FEARFUL QUESTIONS, FEARFUL ANSWERS: THE INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONS OF GOTHIC FICTION

PAUL LEWIS

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/1160

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.
FEARFUL QUESTIONS, FEARFUL ANSWERS: THE INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONS OF GOTHIC FICTION

Keywords
Literature, American

This dissertation is available at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/1160
INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

University Microfilms International
300 North Zeib Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
St. John's Road, Tyler's Green
High Wycombe, Bucks, England HP10 8HR

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
LEWIS, Paul, 1949-
FEARFUL QUESTIONS, FEARFUL ANSWERS: THE INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONS OF GOTHIC FICTION.

University of New Hampshire,
Ph.D., 1977
Literature, American

© 1977
PAUL LEWIS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
FEARFUL QUESTIONS, FEARFUL ANSWERS: THE INTELLECTUAL
FUNCTIONS OF GOTHIC FICTION

by

PAUL LEWIS

M. A., University of Manitoba, 1971

A THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
May, 1977
This thesis has been examined and approved.

Thesis director, Gary H. Lindberg,
Asso. Prof. of English

Philip L. Nicoloff, Prof. of English

Earl F. Briden, Asst. Prof. of English

Charles E. Clark, Prof. of History

Eugene S. Mills, President and Prof. of Psychology

May 2, 1977

Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people and institutions that have supported my academic work. Wendy Lewis, Mary Lewis, Irving Seligman, and Edythe Seligman have provided me with emotional and financial support. Mr. Hoffman and Dr. Gordon of The Bronx High School of Science and Prof. Robert K. Morris of The City College of New York encouraged me at early stages of my academic life. I would like to thank The University of New Hampshire for five years of financial assistance, including three summer fellowships and a dissertation year fellowship. I owe an immense debt to the members of The University of New Hampshire Department of English for their advice, instruction, and guidance over the last five years. I should mention, in particular, Professors Briden, Carnicelli, DePorte, Fisher, Nicoloff, and Murray who have been generous with their time and knowledge. Finally, I would like to thank Gary H. Lindberg for the critical and editorial acuity that he brought to the work of directing this study.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme and Plot in Gothic Fiction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative Forms of Gothic Fiction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative Voice in Gothic Fiction</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL: WALPOLE, REEVE, RADCIFIFE, AND LEWIS</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Didactic Sources of the Gothic Movement</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Castle of Otranto</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Old English Baron</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radcliffe and Lewis: Explanations of the Supernatural</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL: WILLIAM GODWIN, CHARLES R. MATURIN, AND JAMES HOGG</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Godwin and Gothicism</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles R. Maturin's Gothic Calvinism</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James Hogg's Justified Sinner: The Devil Within and the Devil Without</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE PURSUIT OF CERTAINTY: CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC TRADITION</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>False Deductions and Unsatisfactory Explanations</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brockden Brown and the Gothic: The Critical View</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wieland or the Transformation of the Gothic</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edgar Huntly and the Journey Out of Knowledge</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brown and the American Speculative Gothic Tradition</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
V. RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX: EDGAR ALLAN POE
AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC TRADITION ............. 164

Irony, Ambiguity, and Speculation in
the Gothic Tales .................................. 164
The Fall of Reason in the House of Usher .... 170
A Question Not Yet Settled in "Ligeia" ...... 179
Natural Causes and Phantasms in "The
Black Cat" ........................................ 189
Poe's Humor and Unity of Effect in the
Gothic Tales ....................................... 195
Riddles of the Sphinx: Poe's Commitment
to Continuing Speculation ...................... 203

VI. MOURNFUL MYSTERIES: NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE,
HERMAN MELVILLE, AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC
TRADITION ........................................... 208

Hawthorne's Use of the Two Gothic Modes
in the Short Fiction .............................. 211
The Scarlet Letter and the Use of Mystery
in Hawthorne's Completed Romances ........... 225
Neither Belief Nor Unbelief: Melville's
Use of the Gothic ................................ 243

VII. CONCLUSION .................................... 269

Emerging From Delusion as a Pattern
in Gothic Fiction .................................. 269

FOOTNOTES ............................................. 282

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................... 305

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

FEARFUL QUESTIONS, FEARFUL ANSWERS: THE INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONS OF GOTHIC FICTION

by

PAUL LEWIS

The work of eleven British and American writers is examined in an effort to determine the thematic and formal characteristics of Gothic fiction. In refuting two mistaken views of the Gothic (that is, that all Gothic fiction is intellectually shallow, and that Gothic fiction was from the start Romantic and subjective), this study traces a development from the largely didactic fiction of the British writers to the speculative intensity of the American Gothic Tradition.

The history of Gothic fiction has been described by Summers and Varma, its psychological appeal by Fiedler, its expression of a paradoxical, subjective, and Romantic vision of life by Nelson, Hume, Mandel, Kiely, and Dawson. This study responds to the call by Benton and others for a
discussion not of the philosophic content but of the intellectual functions of the Gothic.

In an effort to avoid value-laden terms like high and low Gothic, Chapter I distinguishes between didactic and speculative Gothicism, a distinction based on the way ideas are used. Starting with the accepted association of mystery with Gothicism, Chapter II shows how some writers (Walpole, Reeve, Radcliffe, and Lewis) use the resolution of mystery to advance theses and inculcate virtue, Chapters IV, V, and VI consider how other writers (Brown, Poe, and Melville) allow unresolved mysteries to inspire a speculative process, and Chapters III and VI suggest that still other writers (Godwin, Maturin, Hogg, and Hawthorne) combine both intellectual functions.

An effort is made to eschew rigid distinctions between British and American Gothicism, to show that although British Gothicists were generally more committed to didacticism than their American counterparts, there are important examples of British speculative and American didactic Gothic fiction. The chapters on the British Gothic movement question the increasingly popular equation of the Gothic and the Romantic. The chapters on the American Gothic movement insist on the thematic importance of Gothic mystery in classic American fiction and point out the difference between ambiguity and speculation.
Chapter VII, the conclusion, considers the recurring moments in Gothic fiction in which villains or villain-heroes emerge from their comfortable certainties and re-examine their assumptions about man and the universe. In didactic Gothic fiction, villains emerge from their delusive pursuit of power or wealth to see that they have been wrong (for example, that they have been opposing the will of heaven). Manfred's conversion, Ambrosio's ordeal, St. Leon's nostalgia all help to support a world view that condemns the previous folly of the misguided penitents. In speculative Gothic fiction, characters either fail to emerge from delusion or their emergence is complex. Ahab's tear, Wieland's despair, and Chillingworth's "old faith" do not restore these characters to a new sense of the truth. Rather, their often temporary escape from obsessive conviction is used to raise final questions in their minds and in the reader's.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A scream from the crypt. Lascivious monks contemplate the seduction of a virgin. Music wafts through moonlit air near a castle in the mountains. Rats scurry over putrescent flesh in web-filled dungeons. A monster wakes to life on the scientist's table. The victim of premature burial stirs in his tomb. One hundred sweating knights carry a giant sword. Skeletons give moral advice to potential sinners. The hand of heaven, rewarding virtue and punishing vice, is always heavy.

For generations these stock conventions of the Gothic novel entertained a popular audience and earned the ridicule of critics. Readers of Gothic fiction never doubted that its main interest rests on the tension raised by its convoluted plot. Jane Austen's Catherine Morland speaks for readers in her (and perhaps our) day when she says that the tantalizing suspense of the mysterious black veil makes her wish she could spend her whole life reading The Mysteries of Udolpho. Like Richardson, successful Gothic writers can sustain a single conflict for six hundred pages without losing the
reader's interest. In the Sentimental novel, the suspense centers on the heroine's virginity; in the Gothic novel on her fortitude. The Gothicist's primary objective is to achieve as early as possible a level of terror or horror and to maintain that level with occasional releases (for exposition or reflection) and occasional intensifications (over dripping blood or violent crimes).

Until quite recently it escaped the attention of many readers and critics that, for all its tawdriness, the Gothic novel by its very nature raises and often answers important questions about man, society, and the universe. If villains prosper in this world but must face an eternal compensation, what can be said about social or institutional corruption and divine justice? What is evil and what makes men evil? Does the occurrence of a supernatural event imply the existence of God or another agent of the supernatural? If a narrator reports seeing a ghost, can we trust his perceptions? If a fanatic or lunatic tells us a story, what can we believe?

In the last twenty years critics have argued that the Gothic novel is a "quest for the numinous," an attempt to confront the irrational, transcendent, paradoxical, ambiguous or unconscious sides of human experience.\(^1\) Devendra Varma emphasizes the importance of dreams as inspirations for and a subject of Gothic fiction. Francis R. Hart suggests that the Gothic novel avoids being trivial by treating the confrontation with the inexplicable or supernatural seriously.
Robert D. Hume goes further, perhaps too far, when he suggests that the "Gothic novel offers no conclusions . . . It emphasizes psychological reaction to evil and leads into a tangle of moral ambiguity for which no meaningful answers can be found."

In the last ten years the nature of Gothic fiction has been reexamined and redefined. Traditionally the Gothic has been seen as primarily affective, that is, directed toward stimulating emotional responses in the reader. In his unpublished dissertation Frederick Stilton Frank, however, points out that Gothic fiction is a medium "for ideas . . . that exhibits great intellectual vivacity." In the same line, Richard P. Benton, discussing "The Problems of Literary Gothicism," distinguishes between low and high Gothic, the former being primarily affective, the latter intellectual. "The principal appeal of the high Gothic," Benton suggests, "lies in its epistemological and moral ambiguity. It makes us think."

By insisting on the philosophic content of the Gothic, Frank and Benton have freed criticism from the wide-eyed, tongue-clicking approach that uniformly coupled the word Gothic with an adjective like tawdry or shabby. But, as Benton suggests in the note quoted above, much needs to be done to clarify the way in which Gothic writers use ideas. We need first to establish a value-free set of terms to distinguish between "high" and "low" Gothic. To achieve this I propose to differentiate between didactic and speculative Gothic fiction in
the pages below. We need, moreover, to concentrate not on
the nature of the ideas used by writers of these two Gothic
modes—Frank correctly notes the shift from external to in-
ternal horror—but on the way they use ideas, some to argue
and others to think. Finally, we must escape the desire to
establish rigid distinctions between English and American
Gothicism. Gothicism was an international movement with many
cross currents. Although English Gothicists were generally
more committed to didacticism than their American counter-
parts, there are important examples of British speculative
Gothic and American didactic Gothic which will be considered
below.

In the didactic Gothic mode, the questions raised by
the plot (for example, who is the mysterious stranger or why
is the villain so wicked) are answered in terms of convention-
al theological or moral values. The unknown stranger is usually
the devil and men do evil because they have given way to
temptation. It is not, as was often said against Ann Rad-
cliffe and as Robert Kiely says of the early Gothic novel in
general, that too facile explanations are offered for complex
situations. Rather, the initial experience of evil or vio-
ence, however alarming, is quite understandable. Like Wal-
pole's Manfred, the reader of the didactic Gothic novel becomes
"hardened to preternatural appearances" because they are part
of an ordered, if spooky, universe.

All Gothic fiction is pervaded by mystery. An important
characteristic of didactic Gothic fiction is that in resolving
mysteries it provides lessons. In other forms of fiction the resolution of mysteries does not necessarily imply a thesis because the mysteries do not call into question the way the universe is structured. For example, in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, a realistic novel, William Dean Howells goes to some length to interest his readers in two mysteries: the hold William K. Rogers has over Silas and the nature of Silas’ relationship with a certain Mrs. Millon and her daughter. Still, when we are let in on these secrets, we learn something about individual characters, but little about the world at large. In realistic fiction the resolution of mystery generally points to a difference between a given character's perceptions and the reality perceived; in Gothic fiction the mysteries are deeper and may even cast doubt on the existence of characters and the possibility of perceiving an objective reality.

Even in detective fiction, which hinges on the resolution of mysteries, a puzzling crime does not usually make the universe into a puzzle. The detective uses what he knows about the physical world and human nature, in fact, to solve the crime. It is, then, a definitive characteristic of Gothic fiction that the confusions which arise in it challenge or seem to challenge received ideas about God and man. In explaining how mysterious voices are natural enough, or why God allows devils to perform magic wonders, a didactic Gothic writer both conquers the mysterious and reaffirms an approach to human
experience. This reaffirmation, carrying with it a comprehensive morality, theology, and psychology, most often provides the reader with a sense of how he (or she) should feel, think, and act.

In the speculative Gothic mode the seeming disruption of order, the temporary insanity or evil, become permanent. Narrators invite the reader to begin a process of speculation that, in trying to find answers, leads deeper and deeper into the subjective nature of experience. At its extremes these two modes are as different as The Castle of Otranto and "The Fall of the House of Usher." When the doors fall down in Walpole's world we know that God has pushed them over. When we are told about the collapse of Roderick's divided mansion into the fuming tarn, we cannot even be sure there was a house, a tarn, or a Roderick.

The Gothic novel was engrossing from the start, but a proper appreciation of Gothic fiction can be based only on a sense of its development away from the didactic toward the speculative mode. The English Gothic novel remained at least in part didactic even in the hands of its most Romantic practitioners. The Monk and Frankenstein are, for all their agony, religious allegories. What destroys the titanic, if weary, Melmoth is not the innocent Immalee but the Calvinist universe he inhabits. Only God can always save the heroines, if not in this world then in the next.

What a growing body of critics is saying about the Gothic novel generally is true of the later, mostly American, Gothic
When, in the last pages of *Wieland; or, The Transformation*, the tormented protagonist offers a final explanation of his plight, we are left gaping at a tragic cycle of coherently motivated but totally insane action. Theodore Wieland's shifting state of mind, based, as it is, on the vacillation of Godwin's Caleb, defines as it Americanizes the speculative Gothic tradition. Brown's Carwin, Wieland, Mervyn, Irving's German student, Poe's narrators, Hawthorne's Holgrave and Donatello, and most purely Melville's Ishmael and Pierre find themselves in a changing, though consistently dangerous, world, a world in which one bounces from question to question trying to avoid the bitter consequences of the "universal thump."

The distinction between the two modes of Gothic fiction is not offered as a value judgment. The point is not that one mode is superior to another, but that there are significant differences. The didactic Gothicist often sacrifices ideas to plot and plot to received ideas, preferring to entertain, rather than to stimulate, his readers. The speculative Gothicist frequently loses sight of his plot, becomes entangled in a confusing texture of ideas. *The Italian* for this reason is a more readable, if less provocative, book than *Pierre*. The purpose of this study is not to suggest which books are best (since what is meant by best varies from reader to reader,) but to trace the development of Gothic fiction and to define its two major modes in terms of the relations in each between plot, theme, narrative form, and narrative voice.
Theme and Plot in Gothic Fiction

It is not that the didactic Gothicist necessarily cares more or less about ideas than the speculative Gothicist. Rather, each uses the ideas in his fiction in a different way. In the didactic Gothic novel the limits of experience, though often unclear and mysterious to the characters and sometimes to the reader, are always understandable and, finally, clear. Any event in the novel will eventually be fitted into a comprehensive mechanistic or theological scheme. God or God in a machine carries confusion off.

In the speculative Gothic novel the writer uses his plot to generate thinking, to involve his characters, and by extension his readers, in a process of investigation. This process is not fruitless in the sense of leading nowhere, but neither does it arrive at final answers. It leads not around in circles (suggesting the ultimately ambiguous or unintelligible) but out in lines of thought, each suggesting an alternative explanation for a shifting set of perceptions.

Some of the differences between these two Gothic modes can be seen in the two passages below, both of which present a central character in the process of trying to understand what is happening around him. The first describes Walpole's Manfred trying in vain to deduce the relations between the other characters in Otranto; the second describes Brown's Edgar Huntly trying to understand where he is when he wakes up at the bottom of a cave after a night of sleep walking:
I. Every reflection which Manfred made on the friar's behavior, conspired to persuade him that Jerome was privy to an amour between Isabella and Theodore. But Jerome's new presumption, so dissonant from his former meekness, suggested still deeper apprehensions. The prince even suspected that the friar depended on some secret support from Frederic, whose arrival coinciding with the novel appearance of Theodore, seemed to bespeak a correspondence. Still more was he troubled with the resemblance of Theodore to Alphonso's portrait. The latter he knew had unquestionably died without issue. . . . These contradictions agitated his mind with numberless pangs.

II. I once more tasked my understanding and my senses to discover the nature of my present situation and the means of escape. I listened to catch each sound. I heard an unequal and varying echo, sometimes near and sometimes distant, sometimes dying away and sometimes swelling into loudness. It was unlike anything I had before heard, but it was evident that it arose from wind sweeping through spacious halls and winding passages. These tokens were incompatible with the results of the examinations I had made. If my hands were true, I was immured between walls through which there was no avenue.

The most obvious difference between these two passages is that Manfred's deductions are based on rather broad and false assumptions and preconceptions about human behavior, while Edgar Huntly's speculations derive from a minute examination of sensory information. Because he treats others as they should treat him (that is, with great distrust), Manfred falsely assumes the pious Jerome is pandering to what Manfred sees as Theodore's lust. Because Manfred fails to see God's overpowering guidance in Otranto, he wrongly concludes that Frederic and Theodore's simultaneous arrivals suggest a conspiracy. And, finally, because Manfred is "certain" that Alphonso died without leaving a child behind, he cannot
understand Theodore's resemblance to his grandfather's portrait. While each of these errors of logic or fact leads Manfred further into confusion, the reader sits back in a detached state of certainty, watching a villain confounded by his own evil mind. By the end of the novel, the reader fully understands what has happened to Manfred, and even Manfred, humbled by heaven, sees the justice behind the defeat of his own criminal tyranny.

Edgar Huntly's problem in the quoted passage is apparently less complex than Manfred's. Huntly goes to sleep in his bed one night and wakes up at the bottom of a rock lined pit. He thinks that because he cannot see he is blind, that because it is cold and dark he is in a tyrant's dungeon, and most improbably, that because he is in a tight space he has been buried alive by mistake. As he says, he conjectures in vain; his "thoughts were wildering and mazy, and, though consciousness was present, it was disconnected with the locomotive or voluntary power."

What Brown gives us, then, is man thinking. Trapped by a hostile environment, threatened with death from starvation and exposure, Huntly is the prototypical character of the speculative Gothic novel. Only his mind comes between himself and destruction. The result is an intensification of thought and a heightening of sensations.

Curiously enough, Huntly finally does arrive through his own efforts at a correct understanding of his physical
situation at the time of the quoted passage, while Manfred understands only when he is shown the folly of his plans at the end of the novel. Huntly uses his knowledge to escape from the pit. Nevertheless, that pit is a symbol of the complex world presented in speculative Gothic fiction in which the escape from one specific pit leads only into the deepening pit of experience. Huntly emerges from a seemingly irrational situation only to face irrationality in himself. He sets out to study and cure a destructive madman only to find a lunatic within.

The quoted passages placed in context suggest how the two Gothic modes are intended to affect their readers. The didactic mode argues, it uses its worldview as a container for moments of terror, horror, and the seemingly mysterious. There is nothing less mysterious, however, than a predictable miracle. That God's in his heaven and all's eventually right on earth may seem a trivial thesis for any work of fiction, but it did allow Walpole and his immediate followers to weave threads of improbability into a coherent (if sometimes silly) cloth. The early Gothic novel uses theology or scientific rationalism as a way of closing off both terror and perplexity.

The speculative Gothic mode cannot argue because it does not pretend to understand what it is discussing. But, and this is important, the speculative Gothic writer does not surrender to the irrationality and unintelligibility of experience. Indeed, it is a question whether such a surrender is
possible in art. On the contrary, the speculative Gothicist uses his fiction as a way of opening an inquiry. Starting with *Otranto*, there are many didactic Gothic novels. But there are very few perfectly speculative Gothic works because the mode requires a frenzied intellect devoted to the process and not the consequences of thought, an Ahab-like determination and an Ishmael-like sense of proportion.

For some didactic Gothicists the implicit argument of the novel is, more or less, a formal device. Writers like Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker were not primarily trying to inculcate virtue. Rather, they used philosophic frames as a playwright uses backdrops. Once the ideational stage is set, that is, once the reader understands the moral context of the action, the plot proceeds with little sermonizing or explaining. It is a mistake, however, to ignore these theological frames or to impose modern values over them. What Walpole, Lewis, and Shelley wanted was a coherent foundation on which to rest their fear-provoking plots.

