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Author(s): Maximillian E. Novak

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Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque

MAXIMILLIAN E. NOVAK

When Henry Tilney decides to lecture Catherine Morland on the absurdity of carrying her fascination with Gothic fiction into her perception of ordinary life, his strictures have to be read in terms of the total context of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Whatever he has to say is undercut by the pleasure he takes in feeling so completely superior to Catherine, whom he loves for her openness, her good looks and her "very ignorant mind."¹ He too is an admirer of Mrs. Radcliffe, but he sees the possible danger of her works on susceptible minds:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you— Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?²

Jane Austen is fully aware that the thrill of Gothic fiction, apart from its "charming" qualities, was like the vertigo connected with dancing and jumping, a sexual surrogate for teenage girls, but Henry Tilney's criticisms are more than psychological. Having previously acknowledged his own "pleasure" in reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Tilney subjects Gothic fictions to an examination of their relationship to the historical and ethical experiences of nineteenth-century English men and women. He clearly regards them as grotesque, and it is as a grotesque mode that I wish to approach Gothic fiction.

By "grotesque," I simply mean the combination of conventionalized organizational structures, ideas and characters in fiction dealing with the supernatural and bizarre from the time of Horace Walpole to the present day.³ In the following pages, I intend to examine Gothic fiction from the standpoints of what appear to me the crucial critical problems: the relationship of Gothic fiction to history and the past, the connection between Gothic and Grotesque, the Grotesque villain, and finally, Gothic form.

¹ *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), V, 111. This is the comment of Jane Austen as narrator. When Henry speaks for himself, he uses terms like "Open, candid, artless, guileless." See V, 206.

² *Northanger Abbey*, V, 197–98.

³ On the simplest level it may be said that the rendering of skeletons, demons, witches and ghosts, from ancient times to the present, qualifies automatically as grotesque.

I

In his review of Lewis' *The Monk*, Coleridge added to the general chorus of those wishing a speedy end to Gothic fiction. "We trust," he remarked, ". . . that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, with shrieks, murders, and subterranean dungeons, the public will learn . . . with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured."⁴ Isaac Disraeli in *Vaurien* (1797) also found Gothic novels objectionable and unnatural, comparing their effect to that of "'The Magical Mirror,' exhibited not long ago in this place of exhibition, London; where after viewing the charming delusion of grapes swelling into a blooming maturity, or faces angelically smiling, suddenly their appeared a most hideous skeleton's skull, distending its terrific jaws."⁵ Writers on Gothic fiction continue to feel the same embarrassment. G. R. Thompson complains that "when the word *Gothic* is applied to literature it merely evokes images of ghosts, demons, trapdoors, castles."⁶ Such a reputation, he argues, is unfortunate, and in an effort to beef up the Gothic mode, he suggests "Dark Romanticism" as a better term. Under that title, works like *Moby-Dick* or *The Castle* may be brought in to make Gothic fiction respectable.

Thompson refuses to look into the *Magical Mirror*. The skeleton with its combination of deathly terror and horrible grin is the essence of the grotesque and the essence of the Gothic. Slightly more silly than Holbein's figure of death, he sits at the front of Rowlandson's *English Dance of Death* (1815–1816) as evidence of continued interest in the lighter and more sententious aspects of contemporary grotesque literature into the nineteenth century. And his involuntary grin plays over the "straight black lips" of Frankenstein's monster.⁷ If Wolfgang Kayser can complain of the limitations of the grotesque itself as "one of those quickly cheapened terms," how much more limited is that aspect of the grotesque that is exploited by the Gothic.⁸ But there is no use making the very concept of the Gothic as a fictional mode meaningless in order to lend it more scope than it had. Works like *Moby-Dick* may utilize certain Gothic effects, but they are not essentially Gothic. If skeletons, shrieks, old castles and trap doors are an embarrassment to the critic of Gothic fiction, he might as well turn his interests elsewhere.

Since I am on the subject of defining the Gothic in terms of the grotesque, let

⁴ Coleridge's *Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), p. 369.

⁵ (London: T. Cadell, 1797), I, 197.

⁶ "Introduction," *The Gothic Imagination*, ed. G. R. Thompson (Pullman: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 1.

⁷ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Signet, 1965), pp. 56–57. A vivid contemporary skeleton poem with Gothic paraphernalia may be found in Frank Sayers, *Poems* (London: J. Johnson, 1792), p. 182.

⁸ *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 17. Arthur Clayborough dismisses "Gothic" materials as too "hackneyed and conventional" to be properly grotesque, but his real reason for avoiding the subject appears to be less the aesthetic argument that whatever is familiar cannot be grotesque than his desire to treat major authors. The section on Coleridge, for example, is well done, but the centrality of such a discussion in a book on the grotesque is questionable. See *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 160 ff.

me try to lay aside two other viewpoints which have been prevalent in criticism of Gothic fiction but which strike me as misleading. The first is that the Gothic novel is merely a variation on contemporary fiction of sensibility; the second is that there is an important distinction between novels exploiting terror and those concentrating on horror, between those suggesting the supernatural and those reveling in it. Both ideas have had a near hypnotic attraction for critics, and while I am not denying the facts which have led critics to these conclusions, I question the centrality of such views to our experience of the works. That a novel written during the second half of the eighteenth century was going to be, at least in part, a novel of sensibility is undeniable, but when all the elements of sensibility are removed, we still have a recognizably Gothic fiction. Significantly enough, when Jane Austen wanted to attack sensibility as a preposterous replacement for traditional morality, she wrote *Love and Freindship* and *Lady Susan*, but when she wanted to show that the terrors raised in young ladies by an ardent reading of Gothic fiction was no substitute for sexual maturity, she wrote *Northanger Abbey*.

