Literary Messenger (1835), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 307.

⁷⁹ Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 188, 238-39.

Sentimental Novel (1797).⁸⁰ While scholars regard these works as most obviously exhibiting Beckford's oppositional, liberal Whig politics,⁸¹ it is worth pointing out that Beckford's social and political views here were expressed tacitly, for both novels were published anonymously and were not identified by contemporary critics as his productions. In Azemia, Beckford inserted an "Ode, Panegyrical and Lyrical," condemning Pitt's decision to engage in the war as causing death and the starvation of "[t]wo thirds of th[e] nation."⁸² In Modern Novel Writing, the hero Henry Lambert dreams that he "was thrown upon an island in the Atlantic ocean" in which "the men who had thus seized the reigns of authority published an order forbidding all persons to assemble, or even to murmur."⁸³ This is a direct reference to Pitt's Seditious Meeting Act in 1795 which, for Beckford, was similar to other illiberal measures such as the Traitorous Correspondence Act which compelled him to immediately return to England in 1796, lest his stay and contact with the French be deemed treasonable. At the end of the book, Beckford added an address to the British Critic, a pro-government periodical, further attacking Pitt's oppressive administration and the effect of war on the poor. The attention that Beckford paid to class differences at times sounds radical:

Owing to your [the readers'] animated exertions, and the vigorous measures of your *patrons*, you may soon hope to see the happy inhabitants of this prosperous island express by one opinion, ... [that] great men shall eat bread in peace, and the poor feed on barley cakes in silence. Every person in the kingdom shall

⁸⁰ Jack, Introduction, Vathek and Other Stories xvi.

⁸¹ See Alexander, England's Wealthiest Son 144-46; and Jack, Introduction, Vathek and Other Stories xxv-vi.

⁸² [William Beckford], Azemia: A Descriptive and Sentimental Novel (1797), by J. A. M. Jenks, Modern Novel Writing (1796) and Azemia (1797): Fascimile Reproductions (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles, 1970) vol. 2, 15. Subsequent references to Azemia will be given (with volume and page numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

⁸³ [William Beckford], Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast (1796), by Lady Harriet Marlow, Modern Novel Writing (1796) and Azemia (1797): Fascimile Reproductions (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles, 1970) vol. 2, 99, 101. Subsequent references to Modern Novel Writing will given (with volume and page numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

acknowledge the blessings of a strong, regular government; while the absurd doctrine of the Rights of Man, shall be no more thought of, or respected, than the rights of horses, asses, dogs, and dromedaries. (2, 231)

Such political engagement, however, constitutes only one aspect of Beckford's writings in the 1790s. As the titles of his fictions suggest, they primarily deal with contemporary novels. For some modern critics, the satirical aspect is intrinsic to most of Beckford's literary works, since in whatever genres he engaged with he relentlessly defined himself against what was considered as conventional or respectable by the reading public: Modern Novel Writing and Azemia, as James Folsom has pointed out, are satires of the Gothic and sentimental novel, just as Vathek is of the Oriental tale and Biographical Memoirs of the biographical approach to art history and criticism.⁸⁴ These works responded in particular to the popularity of sentimental novels, especially those of female authors who became increasingly prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century. Beckford himself was particularly hostile to women writers, sarcastically commenting in 1821 on how he wished "the super-literary ladies of the present period" had "pass[ed] a little more of their time at cross stitch and yabble stitch" than "por[ing] over the mazes of their interminable scribblenations."⁸⁵ Under the pseudonyms of Lady Harriet Marlow and J. A. M. Jenks, Beckford parodied female writers and their emphasis on heroines' virtue and sensibility, declaring to his readers in Azemia that he attempts to "relate a story which will favour so much of the feebleness of a feminine mind" (1, ii), and, in Modern Novel Writing, that he "endeavoured to unite correct, delicate, and vivid imagery to an animated moral sensibility" (1, ii).

⁸⁴ James Folsom, "Beckford's Vathek and the Tradition of Oriental Satire," Criticism 6 (1964). McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 281.

⁸⁵ qtd. in Kiely, Romantic Novel in England 43.

In Modern Novel Writing, Beckford parodied the familiar Bildungsroman plot of a work such as Frances Burney's Evelina (1778) by building his novel around the orphan heroine, Arabella Bloomville, who enters sophisticated London society and encounters a number of incidents before finding out her true identity, uniting with the hero, and achieving domestic contentment. Like Evelina, Arabella is raised by a guardian in the countryside but eventually proves to be the sole heiress of the Countess of Fairville whom she later meets in London. Beckford made his story even more improbable than Burney's, using the contrived machinery of the birthmark, and having the Countess accidentally discover her long lost daughter by noticing "that strawberry" on Arabella's arm—an event which prompts the two of them to burst into tears, before entering an embrace that lasts "upwards of seven minutes and a half, before either of them could speak" (2, 6-7). Such expressions of feminine sensibility are indeed ridiculed throughout Beckford's satire. In the episode "A Polite Circle," for instance, the emotional outpourings of his characters are blatantly exaggerated, as is the case when Lucinda's heartfelt gratitude towards the kindness of the Countess of Fairville not only causes her to shed a "lucid drop" that "quivered upon the eyelid," and "let[...] fall her teacup upon the floor" and faint, but also moves the Countess herself to be "bathed in tears" (1, 25-26). In her correspondence with Arabella, Amelia's narration of her persecution at the hands of the libidinous Lord Mahogany can also be seen to mock virtue-rewarded romances, as his attempts at seduction fail, not because of his yielding to Amelia's virtue, but his own fright "at the terrible manner she was taken with the fit" (1, 124).

In contrast to Arabella, Azemia, the female protagonist of Beckford's second satire, is a Turkish woman, the daughter of Hamet-beig of Constantinople, who on her way to Marseilles is seized by the British Captain Josiah Wappingshot, then

taken to England and put under the care of Mrs. Periwinkle. The opening of Azemia can be seen obliquely to engage with the Oriental captivity narrative, in which, as Joe Snader remarks, one or more English characters, “[u]sually merchants and seamen,” are captured by Orientals, “voic[ing] indignant denunciations of the ‘despotic’ and ‘barbaric’ peoples who have interrupted their trade in alien waters.”⁸⁶ By having an Oriental woman captured by British invaders, Beckford’s story reversed the generic norm of the Oriental captivity novel which, according to Snader, sought to delineate the captives’ “self-reliant efforts to regain native ‘English liberties’ ... against a detailed representation of the Orient as debased and despotic”;⁸⁷ Beckford presented the British as brutal and covetous imperialists, as is attested by the names of Captain “Wappingshot” and his ship the “Amputator,” along with the seizure of Azemia’s vessel and its “cargo of figs, coffee, [and] raw silk” (1, 12-13).

The Oriental narrative pattern of “an individual’s exposure to, isolation within, and resistance to an alien and oppressive environment,” as Snader observes, is correspondent with the pattern of those novels with naïve or persecuted female protagonists who find themselves estranged from the society they are placed into, “whether we consider Pamela’s confinement in the various houses of Mr. B., ... Evelina’s experience in the fashionable world, or Emily St. Aubert’s confinement at Udolpho.”⁸⁸ Beckford’s Azemia satirises such a pattern in contemporary fictions. In the note to an episode depicting a masquerade, for example, Beckford stated that he was tempted to delineate the scene after the “two most celebrated writers (Fielding and Madame D’Arblay)” (2, 119). But whereas Fielding’s and Burney’s portrayal of

⁸⁶ Joe Snader, “The Oriental Captivity Narrative and Early English Fiction,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 9 (1997): 268.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 272-73.

masquerades “generally produces a great variety of adventures, and almost as generally an elopement, or an enlevement of the heroine,” Beckford declared that “I choose it should be otherwise” (2, 126). Instead of being disconcerted by the masquerade scene like Fielding’s and Burney’s naïve heroines, Azemia can instantly discern the artificiality of masquerade performers, stating that it is “a melancholy sight to see” people “dressed up so little like reasonable beings, and squeaking nonsense, with such deformed masks on, that they seemed to try both in their minds and persons to libel human nature” (2, 164-65).

Azemia, moreover, shows similarities with the much favoured virtue-in-distress protagonist and the Gothic romance heroine, who is often a foreigner cast out in another country or surroundings. As is the case with her counterparts in other contemporary novels, especially those of Ann Radcliffe, Azemia’s sensibility and purity are manifested in her closeness to nature. In her pensive mood she usually takes a walk amid beautiful scenery and composes poetic lines. Whereas natural descriptions allow female writers to insert verses and hence to exhibit their cultivated taste in poetry, the incongruity between the character’s circumstances and the interspersed lines is satirised by Beckford, as he put it in his footnote:

Let not my readers object to the probability of Azemia’s writing English verses; or, if they should, let them recollect, that some of our celebrated heroines, though born in another country, and two or three centuries ago, write most pathetic and polished poetry in very pretty modern English. (1, 45)

Throughout the novel, Beckford can be seen to imitate a number of Radcliffean Gothic scenes, describing the abduction and incarceration of Azemia by the villain, and her confrontation with banditti in the forest, before she is safely rescued by the hero. Beckford’s illustration of Azemia in the dark lumberroom of

Mrs. Periwinkle, in particular, is a burlesque of the Radcliffean mode of the “explained supernatural” by which rational, natural explanations are provided in the end to explain away mysteries that at first seem to involve the supernatural. In Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), what appears to be a bloody corpse found by Emily St. Aubert behind the veil is revealed to be only a wax figure—an effigy of a human being, “a momento mori”—long kept in the castle. Likewise, “the figure of an old man” with a white beard, withered hands and long nails, “sitting in a long dark robe” (1, 53) and nodding to Azemia in the lumberroom, was explained by Beckford as neither “*a real ghost*” nor “*even a wax-work figure*” (1, 54). As if to outdo Radcliffe’s surprising revelation, Beckford related to his readers that the “ghastly and terrific” figure is in fact a plaything, “a large Chinese Mandarin, damaged in its voyage to Europe, and which had nodded ever since in the museum of Mrs. Periwinkle” (1, 54). Beckford’s parody of Emily and the wax figure shows his irritation with the decorousness of novels by Radcliffe and other female writers, works in which the unveiling of mysteries at the end functions to keep readers’ fantasies in check and to teach them to judge things rationally. As Beckford sarcastically proclaimed, “may I not be allowed a few extraordinaries”—“a castle or two, or an abbey—a few ghosts, provided I make them out afterwards that they were not ghosts, but wax-work and pasteboard” to “beat up my literary pap with as innoxious ingredients as the most straight-laced matrons, or rigid elders, can recommend for their babes and sucklings” (2, 64-65).

The tale “Another Blue-Beard!” that Mrs. Chesterton asks Azemia to read, moreover, is crowded with familiar Radcliffean Gothic motifs such as the hollow, murmuring noise in the closet, the apparition behind the curtain, the spectre in the dark passage, and bloodstains on the floor. While Beckford’s work did not explain

away the supernatural element, maintaining that the female spectre is Mr. Grimshaw's murdered wife who helps Eleanor, the heroine, escape from the manor, he emphasised that the narrative is "an old manuscript" found in an ancient manor (1, 151), hence pastiching the legitimising strategy that had been used by Gothic writers since the time of Walpole and Otranto. As Beckford reiterated, "[t]he story is so well authenticated, that it may serve ... to substantiate the notion of ghosts and specters, which, as readers seem tired of all representations of actual life, and going fast into the childish horrors, impressed by ignorance and superstition seventy or a hundred years ago, may possibly be very acceptable" (1, 139).

Once published, Beckford's anonymous novels were recognised by reviewers as humorous satires of contemporary fictions. The Monthly Review (1796) called Modern Novel Writing a "burlesque" of "the ordinary run of our circulating-library novels," and a "literary mimicry" that "has so happily produced its full effect, without the formality of censure, or the trouble of criticism."⁸⁹ The Monthly Mirror (1797) regarded Azemia as a "hasty production of a person of talent" who "ridicule[s] ... the modern romance" and "the hackneyed sensibility which is so abundantly distributed to the heroes and heroines of all our novels."⁹⁰ For critics, the mockery and laughter that Modern Novel Writing and Azemia generated presented both works as sportive and frivolous writings. In other words, if Beckford remained concerned to define himself and his work against "middle-class" values, his antagonism towards contemporary novelists in his 1790s works took the form of satire or comic imitation and is therefore different from Vathek and the Episodes, which are darker in tone and appear to celebrate their male protagonists' licentious, hedonistic lives.

⁸⁹ Monthly Review (1796), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 308.

⁹⁰ Monthly Mirror (1797), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 309.

During the time when Beckford was back to England and was concerned with rehabilitating his reputation, his interest shifted from Oriental writing to a more obviously prominent artistic field, that of architecture. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, Beckford seems to have worked hard to reestablish his reputation and to gain respect and acceptance from society. Between 1796 and 1822, he busily engaged himself in the construction and improvement of Fonthill Abbey, paying tribute to the contemporary taste in Gothic architecture, which, by the early nineteenth century, had departed from Walpole's decorative style and become more bound up with a surge of archeological enthusiasm and an ongoing craze for the picturesque and the sublime.⁹¹ As Redding noted, Beckford contemptuously referred to Walpole's Gothic castle as a mere plaything, calling Strawberry Hill "a miserable child's box—a species of gothic mousetrap—a reflection of Walpole's littleness."⁹² In contrast to Walpole's toylike Strawberry Hill, Fonthill Abbey was a structure of considerable dimension. The Abbey, as Charles Eastlake describes, was outlined as a cruciform building with the principal edifice 312 feet long, the cross structure 250 feet, and the octagonal tower at the centre 278 feet high.⁹³ It was designed by the renowned architect, James Wyatt—"a scenic artist," who, as Clark puts it, "believed that Gothic should have a sudden, overwhelming, emotional effect, and that this was best achieved by an unimpeded vista."⁹⁴

Beckford's and Wyatt's purpose, it seems, was to make use of the sheer scale and space of the Abbey to provide the viewer with a range of different spectacles. One of these is the spectacle of a real Gothic cathedral, a scene that evoked what

⁹¹ Clark, *Gothic Revival* 67-68, 72-82.

⁹² qtd. in Melville, *Life and Letters* 299.

⁹³ Charles L. Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (1872; Leicester: Leicester UP, 1978) 62-63.

⁹⁴ Clark, *Gothic Revival* 86.

Uvedale Price referred to as “religious awe,”⁹⁵ as well as encouraging visitors such as Samuel Rogers to refer to Beckford, in his letter to Lord Byron in February 1818, as “the Abbot of Fonthill.”⁹⁶ More importantly, whereas Walpole framed his Gothic castle as a trifle and a sport, Beckford much more ambitiously presented his Fonthill as an important national landmark, using it as a venue for the grand reception of the “Hero of the Nile,” Horatio Nelson, in 1800. As Fothergill and Brockman remark, the Nelson fête was specifically motivated by the peerage that Beckford hoped could be obtained through Sir William Hamilton, upon whom Beckford promised to settle compensation for the loss of treasures that the latter had loaded on the navy ship *Colossus*.⁹⁷ The fête was consequently as much the glorification of a national hero as a demonstration of Beckford’s self-image as a patriotic figure. As Brockman describes, the three-day celebration included the heralding of Nelson by Fonthill volunteers; the playing of the anthem *Rule Britannia*; bonfires; the magnificent procession of Lord Nelson from the old Fonthill to the Abbey; and an evening of a splendid, medieval banquet and entertainments.⁹⁸ Colley points out that Nelson himself was obsessed with the pomp of his medals and uniforms to the level of affectation.⁹⁹ In a similar way, the spectacle and showiness of Beckford’s Nelson reception was calculated to impress the public, and can be seen as part of his attempt to regain his reputation in England.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to move ahead two decades in order to consider a final instance of how Beckford span the circumstances of his life. The sale of Fonthill Abbey and its collection in 1822 is another instance of how

⁹⁵ Alexander, *England’s Wealthiest Son* 176.

⁹⁶ qtd. in Melville, *Life and Letters* 239.

⁹⁷ Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* 257; and H. A. N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill* (London: Laurie, 1956) 115-16.

⁹⁸ Brockman, *Caliph of Fonthill* 117, 123.

⁹⁹ Colley, *Britons* 183.

Beckford span circumstances—though in this case, a financial embarrassment—in such a way as to present a particular image of himself. From the outset, he decided that the sale had to be specially organised by Christie’s with tickets of admission and auction catalogues listing the treasures. Since Beckford had never opened his house to the public, the viewing of the Abbey was described by contemporary accounts as a “rage,” an event that turned into “Fonthill Fever.”¹⁰⁰ The Morning Post described the sale as causing “a public sensation” and the Times reported on the “variety of scenery, elegance of architecture, novelty of situation” and the costly furniture which “astonish[ed] everyone.”¹⁰¹ Probably to conceal his need for money, Beckford boasted that the sale items were merely “superfluous furniture” which “Horace Walpole would not have suffered in his toyshop at Strawberry Hill”¹⁰²—a statement that reaffirms the rivalry between Beckford and Walpole, and Beckford’s self-representation as a great collector of works of art.

After the Fonthill sale, Beckford settled in Bath in 1825 and built Lansdown Tower on Lansdown Hill. Instead of using Gothic models, Beckford turned to the classical Greek for his tower, while planning his interior decoration, as Fothergill suggests, after “the somewhat heavy, over-furnished style of the Victorians.”¹⁰³ Later in his life Beckford to some extent adjusted to early Victorian society. He no longer took an interest in literary Orientalism, and instead sought to revise his long suppressed travel diary, Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents, leaving out passages of fanciful reverie, and giving the work the new title of Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal (1834). His other travel book, Recollections of an Excursion

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, England’s Wealthiest Son 193.

¹⁰¹ qtd. in Megan Aldrich, “William Beckford’s Abbey at Fonthill: from the Picturesque to the Sublime,” William Beckford, 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) 127-29.

¹⁰² qtd. in Melville, Life and Letters 320.

¹⁰³ Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill 319.

to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha, was published in 1835. By shifting from fiction to travelogue, Beckford perhaps sought to reestablish his literary reputation with a more respectable genre of writing. Indeed, these two works achieved a notable success, especially his Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal, which caused the Quarterly Review (1834) to assert that “Mr. Beckford’s Travels will henceforth be classed among the most elegant productions of modern literature.”¹⁰⁴ In the same review, the writer also commended Beckford’s taste for art and architecture, stating that despite his “over-pampered luxury,” Beckford was “at least a male Horace Walpole; as superior to the ‘silken Baron,’ as Fonthill ... was to that silly band-box which may still be admired on the road to Twickenham.”¹⁰⁵

Beckford’s reputation, tarnished ever since the Courtenay scandal, was, as I have shown, partly recovered late in his life. As was also true of Walpole, Beckford’s longevity enabled him to re-examine and to alter his self-presentation to suit the changing circumstances that he encountered. In the 1780s, when Beckford was aspiring to become a distinguished author, his Oriental fiction was calculated both to create a sensation and to serve as a licensed space to play out various transgressive identities. In the 1790s and the nineteenth century, Beckford was primarily concerned with his social rehabilitation—a process which, as the chapter has shown, encompassed a revision of his uninhibited juvenile writing and the assumption of patriotic poses in his representation of Fonthill Abbey. While Beckford was more ambitious and less discreet than Walpole in offering his works to the public, he can still be seen to be similarly preoccupied with his social position and respectability. As the next chapter will elaborate, Mathew Lewis was to take a very different path from Beckford and Walpole. Whereas his Gothic novel, The

¹⁰⁴ Quarterly Review 51 (1834): 456.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 429-30.

Monk, was implicitly bound up with the tradition of French philosophical pornography and testified to his alliance with aristocratic liberal Whigs, severe criticisms of Lewis's writing rather caused him to be more blatantly provocative, and to present himself as a popular playwright who catered to his audience taste for stage effects and sensationalism.

CHAPTER 3

MATTHEW LEWIS: “LEWISIZING”¹ GOTHIC

When Samuel Taylor Coleridge read The Castle Spectre in 1798, he commented on the play, in a letter to William Wordsworth, that “[t]here are no felicities [of language] in the humorous passages; and in the serious ones it is Schiller Lewis-ized—i.e. a flat, flabby, unimaginative Bombast oddly sprinkled with colloquialisms.”² Coleridge’s reference to the “serious” passages of the play pinpoints Lewis’s borrowing from the “Sturm und Drang” works of Friedrich Schiller, whose plot dealing with a conflict between two brothers, and domestic tyranny, in his famous Die Räuber (1781, translated as The Robbers in 1795) seemed to provide a framework for Lewis’s play and many other dramatic works in the period. The Castle Spectre was not simply based upon the German model, however, but was also, as Coleridge noted, “Lewis-ized,” that is “admirably managed for stage effect,”³ or designed to match the taste of the English popular audience, in the process making Schiller’s original “flat, flabby” and “unimaginative.” This chapter will focus on the way in which all of Lewis’s works might be seen to manifest the “Lewisizing” of which Coleridge complained. Most of his early works, as I will show, were written as satires of the culture of sensibility, and The Monk, in particular, is a libertine revision of Ann Radcliffe’s celebrated Gothic romance, The Mysteries of Udolpho. As I will argue, the libertinism of The Monk can be read as an

¹ Here I borrow the verb to “Lewisize” from Coleridge in his letter to Wordsworth in January 1798, qtd. in Michael Gamer, “Authors in Effect: Lewis, Scott, and the Gothic Drama,” ELH 66 (1999): 835.

² Ibid. 835.

³ Ibid. 836.

expression of Lewis's alliance with the liberal Whig circle of Charles James Fox and the Hollands.⁴ In the counter-revolutionary climate of mid-1790s Britain, the themes and images of feudal despotism in Lewis's novel clearly had a political resonance, and Lewis's borrowings from French and German sources in The Monk likewise seemed potentially subversive. His treatment of similar themes in subsequent works, however, constituted a form of branding or self-promotion which might also be taken as evidence of a kind of arrested development, as Lewis continually revisited scenes and features of The Monk but without any apparent agenda other than to annoy critics and pander to the popular taste for sensation. Ignoring what was thought fitting and decorous, Lewis maintained his literary reputation by keeping alive the infamy of The Monk. Whereas Walpole and Beckford thought of writing as a recreation, and sought to distance themselves from the market, Lewis was eager to establish himself as a professional writer, and his reworking of the "male Gothic" ultimately consisted of transferring its status from an exclusive or elitist to a popular realm.

LEWIS AND THE CULTURE OF SENSIBILITY IN THE EARLY 1790S

Lewis's engagement with the culture of sensibility is more extensive and notable than that of other "male Gothic" writers. In The Effusions of Sensibility; or, Letters from Lady Honoria Harrowheart to Miss Sophonisba Simper: a Pathetic Novel in the Modern Taste, being the first literary attempt of a Young Lady of tender feelings (written 1791, unpublished), Lewis satirised the Bildungsroman plot and the

⁴ My argument on the connection between Lewis's libertinism and his alliance with the Foxite Whigs here follows Markman Ellis in The History of Gothic Fiction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), Chapter 3: "Revolution and Libertinism in the Gothic Novel" 81-120.

epistolary form with his story of a naïve young country woman encountering fashionable London society. In the less than 30 pages of the novel which remain, the Effusions, like Beckford's Modern Novel Writing and Azemia, parodies expressions of sentiment and sensibility. Honoria's melancholy, for example, is mockingly exaggerated: "the trickling tears rolled down my cheek; the storm of sighs involuntarily escaped from my trembling breasts;—I was in torment, I was agitated, I was agonised, and I had not the least appetite to my breakfast."⁵ Her kindness, as Sophonisba remarks, extends to an "old turkey-cock," which, "pursued by Doll Trot, the cookmaid, fled to your [Honorias] arms for shelter, and found a refuge in hiding himself under your dress" (265)—a claim which also carries an obvious sexual connotation. This notion of sensibility as "performance," to adopt Robert Markley's term, had already been explored by writers such as Fielding, who suggested that displays of virtue could also be a vehicle for self-promotion, as in the case of Shamela's entrapment of her master through blushes and tears in Shamela (1741).⁶ Lewis similarly suggested that physical appearances can be deceptive, and as in the case of Honoria calculated and motivated by vanity, as when she describes her reaction to "the numerous beaux who were loading me with compliments" at a ball:

I nodded to one, smiled at a second, smirked at a third, and cried 'he!he!' to the praises of a dozen (ah! how little did the sensations of my bosom accord with the juvenile joy, which darted delusive beams from my eyes, and played bewitching upon my blooming cheek) ... (252-53)

⁵ Matthew Lewis, The Effusions of Sensibility; or, Letters from Lady Honoria Harrowheart to Miss Sophonisba Simper: a Pathetic Novel in the Modern Taste, being the first literary attempt of a Young Lady of tender feelings, The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis. With many pieces in prose and verse never before published, by Margaret Baron-Wilson, vol. 2 (London: Colburn, 1839) 247. Subsequent references to the Effusions will be provided in parentheses after quotations in the text.

⁶ Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue." The New 18th Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987) 219.

The theatricality of sensibility is likewise evident in Lewis's comedy The East Indian, in the character of Lady Clara Modish, whose "appearance of protecting a friendless orphan [Zorayda, the heroine]," as Lewis put it, "flatters that ostentatious sensibility, which it is her passion to display on every occasion."⁷ The play (written in 1792 and staged at Drury Lane in 1799), as Lewis stated in his Preface (1800), was based on Frances Sheridan's Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761).⁸ While his plot similarly revolves around a young heroine and her marriage problems, it presents a different treatment of the former and a wishful, though rather unethical, solution to the latter. Through her mother's advice, Sheridan's Sidney Bidulph succeeds in resisting her passion for Orlando Faulkland and twice declines his proposals, finding that he had previously had an affair with the pregnant Miss Burchell. Sheridan's novel, dedicated to "THE AUTHOR OF CLARISSA AND SIR CHARLES GRANDISON,"⁹ obviously took on and explored further the cult of sensibility that had been made popular by Richardson's novels. Like Pamela and Clarissa, Sidney Bidulph is set up as a moral exemplar, and her afflictions serve to elicit empathy from readers, as Sidney's sister, Cecilia, asserts at the end of the novel: "Her natural disposition ever sweet and complying, was improved by her sufferings into a patience very rare in woman; and a resignation imbibed at first from a rigid education, was heightened by religion into an almost saint-like meekness and humility" (466). Lewis, however, paid scant attention to the moral function of his heroine. Though a truly generous and modest woman, Zorayda can be seen as morally ambivalent, as she elopes from India to England with her married lover,

⁷ Matthew Lewis, The East Indian: a Comedy. In Five Acts (London, 1800), English Short Title Catalogue Microfilm: reel 585, no. 15, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.* 3.