Defenders of the English Gothic novel have gone too far in recent years in emphasizing its Romanticism, its concern with subjective experience and the isolation of the individual. Robert Kiely especially, in his misnamed study of *The Romantic Novel in England*, overstates the case when he denies or underplays the didacticism of early Gothic fiction. The basic tension of *Otranto* or *Udolpho* revolves around the removal of a heroine from society into a dangerous and
unpredictable setting. But this isolation is rarely, in these early works, exploited for its radical subjectivity because the heroines, as Francis Hart points out, remain normal; that is, they carry "society" or moral norms with them. As Hart argues, the Gothic novel brings the rational mind (of an Emily or Matilda) in contact with irrational experience (in the form of a villain or a ghost). But what neither Kiely nor Hart sees clearly enough is that in didactic Gothic works this confrontation is temporary, however sustained, and is, finally, replaced by the return to the normal world. Manfred abdicates in favor of Theodore; Emily marries Vallancourt. What J. M. S. Tompkins pointed out in 1932 is true even after a decade of critical attention: not enough has yet been made, as an "ingredient" of Gothic Romance, of "the charm of recovery, . . . the return with hands full, to a familiar world." In fact, with God either watching from above or firmly entrenched in the heroine's heart, it is a question how "unfamiliar" the world ever gets in didactic Gothic works.

Contemporary defenders of the Gothic tradition have fallen into a critical trap by projecting their tastes onto works rooted firmly in unfashionable models and sensibilities. In these days of psychological relativism and widespread atheism, readers are unwilling to accept, even for a moment, theological ideas and rigid psychological norms. Kiely speaks of the "shifting light" of human nature that "makes all
abstract theories so difficult to apply to specific cases."

Robert Hume sees a complex psychology inherent in Gothic fiction from the start. Critics who are uncomfortable with theology but interested in psychology find the tension in early Gothic works fascinating but the conventional resolutions dull. What these critics fail to see is that in the early Gothic novel tension is generated around action, not ideas. We are frightened for the heroine but we do not doubt her integrity, still less the validity of the moral values she consistently embraces.

We must not allow our twentieth century dislike of moral teaching to lead us into minimizing the thematic content of early Gothic fiction. Walpole praises "the piety that reigns throughout" Otranto, Radcliffe always ends her novels by summing up the moral she has illustrated, and even Matthew G. Lewis insisted of the instructive purpose of The Monk. The theology in these works is never simply a way of tying up loose ends. On the contrary, in works like Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, Godwin's Caleb Williams, and Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner, the argument is maintained with conviction and more than lip service is paid to the goal of inculcating virtue through a picture of excessive vice.

Narrative Forms of Gothic Fiction

Defenders of the genre now agree that Gothic fiction draws its strength and integrity from the confrontation it
presents between order and chaos, clarity and mystery, individuality and conformity, all of which may be broadly seen as a conflict of a reasoning mind and apparently irrational experiences. What has not been sufficiently appreciated is that the relation between these forces varies dramatically from one Gothic work to another. This variable relation, coupled with the specific fictional world of a given work, generates a variety of narrative forms. Both the didactic and the speculative Gothic story begin in order and move into a period of chaos. The didactic story returns to order; the speculative narrative despairs of such a return and moves away from pat resolutions.

Didactic Gothic fiction begins in coherence (for example, with the heroine safe in the hands of her parents), moves into tension and moral chaos (when the heroine falls into the villain's clutches), and returns to order (when the heroine is saved from danger and resumes a happy, controlled life). Matthew Lewis' story "The Anaconda" is a good example of this form, although it does not center on the interaction of a villain and a heroine. Lewis frames his main story about a Ceylonese serpent with a living room drama. In England, Everard Brooke, a young man engaged to Jesse Elmwood, is accused by the girl's aunt, a gossip, of having acquired his fortune through the murder of a woman named Anne O. Connor. To acquit himself in the eyes of a flock of prejudiced relatives, Everard narrates the story of his tragic battle to
save the life of his friend and employer, Seafield, from the giant reptile. Everard's story begins slowly but bursts into terror when a servant notices the anaconda swinging on a tree near the pavilion in which Seafield is trapped. The tone of deep "horror and consternation" of the servant's cry, "We are undone," is maintained through twenty pages in which Everard does everything he can think of to free Seafield. Nothing avails: the snake is swifter than a greyhound, stronger than an elephant; it cannot be killed with bullets or flames. Like the trapped Seafield, the reader feels an "agony of soul" as he contemplates the "great piercing eyeballs" and putrid breath of the monster. Finally, after the faithful servant Zadi is crushed by the snake, he remembers a way to defeat the creature by first getting it to eat a bull. In an outpouring of reason that seems anti-climactic, Zadi exclaims:

Oh! wretch that I am! curses, eternal curses on my old head, that I did not think of it till now, and now it comes too late. I might have saved him! I might have saved him! Had I but thought of it sooner my master would have been safe at this moment.10

Had Zadi thought of this sooner, however, there would have been no story. In the didactic Gothic mode the monster can rule only while reason takes a nap. Once Zadi "remembers" how to fight the anaconda, order is restored. Bloated on beef, the snake becomes "impotent," is, in fact, killed and eaten by the natives. The deaths in the days that follow of Seafield and his wife leave Everard, their best friend, in possession of their fortune. Having finished his "dreadful
story," Everard is fully exonerated and rewarded by Jesse's kiss, "a reward in full for the sufferings which he had experienced through the vicissitudes of his whole past life."11

The experience of reading "The Anaconda" is that of a vacation from the normal world. We are eased in and out of the presence of an irrational, unassailable force. While this force holds sway it can do great harm; once it is contained—like a vicious genie back in its bottle—social norms can function. This return to normalcy is generated by and supports the didactic impact of the mode. The defeat of the anaconda, like the defeat of the serpent of Eden, is affirmative. The irrational becomes a darkness that affirms the power of light.

In the speculative mode, once things begin to fall apart they cannot be put back together in the same way; characters rarely live happily ever after. Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland is a good example of the mode. It begins by introducing a group of characters who are dedicated to piety and reason, to a life of culture and philosophy. But not long into the novel violent shocks combine with ominous mysteries to confuse or destroy the major characters. Throughout the bulk of the work the narrator (who is increasingly caught up in the chaos) and we as readers wonder whether the evil is being caused by a religious fanatic or Satanic forces or some combination of the two. The intellectual intensity of the attempts to understand what is happening and why it is
happening is typical of speculative Gothicism. For, though many local mysteries are explained, many larger questions about characters and events in Wieland continue to puzzle us.

Both of the narrative forms discussed above have an inherent tension. The didactic mode moves away from order for a while but must return. Often the return seems contrived, a rational deus ex machina. This is the charge unfairly levelled against Ann Radcliffe. The charge is unfair only because she is singled out for special criticism for doing in an obvious and scientific way what most of the major English Gothic writers do in a more subtle and theological way. Unlike Radcliffe, Walpole, Lewis, and Reeve, later English and American Gothicists adopted the speculative Gothic mode which moves from order into confusion, never to return to its point of origin. In the hands of its best practitioners this mode generates a rich confusion, an expansion of sensation and thought aimed, however unsuccessfully, at understanding a complex set of experiences.

Each of the two Gothic modes has an extreme variant. In extreme didactic Gothic fiction, the sense of order is so strong that the terror and irrationality never explode in a convincing way. Otranto, based, as it is, on Jacobean models, is the clearest example of this form. In Walpole's novel the potentially sinister Manfred is defeated from the outset by the painstaking interference of God. Isabella looks lovely running through the castle at night, but we never worry about
her safety. We feel quite certain that a walking skeleton, or a clap of thunder, or a sighing portrait will come to her rescue.

In the extreme speculative mode, as used most consistently by Poe, we know from the outset that what we are being told is radically subjective, possibly the raving of a lunatic. When terror builds it is the terror of a mind dissolving, like Roderick Usher's, under the weight of its own distorted perceptions. Reason may try to understand what is happening, but it will fail. The triumph of the extreme speculative mode is that, in failing to explain itself, it reveals a great deal about the nature of the human mind. We may not know, finally, whether Ligeia actually returns from the grave, but we do know a good deal about the obsession that leads the narrator to believe in her rebirth.

The kinds of explanations which the didactic Gothicists offer are, to modern critics, if not the mass reading audience, absurd. Lewis' Ambrosio does evil because he is lured into temptation by a seductive devil. Frankenstein must fail because only God can make a man. Melmoth is unsuccessful because the elect cannot be lured from righteousness. Each of these answers seems to the secular modern reader an evasion, a way in which writers could pretend to understand problems in human behavior which were in those times, and perhaps in these, unexplainable. The speculative Gothicist's fiction, on the other hand, seems more profound. Both modes examine
the same kinds of subjects: lust, violence, the supernatural, the obscene. But the speculative writer, by eschewing easy answers, embraces a process of investigation that does not end with the narrative but continues in the reader's mind. The didactic Gothic writer brings his readers safely home, but home in the didactic Gothic mode can be a rather boring place. The speculative Gothic writer takes his readers on a voyage of discovery which, if it never finds a resting place, never comes to rest on discreditable opinions.

Narrative Voice in Gothic Fiction

Nothing so conditions the tone of a narrative as its voice. In the Gothic novel the narrator is either at the center of the confusion or standing over the action, explaining and clarifying what is going on. The omniscient narrator is omniscient in two senses: first, he knows all about what happens (plot) and what different characters think about what is happening (characterization). Second, he knows how to account for what may have seemed mysterious in the actions or thoughts of the characters, and his explanations usually state the author's message (theme) explicitly. Ann Radcliffe's novels of controlled terror are told by omniscient narrators who, remaining conscious when the heroines faint, move us from one tense moment to the next with a sense that in the end the tension will subside, be subsumed under a coherent overview. This coherence is heard in the voice narrating the opening of the most popular Gothic novel, Udolpho:
M. St. Aubert loved to wander, with his wife and daughter on the margin of the Garonne, and to listen to the music that floated on its waves. He had known life in other forms than those of pastoral simplicity, having mingled in the gay scenes of the world; but the flattering portrait of mankind, which his heart had delineated in early youth, his experiences had too sorrowfully corrected. Yet, amidst the changing visions of life, his principles remained unshaken, his benevolence unchilled; and he retired from the multitude 'more in pity than in anger,' to scenes of simple nature, to the pure delights of literature, and to the exercise of domestic virtues.

The narrator here is, like St. Aubert, aware of human corruption but still sensitive to beauty, conscious of the degenerate vanity of civilized life but drawn by the music of waves and "simple nature." Like St. Aubert, the moral overview of Udolpho remains unshaken and unchilled through long nights of terror, allowing a pervasive didacticism to reign even during the sinister laughter of the driven Montoni.

The first person narrator, caught up in the terror of his experiences, strives by returning to coherence to avoid unconscious surrender to emotions. In the struggle to overcome pain or fear, his mind focuses on concrete sensations, trying to build from the materials of his perceptions a saving idea. It is not in intensity alone, however, that the following passage—the opening of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum"—differs from the passage quoted above:

I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last distinct accentuation that reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum . . .
This tale clearly shows the effect of first person narration in Gothic fiction because it begins at a high pitch of terror. The seemingly doomed narrator faces death by torture from the outset and his reflections are those of a man desperate to understand the means being employed to bring about his destruction. He lies in agony, straining to hear, feel, or see his dungeon. His efforts to understand his environment are Poe's most important tools in leading his readers, step by step, through an experience, an experience important not for the moral it demonstrates but for the thinking it inspires.

No necessary correlation exists between narrative voice and mode in Gothic fiction. Most didactic Gothic fiction relies on omniscient narration; most speculative Gothic fiction on first or third person narration. But there are important exceptions. Whenever irony is employed— as in Beckford's Vathek or Hogg's Justified Sinner— a seemingly subjective narrator, involved in the action, may be laughably in error, or a seemingly omniscient narrator may be unable to explain what he is discussing. In this way the speculative quality of Robert Wringhim's section of Justified Sinner is turned into a didactic assault on the Calvinism Wringhim respects. Similarly, the narrator in Vathek knows that Mohammed and Allah are planning to destroy the wicked caliph, but even the narrator cannot explain why vice should be punished in a world where virtue is effeminate. Vathek and Justified Sinner
are important, and not solitary, exceptions to a general pattern, however. It is no coincidence that *Otranto* is told by an omniscient narrator and illustrates the workings of a divinity both omniscient and omnipotent, and that *Moby Dick* is the story of a didacticist's doom as told by the most sensitive speculator in American fiction, unable to reach final conclusions about the whale and the whale hunters.

A peculiarity of narrative voice in Gothic fiction is that narrators driven to distorted perceptions, nightmare visions, and even insane ravings, narrators traditionally viewed as "unreliable," are, often, more reliable than objective observers would be. The subject of much Gothic fiction is the human mind in stress. The objective voice can describe in clinical terms the chaos of the characters' experience. Objective narrators reassure us by bringing the external world back into focus—like a pond settling after a rock disrupts it. The objective narrator can even smooth the pond while the waves are rolling by reminding us that help is on the way or that villainy is punished in another world. Only the characters themselves can drag the reader along detail by detail into the madness.

Too often in the past critics have, by reducing Gothic fiction to its shabbiest elements, failed to consider its thematic and formal characteristics. By its very nature Gothic fiction concerns the nature of evil in man or in the
universe. This evil can be explored in terms of theology or psychology, social theory or morality. And each of these ways of trying to explain evil, depending on the writer's purpose, can be contained in a variety of narrative forms.

The distinctions outlined above are not proposed as Procrustean beds into which specific works should be stretched or squeezed. Nor are the two Gothic modes mutually exclusive; elements of both often exist in a single work. No amount of analysis will force such unique works as Hogg's *Justified Sinner*, Maturin's *Melmoth*, or Melville's *Pierre* into rigid categories. On the contrary, the discussion that follows will, by focusing on the relations between theme, form, and voice, point not to the uniformity but to the diversity of a school of fiction that in all its richness interests both critics and a wide popular audience.
CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL:
WALPOLE, REEVE, RADCLIFFE, AND LEWIS

Didactic Sources of the Gothic Movement

Discussions of the nature and development of English Gothic fiction have in the past focused attention on hackneyed conventions rather than on narrative form and purpose. Thus, in his satiric piece, "A Tale for a Chimney Corner" (1819), Leigh Hunt says he thinks very little of stories which, featuring "Haunting Old Women, and Knocking Ghosts . . . and Horrid Eyes," appeal "to the least judicious, least healthy, and least masculine of our passions—fear." In this same spirit, the narrator of Poe's "The Premature Burial" refers to the very story he has been telling as a "bugaboo" tale, and some modern critics have regarded the Gothic element in Poe's fiction as "shabby." Even Clara F. McIntyre, whose 1921 essay, "Were the 'Gothic Novels' Gothic?", opened up the field of influence study in Gothic fiction, sees the main contribution of 17th century drama to Ann Radcliffe in terms of a common interest in incest, violence, madness, monsters, poison, mortality, and gore.
The earliest English Gothic novels have more in common with their English literary antecedents—Jacobean horror tragedy, graveyard poetry, and the Sentimental novel—than these images and subjects. Behind Jacobean tragedies, even those which present the most negative view of human society, is a sense of divine Justice. Behind graveyard poetry, even as it hovers over rotting flesh, is a firm answer to the question "Ubi sunt?". Behind the Sentimental novel are clear morals about the proper conduct of parents and daughters and the proper function of sentiment. When Horace Walpole drew upon these sources in writing Otranto, he borrowed not only their interest in the supernatural or threatening but also the rational framework containing the mystery and danger.

In the words of John Webster, Jacobean tragedy offers its audience a "perspective that shows hell." All of these plays—including Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, Massinger's The Duke of Milan, Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy and The Atheist's Tragedy, and Shakespeare's Hamlet, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet—present societies in which "something is rotten." In The Revenger's Tragedy, for example, almost every character is driven by uncontrollable passion for money, for lust, or for revenge. The chief revenger, Vindice, keeps the corpse of his wife unburied for nine years so he can use it to trap her destroyer, the Duke. The Duke dies from kissing the envenomed lips of the decayed cadaver. The last scene of the play is a sequence
of murders that makes the close of Hamlet seem non-violent. In Ford's 'Tis Pity She's A Whore, the conflicts concern the wedding plans for Annabella, a young woman who is having an affair with her brother, Giovanni. Early in the play Giovanni is warned by a friar not to forsake "knowledge to converse with lust and death" (I, i, 56). While the incest is accepted by some of the characters as being "what any lady in Italy . . . would do" (IV, iii, 86,) it is resented deeply by Soranzo, Annabella's husband, who hires a group of banditti to kill Giovanni. The play ends with Soranzo and Giovanni dead, Annabella's heart on a dagger, and old Florio, the wicked pair's father, dead of a broken heart.

'Tis Pity, then, is typical of this group of plays in that it deals with the consequences of sin, with terrestrial slaughter and tragedy and, by implication, with divine restoration and comedy. Old Florio suggests this after a corrupt cardinal befriends Grimaldi, a murderer:

Justice is fled to Heaven and comes no nearer.

When cardinals think murder's not amiss.

Great men may do their wills, we must obey;
But Heaven will judge them for it another day.

(III, ix, 60-70)

And the friar paints a vivid picture of the sinner's eternal resting place to Annabella in Act III:

There is a place . . . in a black and hollow vault,
Where day is never seen; there shines no sun,
But flaming horror of consuming fires,
A lightless sulphur choked with smoky fogs
Of an infected darkness; there damned souls
Roar without pity; there are gluttons fed
With toads and adders; there is burning oil
Poured down the drunker's throat; the usurer
Is forced to sup whole draughts of molten gold;
There is the murderer forever stabbed,
Yet can he never die; there lies the wanton
On racks of burning steel, whiles in his soul
He feels the torment of his raging lust.

(III, vi, 8-23)

Antonio, a comparatively virtuous character in The Duchess of Malfi, summarizes the view of worldly life common to these plays when he says:

. . . In all our quest of greatness . . .
We follow after bubbles blown in th' air.
Pleasure of life, what is't? only the good
Hours of a ague; merely a preparative
To rest and endure vexation.

(V, v)

Hamlet's "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy expresses a similar spirit of contemptus mundi derived from medieval theology and central to Jacobean tragedy. However dreary or ugly these plays become, there is always the comfort of knowing that for the noble flights of angels will descend, and for the corrupt a more painful destiny beckons.

The didactic implications of rotting flesh and crumbling church stones shared by early Gothic fiction and graveyard poetry are clearly suggested by Antonio's speech in Act V, scene iii of Duchess:

I do love these ancient ruins.
We never tread upon them but we set
Our foot upon some reverend history:
And, questionless, here in this open court,
Which now lies naked to injuries
Of stormy weather, some men lie interr'd
Loved the church so well, and gave so largely to't
They thought it should have canopied their bones
Till doomsday; but all things have their end:
Churches and cities, which have diseases
Like to men, must have like death that we have.
The conventions of graveyard poetry are, if possible, more rigid than those of Gothic fiction. In Thomas Parnell's "A Night Piece on Death" (1722), an early and typical example of the type, the speaker, a student, leaves his books to wander at dusk through a desolate churchyard. Like Webster's Antonio, he sees in the ruins around him an emblem of his own mortality. He realizes that the poor are in death equal to the rich who now are "senseless" to their fame. He has a frightening vision of the dead rising "wrapp'd in shrouds," crying "Think, Mortal! what it is to die." But then the voice of death itself speaks from the ground and advises the student to accept death as a "path to God." The poem ends by describing souls "springing forth" to greet the sun, flying in eternal felicity:

On earth, and in the body plac'd,
A few and evil years they waste;
But when their chains are cast aside,
See the glad scene unfolding wide,
Clap the glad wing, and tow'r away.
And mingle with the blaze of day.

Robert Blair's "The Grave" follows this same pattern of ideas. The speaker is confronted by "the gloomy horrors of the tomb" where skulls, worms, coffins, and "light-hearted ghosts . . . perform their mystic rounds." The speaker catalogs the inhabitants of the graveyard: workers, lovers, thinkers, all swallowed by the "invidious grave." But then the speaker is comforted by the thought that death is not just sleep, that because Christ took the "venom" out of dying, men must learn how to die. The soul rejoins the body after

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
a short separation, and both live in Christ forever: "Thrice welcome Death! / That after many a painful bleeding step / Conducts us to our home, and lands us safe / On the long-wish'd-for shore."\(^5\)

The Gothic novel has traditionally been seen as an offshoot more of the sentimental novel than of either Jacobean drama or graveyard verse. In his comprehensive study of the pre-romantic novel, James R. Foster argues that:

The Gothic romance . . . is a sentimental novel in which the characters are tricked out in costumes belonging to some past epoch. . . . There is an attempt to incite interest by novelty, glamor, strangeness, and romantic settings, the latter usually featuring a feudal castle inhabited by a brutal "Gothic" baron, nervous females, and one or more pairs of lovers, and haunted by ghosts, usually sham ones. Gothicism was a new plaything for the sentimental imagination.\(^6\)

It is, of course, true that the sentimental and early Gothic novels often feature a heroine's struggle to resist seduction or avoid harm. More significantly, the sentimental novel, like the Gothic novel uses a highly episodic plot to maintain from chapter to chapter a single emotion, pity or fear. But the most important shared quality of these schools of fiction is their commitment to didacticism, their manipulation of the reader's emotions to bring him to a higher moral view.

Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), perhaps the most influential sentimental novel, is didactic in three distinct ways important to the early Gothic novel.\(^7\) First, it is addressed to an audience of parents and daughters, and uses the errors of both Clarissa and
her father to urge daughters to obey and parents to be reasonable in their demands. Second, it encloses its main illustration of this lesson—Clarissa's abuse at the hands of Lovelace—within clearly defined social contexts: the middle class world of the Harlowes, and the degenerate lower class world of Mrs. Sinclair's establishment in London. These contexts make it possible for the reader to judge more easily the actions of a given character by comparing them to social norms. Clarissa's friend and correspondent Anna Howe, who repeatedly advises her friend to either leave Lovelace because he is wicked or to marry him because that would be virtuous, and Lovelace's sometimes friend John Belford are spokesmen for these clear social and moral worldviews. Finally, as the novel progresses, an allegorical frame provides another way of seeing Clarissa and her world.

Clarissa dying—forgiving and blessing everyone and instructing her friends on the mortality of man and the superficiality of "temporal calamities"—becomes a saint, and her persecutors seem, at times, mere devils. Mrs. Sinclair's drawn out agony on her death bed is carefully constructed to parallel Clarissa's gentle passing. "What is dying but the common lot?" Clarissa whispers, "I am all blessed hope--Hope itself." Mrs. Sinclair, wailing in pain, cries "Die, did you say, Sir?--Die! I will not, I cannot die!—I know not how to die!" In this same allegorical frame, Belford becomes a penitent at his "angel's" (Clarissa's) deathbed, and Lovelace,
when he learns of Clarissa's persecution, becomes for a moment little more than a fiend. He rants at his overly eager underlings in his July 15 letter to Belford:

The great devil fly away with them all, one by one, thro' the roof of their own cursed house, and dash them to pieces against the tops of chimneys, as he flies; and let the lesser devils collect their scattered scraps, and bag them up, in order to put them together in their alloted place, in the element of fire with cements of molten lead.

In passages like this Richardson moves with consummate agility from realism to allegory, from the personal to the analogical meaning of his narrative. Like Richardson's masterpiece, the didactic Gothic novel is located at a crossroad of English literary history. Both look forward to psychological individualism and back to a tradition that subsumes the particular experiences of human life under an all explaining theology.

This brief discussion of some of the sources of Gothic fiction is meant to refute the view that either supernatural incidents or a concentration on gore or sentiment necessarily stimulates an irrational response or is based on an undefined worldview. In the literary models most available to Walpole and his followers, the supernatural is not synonymous with the unnatural, the gloom of the grave is not described in an effort to inspire unreasoning terror, and emotional responses in readers are not intended to lead to the collapse of understanding. On the contrary, these models present supernatural occurrences as parts of an ordered universe which includes
God and Satan, and picture death as an enticement to virtuous living. What Walpole learned from Jacobean tragedy is that, theologically speaking, even ghosts need a home. What he learned from Jacobean tragedy and graveyard poetry is something every good evangelical preacher knows: that terror and the image of tormented sinners are strong incentives for living properly. And what Walpole learned from the sentimental novel is that it is possible to provide social and moral contexts for the most intense emotional events.

The Castle of Otranto

In his second introduction to Otranto, Walpole suggests that his strange book is "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 . . . copied with success." Although critics as divided in time and perspective as Walter Scott and Francis Hart have seen this attempted synthesis as giving life to English fiction, others have pointed to Walpole's failure to achieve his goal. Walpole's boast is that he introduces the miraculous into his plot, but never allows his characters "to lose sight of their human" identities. Walpole follows this even in small details, as when a hundred knights carrying a giant, magical sword "stumble" into the courtyard of Otranto castle. An ancient romance would have made the giant sword weightless; a modern romance would have omitted
the sword altogether. But does Walpole lose the advantages of both by combining them? Can real people exist in a miraculous world? Can miracles be convincing if they happen to people as they stumble through life?

A consideration of these questions (to which I will return in discussing The Old English Baron) has since the days of Clara Reeve distracted readers from an even greater contradiction in Otranto. In his first preface, purportedly written by a translator, William Marshall, Gent., Walpole argues that his work is "pious throughout" and that terror is its author's "principle engine." There is no inherent conflict between a "pious theme" and an audience response of terror; Macbeth, for example, is pious in its punishment of vice but terrifying in its portrayal of sinful ambition. But Otranto pushes piety to its extreme in an effort to maintain a "rigid purity of the sentiments," and this extreme didacticism effectively stifles any terror the book might otherwise evoke. 10

As a prince Manfred is a bad sort; as a villain he is remarkably ineffectual. His efforts to seduce Isabella, divorce Hippolita, and execute Theodore are repeatedly thwarted by what Manfred quite logically assumes to be a conspiracy between almost all the other major characters, but is really the over elaborate machination of divinity. When a giant helmet drops on Conrad, Manfred assumes that Theodore has used magic to kill the prince. When the portrait of his

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
grandfather, Ricardo, first sighs and then leaps off the wall, Manfred assumes it is a vision from hell. When Theodore is caught near the trap door, Manfred asks, with an irony that rebounds against himself, why Providence did not place the "peasant" out of the tyrant's reach. Finally, when a knight arrives and denounces Manfred as a "usurper," Manfred scorns the knight, saying that "Heaven does not send heralds to question the title of a lawful prince." Otranto is a conventional Gothic novel because it centers on the activities of a villain in a medieval setting, a didactic Gothic novel because the villain's frustrations are engineered in an understandable way by God, an extreme didactic Gothic novel because the villain is from the start defeated. From his doomed effort to avoid the prophesy by marrying the sickly Conrad to Frederic of Vincenza's daughter to his mistaken murder of Matilda, Manfred is surrounded by characters who see the folly of his actions. Like a sea shell trying to stop the waves, Manfred is swept into humiliation by Providence.11

The terror Walpole hoped to inspire in his readers is countered by the moral over-kill of the book. Every major character except Manfred behaves properly because of his or her piety. Theodore cheerfully accepts his undeserved poverty because it is "the lot which heaven casts for him." Hippolita, who sees from the outset that the supernatural occurrences associated with Alphonso's armor are a message

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
from heaven portending the fall of her family from power, repeatedly tries to persuade Manfred to abdicate. Even Isabella's father, Frederic, who is tempted momentarily from the path of virtue, sees that Manfred is a villain whose ancestors offended God.

The heroines are the strongest moral characters in a cast of the righteous. Matilda, the doomed daughter of Manfred, longs (perhaps because she was "born to be a saint") at the beginning of the novel for nothing but the cloistered life of a nun. She is equally obedient to both her parents, though one treats her with affection and the other with disdain. For an innocent maiden she is often sententious, as when she rebukes her serving woman Bianca for trying to learn the secrets of Hippolita by saying: "a child ought to have no ears or eyes, but as a parent directs," or when she scolds Bianca for suggesting that Isabella did not love Conrad:

I do not allow you to mention my friend disrespectfully. Isabella is of a cheerful disposition, but her soul is as pure as virtue itself. She knows your idle babbling humour, and perhaps has now and then encouraged it, to divert melancholy, and enliven the solitude in which my father keeps us.

And, although she falls in love with Theodore for his "uncommon piety," Matilda refuses to talk for long with him because "it is not seemly" for her to hold "converse" with a man at night.

Even in dying Matilda behaves properly. Cruelly murdered by her intoxicated father, she spends her last minutes begging the onlookers to comfort Manfred. "Heaven bless my
father, and forgive him as I do!" (pp. 108-109), she cries almost with her last breath. Her greatest sadness is that her death will cause her mother grief. Like Clarissa, Matilda admonishes her mourners: "...weep not for me... I am going where sorrow never dwells." Dying only confirms Matilda's belief that obedience to heaven is more important than "carnal desires."

Like her daughter, Hippolita is ready to sacrifice her own happiness to make others happy. Her submission is exceeded only by her piety; since her husband is a villain she must search for opportunities when she can in good conscience obey him. She refuses to listen to her confessor's true but damning reports about Manfred, and she seriously considers consenting to a divorce she knows is against the will of the church. If Manfred is torn by conflicting vices—ambition and lust—his wife is caught between conflicting virtues. But for Hippolita there is a saving faith, a faith that makes it possible for her to contemplate the impending death of Matilda with equanimity. Hippolita realizes that "heaven does nothing in vain; mortals must receive its divine behests with lowliness and submission" (p. 83).

Surrounded by images of virtue, Manfred is most impressed by the resolute Father Jerome, his wife's spiritual advisor, who turns out to be the incognito Count of Falconara, father of Theodore the true heir of Otranto. In their first encounter in the novel, Jerome answers Manfred's charge that he is a "meddling priest" by declaring:
I am no intruder into the secrets of families. My office is to promote peace, to heal divisions, to preach repentance, and teach mankind to curb their head-strong passions. I forgive your highness' uncharitable apostrophe; I know my duty, and am the minister of a mightier prince than Manfred. Hearken to him who speaks through my organs.

(p. 54)

Jerome is after this always on hand to explain the ways of God to Manfred. The priest knows that heaven rescued Isabella (p. 56), that heaven shook the helmet plumes to warn Manfred of its displeasure with his "mockery" of the church (p. 64), that heaven has doomed the race of Manfred (pp. 94-95), and that heaven has allowed Matilda to die to restore a three generation old debt (p. 106).

Manfred, surrounded by the faithful, then, is one pipe temporarily out of tune in an organ of the world playing a hymn in praise of God; and even Manfred comes to accept the burden of the evidence—and it is convincing and consistent—that "heaven directed" his defeat, that "to heap shame upon" his own head is all he can finally offer an offended deity, and that the "bloody record" of his reign may help to warn "future tyrants" (p. 110). Actually, Manfred knew from the start. His desperate efforts to avoid the fulfillment of a prophesy (and any effort to avoid a prophesy only helps bring it about) are based, paradoxically, upon his belief in the prophesy. Manfred tries to convince himself, and everyone else, that his grandfather was a good man (and not an assassin), that the odd portents are sent from hell (and not heaven), but he knows the truth: that he is the deserving victim.
of a methodical and incredibly detailed campaign waged by heaven to restore Alphonso's line to power.\textsuperscript{13}

It is the very excesses of this campaign which disturbed Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe and which interfere with any terror the novel might otherwise inspire. God is more than thorough; he is meddlesome. He drops a gigantic helmet on Conrad, shakes feathers to express his disapprobation, causes a statue to bleed, transports the ghost of the hermit of Joppa from the Holy Land to Italy, causes moon beams to help fleeing lovers, and thunders to make it impossible for mismatched lovers to hear each other speak. Walpole says in his first preface that, although he does not believe in the prodigies of his story, they were included to represent the "manners of the time." But Walpole goes beyond this almost sociological view by giving us not a world of superstitious people but a world filled with events that would justify their superstitions. At one point Matilda accuses her babbling maid of "reducing everything to magic" and so, like Otranto itself, explaining all mystery away. Manfred, in trying to deal with a plague of unusual incidents, is said to have become "almost hardened to preternatural occurrences." Like all of the major characters, the reader of Otranto realizes quite early that, in spite of Manfred's plotting, nothing too bad will happen. And nothing too bad does happen, though Matilda dies and Frederic is wounded. She goes to heaven, he recovers.

The most frightening scene in Otranto is not very frightening. After the death of Conrad, Manfred summons the
reluctant and, so, relieved fiancee, Isabella, to his chamber. To allow for "issue male" to continue his line, Manfred wants to divorce the sterile Hippolita and marry the fertile Isabella. Isabella at first refuses to understand the villain's desires, confounds him by referring to her affection for Conrad and for Hippolita. In frustration Manfred exclaims: "Think no more of him. . . . Curse on Hippolita! Forget her from this moment, as I do." (p. 33). When she does realize what Manfred is proposing, Isabella becomes "half dead with fright and horror," and she shrieķs. But as soon as she cries out the plumes in the helmet grow and move in the moonlight outside a nearby window. "Look! my lord! Heaven itself declares against your impious intentions!" Isabella correctly asserts. When, just a moment later, Manfred becomes distracted by Ricardo's groaning portrait from his growing lust, the never too endangered virgin escapes. The scene is an example of the incompatibility of extreme piety and even moderate terror.

Carried to extremes terror and piety are incompatible because the latter depends on a menacing uncertainty and the former on a theological guarantee against lasting harm or real danger for the virtuous. An educated 18th century reader would have regarded the supernatural events of the novel as impossible, as melodramatic distortions of the way in which God works in the world. But it is a mistake to confuse the implausible, even the impossible, with the incoherent.
Walpole's novel follows a pattern which, if it is untrue to nature, is true to itself; that is, it is internally consistent.

The lessons of Otranto are obvious, perhaps too obvious. God protects the righteous and punishes the wicked. The ways of Providence may for a time be unclear to men, but over the generations a perfect balance is maintained. Walpole criticized this moral in his first preface, when he wrote of the supposed Italian author:

I could wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this: that 'the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation.' I doubt whether, in his time, any more than at present, ambition curbed its appetite of domination from the dread of so remote a punishment.

It is important to note that Walpole is upset not with the book's didacticism but with the fact that it is not effective didacticism. His lesson is worthwhile, but it probably will not lure the ambitious from their sin.

Neither persuasively pious nor especially terrifying, neither realistic nor imaginative, Otranto is a curiosity of English literary history. It does unite for the first time a cluster of images and characters from Jacobean tragedy, graveyard poetry, and the sentimental novel— the fleeing virgin, the ambitious but doomed villain, the midnight message of a ghost, etc., etc.— in a Gothic castle. More significantly, it forces rational characters who function within social and moral norms to confront the irrational actions of
a tyrant. But the inherent terror of these images and the questions that this confrontation would suggest are subverted by a God who makes a spiritual labor of worldly danger and a theology that answers questions before they are asked. The common view that Walpole's work immediately inspired an onslaught of imitators is in error. It is no coincidence that a work conspicuous both for its potential and for its failure to achieve its potential should have had to wait thirteen years for its first intended successor. And it is no accident that that imitation, Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron (1777), though it avoids Walpole's excessive supernaturalism, falls victim to the very terror-stifling didacticism that makes Otranto finally such an unmoving piece of fiction.

The Old English Baron

Some eight years after the publication of The Baron Clara Reeve wrote a broad critical work on the history of narrative called The Progress of Romance. In this study Reeve distinguishes between romance and novel on the basis of probability: "the romance . . . treats of fabulous persons and things. . . . The novel is a picture of real life and manners." Although she sees the romance as wild and extravagant, and the novel as "a familiar relation of such things, as pass before our eyes" (p. 111), Reeve insists that narratives of either type are of value in proportion to the "useful instruction" they contain:
Such books cannot be too strongly recommended, as under the guise of fiction, warm the heart with the love of virtue, and by that means, excite the reader to the practice of it.  

(p. 126)

In this spirit Reeve defends Richardson's novels against the charge that they are insufferably long by pointing to both their originality and didacticism, to Richardson's role as a friend of the human heart in peril, the most "perfect moral legislator" of human conduct (p. 134). This critical outlook (which Walpole and Reeve shared with most of their contemporaries) made 18th century writers see themselves, like the title character of The Baron, as champions of virtue.

When Reeve wrote The Baron (which, significantly, was originally published with the title The Champion of Virtue), she was trying to follow Walpole's idea of combining romance and novel but to avoid his use of an excessive number of supernatural occurrences. Unlike Walpole, Reeve confines her ghosts to one chamber and to the late hours of the night and so seems (through this reduction of otherworldly interference) to allow her characters a greater autonomy. Like Otranto, The Baron is the story of the restoration of a proper heir to his title and property. As in Otranto, in The Baron heaven directs the action to a just conclusion. More importantly, The Baron, like Otranto, surrounds its ineffectual villains with a score of characters who see clearly and discuss at length the obvious lessons of the plot.

In The Baron, the heir whose title is usurped, young Edmund Twyford, is brought up by peasants after his father's...
murder and his mother's death in child bearing. The man responsible for these deaths is Edmund's uncle Walter, the usurping Baron of Lovel. Out of envy he ordered his brother's murder in the hope of acquiring his estate and, eventually, his wife. But Lady Lovel was warned by visions of her dead husband and she fled the castle in the last hours of her pregnancy. Shortly after the disappearance of Lady Lovel, the usurper was haunted by the ghost of his dead brother. In fear and frustration Walter locked up the haunted chamber (in which his brother was buried) and sold Lovel Castle to his brother-in-law, the virtuous Baron Fitz-Owen.

Although he spends his first years among serfs, Edmund's superiority is soon seen. Clearly a diamond in the rough, Edmund is taken into Lovel castle and educated at Fitz-Owen's expense. Edmund is, from his earliest days at the castle, not only bright and amiable but also good. He weeps over the sufferings of the unfortunate, forgives his enemies (even when they try to kill him) and, in sincere humility, prays for the will of heaven to prevail. When Edmund begins to suspect his true identity, he prays with great fervency, putting himself in God's hands:

I am nothing, said he, I desire to be nothing but what thou, O Lord, pleasest to make me: If it is thy will that I should return to my former obscurity, be it obeyed with cheerfulness! and, if thou art pleased to exalt me, I will look up to thee as the only fountain of honour and dignity.

(p. 50)

The results of this prayer suggest that God does not forget his own:
While he prayed, he felt an enlargement of heart beyond what he had ever experienced before; all idle fears were dispersed, and his heart glowed with divine love and affiance: He seemed raised above the world and all its pursuits.

Like Walpole's virtuous characters, perhaps because being good is so easy for him, Edmund is something of a prig. When his friend and teacher Father Oswald (the Jerome figure in this book) refers to the history of the haunted chamber, Edmund's curiosity is aroused. But Edmund asks the priest to gratify his curiosity only "if it be not improper" for this to happen. As Father Oswald notes, Edmund is a youth of "uncommon discretion."

The novel begins a generation after the deaths of Edmund's parents and, so, centers around the vengeance of a just God. Reeve goes beyond Walpole in piety by removing evil from the center of her work. Walter Lovel does not appear until the middle of the novel, and he is a frightened little man whose defeat is never seriously doubted even by himself. After Sir Philip Harclay, the title character who was the murdered Lord Lovel's friend and is Edmund's protector, triumphs over the pretender on the field, the villain exclaims: "The judgments of Heaven are fallen upon me! ... I am childless, and one is risen from the grave to claim my inheritance" (p. 104).

Nor is the villain the only person who can see Reeve's obvious moral. From the start the action is set in a clear religious framework. Sir Philip, returning from a holy war
against encroaching Saracens, is, like Chaucer's knight, "no less esteemed for Christian virtues than for deeds of chivalry." Sir Philip befriends Edmund because as a "Christian soldier" Harclay spends "his time in the service of his Creator," and glorifies God by "doing good to his creatures." Father Oswald repeatedly comforts Edmund's "drooping heart" with the "wholesome advice . . . of bearing unavoidable evils with patience and fortitude, from the consciousness of his own innocence, and the assurance of a future and eternal reward" (p. 33). Baron Fitz-Owen, drawn into the consequences of evil by his relation to the usurping Lord Lovel, knows that truth will, in the end, prevail because "man can only judge by appearances, but Heaven knows the heart" (p. 39). And Edmund, at a moment which might have been exploited for its potential terror, when he hears ghosts groaning at night, takes comfort by "resigning himself wholly to the will of Heaven," and is restored to his "usual confidence" (p. 43). Although her point has been clear to all her characters and readers, Reeve cannot resist ending on a didactic note. The book closes with a reference to itself, noting that it furnishes "a striking lesson to posterity, of the over-ruling hand of providence, and the certainty of RETRIBUTION" (p. 153, Reeve's emphasis).

The hand of heaven, though less conspicuous here than in Otranto, is no less effective. When a cabal of Edmund's enemies led by the vicious Wenlock tries to slander Edmund,
their lies rebound to their own discredit. When the cabal sends Edmund to certain death in a battle, Edmund returns covered with glory for his outstanding heroism. At the height of Edmund's difficulties, Reeve notes that "his gentle spirit might at length have sunk under this treatment, but providence interposed on his behalf; and by seemingly accidental circumstances, conducted him imperceptibly towards the crisis of his fate" (p. 32).