As for the traditional attempt to distinguish Mrs. Radcliffe's refusal to use real ghosts from Lewis' parade of supernatural figures—Wandering Jews, Bleeding Nuns, and other domestic visitants, I am not even certain that I agree with Devendra Varma's distinction between terror and horror. He writes: "Terror thus creates an intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world. Horror resorts to a cruder presentation of the macabre: by an exact portrayal of the physically horrible and revolting, against a far more terrible background of spiritual gloom and despair."⁹ This seems to be merely a distinction based on explicitness, which is a very separate matter from a difference in kind. In the process of commenting on certain aspects of curiosity and compulsion, Angus Fletcher quotes the scene in Plato's *Timaeus* in which a man, feeling a terrible compulsion to stare at some dead bodies, dismisses his own guilt by blaming his eyes rather than his true self.¹⁰ Behind the suggestive terrors of a Mrs. Radcliffe or a Henry James lie the same compulsion to observe the horrible and frightening that is experienced in more explicit descriptions of rotting corpses and bloody vampires. Fletcher's term, "emotive ambivalence," seems too tame to describe this very clear attraction for the terrifying, the disgusting, but it brings us closer to reader response to Gothic fiction than the traditional dichotomy between terror and horror.¹¹

Roger Caillois' remark on the resemblance between fiction and dream might be helpful here:

The dream remains the common property of the sleeper who has dreamed it

⁹ *The Gothic Flame* (London: Barker, 1957), p. 130. I am not questioning the historical basis for this distinction. Mrs. Radcliffe, herself, wrestled with it, and it was a commonplace subject in any discussion of sublimity; but there is no question that modern critics have found the terms inexact. See Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (1826), part I, 147-48; and Peter Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (London: Peter Nevill, 1952), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ *Allegory* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 225-27.

¹¹ *Allegory*, p. 227. Fletcher argues (p. 314) that "'Gothic' is next door to the grotesque."

and of the waking person who remembers it; in an analogous sense the novel fulfills itself with a mediation between the writer who has created it and the reader who is introduced for a brief instant, for an interlude, as a supernumerary character into a fictional world, no doubt a deceptive and inconsistent world, but a world to which one must resort so long as one delights in literature.¹²

While we, as readers, experience the world of Maturin or Mrs. Radcliffe, we are participants in a larger fantasy, and we cannot change the nature of that experience by any belated explanation that a vividly described and experienced monster was merely an illusion. Even the doubts expressed at the moment of such an appearance may merely act to strengthen our experience rather than cause us to "hesitate." Tzvetan Todorov's use of Jan Potoki's powerful *Saragossa Manuscript* to argue for the viewpoint that the feeling of doubt about whether the ghost is indeed a ghost is the most important structural element in fiction treating the supernatural is entirely unconvincing on this matter of hesitation unless one understands his insistence that he is describing "hollow structures" in a very literal sense.¹³

Caillois' analysis of Borges' *Circular Ruins* as a dream world in which the protagonist is forced to repeat the action of a dreamer having a repeated dream is very close to Fletcher's concept of compulsion and ambivalence and fits Caillois' own definition of the fantastic as something having "le sursaut d'irréductible étrangeté."¹⁴ The sense of a fantasy that compels us and from which we have difficulty escaping because we only partly want to escape is one of the central elements that links the Gothic to the grotesque, and while I will have more to say of this, I find it intriguing that in one of Wieland's fairy tales, the justification for dissipating a dream world is that "in this case the reality was so beautiful and extraordinary, that the charms of fiction were superfluous."¹⁵ Some of the fairy tales written at the end of the eighteenth century have an intimate connection with the Gothic and differ mainly in the ease with which a normative world of wish fulfillment replaces the compulsive involvement of the Gothic.¹⁶

As for the technical question of the effect of hesitation concerning the involvement of any supernatural agency upon the audience, we must ask ourselves whether, in Lewis' *Castle Spectre*, Osmond's account of the ghost of Evelina as she appears to him in a dream, "a skeleton, loathsome and meagre" with blood

¹² "Logical and Philosophical Problems of the Dream," *The Dream and Human Societies*, ed. G. E. Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966), p. 51.

¹³ See *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 94. I doubt if Todorov would have considered the question of the validity of the supernatural as a vital structure if it had not been a concern of late eighteenth-century criticism. Mrs. Radcliffe and other writers of Gothic fiction were genuinely concerned that they would be thought to be propagating "superstition" in an age of enlightenment. See "On the Supernatural," p. 148.

¹⁴ *Au coeur du fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 30.

¹⁵ Christoph Wieland, *Select Fairy Tales* (London: J. Johnson, 1796), Vol. II, pp. 302-303.

¹⁶ Peter Haining's inclusion of rewritten legends and fairy tales in his Penguin anthology, *Gothic Tales of Terror*, is an excellent way of pointing out this relationship. Todorov's insistence (*Fantastic*, pp. 54, 64-65) that we recognize fairy tales as unreal from the first sentence seems tenuous to me. For a contemporary defence of the fairy tale, see William Beckford, trans., *Popular Tales from the German* (London: Murry, 1791), p. vi.

streaming from her bosom, is any the less vivid for being merely a dream and whether, when he tells how her "infected breath was mingled with mine; her rotting fingers pressed my hand, and my face was covered with her kisses," we experience this differently from the supposedly genuine apparition of the Bleeding Nun that Lewis conjures up for the reader in *The Monk*.¹⁷ In that work Raymond, like Osmond, tells how "the spectre pressed her lips to mine, again touched me with her rotting fingers. . . . Far from growing accustomed to the ghost, every succeeding visit inspired me with greater horror."¹⁸ Both passages bear Lewis' touch, and both are equally terrifying. What may be at stake in discriminating Mrs. Radcliffe and her followers from the practitioners of the "school of horror" is more likely to be a matter of style and form than any distinction in their presentation of the supernatural.

Mrs. Radcliffe blended Gothic materials with the romance. This is probably more apparent in her earliest work, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), which turns, for the most part, on the question of whether Alleyn will be able to marry the high-born Mary, in spite of his seeming low birth. The work is dominated by the typical romance plot rather than by Gothic effects. If Gothic fiction is truly a grotesque mode, the proper plot should be a series of intertwined stories held together by some loose unifying pattern—the form of that original grotesque scrollwork uncovered in Italy during the late fifteenth century. And, as I will suggest, that was indeed the form for most Gothic fiction written during Mrs. Radcliffe's lifetime.