⁹ Frances Sheridan, Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph, ed. Patricia Köster and Jean Coates Cleary (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 3. Subsequent references to the novel will be provided in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Beauchamp, who puts her in the care of the vain Lady Clara Modish. After scenes depicting the Modishes and their friends which satirise fashionable society, the play ends with the reunion between Zorayda and her father, a wealthy East-Indian proprietor, and the marriage between Zorayda and Beauchamp which is made possible by the news of Beauchamp's wife's death. Lewis's work not only created a socially and morally transgressive heroine, but also brushed aside the notions of regulated passion and conjugal fidelity which are central to the didacticism of Sheridan's novel.

As a comic drama, as Lewis admitted in his preface, The East Indian was in part modelled upon Richard Brinsley Sheridan's highly successful The School for Scandal (1777),¹⁰ using the return of a long lost relative (Zorayda's father) to bring about the denouement of the plot and enable the marriage between the hero and the heroine. Unlike Sheridan's comedy, events in Lewis's work hang loosely together and the humour is rather stale. When Lewis sought to stage the play, his main purpose seems to have been to attract public attention with a work which, as he boasted in his prologue, he wrote before he turned sixteen. Challenging his critics to "damn it!" if his work "prove[d] worthless,"¹¹ Lewis laid bare the appetite for provocation and scandal which will form the main focus of this chapter.

In the 1790s, debates about the idea of sensibility were complicated further by the French Revolution and its aftermath. In this period, sensibility became a highly contested term and a politically charged concept; as Chris Jones argues, it was "a site of contention between radical and conservative discourses."¹² Particularly in response to Edmund Burke's highly sympathetic account of the apparent persecution of Marie Antoinette in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), English

¹⁰ Lewis, The East Indian 3.

¹¹ Ibid. 6; Prologue, lines 37-38.

¹² Chris Jones, Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s (London: Routledge, 1993) 6.

radicals mounted an attack on Burke's sentimental language and his defence of social hierarchy.¹³ In Rights of Man (1791), for example, Thomas Paine criticises Burke's description of the French queen as "not affected by the reality of distress ... but by the showy resemblance of it," for Burke seems to "pit[y] the plumage, but forget[...] the dying bird," sympathising with the French monarch and ignoring the suffering of common people.¹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, in A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), also considered Burke's denunciation of the Revolution to be somehow fake and effeminate: "Even the Ladies, Sir," she addressed Burke, "may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations."¹⁵ Following on from this, Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) discussed the perilous effects that an "over exercised sensibility" has on women, calling it a "false refinement" generated by a patriarchal system that results in women's frailty and self-indulgence, and the prioritisation of feeling over reason (130-31).

Because of the increasingly negative perception of sensibility, many women writers in this period were particularly concerned to lay stress upon the importance of the regulation of feeling. Reformists such as Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays stressed the importance of the education that would develop women's rationality and independence. Wollstonecraft's first heroine, Mary, for example, is a woman with "thinking powers,"¹⁶ who teaches herself to read philosophical texts and is able to criticise the injustice of marriage. In Maria, or the Wrongs of Women (1798),

¹³ See Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003) 60-65. Burke famously recounts the scene of the intrusion of "[a] band of cruel ruffians and assassins" into the French queen's bedchamber in Versailles Palace (60).

¹⁴ Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 102.

¹⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Men, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, An History and Moral View of the French Revolution, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 6. Subsequent references to Rights of Woman will be provided in parentheses after quotations in the text.

¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, Advertisement, Mary, A Fiction (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1995) 3.

Wollstonecraft opposed the marriage laws, depicting Maria as confined by her abusive husband in a private madhouse. Maria, however, is also an example of what Wollstonecraft termed a “creature[...] of sensation” (131) in her Rights of Woman. Her indulgence in the reading of old romances and sentimental novels invigorates her passion for her fellow prisoner, Henry Darnford, who, as some of Wollstonecraft’s notes on the novel’s conclusion suggest, later abandons Maria and their daughter in misery. The heroine of Hays’ Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), is similarly nurtured with tales and romances that inspire imagination and unrestrained feelings. As the “offspring of sensibility,” Emma has a deep affection for Augustus, who is already married to another woman, but with her rationality and self-control, she is finally subdued to reason and marries her long-time suitor Montague for “rational esteem,” not “romantic, high-wrought, frenzied emotions.”¹⁷

While similarly drawing the reader’s attention to the issue of women’s emotional restraint and self-discipline, Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho is not as overtly political as Wollstonecraft’s and Hays’ works, and instead of using a contemporary social and historical background, adopts a remote “Gothic” setting in sixteenth-century provincial France and Italy. Radcliffe’s heroine is moreover directly influenced by the instruction of her father, who teaches her a “general view of the sciences” and “elegant literature,” believing that these will give Emily a “well-informed mind” and a cultivated taste in the arts, and who also warns her against “the dangers of sensibility,” which can lead to “self-delusion” rather than happiness.¹⁸ As an exemplary figure, she is distinguished from other female characters who typify both a lack and an excess of sensibility. Her refined emotion is

¹⁷ Mary Hays, Memoirs of Emma Courtney, ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000) 36, 197.

¹⁸ Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 6, 80. Subsequent references to the novel will be provided in parentheses after quotations in the text.

contrasted with the “indelicacy” (124) and “coarse and unfeeling” (112) disposition of her aunt, and the self-indulgence and violent passions of the murderous Signora Laurentini. Robert Miles, however, has paid attention to the vast space that Radcliffe gave in the novel to Emily’s visionary imaginings of the supernatural and the hidden crimes of adultery and murder, calling Emily a “transgressive spectator,” whose attempt to uncover forbidden patriarchal secrets “reflect[s] her unconscious thought processes and her transgressive impulses.”¹⁹ While Emily’s suspicions and anxieties are all implicit, Radcliffe eventually resolved the “mysteries” of her novel, providing natural explanations for seemingly supernatural events and revealing that the affair initially hinted at took place between Laurentini and the Marquis de Villeroi, not her father, hence returning Emily and the reader to the world of reason and domestic happiness.

Udopho, as James Watt observes, was warmly welcomed by conservative critics who approved Radcliffe’s model of the explained supernatural, “drawing attention to the parallel between credulity or superstition and revolutionary idealism, and implicitly equating rationalising explanation with a recovery of the rule of law.”²⁰ Along with Nathan Drake who picked out Radcliffe for special praise, Robert Bisset, a contributor to the Anti-Jacobin, regarded Radcliffe’s Gothic writing as legitimate, for she did not depict ghosts, but “the effects of the belief of ghosts on the human imagination.”²¹ Whereas Wollstonecraft’s model of a rational female was rejected by Richard Polwhele as akin to an “unsex’d woman,”²² and while Hays’ Emma Courtney was criticised by the Tory British Critic as being too much absorbed

¹⁹ Robert Miles, Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995) 137, 140.

²⁰ Watt, Contesting the Gothic 116.

²¹ *Ibid.* 116-17.

²² qtd. in Claudia L. Johnson, Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s. Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 9.

in “the sophistries of Rousseau, Helvetius, and writers of that class,”²³ Radcliffe’s heroines escaped such hostile criticism, and, as in the case of Emily St. Aubert, upheld the idea of female filial obedience. Albeit that critics now recognise Radcliffe’s fiction to be rhetorically complex, it seems that many if not most of her contemporaries saw her as a writer of escapist romance, untainted by the idea of revolution.

In the same year that Lewis wrote The East Indian, he told his mother that he had commenced “a Roma[nce] in the style of the Castle of Otranto.”²⁴ In his letter dated 18 May 1794 from the Hague, he confided to her that he had “again taken up” the romance and was “induced to go on with it by reading ‘the Mysteries of Udolpho,’” which, he thought, was “one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published.”²⁵ In the same letter, Lewis commented further: “[I]t is not very entertaining till St. Aubert’s death. His travels to my mind are uncommonly dull, and, I wish heartily that they had been left out, and something substituted in their room.”²⁶ Indeed, in writing The Monk, Lewis dropped the lengthy natural description which situated Radcliffe’s heroine in the pastoral, blissful world of La Vallée, and which made her romance appeal to the contemporary taste for picturesque painting and tourism. Instead, Lewis filled his novel with sensational adventures and appalling crimes, twisting Radcliffe’s plot of family secrets and exposing his heroines both to the supernatural and to victimisation by his villain-hero. Though Lewis’s work did not explicitly deal with contemporary events, the backlash against its explicit content, as the next section will show, branded him a potentially dangerous upstart.

²³ qtd. in Gary Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 108.

²⁴ Louis F. Peck, The Life of Matthew G. Lewis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1961) 189.

²⁵ Ibid. 208.

²⁶ Ibid. 208-09.

THE MONK

When the second edition of The Monk was published, the Whig M. P. Charles James Fox, as Walter Scott noted, “paid the unusual compliment of crossing the House of Commons that he might congratulate the young author, whose work obtained high praise from many other able men of that able time.”²⁷ Fox’s appreciation of Lewis’s novel is not surprising if we consider the latter’s political and social alliances and affiliations. Though serving as an attaché to the British Embassy at the Hague, Lewis did not endorse the anti-French and anti-revolutionary politics of the Pitt administration in the early 1790s; instead, as he told his mother, he was plagued by “the Devil Ennui,” finding an outlet for his boredom in the coterie of the aristocratic French emigrés—“the very best society of Paris,” as he put it—who entertained him with lively conversation and kept him up to date with events in France.²⁸ At home, Lewis was also inactive in his role as an MP, making but one speech in support of the mitigation of punishment of prisoners committed for debt.²⁹ Unlike his father, who was an anti-abolitionist and a loyal member of Pitt’s government, Lewis was an admirer of Fox and was probably influenced by Fox’s politics as much as his hedonistic lifestyle. As a son of the Baron and Baroness of Holland and a direct descendant of Charles II, Fox, outside Parliament, led an extravagant life in pursuit of pleasure. He was notorious for his affairs with women and his passion for gambling. He befriended the lecherous Prince of Wales and, as L. G. Mitchell asserts, was pointed out by George III as “beyond morality” and as the prince’s

²⁷ qtd. in Peck, Life of Lewis 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 210, 212.

²⁹ Ellis, History of Gothic Fiction 107.

“tutor in debauchery.”³⁰ Fox was also the uncle of Henry Richard Fox, the third Baron of Holland, who had known Lewis since he was a student at Oxford. Holland House in Kensington, where Lewis was a frequent visitor, was well-known as a centre of Whig politicians, social elites and distinguished writers. The circle shared liberal political attitudes: the Hollands and Lewis, in particular, were fervent supporters of the abolition of the slave trade. Most members of the set, moreover, were aristocrats and this is perhaps what Lewis found most agreeable to his taste, as Scott remarked that Lewis was “fonder of great people ... either as a man of talent or a man of fortune. He had always dukes and duchesses in his mouth.”³¹ His best-known work, The Monk, which I will now examine, can in many ways be read as a product of the liberalism and libertinism of this Whig circle.

From the outset, Lewis’s work explores the physical manifestations of his heroine’s sensibility. In the opening pages of The Monk, Antonia is portrayed as exhibiting “unexampled sweetness,” “delicacy and elegance.”³² Her “sensibility of countenance” is at the same time strikingly sensual:

Her skin, though fair, was not entirely without freckles; her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long. But then her lips were of the most rosy freshness; her fair and undulating hair, confined by a simple ribband, poured itself below her waist in a profusion of ringlets; her neck was full and beautiful in the extreme; her hand and arm were formed with the most perfect symmetry; her mild blue eyes seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of diamonds. She appeared to be scarcely fifteen; an arch smile, playing round her mouth, declared her to be possessed of liveliness, which excess of timidity at present repressed. (15)

³⁰ L .G. Mitchell, “Fox, Charles James (1749-1806),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Oxford UP, 2004, Online ed., Jan. 2006, 30 Jan. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10024>>.

³¹ qtd. in D. L. Macdonald, Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000) 102-03.

³² Matthew Lewis, The Monk: A Romance, ed. Christopher Maclachlan (London: Penguin, 1998) 12-13. Subsequent references to the novel will be provided in parentheses after quotations in the text.

It seems, however, that Antonia does not recognise her sexual attractiveness and, in her aunt's words, "is totally ignorant of the world" (15). Lewis therefore sets up Antonia as a victim, incessantly emphasising her naivety as the aspect of her beauty that most attracts the lustful Ambrosio. Antonia's innocence upon the subject of love, for example, inflames the monk's carnal desire, as he describes her "melting eye" and "blushing cheek" as "enchanting" and "voluptuous" (224). By exposing Antonia to Ambrosio's victimisation, Lewis can be seen to reverse the Radcliffean Bildungsroman plot which protects the heroine from what Antonia suffers in The Monk. As Lorenzo forewarns Antonia at the beginning, her entrance into society will soon lead her to "discover the baseness of mankind" (22).

Lewis's work seems to attribute Antonia's frailty to her mother's overprotective upbringing and education. Elvira's rule for Bible reading, in particular, is that the Bible must be expurgated, with "all improper passages either altered or omitted" since "[m]any of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: every thing is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a great choice of indecent expressions" (223). Lewis's focus on the unrefined language of the Bible is provoking, especially when Elvira is said to prefer chivalric romances such as "*Amadis de Gaul*" and "*The Valiant Champion, Tirante the White*" (223) to it. As Jacqueline Pearson has argued, the reading of an expurgated or edited version of the scripture was recommended by educationists and writers such as Sarah Trimmer and Frances Burney D'Arblay, and was widely practised by many young female readers of the period.³³ Lewis's novel, in this respect, can be read as a playful but also critical engagement with conservative understandings of female education. As

³³ Jacqueline Pearson, Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 45.

Pearson argues, in offering a libertine narrative in The Monk. Lewis ingeniously “defends his own blatantly transgressive text as having informative functions for the virtuous female reader: had she been allowed wider reading, Antonia might have acquired enough worldly wisdom to suspect Ambrosio.”³⁴ Indeed, Antonia is not aware of Ambrosio’s diabolical intention and is cruelly raped and murdered by him. The subversive potential in Radcliffe’s novel, to adopt Ian Duncan’s term, is “literalised” in Lewis’s,³⁵ for Emily’s fear of rape and her suspicion about family secrets are externalised in The Monk, as the story unfolds that Ambrosio is Elvira’s long lost son, so that his crimes come to encompass both matricide and incest.

In the character of Leonella, however, Lewis returned to a more conventional satirical treatment of sensibility as fraudulence. The physical expression of modesty and the preference of country simplicity over urban corruption—both prevalent in the description of the heroine in novels by Radcliffe and Burney—were cynically presented in Leonella as mere performances aiming to capture Don Christoval’s attention. While waiting for the arrival of Don Christoval in Elvira’s house, for instance, Leonella is ridiculed as wearing “a pastoral dress,” reading Montemayor’s Spanish pastoral romance, Diana, and assuming “airs of modesty” with her “blush and tremble” and “her eyes cast down to receive, as she expected, [his] compliments” (176). By contrast, in his illustration of Matilda, Lewis made the theatricality of sensibility threatening to conventional constructions of gender and sexuality. Matilda’s disguise as a young novice, Rosario, both conceals and legitimises Lewis’s exploration of homoeroticism in his novel—a mode similarly adopted by Beckford in his Episodes of Vathek and by Byron in his Turkish tales. The conversation between Ambrosio and Rosario in the grotto of the abbey-garden

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ian Duncan, Modern Romance and the Transformation of the Novel: the Gothic, Scott and Dickens (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 31.

resembles that between lovers, as the latter wishes to unveil his suffering and Ambrosio expresses his willingness to listen and help; as he confesses, “I perceive sensations in my bosom till then unknown to me; I found a delight in your society which no one’s else could afford” (54). In the convent Matilda hires a painter to paint her image as the Madonna, whose beauty increases Ambrosio’s “wonder and adoration” (39). When she reveals her true identity as a woman and threatens to stab herself, tearing open her clothes and half exposing the “dazzling whiteness” of her breast, Ambrosio finds it impossible to resist the temptation:

[H]is eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous orb: a sensation till then unknown filled his heart with a mixture of anxiety and delight; a raging fire shot through every limb; the blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination. (60)

The “sensation till then unknown,” referred to in the passage above and in the grotto scene points to the sexual awakening that Ambrosio experiences when he sees Matilda, both as the disguised Rosario and a woman. If Antonia is untutored in human malevolence, Ambrosio is likewise ignorant of Matilda’s artful performance, which renders her, as Ambrosio later puts it, a “dangerous,” “seducing object” (71). Matilda’s sexual advancement and her influence over him afterwards dissolve the traditional conception of passive, subservient femininity.³⁶ Nevertheless, Lewis’s depiction of the desiring woman is to some extent legitimised by the moral framework of devilish temptation. As Lewis admitted in the novel’s Advertisement, his romance was outlined upon “the story of the *Santon Barsisa*” (6), a tale by Richard Steele about the devil’s allurements of a santon to seduce a young princess, published in The Guardian in August 1713. Whereas Steele’s narrative is just two

³⁶ Ellis, History of Gothic Fiction 86.

pages long, Lewis's takes up three volumes, with graphic descriptions of seduction, rape and murder. As a result of its loose didactic framework, however, The Monk was favourably received by many of its early reviewers. The Monthly Mirror (1796), for instance, described the story as "masterly and impressive," praising the "strong[...] passions ... finely delineated and exemplified in the progress of artful temptation working on self-sufficient pride, superstition, and lasciviousness."³⁷

While Lewis asserted that his theme of demonic temptation was based upon Steele's "Santon Barsisa," the Monthly Review (1797) noted that it also seemed to be plagiarised from the more recently published work of the French author, Jacques Cazotte, Le Diable Amoureux (1772, translated as The Devil in Love in 1793).³⁸ In Cazotte's novel, the protagonist, a Spanish soldier and a dabbler in magic, is lured by Beelzebub in disguise as the beautiful Biondetta. As Louis F. Peck points out, the subject of devilish temptation through a seductress was commonplace even before the publication of Le Diable Amoureux,³⁹ but what made Lewis's novel so like Cazotte's narrative in the eye of his contemporaries was probably the vivid and sensuous detail of the allurements. Whereas Lewis described the "dazzling whiteness" of Matilda's breast, which is unveiled with the "moon-beams darting full upon it" (60), for example, Cazotte's text was translated thus: "the brightness of the moon displayed to my view her polished limbs, and its rays appeared more brilliant from the reflection."⁴⁰ Lewis later disputed the charge of plagiarism in his postscript to Adelmorn, the Outlaw (1801), playfully claiming that he "had not read" Cazotte's novel before he published The Monk, that Beelzebub's attempt at seduction differs from Matilda's because it "*fail[s]* of success," and that the French novel

³⁷ Monthly Mirror (1796), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 249.

³⁸ Louis F. Peck, "The Monk and Le Diable Amoureux," Modern Language Notes 68.6 (1953): 406.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 407.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

corresponds, if at all, with “only the two first chapters” of his romance.⁴¹ It is, indeed, difficult to say whether Lewis did copy Le Diable Amoureux, but he obviously did not follow the English tradition, which tended to concentrate much more on the didactic end-point of such a story rather than the graphic and descriptive process of temptation itself.

Cazotte’s sensational style might be seen to bear witness to a French pornographic tradition, which, according to Lynn Hunt, had flourished since the 1660s, and played a vital role in the development of European pornography.⁴² Particularly between the 1740s and the 1790s, French pornographic publications, as Hunt argues, became increasingly political, aiming to “criticis[e] the status quo at a time when the status quo was weakening,” starting from the failure in the War of Austrian Succession in the late 1740s up to the period of the French Revolution.⁴³ Eighteenth-century French pornography, as Robert Darnton has elucidated, sold along with other forbidden religious, philosophical and political writings that purported to challenge or attack the Old Regime and conventional social and moral values.⁴⁴ Many writings, engravings and portraits claimed to base their stories on reports of the trials concerning the sexual misdemeanors of French priests, and on scandals about the licentious private lives of courtiers. Others were fictional, but their similar plots and sensational narration equally fed the public’s scepticism and

⁴¹ Matthew Lewis, Adelmorn, the Outlaw; A Romantic Drama (1801), English Prose Drama Full-Text Database (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996), Literature Online, 1 Jan. 2006 <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/search>>, vii.

⁴² Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800,” The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone, 1996) 21.

⁴³ Ibid. 34-35. Hunt’s argument about the War of Austrian Succession here follows Margaret C. Jacob’s essay, “The Materialist World of Pornography” in Invention of Pornography, 157-202.

⁴⁴ Robert Darnton, The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (New York: Norton, 1996) 4.

antagonism towards the monarch and the church.⁴⁵ French pornography was also categorised under the heading of “philosophical books,” a phrase that served as more than a trade jargon since it connoted the libertine “philosophy” that these books offered in their quest for freedom from institutional despotism and restrictive religious and sexual mores—the word “philosophy,” as Darnton points out, is related to the French term “philosophe,” meaning “freethinker.”⁴⁶

In addition to the resemblance to Cazotte’s novel which I have described, Lewis’s association of the Church with sexual activity and crime is reminiscent of contemporary French anticlerical pornography, most famously exemplified by the writings of the Marquis de Sade. His La Philosophie dans le boudoir (1795), for example, simultaneously advances the causes of atheism and republicanism. As the novel throws off Christian spiritual concepts and instead celebrates sexual pleasure as the real essence of human existence, it inserts a pamphlet, “Français, encore un effort, si vous voulez être républicains,” to affirm Sade’s support of political, as well as sexual, freedom.⁴⁷ Although Lewis’s work was written in a different context and lacks the systematic political resonance that propelled Sade’s narration, it nonetheless seems to embrace the same kind of libertinism inherent in Sade’s writing. As Angela Wright asserts, there is a close connection between subjects and ideas in The Monk and Sade’s Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu (1791), which Lewis read during his stay in Paris in 1791.⁴⁸ Sade, like Lewis, inverted the

⁴⁵ For details about the varieties of pornographical writing of the eighteenth century, see, for example, Darnton, Forbidden Best-Sellers; Julie Peakman, Mighty Lewd Books: the Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); and Lynn Hunt, ed., Invention of Pornography.

⁴⁶ Darnton, Forbidden Best-Sellers 21, 90. On libertinism of The Monk and the French Revolution, see Ellis, History of Gothic Fiction, Chapter 3: “Revolution and Libertinism in the Gothic Novel” 81-120.

⁴⁷ John Phillips, Sade: The Libertine Novels (London: Pluto, 2001) 70.

⁴⁸ Angela Wright, “European Disruptions of the Idealised Woman: Matthew Lewis’s The Monk and the Marquis de Sade’s La Nouvelle Justine,” European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange 1760-1960, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester UP 2002) 40.

conventional Bildungsroman plot by depicting his virtuous and naïve heroine's entrance into the world, and the disastrous consequences of rape, sexual abuse and unjust accusations of theft and murder. When Justine seeks refuge in a monastery, for example, she is tortured and brutally raped by the monks. Antonia's innocence likewise causes her to be victimised by the abbot, Ambrosio, whose rape is described with Sadean violence:

He stifled her cries with kisses, treated her with the rudeness of an unprincipled barbarian, proceeded from freedom to freedom, and, in the violence of his lustful delirium, wounded and bruised her tender limbs. Heedless of her tears, cries and entreaties, he gradually made himself master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till he had accomplished his crime and the dishonour of Antonia. (328)

The delineation of Justine's misfortunes, as Sade put it in his dedication to his friend Marie-Constance Quesnet, was "to show Vice everywhere triumphant and Virtue the victim of its sacrifices."⁴⁹ Along with this "moral," Sade rejected the idea of divine providence and presented to his readers the subjective and unreliable nature of "virtue." As Sade showed, Justine is repeatedly humiliated and taken advantage of by people who are supposed to be the guardians and defendants of goodness and justice such as monks, noblemen and magistrates—his attack was clearly aimed at the corruption and absolutism of social, political and religious authorities. However, while Sade made libertinism a part of his critique of the ancien regime, Lewis's engagement with politics is rather more ambiguous and erratic. It is likely, as Wright argues, that Lewis's Gothic novel influenced and encouraged Sade, who praised The Monk in his famous essay, "Idée sur les romans" (1800), to revise Justine and publish its sequel, La Nouvelle Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu, suivi de

⁴⁹ Marquis de Sade, Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised (1791), Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings (London: Arrow, 1991) 455.

l’histoire de Juliette, sa soeur in 1797.⁵⁰ What Sade did, it seems, is to develop further scenes and images in Lewis’s work in accordance with his political philosophy. Whereas Ambrosio’s idolisation of the Madonna results from Matilda’s supernatural charm, women who extol and emulate the dress and manner of the Madonna in La Nouvelle Justine become, like Justine, victims of malignant characters and are directly denounced by Sade as representing the erroneous practice of religious idolatry: “It is,” as Sade’s narrator put it, “essential that fools stop worshipping this ridiculous idol of virtue, which until now has only repaid them with ingratitude.”⁵¹ While Lewis similarly destabilised the notion of virtue’s reward in his characterisation of Antonia, the moral ending that he added to the novel’s second edition—“Lady, to look with mercy on the conduct of others, is a virtue no less than to look with severity on your own” (386)—loosely relates to the peripheral episode of Ambrosio’s and the prioress of St. Clare’s punishment of Agnes, hence functioning to legitimise Lewis’s libertine mode of narration rather than to make a direct political statement.

It is perhaps most fruitful to consider Lewis’s delineation of religious tyranny in The Monk as reasserting his alliance with the liberal Foxite Whigs who positioned themselves against the reactionary British government, rather than to regard his writing as straightforwardly endorsing the Revolution or any radical agenda. Lewis’s image of Agnes’s confinement in a gloomy secret dungeon of the church—“chained,” “shut out from the world of light,” and provided with the “simplest and coarsest” food, “just enough to keep together body and soul” (348)—might have been influenced by French revolutionary dramas. His interest, however, tended to lie in the arresting spectacle of such a scene, as he wrote to his mother from Paris in

⁵⁰ Wright, “European Disruptions” 40-41.

⁵¹ qtd. in, and translated by, Wright, “European Disruptions” 51.