Edmund is eased through this crisis by a deity who sends inspired dreams to the good and ominous noises to the wicked. Very early in the novel Sir Philip dreams that he is visited by his dead friend Arthur Lovel who points to blood stained armor and shows Philip a field on which to battle for "the hopes of the house of Lovel" (p. 14). Later, Edmund dreams that his parents stand before him, call him their son and predict that he will soon be "known as such" (p. 45). His mother says, "Sleep in peace, oh my Edmund! for those who are the true possessors of this apartment are employed in thy preservation." Although Edmund meditates "on what all these portents should mean," the reader is in no doubt about who Edmund is and what will happen. On his second night in the haunted chamber, Edmund is confronted by his father's ghost in armor which moans and directs Edmund to leave the room. When, toward the end of the novel, the wind blows open every door in Lovel castle to admit the true, and now recognized, heir, heaven completes a long series of acts which have had
the effect of reassuring the good characters but of frightening no one.

Reeve does even more, if this is possible, than Walpole to frustrate any sense of mystery or fear her story might arouse in readers. Only the most unconscious reader will fail to see Edmund's identity early in the novel. Sir Philip, on a pilgrimage to Lovel castle, stares at Edmund with unusual intensity, and later remarks the boy's "strong resemblance" to "a certain dear friend I once had" (p. 19). A little later the only old servant left in Lovel castle, Joseph, calls Edmund his master and announces that he "cannot help thinking you were born to a higher station than what you now hold" (p. 25). No more than a third of the way through the novel Father Oswald suggests that the present Lord Lovel acquired his title through murder. At this point we know who Edmund is, why ghosts are haunting the castle, and can, with the hero, resign ourselves with equanimity to the will of heaven. When prodigies occur, we do not, like Hamlet, wonder if they are caused by heaven or hell. We know that everything happening in the novel is a part of the plan to achieve a "day of retribution! of triumph to the innocent, of shame and confusion to the wicked" (p. 132).

The value system which so totally stifles our fear is seen in Reeve's excessive use of adjectives. Afraid that her readers will even for a moment miss her point, Reeve begins the book by suggesting that Sir Philip served under a "glorious" king with "distinguished" valour and had acquired an
"honourable fame." Later, when Baron Fitz-Owen hears his children praised, he listens "to the honest approbation of a worthy heart, and enjoys the true happiness of a parent." When he applies to Sir Philip for assistance, Edmund calls his benefactor "a truly great man of glorious character," and Sir Philip reciprocates by calling Edmund "The son of my dearest friend!—dear and precious relick of a noble house! child of providence!—the beloved of heaven! (p. 86). When Edmund celebrates his wedding, Reeve describes him as being "full of joy without levity, of mirth without extravagance; he received the congratulations of his friends with ease, freedom, and vivacity" (p. 148). And, finally, when Reeve describes Lovel castle after Edmund's marriage, she says it is "truly a house of joy; not that false kind, in the midst of which there is heaviness, but that of rational creatures grateful to the supreme benefactor, raising their minds by a due enjoyment of earthly blessings to a preparation for a more perfect state hereafter" (p. 150). These adjectives serve as moral epithets, identifying good and evil characters.

In addition to her purely verbal clues, Reeve uses a structural device (which Ann Radcliffe unfortunately picked up)—a parallel sub-plot—to reinforce her message. In the main plot, Walter Lovel is punished for the crimes he committed out of envy and jealousy. Though such trickery and vice may seem to triumph, the novel and everyone in it assures us that it will in the end be crushed. Before we know
of this antecedent evil, Reeve tells us the story of Wenlock's hatred for Edmund. Wenlock, a cousin of the Fitz-Owen children, hates Edmund because Edmund is superior to him in every way, and because Edmund has earned the esteem of Emma Fitz-Owen, the Baron's beautiful daughter. Like Walter Lovel, Wenlock plots to destroy his enemy, but Wenlock fails and, as a result of his treachery, is, like the usurping Baron, exiled. This sub-plot restates Reeve's point with deadly repetition: the mills of God grind slowly, but they do grind.

Reeve is often seen as a bridge between the absurdities of Walpole and the rationalism of Radcliffe. It is difficult to see how The Baron is more rational than Otranto, since one violation of the laws of nature is as serious as their complete overthrow. Nor is one groaning ghost more plausible than a chorus of moaning cadavers. As a matter of literary convention, one miracle may seem more likely than ten; as a matter of logic, one and ten are equally likely or unlikely. It is, therefore, more accurate to see Reeve in her novelistic theory and practice as passing Walpole's didacticism to a generation of Gothic writers in Britain. For, by limiting the number of miraculous events and by confining these events to two or three scenes, Reeve gives a greater air of credibility to her novel, and so seems to tie her spiritual and moral lessons more closely to the "real" world.
Radcliffe and Lewis: Explanations of the Supernatural

The first English Gothic novels were, then, more interested in piety and justice than in fear and evil. Although both Otranto and The Baron were commercially successful, it remained for the writers of the 1790's—most notably Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory ("Monk") Lewis—to place evil and fear at the center of their work. These two writers moved English Gothic fiction on the one hand to a terror-suspense based on the real menace of powerful villains and on the other hand to a shocking horror which bathes readers in violence, depravity and supernaturalism. The traditional critical distinction between these two schools of Gothicism, however, fails to note the fact that both Radcliffe and Lewis wrote rational, didactic fiction.¹⁷ Rational theology is no less coherent than rational science, and, as Walpole and Reeve had shown, the inculcation of virtue can be achieved through a depiction of either good rewarded or wickedness punished. The Mysteries of Udolpho (1795) is a more discrete, more conventional, more bourgeois novel than The Monk (1796); it is not more didactic.

Critics of Ann Radcliffe have from the date of the publication of her first novel, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789), pointed to her allegiance to didacticism and propriety. Contemporary reviews point to her "correctness of taste and morality."¹⁸ In our century Robert D. Mayo notes

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
that *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *Udolpho* are, for their "moral bias, . . . abiding emphasis on propriety, . . . and their view of love as a gentle tremor of the heart with few more serious consequences than a dreamy melancholy, squarely in the genteel tradition in prose fiction." In his study of Burke's influence on Radcliffe, Malcolm Ware catalogues scenes in the novels in which heroines turn from threatening situations to contemplate nature and nature's God. And Ellen Moers, in her work on literary women, sees that Radcliffe does not "offend the proprieties," that, in fact, Radcliffe often sacrifices probability to propriety: "No matter what happens, Emily is always correctly employed, correctly behaved, God knows correctly spoken—and of course correctly dressed."  

In his discussion of Radcliffe's influence, Professor E. B. Murray argues that her novels serve two purposes by being "an outlet for officially repressed desires for the unnatural and the unconventional" but also a vindication of "nature, reason, and decorum." Murray continues:

The evil human agents, like Montalt and Montoni, direct the action, set up the decor, and convert the rational into the inexplicable. When they distort the real world by foisting their irregular conceptions on it, this distortion is perceived by the heroine who is then forced to the conclusion that irrational and even supernatural powers are behind the obscure and certainly unnatural phenomena. . . . But bad nature disintegrates finally. The natural order of things is vindicated, virtue and reason triumph, and the supernatural is explicated as the effect of an evil nature on a good but delicate sensibility.
The pattern Murray describes is accurate in broad outline only. Radcliffe's contribution to Gothic fiction is her shift toward the unnatural and irrational, her willingness to involve heroines in frightening situations. And, of course, as Murray suggests, these perils are always overcome, the mysteries dissolve, and happy marriages end the novels. What Murray does not see is that even while she was changing the Gothic novel Radcliffe, like most English Gothic writers before and after her, was committed to the didacticism of Walpole and Reeve. Thus, in the midst of terrors the heroine is a pillar of virtue. The reader soon grasps the trick of Radcliffe's novels, soon realizes that the unnatural and unconventional can seem to endanger but can never corrupt the Emilies and Julias. Radcliffe's heroines, like Clarissa, are morally impregnable, however easy it may be for villains to menace them physically. This moral certitude limits the impact of irrationality in Radcliffe's novels; however confused and superstitious her heroines may temporarily seem, the purity of their motives remains unshaken. The central action of these novels is a confrontation between virtue and vice. Though we often doubt whether virtuous characters will survive, we never question the value of their virtue or their allegiance to the good life.

A Sicilian Romance, Radcliffe's second novel, establishes the conventions she develops in later works, and, because of its comparative brevity, is most easily studied. In it
we get the struggle between a villain and a couple of virtuous lovers, in this case the Marquis Mazzini, his daughter Julia, and her beloved Hippolitus, the Count de Vereza. Also featured are the apparently supernatural lights and groans in a "haunted" wing of the castle, and a general sense of mystery aroused by the failure of a dying sinner (Vincent) to speak a deathbed confession. The plot of the novel is one of pursuit, recapture, escape, and pursuit, as Julia flees her tyrannical father and the cruel Duke de Luovo, her intended husband.

Like Otranto and The Baron, Sicilian Romance begins and ends in order, with the main characters safe. But unlike these extreme didactic works Sicilian Romance moves into a long middle section in which mystery, danger, and fear prevail over the heroine and the reader. The novel begins with Julia and her saintly sister Emilia living, as they always have, in tranquility under the care of an old friend of their mother's, Madame de Mennon, in the castle of Mazzini. This tranquility is shattered quickly when the Marquis and his followers appear to celebrate the coming of age of Ferdinand, a brother from whom the girls were raised apart. Within days Julia falls in love with Hippolitus and is ordered to marry an objectionable suitor. Her unsuccessful attempt to elope with Hippolitus and her subsequent successful escape alone begin a series of adventures which are too random to be called a plot.
What happens in *Sicilian Romance* is that various forces are set in motion by the resistance of the good characters to the treachery of the polygamous Marquis and his second "wife." Julia escapes, the Marquis pursues her to compel her to marry falsely, Madame de Mennon follows to assist Julia in her flight, Hippolitus, assumed dead, leaves Sicily only to return later, Ferdinand is imprisoned but escapes and also goes in search of Julia. Once these characters are in motion, they come together and drift apart with a rapidity which, when not terrifying, is humorous. Each of the major characters at some time wanders into a forest at night and is captured by banditti, only to escape shortly after. Each achieves his or her objective (e.g., Julia reaching a sanctuary, Madame de Mennon overtaking Julia, the Marquis recapturing his daughter, Hippolitus rescuing Julia) only to lose it after a short time.

The final mishap is perhaps the most improbable. Julia, fleeing the Marquis' men, has been captured by banditti. Hippolitus, trying to find Julia, stumbles by chance into the same bandit's camp and rescues Julia from her jailor. They both wander around the ruins of the hideout until soldiers come and begin to fight the outlaws. In the confusion the lovers become separated, of course; Julia runs deeper into the ruins and emerges (through the inevitable passageway) back in the "haunted" wing of her father's castle. In that wing Julia finds not a ghost but her living and long incarcerated mother, the legitimate Marquessa de Mazzini.
By any standard of realistic fiction, this is simple nonsense, and those readers who think Radcliffe's Sicily might as well be the moon have a point. But it is also important to see that Radcliffe creates a coherent, even predictable, pattern from her mass of improbabilities. Through the repetition which her proliﬁcity allows, Radcliffe simultaneously frightens and reassures her readers. In Sicilian Romance, twice characters attempt to leave Sicily by boat; twice they are forced back to shore. Twice a fleeing girl is overtaken by an angry father; twice it is the wrong father for the girl. Twice we are led to believe a hero is dead (ﬁrst Hippolitus is supposedly killed by the Marquis' men; then Ferdinand is supposedly slain by banditti); twice the heroes return to life when they are least—and so, to the perceptive reader, most—expected. When the heroine seems most safe, we soon realize she is closest to harm. When she is most threatened, she is really quite safe. It is by such twists that Radcliffe sustains suspense; but the consistency of her plotting allows the reader a divided response to the terror. When the surprising becomes commonplace, we can enjoy a temporary fear because we know that soon it will pass.

This same pattern obtains in Radcliffe's better known novels, Udolpho and The Italian (1797). In Udolpho, the Villeroi-Villefort sub-plot allows Radcliffe an opportunity to restate her contrast between natural piety and urban sophistication; the conﬂict between St. Aubert and his daughter and Montoni and his wife (Emily's misguided aunt)
geographically centered on La Valee on one side and Venice on the other is mirrored in the differences between the Paris loving Countess de Villefort and her more Romantic husband and daughter. In The Italian, Radcliffe's darkest romance, the heroine is most dangerously isolated from the hero and her friends, but she manages to escape and be recaptured by Schedoni with a predictable frequency. In Radcliffe's most horrifying scene of all—that in which the ambitious monk approaches with drawn dagger the sleeping Ellena—the heroine, though in great danger, is unconscious while the villain experiences the agonies of conscience and remorse. When Ellena finally awakens she is frightened by a man claiming to be her long lost father, but her experience of the night leaves her willing to believe that he had come to rescue, and not to murder, her. Ellena's misplaced gratitude to her "savior" is an ironic reminder to both Schedoni and the reader that the moral values of Radcliffe's world are fixed and beyond question.

Radcliffe is eager to avoid moments of moral perplexity by building up gradually and with a delicacy of taste to any situations in which her good characters must choose a potentially controversial course of action. Her moral didacticism is most clearly seen in Radcliffe's handling of what had been in English fiction from the time of Richardson the single most morally charged action, a daughter's elopement from her father's house. The greater evil of Radcliffe's fathers and
father surrogates (greater, that is, than the evil of a Mr. Harlowe) puts even more pressure on their daughters to escape. In *Sicilian Romance*, Julia's flight is carefully set up. When she first learns of her father's plan for her to marry Luovo, Julia faints, wakes up, and "totters to her closet." Only after much thought and the advice of her brother does Julia consent to elope with her lover. When that elopement fails Julia escapes on her own. Later, when she meets Madame de Mennon, Julia explains her conduct:

"I have much, my dear madame, to tell . . . and much to explain, ere you will admit me again to that esteem of which I was once so justly proud. I had no recourse from misery, but in flight." "Say no more, my love . . . on the subject," replied madame; "I admired your conduct, and felt severely for your situation."

(II, p. 5)

Madame de Mennon, one of Radcliffe's many moral barometers, can be seen as offering the final word on this subject.

In *Udolpho*, Emily escapes from her step-uncle not with Vallencourt but with several servants and an admirer named Du Pont, so the moral question does not arise. But in *The Italian*, Radcliffe's too careful treatment of the situation is probably the greatest absurdity in the romance. Ellena has been kidnapped in Naples by Schedoni's men and imprisoned in a convent in Northern Italy. Once there she is tormented, confined to a room, and threatened with death if she refuses to become a nun. After this has gone on for some time, Vivaldi, her fiance, appears and offers to save her. But Ellena is "agitated by a variety of considerations":

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
It was true that Vivaldi had discovered her prison, but, if it were possible, that he could release her, she must consent to quit it with him; a step from which a mind so tremulously jealous of propriety as hers, recoiled with alarm, though it would deliver her from captivity.28

Even when Vivaldi promises to conduct her "wherever she judged proper," Ellena hesitates, preferring tyranny and anguish to even the appearance of evil. The situation is potentially loaded with moral confusions, but, true to her didactic ends, Radcliffe subverts the quandry by changing Ellena's choices. Olivia, a nun who befriends Ellena and who is later revealed to be the girl's mother, learns that the abbess plans to murder Ellena. So when Ellena still trembling consents to elope, she is no longer making a moral choice. Like all of Radcliffe's heroines, she is doing what any sensible person would have to do in her situation.

Radcliffe is a didactic Gothicist not because of her method of explaining the supernatural, still less because of her advocacy of any particular set of ideas. It is fair to call Radcliffe a didactic writer because her books provide answers for all the questions which they raise. Each mystery is exposed to the light of a common sense which assumes that all mysteries are illusory. Radcliffe offers no psychological explanations of what makes her villains evil, though she defines the nature of their vices clearly, but she does not seriously raise this question. She is content to identify her malevolent characters and set them to work.30

Similarly, her good characters are good in clearly
understandable ways. She forces her characters to speculate briefly about the possibility of supernatural events, but she clearly (in all but the posthumous Gaston de Blondeville) accounts for these events in terms of natural causes, preferring a deity who works through nature to one who—like the God of Tourneur and Walpole—intervenes periodically in human affairs. Finally, the ordered chaos which constitutes the greatest part of a Radcliffe novel forces the reader to expect a happy ending. That justice will be done, that true lovers will marry, and tyrants be overthrown through their own excesses we never seriously doubt. Radcliffe's work is didactic because it never speculates about what justice, true love, and excessive vice are.

The differences between Lewis' and Radcliffe's fiction have frequently been discussed. The conventional distinction, outlined by D. P. Varma, emphasizes the drift from terror to horror, from "awful apprehension" to "sickening realization," from the "smell of death" to "stumbling against a corpse." When a Radcliffe heroine wanders into a vault of unburied corpses, the scene is described as "a spectacle too shocking for humanity." When Lewis' Agnes is locked in such a dungeon for months, we are given a detailed description of her situation:

A faint glimmering of light . . . permitted me to distinguish the surrounding horrors. My hand rested on something soft: I grasped it, and advanced it towards the light. Almighty God! what was my disgust! my consternation! In spite of its putridity, and the worms which preyed upon it, I
perceived a corrupted human head, and recognized the features of a nun who had died some months before.32

When Radcliffe's lustful characters attempt to seduce someone they cast a meaningful glance or two at their intended lovers. When Lewis' Matilda seduces Ambrosio, she does it by tearing off her clothes, exposing her breast, and threatening to kill herself if he spurns her:

The weapon's point rested on her left breast... The moon-beams darting full upon it enabled the monk to observe the dazzling whiteness: his 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; his blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination.

(p. 87)

On the whole Radcliffe avoids the supernatural; The Monk is a veritable catalogue of supernatural characters and incidents, featuring the wandering Jew, a bleeding nun, Satan, minor devils, and the ghost of the heroine's mother.

By placing too much emphasis on these important differences it is possible to mistakenly conclude that Radcliffe's fiction is more rational than Lewis'. It is more accurate to say that Radcliffe and Lewis make their points by exciting different emotions in their readers. It is true that Lewis submerges his readers in the abyss of intemperate passions, but this descent into horror, lust, and gore is preparatory to a spiritual lesson. As Montague Summers puts it:

...the full swift pulse of life, beauty, love, desire, all these are suddenly shadowed by the
dark pall of mortality; those eyes that sparkled with lust's flame must fade and close in night, those hands whose touch was a draught of heady wine must palsy, grow cold, and decay, the worm must pasture on those corrupting limbs where lover's teeth once bit the white flesh in frenzy of sadistic appetite.33

Evil in a Radcliffe novel is, though threatening, never tempting: villains are ugly creatures of conflicting vices; heroines are beautiful, simple, and virtuous. For Lewis the temptation of lust is strong; though spiritually hidious the devil can appear as an angel. Lewis creates a world similar to that of Jacobean horror tragedies, a world in which almost everyone succumbs to temptation. The reader of The Monk is caught up not only in the drama of rape and murder, but also in the moral battle behind this drama. If he can lure us into a partial identification with a matri- cidal, incestuous hypocrite and then show us where the path of sinning leads, then Lewis' moral is more forcefully felt than Radcliffe's. The reader pays a price for the titilation in The Monk; it is the same price, in a much reduced form, that the monk himself must pay.

Robert Kiely takes a radically different approach to The Monk when he argues that the moral expressed in the last chapter is intended to deceive the "reader of bad conscience" into the conviction that he has received a "stern lesson." Kiely argues that Lewis is primarily interested not in a didactic tale of a devil's bargain lost but in the plight of a man who cannot find his true self because that self is
To support his attack on the view that *The Monk* is a didactic novel, Kiely asserts that Lewis cannot be concerned with showing the "psychological damage caused by a conventual life" because that "was hardly a problem in the England of 1796." Moreover, Kiely asks, since "nearly all the characters in the novel--innocent and guilty alike--suffer the same fate" as Ambrosio, how can his punishment be part of a coherent moral scheme? The moral which Kiely finds too patly expressed in the closing chapter is, in fact, only a summary of the action of the rest of the book. Obviously Lewis was not concentrating on attacking conventual life; that life stands as a metaphor for all hypocrisy, all belief in the possibility of a perfectly moral existence. And it is especially important to see that, though almost all of the characters in the novel suffer intensely, none suffers Ambrosio's fate. Raymond and Agnes sin and are punished; Elvira and Antonia are murdered; Lorenzo loses the woman he loves; but only Ambrosio dies to be reborn in hell, having sold for a moment of sadistic delight his eternal soul.