II

Although many scholars have commented on the attitudes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries toward the past and particularly toward the middle ages, I am not sure that anyone has argued that, however fascinated they may have been by ancient castles, they tended to regard the past as rude, crude and grotesque—grotesque in its manners, morals and art. Admittedly the stress in works like Bishop Hurds' *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* was upon justifying the artistic principles of the middle ages and a similar effort may be found in the attempt to demonstrate the regularity of Chaucer's meter. But the very idea of "an old castle" is enough to send shivers of excitement up Catherine Morland's spine. Since Catherine finds genuine history tiresome, the past which thrills her is the historical past of the Gothic romances—a time when there was not the "general though unequal mixture of good and bad" to be found in contemporary England but heroes and heroines of extraordinary virtue and villains of the blackest kind.¹⁹

There is a remarkable passage in Radcliffe's *The Italian* which illustrates thoroughly this odd relation toward the past. Vivaldi and Ellena have just

¹⁷ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Castle Spectre*, in *The London Stage* (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., n.d.), p. 11 (Act IV).

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Louis Peck (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 173.

¹⁹ *Northanger Abbey*, V, 200.

escaped from the Carmelite nunnery, and after passing through some frightening chasms, they come upon a beautiful, pastoral countryside. Nevertheless it is a land which witnessed a tremendous slaughter in Roman times. Radcliffe's comment is curious; though the occurrence of monumental evils might be a part of historical records, such matters were best left unacknowledged by the conscious mind:

"And to such a scene as this," said Vivaldi, "a Roman Emperor came, only for the purpose of witnessing the most barbarous exhibition; to indulge the most savage delights! Here, Claudius celebrated the accomplishment of his arduous work, an aqueduct to carry the overflowing waters of the Celano to Rome, by a naval fight, in which hundreds of wretched slaves perished for his amusement! Its pure and polished surface was stained with human blood, and roughened by the plunging bodies of the slain, while the gilded galleys of the Emperor floated gaily around, and these beautiful shores were made to echo with applauding yells, worthy of the furies!"

"We scarcely dare to trust the truth of history, in some of its traits of human nature," said Ellena.²⁰

Even allowing for the fact that, as so often, Mrs. Radcliffe has her cake and eats it too by conjuring up a horrible scene and then offering the suggestion that such scenes were not to be thought about, Ellena's sentiments are clearly endorsed by the author as a conscious commentator on the events of the work.

If such horrific moments in history were to be driven from the consciousness, they were clearly to be suppressed in the name of civilization. Volney in his *The Ruins* (1791) pointed out that even modern warfare was "less sanguinary and less ferocious" than past conflicts.²¹ But, as I will show later on in this essay, evil is not so easily dismissed. *The Italian* is the closest of all of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels to having a contemporary setting, and the excitement of the conclusion is generated by the continuation of past institutions of pain and torture into a period proud of its enlightenment.

The vision of the past as conjured up for the readers of the time involved a sense of disorder and the grotesque suggestive of moral evil. Perhaps no one was so clear on this as Shaftesbury, whose *Characteristics* advocating the relationship between good taste and good morals was the *locus classicus* of such ideas for the period. In a section of *The Philosophical Regimen*, Shaftesbury suggested that men attempting to pursue the beautiful should surround themselves with beautiful objects. By so doing it may be possible to create something beautiful "within"; this is contrasted with what is "Gothic or grotesque *within*" produced by what is grotesque without:

²⁰ Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, ed. Frederick Garber (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 159–60. For a similar reaction to the violence of the past, see her *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), I, 169.

²¹ Constantine Francis Chasseheuf de Volney, *The Ruins*, trans. Count Daru (Boston: Josiah Mendum, 1877), p. 67.

On one side, Gothic architecture, Dutch pictures, Italian farce, Indian music; on the other side, Attic numbers, Ionic and Corinthian orders, and the Greek models in every kind—Phidias, Appelles, Homer, and Hemskerk, Scarron, Tom D'Urfey.

Compare with the two orders of life—the rake and vicious, the orderly and good. Or are there no measures, no numbers, or proportion here? nothing like this in life? . . .

Take it in the finest descriptions of vice; take a Petronius. Try. Is this it? does this do? Is it the life of an Encolpius or an Ascylos? Is it the ship of a Tryphon?—See but how this is in the most debauched authors that copy after nature, that write naturally and ingeniously. Away with these other romances, the women-authors, French gallantry and amours, the modern plays and novels; where there is neither nature nor anything natural so much as lewdness: as those who are wittily lewd see well enough. . . . But for the very real, true nature, and what is according to that nature truly graceful, proportionable, harmonious, and of the higher virtuoso kind; what can it be but virtue itself?²²

In Mrs. Radcliffe's rejection of history there is a parallel to Shaftesbury's rejection of what he calls Locke's "Indian, barbarian stories of wild nations," as being impossible because they controvert his and his era's notion of the way natural man must behave.²³

As for Shaftesbury's coupling of the Gothic and the Grotesque, what may be most significant here is that they are both associated with vice and disorder. The follies of the past, whether in architecture, gardening or morals, are reduced to a deviation from harmony and right morals. For Catherine Morland to find herself loving Gothic romances and old castles, with their ghosts, gargoyles and rattling chains, is more than a mild error in taste. When she carries her fantasies from fiction to life, her actions are equivalent to a deviation into a grotesque form of behavior. No wonder Henry's lecture is enough to make her realize her folly. The world conjured up by Henry Tilney may not follow virtue or beauty in Shaftesbury's sense of these terms, but he assures Catherine that it will not tolerate any major detour from law and common sense.

Having so often experienced the idea of the magical force from the past, modern readers might view it as a cliché, though in a motion picture like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, the ancient wizard's shack in the midst of modern skyscrapers, which have been constructed through the magical powers operating from the shack, can still function as a powerful symbol. Similar effects in *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* show that, however overused, they can still move an audience. But in *Frankenstein* it assumes an important role for the first time. We tend to think of the monster as the product of technology which has not sufficient controls to harness the destructive forces unleashed. But Mary Shelley's hero enters

²² *The life, unpublished letters, and philosophical regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900), pp. 247–48.