September 1792 that he found the presentation of a woman and her child, “hid in a cavern in her jealous husband’s house ... without food ... till they are perishing with hunger,” in the play Camille ou le Souterrain (1791), one of the “most affecting things I ever saw.”⁵² In the same letter, Lewis mentioned to his mother his translation of Jacques Marie Boutet de Monvel’s Les Victimes Cloîtrées (1791),⁵³ which similarly exhibits scenes of subterranean captives and which Lewis later adapted and staged as Venoni, or, The Novice of St. Mark’s in 1808. Moreover, Lewis’s image of the mob, who direct their vengence against the prioress, is notably ambivalent. While appealing for justice, his “band of rioters” is also destructive, uncontrolled and ferocious:

They tore her from one another, and each new tormentor was more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and execrations her shrill cries for mercy, and dragged her through the streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent. (306)

Lewis’s illustration of the bloodthirsty crowd is read by Ronald Paulson as representing a liberal Whig’s fear of popular movements, at a time when the French Revolution was no longer as warmly welcomed in Britain as it had initially been.⁵⁴ His novel, as Paulson observes, “is far removed from the morally clear-cut renderings of anticlericalism exemplified by the *dramas monacals* popular in the theatres of Revolutionary Paris.”⁵⁵

It is important to examine Lewis’s use of sixteenth-century Catholic Spain as his setting. In Britain, fear and hostility towards Catholicism had been entrenched for centuries. In the Protestant English imagination, Catholicism was associated with

⁵² qtd. in Baron-Wilson, Life and Correspondence, vol. 1, 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 61.

⁵⁴ Ronald Paulson, Representations of the Revolution (1789-1820) (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 223.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 219.

superstition, irrationality, and rigid and repressive monastic orders. Catholic countries, moreover, were also linked to sexual excess: a number of accounts of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century mentioned extramarital relationships, prostitution and sodomy as commonplace in continental countries, and some writers even reported of sexual activities in places such as monasteries and convents.⁵⁶ It was, therefore, not a coincidence that Gothic writers such as Horace Walpole would choose medieval Italy as a site to depict Manfred's incestuous sexual aggression. Lewis's novel likewise locates religious and sexual crimes in a Catholic country. His portrayal of these scenes, as I have elaborated, is so graphic and descriptive that Lewis could be seen to take pleasure in or even (as Haggerty puts it) "celebrate" such sexual excess and violence, the Catholic background offering a licence for Lewis to explore various transgressive forms of sexual behaviour.⁵⁷ Indeed, Lewis's anti-Catholicism (like Walpole's) seems quite perfunctory, at least when considered alongside Charles Maturin's substantial engagement with monasticism and other Catholic tenets in his Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), in which references to recent circumstances in Ireland alert readers to the growing conflict between Anglo-Irish Protestants and the Catholic majority.

Catholicism, moreover, offers a framework in which Lewis could make his protagonist, Ambrosio, sympathetic to his readers. Like Walpole, who presented Manfred's despotic attempt to preserve his lineage as resulting from the crimes that his grandfather commits, Lewis depicted Ambrosio as a victim of his repressive

⁵⁶ See Jeremy Black, The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century (Stroud: Sutton, 1992) 189-201; and Haggerty, Queer Gothic, Chapter 4: "The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction" 63-83. For a discussion of anti-Catholicism and the development of English pornography, see Julie Peakman, Mighty Lewd Books, Chapter 6: "Anti-Catholic Erotica" 126-60.

⁵⁷ Haggerty, Queer Gothic 70-71. Paulson also sees the scenes of Ambrosio's rape of Antonia and the lynching of the prioress as filled with "sexual release and sadism," a kind of "fulfillment and satisfaction of unrestricted power over another person." Representations of the Revolution 222.

Catholic upbringing. Ambrosio's character, as it is suggested in the novel, is not naturally bad, but a product of his restricted monastic education: "Instead of universal benevolence ... he was taught to consider compassion for the errors of others as a crime of the blackest dye" and "was suffered to be proud, vain, ambitious, and disdainful" (204). His matricide and incestuous sexual violence are, in Paulson's words, an "act of liberation," a "sexual liberty and fulfillment" that he cannot attain in the austere and secluded environment of the monastery.⁵⁸ Like other "male Gothic" writers, Lewis incorporated in his narrative the theme of a Faustian pact with the devil, portraying Ambrosio's sexual desire as being aroused by the temptation and the supernatural power of Matilda. The severe punishment of Ambrosio in the end, while serving as retribution for his brutal crimes, is somehow disturbing in its excess, as he is thrown down from "a dreadful height," suffering with "broken and dislocated limbs" on a river bank, where "[m]yriads of insects" drink his blood and "eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eyeballs with their crooked beaks" till he becomes "[b]lind, maimed, helpless, and despairing" (376). The seven-day torment that Ambrosio undergoes, and his death, can be read as Lewis's ironic inversion of God's creation of the world and providence, which, in Ambrosio's case, does not promise him a happy ending. The subversiveness of Lewis's novel, though apparently overlooked by many of its early readers, troubled Radcliffe and induced her to rewrite it in The Italian (1797), in which she not only saved her heroine from murder and rewarded her with a happy marriage, but also toned down Lewis's provocative narration by severing the ties between the crimes of an individual and his institutional upbringing. "Schedoni," as E. J. Clery remarks, "committed all his crimes as a layman, and only subsequently

⁵⁸ Paulson, Representations of the Revolution 221.

joined a religious order as a method of concealment: a rebuttal, then, of the cliché of the monk whose twisted nature is a result of his unnatural monastic existence.”⁵⁹

Under the cloak of anonymity, Lewis could safely lay before the public his libertine fiction and, as I have earlier mentioned, elicit admiration from early reviewers. The revelation of his authorship, when the title “MP” was added to his name in the second edition, however, turned most critics against him, as they expressed disapproval of the co-existence of Lewis’s status as a member of Parliament and as a writer of such a lascivious romance. This is obvious in the Critical Review (1797), in which Coleridge censured Lewis’s passage about Antonia reading the Bible as blasphemous, and sarcastically concluded: “Yes! The author of the Monk signs himself a LEGISLATOR!—we stare and tremble.”⁶⁰ In the same review, Coleridge remarked on Lewis’s presentation of “a libidinous minuteness” and “the most voluptuous images,” denouncing the novel as “a poison for youth and a provocative for the debauchee.”⁶¹ Likewise, the Monthly Review (1797) referred to its “obscenity” that “renders the work totally unfit for general circulation,” and the European Magazine (1797) considered it as conveying “neither originality, morals, nor probability” to the reader.⁶²

Of all critics in the 1790s, T. J. Mathias perhaps most emphatically identified the political resonance of The Monk.⁶³ In the fourth dialogue of The Pursuits of Literature (1797), Mathias criticised Lewis—“[a] legislator in our own parliament, a member of the House of Commons of Great Britain, an elected guardian and defender of the laws, the religion, and the good manners of the country”—as having

⁵⁹ E. J. Clery, Introduction, The Italian, by Ann Radcliffe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) xii.

⁶⁰ Critical Review (1797), Macdonald and Scherf, eds., Appendix C, The Monk 399-402.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 401.

⁶² Monthly Review (1797) and European Magazine (1797), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 250.

⁶³ T. J. Mathias, The Pursuits of Literature: A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues, 7th ed. (London, 1798) 346.

“neither scrupled nor blushed to depict, and to publish to the world, the arts of lewd and systematic seduction, and to thrust upon the nation the most open and unqualified blasphemy against the very code and volume of our religion.”⁶⁴ The threat that Lewis’s novel posed to Mathias, as Clery suggests, is that it thrived on popular consumption in a similar way to the works of radical and reformist writers.⁶⁵ Mathias’s account of Lewis followed his attacks on Paine’s Rights of Man and “unsexed” female writers, suggesting that Lewis’s work, like those of radicals and reformers, was undermining the nation’s political and social stability. As he stated in the opening of his dialogue, “LITERATURE, well or ill conducted, is THE GREAT ENGINE by which ... all civilised states must ultimately be supported or overthrown.”⁶⁶ By comparing Lewis with Edmund Curll, who was pilloried for printing obscene books in 1728, and with John Cleland, whose pornographic Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (1748-49) was rebuked by the Privy Council, Mathias’s reference to earlier prosecutions seemed to argue for a more or less similar legal punishment of the distribution of Lewis’s work, which he likewise regarded as an obscene libel (a category which, in the eighteenth century, did not distinguish between pornography, blasphemy, and political radicalism⁶⁷).

Following this deluge of criticism, Lewis expurgated the fourth edition of The Monk in 1798, deleting the passage about the Bible and either leaving out sexually explicit terms such as “lust” or “voluptuousness,” or substituting them with milder ones such as “pleasure” or “luxury”. The alteration was superficial and Lewis’s libertine content was still largely intact, nonetheless, and the novel remained a target of attack and controversy for decades; not long after its first publication, The

⁶⁴ Mathias, Pursuits of Literature 239.

⁶⁵ Clery, Rise of Supernatural Fiction 163.

⁶⁶ Mathias, Pursuits of Literature 238.

⁶⁷ Hunt, “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity” 16.

Monk provided its author with the appellation “Monk Lewis,” which, according to Margaret Baron-Wilson, Lewis did not object to, even telling his mother in a letter that he was “just as well pleased with that name as with any other.”⁶⁸ Though Lewis admitted in a letter to his father in February 1798 that the work was a mere adolescent diversion, hence written with “high imprudence,”⁶⁹ he very often expressed pride in his novel, and was irritated when others adapted his story and presented it as morally purified. James Boaden, for instance, staged it as Ambrosio in 1798, with Matilda as a virtuous woman in the disguise of a monk, and Ambrosio as an heir of a nobleman who later abrogates his monastic vows and marries Matilda. Articulating his annoyance at Boaden’s happy, “companionate-marriage” ending, Lewis expressed his contempt for the play to Scott: “Ambrosio is made a good sort of Man, and finishes by marrying Matilda! There’s the very Devil’s own invention for you!”⁷⁰ Whereas Michael Gamer saw the name “Monk Lewis” as stigmatising for the author who, he asserts, incessantly “attempt[ed] to defuse the scandal produced by The Monk,”⁷¹ I would argue that Lewis also made use of this reputation to establish himself in the theatre. As he continually revisited themes and images of The Monk in his later plays and fictions, Lewis’s subsequent works, as the next section will show, were dependent on his first novel, and his self-defence against the scandal that novel generated was part of his increasingly indiscreet and provocative self-presentation.

⁶⁸ qtd. in Baron-Wilson, Life and Correspondence, vol. 1, 185.

⁶⁹ Lewis to his father, 23 Feb. 1798, Macdonald and Scherf, eds., Appendix C, The Monk 408.

⁷⁰ qtd. in Peck, Life of Lewis 30.

⁷¹ Gamer, “Authors in Effect” 849.

LEWIS AFTER THE MONK SCANDAL

Despite the scandal of The Monk, Lewis sought to maintain his literary fame by shifting to a more popular field of entertainment, the theatre. The Castle Spectre, his first work after The Monk, similarly reworked features from earlier Gothic fictions, including The Monk itself, to appeal to the audience. However, Lewis's revision of the Gothic in his play was done in a very different manner from that in The Monk and seems to have been intended to convey a rather different effect. First of all, it should be noted that Lewis's play would have been classified by his contemporaries as a melodrama—a subcategory of the “illegitimate drama,” initially prospering alongside pantomimes, farces, burlesques and other kinds of entertainment in London's minor theatres.⁷² In the 1790s the melodrama was increasingly popular in its infusion of music, songs, comic scenes and spectacles into sensational romance plots. With the enlargement of Covent Garden in 1792 and Drury Lane in 1794, the incorporation of melodrama with traditional, “legitimate” performances of tragedy and comedy in both patent theatres quickly brought about wider audiences and bigger profits.⁷³ Lewis's The Castle Spectre is evidence of the rise to prominence of illegitimate drama in this period. First staged at Drury Lane in December 1797, it became a sensation, running for forty-seven nights, but also drew much critical attention from reviewers, who seized upon the “illegitimacy” or generic heterogeneity of Lewis's play. The St. James Chronicle, for example, called The Castle Spectre “a drama of a mingled nature, Operatic, Comical and Tragical,” and

⁷² For an extensive account of illegitimate theatre, see Jane Moody, Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

⁷³ Michael R. Booth, Richard Southern, Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker and Robertson Davies, The Revels History of Drama in English, vol. 6 (London: Methuen, 1975) 42.

the Monthly Magazine considered it “a tragedy-pantomime.”⁷⁴ Far from endeavouring to regain his reputation, Lewis’s shift from novel to melodrama was to make himself even more unpopular with critics, as his staging of an illegitimate play, as I will show, deliberately confounded their expectations of seeing a traditional, proper tragedy in the patent theatre of Drury Lane.

In the prologue, Lewis made it clear that his play is of a mixed character. While its outline—that of “false friendship, hopeless love, or faith betray’d”—belongs to the genre of tragedy, its characters, as Lewis asserted, are “from Shakespeare’s comic school” comprising “[t]he gossip crone, gross friar, and gibing fool” as well as “a virgin fair and lover brave.”⁷⁵ Such a combination is indeed reminiscent of a number of Gothic romances, especially Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto which aimed to delineate a mixture of the tragic and the comic, an attempt no less pioneering than its blending of the “old” and “new” styles of romance, something which Walpole sought to legitimise with reference to Shakespeare. It is indeed likely that Walpole’s novel provided a germ of inspiration for Lewis’s writing of The Castle Spectre, as the latter is similarly centred on a usurping tyrant, Osmond, who murders his brother, Earl Reginald, to become the lord of Conway Castle, and then forces his niece into a marriage with him. Like Manfred, Osmond is capable of being both evil and remorseful: as the story unfolds, it appears that his behaviour results from his unrequited love for Reginald’s wife, Evelina, whose death is the source of his perpetual suffering and violent passion for her daughter, Angela. Lewis, however, did not seem to develop Walpole’s Gothic villain-hero beyond its comic potential. For example, Percy’s disguise as Earl Reginald in armour,

⁷⁴ qtd. in Moody, Illegitimate Theatre 50; and Macdonald, Monk Lewis 182.

⁷⁵ Matthew Lewis, Prologue, The Castle Spectre, Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens: Ohio UP, 1992) 152, lines 36-38. Subsequent references to the play will be given after quotations in the text. Since line numbers are not provided in the source, page numbers will be given instead (after the semicolon) along with act and scene numbers.

“extend[ing] his truncheon with a menacing gesture and descend[ing] from the pedestal” (2.1; 171) to scare Osmond away from Angela, was (as Lewis admitted) a direct borrowing from the episode of “the animated portrait in *The Castle of Otranto*” (2.1, Lewis’s note; 172), and was therefore a literalisation and visualisation of *The Castle of Otranto*’s pantomimic effect. Osmond, moreover, can also be seen as Lewis’s revision of Ambrosio, only with his behaviour sarcastically described as predestined: “Nature,” as Osmond declares, “formed me the slave of wild desires; and Fate, as she frowned upon my cradle, exclaimed, ‘I doom this babe to be a villain and a wretch!’” (2.3; 175). Lewis’s footnote on Osmond’s character was a pre-emptive strike at hostile critics who might regard his empathy with the morally defiant villain as associated with rebellion:

I think it necessary to observe to my readers, that the foregoing speech is not meant to contain a moral sentiment, but to display the false reasoning of a guilty conscience.—If I were not to make this explanation, I should expect to see it asserted that the whole Play was meant to inculcate the doctrine of Fatality. (2.3, Lewis’s note; 175)

To make his play more extravagant, Lewis included in it the scene of Percy’s escape, by means of leaping from the window of the prison tower into Motley’s boat. Lewis’s remark about the event being based on the historical German account of the renowned eleventh-century prison breaker, “Ludwig the Springer,” is a mock authentication that reveals his playful engagement with the convention of footnoting, which here serves to justify the improbability of the scene, as Lewis provocatively proclaimed: “I never said it was possible, I only say it’s true!” (2.3, Lewis’s note; 180). Lewis’s play, in this sense, is Walpolean in its ludicrous, over-the-top display of the marvellous. In the same way that John Dunlop, in *History of Fiction* (1814), criticised Walpole’s Gothic paraphernalia of “skulls or skeletons—sliding panels—

damp vaults—trap-doors—and dismal apartments” as absurd and unconnected to “the tented fields of chivalry and its airy enchantments,”⁷⁶ the Monthly Review (1798) censured Lewis’s theatrical machinery as indiscriminate and lacking ordering principles:

What do you call it?—a drama, it seems, it must be, we cannot but regret that an author, whose talents seem designed for better things, should condescend to make us stare at Groves, and Suits of Armour, and Pedestals with Names, and the River Conway, and in short, whatever presented itself to his imagination.⁷⁷

The incident of Percy’s escape, as Jeffrey Cox notes, “was thought not only improbable but also undignified,” particularly for a prominent actor like John Kemble, who, as the Times (1798) observed, was reduced to a mere “harlequin” in the play.⁷⁸ Indeed, Walpole’s and Lewis’s deviation from the high culture of tragedy was viewed by late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century critics as disparaging to the morality and cultivated taste of the nation. Like William Hazlitt, who went on to refer to Walpole’s supernatural elements as “the pasteboard machinery of a pantomime” which was “done upon false principles of taste,” the British Critic (1798) condemned Lewis’s play as displaying “a kind of nonsensical curiosity about the grossest improbabilities,” while the Analytical Review (1798) considered it “humiliating to the pride of our national taste.”⁷⁹

What critics found most offensive in The Castle Spectre, it seems, was Lewis’s presentation of Evelina’s ghost on stage. Its first appearance is in the Oratory in which, according to Lewis’s stage direction, there “stands a tall female

⁷⁶ John Dunlop, The History of Fiction (1814), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 99.

⁷⁷ Monthly Review (1798), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 254.

⁷⁸ Cox, ed., Seven Gothic Dramas 180; Cox’s addition after Lewis’s note on “Ludwig the Springer.”

⁷⁹ William Hazlitt, Lectures on the Comic Writers (1819), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 101; and British Critic XI (1798) and Analytical Review XXVIII (1798). McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 253.

figure” in “white garments spotted with blood,” and with a “pale and melancholy countenance” (4.2; 206), pointing to Reginald’s picture as if to hint to Angela to save her father. With the help of the organ’s sound, “a full chorus of female voices” and “a blaze of light [that] flashes through the Oratory” (4.2; 206), Lewis’s representation of the ghost could not be more blatant to the eyes of his audience and must have been calculated to produce a remarkable effect. In the final scene Evelina’s ghost rushes upon Osmond to stop him from killing Reginald, enabling Angela to stab her villainous uncle—thus functioning as a *deus ex machina* that apparently served to heighten the audience’s sensation at the end of the performance. As Lewis boasted in his postscript to the play, the ghost was received “with increased applause” (224)⁸⁰ each night that The Castle Spectre was performed. The Monthly Mirror (1798) also noted the play’s “extraordinary popularity” that mainly derived from “the happy management the author has exhibited in the paraphernalia of his spectre” and “the air of romance he has given to the principal situations.”⁸¹ Though most critics objected to the ghost and noticed that the drama could do without its literal representation, they agreed that it hugely contributed to the play’s commercial success since it seemed to pander to the popular taste for spectacle and sensationalism.⁸² Wordsworth observed how the play “fitted the taste of the audience like a glove” and contemptuously emphasised the considerable profit that Lewis’s work drew from spectators, despite its lack of substantial literary merit: “The Castle Spectre is a Spectre indeed. Clothed with flesh and blood of £400 received from the

⁸⁰ Page number from Cox, ed., Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825 will now be given in parentheses when I refer to the postscript of The Castle Spectre.

⁸¹ Monthly Mirror (1798), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 254.

⁸² Monthly Mirror (1797), for example, said that the ghost was of “no necessity.” The British Critic (1798) even sarcastically remarked that the play seemed to be written only for the display of the ghost: “the spectre from which it is named, instead of being necessary, contributes not a little to the plot of the drama, and might be omitted without any change, except the show.” See McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 253.

treasury of the theatre it may in the eyes of the author and his friend appear very lovely.”⁸³ While calling the play “a mere patchwork of plagiarisms,” Coleridge also acknowledged that “they were well worked up, and for the stage effect make an excellent whole.”⁸⁴

Lewis’s engagement with the supernatural here is distinctly different from in The Monk. His novel, as I have earlier suggested, can be read as a take on the Radcliffean Gothic tradition. Lewis’s account of the Bleeding nun, for example, reverses Radcliffe’s “explained supernatural” plot by substituting the sham ghost (Agnes in disguise as the Bleeding nun) with a real one. The appearance of the dead Beatrice de las Cisternas, as Raymond describes, is appalling: “Her countenance was long and haggard; her cheeks and lips were bloodless; the paleness of death was spread over her features; and her eye-balls, fixed stedfastly [*sic*] upon me, were lustreless and hollow” (140). Lewis’s delineation of the supernatural is as graphic as his images of the victimised heroines. In contrast to Radcliffe’s romances, Lewis’s Gothic narrative carries with it a heightened shock-value, as Sade asserted in his “Reflections on the Novel” (“Idée sur les romans”) in 1800, when he wrote that amid the surrounding political turmoil and readers’ jaded interest, “the romantic novel was becoming somewhat difficult to write” and authors such as Lewis had to “call upon hell,” or the machinery of murder, imprisonment and ghosts, to capture the reader’s attention.⁸⁵ Lewis’s Gothic horror in The Castle Spectre, on the other hand, was more bathetic than terrifying. While Lewis seemed to revive the theme of aristocratic oppression and, specifically, images of the tormented Agnes, in his representation of Reginald in the dungeon, “pale and emaciated, in coarse garments, his hair hanging

⁸³ qtd. in Macdonald, Monk Lewis 181; and Peck, Life of Lewis 76.

⁸⁴ Samuel Coleridge, Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1956-71), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 245.

⁸⁵ Marquis de Sade, “Reflections on the Novel” (1800), Macdonald and Scherf, eds., Appendix C, The Monk 415.

wildly about his face, and a chain bound round his body” (5.3; 212), his insertion of Evelina’s ghost in the scene (running wildly on stage) also made his play hover on the verge of a comic burlesque. The incident in the hidden passage where Father Philip’s groan terrifies Alice was noted by Lewis as having been influenced by the episode of Emily and Dorothee in the marchioness’s bedchamber in Udolpho, but, unlike Radcliffe’s “terrific scene,” his was “intended to produce an effect entirely ludicrous” (3.3, Lewis’s note; 192). While many reviewers censured the improbability of the drama, Lewis responded in his postscript to the playtext that “because the belief in Ghosts no longer exists[,] ... that is the very reason she [Evelina’s ghost] *may* be produced without danger” (223)—emphasising that for him, there was nothing at stake in his presentation of the supernatural, aside perhaps from irritating moralising critics.

Lewis’s introduction of slaves in his medieval English setting was an obvious anachronism, and, along with his presentation of ghost and villain-hero, rather served to annoy critics than to give a larger analysis of their social or political resonance. Lewis’s description of Osmond’s slave, Hassan, for instance, incorporates anti-slavery sentiment, as Hassan bemoans that:

I have been dragged from my native land, from a wife who was every thing to me, to whom I was every thing! Twenty years have elapsed since these Christians tore me away: they trampled upon my heart, mocked my despair, and, when in frantic terms I raved of Samba, [they] laughed, and wondered how a negro’s soul could feel! (1.2; 161)

Lewis’s sympathetic depiction of Hassan was in fact a subject of controversy, and in the printed Larpent performance version, Hassan’s speech concerning his slave

condition was marked for omission, as Cox puts it, “presumably by the examiner.”⁸⁶ The Monthly Mirror (1797) also opposed Lewis’s “introduction of Africans” into his “Gothic story” as well as his “allusion to the *Slave Trade*.”⁸⁷ Lewis’s response was even more provocative, since he later published the play, as he affirmed in the postscript, “almost verbatim, as originally written” to counter those “erroneous assertions” of his play being “violently democratic” (221-22). Hassan’s speech could be disagreeable to many Britons, but his anguish, as Felicity Nussbaum argues, “is partially excused because of his capacity for strong sentiment,” and the negroes, overall, “remain peripheral to the plot, though their obvious victimisation could be interpreted as justifying the return of freed blacks to Africa rather than as an indictment of slavery which is not mentioned in the play.”⁸⁸ Lewis himself disowned any responsibility for his ambivalent staging of the Africans, playfully claiming in the postscript that the representation of skin colour in his story was devoid of any cultural significance: “I thought it would give a pleasing variety to the characters and dresses, if I made my servants black; and could I have produced the same effect by making my heroine blue, blue I should have made her” (223).

Lewis’s anachronistic insertion of the Africans in his drama differs from his much more detailed description of his Jamaican slaves in his final work, Journal of a West India Proprietor (written between 1815-18, published posthumously in 1834), in which Lewis’s concern over the improvement of the slaves’ condition portrays him as a benevolent, paternalistic proprietor. The genre of the journal itself reflects Lewis’s self-fashioning as a travel-writer, another form of self-presentation by which he perhaps sought to re-establish himself as a respectable author—for Coleridge, for

⁸⁶ Cox, ed., Seven Gothic Dramas 150, 161 (note 36).

⁸⁷ Monthly Mirror (1797), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 253; and Cox, ed., Seven Gothic Dramas 16 (note 36).

⁸⁸ Felicity A. Nussbaum, The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 232.

example, Lewis's Journal was "by far his best book, and will live and be popular."⁸⁹ The Journal, however, was not the only work that showed Lewis's serious engagement with the social and political climate of his time. In 1799, Lewis dedicated to Fox The Love of Gain, a satirical poem in imitation of the thirteenth satire of Juvenal. In 1806, he wrote "Lines Written on returning from the Funeral of the Right Hon. C. J. Fox" in which he revered Fox as a fervent supporter of the cause of India, American independence, religious freedom, abolitionism, and peace with France. Though The Castle Spectre seemed to invoke themes and images with political meanings, they were offered without any clear-cut underlying agenda, apart from piquing critics and gratifying the public thirst for sensationalism. Despite Lewis's affiliation with the liberal Foxite Whigs, it is difficult to pin down the political resonance in his fictional writings, since Lewis's self-representation as a writer after The Monk scandal (except in his Journal) became increasingly involved with his alliance with the public and an outright identification of himself against critical authority. Lewis's "desire to maintain his profile as a literary *enfant terrible*," as Watt asserts, "ultimately overrode any concern with more direct political intervention" in his fictions.⁹⁰ As Lewis declared in his title-page of Adelmorn, the Outlaw; A Romantic Drama (1801), quoting William Paley, "[n]othing is a trifle, which contributes to the harmless amusement of multitudes."⁹¹ Defiantly waging war with critics, he made it clear in his postscript to the play that he was indifferent to their opinion: "they take so much trouble with productions which I thought from their nature not worthy to cost me any,—they convert that into a source of so much labour to them, which to me was merely a source of amusement ..."⁹²

⁸⁹ qtd. in Peck, Life of Lewis 169.