The problem with Kiely's interpretation of *The Monk* is that it sees Ambrosio's consciousness as the center of the book. Lewis' willingness to devote so much space to the Raymond and Agnes sub-plot and to half a dozen interjected verse narratives suggests that for the author Ambrosio is only one sinner in a corrupt world. More than anything the energy of
the action interests Lewis' readers. Lewis learned two things from Ann Radcliffe: to keep things moving and to make even the most mysterious things finally clear.

Any purely verbal summary of the lessons of The Monk sounds hollow. Ambrosio, abbot of a Capuchin monastery is, at the start, the spiritual darling of Madrid. People flock to his weekly sermons for every reason but piety:

The women came to show themselves, the men to see the women: some were attracted by curiosity to hear an orator so celebrated; some came, because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; . . . and one half of Madrid was brought hither by expecting to meet the other half.

(p. 35)

Ambrosio, puffed up by his reputation as "The Man of Holiness," presents a humble face to the world, but wallows in secret spiritual pride. As Lorenzo de Medina points out, this pride is especially false because Ambrosio's virtue has never been tested. Raised in the monastery, Ambrosio has arrived at manhood without knowing "of what consists the difference of man and woman" (p. 44). Ambrosio is entering a dangerous period of life in which "the passions are most vigorous, unbridled, and despotic" (p. 48), and in which his access to beautiful women and his own natural talents will "contribute to his ruin."

It is the old story of the corrupt monk, but Lewis drags his readers stage by stage through Ambrosio's corruption. Seduced by the passionate Matilda, Ambrosio becomes himself seducer and destroyer. Throughout the book the monk wisely...
stops short of making a bargain with Satan, hoping against hope to repent at a future time and earn God's forgiveness. But when, after a short intense career of villainy, he is captured and tortured by the Inquisition, Ambrosio signs the devil's book and is carried off to an excruciating death and an eternity of pain.

The problem with the above summary is that it sounds too easy: from the very gate of heaven runs a by-path to the pit, pride goes before a fall. The experience of reading The Monk is not easy, however. Lewis does not allow his readers to sit back and click their tongues at the folly of sin. Rather, by seducing at least a part of the reader's mind, Lewis draws us into the crime. 37 Ironically, the very details which some contemporary and modern readers have condemned turn Lewis' obvious moral into a strongly felt lesson.

When Antonia, the heroine, is first described, each feature of her body is lingered over with a voluptuous leisure:

... a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist.... Her bosom was carefully veiled. Her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot of the most delicate proportions. ... Her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze.

(p. 37)

It is impossible to read this without wanting to "see" more. Lewis knows what Ambrosio and we (as readers) must learn: a
glimpse is more provocative than a full view: the peeping foot, the veiled face and bosom excite and can sustain more interest than writhing nudity. Much later in the novel, Ambrosio approaches the sleeping Antonia:

She lay with her cheek reclining upon one ivory arm... A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the muslin which covered the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it heaved with slow and regular suspiration... A smile inexpressibly sweet played round her ripe and coral lips, from which every now and then escaped a gentle sigh... there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful monk.

(p. 294)

There are only a few people in Lewis' world (or in ours) who could read this passage and identify with only the innocent Antonia. Of course we loathe the monk's intended violence, but at the same time the ripeness of Antonia's beauty is hard to resist. And this is Lewis' objective: to raise our desires and then, through a debauched excess, glut us on their effects. Just after the above description, while Ambrosio is beginning to rape Antonia, Elvira, the girl's mother, enters and fights the monk. Instead of enjoying the daughter, Ambrosio murders the mother. Because he allowed his passions to reach a "brutal" extreme, he holds not a virgin but a corpse in his arms. As he looks down at Elvira, he sees a "frightful blackness," "stiff and frozen hands," and veins filled with "chilled blood."

Although he is temporarily nauseated by his violent act, Ambrosio soon is busy again plotting Antonia's rape.
He poisons her with a mock-death drug, and then waits for her to awake in the catacombs below the convent where she had been "buried." Again the monk's lust is aroused by the virgin's innocent cries for help. Again he is dehumanized, his "affection" for Antonia reduced to its "grossest particles." And again, where he had sought pleasure he finds only disgust:

He stifled her cries with kisses . . . 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.

(p. 368)

As soon as he is finished Ambrosio shudders at himself, realizes too late that passion indulged is love among the ruins of your own life. Antonia awakes among corpses and is murdered by a man who has become an eager participant in his own undoing.

Some readers (Coleridge was among them) feel that any "useful lesson" the book might contain is blunted by the fact that Ambrosio is overthrown by supernatural forces. Louis F. Peck, Lewis' biographer, agrees with Coleridge to a point, but emphasizes Ambrosio's lack of mercy in dealing with Agnes as a major flaw in his personality before Matilda's seduction. Besides, Lewis obviously had a different concept of a useful lesson than did Coleridge. Lewis is not trying to show that sin can be resisted, but that temptation is as powerful as Satan is in The Monk, that all men and women are frail, easy victims of the deceptions of others and their own passions.
It is to make this point clear that Lewis introduces the long Raymond and Agnes sub-plot. Many critics have found this interlude distracting, if often fascinating, in its only remote connection to the Ambrosio-Matilda-Antonia plotline. It is true that, in terms of incident, these plots converge only twice: first when Ambrosio turns Agnes over to the stern prioress, and second when Lorenzo finds Agnes and then the murdered Antonia in the catacombs below the burning convent of St. Clare. But thematically the two plotlines are parallel, both showing the short range attractiveness of passion and the inevitable long range sufferings.

When we first are introduced to Agnes de Medina and Raymond de las Cisternas (in the latter's interjected "History"), they are clearly virtuous and noble young people. Raymond, an heir to wealth and power, is travelling incognito as Don Alphonso in an effort to associate with all kinds of people. In what is probably the best rauber episode in all of English Gothic fiction, Raymond saves Agnes' spiteful aunt Donna Rodolpha from a bandit's plot. As a guest in the castle of Lindenberg, Raymond falls in love with Agnes but is pursued by the enflamed Donna Rodolpha. To escape the wrath of the scorned aunt and the convent waiting for Agnes, the young lovers plan an elopement on the one night in five years when the dread bleeding nun rises from her unquiet grave to stalk the parapets of the castle. Neither of the lovers actually believes in the existence of ghosts. While he waits for
Agnes, Raymond reflects "on the influence of superstition and weakness of human reason" (p. 165). But, in the world of The Monk, bleeding nuns are common. Through her own weakness Agnes will become one of many bleeding nuns in the romance.

When the elopement is frustrated by the appearance of the real ghost, Raymond is injured, and Agnes, who has been convinced of Raymond's disloyalty, joins the convent of St. Clare. When Raymond, rescued by the wandering Jew, reappears in the convent garden, the lovers consummate what then seems a hopeless love. This "criminal" act shows how far in some ways Lewis' fiction is from that of Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe. After the deed, Agnes berates Raymond, calling him "a monster of perfidy and ingratitude," a villain who has reduced her to the "level with the basest of my sex" (p. 194). Though Raymond attempts to mitigate their offense by recalling their "youth, long attachment," and desperation, the incident leaves a bitter feeling in the reader's mind. Lewis robs us of the luxury of confidence: no longer can we trust that heroes and heroines will escape, however bruised, morally perfect. For Lewis this is a world of sweets and sours.

Many of the stories (in verse and prose) Lewis inserts into his romance show sinful lovers who pay dearly for their transgressions. In the fourth stanza of "Alonzo the Brave and Imogene the Fair," Imogene promises never to succumb to the temptations of "lust or wealth" and marry anyone but

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Alonzo who is bound for Palestine and a holy war. But twelve months and only two stanzas later Imogene agrees to marry a rich baron. The ghost of Alonzo appears at the wedding, worms crawling around his eyes, and, through God's will, punishes Imogene by carrying her off "to her grave." In the story of the bleeding nun which Agnes tells humorously to Raymond, the young Beatrice de las Cisternas violates her vow of chastity and runs away from her convent with the baron of Lindenberg. Abandoning herself to "the impulse of her passion," Beatrice displays the "incontinence of a prostitute" (p. 182). She soon tires of the baron and falls in love with his brother, a man attractive because of his "gigantic stature and herculean limbs." The price Beatrice pays for her hedonism and infidelity is an unquiet spirit, doomed to haunt for years Lindenberg castle. In "The Water-King," a maiden falls in love with a white knight (a water fiend in disguise) who carries her off on his horse and drowns her, while she cries: "Stop! stop! For, oh! / The waters o'er my bosom flow!" (p. 286). The lesson, "Believe not every handsome knight, / And dance not with the water-spright," is a specific application of the repeated argument of The Monk.

Lewis gives us a world in which if each of his characters were judged according to his or her deserts, almost none would escape whipping, a world in which, though people are fallible and much in need of mercy, moral absolutes obtain. Mythic and Biblical images help establish Lewis'
moral scheme; e.g., Ambrosio is bitten by a serpent and dies in seven days, Satan's destruction being a perversion of God's creation. Although Matilda, who offers devilish sophistries, and Ambrosio, eager to excuse his conduct, argue that their crimes are virtues, Lewis does not allow the moral value of any given act to remain vague. Ambrosio justifies his violation of his vow of chastity as a "slight and natural deviation" (p. 230); Lewis reminds us that "incontinence, in laymen the most venial of errors, became in his person the most heinous of crimes." In his clearer moments Ambrosio can see that Matilda is a "prostitute" and that the ruining of Antonia would be a "blackest" crime than the world has ever seen (p. 244). As Elvira says when she catches Ambrosio in her daughter's bedroom, the monk is guilty of "perfidy, hypocrisy, and incontinence." Antonia's sense of having lived free of moral corruption allows her to die (and she outdoes Clarissa by "dying" twice) happily: "I have no crimes to repent . . . and I restore my soul without fear to him from whom I received it" (p. 331). Even Agnes, who suffers the most unpleasant incarceration of any Gothic heroine, when she is carried half-dead to freedom, acknowledges the moral justice of the universe:

Oh! yes! yes! yes! . . . there is a God then, and a just one! Joy! Joy! Joy! I shall once more breathe the fresh air, and view the light of the glorious sunbeams! . . . Oh! Heaven will bless you for pitying an unfortunate!

(p. 358)
The plot which illustrates this divine justice becomes, through its own excesses and a good deal of foreshadowing, predictable but never dull. When Ambrosio refuses to temper his judgment of Agnes with mercy, Agnes curses him, predicts his undoing:

Hear me! . . . proud, stern, and cruel! . . . Insolent in your yet-unshaken virtue, you disdained the prayers of a penitent; but God will show mercy. . . . What temptations have you vanquished? Coward! . . . the day of trial will arrive. Oh! then when you yield to impetuous passions; when you feel that man is weak, and born to err, when shuddering, you look back upon your crimes, and solicit, with terror, the mercy of your God, . . . think upon me!

(p. 72)

Within twenty pages of the opening Lorenzo has a visionary dream in which he sees Antonia being murdered by a swarthy unknown giant who descends to hell while the defiled heroine grows wings and ascends to heaven. Later, when Antonia is menaced at night by the monk, Elvira dreams her daughter is standing on an abyss crying "Save me, mother" (p. 295).

Even the supernatural episodes do not decrease the rationality of the romance, whatever they do to its probability. When the miraculous becomes common, it has a logic of its own. If a ghost haunts you, send for "the Great Mogul" to exorcise it. He will ask the right questions and receive honest answers. If you make a bargain with the devil, hold out for good terms or you may end up like Ambrosio, snatched from the frying pan, dumped into the fire, with Satan gloating as he "explains" his triumph:
Hark, Ambrosio, while I unveil your crimes! You have shed the blood of two innocents; Antonia and Elvira. Tremble, abandoned hypocrit! incestuous ravisher! . . . It was I who threw Matilda in your way; it was I who gave you entrance to Antonia's chamber; it was I who caused the dagger to be given you which pierced your sister's bosom. (p. 418)

Like most of the explanations at the end of 18th century English Gothic fiction, this speech is unnecessary because it states the obvious. Every violation of the laws of nature in The Monk is understandable not through subjective intuition but through a sense of the laws of the supernatural; laws which regulate an eternal battle between God and Satan, a battle in which Ambrosio, Raymond, Agnes, Antonia, and the others are minor characters and which leaves its survivors living not happily ever after but "as happy as . . . mortals born to be the prey of grief and sport of disappointment" can be (p. 400).
CHAPTER III

THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL:
WILLIAM GODWIN, CHARLES R. MATURIN, AND JAMES HOGG

Godwin and Gothicism

The English Gothic novel developed in an age of increasing secularism. An admirer of Matthew Lewis, the Marquis de Sade, noted that Gothic fiction was "an inevitable outcome of the revolutionary upheavals experienced throughout the whole of Europe," and that The Monk answered the need for strong emotions following great social change. The idea that the French Revolution and Gothic fiction have a common source in a growing anti-religious anti-authoritarianism is an interesting oversimplification. As the church and aristocracy became discredited in France, revolutionary fervor mounted; as an easy piety seemed less and less valid in England, Gothic writers allowed more room in their works for Satan and, more importantly, for man.

Starting with William Godwin, English Gothicists began using their fiction to ask questions about social justice, psychology, epistemology, and theology. Godwin, the author of two Gothic novels (The Adventures of Caleb Williams; or,
Things as They Are and St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century and of a controversial treatise on political justice, through his own fiction and his influence on writers like Hogg and Maturin in England and Brown, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville in America, helped to move Gothic fiction in the direction of speculation. Although he began writing novels to argue for his ideas, Godwin's willingness to use first person narration to relate extreme or dangerous situations inevitably led him to explore the subjectivity and strangeness which had been stifled in earlier Gothic works. It is not that the lessons of Godwin's novels, or the novels of Maturin and Hogg, are unimportant or unrelated to the plots, but that somehow these lessons do not resolve all our perplexities. The result is a mixture of didacticism and speculation, a middle ground between the predictable, if gripping, early Gothic works and the shifting, questioning Gothicism to come. By the time we have finished Caleb Williams we know what Godwin thinks about the legal system in Britain, but we are haunted by the questions that arise in the tormented minds of Caleb and Falkland. Godwin makes his readers understand why, as a man of unlimited wealth and eternal youth, St. Leon had to be unhappy, but this understanding does not eradicate our sympathy for a character whose suffering we have shared and whose errors were the result of a seemingly irreconcilable combination of pride and benevolence.
The extent to which Godwin's Gothic novels are didactic, even propagandistic, expressions of his political theory has been the major critical question since his books were published. In the suppressed preface Godwin wrote for the first edition of Caleb Williams, he asserts that the book was written "to answer a purpose," to argue for political reform by showing things as they are. Mrs. Inchbald, a friend of Godwin's, however, begged the author to omit this preface. She felt that Caleb Williams was most conspicuous for its "energy of mind," and that the overt statement of Godwin's purpose might alienate conservatives who would "condemn the whole work as of an immoral tendency." A contemporary discussion of the book in The Analytical Review praises the "strong feeling, and depth of reflection on the state and habits of society," but complains that no "entire moral pervades the narrative."

Modern critics have frequently offered just the opposite reading of Caleb Williams; they have deplored its heavy-handed moralizing. Eino Railo argues that Godwin is a poor Romantic because he uses "romantic materials to entice the reader into following him through the philosophical dissertations and psychological analyses which form the main interests of his books." James T. Boulton notes that Godwin's novels, even more than Political Justice, belong to the storm aroused by the French Revolution. In his forward to Woodcock's study of Godwin, Herbert Read asserts that the rationalism of Godwin's fiction, though "ingenius and profound," is
"fatally omniscient, and omniscience, in philosophers, is pretentious, and finally boring." And Woodcock himself argues that much of the defectiveness of Caleb Williams "is due to the didactic nature of the book." 

A middle ground between these two extreme positions (i.e., that Godwin is not didactic enough or that he is too didactic) seems most tenable and most useful in assessing Godwin's place in the Gothic movement. As early as 1873, James Davies noted that Caleb Williams is so intense and powerful that its didactic purpose goes unnoticed. In 1899 Wilbur Cross observed that Godwin combines Gothic conventions and didacticism. In his study of the English novel, Wagenknecht focuses on Godwin's shift to the internal, his concentration on psychology. Edith Birkhead sees Godwin as a "scientist of emotions," and Ford K. Brown regards Caleb Williams as "the earliest example . . . of psychological study of a criminal mind." More recently, critics like Harvey Gross, Patrick Cruttwell, and Robert Kiely praise Godwin's imagination for creating fictions which even his prodigious intellect could not always completely explain.

In refuting Johannes Meyer's contention that Godwin's interest in social conditions fades before his interest in psychological states, J. M. S. Tompkins argues that in Godwin's fiction "psychological states spring from social conditions and from moral ideas connected with them." Tompkins' argument is still effective in refuting the extreme
view of Robert Kiely who insists that in *Caleb Williams* "external considerations . . . fade beside the intensely imagined . . . world of personal event." Both *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* are about the corruption of men by society and law. In both works, victims and victimizers pursue each other, trapped in a pattern of evil which originates in socially determined preferences (e.g., Falkland's sense of honor, Caleb's curiosity, and St. Leon's desire for wealth and power) and feeds on social privilege and authority.

Godwin's didactic purpose compels him to explain the causes of evil in his books. The author of *Political Justice* at various times asserts the social origin of human corruption. Mr. Collins, Caleb's former friend, forgives Williams on the ground that no man is responsible, ultimately, for the wrong he does:

> I do not consider the vicious as proper objects of indignation and scorn. I consider you as a machine; you are not constituted, I am afraid, to be greatly useful to your fellow men; but you did not make yourself; you are just what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be.

(p. 360)

And Caleb is eager to extenuate Falkland's guilt for the murder of Tyrrel and the execution of the innocent Hawkinses:

> A nobler spirit lived not among the sons of men. Thy intellectual powers were truly sublime, and thy bosom burned with a godlike ambition. But of what use are talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. All that in a happier field and a purer air, would expand into virtue and germinate into usefulness is thus converted into henbane and deadly nightshade.

(p. 377)
Once Caleb's excessive curiosity (the result of the misplaced esteem in which he holds his class superiors) leads him to discover Falkland's secret, the chase begins. Using "the remorseless fangs of the law" whose servants wear "the gore dripping robes of authority," Falkland persecutes Caleb for years. When Caleb, driven to desperation by this unflagging brutality, calls Falkland into court, the tables are turned. Falkland, nearly dead, collapses in Caleb's arms, admits his guilt, and bemoans his loss of reputation. All of this suffering—from the power Tyrrel had over Miss Melville, to the power Falkland has over Williams—Godwin sees as a product of the inequality of men and the temptations of power. Caleb notes that Falkland is but the image of any monarch, that all of England has become his jail, all Englishmen his cruel jailors. As the title page motto says:

Amidst the woods the leopard knows his kind;  
The tyger preys not on the tyger brood;  
Man only is the common foe of man.

This drama of class struggle, of tyranny and oppression, is—if not replaced, then—at least interrupted by the agony of individual minds in torment. And it is this concern with the human mind under stress that Godwin brought to a new height in Gothic fiction. In Caleb Williams, Godwin moves from external pictures of Falkland's mental turmoil to drawn out scenes of Caleb's guilt, pain, and sorrow. Caleb tells us that, after the murder of Tyrrel by Falkland, the killer

... was sometimes seen climbing among the rocks, reclining motionless for hours together upon the
edge of a precipice, or lulled into a kind of nameless lethargy of despair by the dashing of the torrents. He would remain whole nights together under the naked cope of heaven, inattentive to the consideration of either place or time, insensible to the variations of the weather, or rather seeming to be delighted with the uproar of the elements, which partially called off his attention from the discord and dejection that occupied his mind.

(pp. 143-144)

When he learns Falkland's horrid secret, Caleb is stunned by the knowledge and becomes "like a man, who, though blasted with lightning, and deprived for ever of the power of motion, should yet retain the consciousness of his situation. Death-dealing despair is his only feeling" (p. 155). It is this consciousness of suffering, of which we catch only glimpses in earlier Gothic fiction, that Godwin explored in detail for the first time.

When he is first incarcerated in as cruel a prison as possible, Caleb bears up remarkably well, supported by the consciousness of his innocence:

To an ordinary eye I might seem destitute and miserable, but in reality I wanted for nothing. My fare was coarse, but I was in health. My dungeon was noisome; but I felt no inconvenience. I was shut up from the usual means of exercise and air; but I found the method of exercising myself even to perspiration in my dungeon.