²³ Shaftesbury, "Letter to Michael Ainsworth," in *Philosophical Regimen*, p. 403. See also *Characteristics*, ed. John Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), I, 72–73, 223.

medical school a disciple of the ancient alchemists, and his dreams are their dreams:

. . . I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy. It was very different when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand; but now the scene was changed. The ambition of the inquirer seemed to limit itself to the annihilation of those visions on which my interest in science was chiefly found. I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth.²⁴

He absorbs modern scientific techniques but never abandons the desire to return to his "ancient studies" in order to search after solutions to matters of immortality. And Frankenstein is careful to point out that his passionate and imaginative longing after the creation of the monster is far closer to the feelings that motivated the alchemists than the calm search after knowledge that ought to distinguish the scientist. Among the many themes that emerge in *Frankenstein*, the distorted longing after unnatural powers is not the least. And the grotesque monster is the product.

As for history itself, unless we are aware of the sense in which the past seemed genuinely evil, we will misunderstand Sir Walter Scott's contribution to fiction. He was praised for making the past available by showing historical figures as having that "general though unequal mixture of good and bad" which Austen accepts as the nature of contemporary humanity. If we insist that the past was really very different and that Scott's view was a falsification, we miss the point. By falsifying the past he made it available to his audience. The Gothic villain may be closer to historical and psychological reality, but just as he was, for the most part, the creation of those "women-authors" Shaftesbury attacked, so he was consigned to the arena of romance by the Henry Tilney's of the world and roundly condemned by Coleridge as the participant in a type of fiction worse than the "annals of a brothel."²⁵

III

I want to turn now to a consideration of the grotesque in the Gothic. For the most part, I will use this word in the sense of the broad categories employed by Wolfgang Kayser, making particular use of two of the four major definitions he provides: the grotesque as "THE ESTRANGED WORLD," and the grotesque as "AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD."²⁶ Since I want to avoid the larger philosophic problems, I will also use Ruskin's very practical division of the grotesque into the serious and the playful, the moral and the decorative. The weakness (and to some extent the strength) of Kayser's effort at definition is that it attempts to be all-encompassing.

²⁴ P. 46.

²⁵ *Miscellaneous Criticism*, p. 375.

²⁶ *The Grottesque*, pp. 184, 188.

For example, he strives to bring together what the eighteenth century knew as "comic grotesque" in its pantomimes with more psychologically disturbing aspects. Doubtless there are elements of terror behind the grimaces of a Harlequin, but Ruskin was right to separate the two types of grotesque, which, parallel to the "separation of styles" remarked by Auerbach, persists in the division between the clowning of the servants and the disturbing psychological involvements of their masters.²⁷ The grotesque that appears in picaresque fiction and in satire is mainly comic in nature. Hence the distinction between works like Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and the Gothic, for however much the scene in that work involving a mysterious inn, a dead body, and a band of banditti might fit into a Gothic novel, we never forget that Ferdinand is a rogue toward whose antics the reader feels a sense of superiority.

The grotesque of the Gothic is more closely related to what Wieland called "grotesque in the proper sense," the end result of which is likely to be disgust rather than laughter.²⁸ The demons of the Gothic—real, imagined, or fabricated—represent a sudden revelation of the uncontrolled forces of the mind as they are reified in the seemingly ordered, real world. In *The Italian*, the sudden revelation of the continuing existence of the Catholic Inquisition with its instruments of torture, its odd rituals and its threat to the normal in the world of the Italian Enlightenment is far more symptomatic of the Gothic mode than any puzzling over the reality or unreality of demons and ghosts. Much of *The Italian* is filled with the Neapolitan sunlight, which finds its intellectual and human counterpart in Vivaldi's speeches on civil liberties and justice. More than any other element in *The Italian* the presence of human evil—a Schedoni, a group of torturers—gives the twist to the work that makes us think of it as Gothic and grotesque.

The grotesque twist I speak of is best expressed in Schedoni's symbolic motions as, stalking Ellena along the beach, he moves before and about her like a cowardly beast of prey. Her first reaction is to approach him for help, but she soon discovers that his glance which seemed at first ambiguous, then "sly," is, when fully revealed, terrifying.²⁹ Like the twisted pattern of the grotesque scroll work with its braid of snakes, lizards and monstrous forms, the impression is, at first, relatively light and, finally, sinister; like the brutal battles of the past, the grotesque suggests an underlying reality that ought not be confronted too often if we are to preserve our belief in civilized values.

If we keep these ideas in mind, Horace Walpole's attack on Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron* as "insipid" is hardly surprising. In spite of his depreciating comments on his own *The Castle of Otranto*, he did not feel that Reeve's attempt

²⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 274–78, 290–91. Comic servants were part of Gothic fiction from the time of Walpole, who claimed Shakespeare's plays as a precedent, and William Beckford's *Modern Novel Writing* (ed. Herman Levy Jr. [Gainesville: Scholar's Facsimiles, 1970], pp. 39–40), written in 1797, has a good parody of this convention. What is more interesting is the degree of comedy in the adventures of characters from the upper and middle classes. James Hogg's Gil Martin, the satanic figure of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, brings into all his actions some of the antics which were expected from devils in Elizabethan drama, and even Mrs. Radcliffe will occasionally place her heroines in a comic light.

²⁸ Quoted in Kayser, p. 30.