⁹⁰ Watt, Contesting the Gothic 99.

⁹¹ Lewis, Adelmorn, title page.

⁹² *Ibid.* x.

An important reason why Lewis was renounced by contemporary critics was his persistent use of German sources during a period when translations and adaptations of German literature in England were subject to intense scrutiny and dispute. In the 1790s and the early 1800s, German fictions, as Watt explains, “became guilty by association” with an “excess of both sentiment and rationality” as well as with the democratic inclination of famous authors such as Schiller and Kotzebue, whose writings popularised images of outlaws and secret societies that worked to undermine the power of established governments and constitutions.⁹³ Wordsworth’s preface to Lyrical Ballads in 1800 complained of the popularity of “sickly and stupid German Tragedies,” hinting at both the spread of German works and the threat they represented to the British canon of respectable authors such as Shakespeare and Milton.⁹⁴ Lewis was distinguished from other borrowers of German writing in the period, not only in his indiscriminate use of German sources, but also in the way that he “Lewisized” them, or, in other words, adapted his sources to match the popular taste of his audience. Coleridge’s Osorio (1798), based upon the German plot of an outlaw’s revenge against his tyrannical brother, was rejected by the manager of Drury Lane since, as Byron told John Murray, it “did not appear at all practicable” to the theatre.⁹⁵ Joanna Baillie also adopted the revenge theme in De Monfort (1798). Removing the murder scene off stage, Baillie’s tragedy was applauded by critics, but not her audience, as a reviewer noted: “The audience yawned in spite of themselves and in spite of the exquisite poetry, the vigorous

⁹³ Watt, Contesting the Gothic 75-76.

⁹⁴ William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth and Coleridge; the Texts of the 1798 Edition with the Additional 1800 Poems and the Prefaces, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1991) 249.

⁹⁵ Byron to John Murray, 12 Oct. 1817, Leslie A. Marchand, ed., Byron’s Letters and Journals, vol. 5 (London: Murray, 1973) 267.

passion, and the transcendent acting.”⁹⁶ Lewis’s The Castle Spectre similarly highlights the overthrow of a tyrannical usurper. But if the play contained any German characteristics, they seemed to be outweighed by Lewis’s introduction of a ghost and theatrical effects, hence diluting the democratic social and political ideology that Lewis’s contemporaries would attribute to German literature. Lewis was known as a populariser of German literary influence, as an anonymous writer in the Courier reflected in October 1818, five months after Lewis’s death in Jamaica: he was “a profligate,” “a reckless defiler of the public mind,” “a leader in this northern invasion [of German popular writing], and he triumphed in the common degradation of the English genius.”⁹⁷

Lewis’s engagement with his sources is indeed erratic. In the advertisement to The Monk, Lewis explained that his depiction of the Bleeding Nun derived from “a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany” (6). The poem “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine,” which recounts the story of the unfaithful Imogine and the revenge of her phantom lover Alonzo, though its source was not acknowledged by Lewis, is claimed by Syndy Conger to have been based on Gottfried August Bürger’s famous ballad “Lenore” (1773).⁹⁸ Both were included in The Monk to heighten the effects of horror, as Agnes (in disguise as the Bleeding Nun) turns out to be the dead Beatrice who disrupts Raymond’s plan of elopement, while the poem “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine” that Antonia reads increases her fear of the spectre of her dead mother. Lewis republished both works (with the Bleeding Nun rewritten as a ballad) in Tales of Wonder (1800), playfully describing “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine” as “Original—M. G. Lewis,” and “The Bleeding Nun” as

⁹⁶ qtd. in Paul Baines and Edward Burns, Introduction, Five Romantic Plays, 1768-1821 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) xix.

⁹⁷ qtd. in Peck, Life of Lewis 174-75.

⁹⁸ Macdonald and Scherf, Introduction, The Monk 13.

“founded on the fourth chapter of the Romance of ‘Ambrosio, or the Monk.’”⁹⁹ While the poems are part of Lewis’s collection of translations and imitations of old supernatural ballads, Lewis’s treatment of them is dubious, as the volume also contains his own parody of “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine,” “Giles Jollup the Grave and Brown Sally Green,” along with other burlesques such as the anonymous “Cinder King” and George Colman the younger’s “The Maid of the Moor; or, the Water Fiends.”

During this period, a time when there was an increasing interest in old ballads, Walter Scott, who collaborated with Lewis on Tales of Wonder, was preoccupied with providing the historical provenance of his contributions, and was later renowned for his own ballads and poems that helped reinvent Scottish culture. Lewis’s interest in this ballad revival was very different, however, and he told Scott that what he counted most in Tales of Wonder was “a Ghost or a Witch,” “a sine-qua-non ingredient in all the dishes, of which I mean to compose my hobgoblin repast.”¹⁰⁰ Whereas most of the ballads served to pander to the popular taste for supernatural horror, Lewis’s parody of “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine” did not only draw the reader’s attention once again to The Monk but, as Lisa Wilson observes, also “implicitly challenge[d] the critical establishment by poking fun at the one piece of his work of which they consistently approved.”¹⁰¹ As the Anti-Jacobin Review (1801) remarked, Lewis’s poetical talents “are strangely perverted, and he

⁹⁹ My references to Lewis’s Tales of Wonder here are from the 1887 edition of Tales of Terror and Wonder (London: Routledge, 1887) 124, 244. This edition is the one most available now, though it has to be remarked that Lewis is probably not the author of Tales of Terror, an anonymous parody of Tales of Wonder which came out in 1801 and was later issued and sold by Lewis’s publisher along with Tales of Wonder in a single volume. On Lewis’s authorship and Tales of Terror, please see Elizabeth Church, “A Bibliographical Myth,” Modern Philology 19.3 (1922): 307-14.

¹⁰⁰ qtd. in Watt, Contesting the Gothic 85.

¹⁰¹ Lisa M. Wilson, “Monk’ Lewis as Literary Lion,” Romanticism On the Net 8, Nov. 1997, 19 Feb. 2007 <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/literary.html>>.

sometimes seems even to be employed in throwing a ridicule upon himself.”¹⁰² The writer of the Poetical Register (1801) likewise repudiated Lewis’s inclusion of parodies in the volume, noting that they were “evidently designed to ridicule the present taste for the wonderful” and that it was “difficult to decide whether they are meant to be serious or ludicrous.”¹⁰³

The eclectic display of the spectacular and the ludicrous is similarly central to Lewis’s novel, The Bravo of Venice: A Romance (1805). Claiming that the narrative was translated from the German Abaellino, der grosse Bandit (1794) by Johann Heinrich Zschokke, Lewis transformed his source material to such an extent that his version can be read as a burlesque of a “typical” German terror romance. The outlaw hero, Abellino, is first introduced as a mysterious, fearful villain—“hear the name of Abellino...tremble!”¹⁰⁴ Lewis’s subsequent description of Abellino’s appearance, however, is so exaggerated that he becomes more of a comic character. “His mouth,” as Lewis put it, “was so wide, that his gums and discoloured teeth were visible” and his “eye (for he had but one) was sunk deep in his head, and little more than the white of it was visible; and even that little was overshadowed by the protrusion of his dark and bushy eye-brow” (30-31). Even the narrator himself playfully confesses that he doubts “whether this repulsive physiognomy exprest stupidity of intellect, or maliciousness of heart, or whether it implied them both together” (31).

While Lewis burlesqued the stereotypical German Gothic villain-hero in Abellino, he reprised his own fictional character, Ambrosio, in Matteo, the bandit chief in the novel. Matteo is not only “educated in a monastery” (46), but is also a product of a clandestine relationship paralleling that between Ambrosio and Antonia:

¹⁰² qtd. in Wilson, “Monk’ Lewis as Literary Lion.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Lewis, The Bravo of Venice: A Romance (New York: Arno, 1972) 11. Subsequent references to this work will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

“my father,” Matteo explains, “was a dignified prelate in Lucca, and my mother a nun of the Ursuline order, greatly respected for her chastity and devotion” (46). In a similar way to Ambrosio, Matteo’s rebellious character was formed by his restricted and unnatural upbringing: “What is virtue! What is vice? Nothing but such things as forms of government, customs, manners, and education have made sacred” (43). Apart from these expressions of resentment, however, Lewis did not provide any further analysis of Matteo and his oppressed condition. Instead of being a sympathetic character, Matteo is comically depicted as a boastful bandit leader and a gigantic but weak figure who is easily thrown to the floor “as had he been an infant” (34) by Abellino in a wrestling match; after only thirty or so pages, Lewis removed him from the narrative by having him outwitted and killed by Abellino. Lewis’s portrayal of Rosabella, furthermore, mimics his illustration of Antonia in The Monk:

[H]er light and delicate limbs, enveloped in a thin white garment which fell around her in a thousand folds; her blue and melting eyes, whence beamed the expression of purest innocence; her forehead, white as ivory, overshadowed by the ringlets of her bright dark hair; cheeks, whence terror had now stolen the roses; lips, which a seducer had never poisoned with kisses...the perfection of female loveliness—Such was she ... (68)

In contrast to the case of Antonia, however, Rosabella’s “uncommon beauty” (74) prevents Abellino from killing her as Matteo has commanded, and instead induces him to save her life.

With such pastiches of The Monk, Lewis not only took pleasure in altering and playing with his source, but he also underscored the fact that his literary reputation depended on the public recognition of himself as the author of that notorious novel. The “villain” Abellino in The Bravo of Venice is revealed to be Rosabella’s handsome lover in disguise, a Neapolitan whose motivation in dealing

with bandits and politicians is to eliminate outlaws, expose conspirators and restore justice. If there is any political resonance here, Lewis's work might be read as an allegory of the Jacobin conspiracy against the Directory, followed by the coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799. Such allegorical potential is not pushed by Lewis, however, and, as I have shown, is outweighed by the bizarreness of his characters and story. While the British Critic (1805) remarked on the "improbability" of the narrative, the Critical Review (1805) asserted that "Mr. Lewis was initiated into learning by one of those histories of harlequin, where the *turn up* and *turn down* of every leaf introduces the hero in a new situation, and creates fresh matter for surprise and wonder."¹⁰⁵

In 1806 Lewis published Feudal Tyrants; or, The Counts of Carlsheim and Sargans. A Romance, translated from a German adaptation of Christiane Benedicte Eugenie Naubert's work. In opposition to contemporary interest in the recuperation of the Middle Ages and the notion of Gothic chivalry, Lewis's work, as its title suggests, revisited The Monk's theme of feudal corruption: while the book comprises four different but connected tales, each similarly revolves around stories and images of domestic tyranny, monastic vice, bandits, confinement, and murder. A tableau that continually recurs is that of female entrapment in a secret dungeon. Urania in the first tale, for example, is imprisoned in the same dungeon as her atrocious husband's first wife, who lay on "a wretched pallet" and "whose features were totally unknown to us [Urania and Edith, her cousin], but whose appearance excited in us the deepest sentiments of pity."¹⁰⁶ In the second tale, Helen relates her

¹⁰⁵ British Critic (1805), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 259; and Critical Review (1805): 252-56, British Fiction 1800-1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception, 2004, Cardiff U, 9 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/titleDetails.asp?title=1805A076>>.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Lewis, Feudal Tyrants; or, The Counts of Carlsheim and Sargans. A Romance, 2nd ed. (London: Shury, 1807), vol. 1, 184-85. Subsequent references to this work will be given (with volume and page numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

misfortunes after being carried off by Count Donat who puts her in the convent dungeon, placing “by her side a loaf of bread and a small flask of water ... flinging the door after him in violence” (3, 140). The depiction of another female captive in the same dungeon, Emmeline, resembles that of Ambrosio’s rape and torment of Antonia: “Luprian, the unworthy Abbot of Curwald, who even under the protecting roof of her [Emmeline’s] father had insulted her by a declaration of his passion, renewed his persecution with increased ardour in a place, which was completely under his dominion” (3, 251-52); when Emmeline rejects him, she is “compelled to endure a variety of the most cruel insults and injuries, and then ... dragged back to her dungeon so exhausted with her sufferings, that she could scarcely be called alive” (3, 252-53). Whereas most of Naubert’s fictions were tied to their historical and political context—his medievalism was employed to expose the sinister activities of the fifteenth-century Secret Tribunal of Westphalia¹⁰⁷—Lewis seemed to be more interested in using Naubert’s motif of feudal despotism to create a spectacle, without analysing characters and their motivation as he did in The Monk. His familiar images of female suffering, in other words, became Lewis’s trademark, an important part of his “branding” of himself after The Monk scandal. As the reviewer of the Flowers of Literature (1806) proclaimed, the novel “contains so much of Mr. Lewis’s peculiar manner, that we suppose it to be an original composition. At all events, he has considerably increased his reputation by producing it, notwithstanding the fame he has already acquired.”¹⁰⁸

Lewis’s adaptation of Monvel’s Les Victimes Cloîtrées on stage as Venoni, or The Novice of St. Mark’s in 1808 revised the themes of religious tyranny and

¹⁰⁷ Terry Hale, “French and German Gothic: the beginnings,” The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, ed. Jerold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 67-68.

¹⁰⁸ Flowers of Literature (1806): 501-02, British Fiction 1800-1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception, 2004, Cardiff U, 9 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/title/Details.asp?title=1805A076>>.

monastic crimes dealt with in The Monk, though it eschewed the lurid sexual component that was intrinsic to that novel. The play focuses on the Prior Coelestino's temptation of Venoni, the betrothed lover of Josepha, to quit the world and retire to monkhood. While Coelestino's motive for secluding Josepha in the convent is his "licentious passion" for the young bride, Lewis did not stage or refer to Coelestino's seduction of Josepha, except in the Prior's ambiguous mentioning of her as "in my power defenceless!"¹⁰⁹ Instead, Lewis's interest was shifted to the theatrical presentation of his hero and heroine in the adjoining dungeons. In the third act, Venoni, after discovering the Prior's secret, is imprisoned in the dark dungeon with a large iron-grated door in the back. Next to his dungeon and separated by a wall is Josepha's cell which contains "a miserable pallet, at the head of which is a block of stone supporting a basket, a pitcher, a small flask of oil, and an iron lamp" (3.3; 89). The scene resembles that of the captured Agnes in the dungeon, particularly when Lewis described the frantic Josepha on the pallet as "pale and emaciated, with her hair disshevelled," uttering a loud cry and starting at slightest noises "as if affrighted by some terrible dream" (3.3; 89).

Earlier in 1803 Lewis had attempted to stage the scene of female suffering in The Captive: A Monodrama, or Tragic Scene. His presentation of the tormented, chained, and delirious woman in the private madhouse of her "tyrant husband,"¹¹⁰ might have been inspired by Wollstonecraft's Maria, or the Wrongs of Women, but Lewis's emphasis was on the theatrical experimentation with a single scene of intense mental and physical suffering, to produce striking effects, rather than on

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Lewis, Venoni, or The Novice of St. Mark's (1809), English Prose Drama Full-Text Database (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1997), Literature Online, 31 Dec. 2005 <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/search>> 32; Act 2, scene 1. Subsequent references to the play will be given after quotations in the text. Since line numbers are not provided in the source, page numbers will be given instead (after the semicolon) along with act and scene numbers.

¹¹⁰ Matthew Lewis, The Captive: A Monodrama, or Tragical Scene, Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825 226. Line numbers are not given in the source.

offering his audience a social commentary. As reported in the Monthly Mirror, the image was “too strong for the feelings of the audience,” causing “[t]wo ladies [to] f[a]ll into hysterics” and Lewis to withdraw the drama after a few more performances.¹¹¹ In Venoni, Lewis seemed to revise the scene with his presentation of Josepha, and also made the ending more dramatic by placing two adjoined dungeons on stage that allowed the audience to see at once his two protagonists, and how Venoni, through a “secret” door, enters Josepha’s cell and leads her out of the place. Though the horrendous image of Josepha in torment terrified many spectators and induced him to alter the scene by replacing Josepha’s dungeon with a convent room in which she is seen in the company of other nuns, and in her normal condition, Lewis claimed, in his preface to the play’s published version in 1809, that the play was still “received with unqualified applause” and went through eighteen successful performances before the burning down of Drury Lane theatre.

Lewis’s adaptation of literary sources attests to the commercialisation of his works, both written and performed. His last play, Timour the Tartar: A Grand Romantic Melo-drama in Two Acts (1811), though not so dependent on The Monk as other works that I have discussed, is one of the most obvious examples of Lewis’s alliance with the public and his identification of himself against custodians of the literary and theatrical spheres. The drama was originally staged at Covent Garden as an afterpiece, which, with the half-price system for latecomers, was intended to attract a popular audience. His favourite theme of tyranny was still central to the plot, but this time Lewis wrote a play that responded to the early nineteenth-century craze for equestrianism, which, according to Gamer, was most apparent in a number of gentleman’s clubs associated with horse riding, coach driving, and military

¹¹¹ qtd. in Cox, ed., Seven Gothic Dramas 229 (note 16).

fashion in the period.¹¹² Previously in the same year George Colman the Younger's Blue-Beard; or, Female Curiosity! had enthralled the theatre's audience with an equestrian procession on the stage.¹¹³ To ensure his play's success, Lewis not only offered a magnificent procession, but also, as he put it in the Advertisement, "substitute[d] a combat on foot for one on horse-back."¹¹⁴ The story itself borrowed the historical figure of the fourteenth-century Turkish conqueror, Tamerlane or Tamberlaine, renaming him as Timour and illustrating his fall from power. Christopher Marlowe had earlier been inspired by the same historical figure and composed Tamburlaine the Great (1590) as a play in which Tamburlaine, though a tyrant, is also a charismatic warrior and the faithful lover of Zenocrate. Lewis's play, on the other hand, brushed aside the psychological interest of its character and instead expanded on the grand theatrical effect of its wartime setting. The Oriental background, as Lewis remarked, was to show "the magnificence of the Scenery and Dresses" (19; 98).

The figure of an Oriental despot had been commonly employed in literature and drama to allegorise contemporary British or European politics. Nicholas Rowe's Tamerlane (1701), for example, was "nearly always" performed, as Jeffrey Cox and Michael Gamer have noted, on the anniversary either of William of Orange's birth on November 4 or of his landing in England on November 5 to commemorate the 1688 glorious revolution.¹¹⁵ In Lewis's time, such a Turkish tyrant might be used to allegorise Napoleon's usurpation of the French monarchy and his invasion of other

¹¹² Michael Gamer, "A Matter of Turf: Romanticism, Hippodrama, and Legitimite Satire." Nineteenth-Century Contexts 28.4 (2006): 308-15.

¹¹³ Jeffrey N. Cox and Micheal Gamer, eds., The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama (Toronto: Broadview, 2003) 97-98.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Lewis, Timour the Tartar: A Grand Romantic Melo-drama in Two Acts, The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama 98, lines 12-13. Subsequent references will be given after quotations in the text (with line and page numbers for the Advertisement; and act, scene, line and page numbers for the play).

¹¹⁵ Cox and Gamer, eds., Broadview Anthology 99 (note 4).

European countries. Nevertheless, Lewis did not seem to pursue this allegorical potential, despite the fact that the radical Examiner (1811) considered his illustration of the downfall of Timour an “insidious attack on the reputation of BONAPARTE.”¹¹⁶ Such implicit patriotism appears again to have been trumped by Lewis’s insistent concern with his play’s commercial success. While Lewis himself did not encounter any financial problems in his life, he delighted in being seen to write for money ahead of more “worthy” priorities such as the pursuit of a moral or literary reputation. The episode of the combat between Sanballat and Kerim, for instance, is irrelevant to the main plot but was conspicuously inserted to present a well-trained horse, which, as Lewis described, “seizes Sanballat, and drags him to the ground” and when Kerim falls, “leaps the Barrier, prevents Sanballat from advancing, picks up the sword, and carries it to his Master” (1.3.scene description; 108). Equally sensational is the last scene on the tower terrace where Zorilda disengages herself from Timour and plunges into the sea, only to be saved by her son who rides his horse into and out of the water bearing Zorilda back to the fortress.

When the play caused offence to critics, it therefore did so on the ground of its spectacular stage presentation rather than its political resonance. The reviewer of the Morning Chronicle (30 April 1811) stated that the “horse-actors” in Timour the Tartar exhibited a “new species of bathos” and “a whimsical sort of embarrassment,” blaming what he saw as the decline of the British stage on its audience: “we may venture to say that three-fourths of them came to see the horses—the horses—and nothing but the horses.”¹¹⁷ Likewise, the Dramatic Censor (May 1811) criticised the play as “the worst attempt at that exploded thing called ‘plot’” and attributed its success solely to its “theatrical pomp,” referring to it as another “experiment on the

¹¹⁶ Examiner (1811), Cox and Gamer, eds., Appendix, Broadview Anthology 349.

¹¹⁷ Morning Chronicle (1811), Cox and Gamer, eds., Appendix, Broadview Anthology 344.

public taste for scenery, horsemanship, and mummery.”¹¹⁸ Most notably, the European Magazine related a stir in the theatre on the night of May 1, 1811 when “a strong party ... threw a great number of hand-bills from the upper boxes, containing (as we understood) some declamations against equestrian performances being introduced at the regular theatre.”¹¹⁹ But these “hand-bills,” as the review continued, “met with a very unfavourable reception,” for “most of them were torn to pieces with indignation and those who had dispersed them were loudly hissed.”¹²⁰ Despite such evidence of discontent over the equestrian exhibition, all the reviews asserted that the performances ended with “a roar of approbation,” and a “tumult of applause.”¹²¹ Following Blue-Beard and Timour the Tartar, a number of mock hippodramas were performed in other London theatres in the same year.¹²² Though these plays purported to ridicule Colman’s and Lewis’s use of horses for spectacle, they somehow made their performances even more spectacular and eclectic by including, for example, more horses on stage, along with donkeys and mules; the public fad for these dramas, as Gamer argues, testifies to the “unabated” popularity of Colman’s and Lewis’s illegitimate productions.¹²³

As this chapter has shown, Lewis’s investment in the “Lewisizing” of which he was accused is evident in his efforts to cater for the popular taste for sensationalism and spectacle. Lewis’s defiance of critical authority was nonetheless not expressed in the same manner throughout his literary career. While Lewis’s

¹¹⁸ Dramatic Censor (1811), Cox and Gamer, eds., Appendix, Broadview Anthology 346.

¹¹⁹ European Magazine (1811), Cox and Gamer, eds., Appendix, Broadview Anthology 350.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ These reviews are, for instance, The Morning Chronicle (1811), The Sun (1811), and The Times (1811). See Cox and Gamer, eds., Appendix, Broadview Anthology 344-46.

¹²² These satirical performances are, for instance, Quadrupeds; or, The Manager’s Last Kick! (Lyceum, July 1811), Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh; or, The Rovers of Weimar (Haymarket, July 1811), Harlequin and Bluebeard (Sadler’s Wells, July 1811), Four-in-Hand (Haymarket, August 1811), The Travellers Benighted (Haymarket, September 1811), One Foot by Land and One Foot by Sea; or, The Tartar’s Tartar’d! (Olympic, November 1811). See Gamer, “A Matter of Turf” 319-21.

¹²³ Gamer, “A Matter of Turf” 319.

liberalism is exemplified by the libertinism of The Monk, and its antagonism towards the Radcliffean female Gothic tradition, it became more erratic in subsequent works, and was rather supplanted by Lewis's interest in literary and theatrical effects. As Lewis's display of ghosts, crimes, dungeons and incarceration became increasingly formulaic in his fictions after The Monk, it is not surprising that reviewers would regard The Monk as "considerably the best of the works" by Lewis.¹²⁴ Byron famously described Lewis's reputation in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809):

Oh! wonder-working LEWIS! Monk, or Bard,
Who fain would'st make Parnassus a church-yard!
Lo! Wreaths of yew, not laurel, bind thy brow,
Thy Muse a Sprite, Apollo's sexton thou!
Whether on ancient tombs thou tak'st thy stand,
By gibb'ring specters hailed, thy kindred band;
Or tracest chaste descriptions on thy page,
To please the females of our modest age,
All hail, MP! From whose infernal brain
Thin sheeted phantoms glide, a grisly train...¹²⁵

Byron's satire sums up Lewis's self-representation as an unashamed author (and MP) who deliberately turned the respectable world of literature into "a church-yard" with his blatant and ludicrous staging of the supernatural ("gibb'ring spectres") as well as his sexually licentious narration, which Byron sarcastically referred to as the "chaste descriptions" of The Monk. Though satirical, Byron's verse reveals both the pre-eminence and the mesmerising effects of the "wonder-working" of Lewis's literary and dramatic productions. Byron's relationship to his reader is markedly

¹²⁴ Review of Feudal Tyrants, Critical Review (1807), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 260.

¹²⁵ George Gordon Byron, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, Major Works 7, lines 205-14.

different from Lewis's, since he sought to maintain a distance from his audience while at the same time creating a particular self-image through writing—a character that, as the next chapter will elaborate, led the “male Gothic” to its zenith of popularity as well as, perhaps, its end.

CHAPTER 4

“DRAWING FROM SELF”¹: LORD BYRON

Although there have been many critical studies of Byron, very few have set out to examine the relation between the author’s works and the popular literary mode of the Gothic. Michael Gamer is perhaps the most recent scholar who has delved into the subject. In Romanticism and the Gothic (2000), for example, Gamer takes up Robert Hume’s famous 1969 essay, “Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel,” and elaborates on the continuities between the two genres, arguing for the persistent influence that Gothic writing had on the development of the “higher” culture of Romanticism. His essay, “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain” (2002), places Byron alongside other Romantic writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott, focusing on how, amid the augmenting antagonism towards Gothic fiction, these writers employed Gothic conventions and made more “acceptably intellectual and ideological” uses of them.² While Wordsworth, for instance, includes superstitious characters in Lyrical Ballads (1798) to delineate the mental universe of ordinary rural dwellers, Byron’s notes to The Giaour (1813), as Gamer argues, serve to legitimise the sensational Gothic elements of the poem, and turn his work into “a piece of oriental antiquarianism,” a strategy similarly used by

¹ The phrase “drawing from self” was used by Byron in his letter to Thomas Moore on 2 January 1814, published as preface to The Corsair in 1814. My further discussion of the phrase is in the section on the Turkish Tales.