(p. 215)

With all the confidence of a man of reason, Caleb exults over "the impotence of his persecutor." But, as he matures in pain, Caleb realizes that he cannot find "satisfactory solutions" to every mystery of life (p. 218). Moreover, Caleb learns how insufficient a protection mere innocence is
and how much a man of reason can suffer. The following pas-
sage (which I quote at length because of its importance)
shows the direction in which Godwin moved Gothicism by show-
ing Caleb moving from torment to questioning. Caleb, caught
in a hail storm as he wanders on a desolate heath, thinks:

Here I was, without comfort, without shelter,
and without food. There was not a particle of my
covering that was not as wet as if it had been
fished from the bottom of the ocean. My teeth
chattered. I trembled in every limb. My heart
burned with universal fury. At one moment I
stumbled and fell over some unseen obstacle. At
another I was turned back by an impediment I
could not overcome.

There was no strict connection between these
casual inconveniences and the persecution under
which I laboured. But my distempered thoughts
confounded them together. I cursed the whole sys-
tem of human existence. I said, "Here I am, an
outcast, destined to perish with hunger and cold.
All men desert me. All men hate me. I am driven
with mortal threats from the sources of comfort
and existence. Accursed world! that hates without
a cause, that overwhelms innocence with calamities
which ought to be spared even to guilt! Accursed
world! dead to every manly sympathy; with eyes of
horn and hearts of steel! Why do I consent to
live any longer? Why do I consent to drag on an
existence, which, if protracted, must be protracted
amidst the lairs of these human tigers?

(p. 292)

Driven by similar mental and physical agonies, Caleb later
wonders about Falkland's motives (p. 319) and means (p. 343),
about the morality of his own actions (pp. 370-371), and
about the nature of man (p. 324).

Arnold Kettle argues that Caleb Williams stops being
a purely didactic piece when Caleb, Godwin, and the reader
develop sympathy for the oppressor Falkland. In fact,
this sympathy is an important part of Godwin's moral. Godwin
does not want us to blame a villain for Caleb's persecution; that would be too easy. If Caleb's narrative, as he hopes, is to make tyrants tremble, we must be forced to blame society, and not a single anti-social villain, for what happens to it. Caleb Williams never stops being a moral fable; Godwin is true to his lesson throughout. But Godwin is also true to his characters, is willing to follow their processes of discovery and decay.

Godwin's second novel, St. Leon, is characterized by the same mixture of preaching and feeling. In Political Justice, Godwin denounced personal attachments as a corruption of objective morality; in St. Leon, he took the opportunity to modify his position (perhaps because of his successful marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft) by showing the humanizing effects of familial relationships. Pampered by his aristocratic mother who regarded him as the heir to a name of honor and fame, St. Leon grows up hungry for glory, riches, and pleasure. By gambling first his own estate and then his wife's dowry away, he falls into a trap his father-in-law warned him to avoid:

Do not . . . be drawn aside by ambition; do not be dazzled by the glitter of idle pomp and decoration, do not enter the remotest circle of the vortex of dissipation! Live in the midst of your family; cultivate domestic affection.

(p. 48)

Reduced to poverty and disgrace, St. Leon becomes insane; his saintly wife Margaret takes over and preserves the family
from ruin. While St. Leon raves in his bed, Margaret attempts to console him by reciting lessons on the evil of riches:

Alas, Reginald! it is, I fear, too true, that the splendour in which we lately lived has its basis in oppression; and that the superfluities of the rich are a boon extorted from the hunger and misery of the poor.

(p. 85)

Margaret, of course, is correct—she always is—but her reassurances cannot calm St. Leon, a man whose intellect, though formidable, is overruled by passion.

St. Leon suffers intensely before he accepts a stranger's gift of the philosopher's stone and an elixir of youth. In fact, the supernatural afflictions are only magical versions of his established pattern of self-isolating lust for wealth and power. St. Leon sees these gifts as aids to his philanthropy, tools to use in bettering the economic and social conditions of mankind. But his repeated failures to achieve his goals convince St. Leon that he is being pursued by an evil genius (p. 297) and that he has stumbled into a "cavern so wild and pathless, as almost to defy the utmost extent of human sagacity to explore its recesses" (p. 432). The evil genius, it becomes clear to everyone but the protagonist, is St. Leon himself; and the pathless cavern is his own conflicted mind.

St. Leon complains many times that reason is weaker than emotion, that men are not masters of their hearts. It seems clear that, though he is persecuted by the Inquisition, rejected by his righteous son Charles, and bullied by the
misanthropic Bethlem Gabor, St. Leon is his own worst foe. Still, what Godwin gives us in this book is richer than this summary suggests. We may abhor St. Leon's experiments with money, but we cannot only abhor a man whose agonies and questionings we so fully share.

Early in the book St. Leon rushes toward his house after a devastating hail storm. He sees "wounded bodies . . . intermingled with the brute destruction," and approaches the corpse of a girl who, face down, resembles his six-year-old daughter Louisa. When the child turns out not to be Louisa, St. Leon reflects on the strange vicissitudes of his life. In the prison of Bethlem Gabor, St. Leon waits in desperation for help:

I listened with eager attention to every sound, and my soul floated on the howling winds. In vain! nothing came of it; there was no alteration in the sound . . . I then turned away in anguish; I cursed; I stamped with my feet; I smote my forehead with my closed hand; I tore my hair. Anon another sound arrested my attention; it was a different howling; it seemed to be like a human voice; my fancy created to me the tread of a human foot. I listened with more intentness of soul than ever. It was again in vain!

No, no; he will not come! he will never come. Why should I agitate myself to no purpose? Let me lie down and die!—I reasoned with myself. Why should I wish to live?

(pp. 412-413)

As each failure leads to new torments, St. Leon wanders deeper into a "wilderness of conjecture." At various times he wonders if the philosopher's stone is a boon or a curse, whether eternal youth is humanizing or dehumanizing, and about the justice of a world in which philanthropists are tortured. Godwin escapes the reassuring theology of earlier Gothicists.
and forces his characters to speculate about morality by noting that "Though God is good there are dreadful misfortunes in the world" (p. 110), and that chaos often resumes his empire over the order and beauty of life (p. 90).

Godwin does not abandon the deterministic psychology of Political Justice and Caleb Williams in St. Leon. Through the account of St. Leon's youth and adolescence, and even more through the story of Bethlem Gabor's souring, Godwin insists on environmental causes of human depravity. But Godwin also insists on the individual experiences of characters who get caught in social snares. Thus, while St. Leon's life provides important lessons on the corrupting nature of political and economic power, on the importance of private relations, and on the false virtue of pride—it also introduces us to the "inscrutableness" of a character who finds mystery to be "the bane of his existence" (p. 394). Though Godwin forces us to see through some of St. Leon's supposed mysteries (many of which are mere rationalizations of his guilty desires), he also leads us through a lifetime of loneliness and toil, experimentation and failure, expectation and grief. And in the moments of launching out in hope or settling into despair Godwin creates a speculative mood which, more than his interest in political ideas, influenced the growth of Gothic fiction.

Those critics who see Godwin as the first writer to combine Gothicism with didacticism are clearly in error.
Although he used his fiction to indict governmental abuses (and Godwin saw government as inherently destructive), Godwin is traditional in his use of Gothic images of brutality (e.g., Inquisitors, feudal tyrants) to argue against corrupt authorities. The German rauberromane, from which the bandit section of Caleb Williams derives, traditionally offers a similar opportunity for social criticism, and, as I have shown, Walpole, Reeve, Radcliffe, and Lewis use moments of mystery or fear to reinforce coherence and inculcate virtue. Godwin's innovation—and it is amazing that it took thirty years to happen—is the subjectivity he brought to Gothic fiction as the inevitable, and in his case perhaps unconscious, result of first person narration.

Godwin sums up his major contribution to Gothic fiction in discussing the evolution of his thinking about narrative voice in Caleb Williams:

I began my narrative, as is the more usual way, in the third person. But I speedily became dissatisfied. I then assumed the first person, making the hero of my tale his own historian; and in this mode I have persisted in all my subsequent attempts at works of fiction. It was infinitely the best adapted, at least, to my vein of delineation, where the thing in which my imagination revelled the most freely, was the analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind.19

Godwin began by wanting to present a straightforward fictional version of his indictment of political injustice. He was led, however, through his imaginative sympathy with both victims and executioners into writing knottier books.
Paul Levine, in discussing Godwin's influence on Brockden Brown argues that for English Gothicists the source of terror is external; for Brown and the American Gothicists the source of terror is internal. Although this is true in broad outline, it ignores Godwin's movement in the direction of internal terror. For, whatever the source—personal obsession or tyrannical pursuit—when fear is presented by the frightened person, the clear boundaries between external and internal, between the devil without and the devil within, boundaries so clearly marked in earlier Gothic works—begin to blur. It may be that Brown was the first writer to smash these distinctions; but it is also true that Brown and the later English Gothicists were indebted to William Godwin for more than a few stock characters and situations.

Charles R. Maturin's Gothic Calvinism

Charles R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is often considered a high point in the English Gothic movement. A rambling, episodic narrative, Maturin's masterpiece owes much to the horror of Monk Lewis and to the anguish which Godwin cultivated by allowing sufferers to speak for themselves. The novel concerns a man who agrees to do the devil's work in exchange for a long life and some supernatural powers, assured that he will not have to go to Hell if he can find anyone willing to make a similar deal and take his place. In the figure of the tormented and tormenting wanderer and in a
host of other characters who are forced to endure extreme pain, Maturin explores the limits of human fortitude. The book's most interesting moments are those which occur when characters are driven beyond desperation to despair, when all social supports have been removed and only spiritual power can help. For, though Rev. Maturin uses his collection of tales to argue for a Calvinist view of salvation, it is in those moments when characters are most tempted that the novel is most compelling.

Edgar Allan Poe (who was generally willing to bite a feeding hand) mocked *Melmoth* for its improbable view of human nature by referring to the wanderer as laboring "indefatigably through three octavo volumes, to accomplish the destruction of one or two souls, while any common devil would have demolished one or two thousand." What Poe does not note is that Melmoth is no ordinary devil, but a devil trapped in a predestinarian universe. Poe's great concern in stories like "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" is not whether men succumb to temptation, but how they account for their moral weakness after the fact. In contrast, the idea for Maturin's novel grew out of a comment in one of his sermons:

At this moment is there one of us present, however we may have departed from the Lord, disobeyed his will, and disregarded his word--is there one of us who would, at this moment, accept all that man could bestow, or earth afford, to resign the hope of his salvation?--No, there is not one--not such a fool on earth, were the enemy of mankind to traverse it with the offer!23
To illustrate this idea Maturin must set up the most extreme examples, must reduce comparatively innocent characters to abject poverty and sorrow, and then introduce into their lives the taunting Melmoth. And, though in so exposing his good characters to harm Maturin explores the depths of the human mind, he offers finally a theological account of the resistance to temptation that Poe found so incredible. The Bible asks, who would sell his own soul to gain the world. To a Calvinist minister the question, except in a figurative sense, is absurd because redemption and salvation are eternally decreed. No man sells or saves his own soul in a Calvinist universe. Melmoth is the saddest sufferer of them all in the end. Tricked into the devil's bargain of selling something already lost, he spends his long life attempting the impossible.

In the course of that life Melmoth develops little respect for his fellow man. He sees enough of human folly to despise corrupt churches, governments, and individuals. On first glance it seems strange that Melmoth does not, through his repeated failure to seduce the virtuous, develop some admiration for the strength of his intended victims. The cynicism and ironic laughter which Baudelaire so delighted in are, perhaps, the expression of Melmoth's lack of faith in humanity, or they may be his only defense against a growing awareness that every saved soul he fails to capture affirms both the power of God and the impossibility of succeeding in doing the devil's work. Slowly the wanderer
realizes that he is resisting an irresistible "Power in whose eye pyramids, palaces, and the worms whose toil has formed them, and the worms who toil out their existence under their shadow or their pressure, are perhaps all alike contemptible ..." (p. 30).

The book begins in mystery. Young Melmoth, a descendant of the wanderer, returns from college to the house of his dying uncle (still another of the villain's descendants) on the Irish coast. The uncle raves about the impossibly long life of the ancestor whose portrait he owns. Moreover, before dying, the uncle implores his nephew to destroy a frightening manuscript. At first young Melmoth cannot accept his uncle's claim about the man in the portrait. But when the uncle dies a man who looks like the figure in the portrait appears; and the resemblance startles and interests the student. To satisfy his curiosity, young Melmoth interrogates the housekeeper and learns that his uncle was neither superstitious nor deranged. Moreover, the student pursues his inquiry by reading the old manuscript. Through these actions, young Melmoth attempts to solve a mystery, to move from questions about his ancestor to answers.

The story in the manuscript of John Stanton, a 17th century English man who becomes obsessed with the wanderer, combines horror with confusion by blurring the distinction between sanity and insanity. Stanton first encounters Melmoth in Spain where the wanderer is terrorizing a wedding
party. A priest named Father Olavida who has been brought in to exorcise the fiend begins by asking questions which fascinate Stanton, young Melmoth, and the reader:

"Who is among us?—Who— I cannot utter a blessing while he is here. I cannot feel one. Where he treads, the earth is parched!—Where he breathes, the air is fire!—Where he feeds, the food is poison!—Where he turns, his glance is lightning!—Who is among us?—Who?"

(p. 34)

Before he can answer his own question, or, rather, in the very act of answering, crying "I know him . . . He is--he is----" Father Olavida is struck dead. Later that night the newlyweds are found dead by the father of the bride who never recovers his sanity after the shock.

For Stanton these mysteries, associated with a strange Englishman, become matters of monomaniacal interest. Stanton follows every clue about the nature of the wanderer. Later, back in England, the pursuer is pursued, as Melmoth meets Stanton in a theatre and promises to meet him again in a madhouse. True to this prediction, an unscrupulous relative has Stanton committed, and the wanderer who, as he ironically says, never deserts his friends in misfortune, haunts the despairing Stanton in his asylum cell. In the madhouse Stanton first resists the insanity around him by trying to preserve his health and intellect. But, finally, he is worn down by his fellow inmates, and spends his days sighing: "He began at times to listen with sullen and horrible pleasure to the cries of his miserable companions. He became squalid, listless,
torpid, and disgusting in his appearance" (p. 54). At this point, preceded by eerie music, Melmoth enters and tortures Stanton by suggesting the obvious: that his stay in the madhouse will drive Stanton mad.

All humanity will be extinguished in you. The ravings of these wretches will become at once your sport and your torture. You will watch for the sounds, to mock them with the grimaces and bellowings of a fiend. The mind has power of accommodating itself to its situation, that you will experience in its most frightful and deplorable efficacy. . . . You will say "I know I can never escape, and the preservation of my faculties is the only aggravation to my sufferings. I have all their miseries—I have none of their consolations. They laugh,—I hear them; would I could laugh like them." You will try, and the very effort will be an invocation to the demon of insanity to come and take full possession of you from that moment for ever.

(pp. 56-57, Maturin's italics)

Melmoth remains a mystery for Stanton even after these meetings. Stanton wonders whether his tormentor was "an insane illusion." Perhaps Stanton, after his release, spends his life tracking down the wanderer just to assure himself of his own sanity.

By the end of Stanton's narrative we know, in broad outline, what Melmoth offers his intended victims and how he hopes to lure them to their doom. Waiting until they are at a low ebb of strength and hope, Melmoth paints a horrifying picture of his victims' situations and offers to save them in exchange for an appalling repayment. When Stanton screams "Begone, monster, demon!" in response to his tormentor's whispered offer, we realize that a devil's bargain has been

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
proposed. But, if the original mysteries of Melmoth's identity and powers have been cleared up, new and more important mysteries have unfolded. We are told that in the madhouse Stanton is so reduced that neither his physical nor mental powers can resist the enemy (p. 55). What saves Stanton? We are shown a demon whose utmost exertions (which are impressive) fail, whose only emotion is loathing, and whose characteristic utterance is self-conscious laughter. It is easy to see that Stanton is redeemed, Melmoth damned; but Maturin goes beyond this facile theology by showing what it is like to be saved in spite of yourself, and what it is like to project the hell of your own mind onto the external world.

When he finishes reading Stanton's narrative, young Melmoth burns it along with the portrait, but both leave a feeling of dread in his mind. He sleeps fitfully and is awakened by his travelling ancestor who whispers, "You have burned me, then; but those are flames I can survive. --I am alive, --I am beside you" (p. 60). The night's experiences leave young Melmoth in a "mingled state of stupor and excitement," suspended between a rational belief that his strange perceptions were dreams and a dread of their reality. Before long, however, with the arrival of another of the wanderer's victims, Alonzo Moncada, young Melmoth's doubts are resolved.

By telling several stories about the wanderer, Moncada clears up doubts raised by Stanton's manuscript. Like Stanton, Moncada is tempted by Melmoth to become an agent of the devil.
in exchange for power and release from pain. Like Stanton, Moncada is a fit victim because he has suffered, and, like Stanton, Moncada in suffering is pushed to the limits of human endurance. In stripping Moncada of his rational faculties and social defenses, Maturin offers a fascinating psychological study.

Alonzo Moncada is the illegitimate son of an aristocratic Spanish couple. Raised in secrecy, Moncada is forced into a monastery when he comes of age. It is a part of Maturin's purpose to show monastic life not as benevolent and pious, but as sadistic, competitive, and corrupt. In his first weeks in the monastery, Moncada sees monks punished by the Superior for no good reason. A young monk who protests this arbitrary power is stripped naked and whipped to death in the corridor outside Alonzo's cell. When he intervenes to help the victim, Moncada becomes the new subject of the Superior's tyranny. And when Moncada tries to be released from his vows, that tyranny strains itself to the utmost ingenuity in developing methods of inflicting anguish. First, in the tradition of Lewis' Agnes, Moncada is locked in a dark dungeon filled with lizards:

The reptiles, who filled the hole into which I had been thrust, gave me opportunity for a kind of constant, miserable, ridiculous hostility. ... I tried to terrify them with my voice, to arm myself against them by the help of my mat; but above all my anxiety was ceaseless to defend my bread from their loathsome incursions, and my pitcher of water from their dropping into it.

(p. 146)
But these physical trials are trivial in comparison to the mental stress. During his incarceration Alonzo, in desperation, wishes he were insane or inanimate. Later, after his appeal for release is rejected, Moncada is deluded into thinking he can escape with the help of another monk (a parricide who is actually following the Superior's instructions). In the catacombs under the monastery Moncada and the cynical parricide are forced to wait two days and two nights. Listening to the madman's bitter raving is Moncada's greatest trial; this, more than any other torture, makes him wish he had no mind.

One of the stories the parricide tells contains both Maturin's didactic thesis and his speculative investigation. At the height of his delirium, the evil monk tells the tale of a young man who, when forced to become a monk, brings his sweetheart disguised as another novice with him. The two lovers are discovered making love and are confined together in a cell to die. So far the episode is very close to similar events in The Monk, but Maturin's treatment of these actions is radically different from Lewis'. Lewis' Agnes survives her ordeal and emerges from her dungeon praising God and ready to begin her life with Raymond. Maturin's lovers are reduced to an insane animalistic desperation and slowly murdered. At first the lovers comfort, but soon they avoid, each other. In the end they move from loathing to madness, to death, as the young man feasts on his "lover's" shoulder (p. 213).
The parricide telling this story draws only a part of Maturin's point from it:

I laugh at all mankind . . . at human passions, and human cares,--vice and virtue, religion and impiety . . . One physical want, one severe and abrupt lesson from the tintless and shrivelled lip of necessity is worth all the logic of philosophers.7

(p. 213)

Maturin's theological point is obvious here as it is in each of his separate tales: man is nothing, his highest aspirations, his most profound loyalties and affections are despicable; God is all. The parricide's conclusion (which is like Melmoth's) that man's lowness justifies devil worship and cynicism is, for Maturin, an unacceptable assertion of pride.

Moncada's escape, like Stanton's release from the asylum, is not the reward paid to his perseverance or virtue. It is as accidental, as arbitrary, as election in a Calvinist universe. The lesson Alonzo carries with him to Ireland is radically anti-Catholic. In discussing monastic penance and Catholic confession, Moncada remarks: "if men were taught to look to the one great Sacrifice, would they be so ready to believe that their own or those of others, could ever be accepted as a commutation of it?" (p. 147, Maturin's italics).