²⁹ *The Italian*, pp. 220–22.

to bring probability to the "gothic Tale" was a step in the right direction.³⁰ Yet even Reeve does little to change the general effect of the Gothic, an effect built into what Mrs. Radcliffe was to call the "grotesque beauty" of the landscape and atmosphere.³¹ In Gothic fiction, character is inseparable from scene. Madame Montoni of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* only assumes her Gothic role when she ceases to be the Burneyesque Mlle. Cheron and becomes the archetypal victim of what, for want of a better term, I will call the grotesque villain—the character who represents will and power in Gothic fiction. The secret passageways, caves and grottoes introduced into Gothic fiction by Walpole do not function merely as setting. They evoke the world of psychological terror as surely as, for the romances, a bank of jasmines in an arbor evoked the world of love.³²

For example, when, in Mrs. Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, an old castle stairway crumbles beneath the feet of Ferdinand (one of two heroic young men in the work), what is evoked is the sensation of dreams—or nightmare rather—in which some object we are grasping, that keeps us from falling into an abyss, crumbles in our hands.³³ A similar scene was rendered by William Beckford some years later as, in a cross between a travel book and a collection of visionary experiences, he described the sensation of seeming inevitably to slip into a chasm without any possibility of being able to control the motion.³⁴ Herbert Read was right to compare the Gothic with surrealism; though the visual landscape of Dali's and Chirico's denuded plains is the very opposite of the picturesque Gothic landscape, both share the feeling of unreality we associate with dreams.³⁵

The connection between landscape and the Gothic is familiar enough, but discussions on this subject have been tied much too closely to Edmund Burke's theories on sublimity. Because Burke believed that almost everything capable of producing terror was an aspect of the sublime, he failed to distinguish between the sublime and the grotesque.³⁶ Sublime landscapes abound in the Gothic,

³⁰ *Letters*, ed. Peter Cunningham (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1960), VII, 111, 319.

³¹ *A Sicilian Romance* (London: T. Hookham, 1795), II, 1–2. This oxymoron suggests what is in fact true—that Mrs. Radcliffe did not clearly distinguish between the sublime, the picturesque, the beautiful and the grotesque.

³² For a brief discussion of romance landscape, see my "Some Notes Toward a History of Fictional Forms," *Novel*, 6 (1973), 125. If the novels of the eighteenth century lacked a rich landscape, this was certainly not true of the romances and short novels of the seventeenth century which were still in circulation and occasionally reprinted. Although Mrs. Radcliffe's descriptions are somewhat more individualized, they are still aimed at producing certain limited affects of surprise or wonder and tend toward stereotypes of pastoral or sublime scenes.

³³ P. 93. Otto Fenichel interpreted the fear of falling in a number of ways but remarked that "the sensation of falling itself . . . represents the sensation of sexual excitement." See *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), p. 197.

³⁴ *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, in *The History of the Caliph Vathek and European Travels* (London: Ward, 1891), pp. 250–52.

³⁵ *Surrealism*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 10. See also Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (London: Fortune Press, 1938), pp. 382–412.

³⁶ For a well documented but somewhat uncritical examination of this problem, see Malcolm Ware, *Sublimity in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe*, Upsala Essays and Studies on English Literature No. 25 (Upsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1963). The distinction between terror (sublime) and horror (grotesque) often served in the place of a working definition of the grotesque. Wordsworth argued that when the mind was possessed with "personal fear," what is produced is merely "fear and degradation," and he noted how easily the sublime could slip into the grotesque—a mixture of the "terrible and the ludicrous." See William Wordsworth, "The Sublime and the Beautiful," *Prose Works*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), II, 354–60.

but they are incidental to the form. Rousseau's *Eloisa* is certainly not a Gothic novel, yet it too is filled with sublime scenes of the mountains of Europe. What Burke provided was an explanation for our attraction to scenes of distress. His arguments, that "we have a degree of delight . . . in the real misfortunes and pains of others," and that our sense of *delight* comes from a feeling of relief from sympathetically experienced pain rather than our distance from it, provided one level of psychology used by writers of Gothic fiction.³⁷

Burke's explanation was not entirely original. For example, take the scene in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in which Blanche, from the safety of a comfortable room in a monastery, experiences a certain excitement in observing a ship endangered by a Mediterranean storm.³⁸ This is merely a reenactment of what has been called the "Lucretian return," from a scene of a shipwreck in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* in which the Roman poet explained the pleasure felt at a sudden awareness of our own safety in watching the distress of others. (It was one of the common explanations for the ability of audiences to sit through tragedies like *Oedipus* and *Lear*.)³⁹ But Burke provided a new insight into the "pleasure" afforded by this experience, as a glance at similar shipwreck passages in *Robinson Crusoe* will demonstrate, for the involvement that Blanche feels in watching this scene of distress suggests ambivalence—not the direct concern of a Crusoe, but a conscious thrill that goes far beyond the pity and anxiety she feels for the safety of the passengers.

Such a scene draws upon Burke's theories for its effects and demonstrates the degree to which the admiration for the sublime influenced Gothic fiction, but as I have already argued, the sublime influenced the fiction of sensibility as well. If we are seeking the essential Gothic effect it will not be in the landscapes of Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*; as with her romance plots, this is an intermixture. This same intermixture appears frequently in Gothic drama. In arguing that Burke's theories on the sublime "read like a text on how to write a Gothic drama," Pamela Kaufman fails to distinguish those aspects which this drama shared with the "she-tragedy" of the period and those which were distinctively Gothic.⁴⁰ Even the themes of incest which she finds central to the Gothic drama were part of the heritage that eighteenth-century tragedy owed the Restoration. If the *Oedipus* of Dryden and Lee and Dryden's *Don Sebastian* were no longer performed, they were still read, and Otway's *The Orphan* retained its popularity on the stage. Walpole's debt to these writers in *The Mysterious Mother* is far more obvious than any debt he owed to previous fiction in writing *The Castle of Otranto*.

If we wish to find a pure Gothic effect, we should examine the familiar scenes from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in which on two occasions Emily, the heroine,

³⁷ *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, in *Works* (London: Bell, 1881), I, 80 (I, xiv).

³⁸ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 484–86.

³⁹ See Baxter Hathaway, "The Lucretian 'Return upon ourselves' in Eighteenth-Century Theories of Tragedy," *PMLA*, 62 (1947), 672–89.

⁴⁰ "Burke, Freud, and the Gothic," *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 13 (1972), 2181.

opens mysterious veils. Mrs. Radcliffe is still using the language of the sublime, but the intention is clearly different:

This brought to her recollection the veiled picture, which had attracted her curiosity, on the preceding night, and she resolved to examine it. As she passed through the chambers, that led to this, she found herself somewhat agitated; its connection with the late lady of the castle, and the conversation of Annette, together with the circumstance of the veil, throwing a mystery over the subject, that excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink.⁴¹

Though Radcliffe asks the reader to think of the sublime, this is not an experience which a reading of Burke will easily clarify. Like the sublime, the experience has the effect of suspending time. "Horror," says Radcliffe, "occupied her mind, and excluded, for a time, all sense of past, and dread of future misfortune. . . ." ⁴² But if the sublime does indeed expand and elevate the mind, the kind of horror experienced by Emily is closer to the physical sensation we experience when an elevator seems to move up and down at the same time than to the spiritual pleasures of sublimity.