² Michael Gamer, “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain,” The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, ed. Jerold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 98.

Scott, whose annotation provides a historical and scholarly perspective on his metrical romances.³

Byron's notes, however, are presented as based on his direct, personal experience in the East rather than on antiquarian research. The tone of his notes, as I will discuss later, is also markedly different from that of other writers such as Scott or Southey. As most of his contemporary readers agreed (despite Byron's denial), his method of writing involves "drawing from self,"⁴ since in whatever Byron wrote he seemed to encourage the reading of his life into his work. What distinguishes Byron from other writers, as Andrew Elfenbein observes, is the prominent reputation resulting from gossip, rumour, and scandal that surrounded Byron's life, and which ran in parallel with the delineation of his heroes, making "Byronism," in Elfenbein's words, a "cult" or a "phenomenon" embracing both Byron's personality and his poems.⁵ It is, in this sense, difficult to accommodate Byron with other canonical Romantic writers, whose subjectivity was absent or at least more concealed in their texts, and who seemed to be interested more in the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of their works than in their self-projection.

Instead of seeing Byron as a "Romantic" writer, it is, as I will argue, more illuminating to read him in the light of the "male Gothic" addressed by this study. Like Walpole, Beckford and Lewis, Byron made use of Gothic themes and features such as the Faustian narrative, the idea of "family secrets," and the disguise/transvestism motif to try out socially and sexually transgressive identities. Unlike other "male Gothic" authors (certainly Walpole and Lewis), however, Byron's engagement with the Gothic served to orchestrate a reception that clearly connected Byron with his heroes, in spite of Byron's attempts to legitimise his

³ Ibid. 99.

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 9.

morally ambiguous works. Byron's heroes, moreover, developed in accordance with the changing circumstances in Byron's life. This chapter will investigate Byron's dealings with the Gothic, from the beginnings of his literary career when he sought to establish himself as an author, to the period after his separation from his wife and his self-exile in 1816, when he started to involve himself in revolutionary activities in Italy and Greece and his writing became more blatantly provocative, representing Byron as an icon of rebellion against political and religious authority, and conservative moral and sexual values more generally. While Byron was highly esteemed in Europe in the 1820s and 1830s as the bulwark of the Greek cause, his work met with little approval in the reactionary society of Britain. The severe criticism of Byron and his works, along with the growing backlash against other "male Gothic" writers in the nineteenth century, showed how "male Gothic" identity play was increasingly deemed to be threatening to moral and social decorum. In Byron's work, then, we see what might be thought of as the high-point and also perhaps the end-point of the "male Gothic."

CONSTRUCTING AUTHORIAL IDENTITY: FROM HOURS OF IDLENESS TO CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE, CANTOS I-II

In 1807, Byron introduced himself to the public for the first time as an author, who, like Walpole and Beckford, regarded his work as a private recreation rather than a serious attempt to cater to the market and to earn a living. As Byron stated in the preface to his revealingly titled collection Hours of Idleness, he saw his poems as "trifles," the products of "a young man, who has lately completed his nineteenth

year,” and who insisted that “[p]oetry ... is not my primary vocation” for it serves only “to divert the dull moments of indisposition, or the monotony of a vacant hour.”⁶ Such an emphasis on amateur status was of course a common gesture of aristocratic writers, an assertion of their distance from the profession of writing. In the case of the other “male Gothic” writers I have discussed (who, unlike Byron, were not titled aristocrats), their “aristocratic” self-fashioning also served to license their engagement with unconventional and, sometimes, outrageous subjects. Byron’s self-positioning in the preface to Hours of Idleness served to legitimise his juvenile delinquency, as Caroline Franklin observes, via a “mock-modest plea for indulgence on account of the writer’s youth.”⁷ Byron’s libertine language is evident in a number of the amorous poems that he addressed to ladies in his Southwell society: some had appeared in his privately printed volume, Fugitive Pieces (1806), but their ribaldry was suppressed or expurgated so that they became, as Byron noted, “miraculously chaste” in his revised versions.⁸ Many of the poems, moreover, were satires, translations and imitations of classical models, and therefore presented Byron as an educated author, who conformed to respectable literary standards. Central to critics’ concerns, however, was Byron’s portrayal of himself as a young aristocrat, as Henry Brougham remarked in his anonymous review in the February 1808 issue of the Edinburgh Review:

Besides a poem ... on the family seat of the Byrons, we have another of eleven pages on the self-same subject, introduced with an apology, ‘he certainly had no intention of inserting it;’ but really, ‘the particular request of some friends,’ &c. &c. It concludes with five stanzas on himself, ‘the last and youngest of a noble line.’ There is a good deal also about his maternal ancestors, in a poem on

⁶ George Gordon Byron, Hours of Idleness, Complete Poetical Works, vol. 1, 32-33.

⁷ Caroline Franklin, Byron: A Literary Life (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 19.

⁸ Byron to M. G. Pigot, 13 Jan. 1807, Letters and Journals, vol. 1, 103. The revised versions that I refer to are Poems on Various Occasions (1807) and Hours of Idleness.

Lachin-y-gair, a mountain where he spent part of his youth, and might have learnt that *pibroch* is not a bagpipe, any more than duet means a fiddle.⁹

Irritated by the ostentation of Byron's idleness and his insistence on his rank, Brougham criticised Byron for being "peculiarly forward in pleading minority."¹⁰ As the work did not offer anything beyond the author's egotistical self-portrait, Brougham argued that Byron should "abandon poetry, and turn his talents, which are considerable, and his opportunities, which are great, to better account."¹¹

The damage that Brougham's review did to Byron was tremendous, as he admitted to John Cam Hobhouse when he stated that he was "cut to atoms" by the Edinburgh Review.¹² In 1809 Byron launched an anonymous satire, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, partly as personal revenge against the Edinburgh Review and partly as a commentary on the contemporary literary scene. Byron based his poem on Juvenalian satire, and proclaimed that he aligned himself with the "Sense and Wit" of English neoclassical writers such as Pope, Dryden, Congreve and Otway.¹³ Apart from his attack on the Edinburgh Review's critics and its editor, Francis Jeffrey, Byron can be seen to uphold the "Augustan" emphasis on reason and experience against recent poets such as Wordsworth (whose attachment to "simplicity" was ridiculed by Byron), Coleridge (who relied too much on imagination and emotion), and Lewis and Scott (both of whom Byron saw as pandering to the popular taste for the supernatural).¹⁴ Despite his anonymity and his earlier disavowal of his desire to pursue a literary career, Byron's criticism of contemporary writers in English Bards inevitably located him within the public sphere of literary production and reception.

⁹ Edinburgh Review (1807), Andrew Rutherford, ed., Byron: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1970) 31.

¹⁰ Ibid. 27.

¹¹ Ibid. 28.

¹² Byron to John Cam Hobhouse, 27 Feb. 1808, Letters and Journals, vol. 1, 158.

¹³ Byron, English Bards, Major Works 3, line 45.

¹⁴ See Byron, English Bards, Major Works 7-8.

In the preface to the satire's second edition, Byron, while disclosing his authorship, offered his work as "public property" with the aim, as he put it, "not to prove that I can write well ... but ... to make others write better."¹⁵ The change in Byron's self-representation in English Bards, as Franklin points out, marks Byron's significant move from the private to the public—from writing as a *jeu d'esprit* to writing as a profession; from works addressing an in-crowd to satires about "cut-throat competition between professional writers for the marketplace."¹⁶ This does not mean that Byron altogether discarded his interest in self-presentation, however, only that instead of offering direct self-revelation, he was to adopt the practice of self-mystification, masquerading as particular characters in his subsequent works, and recreating the dialectic between life and writing, so as to strengthen his popularity and his public persona as an author.

During the time that Byron wrote the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812), he regularly corresponded with the writer Robert Charles Dallas and the publisher John Murray concerning revisions, additions and corrections to his work. While Hours of Idleness started off as a piece to be privately circulated among a coterie, Childe Harold was composed for a wider audience, with whom Byron was redefining his relationship and eager to establish a literary reputation. Whereas Walpole playfully confounded his readers' expectations of what a "Gothic" work should look like, Byron more straightforwardly positioned his poem against the contemporary vogue for chivalry and romance. In the preface to his work, Byron argued against any criticism which castigated his protagonist as being "very

¹⁵ George Gordon Byron, Preface, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, Byron: Poetical Works, ed. Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 113.

¹⁶ Franklin, Byron 36.

unknightly, as the times of the Knights were times of love, honour, and so forth.”¹⁷ Referring to works by writers as various as St. Palaye and Sir Joseph Banks, Byron insisted that the Middle Ages “were the most profligate of all possible centuries” (20). “The vows of chivalry,” as he put it, “were no better kept than any other vows whatsoever, and the songs of the Troubadours were not more decent, and certainly were much less refined, than those of Ovid” (20-21). Byron seemed to take an oppositional political stance here, asserting that “Burke need not have regretted that ... [the days of chivalry] are over,” and referring to the “monstrous mummeries of the middle ages” (21); the culture of chivalry, he suggested here, was all a hypocritical façade, and figures such as Sir Tristram and Sir Lancelot were “poetical personages,” whose marvellous adventures were nothing more than “fable[s]” (21). Like Lewis in *Feudal Tyrants*, Byron was cynical about any attempt to idealise the distant past, and similarly employed the “Gothic” or “medieval romance” to engage with unconventional and sometimes proscribed forms of moral and sexual behaviour.

In *Childe Harold*, Byron reconfigured his readers’ ideas of romance by incorporating more factual accounts of modern times. He set his poem against contemporary events in Europe, claiming that it was written “from the author’s observations” during his travels in “Spain, Portugal, Epirus, Acarnania, and Greece” (19). While the work does not resemble a medieval romance, it also “constitute[s] a radical transformation of the popular genre of travelogue,” as Jerome McGann points out, as Byron “interiorises the form so drastically that it mutates into a drama of personal history.”¹⁸ The poem begins with the account of Harold as a noble youth who has exhausted himself with the earthly pleasures of “concubines,” “carnal

¹⁷ Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, *Major Works* 20. Page number will be given for subsequent references to Byron’s preface, while canto, stanza and line numbers will be provided in parentheses for quotations from the poem.

¹⁸ McGann, Notes, *Major Works* 1026 (note 19).

companie,” and “flaunting wassailers” (1.2.17-18), and has now become so world-wearied that he decides to leave home and travel abroad for a change of scenery. Harold’s situation in some ways clearly parallels that of Byron, who made his way to the Iberian peninsula and the Levant in 1810 and 1811; the hero’s original name “Childe Burun” (one of Byron’s earliest ancestors) in the initial manuscript suggests how Byron might once have intended to present his pilgrim and the author as identical.¹⁹

As Harold’s travels proceed, the poem can further be seen as the projection of Harold’s (and also Byron’s) psychological state. Jaded with his past voluptuous life, the hero is even more disillusioned by the war-torn condition of southern and southeastern Europe. Spain, for instance, was in turmoil when the populace rose against the French invaders in 1808, while Greece under Turkish rule, as Byron’s work describes it, is a land of “lost Liberty” (2.75.714): “ne’er will freedom seek this fated soil,/ But slave succeed to slave through years of endless toil” (2.77.736-37). Harold’s dejected and mournful conscience is thus reflected through the ravaged condition of the lands he traverses. His commentary on these scenes alternates with ruminations on his past life and loves, consequently differing from most contemporary travel writings which prioritised the traveller’s ordered process of observation, as well as the moral and intellectual improvement inspired by travel. Harold’s journey resembles what Chloe Chard terms the “purposeless movement onwards” or “aimless wandering” that was likely to be rejected by critics “as evidence of complete inadequacy in managing the experience of the foreign.”²⁰ It portrays Byron’s hero as an idler. As the Anti-Jacobin Review asserted in 1812, the work was “destitute of plot or even of plan and its hero [is] a personage not only

¹⁹ MacCarthy, Byron 13.

²⁰ Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600-1830 (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999) 28-29.

wandering over the world, without any fixed object, but wholly unnecessary toward any purpose of the poem.”²¹ Harold, as the reviewer noted, “appears to be nothing but the dull, inanimate, instrument for conveying his poetical creator’s sentiments to the public.”²²

Childe Harold, moreover, displays Harold’s fascination with different customs and manners, especially those of the Levant, described in the second canto. In the poem, the colourful mixed ethnic groups of Albanians, Greeks and Turks are depicted through descriptions of their distinctive, exotic costumes, sanctioned by Byron’s lengthy account of the inhabitants of Albania in his notes: the Albanians in general, he noted, “have a fine cast of countenance ... [t]heir manner of walking is truly theatrical; but this strut is probably the effect of the capote, or cloak, depending from one shoulder” (89). For a European traveller such as Byron who did not cross into Asia, Albania and Greece constituted, as Saree Makdisi has argued, a “frontier” zone that represented the very different culture of “the East”: as soon as Harold enters Albania, for example, he feels “himself at length alone,/ And bade to Christian tongues a long adieu” (2.43.379-80).²³ Byron’s encounter with the “Oriental” here perhaps initiated his enduring fascination with the assumption or enactment of other identities, and as his journals and letters reveal, this self-fashioning encompassed different orders of otherness: in the Athens carnival in 1809, for instance, Byron masqueraded as a Greek woman, while in 1814 he commissioned Thomas Phillips to paint a portrait of himself in Albanian dress (Plate 1).²⁴ With his long white kilt and turban, of which one end was loosened and dangled on his shoulder to resemble

²¹ Anti-Jacobin Review (1812), Donald H. Reiman, ed., The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers, Part B (New York: Garland, 1972) 10-11.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Saree Makdisi, Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 124. My quote of Childe Harold is also from Makdisi.

²⁴ MacCarthy, Byron 114.

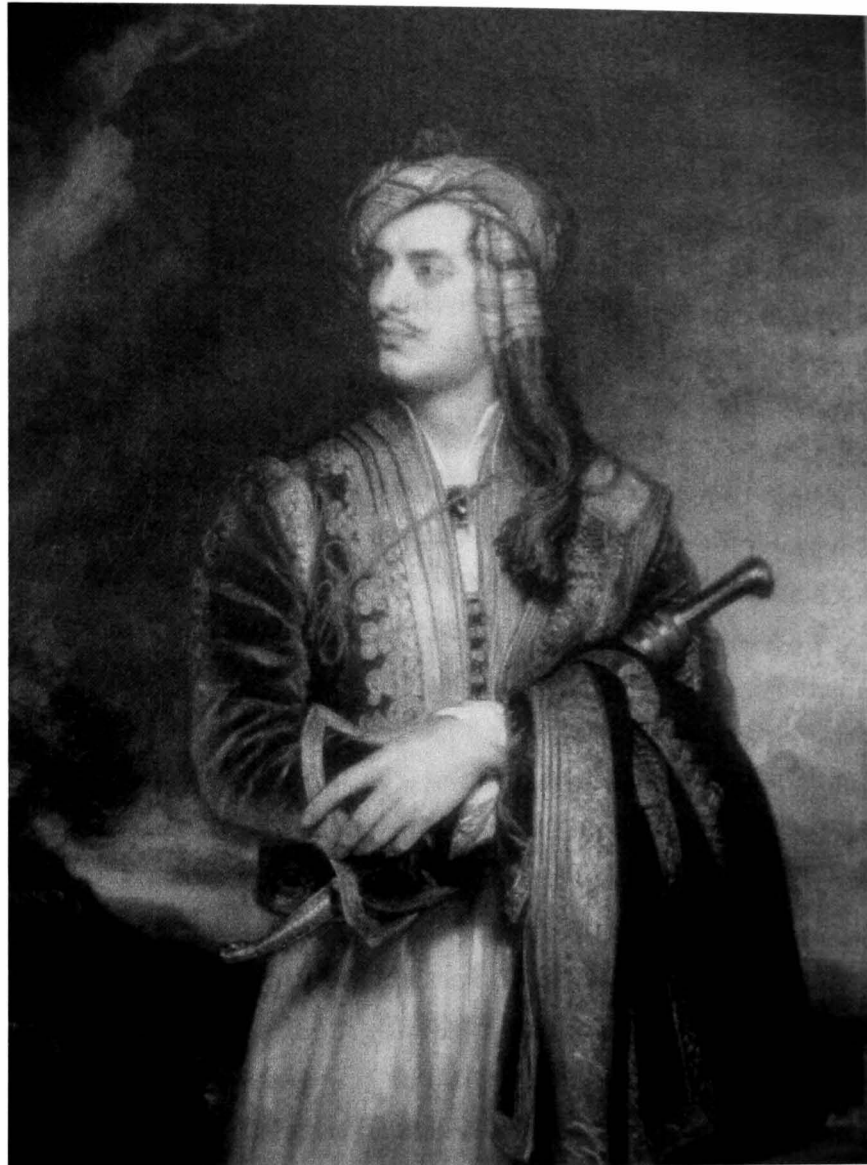


PLATE 1 Portrait of a Nobleman in the Dress of an Albanian, by Thomas Phillips
(1814)

wavy locks of hair, Byron in Albanian costume looks particularly feminine. Interestingly, Byron later gave the same clothes to his female friend, Mercer Elphinstone, who wore them at a private masquerade at Burlington House in London.²⁵

To Byron, the “Orient” was also a site of sexual transgression. According to Louis Crompton, part of the appeal of the East for Byron and Hobhouse was “the difference between its moral climate and England’s,” and the chance it provided them to pursue “homoerotic adventures.”²⁶ Writing of his time in the court of the Albanian chief, Ali Pacha, Byron related to his mother how the old Pacha admired his “small ears, curling hair, & little white hands” and treated him “like a child” by “sending ... almonds & sugared sherbet, fruit & sweetmeats 20 times a day.”²⁷ The image of Ali Pacha as a pederast was further established in the manuscript of Childe Harold, which mentions the goings-on in one of his chambers: “For boyish minions of unhallowed love/ The shameless torch of wild desire is lit,/ Caressed, preferred even to women’s self above.”²⁸ In the first canto, Byron also expressed his sympathy for Beckford, as he mourned how the latter had been “smitten with unhallowed thirst/ Of nameless crime” and how his “sad day must close/ To scorn, and Solitude unsought.”²⁹ In the published version, however, Byron omitted his lines on Ali Pacha’s “boyish minions,” and modified the Beckford stanza by dropping his reference to homosexuality and instead adding some detail concerning Beckford’s wealth and extravagance as the main source of his misfortune. Telling Dallas that he was concerned if “any improper allusion” might have done Beckford further

²⁵ Ibid. 217.

²⁶ Louis Crompton, Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th-Century England (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 109.

²⁷ Byron to Mrs. Byron, 12 Nov. 1809, Letters and Journals, vol. 1, 227-28.

²⁸ qtd. in Crompton, Byron and Greek Love 139.

²⁹ Ibid. 120.

damage,³⁰ Byron altered the Beckford stanza by replacing the licentious account of the author with a moral lesson concerning the perils of overconsumption. This editing process, similarly evident in his omission of Ali Pacha's boy harem, provides an example of what Nigel Leask calls Byron's "moral filtering," signifying the suppression of any Oriental cultural description incompatible with Western norms, or its subordination to a certain didactic purpose.³¹ Byron thus composed Childe Harold with a keen awareness of his readers, who might not approve of his delineation of Oriental excess and might even reject the work altogether.

Nevertheless, Byron stressed in the preface that Harold "never was intended as an example, further than to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones" (21). Despite the tedium of his early life as a libertine, Harold is not repentant, but turns to regard his "fellow bacchanals" (1.6.47) and "his native land" (1.4.35) with repugnance, and hence flees from England in a state of "life-abhorring gloom" (1.83.826). As the reader is told, the character of Harold was modelled upon the misanthropic spendthrift "Timon" of Athens, and John Moore's profligate and villainous protagonist in his 1789 novel, Zeluco (21). Moore's character, in particular, is akin to the popular literary figure of the morally ambivalent Gothic villain-hero. Byron's borrowing of such figure is, indeed, not surprising, for evidence has shown that he was a keen and enthusiastic reader of works in the genre. In his preface to Marino Faliero (1820), he praised The Castle of Otranto as "the first romance" and The Mysterious Mother as "a tragedy of the highest order";³² as I have discussed in my first chapter, both of these works focus on the lascivious, incestuous crimes of their protagonists. Likewise, Byron

³⁰ Byron to Robert Charles Dallas, 26 Sept. 1811, Letters and Journals, vol. 2, 107.

³¹ Nigel Leask, British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 21-22.

³² Byron, Preface, Marino Faliero 305.

proclaimed that he was “a strenuous & public admirer” of Vathek and even asked his friend Samuel Rogers to “beg” Beckford for “a copy in M.S.S of the remaining *tales*,” works which similarly explore the theme of moral and sexual transgression.³³ Despite his satire of Lewis’s Gothic novel and plays in English Bards, Byron’s remark on the “wonder-working” of Lewis’s fictions shows his acknowledgement, though not admiration, of the commercial success of Lewis’s Gothic.³⁴

In Childe Harold, Byron also made use of the picaresque tradition to delineate the “adventures” of a rakish anti-hero. The poem might be seen as a mock epic, for Harold does not really engage in adventure, but is instead an introspective, cynical and idle “hero” who constantly reflects upon his past and makes comment on the scenes he encounters. Most importantly, Harold is set up as a potential analogue for Byron himself. His lament for the unattainable freedom of the Levantine nations, particularly Greece, recalls Byron’s philhellenism and his specifically aristocratic brand of republican Whiggism.³⁵ Harold’s travels also parallel those of Byron, as the latter elaborated on his experiences in his notes. In his preface to the first two cantos, however, Byron playfully rejected “the suspicion” of Harold being “some real personage,” asserting that his hero is merely a “child of imagination” (19). In this pre-emptive denial of the identification between himself and his character, Byron nonetheless drew attention to the link that the hero might have with him. This device of playful refutation, as I will show, was to become a feature of Byron’s self-representation throughout his literary career, functioning to disown Byron’s responsibility for the characters he portrayed whilst allowing him continually to remind the reader of his presence in those works. Later Byron repeatedly hinted at the connection between Harold and himself, and even admitted, tongue-in-cheek, in

³³ Byron to Samuel Rogers, 3 Mar. 1818, Letters and Journals, vol. 6, 17.

³⁴ Byron, English Bards, Major Works 7, line 205. See, also, my third chapter, p. 159.

³⁵ Malcolm Kelsall, Byron’s Politics (Sussex: Harvester, 1987) 2, 10.

his preface to the fourth canto, that Harold was barely distinct from “the author speaking in his own person:” “it was in vain that I asserted, and imagined,” he went on, “that I had drawn a distinction between the author and the pilgrim; and the very anxiety to preserve this difference, and disappointment at finding it unavailing, so far crushed my efforts in the composition, that I determined to abandon it altogether—and have done so” (146).

The reception of the poem focused on the character of the author as well as his protagonist, and conservative critics were especially hostile towards Harold’s liberal attitude and manner. The Anti-Jacobin Review (1812), for instance, objected to “the political prejudices, to the unpatriotic defects, and to the irreligious principles, of this bastard of the imagination.”³⁶ The evangelical British Review (1812) also condemned Byron’s immoral and antisocial hero, asserting that “[n]o man has a right to be angry with the world because he has been outwitted by it in a contest of iniquity; because prostitutes have jilted him; and the promises of sensuality have proved false and treacherous. There is no dignity in the melancholy or misanthropy of such a man.”³⁷ At the same time, Childe Harold was a literary sensation. It went through over five editions within a year and established Byron as an acclaimed author. The poem, as Lady Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, wrote to her son in 1812, was “on every table,” and Byron “[t]he subject of conversation, of curiosity, of enthusiasm.”³⁸ Contemporary readers often identified the author with his hero, whose mournful and mysterious character proved an irresistible attraction, especially for his female audience. As Fiona MacCarthy shows, Byron received a great number of amatory letters from women, some of whom imagined themselves the subject of “To Inez,” and some of whom even offered him their own versions of

³⁶ Anti-Jacobin Review (1812), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 11.

³⁷ British Review (1812), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 400.

³⁸ qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 159.

sentimental love poems.³⁹ Byron, MacCarthy observes, “was intrigued and flattered” by these letters and was delighted in “hoard[ing] this clandestine correspondence.”⁴⁰ It is not surprising, then, that Byron would later reinforce the connection between his life and writing, most notably in his addition of the poem “To Ianthe” to the seventh edition of Childe Harold in 1814, addressed to Lady Charlotte Harley, the daughter of Lady Oxford, with whom Byron was then having an illicit relationship.⁴¹ In the fifth edition of the poem, Murray also supplied an engraving of Byron’s miniature portrait by George Sanders (Plate 2). It is the picture of the author and his page about to embark on a sea voyage, or, possibly the grand tour of 1809. Byron’s dress resembles a naval uniform, but, as Robert Beevers points out, with the “loosely tied scarf worn with an open neck shirt,” there seems to be “a deliberate rejection on Byron’s part of the social restrictions implied by the standard linen high cravats of gentlemen’s fashion.”⁴² Along with the gloomy, mountainous background, Byron’s melancholic countenance and eyes, which gaze out of frame into a distance, give a reflection of the jaded, Romantic hero of his poem.

THE TURKISH TALES

In a letter of August 1813, Byron famously implored Thomas Moore to “[s]tick to the East”: “the oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted; but from the East, we have nothing but S**’s [Southey’s] unsaleables,—and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting

³⁹ Ibid. 162-63.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 163.

⁴¹ McGann, Notes, Major Works 1027 (note 21).

⁴² Robert Beevers, The Byronic Image: The Poet Portrayed (Abingdon: Olivia, 2005) 13.