The strongest feeling Moncada's experience leaves us with is of the frailty of the human mind, the shallowness of reason, and the depth of nightmare chaos below. His Calvinist conviction leads Maturin, like his parricide, to see beneath man's thin veneer of order, logic, and sentiment, a cauldron of vicious passion.
The story of Guzman's family allows Maturin to move from the collapse of isolated individuals to the collapse of a group of loving people. Insofar as it takes place in Spain, which Moncada calls one big monastery, this tale re-states Maturin's anti-Catholic, anti-authoritarian thesis. Unscrupulous priests alienate the family from their rich relative Guzman, and falsify the latter's will in an effort to steal the estate. When the family is reduced to poverty and famine, they become fitting victims for the wanderer, fitting examples of Maturin's theology, and fitting subjects of psychological study.

The tale of the Indian goddess Immalee is Maturin's most probing examination of human virtue and vice. A lush Romantic narrative, this story offers an anti-Rousseauian view of Eden and the natural man (in this case, a woman). Having grown up on a paradisiacal island, Immalee runs wild like a young faun, is ignorant of sexuality, and a stranger to fear and pain. She is the tabula rasa of Locke, the noble savage of Rousseau, Eve without Adam and the serpent. Ever on the look out for victims among the wrecks and wretches of humanity, Melmoth finds Immalee, and having found her becomes both her husband and her tempter. In the strange marriage of human devil and human angel, Maturin restates his Calvinist point and explores the limitations of reason in understanding and improving life.

Maturin needs the tale of the Indian to emphasize the innate depravity of man. It is possible to see the lovers'
hostility in the parricide's tale or the squabbling of Walburg and his father over food in the story of Guzman's family as the results of peculiar circumstances. Perhaps the monks who torture Moncada were deprived of proper instruction in morality. Only in Immalee do we have a character who falls in love with the incarnation of evil not through conditioning but through natural tendency.

When Immalee is transplanted to Spain and reunited with her parents in what must be the single most improbable set of events in any work of fiction, she becomes a Catholic and assumes the name Isadora. But this transformation leaves her still loving Melmoth, still willing to forsake everything and elope with him. Her elopement is told in the spirit of Lewis' "The Water King" and Anne of Swansea's "The Unknown! or The Knight of the Blood-Red Plume." It is a horror Gothic wedding performed in a graveyard by a dead priest. And her decision to elope ultimately has tragic consequences, including the death of her brother who dies defending her honor and her own incarceration during the terminal stage of her pregnancy in Inquisitorial dungeons. In the hands of the Inquisitors Isadora suffers on the rack and watches her infant die slowly of malnutrition. Like all the other subjects of Melmoth's seductions, Isadora finds the strength in the end to resist him. She has seen the brutality of man, the hypocrisy of Catholicism, and she is ready to die. Her strength in extreme torment is, as she notes, a gift of God's:
"Call upon God, daughter!" said the priest, applying the crucifix to her cold lips. "I loved his religion," said the penitent, kissing it devoutly, "I loved it before I knew it, and God must have been my teacher, for I had no other! . . . Oh that I had loved none but God--how profound would have been my peace--how glorious my departure."

(p. 533)

Why Isadora/Immalee loves also he who would destroy her is a mystery to the end.

An equal mystery is that of Melmoth's relation to Immalee; in the tale of the Indian, Maturin lets us for once into the mind of the wanderer. Here only do we see any wavering, any crack in the fiend's rigid misanthropy and cynicism. When Immalee gives him a rose, Melmoth feels a lingering trace of humanity near his heart; a moment later he tears the flower from his bosom. In a moment of compassion--a moment as precious as Capt. Ahab's tear--Melmoth advises Immalee to "hate me, for I hate you--I hate all things that live--all things that are dead--I am myself hated and hateful." (p. 318).

When Immalee protests that he is not hated by her, the wanderer weeps to learn that a human being can love even him. But the very next moment Melmoth withdraws into his usual teeth grinding and convulsive laughter. Just as God redeems the intended victims, so Satan appears to recall the wanderer to his one great task. And once Satan vanishes, Immalee sees no sign of her lover's kindness:

When she looked up again, all trace of human emotion was gone from his expression. The dry and burning eye of despair that he fixed on her, seemed never to have owned a tear . . . amid the
intense and increasing heat of an atmosphere that appeared on fire, his touch was as cold as the dead.

(p. 319)

Locked in a mad embrace, a man who destroys what he loves and a woman who loves what will destroy her act out a drama of dark passions and obsessive drives decreed from eternity. Maturin's greatest picture of the irresistible nature of salvation and damnation is also his greatest exposure of man's weakness. For Maturin Calvinist theology is compatible with a psychology of chaos. In order for human life to be irrelevant as a factor in achieving salvation, that life must be confused, irrational, and, for itself, worthless.

V. M. S. Kennedy notes the shifting dream emphasis of the novel, and Edith Birkhead believes Melmoth is memory haunting because of Maturin's faculty for "painting wild pictures of horror." My own view does not conflict with this by now accepted way of reading the book, nor does the theology of Melmoth detract from its nightmarish feeling. The very repetitiveness of the different stories, designed to reinforce a message, also intensifies the frustration and despair. Once a plotline starts to move, it moves downward from horror to desperation to insanity. Moncada is worse off as an adolescent than he was as a boy, and once he is trapped in the monastery his life gets even worse. The direction of each of the sub-plots, like that of the Raymond and Agnes sub-plot in The Monk (to which Maturin, with a self-consciousness typical of Gothic writers, refers in the opening pages of
Melmoth), is deeper into confinement, isolation, and mind-collapsing horror. At the end, after the wanderer has been rejected, his victims recover some vestige of their former liberty and happiness. Or do they? Stanton falls prey to "a species of insanity." He hunts Melmoth with a "burning desire" to behold him once again, a hope that becomes the "necessary condition of his existence" (p. 58). Walberg has watched his once loving family reduced to mistrust and envy, has been forced to contemplate murdering his children, and has heard his father rave about wanting to die. Moncada has lost his brother and has fled his native country an outcast, pursued even on the sea by the seductive fiend. Each of his intended victims is cut off from former attachments, set adrift in a hostile world, forced to become wanderers themselves. Melmoth's greatest agony is his incapacity to love. A servant of the devil, he must sacrifice any positive impulse he may feel to his master; and, as Melmoth tells Immalee's father, all men, left to their own devices, would serve Satan. Like Lewis' Agnes and Antonia, Stanton, Moncada, Immalee, and Walberg can take some comfort in knowing they have seen the worst this world can inflict on them and that their prospects in the next world are better. It is the horror of this world -- a world in which men are merely worms to an all-governing power--which makes of Maturin's theological vision a Gothic nightmare.

Melmoth is correctly considered the ultimate extension of Lewis' horror Gothicism. In comparison to Maturin's dark

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
masterpiece, however, The Monk seems almost optimistic in its assessment of human dignity and divine mercy. In the moral scheme of The Monk, human actions make a difference; though most of the characters are corrupt and all are frail, some strive for and a few live virtuous lives. It is Maturin's sense of the irrelevance of human efforts, the weakness of the human mind, that makes Melmoth one of the most horrifying books ever written. Perhaps only a Calvinist, convinced that all men qualify from birth for damnation, can create a world that is only in appearance and at some times different than hell.

James Hogg's Justified Sinner:

The Devil Within and the Devil Without

James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) is, like Maturin's Melmoth, fascinating for its portrayal of perversity, innovative in narrative technique, and traditional in thematic didacticism. Like Melmoth, Justified Sinner is a story of devil worship and human weakness, of spiritual pride and the inevitable fall. Like Maturin, Hogg divides his novel into parts and uses different narrators to approach the same characters and events from different perspectives. But, where Maturin writes in defense of Calvinism, Hogg's novel centers on an irony that associates extreme predestinarianism with Satan.

There are two narrators in Justified Sinner: the sinner himself, Robert Wringham, and a later day editor. In the
first of the three parts, the contemporary (circa 1824) editor summarizes the external evidence surrounding the deaths of George Colwan (laird of Dalcastle), his estranged wife, and his son George. In the second part, the "justified" murderer retells the story, with some additions, from his own highly distorted viewpoint. And, in the final section, the editor returns to explain how he discovered the second part (i.e., the sinner's narrative) in the clothing of a century old corpse. The first part is interesting because it presents a vivid image of factional disputes in late 17th and early 18th century Scotland. The third part is interesting because, in attempting to explain what has preceded it, it raises questions central to the development of Gothic fiction. But the second part, the sinner's memoirs, is, perhaps, of greatest interest to this study because it combines psychological complexities with the defense of a theological position.

Part Two of Justified Sinner is a Gothic bildungsroman, the growth into decadent, deluded young manhood of Robert Wringham Colwan. The illegitimate offspring of two "pious" Calvinists, Robert is puffed up with pride from birth. His first revealing exploit is his persecution of Old Barnet, the honest beadle of his father's church. Robert hates Barnet because the old man points out the boy's many faults. So, to rid himself of this moral censor, Robert tells his father calumniatory lies about Barnet. When his father fires the
old man, Robert delights in his triumph, falsely reassuring himself that he is witnessing the "victory of righteousness over error" (p. 95). Robert continues his vicious career by plotting the ruin of his classmate M'Gill. Since M'Gill is smarter than me, he must be "a very wicked boy," thinks Robert, who goes on to persecute his competitor and drive him out of school.

Robert, then, is ripe for the devil, a "justified sinner" from childhood. Hogg uses this term ironically: Robert is justified in the sense that he sees his evil acts as expressions of divine will and in the sense that he has passed through justification and sanctification into the certainty of his status as one of the elect. The devil, Gil-Martin, when he appears, plays on the ambiguities of this doctrine by arguing that Robert's good and evil acts cannot "in the smallest degree" influence God's predestined will. What makes him a prize for Satan and a fascinating character is Robert's bizarre point of view. Robert commits the worst crimes—fratricide, matricide, seduction, betrayal—without losing faith in his own innocence. Robert is blinded by his refusal to see the possibility that the devil would travel half the globe to obtain the soul of a sanctified sinner. As he sinks deeper into sin, Robert becomes more confused until he comes to see his whole life as an incomprehensible riddle.

The experience of reading Justified Sinner is not much like trying to solve a riddle, however. At different points
in the book various characters are confused about what they see or hear. George Colwan, persecuted by his brother and Gil-Martin, sees first a demon image in the sky and then his brother on the ground. For a moment George is said to be "confounded between the shadow and the substance" (p. 40). When Bell Calvert sees two identical men, she questions the accuracy of her perception. Throughout the book Robert, sinking deeper into a "chaos of confusion," wonders what Gil-Martin is, angel, devil, or man. But Hogg consciously steers his readers away from uncertainty and confusion. George Colwan is plagued by a demon. Bell Calvert, as she comes to see, has correctly perceived a supernatural event and must depend on her senses. And Robert, the victim of his own false assumptions and dubious logic, is most easily understood in those moments when he is most obviously in error.

When he first meets Gil-Martin on the day of his experience of saving grace, Robert begins a "series of adventures" which he believes will "puzzle the world" (p. 106). Robert's first deduction on seeing his exact double is that his "guardian angel" is appearing at this crucial moment in his spiritual life. Later Gil-Martin toys with Robert by telling him the truth in a deceitful manner. He says, for example, that Gil-Martin is not his "Christian name," that he has no parents save one whom he does not acknowledge (p. 118), that he has more servants than he can count, that he has but "one great aim in the world" (p. 122), and that all his European subjects
believe they are Christians (p. 123). "Who could doubt, after this," asks Robert, "that he was the Czar of Russia?" (p. 123). But Robert's rhetorical question places him at a distance from the reader who easily understands that all of Gil-Martin's assertions identify him as the lord of hell.26 When Robert is not prosecuted for the murder of his brother George, the sinner asks, "How could I doubt, after this, that the hand of Heaven was aiding and abetting?" (p. 156). And, when a messenger from heaven warns Robert to proceed no further in evil action, the devil convinces the sinner that heaven is upset because murder has been delayed. The reader understands the hellish sounds that close in on Robert, though he can in "nowise account" for them. We see in the sinner's entrapment in a weaver's loom the perfect symbol of his spiritual demise:

My feet had slipped down through the double warpings of a web, and not being able to reach the ground with them (there being a small pit below) I rode upon a number of yielding threads, and, there being nothing else I could reach, to extricate myself was impossible. I was utterly powerless; and, besides, the yarn and cords hurt me very much.

(p. 195)

In striving falsely for the light of salvation, he falls into the cutting "intricacies" of a web of doom.

The fixed moral, theological, and epistemological frameworks of Justified Sinner are seen in the many consistent reactions of other characters to Robert and Gil-Martin. When Robert's mother sees her son after his first meeting with Gil-Martin, she deduces from his changed manner that "the
enemy of salvation" has been busy with her boy. Only Robert's assurance that the stranger is a strict Calvinist convinces Robert's parents of his friend's virtue. Mr. Blanchard, a moderate Calvinist whom Robert later murders, warns young Wrimingham to avoid Gil-Martin because "your creed and his carries damnation on the very front of it" (p. 120). Both Mrs. Logan and Bell Calvert, who join together to track down the killer of George Colwan, come to see that Robert has degenerated into a demon and that Gil-Martin is "adept in wickedness" (pp. 82-83). Even a servant sees through Robert's hypocrisy and knows the truth of his master's life: "the deil often . . . takes your ain shape, or else enters into you, and then you turn a deil yoursel" (p. 177).

*Justified Sinner*, with all its quirks and oddities, needs these objective points of view to allow it to use its far fetched plot to advance a thesis. The theological argument of the book, as Douglas S. Mack notes,\(^27\) is an attack on "extreme Calvinism comparable to Burns' *Holy Willie's Prayer.*" A moderate Calvinist himself, Hogg rejected what he saw as a *reductio ad absurdum* of his theology. The Wringhams --who are variously described as bigots, enthusiasts, and Pharisees--believe that good works are neither necessary nor sufficient to achieve salvation. Robert and Gil-Martin go one step further by indulging in evil as an expression of the faith in God's power. Calvinist theologians rejected this argument (calling it "supralapsarianism") as a heresy for
two reasons: (1) no man can know with perfect certainty that he or any other specific person is among the elect, and (2) therefore it is necessary for the saints (those who have some reason to believe they are redeemed) to persevere in virtuous behavior and thought. A good Calvinist is virtuous not because his virtue will save him, but because his virtue will help him believe he is saved. As Hogg, in his own voice, says in Part One:

But the ways of heaven are altogether inscrutable, and soar as far above and beyond the works and comprehensions of man as the sun, flaming in majesty, is above the tiny boy's evening rocket. It is the controller of Nature alone that can bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. Who is he that causeth the mole, from his secret path of darkness, to throw up the gem, the gold, and the precious ore? The same that from the mouths of babes and sucklings can extract the perfection of praise, and who can make the most abject of his creatures instrumental in bringing the most hidden truths to light.

(p. 52)

Hogg's attack on extreme Calvinism is clear in his portrayal of the Rev. Wringham, the sinner's stern but sinful, adulterous father. Robert Wringham's conception is described humorously as occurring during "the sweet spiritual converse" of a religious argument in "the heat of zeal." When he learns that his son is running around with a mysterious stranger, Rev. Wringham is alarmed. The reverend knows that "one of the Devil's most profound wiles" (p. 110) is to appear as an angel, but he and young Robert are fooled by their conviction that the devil could never appear as a Calvinist angel. The better acquainted Rev. Wringham becomes with Gil-Martin, the
better the two get along because "their religious principles tallied in every point, and their conversation was interesting, serious, and sublime" (p. 167).

The heavy-handed irony characterizing the devil's relations with these devout Calvinists is a reflection of Hogg's thesis. As Louis Simpson and Douglas S. Mack suggest, Hogg in treating this question was not discussing a problem very far removed in time from the Scotland of 1824. Moreover, in what is probably the best commentary on *Justified Sinner*, David Eggenschwiler suggests that Hogg's repudiation of extreme Calvinism is a part of a larger rejection of all extreme divisions (between, for example, body and spirit) in human experience. According to Eggenschwiler, Hogg supports and praises those characters who forgive opponents and try to find connections between disparate ideas and feelings, and condemns characters who can only tolerate one approach to life. In this view, Hogg is arguing for a traditional Romantic principle, that a synthesis of matter and spirit is redemptive.

Critics who (quite properly) emphasize the psychological themes of *Justified Sinner*, for example, Robert M. Adams and Andre Gide, do not note that Hogg's didacticism is a part of his debt to English Gothicism. Adams argues that *Justified Sinner* is close to the Gothic school in its "blood-and-thunder rhetoric" and its theme of diabolic possession, but sees Hogg's central concern in the book as being a quite modern analysis.
of "a schizoid hero . . . grasped by an idea as powerfully as by the devil himself." In his aftermath to the novel, Andre Gide argues that the book is "admissable, even by unbelievers," that is, by those who think the devil so much nonsense, on the ground of its profound psychological teaching (p. 237). Whatever Hogg teaches us about the divided consciousness of our moral life, however, grows directly out of his roots in English Gothicism, and is not a redeeming feature of a book otherwise mired in that tradition.

Hogg's treatment of the divided mind springs from his rejection of Calvinism. Young Robert offers a simplistic view of the nature of man: everything the elect do is good; everything the unredeemed do is evil. All men simply carry out God's preordained will. Hogg suggests that the mind of man is too complex for such straightforward moral concepts to be valid, that each of us is a divided battle field on which real (and not, as Gide suggests, metaphoric) angels and devils fight for control.

The novel is filled with divided minds and with characters who see their doubles stand before them. George Colwan, the honest but doomed half brother of Robert, sees his brother as a malignant shadow (p. 21). Gil-Martin is Robert's constant companion, the embodiment of the worst part of Robert's mind. And Robert is often convinced that he is "two people." The novel is most modern in those passages which show Robert tortured by his doubleness:
The most perverse part of it was that I rarely conceived myself to be any of the two persons. I thought for the most part that my companion was one of them, and my brother the other; and I found that, to be obliged to speak and answer in the character of another man, was a most awkward business in the long run.

I began to be sick at times of my existence. I had heart-burnings, longings, and yearnings that would not be satisfied; and I seemed hardly to be an accountable creature; being thus in the habit of executing transactions of the utmost moment without being sensible that I did them. I was a being incomprehensible to myself.

To be in a state of consciousness and unconsciousness, at the same time, in the same body and same spirit, was impossible. I was under the greatest anxiety, dreading some change would take place momentarily in my nature.

However clinically valid this may sound to the modern reader, Hogg's point is to show that Robert's double is his lust for evil, that is, his inner Satan. In this way Robert, the most divided character in the book, as a servant says, goes "side by side with the devil." Hogg is in the mainstream of post-Godwinian English Gothicism because he does the reverse of what Gide sees him doing. Hogg does not use the supernatural to body forth the psychological, as, for example, Henry James does in "The Turn of the Screw." Rather, Hogg uses fascinatingly disturbed characters to advance a theological argument. There is nothing wrong with a modern reader scorning what Adams calls the Gothic supernaturalism, the "chill casters and flesh crawlers" (p. xii) of the book, and concentrating on the more "realistic" portrayal of a mind at war with itself. Such a reader is simply expressing his bias against
religious and for "scientific" ideas. This hypothetical reader, however, will miss a great delight of the book: the pleasure of seeing a pompous, proud fanatic falling deeper into sin and doom through his own unconscious will to power and lust. Adams' view that Hogg's resolution of having the villain kill himself is not "what's these days called a 'generally viable' solution" says more about Adams than about Hogg. Perhaps Adams would prefer a program of therapy followed by a long rest at a sanatorium. Hogg places his sinner in the established tradition of Schedoni and Ambrosio, villains who embrace death and eternal torment as the crowning crime of their deluded lives.

Hogg has been called a Scots Dostoevsky and has been associated with Poe for his use of an insane narrator. It is true that Hogg studies insanity, but he stops far short of the total immersion in subjective experience which Poe embraces. For Poe the narrator of a Gothic tale is the only reality; for example, we know only so much about Ligeia's corpse as her opiated widower records. But for Hogg the narrator offers only one—and that one a clearly limited—vision of his experience. Robert Wringham finds his life mysterious and alarming. The reader, put at a distance from the sinner by the testimony of other characters and by the obvious irony of his treating the devil as a god, is offered a theological explanation of the mystery. This theological explanation—the hallmark of much English Gothic fiction—does not, however,
destroy or even conflict with the psychological complexity and ambiguity of Hogg's work. We know where the sinner goes after he dies, but we remain intrigued by how he got there.

What makes *Justified Sinner* an interesting book in terms of the development of Gothic fiction is that after it steeps us in the historical verities of Part One and the supernatural horrors of Part Two, it asks us to regard the characters and events discussed in several ways. In Part Three, Hogg appears as a character, the original discoverer of young Wringham's corpse. The fictional editor scorns Hogg's claim that the body was fresh in its one hundred year old grave and doubts the sanity of the author of Part II, arguing, as ingeniously as any Poe narrator, that the author was:

not only the greatest fool, but also the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity; or, that he was a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness that he believed himself the very object whom he had been describing.