The reader does not learn what Emily observed until the end of the novel, when the vision is revealed as a wax image of a figure dressed for the grave, covered with worms, but Mrs. Radcliffe heightens the horrific effect by having Emily's thoughts dwell on the scene with anxiety and by establishing a parallel scene shortly thereafter. Once more there is a curtain to be drawn, and the reader is kept in suspense through an analysis of Emily's "fit of desperation" just before drawing the veil. The scene satisfies her expectation:

Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch.⁴³

In considering this fascination for death and the horrible, we might go back to the scene from Plato's *Timaeus*, but a glance at some of the reactions of a contemporary of Mrs. Radcliffe, James Boswell, might be more satisfying from an

⁴¹ *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 248.

⁴² *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 249. Even before Burke, the concept of simultaneous emotions as part of experiencing the sublime was common. See for example John Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), Augustan Reprint Society No. 43 (Los Angeles: Clark Library, 1953), pp. 31–32.

⁴³ *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 348. Few contemporary writers would have considered such an evocation of terror as sublime. Hugh Blair warned that the object producing a sublime fear had to be indicative of a high spiritual power. See *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters*, 10th ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1806), I, 52–60.

historical standpoint. In his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, Boswell comments on a similar fascination:

By the road I had, from that strange curiosity which I always have about anything dismal, stepped out of the chaise and run up close to the gallows where Kenneth Leal hangs in chains for robbing the mail. As he had not hung but above two months, the body was quite entire. It was still a man hanging. The sight impressed me with a degree of gloom. Mr. Johnson did not know of this, or, he told me afterwards, he would not have talked as he did, for he diverted himself with trying to frighten me, as if the witches would come and dance at the foot of my bed.⁴⁴

Shades of *The Saragossa Manuscript*—hanging man, witches and all! But, as we shall see, the key word here is “curiosity.”

What I want to establish at this point is that characters in a Gothic novel are undergoing an experience from which they will not easily recover. When Leslie Fiedler slips into the phrase, “a betrayal of pity and terror”⁴⁵ to describe what he considers the hoax that Radcliffe plays on the reader by her efforts to dispel any notion that she really believes in the supernatural, he is falling into the same trap Mrs. Radcliffe made for herself—to try to convince the reader that in spite of the Schedoni’s, Montonis, and Malcolms, we are to believe “that those who do only which is right, endure nothing in misfortune but a trial of their virtue, and from trials well endured, derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven.”⁴⁶ Mrs. Radcliffe knew better, and her novels tell a different story until the very end. That the demons working in the palace of the Inquisition are human does not make their impact any less terrifying. When the reader discovers that supernatural evil is mainly a metaphor for human evil, he hardly learns anything very comforting.

IV

I have previously suggested that Montoni was a grotesque villain on the grounds that, during the Restoration and eighteenth century, evil was replaced, in part, by concepts of deformity and the grotesque. Peter Thorslev, in his study, *The Byronic Hero*, suggested that the origins of the heroic image created by and associated with Byron might be found, among other places, in Walpole’s *Manfred*, the villain of the first Gothic novel.⁴⁷ But *Manfred*’s own pedigree may be traced directly to the heroic plays of Dryden and particularly to the character of Maximin, the powerful, God-defying Emperor of Rome, who came to the throne after murdering Titus. By a seemingly deliberate misunderstanding of Corneille’s

⁴⁴ Ed. Frederick Pottle and Charles Bennett (London: Heineman, 1936), p. 84.

⁴⁵ *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1964), p. 122. Oddly enough, previously (pp. 107–09) Fiedler appears to suggest that the clearing up of seemingly supernatural events at the end of a Gothic novel is not central to its psychological impact.

⁴⁶ *Sicilian Romance*, II, 216.

⁴⁷ (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 52–54.

gloire, Dryden provided his protagonist eccentricity in his vices instead of the individuality in virtue usually associated with *gloire*, and in spite of his title, and his massive strength, he undercut his dignity by leaving him some of the clownishness of the barbarian hordes from whom he was descended.

Dryden drew many interesting characters, but few so fascinating as this “*deformed piece*,” who dies still asserting his will by thrusting his dagger upward against the Gods. Working through a process of contrast, Dryden set Maximin alongside Saint Catharine, the Christian ideal of perfect chastity and faith, and though intermediary characters blur the starkness of this antithesis, it is always present. Adding to the polarization of the characters is the attraction that Maximin feels for Saint Catharine—an attraction composed of a mixture of awe and the desire of human evil to possess and thereby destroy the good. Jean Hagstrum has shown how thoroughly Dryden was intrigued by the grotesque as a mode of characterization, and surely Maximin is the most interesting of his grotesques.⁴⁸ Actually a mixture between an Alani and a Goth (in Dryden’s play between an Alani and a Thracian), Maximin, like his literary descendant, Shelley’s Zastrozzi, bears some taint in his blood that twists and distorts whatever virtues he has.⁴⁹

This distortion is the product of the sway of the passions and the will over the reason. If we turn to the icon of “Terror” in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, we will find a graphic example of the association of violent fear with the grotesque. Terror itself is a grotesque figure with the body of a man and the head of a lion. The commentary describes the significance of the symbols:

*The Whip, an instrument used to force others to do one’s will, presents the terror caused by pain and violence, and by the apparent success of evil. The changing colors of the robe symbolize the inexplicable changes in life which are so frightening, but also the various passions which race through the soul of the terrified.*⁵⁰

Behind the figure of the personification of terror is a scene depicting the banquet of the Emperor Domitian in which hanging skulls and other human parts are intended to fill the guests with terror. Domitian, whose complete power enables him to play with his guests’ emotions, looks on with amusement.