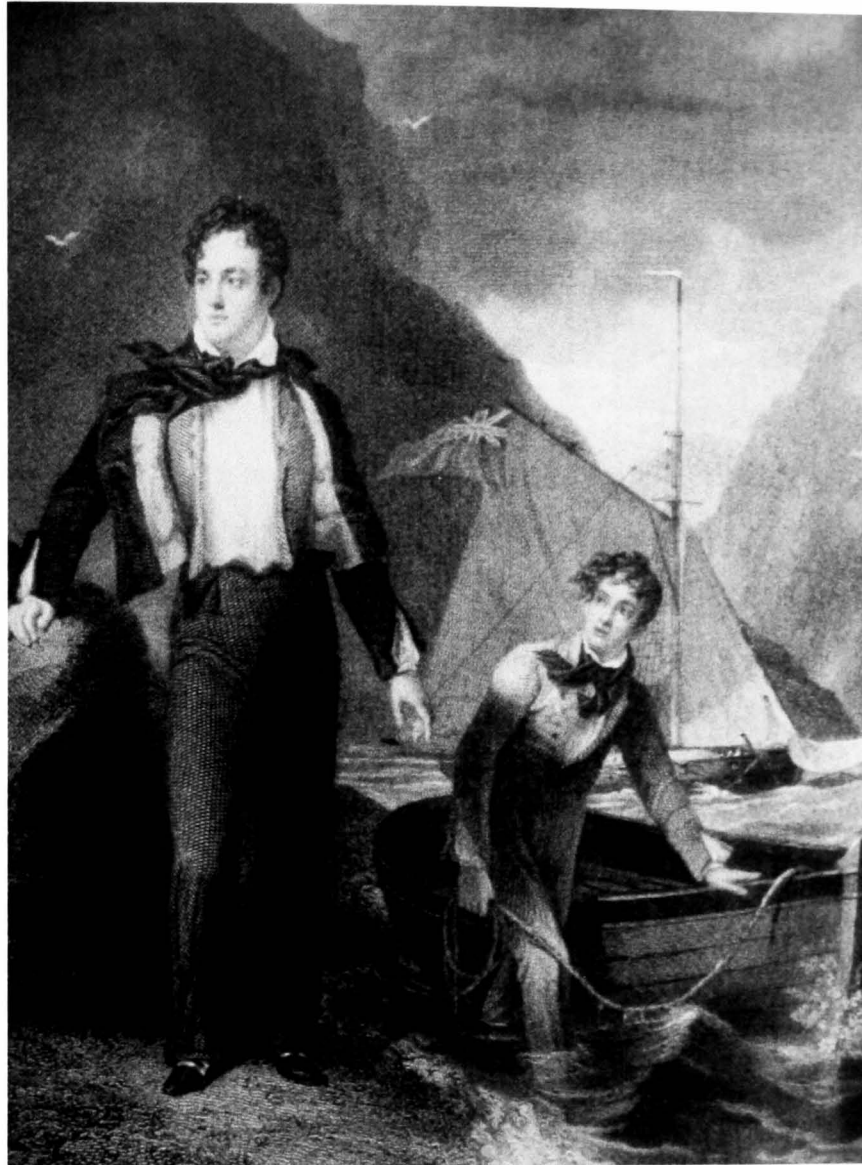


PLATE 2 Byron, engraving after George Sanders' portrait of 1809 by William Finden (1830)

only their most outrageous fictions.”⁴³ Byron in the same year had himself written and published his first Turkish tale, The Giaour. Though Byron still publicly held on to his image as a noble author uninterested in monetary reward, his letter to Moore implies that he was at least aware of, if not motivated by, the demands of the market. The “unsaleables” of Southey that Byron referred to were his metrical romances, Thalaba the Destroyer (1801) and The Curse of Kehama (1810), both of which, as Byron contemptuously observed, were not financially successful, especially the first which had very poor sales figures in its 1813 third edition, with more than half of the copies left unsold.⁴⁴ The main reason for this, as Leask suggests, is probably that Southey’s Oriental poems were not “tailored to domestic tastes,” and were therefore “too spicy and indigestible for fastidious British appetites.”⁴⁵ While critics admired the detailed information about Eastern mythology, legends, and beliefs in Southey’s extensive footnotes, many found his portrayal of barbarous and despotic Muslims or Hindus incompatible with the refined tastes of modern readers. Despite Southey’s declared aim of illustrating the “false” and “monstrous” nature of Hinduism in The Curse of Kehama, the Eclectic (1811) censured him for confronting his readers with “heathenism,” and exciting “pleasure and disgust, with the knowledge ... that any attempt to prolong them both is infallibly certain to end in the ascendancy of the latter.”⁴⁶ In writing his Oriental poems, Byron was fully aware of the mistake that Southey made, and therefore presented his works as more appealing to the market: they were, as he self-mockingly remarked later in Beppo (1818), “samples of the

⁴³ Byron to Thomas Moore, 28 Aug. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3. 101.

⁴⁴ Lynda Pratt, Appendix, “‘Where...success [is] certain?’ Southey the literary East Indiaman,” Romantic Representations of British India, ed. Michael J. Franklin (London: Routledge, 2006) 152-53.

⁴⁵ Leask, British Romantic Writers and the East 13-14.

⁴⁶ qtd. in Pratt, “‘Where...success [is] certain?’” 146.

finest Orientalism,” “mix’d with western sentimentalism.”⁴⁷ Such Orientalism, as I will argue, subsumes Byron’s use of (“male”) Gothic elements along with his “self-mystificatory” strategies to capture his audience’s attention.

From The Giaour onwards, Byron adopted the popular Gothic themes of domestic tyranny, illicit love and revenge, substituting the Near East for the Mediterranean settings of Walpole or Lewis. Byron told Henry Drury in May 1810 that “[i]n England the vices in fashion are whoring & drinking, in Turkey, Sodomy & smoking, we prefer a girl and a bottle, they a pipe and a pathic.”⁴⁸ At a time when the prosecution of those involved in “unnatural” sexual relations was becoming increasingly common, however, Byron’s tales very suggestively elide the differences not only between Britons and Turks, but between the sexual practices respectively attributed to them in the quotation above. Just as Lewis did in The Monk, Byron made use of the cross-dressing motif so that, as in The Giaour, relations between a hero and a heroine could take on homoerotic overtones. In this poem, Hassan’s cruel punishment of his wife Leila is triggered by her adulterous relationship with her Venetian lover. When Hassan finds out that Leila, “[i]n [the] likeness of a Georgian page,” “[h]ad wrong’d him with the faithless Giaour,” he has her sewn in a bag and thrown into the sea according to “the Mussulman manner.”⁴⁹ Leila’s cross-dressing is not just a concealment or deception here, for her elopement also enacts a homoerotic encounter that is sanctioned by Turkish society. Leila’s disguise, moreover, probably has its source in Caroline Lamb’s “secret” meeting with Byron in 1812, when she dressed herself as a young page, “in scarlet hassar jacket and pantaloons,” bearing a

⁴⁷ George Gordon Byron, Beppo, Major Works 329.

⁴⁸ qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 115-16.

⁴⁹ Byron, The Giaour, Major Works 219, lines 456 and 458; the phrase “the Mussulman manner” is from Byron’s Advertisement, 207. Subsequent references to The Giaour will be given (with line numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

letter to Byron;⁵⁰ Caroline, as MacCarthy notes, employed several pages and even named one of them Rushton, after Byron's favourite attendant.⁵¹ The conspiracy of transvestism, which might have first been intended to facilitate the lady's visit to Byron, could therefore additionally entertain the lovers' homoerotic fantasy, a theme which, as I will later discuss, became most conspicuous in Byron's final tale, Lara.

Along with sodomy, incest is another sexual taboo that Byron associated with the Orient. In the opening scene of The Bride of Abydos, Selim, the hero, is presented as an effeminate Turkish prince. His physique is described as thin and delicate, as the old Giaffir sneers at Selim's "less than woman's hands," and his feeble arms which can neither "hurl the dart, and curb the steed" nor "cope/With timid fawn or antelope."⁵² What is remarkable about Byron's tale is that he used the Gothic theme of family secrets to banish the subversive potential of such a plot. After Selim reveals the truth that he is the son of Abdallah, who had been murdered by his usurping brother, Giaffir, his passionate relationship with his sister Zuleika becomes as acceptable as his revolt against his uncle/stepfather. When Selim takes off his exquisite robe and "high-crown'd turban" (2.9.132) and instead puts on the garb of a pirate chief, he can be seen to have transformed from an effeminate prince into a courageous, manly hero. The affection between Selim and Zuleika, however, is originally founded upon incest, since Byron initially meant to make them brother and sister throughout the story, as he told Edward Daniel Clark that "none else could there obtain that degree of intercourse leading to genuine affection."⁵³ In his letter to John Galt, Byron argued that the subject of incest was not actually unfamiliar to

⁵⁰ Crompton, Byron and Greek Love 198.

⁵¹ MacCarthy, Byron 170-72.

⁵² George Gordon Byron, The Bride of Abydos, Poetical Works 265; canto 1, stanza 4. lines 99, 86. and stanza 5, lines 136-37 respectively. Subsequent references to The Bride of Abydos will be given (with canto, stanza and line numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

⁵³ Byron to Edward Daniel Clark, 15 Dec. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3. 199.

British readers, for it had been adopted in “the finest works of the Greeks, one of Schiller’s and Alfieri’s in modern times, besides several of our *old* (and best) dramatists.”⁵⁴ His eulogy of Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother in the preface of Marino Faliero, as I mentioned earlier, was also a result of the play’s powerful treatment of incest, which made the piece, as he put it, “not a puling love-play.”⁵⁵ Whereas Walpole legitimised the incest theme by presenting the play as a closet drama and assuming a self-depreciating gesture in his preface to its first published edition, Byron chose to indulge the reader in Oriental sexual excess before returning to a more orthodox state of affairs in the second canto, playfully affirming that he was aware of the difference in the moral climate between “the East” and “the *North*” and therefore decided to “alter” Selim’s and Zuleika’s “consanguinity” and “confine them to cousinship.”⁵⁶

The most “Gothic” of all Byron’s Turkish tales is the last of them, Lara, which is centred on the “long self-exiled chieftain,” who may be recognised as the pirate chief Conrad returning to his homeland (Spain) after his strange disappearance at the end of the third tale, The Corsair.⁵⁷ From the beginning, Byron filled his narrative with an air of mystery, depicting Lara as consorting with the supernatural:

Why gazed he so upon the ghastly head
Which hands profane had gather’d from the dead,
That still beside his open’d volume lay,
As if to startle all save him away? (1.9.143-46)

Through the “Gothic windows” of the hall where Lara is seen at midnight, there appears a shadow with “bristling locks of sable, brow of gloom,/ And the wide

⁵⁴ Byron to John Galt, 11 Dec. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3, 196.

⁵⁵ Byron, Preface, Marino Faliero 305.

⁵⁶ Byron to Edward Daniel Clark, 15 Dec. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3, 199.

⁵⁷ George Gordon Byron, Lara, Poetical Works 303; canto 1, stanza 1, line 4. Subsequent references to Lara will be given (with canto, stanza and line numbers in parentheses) after quotations in the text.

waving of his shaken plume,/ ... like a spectre's attributes" (1.11.197-99). Here, Byron turned to Walpole's motif of the waving plume, but for a different effect. Whereas Walpole's original (the plume on Alfonso's helmet) is connected with an ancestral claim of legitimacy, Byron's poem does not dwell on the symbol, and indeed puzzles the reader over its hero's background and identity. Lara is associated with "crimes," like Conrad, yet the reader is told that "there was softness too in his regard" (1.17.303), and his gloomy and impenetrable mind captures other people with "unwilling interest" (1.19.380).

One aspect of Lara's enigmatic character is his mysterious relationship with Kaled. As Lara's page, "[o]f foreign aspect, and of tender age" (1.4.48), Kaled might be read as the disguised Gulnare, a Turkish slave who falls in love with Conrad and follows him back to his lair, in Byron's third tale. At the opening of the narrative, we are told that Kaled would "fix his glance" and express his "mute attention" and "care" to Lara (1.27.556). The affection between the two is most revealing during the scene where Lara is dying: while Kaled holds the man "*he* loved" (2.21.512), Lara murmurs, pressing Kaled's hand "upon his heart" (2.20.494), and pointing to the East to refer to "some remember'd scene" (2.19.470). While Lara's ambiguous gesture of pointing Eastward is suggestive of a certain shared experience between him and Kaled in the past, the subsequent disclosure of Kaled's true identity as a woman also reminds the reader of the role of disguise in The Giaour, only in Lara the homoerotic undertone is more obvious, and Byron's revelation of Kaled's sex serves even more overtly to legitimise such homoeroticism.

A prominent feature of Byron's Turkish tales is their seriality. The union between Conrad and his wife, Medora, for instance, can be read as an echo of that of Selim and Zuleika, in the same way that Lara and Kaled might be regarded as a

refiguring of the adulterous Conrad and Gulnare. The heroes of Byron's Turkish tales are in fact very similar in their disposition and personality. As outlaws or pirate chiefs, they are rebellious, positioning themselves not only against political but also religious authority. Conrad, for instance, renounces his religion, proclaiming that "my God ... I left in youth."⁵⁸ The Giaour likewise refuses to conform to ecclesiastical rules, abjuring Christianity as unable to relieve his grief or mend the wrongs of the past. Given their mysterious background and the sexual transgression that is hinted of them, these men seem to be akin to the socially and morally defiant Gothic villain-hero. As Elfenbein remarks, Byron "jolted his audience by cutting off masculinity from morality."⁵⁹ To legitimise the content of their stories, other "male Gothic" writers incorporated a Faustian framework such that transgression always ends in punishment. Byron, on the other hand, was clearly fascinated with the idea of transgression, but did not provide any clear or systematic resolution to his different works; if his narratives commonly end with the death of their heroes, they do not seem to offer any retribution for those characters' violation of moral and sexual mores. In the case of The Giaour, Byron borrowed Beckford's imagery in order to emphasise the tormented condition of the vengeful Giaour, as the Tartar fisherman curses him to "wander round lost Eblis' throne:" "fire unquench'd, unquenchable—/ Around—within—thy heart shall dwell/ ... The tortures of that inward hell!" (750-54).

Through their transgressive sexual relationships, Byron's Oriental heroines, as Franklin observes, defy their restrictive domestic, patriarchal society.⁶⁰ Just as Leila rebels against her master Hassan, so Zuleika rebels against her father by

⁵⁸ George Gordon Byron, The Corsair, Poetical Works, 292; canto 2, stanza 14. lines 477-78.

⁵⁹ Andrew Elfenbein, "Byron: Gender and Sexuality," The Cambridge Companion to Byron, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 59.

⁶⁰ Caroline Franklin, Byron's Heroines (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 33.

deciding to elope with her brother/lover. Touched by Conrad's generosity, Gulnare not only passionately declares her love to him, but, after trying in vain to persuade the harsh and oppressive Pacha to mitigate Conrad's punishment, even kills the Pacha herself and sets Conrad free from the prison. The revenge which is perpetrated (possibly by Kaled) upon Lara's enemy Sir Ezzelin, murdered and thrown into a river, can also be viewed as a reworking or reversal of Hassan's drowning of Leila in the first tale. To some critics, consequently, Byron's heroines are desiring, or "oversexed," women. "His principal female characters," as the reviewer of the Anti-Jacobin Review (1814) remarked, "make strong love to men, which is not very decorous, nor yet very natural."⁶¹

Conservative critics were equally offended by Byron's heroes. William Roberts's review of The Giaour in the British Review (1813), for instance, condemned Byron's title character, comparing him to the "perverted" Harold, who represents "a disappointed sulky sensualist with the dignity of that misanthropic disgust which minds too exquisitely fastidious in their honourable feelings are liable to contract in this mixed state of good and ill."⁶² Many other reviewers and readers, however, exhibited a more mixed response than this. Jeffrey, in the Edinburgh Review (1814), remarked on there being "something grand and imposing in the unbroken stateliness, courage, and heroic bigotry" of Byron's heroes, even though "[t]here is no intellectual dignity or accomplishment about any of his characters; and no very enlightened or equitable principles of morality."⁶³ The anonymous critic of Byroniana: Bozzies and Piozzies (1825) also noted the "seductive brilliancy" of Lara: "[t]he power which this species of sentimental writing has over the susceptible mind

⁶¹ Anti-Jacobin Review (1814), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 46.

⁶² British Review (1813), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 413, 415.

⁶³ Edinburgh Review (1814), Rutherford, ed., Byron 60, 62.

of ardent youth, is inconceivable.”⁶⁴ Indeed, Byron’s Turkish tales were a great success: 6,000 copies of The Bride of Abydos were sold within the first month, and, as Murray boasted, 10,000 copies of The Corsair were sold on the first day of its publication.⁶⁵ Like Harold, the rebellious heroes of Byron’s tales possessed a potentially erotic magnetism. As Elfenbein observes, Byron was especially popular among women readers because his works not merely offered women the possibility of an imaginary attachment to their faithful and courageous male protagonists, but their depiction of adulterous, even incestuous, relationships with the heroines also provided “an escape into the realm of transgressive sexuality.”⁶⁶

In tandem with their seriality, an important factor that made the Turkish tales appeal to contemporary readers was their connection with the author himself. Published only a year after Childe Harold and Byron’s return from his travels in the Levant, the tales appeared to reinforce further the potential identification between the author and his heroes. In his notes to The Giaour, Byron related that “[t]he story in the text is one told of a young Venetian many years ago, and now nearly forgotten. I heard it by accident recited by one of the coffee-house story-tellers who abound in the Levant, and sing or recite their narratives” (246).⁶⁷ Byron’s presentation of his source pinpoints his role as a first-hand compiler and transcriber of information. Later in the same note, however, Byron apologised to the reader that his “memory has retained so few fragments of the original” and that he thereby had to supply his own “additions and interpolations” which “will be easily distinguished from the rest by the want of Eastern imagery” (246). Rather than present his work as culturally “authentic,” then, Byron drew attention to the fact that he kept adding and changing

⁶⁴ “Critique on Lara,” Byronmania: Bozzies and Piozzies (1825), Rutherford, ed., Byron 71-72.

⁶⁵ MacCarthy, Byron 215; and John Murray to Byron, 3 Feb. 1814, qtd. in Rutherford, ed., Byron 69.

⁶⁶ Elfenbein, Byron and the Victorians 63.

⁶⁷ Page numbers from McGann, ed., Major Works, will now be provided in parentheses for references to Byron’s notes of The Giaour.

lines in The Giaour, so that as he told Murray it grew from 684 lines in its original manuscript form to “about 1200 lines” in its final draft before publication.⁶⁸ Despite Byron’s authentication of the story and his professed admiration of Beckford’s Vathek for its “correctness of costume” (247) or accuracy of Oriental description, his declaration that he “retained so few fragments of the original” ironically points to the fictitiousness and contingency of his material, confounding his readers and at the same time inviting them to connect the poem to its author and his experiences in the East.

Byron’s travels in the Levant indeed frequently seem to provide the groundwork for his writing. The “Mussulman” practice of drowning women, for example, was remarked upon by Byron in his notes as “not very uncommon in Turkey,” since an instance of this—when “twelve handsomest women in Yannina” were punished so “[a] few years ago”—was related to him by “[o]ne of the guards who was present” at the scene (246). The drowning incident in The Giaour, moreover, can also be read as autobiographical, in that it might be seen to allude to rumours (perhaps initially started by Caroline Lamb) surrounding Byron’s amorous affairs abroad. To counter such reports, Byron told Moore about his intrigue with a female slave, who later died of the same punishment as Leila.⁶⁹ Byron also had Lord Sligo write and circulate “a *different story*,” in which Byron had interrupted the drowning procession, fighting with the Turkish soldiers, attaining the girl’s release, and sending her safely to Thebes—an account which contributed to the picture of Byron as both romantic and heroic.⁷⁰

Byron’s image as an “Oriental” hero was reiterated further by Thomas Phillips’ portrait of Byron in Albanian costume: the contrast between the exotic

⁶⁸ Byron to Thomas Moore, 1 Sept. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3, 105.

⁶⁹ MacCarthy, Byron 132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; and Byron to Thomas Moore, 1 Sept. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3, 105.

dress and Byron's western countenance merges him with his Giaour, a Venetian in Turkey similarly "array'd in Arnaut garb" (223). This image was titled "Portrait of a Nobleman in the Dress of an Albanian" (Plate 2) and was, interestingly, displayed in the 1814 Royal Academy exhibition next to another portrait by Phillips (Plate 3). This second portrait ("Portrait of a Nobleman") depicts Byron in a rather formal light, with casual open-neck white shirt and dark blue cloak, while his face and posture uncannily resemble his fanciful Eastern image, "give or take Byron's Albanian moustache," as MacCarthy observes.⁷¹ This doubling of personae is important for Byron's self-representation, since it provided him with the fluidity or freedom to assume different identities, for example that of the noble and scholarly poet and/ or the daring, romantic traveller (and the hero of his Turkish tales). In his literary works, these personae also serve to enhance Byron's self-mystification, distinguishing the author from his heroes while simultaneously hinting that both could be the same.

In The Bride of Abydos, the doubleness of Byron's image becomes more conspicuous. While in the text Selim is compared to Leander, in the notes Byron enacts the Greek mythological scene, describing his swimming across the Hellespont, though it proves, as Byron explained, that the straits described by Homer as "boundless" and "broad" are only "half a mile" wide (896).⁷² Later, Byron mentioned his Turkish "blade of singular construction," on which he wished to have the "Koran verse" engraved, as on Selim's scimitar (897). Byron's notes, in effect, juxtapose author and character, and give a suggestion of how Byron might have made use of his fiction to pass as an Oriental. The incest theme, as MacCarthy observes, also seems to be closely connected with Byron's current relationship with his half-sister.

⁷¹ MacCarthy, Byron 216.

⁷² Page numbers from Page, ed., Poetical Works, will now be provided in parentheses for references to Byron's notes of The Bride of Abydos, and The Corsair.



PLATE 3 Portrait of a Nobleman, by Thomas Phillips (1814)

Augusta Leigh, as he noted in his journal in November 1813 that the writing of The Bride of Abydos was to keep him “alive,” “for it was written to drive my thoughts from the recollection of—‘Dear sacred name, rest ever unreveal’d,’” a quotation from Pope in which Byron substituted the term “sacred” for “fatal.”⁷³

In his letter to Moore in January 1814, subsequently attached as the preface to The Corsair, Byron denied outright any identification between himself and his hero, but in doing so reinforced the association, as he playfully stated it that “if I have deviated into the gloomy vanity of ‘drawing from self,’ the pictures are probably like since they are unfavourable—and if not—those who know me are undeceived—and those who do not—I have little interest in undeceiving” (277). In the notes, Byron validated the status of Conrad as a villain-hero, providing examples from the stories of La Fitte, the pirate commander who spared the life of a Governor’s soldier in Louisiana, and of Archbishop Blackbourne, who used to be “a buccaneer” in his youth (900). These accounts are nevertheless far-fetched, as they are completely different in detail from Conrad’s story. While Byron’s nonchalance in the preface reaffirms the affinity between himself and his hero, his casual annotation functions perfunctorily to guard his poem against criticism rather than to seriously offer the reader reliable authentication.

Unlike other writers in the period, as I have suggested, Byron’s annotations rely less on antiquarian research than his own experience. “The only advantage I have,” as he told Moore in December 1813, “is being on the spot; and that merely amounts to saving me the trouble of turning over books, which I had better read again.”⁷⁴ Byron’s claim to accuracy largely depends on his direct contact with the East, hence the various accounts of his travels in the notes, which, as a result, deviate

⁷³ MacCarthy, Byron 212.

⁷⁴ Byron to Thomas Moore, 8 Dec. 1813, Letters and Journals, vol. 3, 194.

from scholarly footnoting conventions.⁷⁵ As Orientalist fictions, the Turkish tales might be seen to exemplify what Leask sees as the containing function of notes, distancing the reader from the potentially absorptive exoticism of the text by subordinating it to a western “ethnological or historiographical discourse,” in order to assure the authenticity of descriptions and to guarantee the cultural superiority of the reader.⁷⁶ Byron’s notes, however, do not have a pattern and are not products of workmanship or erudition like Henley’s copious notes to *Vathek* and Southey’s annotations to his Oriental romances. His note on the “Jerreed, or Djerrid, a blunted Turkish Javelin” in *The Giaour*, for example, is accompanied by an ironic observation: “It is a favourite exercise of the Mussulmans; but I know not if it can be called a *manly* one, since the most expert in the art are the Black Eunuchs of Constantinople” (242). His description of “the Capitan Pacha’s whiskers” is comic: “the portentous mustachios twisted, they stood erect of their own accord, and were expected every moment to change their colour, but at last condescended to subside, which, probably, saved more heads than they contained hairs” (244). Unlike Southey’s notes which so often present non-Christians as vicious and uncivilised, Byron had the Giaour defy Christian precepts in the tale, and omitted the monk’s sermon in his note, mockingly stating that the preaching is “of a customary length” and “delivered in the nasal tone of all orthodox preachers” (242).

Byron’s Orientalism is thus distinct from that of other contemporary writers, especially Southey. As a reviewer observed in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1824), “Mr. Southey is, and always was, too much of a monk, to understand a man of the world like Byron; and Byron was too decidedly, or rather too exclusively, a

⁷⁵ My argument here concurs with Stephen Cheeke who claims that Byron’s notes “represent a form of anti-antiquarianism, or counter-connoisseurship, rooted in a present reality of which he ... had direct experience.” *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (London: Palgrave, 2003) 30.

⁷⁶ Leask, “Wandering in Eblis” 181.

man of the world, to understand a monk like Southey.”⁷⁷ Whereas Southey staked a claim to the moral and intellectual high ground, according to this critic, Byron catered to the popular taste. As Byron merged gossip and rumour about his personal life with his fiction, this kind of “negative publicity,” in the words of Elfenbein, also encouraged a fantasy of love with a “glamorous aristocrat”—an exciting alternative to the regularity and the “dullness of everyday life.”⁷⁸ Lady Frances Webster, according to MacCarthy, was among the many female readers who could recite the lines of The Giaour by heart, and who identified themselves with Zuleika, as she wrote a passionate letter to Byron calling him “my Selim.”⁷⁹ The charm that had fascinated Byron’s early readers, however, seems to have diminished in his subsequent works. After his separation from his wife, Byron became more overtly antagonistic to English society, which, as I will show in the next section, turned out to repudiate both the writer and his work as pernicious to the reading public.

LEADING THE “SATANIC SCHOOL”: MANFRED AND OTHER WORKS

In the preface to his poetical apotheosis of the late George III, A Vision of Judgement (1821), Southey attacked “those monstrous combinations of horrors and mockery, lewdness and impiety, with which English poetry has, in our days, first been polluted.”⁸⁰ “The poignancy of a death-bed repentance,” he continued, “cannot

⁷⁷ qtd. in Carol Bolton, Writing Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism (London: Pickering, 2007) 147.

⁷⁸ Elfenbein, Byron and the Victorians 63-64.

⁷⁹ MacCarthy, Byron 211-12.

⁸⁰ qtd. in Susan J. Wolfson, “The Vision of Judgment and the visions of ‘author,’” The Cambridge Companion to Byron 172.

cancel one copy of the thousands which are sent abroad.”⁸¹ Without mentioning the names of the poets he is referring to, Southey made it clear that they were Byron and Percy Shelley, who wrote their works abroad and had them published in England. Southey, as Byron believed, spread rumours about his meeting with Shelley in Switzerland in 1816, calling it a “League of Incest,” which included Byron, Shelley, Mary Shelley and her half-sister, Claire Claremont, who was then having an affair with and pregnant by Byron.⁸² Alluding to the two writers in A Vision of Judgement as “men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations,” Southey drew the reader’s attention not only to their personal failings, but also to the repugnant sentiments of their writings, labelling them as leaders of “the Satanic school” that introduced works “characterised by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety.”⁸³ Southey’s purpose was, of course, to denounce the liberal-minded authors as enemies of the country’s monarchical and religious institutions, the main objects of glorification of his poem. His comments on Byron and Shelley in the preface to A Vision of Judgement, moreover, show how significant a writer’s poetical persona had become in the early nineteenth century, when many Romantic writers had become preoccupied with the figure of the poet and his moral and intellectual influence on the reader. Wordsworth, for example, highlighted the poet’s function of “emanati[ng] ... reality and truth,”⁸⁴ while Coleridge described it with an emphasis on the power of imagination. Shelley concurred with Coleridge in valuing the quality of imagination, which he called “[t]he great instrument of moral good.”⁸⁵ Byron, by contrast, did not pay such serious attention to his role as a poet. While denying the

⁸¹ qtd. in Wolfson, “Vision of Judgment” 172.

⁸² qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 308.

⁸³ qtd. in Wolfson, “Vision of Judgment” 172.

⁸⁴ Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), Wordsworth and Coleridge 256.

⁸⁵ Percy B. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry; or, Remarks Suggested by an Essay Entitled ‘The Four Ages of Poetry’ (composed 1821, published 1840), Romanticism: An Anthology, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 1190.

rigid identification between himself and his heroes, Byron appears to have delighted in inserting circumstances from his life into his writing, provoking critics and encouraging them further to stigmatise him, as Southey did, as engendering the “Satanic school” which aimed to corrupt the English public.

Byron’s marriage with Annabella Milbanke proved a failure after only one year of living together. In January 1816, the couple separated, followed by legal proceedings that included Annabella’s allegations of Byron’s sexual affairs with other women and his drinking habit which had led to an outburst of temper and violence against his wife.⁸⁶ With reports and scandals about his domestic affairs increasingly tarnishing his reputation, Byron left England in April. Upon his departure, Byron circulated a poem, “Fare Thee Well!,” drawing a sympathetic, sentimental image of himself as a husband who retains a warm affection for his wife (“Love may sink by slow decay,/ But by sudden wrench, believe not,/ Hearts can thus be torn away”) and a loving concern for his daughter (“When our child’s first accents first flow--/ Wilt thou teach her to say—‘Father!’/ Though his care she must forgo?”).⁸⁷ As McGann has observed, the poem served as Byron’s “sly move in the game of the Separation,” using “the rhetoric of repentant but loving husband” to counter Annabella’s harsh accusations and to attempt to gain the upper hand over his wife and her supporters.⁸⁸ The poem, however, did not much help Byron to regain public favour. It was heavily ridiculed by the periodical press, most obviously in George Cruikshank’s caricature in April 1816 which illustrates Byron leaving the shore of England with a host of mistresses, pretentiously reciting the elegiac “Fare

⁸⁶ Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Portrait* (London: Murray, 1971) 222.

⁸⁷ George Gordon Byron, “Fare Thee Well!,” *Major Works* 262, lines 22-24, and 34-36.

⁸⁸ McGann, Notes, *Major Works* 1037 (note 261); and “Hero with a Thousand Faces: The Rhetoric of Byronism,” *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (1992): 305.

Thee Well!” while waving his hand to Lady Byron, who is holding Ada, their daughter, in her arms.

One month after Byron’s period of exile began, Caroline Lamb published an anonymous novel titled Glenarvon, a roman à clef that further stirred up gossip about and negative opinion towards the poet. Lamb’s description of Clarence de Ruthven, lord of Glenarvon, is easily read as an attack on Byron: “this young man,” as Lamb put it, “having passed his time in a foreign country, ... is now unfortunately arrived here to pervert and mislead others, to disseminate his wicked doctrines amongst an innocent but weak people, and to spread the flames of rebellion, already kindled in other parts of the Island.”⁸⁹ “His stature is small,” she elaborated further, “but his eye is keen and his voice is sweet and tunable ... he is possessed of that persuasive language, which never fails to gain upon its hearers” (1, 293). In the character of Glenarvon, Byron appears Satanic—a diabolical villain who is involved in several murders and seductions of women. Calantha, the heroine, at one point escapes from her house in the attire of a page to meet Glenarvon, in an episode that mirrors Lamb’s own “secret” meeting with Byron as well as the disguise scenes in The Giaour and Lara. After Calantha dies and Glenarvon’s crimes are revealed, Glenarvon is eventually “carried off” to Hell by a figure that first appears as a monk but then turns out to be a fearful monster, covered in “deadly wounds” and “black spouting streams of blood” (3, 218-19)—an intriguing invocation of the Beckford/Lewis model of punishment against Byron. Lady Holland identified Byron with Lamb’s villainous protagonist and associated other characters with people in Lamb’s and Byron’s circle.⁹⁰ Many readers, as Franklin notes, believed that Byron

⁸⁹ Caroline Lamb, Glenarvon, vol. 1 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1995) 292. Subsequent references to Glenarvon (with volume and page numbers in parentheses) will be given after quotations in the text.

⁹⁰ Caroline Franklin, Introduction, Glenarvon, vol. 1, xi.

had actually committed the crimes that were specified in the novel, and several reviews and magazines made the most of the opportunity that the work provided to criticise Byron's behaviour.⁹¹

Byron read Glenarvon in 1817, and in one of his letters to Murray furiously "damn[ed]" the novel.⁹² Lamb's depiction of Byron as a Satanic, Gothic villain perhaps induced Byron to respond via his following work, Manfred (1817), and specifically (as I will show) in the ending of his suppressed version of the play. In a sense, Byron's play takes on Lamb's Gothic plot of transgression and (supernatural) punishment. It might also have been influenced by Goethe's Faust, which Lewis had translated and read to Byron in the summer of 1816 in Switzerland. If there is any one work that provoked Southey to call Byron "Satanic," Manfred would be the most obvious candidate, since it employs current "Gothic" and Faustian conventions in order to flout and break them, and to present its title character as an absolute rebel—the Byronic hero thus becoming increasingly outrageous and provocative. From the outset, Byron can be seen to develop the metaphysical opening of Lara, depicting Manfred conjuring up spirits in "a Gothic gallery" at "Midnight."⁹³ Manfred resembles the overreaching Faust in that he is associated with forbidden knowledge, but he also represents the reversal of such a model, since he seems to have obtained and exhausted his knowledge and power, and is now standing at the end of his quest, tormented and disillusioned that "[t]he Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life" (1.1.12). What Manfred requests of the spirits, therefore, is an end to his sorrow and suffering, in the form of "forgetfulness" (1.1.136) and "self-oblivion" (1.1.145). The setting of the wild, desolate Alps calls up Byron's travels in

⁹¹ Ibid. x-xi.

⁹² qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 302.

⁹³ George Gordon Byron, Manfred, Major Works 275; Act 1, scene 1, scene description). Subsequent references to Manfred will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Switzerland in 1816: “it was the *Staubach* & the *Jungfrau*,” as he told Murray in June 1820, “and something else—much more than Faustus” that prompted him to compose Manfred.⁹⁴ This “something else,” as MacCarthy observes, was probably Byron’s dejection after the separation from his wife,⁹⁵ a connection which becomes clearer when Manfred is considered alongside Harold, in the third canto of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1816), who voyages to Switzerland and is similarly desperate for something to “wean me from the weary dream/ Of selfish grief or gladness—so it flung/ Forgetfulness around me” (3.33-35).

To this basic Faustian structure, Byron introduced the “Gothic” theme of family secrets that underpins Manfred’s misery and that is partly related to his own marital circumstances. Like his Turkish tales, Byron’s play reveals only part of the secret in question, while leaving the rest open to the reader’s interpretation. In the opening scene Manfred sees an apparition of a beautiful lady. As the work states, “[s]he was like me in lineaments” (2.2.105):

the pure warm stream
Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
And loved each other as we should not love. (2.1.24-27)

In a cross-reference to The Bride of Abydos, Manfred’s lines here imply sibling incest. But instead of representing youthful rebellion, Manfred’s incestuous relationship, as he confesses, results in tragedy, including the death of the lady concerned: “Not with my hand, but heart—which broke her heart—/ It gazed on mine, and withered. I have shed/ Blood, but not hers—and yet her blood was shed” (2.2.118-20). The plot thickens when Byron introduces the phantom of Astarte in the

⁹⁴ qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 311.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

second act, who, like the first lady, is virtually silent throughout, except in her foretelling of Manfred's death at the end of Act 2. It is, indeed, tempting to read Astarte and the first lady as the same person, since they seem to be the main source of his sorrow. Astarte's appearance, in particular, has a strong impact on Manfred, as it causes him to become delirious, raving to her about their illicit love that he mentions earlier in the play:

...Thou lovedst me
Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made
To torture thus each other, though it were
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.
Say that thou loath'st me not—that I do bear
This punishment for both—that thou wilt be
One of the blessed—and that I shall die ... (2.4.121-27)

Toying with the reader's curiosity, Byron had Manuel, Manfred's servant, leave his sentence incomplete in the final act: "The lady Astarte, his-----" (3.3.47). Without revealing Astarte's identity, the play presents her as central to Manfred's as much as Byron's mystery. Along with the gossip that Caroline Lamb circulated about Byron's affair with his half-sister,⁹⁶ this hinting at sibling incest in Manfred would no doubt have invited many contemporary readers to consider the play as Byron's sorrowful reflection on his passionate relationship with Augusta, and the damage that Caroline and Annabella's accusations of incest and adultery might have done to her reputation. On the other hand, Astarte can also be interpreted as Annabella and Manfred as Byron, who lamented over the failure of their marriage and tried to justify their separation as the best solution to terminate such a painful relationship. While Manfred asks Astarte to "forgive" or "condemn" him (2.4.105), avowing that he will "bear/ his punishment" (2.4.125-26), Byron seems to perform

⁹⁶ See Crompton, Byron and Greek Love 223.

the role of the guilt-stricken, self-exiled husband. Viewing the play alongside Lamb's Glenarvon, it is interesting to see that Byron did not really deny her charge about his extramarital affairs, but rather made use of the scandals (without admitting them) to rectify his image, transforming the villainous womaniser of Lamb's tale into the penitent, melancholic hero of Manfred. The autobiographical subtext was credited by the public. The Day and New Times, for example, blatantly accused Byron of incest, and later had to expurgate its review of the play.⁹⁷ Byron's self-dramatisation, as McGann has noted, also proved extremely compelling to many readers.⁹⁸ After reading Manfred, both Augusta and Annabella identified themselves with Astarte: the first, as McGann puts it, was "filled with anxiety" whereas the latter "registered a kind of satisfaction."⁹⁹

Despite Manfred's penitence, he vehemently opposes any idea of moral reformation throughout the play. His feeling is not just governed by regret, but also by frustration with the moral and social constraints that make his relationship with Astarte impossible, and with the spiritual power that cannot liberate him from his tortured life. Byron's hero is reminiscent of Walpole's Manfred in The Castle of Otranto, who defiantly struggles against the controlling supernatural force of the dead Alfonso as well as Jerome's religious precepts. But whereas Walpole's Manfred is a largely comic figure, Byron's is a much more clearly heroic character. Byron, in other words, can be seen to rewrite Walpole's Gothic novel by conferring a certain sense of triumph upon the villain-hero. In the final act, Byron introduced the character of the abbot of St. Maurice who attempts to persuade Manfred to become reconciled with the church. Like the Giaour, Manfred rejects religious authority,

⁹⁷ Reiman, ed., Note on the Gentleman's Magazine's expurgated version of the Day and New Times' review of Manfred (1816) 1106.

⁹⁸ McGann, "Hero with a Thousand Faces" 311.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

asserting that he has not “sinn’d” against its “ordinances” and therefore does not require any “mediator” between himself and heaven (3.1.55-56). When the spirits reappear, Manfred also refuses to submit to their power, preferring, as he states, to “die as I have lived—alone” (3.4.90). Instead of being punished and carried off by the devil, Manfred’s triumphant death frees Byron’s hero and narrative from the moral concern of the conventional Faustian framework. In fact, the original version of the play is far more rebellious in its treatment of the abbot. In the manuscript, the abbot of St. Maurice is presented as a gluttonous monk, who asks Manfred to donate his properties to the monastery and is finally carried off the scene by a spirit upon Manfred’s order. The spirit’s allusion to “a worldly Monk” and “a pregnant nun,” moreover, recalls Lewis’s punishment of the licentious Ambrosio in The Monk.¹⁰⁰ Byron’s borrowing from Lewis’s Gothic offers a reversal of Lamb’s conclusion to Glenarvon, in which the hero is taken away by the spirit of a friar. The use of the “male Gothic” Faustian narrative to expose religious cant and hypocrisy also helps to define Byron’s play against the contemporary evangelical insistence on the imparting of religious principles in literary works.

While the reception of Byron’s work continued to be mixed, it is fair to say that contemporary critics pointed out the increasingly provocative nature of his writing. Jeffrey, for instance, observed in the Edinburgh Review (1817) that Byron’s hero was “more proud, perhaps, and more awful than ever—but with the fiercer traits of [his] misanthropy subdued, as it were, and quenched in the gloom of deeper despondency.”¹⁰¹ Calling Manfred “a work of genius and originality,” Jeffrey also drew attention to the work’s disclosure of the “fatal issue of an incestuous passion,”

¹⁰⁰ McGann, Note on Byron’s unpublished ending, Manfred, Complete Poetical Works, vol. 4, 467-71.

¹⁰¹ Edinburgh Review (1817), Rutherford, ed., Byron 115.

which, he stated, “is not a thing to be at all brought before the imagination.”¹⁰² The Critical Review (1817) similarly remarked on the “near consanguinity” of the relationship between Manfred and Astarte, describing Byron’s work as a “monstrous production[...],” a “perversion,” and a “lamentable occurrence in the literature of the day.”¹⁰³ Byron, on the other hand, gave the impression of not taking his writing seriously, telling Murray in February 1817 that he had written a drama “of a very wild—metaphysical—and inexplicable kind,” a “piece of phantasy” of which he himself “ha[d] no great opinion.”¹⁰⁴ A month later in his letter to Moore, Byron called Manfred a “mad drama,” written “for the sake of introducing the Alpine scenery in description.”¹⁰⁵ When Murray mentioned to him the negative reception from reviewers, Byron claimed to show no interest in it: “I care not—he [Manfred] is one of the best of my misbegotten—say what they will.”¹⁰⁶ While many reviews noted the influence of Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus and Goethe’s Faust, Byron asserted to Murray that he had neither read nor seen the first, and only “heard Mr. Lewis [translate] verbally some scenes” of the latter.¹⁰⁷ The outline of the Faust story is nonetheless conspicuous in Manfred, and even though Byron sometimes denied this literary influence, he could also admitted it in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, emphasising to Murray his different treatment of the hero, and his departure from the example of his earlier works: “The devil may take both the Faustus’s, German and English—I have taken neither.”¹⁰⁸

At a time when there was increasing hostility towards stage effects and spectacles, Byron’s depreciation of Manfred, together with the fact that he wrote it as

¹⁰² Ibid. 117.

¹⁰³ Critical Review (1817), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 669-70.

¹⁰⁴ Byron to John Murray, 15 Feb. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 170.

¹⁰⁵ Byron to Thomas Moore, 25 Mar. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Byron to John Murray, 9 July 1817, Marchand, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 249.

¹⁰⁷ Byron to John Murray, 12 Oct. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 268.

¹⁰⁸ Byron to John Murray, 23 Oct. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 270.

a closet drama, served to present him as a disinterested figure, removed from the trade in literature. In a letter of March 1817, Byron confided to Murray that the play “could never be attempted or thought of for the stage—I much doubt it for publication even.”¹⁰⁹ “I composed it,” he continued, “actually with a *horror* of the stage—& with a view to render even the thought of it impracticable, knowing the zeal of my friends, that I should try that for which I have an invincible repugnance—viz—a representation.”¹¹⁰ Despite such a show of aloofness, however, Byron’s engagement with the theatre is ambivalent, since he was in fact familiar with and indirectly involved in the theatrical business. In 1813, for example, Byron persuaded Drury Lane to stage Coleridge’s tragedy, Remorse, and also asked Moore to comment favourably on the play in the Edinburgh Review.¹¹¹ Upon Byron’s suggestion, Murray published Coleridge’s Christabel, Kubla Khan, and Other Poems (1816). After Byron became a member of Drury Lane’s Sub-Committee of Management in 1815, however, he rejected Coleridge’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s A Winter’s Tale, Zapolya, which, as he told Murray, “though poetical—did not appear at all practicable,” unlike Maturin’s Gothic play, Bertram, which had an extremely successful run at Drury Lane in 1816.¹¹²

Notwithstanding critics’ unfavourable reception of Manfred, Byron continued to write plays, and he is indeed the most prolific dramatist among all the canonical Romantics.¹¹³ Despite his ambiguous attitude towards the theatre, Byron’s plays, as Julie Carlson remarks, are the most stageable of all the Romantics, and Byron the

¹⁰⁹ Byron to John Murray, 9 Mar. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 185.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Franklin, Byron 73.

¹¹² Byron to John Murray, 12 Oct. 1817, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 267.

¹¹³ Between 1797 and 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote blank verse tragedies, The Borderers and Osorio, but both were turned down by theatre managers of Covent Garden and Drury Lane because of perceived staging difficulties. Over ten years later Coleridge revised Osorio and offered it anew as Remorse, which became a success with Byron’s help and with Coleridge’s insertion of the spectacular incantation scene in the play.

only writer to survive in the Victorian theatre: among his other plays, Sardanapalus (1821) and Werner (1822) became favourites of mid- and late nineteenth-century audiences, particularly for their lavish stage settings, costumes, and melodramatic plots.¹¹⁴ During his lifetime, however, Byron insisted on presenting his dramatic works as closet plays, and even proposed an injunction against Drury Lane for staging his Marino Faliero in 1821. Apart from his pose of aristocratic disdain towards popular theatrical culture, another probable reason why Byron defined his works as closet dramas is their offensive, immoral content. Byron's offer of his plays as written texts opened up an opportunity for him to present ideas and elements that he probably would not have been able to get away with in the contemporary legitimate theatre, taking into account the examination of performance texts prior to their staging. Manfred thus allowed him to insert an autobiographical subtext, or to perform a private drama of a dejected, self-exiled husband, and his adaptation of the Faustian framework, as I have shown, also enabled him to challenge conservative moral and social restriction more generally.

It is worth noting here that Lamb's portrayal of Byron as a seductive, wicked lord in Glenarvon was partly responsible for establishing his negative image as "mad—bad—and dangerous to know."¹¹⁵ Her description of Glenarvon seems to have influenced John Polidori in his depiction of the vampiric character, Lord Ruthven, the name directly taken from Lamb's protagonist. Like Glenarvon, Ruthven in Polidori's The Vampyre is a mesmeric but evil aristocrat: "his character was dreadfully vicious, for ... the possession of irresistible powers of seduction.

¹¹⁴ Julie A. Carlson, "The Theatre," Romanticism: An Oxford Guide, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 646-47.

¹¹⁵ qtd. in MacCarthy, Byron 164.

rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society.”¹¹⁶ Ruthven attracts the attention of Aubrey, who travels with him to Europe and learns about the myth of the vampyre from the beautiful Greek Ianthe, a name that calls up Byron’s dedication of a poem to his young mistress, Lady Charlotte Harley, in the first canto of Childe Harold. As the story unfolds, Ruthven develops into the renowned predator, and before Aubrey can escape from his power, he becomes ill and delirious, unable to save his sister from being “glutted [by] the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (23). Filled with recognisable images and characters, Polidori’s anonymous novel, when it was sent to and published in the New Monthly Magazine in 1818, was at once identified and subtitled by the magazine’s sub-editor Alaric Watts as “A TALE BY LORD BYRON,” feeding public curiosity about the author and boosting the sales of the magazine.¹¹⁷

While Byron quickly denied his authorship of The Vampyre and Polidori declared himself the writer of it in 1819, the connection that Polidori’s tale had with Byron is more substantial than its first readers might have realised. At that time Polidori was Byron’s personal physician and he travelled with Byron to Switzerland in 1816. Polidori also joined the ghost story competition at the Villa Diodati, comprising Byron, Shelley, Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley and himself. Though The Vampyre was not a direct product of this contest, in which Polidori wrote Ernestus Berchtold; or, The Modern Oedipus (1819), it was, as Polidori stated in a note attached to the Introduction of Ernestus Berchtold, partly grounded upon Byron’s unfinished “Augustus Darvell,” a tale told from the perspective of a young

¹¹⁶ John Polidori, The Vampyre, The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre, eds. Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 7. The subsequent reference to The Vampyre is given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

¹¹⁷ Morrison and Baldick, Introduction, The Vampyre vii-viii.

man who witnesses the mysterious death of his travelling companion.¹¹⁸ Polidori's work became an inspiration for later vampire fiction, which centred on the figure of the sinister, seductive, and bloodthirsty aristocrat, and in the early nineteenth century it also participated in the reception of (and backlash against) Byron and Byronism. On a personal level, Polidori might have imagined himself as Aubrey, in the power of his lordly companion. But as Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick point out, the tale could as well represent "middle-class resentment against the sexual allure of the noble *roué*."¹¹⁹ As I will show towards the end of the chapter, the hypnotic and contagious influence of the vampire—a feature that Polidori adopted from Lamb's novel—chimes with the rhetoric of disease and infection that critics used in their denunciations of Byron, and the dangerous appeal of his work, later in the century.

Despite the increasing antagonism of critics, Byron nonetheless thrived on the literary image of a "Satanic," rebellious hero, while he became at the same time more sympathetic towards independence movements in Europe. In 1820 Byron joined the society of the Carbonari which aimed to liberate Italy from Papal-Austrian rule, and he also developed an interest in the cause of the Greeks, making contact with Prince Mavrocordato's cousin in Pisa in 1821, becoming a member of the London Greek Committee, and finally, sailing to Greece in 1823. The Faust story continued to be prominent in his writing, but it was no longer as closely tied to the Gothic theme of family secrets that implicated Byron's own personal life, and became more closely related to his political and ideological commitment. The disgrace brought about by his separation from Annabella, as Franklin observes, caused him to be even more cynical about an increasingly moralistic English society, and in Cain, for example, Byron employed the Faustian structure of temptation and

¹¹⁸ Ibid. ix-x.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. xiii.

punishment to challenge the very root of Christian belief.¹²⁰ With its biblical content, the play is subtitled “A Mystery” in order to be, as Byron elucidated in the preface, “in conformity with the ancient title annexed to the dramas upon similar subjects, which [are] styled ‘Mysteries, or Moralities.’”¹²¹ Since the medieval Mystery Plays were renowned for their admixture of vernacular language and Biblical subjects, Byron playfully objected to his play’s association with “those very profane productions,” claiming that Cain is “taken from actual *Scripture*” (881). While the story mainly concerns Lucifer’s temptation of Cain, what is most striking about Byron’s fallen angel is not his evilness, but his eloquent reasoning, which upholds the idea of religious and intellectual freedom: “*One good* gift has the fatal apple given—/ *Your reason*:—let it not be over-sway’d/ By tyrannous threats to force you into faith” (2.2.459-61). Unlike the heroes of Byron’s earlier works, Lucifer does not merely represent transgression, but also carries out an inquiry into established moral and social norms. Byron’s attachment to the Mystery Plays, in this sense, provided him a licence, as Philip Martin argues, to “break all the rules whilst remaining ostensibly innocent.”¹²²

Earlier, in 1819, Byron borrowed the seventeenth-century legend of Don Juan (who, like Faust, is also dragged to Hell at the end of the story) to write an epic poem of the same title. It was a comic satire of the increasingly restrictive English society, “consciously initiated,” as McGann suggests, “as an ironic alternative to Coleridge’s reactionary Biographia Literaria (1817).”¹²³ There is an autobiographical dimension in the poem again, especially evident in the figure of Donna Inez, Juan’s

¹²⁰ Franklin, Byron 124.

¹²¹ George Gordon Byron, Cain: A Mystery, Major Works 881. Page number from Major Works will be given for references to the Preface, while act, scene and line numbers are provided in parentheses after quotations from the playtext.

¹²² Philip W. Martin, Byron: A Poet before His Public (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 150.

¹²³ McGann, Notes, Major Works 1043 (note 373).

authoritative and puritanical mother, who is reminiscent of both Byron's mother and his wife, whose unhappy married life led her, like Inez, to attempt to "prove her loving lord was *mad*,/ But as he had some lucid intermissions,/ She next decided he was only *bad*."¹²⁴ While Byron's epic comprises seventeen cantos and covers a wide range of subjects and events, my brief consideration of the poem will focus mainly on the recurring themes of gender play and cross-dressing.