Domitian, unlike Maximin, is a genuine Roman Emperor rather than a usurper, but we find the same kind of pattern—the use of power to cause pain, the delight in torture, the deliberate attempt to terrify—as may be found in Mrs. Radcliffe’s Montoni, who, we are told, “delighted in the energies of the passions.”⁵¹ The same force of character may be found even earlier in the century in Thomas

⁴⁸ See Jean Hagstrum, “Dryden’s Grotesque: An Aspect of the Baroque in His Art and Criticism,” in *John Dryden*, ed. Earl Miner (London: G. Bell, 1972), pp. 107–11.

⁴⁹ See Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Complete Works*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), V, 47–48, 100–03.

⁵⁰ *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery*, ed. Edward A. Master (New York: Dover, 1971), plate 76. See also plate 185, where the illustration of the fear engendered by imagination is reminiscent of the effects achieved through descriptions of precipices and gorges in Gothic fiction.

⁵¹ *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 182.

Leland's Reginald, the villain of *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762), whose face reveals the presence of uncontrolled passions and who therefore provokes feelings of disgust from those around him. The disgust is felt for both the "malignant" and "sensual" passions, and just as Maximin desires to possess Catharine physically, so behind the threatening aspect of the Gothic hero-villain is the continual threat of sexual violation. When Emily asks Montoni by what right he thinks he can control her actions, he replies "with a malicious smile, 'by the right of my will.'" ⁵² His cruelty, his willingness to destroy a helpless enemy, presents a disturbing vision of evil in the world—a world which, at other times, seems beautiful or even sublime. Just as the sunshine of southern France and La Vallée is representative of the ordinary world of Emily, so the mouldering and "grotesque" Udolpho is the true seat of Montoni. ⁵³ Sir Walter Scott rightly remarked that Radcliffe's characters "are in some sort as fabulous as fairies or ogres." ⁵⁴

Characters like Montoni, the strange portraits that somehow appear to resemble the seemingly unconnected hero or heroine, the appearances of skeletons and bloody corpses, the dungeons filled with grotesque snakes are all signs that lead us into the world that Freud called that of "the uncanny," a world in which we feel continually disturbed and alienated. ⁵⁵ And it is not the appearance of a skeleton so much as our expectation of it that leaves us anxious and unhinged, that puts us into that state of discomfort—that state which is a strange blend of fascination and disgust—we associate with the grotesque.

V

We should realize that Gothic fiction came into being at a time when the world of dreams and imagination were highly suspect. Bad dreams might be explained in any number of ways, including some perfectly sensible ideas on the influence of diet and the position of the sleeper, but Andrew Baxter was still arguing near the middle of the century that the only alternative to his notion that dreams were the product of visiting spirits was that "*the soul is mad every night, and that awakening in the morning cures it again of its phrensy.*" ⁵⁶ Baxter, of course,

⁵² *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 216. See also pp. 183, 361, 380. Jean Hagstrum's term, "the grotesque of power," is useful for understanding Montoni as is his argument that Dryden transferred the grotesque from superhuman to human agency. See "Dryden's Grotesque," p. 108.

⁵³ *Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 489.

⁵⁴ *On Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Joan Williams (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), p. 111.

⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1968), XVII, 236–41.

⁵⁶ *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, 3rd ed. (London: A. Millar, 1745), II, 149. Not everyone agreed with John Locke that dreams were merely a confused rehash of past events. Compare Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959), I, 136; and Thomas Tryon, *Pythagoras His Mystic Philosophy Reviv'd* (London: Thomas Salusbury, 1691), pp. 48–51. In a letter dated 18 January 1787, William Cowper expressed what was still the attitude of religious believers at the time:

I have a mind, my dear, (and to you I will venture to boast of it) as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that he has since ceased to do so. If you ask them why? they answer, because he has now revealed his will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that

opts for the influence of spiritual forces: "How delightful is it to think that there is a *world* of spirits; that we are surrounded with intelligent living Beings, rather than in a *lonely, unconscious Universe, a wilderness of matter! It is a pledge of immortality itself.*"⁵⁷ Comforting as this thought might be, the nightmare, during which victims were supposed to feel overwhelmed by an enormous weight, might well be the product of an evil spirit, and if the Gothic might be thought of as being close to the literature of fantasy and dream, it is the world of nightmare to which we must address ourselves.

Thus the experience which Mrs. Radcliffe calls "curiosity" is a complex of feelings involving a sense of unreality, a fear of approaching terror, and an attraction for it. If these feelings have some link to sexuality, which also involves a mixture of attraction and repulsion, they are present in the nightmare as well. Fuseli was right to render his *Nightmare* in symbolically sexual terms.⁵⁸ Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines tremble with that curiosity and terror, which makes them "seek even the object from which . . . [they] appear to shrink"; and so do the men. As La Motte in *The Romance of the Forest* opens a trunk and discovers a skeleton, he feels that "thrilling curiosity which objects of terror often excite in the human mind," and he feels impelled to take a second look.⁵⁹ Although we may find some basis in Burke for this emotion, as moderns, we are likely to be more satisfied with a comparison to the emotions that Freud found in scopophilia—a pleasure accompanied by fear and disgust.

Considerable comment on "curiosity" may be found in the literature of the time. In speaking of the effect of the grotesque Chinese garden, Sir William Chambers argued that by varying the visual experience "from places of horror to scenes of delight," by even using "repeated shocks of electrical impulse," one could subject the spectator to an almost unnatural excitement. The result is that "his attention is constantly kept up, his curiosity excited, and his mind agitated by a great variety of opposite passions."⁶⁰ And Uvedale Price complained that in the landscapes which lack the picturesque "curiosity, that most active principle

he should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts he has left us in want of nothing; but has he thereby precluded himself in any of the operations of his Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of his interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations however of this kind are, I allow, very rare; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them. So much for dreams!

Maurice Lévy, who has some excellent comments on the way imaginative terror of literature may replace a genuine horror of the supernatural, underestimates both the degree of religious belief in England (un climat de totale incrédulité) and the distance that men like Horace Walpole were removed from such beliefs. See William Cowper, *Life and Works*, ed. Robert Southey (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1836), VI, 52–53; and Lévy, *Le Roman "Gothique" Anglais 1764–1824* (Toulouse: Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, 1968), p. 618.