After Juan's amorous affair with Haidée, he is sent off by her father to be sold as a slave in Turkey. In Canto 5, Juan is bought by the black eunuch Baba, who orders him to dress as a woman and enter the sultan's harem to serve as a female slave. Earlier in his Turkish tales, Byron had used the motif of disguise, but transvestism was limited to his Oriental heroines and it was mainly employed to conceal clandestine relationships (with homoerotic overtones) between them and the heroes. The cross-dressing motif in Don Juan, however, is employed in a still more provocative way. Though Juan is distinguished by other harem members as a Christian, his adoption of a female Muslim's appearance and manner offers Byron a range of sexual possibilities, along with gender role reversal, that he could not explore in an English context. As he is "femininely all array'd" (5.80.633) and is taught by Baba to "swing a little less from side to side" (5.91.726) and to "look a little modest" (5.91.728), Juan's disguise, according to Susan Wolfson, becomes "a high-camp parody of the trappings of female subjection."¹²⁵ His "blush and shake" as a "new-bought virgin" (5.156.1242) in front of the sultan later attests to how well he has assumed a feminine sensibility.¹²⁶ When Gulbayez, the sultana, asks him about love, thus reminding Juan of Haidée, Juan "burst into tears" (5.117.936): his crying.

¹²⁴ George Gordon Byron, Don Juan, Major Works 384; Canto 1, stanza 27, lines 210-12. Canto, stanza and line numbers will be given in parentheses for subsequent references to the poem.

¹²⁵ Susan J. Wolfson, "'Their She Condition': Cross-dressing and the Politics of Gender in Don Juan," Byron, ed. Jane Stabler (London: Longman, 1998) 101.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 101.

as Franklin observes, gives a comic twist to the sentimental depiction of women in novels as “obtaining sway by the use of tears.”¹²⁷ A “man”’s tears, as Juan proves, can likewise move and deceive women, as Gulbayez admits that “nothing ... had e'er/ Infected her with sympathy” (5.119.946-47) until she sees Juanna cry. Juanna’s popularity in the harem, moreover, makes other female slaves desire “her” to become their bedfellow. Their fondling and kissing of Juanna, along with their offer to help “her” undress before going to bed, not only carries obvious lesbian overtones, but, as Wolfson remarks, also credits Juan, as a man, with more sexual potency, since he, like the sultan, seems to be in possession of all the girls in the harem.¹²⁸

In Canto 16 Byron returned to the Gothic motifs of family secrets and supernatural agency. In the ancient House of Amundeville in England, Juan encounters in a “ghastly, desolate” (16.17.136) chamber a mysterious “monk,” “arrayed/ In cowl and beads and dusky garb,” (16.21.161-62) who “passed Juan by,/ [and] Glanced, without pausing, on him a bright eye” (16.21.167-68). Listening to Adeline’s story of the Black Friar who has haunted the place since the era of the Normans, Juan becomes more terrified, but later finds out that the “ghost” is in fact the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, who secretly maintains a passionate interest in him. Byron’s parody of the Radcliffean “explained supernatural” reveals a comic transvestism that enables Fitz-Fulke to be sexually dominating in making her advances towards the young hero. The Duchess’s cross-dressing, as Wolfson puts it, “affords an outlet for desire, and grants her a kind of ‘male’ power of action within the existing social structure” that values women’s self-restraint and modesty.¹²⁹ The libertinage of Byron’s epic, as Franklin also asserts, “undermines the concept of

¹²⁷ Caroline Franklin, “‘Quiet Cruising o’er the Ocean Woman’: Byron’s *Don Juan* and the Woman Question,” Stabler, ed., *Byron* 87.

¹²⁸ Wolfson, “‘Their She Condition’” 101.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 104.

reforming society through endowing women with the role of guardian of morals, by suggesting that the unalterable dynamics of human sexuality have appertained throughout time and place, and that woman is by nature as much a creature—or more—of sexual appetite as is man.”¹³⁰

Owing among other things to its sexual politics, Don Juan met with widespread disapproval from critics. The Gentleman’s Magazine (1819), for instance, condemned it for its “shameless indecency,” and the British Critic (1819) similarly attacked the epic’s “spirit of infidelity and libertinism.”¹³¹ The British Review (1819) went further than this in considering the implications of the poem’s subversiveness: “For praise, as far as regards the poetry, many passages might be exhibited; for condemnation, as far as regards the morality, all: but none for either purpose can be produced, without insult to the ear of decency, and vexation to the heart that feels for domestic or national happiness.”¹³² Byron’s comic epic, however, remained a favourite among readers, as a reviewer in the Monthly Magazine (1823) conceded when he stated that “none of his lordship’s productions can afford him so ample a field for self-congratulation as the Don Juan.”¹³³ “Revilers and partisans,” continued the same reviewer, “have alike contributed to the popularity of this singular work; and the result is, that scarcely any poem of the present day has been more generally read, or its continuation more eagerly and impatiently awaited.”¹³⁴

The generalised aura of “rebellion” surrounding Byron and his work, it is interesting to note, was also seized upon by some political radicals. In 1822, for example, a reviewer referred to the pirated editions of Byron’s Cain brought about

¹³⁰ Franklin, ““Quiet Cruising o’er the Ocean Woman”” 80-81.

¹³¹ qtd. in Colette Colligan, The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley: Sexuality and Exoticism in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006) 26.

¹³² British Review (1819), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 476.

¹³³ Monthly Magazine (1823), Reiman, ed., Romantic Reviewed 1705.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

by “Atheists and Jacobins (the terms are convertible).”¹³⁵ The publishing history of Don Juan is likewise complex and eventful, as his break with his long-time publisher John Murray in 1822 caused him to turn to the radical John Hunt for the publication of Cantos 6-16 of Don Juan. Byron’s “combination of blasphemy, political sedition, and hedonistic morality,” as Colette Colligan explains, also made Don Juan “a great favourite among underground publishers with radical allegiances and unconventional morality.”¹³⁶ William Hone, for example, issued the spurious Don Juan, Canto the Third in 1819, which portrays Juan as engaging in the circulation of an anti-government tract in London.¹³⁷ In 1823 James Griffin published another cheap, underground work, The British Don Juan, an imitation of Byron’s epic which is centred on the sexual licentiousness of a man believed to be Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s son.¹³⁸ Four decades later, the publisher William Dugdale issued Don Leon (1866), a poem that dwells on the hero’s indulgence in homosexual pleasures in the East.¹³⁹

The production and consumption of Byron’s portraits after 1816 was also a site of contest. Almost six months before Byron left England, a new portrait of him appeared in Colburn’s New Monthly Magazine in August 1815. It was an engraving by Henry Meyer, after the original by George Harlow, depicting Byron with eyes cast downward, pouting lips and a heightened bridge in his nose, and dressed in a loose-necked shirt with a high collar but without any cravat (Plate 4).¹⁴⁰ The picture, as Beevers points out, was exaggerated so as to present Byron as disdainful of

¹³⁵ qtd. in Ghislaine McDayter, “Conjuring Byron: Byronmania, Literary Commodification and the Birth of Celebrity,” Byronmania: Portraits of the Artist in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Culture, ed. Frances Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000) 50.

¹³⁶ Colligan, The Traffic in Obscenity 24.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 27.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 42.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Beevers, The Byronic Image 66, 68.



PLATE 4 Byron, engraving after the drawing by George Harlow by Henry Meyer (1816)

society: his clothes, in particular, were drawn “in such a way as to imply impatience with restraint.”¹⁴¹ According to Beevers, Harlow’s work was “the first truly public portrait of Byron, created with a mass market instead of a private patron in mind.”¹⁴² It was a notorious image, which sold especially well after Byron’s separation from his wife. The increasing demand for the engraving inspired “cruder and coarser” pirated versions by anonymous engravers, who worked on the original plate “so many times that the facial features have degenerated to a degree suggestive of utmost depravity.”¹⁴³ After Byron’s death, the Chartists appropriated Harlow’s drawing of Byron as their badge during the demonstration in Newcastle in 1838, turning Byron into an icon of rebellion in England, a hero who was associated with political subversion and radicalism.¹⁴⁴ Whereas Byron’s support for revolutionary activities was highly esteemed in Europe and among radicals and reformers in Britain, the reception of Byron in an increasingly conservative British society was registered in a very different way. As the conclusion of my thesis will show, Byron’s posthumous reputation, along with backlash against other “male Gothic” writers, reveals how “male Gothic” theatricality and playfulness enjoyed much less license in the nineteenth century. Byron, therefore, can be seen as both the high-point and the end-point of the “male Gothic” tradition.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 68.

¹⁴² Ibid. 70.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 74, 76.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 70.

CONCLUSION

In many ways Byron's posthumous reputation serves as a reference point for the demise of the "male Gothic." The nature of his reputation, first of all, was considerably different in Europe and in Britain. On the continent, Byron was not only famous for his role as a great supporter of Greek independence, but also for his influence on European writers: Madame de Staël, for example, was an admirer and translator of many of Byron's poems.¹ While acknowledging the influence that his Faust had on Byron, Goethe praised Manfred, calling it "a wonderful phenomenon" that impressed him through the poet's delineation of his passion and pain.² Goethe's appreciation of Cain inspired a wider engagement with and appreciation of the intellectual dimension of Byron's writing in Germany.³ Byron, moreover, inspired Goethe to draw the character of Euphorion in Faust II after him, a character who, in the story, appears as the son of Faust and Helena, aspiring to attain unreachable heights (and who in the course of his quest meets an early death).⁴ In Russia, Pushkin's works were heavily influenced by Byron's satirical mode and his stylistic device of ottava rima.⁵ Byron's personality and his mode of self-presentation also had an impact on other Russian writers, especially Lermontov whose Hero of Our Time (1839-41) presents a specifically Russian perspective on the figure of the charismatic, proud, and cynical Byronic hero.

¹ Frank Erik Pointner and Achim Geisenhanslüke, "The Reception of Byron in the German-Speaking Lands," The Reception of Byron in Europe, ed. Richard A. Cardwell, vol. 2 (London: Thoemmes, 2004) 246.

² Goethe's review of Manfred (1820), Rutherford, ed., Byron 119.

³ Pointner and Geisenhanslüke, "Reception of Byron in the German-Speaking Lands" 240.

⁴ *Ibid.* 255.

⁵ See Peter Cochran, "Byron's European Reception," The Cambridge Companion to Byron 255-59.

In Britain, however, Byron's influence was registered in other ways. His scandalous life remained a highly marketable commodity, as is testified by the number of Byron biographies that were published throughout the nineteenth century.⁶ His style of dress was imitated by Victorians such as Benjamin Disraeli, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.⁷ And despite critical disapproval, Byron's poetical works were still admired by many readers, especially from the middle- and working classes: according to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, for example, a Colchester headmaster's compilation of "poetic gems" for students in 1833 included Byron alongside other poets such as Cowper, Barbauld and Scott, while the female poet Jane Ransome Biddell went as far as naming her son "Manfred" after Byron's protagonist.⁸ While writers such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë famously based particular characters upon the figure of the Byronic hero, however, most Victorian authors, sought to keep a distance from the now notorious poet. Thomas Carlyle, for example, lamented over Byron's death and probably based the protagonist of Sartor Resartus (published in Fraser's Magazine, 1833-34) on Byron, but he also criticised Byron's larger-than-life self-characterisation in his reviews of the poet's work.⁹ In his poem "Empedocles on Etna" (1852), Matthew Arnold seemed to model the cynical philosopher Empedocles on Manfred, but made his hero, as Thais Morgan remarks, "a socially responsible one that corresponds to mid-Victorian ideas about manliness."¹⁰ Byron was a popular subject for silver-fork

⁶ These works include, for example, Thomas Medwin's Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron at Pisa (1824); Thomas Moore's Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of his Life (1830); John Galt's The Life of Lord Byron (1830); Edward John Trelawney's Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron (1858); Harriet Beecher Stowe's Lady Byron Vindicated (1870). See Elfenbein, Byron and the Victorians 76-79.

⁷ See MacCarthy, Byron 558-64.

⁸ Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes 159-60.

⁹ See Thomas Carlyle, Edinburgh Review (1828), and his extracts from Sartor Resartus (1836) in Rutherford, ed., Byron 290-94.

¹⁰ Thais E. Morgan, "The Poetry of Victorian Masculinities," The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 217.

novels, which employed Regency society settings and sometimes incorporated details from actual aristocratic lives and scandals. Nonetheless, as Elfenbein has shown, the portrayal of Byron in works such as Benjamin Disraeli's Venetia (1837) and Catherine Gore's Cecil, or the Adventures of a Coxcomb (1841) functioned to suggest "the inadequacy of Regency values and the need for their ultimate supersession by the supposedly better world of Victorian England." as these novels tend to conclude with the downfall of the villainous, Byronic character and/or the triumphant union of the morally upright hero and heroine.¹¹

In Britain, Byron's reputation was in part a victim of the evangelical revival. As Davidoff and Hall have argued, by the mid-nineteenth century evangelicalism became "the cultural norm for the middle class," promoting, above all, "the commitment to an imperative moral code and the reworking of the ... domestic world into a proper setting for its practice."¹² Evangelical doctrines, as Boyd Hilton claims, also permeated the aristocracy, many members of which, in reaction against an earlier era of excess and conspicuous consumption, styled themselves as exemplars in order to survive in a more rigidly moralistic environment.¹³ In these new circumstances, Byron's aristocratic defiance and self-promotion increasingly came to be seen as suspect. Coleridge predicted in 1825 that Sir Walter Scott would "be read and remembered as a novelist and the founder of a new race of novels, and Byron not remembered at all, except as a wicked lord who, from morbid and restless vanity, pretended to be ten times more wicked than he was."¹⁴ Indeed, the contrast between Scott and Byron was commonly drawn by contemporary critics. Hazlitt, in The Spirit of the Age (1825), contributed a long section on the two writers, praising

¹¹ Andrew Elfenbein, "Silver-Fork Byron and the Image of Regency England," Byronmania 78.

¹² Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes 25.

¹³ Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? 178-79.

¹⁴ Coleridge's marginalia in Pepys' Memoirs (1825), Rutherford, ed., Byron 266.

Scott who “casts his descriptions in the mould of nature, ever-varying, never tiresome, always interesting and always instructive, instead of casting them constantly in the mould of his own individual impressions.”¹⁵ “In reading the Scotch Novels,” Hazlitt asserted, “we never think about the author ... [whereas] in reading Lord Byron’s works, he himself is never absent from our minds.”¹⁶

Scott’s engagement with the Gothic, as James Watt has observed, was in fact more ambivalent than some contemporary commendations of his works attested.¹⁷ Scott was an enthusiastic reader of the Gothic, and in many of his reviews of the genre in fact expressed a preference for the supernatural extravagance of male writers such as Walpole, Lewis and Maturin over the more restrained and rational mode of the Radcliffean Gothic.¹⁸ At the start of his career Scott collaborated with Lewis in Tales of Wonder, and his first attempt at drama, The House of Aspen, was, as he told George Ellis in 1801, a “Germanised brat” in the style of Lewis, rejected by John Kemble for containing “too much blood.”¹⁹ His early poems such as The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) and Marmion (1808) also incorporated Gothic features such as supernatural agency, and grotesque episodes involving (for example) live burial, making critics like Jeffrey, in his review of Marmion, view the poem as an imitation of “a bad German novel” and the Radcliffean school of Gothic.²⁰

Scott, however, was much more successful in distancing himself from the Gothic in prose fiction. As John Murray wrote of Waverley, in a letter to his wife: “it

¹⁵ Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (1825), Rutherford, ed., Byron 270.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 271.

¹⁷ Watt, Contesting the Gothic 131.

¹⁸ See Watt, Contesting the Gothic 136-38.

¹⁹ qtd. in John Gibson Lockhart, The Life of Sir Walter Scott, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1902) 63. My quote from Kemble is from David Hewitt, “Scott, Sir Walter (1771–1832),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford UP, 2004, Online ed., May 2006, 29 Dec. 2007 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24928>>.

²⁰ qtd. in Watt, Contesting the Gothic 134.

is excellent. No dark passages; no secret chambers; no wind howling in long galleries.”²¹ Scott’s novels distinguished themselves from the dominant mode of the Gothic in their elaborate historical descriptions, an important element that, in the eyes of critics, raised Scott’s works above the ordinary run of fiction. Even in Ivanhoe (1820), one of his more “Gothic” works, Scott chose a specific English medieval locale, and set his novel within the historical context of Richard I’s England after the Norman conquest. While there are tonal ambiguities in certain passages and episodes, as Watt has pointed out,²² Scott’s Ivanhoe on the whole abstained from the use of Gothic trappings. In contrast to the self-absorbed Gothic villain or the Byronic hero, Scott’s protagonists are not morally threatening. Waverley, for example, is a passive figure involuntarily caught up in the turbulent events around him, while Lovel, in The Antiquary, is peripheral to the plot of that novel, as he disappears midway through the work until his identity is revealed and his legitimacy established at the close. Scott’s heroes, as Alexander Welsh observes, represent qualities such as prudence, self-restraint and stoicism, and are therefore congruous with what he describes as the period’s emphasis on “national conservatism and moral righteousness.”²³

Scott’s emphasis on the historical context of his works helped to establish what Coleridge saw as “a new race of novels”²⁴ which deviated from the sensational modes of the Gothic and the Byronic. For John Scott, writing in 1820, the Waverley Novels were “fresh and invigorating,” and filled with “health and manliness.”²⁵ In the London and Westminster Review (1838), Carlyle similarly distinguished Scott’s

²¹ qtd. in Fiona Robertson, Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 28.

²² See Watt, Contesting the Gothic 144-46.

²³ Alexander Welsh, The Hero of the Waverley Novels (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963) 27.

²⁴ Coleridge’s marginalia in Pepys’ Memoirs (1825), Rutherford, ed., Byron 266.

²⁵ qtd. in Ferris, Achievement of Literary Authority 244.

works for their “joyous picturesqueness and fellow-feeling, freedom of eye and heart; or to say it in a word, [their] general *healthiness* of mind.”²⁶ In her study of Scott’s self-fashioning as “the Author of Waverley,” Ferris argues that the reviews’ emphasis on the “healthiness” of Scott’s texts helped to establish “a positive, male-inflected form” of what was hitherto regarded, in pejorative terms, as the feminised sphere of the novel.²⁷ This “manliness,” as both Ferris and Fiona Robertson note, is defined against the aristocratic, diseased masculinity of Byron.²⁸ To Hazlitt, what was objectionable about Byron was his display of “morbid sentiments” through his heroes, who are “sullen, moody, capricious, fierce, inexorable, gloating on beauty, thirsting for revenge, hurrying from the extremes of pleasure to pain, but with nothing permanent, nothing healthy or natural.”²⁹ In 1838 Carlyle praised Scott’s historical romances for purifying the field of fiction which was “in the sickliest of recorded ages, when British Literature lay all puking and sprawling in Werterism, Byronism, and other Sentimentalism tearful or spasmodic.”³⁰ The New Monthly Magazine (1820) likewise considered that Scott’s novels had “counteracted the working of that blasting spell by which the genius of Lord Byron once threatened strangely to fascinate and debase the vast multitude of English readers.”³¹

As the language of contemporary reviews attested, the perceived danger of Byron’s writing was its potential to “fascinate and debase,” to poison and contaminate the public, with a contagious disease similar to that inflicted by the vampire’s seductive and infecting bite in the novels of Lamb and Polidori. Byron’s mode of “drawing from self,” especially in his early work, seemed to retain a certain

²⁶ Ibid. 248.

²⁷ Ibid. 247.

²⁸ See Ferris, Achievement of Literary Authority 242-43, and Robertson, Legitimate Histories 27.

²⁹ Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (1825), Rutherford, ed. Byron 272-73.

³⁰ qtd. in Welsh, Hero of the Waverley Novels 27.

³¹ qtd. in Ferris, Achievement of Literary Authority 242.

charm, with Scott himself suggesting that Byron's readers "felt themselves attached to him, not only by many noble qualities, but by the interest of a mysterious, undefined, and almost painful curiosity."³² After Byron's death, however, his self-dramatisation seems increasingly to have been regarded, in Carlyle's words, as "theatrical, false, [and] affected."³³ Thomas Babington Macaulay observed in his review of Moore's Letters and Journals of Lord Byron in 1831 that Byron "was himself the beginning, the middle, and the end, of all his own poetry—the hero of every tale—the chief object in every landscape."³⁴ William Makepeace Thackeray similarly remarked on the affinity between Byron and his heroes, emphasising the "dangerous ground" upon which Byron wrote his poems, as he "got up rapture and enthusiasm with an eye to the public."³⁵

The critical rhetoric of "healthiness" can be seen as one yardstick by which Byron and other "male Gothic" writers were eventually marginalised in the nineteenth century. The denunciation, however, was voiced somewhat differently, as attacks on Byron tended to focus on his seductive or "infectious" influence on the public, while criticisms of writers such as Walpole and Beckford were more directed at their "aristocratic" frivolity and unmanliness. In Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Coleridge (1835), for example, Coleridge condemned Walpole's The Mysterious Mother as "disgusting" and "detestable," commenting that "[n]o one with a spark of true manliness, of which Horace Walpole had none, could have written it."³⁶ While admiring Walpole's treatment of the supernatural in his introduction to the 1811 edition of The Castle of Otranto, Scott, in the Quarterly

³² Quarterly Review (1816), Reiman, ed., Romantics Reviewed 2031.

³³ Edinburgh Review (1828), Rutherford, ed., Byron 290.

³⁴ Edinburgh Review (1831), Rutherford, ed., Byron 313.

³⁵ William Makepeace Thackeray, Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo (1846). Rutherford, ed., Byron 343.

³⁶ Coleridge, Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Coleridge, (1835). Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 148.

Review (1818), saw the flimsiness of Walpole's style as exhibiting "the lightness of the French *badinage*" rather than the "masculine and somewhat rough language" of the English.³⁷ Walpole's literary works, along with his frivolous, attention-seeking self-presentation, were compared by D'Israeli to "plants of sickly delicacy," and were regarded by Macaulay as "literary luxuries" or products of "an unhealthy and disorganised mind."³⁸ While many contemporary readers took Beckford's Vathek at its face value as a moral tale, Henry Crabb Robinson, in his diary for March 1816, pointed out Beckford's "unsuccessful attempt to unite the descriptions of horrid situations and incidents with strokes of humour," and later in 1834 even called the novel "one of the most odious book I ever laid eyes on."³⁹ As early as 1791, Hester Thrale expressed her contempt of Vathek as "a mad Book" written by "a mad Author."⁴⁰ When Samuel Rogers heard Beckford read two of his episodes of Vathek at Fonthill in 1817, he also remarked on their subjects as "objectionable," commenting that "the mind of the author was to a certain degree diseased."⁴¹ Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, the extravagance and provocativeness of "male Gothic" writing no longer generated much excitement among the public. In her Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis (1839), Margaret Baron-Wilson observed how Scott had purified the Gothic by proving that "the deepest and most thrilling interest was to be invoked and sustained, without the aid of the wild or supernatural; while the sympathies were awakened by historical associations, and kept alive by natural

³⁷ Quarterly Review (1818), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 179. For Scott's introduction of the 1811 Otranto, see pages 88-99.

³⁸ Isaac D'Israeli, Calamities of Authors (1812), Sabor, ed., Horace Walpole 283; and Edinburgh Review (1833), same source, 312.

³⁹ Henry Crabb Robinson, Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers (1938). McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 303.

⁴⁰ Hester Lynch Thrale, Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (1942), McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 304.

⁴¹ Samuel Rogers, Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers (1887). McNutt, Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel 303.

delineations of ordinary life.”⁴² While reviving interest in the life and works of Lewis, Baron-Wilson admitted that by the time she wrote this biography, the Gothic productions of male writers like Lewis had already lost their hold on the reader: “the monstrous and supernatural in fiction—having done their worst—were quietly consigned to the graves from which they might be said to have originally sprung.”⁴³

As I have elaborated in this thesis, the “male Gothic” is a historically and culturally specific tradition, offering a space in which writers such as Walpole, Beckford, Lewis and Byron experimented with ways to assume potentially oppositional class and gender identities, and hence to resist emergent “middle-class” ideologies and values. While this categorisation of the “male Gothic” might be seen to present the writers in question as being very much alike, it is also important, as I have argued, to discriminate between their different modes of self-representation and engagements with the genre. Walpole’s Gothic productions, as I have shown, were part of his “aristocratic” self-fashioning, which served to distinguish his works from those of his contemporaries but at the same time did not portray him as altogether repudiating “public” standards of taste. While similarly assuming patriotic poses late in his life, Beckford’s transformation of Walpolean Gothic into Oriental romance more conspicuously glorified the “old regime” of aristocratic excess, as he reworked the norms and conventions of the eighteenth-century Oriental tale so as to highlight his protagonists’ transgressions. Lewis, on the other hand, is the only “male Gothic” author who was seen to be eager to establish himself as a professional writer. Whereas The Monk was implicitly associated with the tradition of French philosophical pornography and Lewis’s alliance with aristocratic liberal Whigs, his subsequent works were offered seemingly without any underlying agenda apart from

⁴² Baron-Wilson, Life and Correspondence, vol. 1, 175-76.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 176.

annoying critics and catering to the popular taste for spectacle and sensationalism. Byron, more than all these writers, employed the Gothic to create a particular self-image of the liberal, rebellious and captivating Byronic hero, who fascinated the public but later met with less approval in the increasingly reactionary society of nineteenth-century Britain.

These writers' "resistance" to "middle-class" culture, as I have argued in the thesis, is not absolute, for it also subsumes their various attempts to offer their works as both legitimate and pleasurable. Central to the "male Gothic" writers' interest is the fluidity and multiplicity of performance. Instead of representing a rigid, uncompromising form of opposition, the "male Gothic" exemplifies an attempt to negotiate the possible co-existence of different cultures—an experimentation with ways of remaining within what Wahrman calls the "ancien régime" of identity, during a period in which class and gender relations were significantly redefined. This process of cultural redefinition, however, also ushered in a heightened sense of moral and sexual probity, which in turn meant that nineteenth-century critics and readers, especially, became more and more suspicious of the provocative writers and works I have discussed. With this social and cultural context, I hope that my discussion of the "male Gothic" will prove to be more fruitful than concentrating simply on the literary tropes of the genre. The emphasis on class and gender aspects, moreover, will help to offer perspectives on "men's Gothic" fiction that are not limited only to the subjects of sexuality and queer theory. While certain motifs and features of the "male Gothic" might be found in other Gothic fictions, they seem to be dissociated from the writers' self-representation and concern with the "ancien régime" of identity. And if we cannot say definitively that the "male Gothic" dies out after the death of Byron, it seems fair to say at the very least that it begins to fade from view.

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