⁵⁷ Andrew Baxter, *An Enquiry*, II, p. 172.

⁵⁸ See Marcia Allentuck, "Henry Fuseli's 'Nightmare': Eroticism or Pornography?" *Woman as Sex Object*, ed. Thomas Hess and Linda Nochlin (New York: Newsweek, 1972), pp. 33–41.

⁵⁹ 2nd ed. (London: T. Hookham, 1791), I, 137.

⁶⁰ *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London: T. Davies, 1772), p. 94.

of pleasure, is almost extinguished."⁶¹ Price carefully distinguished what he calls the "picturesque" from the sublime on the grounds that the sublime was based entirely on feelings of "awe and terror" whereas the picturesque may contain the "light and playful" as well as the awesome. Applying this to mountain scenery which was often considered part of the sublime, he remarks:

*Those who have felt the excitement produced by the intricacies of wild romantic mountain scenes, can tell how curiosity, while it prompts us to scale every rocky promontory, to explore every new recess by its active agency keeps the fibres to their full tone; and thus picturesqueness when mixed with either of the other characters, corrupts the langour of beauty, or the tension of sublimity.*⁶²

All of this adds up to the effect that Sir Walter Scott saw in Mrs. Radcliffe, an effect of "awakened curiosity and suspended interest."⁶³

If Gothic fiction resembled Price's ideal landscape in arousing curiosity and in being grotesque, and picturesque, or rather ambivalently picturesque, to adopt Fletcher's term, the structure of Gothic fiction should follow this pattern as well. It should be essentially semi-circular, twisting, repetitive, open-ended. Although contemporary fiction tended to insist on closed endings, the tradition was not so strong as it later became in the nineteenth century, and those great models of comic grotesque, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *A Tale of a Tub*, and *Tristram Shandy* had set an important precedent for open-endedness. In Gothic fiction, as I have previously suggested, examples of this type are easy to find. In fact, a study of the description appended to titles during the high point of Gothic fiction reveals that the most popular name was "a tale," which, as opposed to titles like "romance" or "novel," usually indicated a number of tales woven into a larger framework.⁶⁴ Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* has an ending imposed upon it that is arbitrary and unconvincing, while Jan Potocki's *The Saragossa Manuscript*, in which all stories seem to be part of a single story with infinite variations and in which any linear progress toward an end is interrupted by repeated visions, gives an even better example of grotesque form in the Gothic.

Of course Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has an ending of a kind (Whatever does happen to the Monster?), but the first stage version in 1826 had already moved the locale to volcanic Italy and provided a scenario similar to the Hollywood version of the story.⁶⁵ All of which suggests the impossibility of imposing

⁶¹ *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: J. Mauman, 1810), I, 24. The unwhinging quality of curiosity in relation to the grotesque is, perhaps, nowhere so clear as in Gulliver's desire to crawl into and examine a cancerous sore he observes on one of the giant Brobdingnagians.

⁶² Price, I, 88. Price's formula (I, 195) is that deformity + the passage of time = the picturesque.

⁶³ *On Novelists and Fiction*, p. 104.

⁶⁴ A rough count reveals the term "tale" was added to titles along the following lines: 1780-1789—23, 1790-1799—98, 1800-1809—154, 1810-1819—191, 1820-1829—375. The term "novel" was more popular until 1800-1809, when it fell behind. Terms like "romance," "history," and "narrative" are far less common.

⁶⁵ See *Frankenstein; or, the Man and the Monster* (London: J. Duncombe, n.d.). Pursued by a mob of peasants, the monster falls into Mount Etna. In William Bradwell's *Castle of Otranto or, Harlequin and the Giant Helmet*, performed on 26 December 1840, the archetypal figures of "Romance," the Monk, Bleeding Nun, etc., battle with the forces of burlesque and "all his host grotesque." The ending involves a symbolic truce between comic grotesque and serious grotesque.

an ending on such an archetypal story. Roger Caillois remarks, "The impact of the dream is that it demands an explanation, a sequel, and, almost, a realization. Whenever it enters competition with reality, it is the dream that wins. . . ." ⁶⁶ The return of Frankenstein's monster may appear to be the creation of a producer trying to make a few dollars on a sure winner, but the public is willing to come because in their collective psyches, they know that the monster cannot die. No more can the grotesque form of Gothic fiction be successfully closed.

At the beginning of this essay I noted Kayser's reservations about the word, "grotesque." He also confessed to the lack of a "wholehearted enthusiasm for the subject." ⁶⁷ Even allowing that the "curiosity" of which Price and Mrs. Radcliffe speak so highly is somewhat different from the quality that E. M. Forster described as "the lowest and simplest of literary organisms" and as a "literary tool" fit for "tyrants and savages," we might question whether Gothic fiction deserves the revival it appears to be experiencing today. ⁶⁸ I think that there is some parallelism between sentimentalism and the Gothic. It is easy enough to make a reader cry, but that does not make a work good in itself, as an eighteenth-century reader might have thought, or bad in itself, as a reader in the first half of the twentieth century might have thought. We have to accept the grotesque machinery—the skeleton that is shaken before us, the gloomy castle, and the brooding villain—for the bag of tricks they are; we have to agree with Henry Tilney that Gothic fiction is a grotesque distortion of anything resembling ordinary life; finally, we must acknowledge that they move us nonetheless, that they are deeply disturbing and compelling at the same time. In the hands of an Eliza Parsons the machinery is hardly sufficient to sustain interest, much less to be regarded as literature. But the accomplishments of a Mrs. Radcliffe, a Lewis, a Maturin and an Emily Brontë lay within the limits of the mode of Gothic fiction, and their achievements are well worth reading and studying.

⁶⁶ "Logical and Philosophical Problems of the Dream," p. 28. R. D. Laing argues much the same in remarking that "There is nothing more real and indubital than pure phantasy." See *Self and Others* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 92.

⁶⁷ *The Grotesque*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954), pp. 26, 27–28.