(p. 230)

For a moment we glimpse a world of broken mirrors reflecting images so twisted they can lead only to speculation.

Enthusiasts of Gothic fiction have in recent years suggested that the Gothic novel was from the start devoted to the ambiguous, the unconscious, the subjective sides of human experience. This view fails to note the development of English Gothicism which has been traced in the last two chapters. Critics who argue that Godwin was the first didactic Gothicist, or that Maturin's originality was his combination of Gothic

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
fiction and ideas fail to see that Gothic writers from the start wrote novels of ideas. If the English Gothic novel began as an assertion of emotional values in the face of Augustan rationalism, it also accepted the conventional 18th century judgment that good fiction is didactic. Like the sentimental novel, early English Gothic fiction uses its emotional intensities to argue for (usually conventional) ideas. Nevertheless, as the Gothic movement matured and steeped itself in excesses of violence and depravity, as it evolved with Lewis and Godwin to first person narration and deeply felt anguish, and with Hogg and Maturin to an exploration of insanity and desperation, it also moved toward speculation about man's relation to social order, to other men, to himself, and to the universe. The inclusion of the three novelists discussed in this chapter is important because their work, divided between didacticism and speculation, helps correct an inference suggested by works like Otranto and "The Fall of the House of Usher." The two modes I have defined are not in any way mutually exclusive, and most Gothic works are a subtle blending of inquiry and assertion.

With the exception of Wuthering Heights, written over 80 years after Otranto, later 19th century English Gothicists remained at least in part loyal to their didactic forebears. Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus (1818) by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, for example, presents both a compelling study of self-destructive ambition and an emphatic
statement on the limits of human power. Charlotte Bronte's 
Jane Eyre (1847), by offering a rational explanation of the 
strange goings on in the attic and of Rochester's erratic 
behavior, affirms both the order of the universe and the 
validity of Jane's controlled and highly moral philosophy of 
life. Dickens, as M. L. Allen argues, uses images of suffer­
ing to advance, in the spirit of Godwin, points of social 
criticism. And Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897), the last great 
product of the 19th century Gothic tradition in Britain, is 
suspended, like Melmoth, between the seemingly incoherent 
speculations of Jonathan Harker and the clear judgments--
medical, mythic, and theological--of Dr. Van Helsing.

This study now moves to a consideration of the American 
Gothic tradition which in large part is speculative from the 
outset, but it is essential to see the trans-Atlantic influ­
ences at work. Deeply read in Godwin, Brockden Brown wrote 
his hectic fiction in a country far less rooted in established 
ideas, institutions, and relations. Perhaps because Brown 
lived in years of social experiment, social flexibility, and 
social questioning, he, and later Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, 
could use their Gothic fiction not to attack or support but 
to question the validity of established ways of seeing, acting, 
and thinking. Or perhaps it was because Gothic fiction had 
evolved for over thirty years in Britain to the point at which 
the questions it raised seemed more interesting, more vital, 
than the explanations it offered.
CHAPTER IV

THE PURSUIT OF CERTAINTY:
CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC TRADITION

False Deductions and Unsatisfactory Explanations

The difference between didactic and speculative Gothic fiction is like the difference between false deductions and unsatisfactory explanations. In the world of didactic Gothic fiction, characters, confronted with the unusual or mysterious, try to account for what they are perceiving. Think of Walpole's Manfred at the opening of Chapter Five of Otranto, or of Emily and the famous black veil. Or think of poor Raymond waiting for Agnes to emerge from the castle of Linden­berg disguised as the bleeding nun. Out comes a veiled woman in the exact outfit he had been expecting. Ah, he deduces, my love is appearing to keep our love tryst, and he whispers into her ear the fatal poem he has composed for the occasion: "Agnes, Agnes, thou art mine, etc., etc." At this point the reader too believes Raymond has been reunited with his love. But within a few pages we realize that Raymond's deduction was faulty, that his companion for the coach ride is, in fact, the ghost herself. And, in due course, we learn why the
bleeding nun wants to haunt Raymond and why he is the best person to badger into submission to her will. However improbable this episode may be, it points to the existence of an objective reality within the book, a reality that includes ghosts. Raymond is wrong because, unknown to him, the castle really is haunted. In order for his deduction to be clearly in error, some other view must be correct. And the reader, if he is to participate in the adventure at all and appreciate its lessons, must temporarily accept the reality of the work.

In speculative Gothic fiction, the mysteries inspire many unsatisfactory, but few false, deductions and explanations. For whatever reasons, an explanation is unsatisfactory whether it might ultimately be true or false, if it fails to convince those who hear or, in the case of readers, overhear it. When a variety of unsatisfactory explanations are offered, the result is that characters and readers alike are left with a feeling that the mysteries under discussion have raised important, if difficult, questions. When Clara Wieland wonders what Carwin's strange power is, when a Poe narrator tries to account for the astounding resemblance between his dead wife and rapidly growing daughter, when Irving's German student raves about his nocturnal affair, when Hawthorne questions whether the bosom serpent is real or imagined, and when Ishmael studies the whale, we are presented with a sequence of alternative perspectives, partial answers which, in the end, cannot satisfactorily answer key questions. Mystery, and not the
resolution of mystery, is the main concern of the speculative
Gothicist, and much of the best nineteenth century American
fiction uses Gothic mystery to begin a process of questioning.

Brockden Brown and the Gothic: The Critical View

Charles Brockden Brown's critics have repeatedly attempt-
ed to salvage the reputation of this previously little known
writer by dissociating his work from the "second-rate" con-
ventions of Gothic fiction. After a glancing acknowledgment
of Brown's fascination with the Gothic, which they see as his
unfortunate literary inheritance, critics generally go on to
study Brown's influence on later American writers, or, if not
his influence, then at least some theme or narrative technique
which Brown employed in embryonic, but potentially fruitful
forms. Again and again critics have argued that it is in
spite of his loyalty to Radcliffe and Godwin that Brown de-
serves attention as the father of American fiction: because
of his realism, or his didacticism, or his examination of
ideas, or his clever use of point of view, or his sense of
moral complexity, or his focus on melodrama--because of any-
thing but his redirecting of the Gothic.¹ Each of these ap-
proaches to Brown begins by separating the mysteries in his
fiction from the questions he raises, but this creates too
drastic a bifurcation between plot and theme. It is unwise
to separate Brown the terrorist from Brown the speculator,
for this very synthesis is Brown's contribution to the develop-
ment of Gothic fiction.
In a typical attempt to distinguish between Brown as thinker and Brown as Gothicist, David H. Hirsch writes:

Brown apparently felt that some combination of the novel of seduction and the gothic romance could provide the best salable vehicle for . . . his ideas. But once committed to this mixture, Brown found himself unable to fuse the individual elements into a new, whole, and significant substance. And it is this that partly explains the chaos of his novels.²

But critics have too often confounded the chaos they encounter in trying to find neat formal patterns in Brown's fiction with the chaos his characters encounter in plagues, pits, and other people. The first chaos may be a result of Brown's rather rushed pace of writing, or it may, as Leslie A. Fiedler suggests, result from the fact that Brown is not a formalist. But the second chaos, the cycle of mystery heaped on mystery which threatens to overwhelm characters like Edgar Huntly and Clara Wieland is central to Brown's use of the Gothic as a way not of advocating but of questioning ideas.

For Fiedler, pioneer critic of passion and violence in American fiction, Brockden Brown is the inventor of American Gothicism. Fiedler suggests that the Gothic novel centers on a villain-hero, that it shows the power of evil (rather than, as in the Sentimental tradition, the power of good), and that it proceeds from "an awareness of the spiritual isolation of the individual in a society where all communal systems of values have collapsed."³ For Fiedler, "the primary meaning of the gothic romance . . . lies in its substitution of terror for love as a central theme of fiction,"⁴ and the value of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
the Gothic rests on its expression of vivid images from "the world of dreams and the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them." There are, of course, problems with this definition. *Clarissa* is in some ways a more terrifying book than *Udolpho*; and love—the love of an Emily for her Valancourt or of God for justice—is a central theme of most Gothic works. Love is almost always stronger than evil in the English tradition. But Fiedler's basic point (which would have seemed obvious to Walpole or Mary Shelley whose novels began as nightmares) is now widely accepted: one major appeal of the Gothic—with its images of patricide and incest, of blood lust and bestial sexuality—is its dramatization of unconscious passions. Nevertheless, Fiedler's excessive emphasis on the unconscious attractions of the Gothic blinds him to the special uses to which Brown put this evolving genre.

In response to his rhetorical question, "why has the tale of terror so special an appeal to Americans?" Fiedler answers "because of the failure of love in our fiction." Fiedler's theory of displacement—that terror filled by a vacuum left by the inability of American writers to deal with normal love—is too negative, though it allows him to see more clearly the high points of what he regards as a twisted tradition. It is important to see that Brown, for one, had no trouble dealing with love, either in his late sentimental novels or in his earlier works. *Wieland* deals with conflicting loves between husband and wife, brother and sister, and
man and God. *Arthur Mervyn* is, among other things, the story of a young man's acts of self-definition through identification with or rejection of a number of different women. The driving force behind many of Edgar Huntly's acts is his obligation to either his fiancée Mary Waldgrave or his fellow man Clithero Edny. And *Ormond*, which Fiedler sees as Brown's repudiation of an earlier interest in demonic passion and speculation, actually is an affirmation of Constantia's self-love and passionate attachment to other women. Brown turned to Godwinian Gothicism for the opportunities it offered, not because he could not deal with love.

Fiedler is more correct when he observes:

> Brown established in the American novel a tradition of dealing with the exaggerated and the grotesque, not as they are verifiable in any external landscape or sociological observation of manners and men, but as projected in our dreams or lived through in 'extreme situations.'

There is, clearly, more mystery than terror in Brown's fiction. Fiedler calls our attention quite properly to the internal landscape of these novels, but he does not stress the fact that this landscape is most often the subject not of vague emotions but of intense intellectual energy, of a rich speculation. If Brown is the father of American Gothicism (and he is more correctly seen as a co-parent of the speculative Gothic mode which was developing at the same time in both the United States and Britain), then it is because of his use of mystery to stimulate a dialogue, a debate in the minds of his characters and, by projection, in the minds of his readers. Brown's
use of a shifting, often untrustworthy, narrator is a major indication of his development of a new Gothic mode—one in which the mysteries lead us back to the thinking, feeling mind that perceives them, rather than out into the "real" world.

Enough has been said, perhaps, about how Gothic fiction makes us feel as readers; it is time to investigate what it makes us think. F. O. Matthiessen is only partially correct when he insists that Brown "transformed the mechanical horrors of the Gothic novel into something really felt, as he explored a mysterious borderland between fantasy and reality." Brown's horrors are no more moving than Radcliffe's or Lewis's. It is, rather, in what Matthiessen calls his explorations that Brown makes his readers think more profoundly than any Gothicist had or would again until Poe.

As many critics have noticed, Brown's prefaces and correspondence suggest that he was torn between various objectives in his fiction. A reader of Radcliffe and Godwin, Brown responded to their strange mixture of sentiment and terror, of subjectivity and argument. The preface to the early fragment "Skywalk" shows the several tendencies in Brown's fiction:

The value of such works lies without a doubt in their moral tendency. The popular tales have their merit, but there is one thing in which they are deficient. They are generally adapted to one class of readers only. By a string of well-connected incidents, they amuse the idle and thoughtless; but are spurned at by those who are satisfied with nothing but strains of lofty eloquence, by the exhibition of powerful motives, and a sort of audaciousness of character. The world is governed, not by the simpleton, but by the man of soaring passions and
intellectual energy. By the display of such only can we hope to enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect. To gain their homage it is not needful to forego the appro­bation of those whose circumstances have hindered them from making the same progress. A contexture of facts capable of suspending the faculties of every soul in curiosity, may be joined with views into human nature and all the subtleties of reason­ing. Brown, like Godwin, sees the novelist as a "story-telling moralist" who exhibits subtle reasoning and excites curiosity. As his letters around the time when he was writing "Skywalk" indicate, Brown was torn between the hope of perfecting a "system of morality" as valid as Godwin's and despair over his failure to do so, his "crude and superficial" thinking and his "narrow and undigested" knowledge. It was not until he accepted these limitations and combined his hopes and frustrations that Brown expressed in his fiction a view of life at once personal and universal. Another early fragment, The Man at Home, contains the seeds of Brown's Gothic work. Trapped in a room alone for two weeks, the narrator Bedloe is left for perhaps the first time in his life completely to his own resources. The more he ponders whatever subjects occur to him, the more he real­izes that "human life abounds with mysterious appearances. Isolated in a space only twelve feet square, Bedloe examines his surroundings minutely and thinks:

In the most vulgar objects, a scrutinizing spirit can discover new properties and relations. In a scene that, to ordinary observers, is monotonous and uniform, he finds an exhaustless source of reflection and inquiry.

(p. 40)
In Bedloe's inquiry is foreshadowed Edgar Huntly's pit, Arthur Pym's below-deck hideaway, and, curiously, Ishmael's whale. There is a solipsistic energy in Brown's Gothic fiction, an energy produced by the circular movement from study of the external world to study of the inner mind. The starting point for Brown is usually a mysterious world as seen by a "man unknown to himself." The end point is arbitrary, only a way of concluding an on-going process which leads the unknowing man from mystery to mystery into a deeper knowledge of his own ignorance.

Fiedler is undoubtedly correct when he suggests that "to define Brown's rank and status involves an attempt at redefining the whole tradition of the American novel. Where he is placed depends upon, and in turn determines, the total shape of the literary hierarchy in which he is situated."

In this view (and it is a view that has generated a good deal of interesting and valid commentary), Charles Brockden Brown is seen as a starting point, as the first professional American novelist. But, if Brown stands at the origin of American fiction, he also occupies a place like Godwin's near the middle of the development of Gothic fiction, and it is Brown as a pivotal figure, fascinated by the mysterious but caught between didacticism and speculation, which this study will reveal. That America's first novelist worked in an established English tradition suggests what will surprise no one, that in the year 1800 there were only the most tentative beginnings.
of American cultural independence. That Brockden Brown pushed that established tradition, experimented with it and by degrees changed it into a useful tool for later American writers, suggests that the act of cultural self-definition in America has always been one of synthesis.

Wieland or the Transformation of the Gothic

The argument that Brown is a speculative Gothicist centers on two of the four books he wrote with such frenetic energy in the late 1790's: Wieland; or, The Transformation and Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker. Both Ormond; or the Secret Witness and Arthur Mervyn or Memoirs of the Year 1793 have Gothic trappings (for example, midnight terrors, seductive villains, persecuted victims, bleeding corpses, etc., etc.) and sustained mysteries. But neither book focuses on threatening mystery as its main concern. In Ormond and Arthur Mervyn, there is a good deal of confusion caused by the outbreaks of yellow fever, but this confusion—though it justifies horrifyingly vivid scenes of people in agony—is not basically mysterious and so not basically Gothic. Yellow fever, unlike a giant helmet or an apparently angelic voice, is an easily explained (if tragic) part of the natural world. Both of these novels are, nevertheless, as speculative as Brown's Gothic fiction. Ormond speculates about the nature of virtue, piety, and vice; and Arthur Mervyn speculates about the personality and purposes of its central character, a young
man on the make in a competitive and dangerous society. Any comparison of Carwin and Thomas Wellbeck, the villain in *Arthur Mervyn*, points to the difference between Brown's speculative and his speculative Gothic work. Carwin's acts raise questions about the material and spiritual universe; Wellbeck, a swindler, opportunist, and sometimes businessman, acts in a way that calls into question the values of a society in which he can even temporarily thrive. Only in *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly* does Brown insist on the horrifying mysteriousness of life, only here does he use the terror of the unknown as a metaphor for human experience.

It is possible to be led into a too simple reading of Brown's first published novel by the preface and by certain assertions made by Clara Wieland, the narrator, at the outset of the piece. In the Advertisement to the first edition, Brown seems to place *Wieland* in the tradition of the Radcliffian explained supernatural: "It is hoped that intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved, but the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature." Brown is here referring to the misguided Carwin's ventriloquial powers, but these powers are only one group of mysterious phenomena in a novel of deepening perplexities. Though Carwin's meddling explains a good deal, it does not explain all; the final spirit of *Wieland* is not one of elucidated mysteries but of expanding confusions. As Clara notes, in summarizing the thoughts
inspired by the strange voices, "after all our efforts, we came no nearer to dispelling the mist in which they were involved; and time, instead of facilitating a solution, only accumulated our doubts."\textsuperscript{13}

It is not enough to say, as several critics have, that \textit{Wieland} presents "a world in constant flux, a world of false appearances, disguises, mysteries, a world in which, though rude awakenings are commonplace, ultimate clarity or illumination is conspicuously lacking."\textsuperscript{14} This accurately describes the shifting world Brown creates, but it does not explore Brown's use of that world. The main subject of Brown's Gothic fiction is epistemology, and the questions (however seemingly foolish) by his characters are related to larger questions about the possibility of human knowledge, correct perceptions of reality, and proper action based on knowledge and true perceptions. The moral ambiguity of Brown's work has been repeatedly noted in recent years.\textsuperscript{15} This ambiguity, however fruitful as a subject of speculation for Brown's characters and critics alike, is built on more fundamental epistemological ambiguities. For, like the deluded and deceived murderer in \textit{Wieland}, Brown insists on the possibility of virtuous but destructive behavior resulting from a failure of the intellect to understand its world.

The horror and tension in \textit{Wieland} are remarkably stimulated not by the many violent crimes that occur, but by the failure of reason in crucial scenes. Brown makes less use of
Wieland's brutal destruction of his family than Radcliffe makes of the attempted murder by Schedoni of a girl who turns out not to be his daughter after all. Brown does, of course, give his readers glimpses of gore, as when he describes Clara's frustrated desire to kiss Louisa Conway's mangled corpse, or the bulging eyeballs, "the deadly and blood-suffused orbs" of the dead Catharine (p. 197). But more often Clara passes, as she says, "lightly" over the violence. We learn the names of the murdered children, for example, only after they are dead (p. 179), and though we hear a great deal of Wieland's raving, we see almost no signs of his brutal work upon him.

The legitimate source of terror in Wieland is not action but thinking. It is fashionable to note the dark psychology of Brown's work; but perhaps an equally important characteristic of these novels is their dark theory of knowledge. As long as characters can maintain an open mind, can sustain a speculative force, they do little harm. But when the thinking stops they set out to act destructively. In dismissing the epistemological themes of Wieland as trivial, William Hedges probably offers the greatest understatement in Brown criticism when he says that for Brown "reason is no panacea." Of course, Brown denies the ability of a rational man (Pleyel) to triumph over emotionally induced errors of thinking. But Wieland is not simply a comparison of reason and emotion, of science and religion; it is a dramatic presentation of the problems of deciding what is happening in the world.
What makes this presentation dramatic is the temporary identification of various characters not with a specific set of ideas but with ways of thinking and perceiving. At the outset, during their friendly debates about religion, Wieland and Pleyel are shown as representing two approaches to the purpose of thinking. Wieland takes pains "to establish the validity" of religious opinions (p. 30), and to arrive at conviction; Pleyel's more rational approach is also more negative; he strives to avoid error rather than to arrive at truth. "Where one discovered only confirmations of his faith, the other could find nothing but reasons for doubt" (p. 33). That both Wieland and Pleyel should eventually be misled into harmful action is an indication that Brown has more to say in Wieland than that both the rational and the fanatic are vulnerable. The nature of their vulnerability is crucial. For, these very different men both accept what they regard as unassailable evidence of one vision of their different experiences. Both realize too late, if at all, what Brown insists on over and over, that the horror surrounding them is "inexplicable."

Between Wieland's perspective and Pleyel's, and filtering both for the reader is the distraught but determined sister of the fanatic, Clara Wieland. Clara begins as a woman of opinions but is led through a series of shocks and confusions to a more flexible approach to experience. Some of Clara's early pronouncements are clearly intended to strike
the reader with their absurdity. Of her murderous brother and his future victim, Clara remarks that "it was easy to see that Catharine and my brother were born for each other" (p. 29). She recalls with apparent delight the self-satisfied gatherings of her family in the chapel of reason where, while Wieland and Pleyel bandied quotations and syllogisms, "the social affections were accustomed to expand, and the tear of delicious sympathy to be shed" (p. 32). Much later, when Clara looks back on her old way of thinking, she confesses to a Caleb Williams-like moral simple-mindedness: "I used to suppose that certain evils could never befall a being in possession of a sound mind; that true virtue supplies us with energy which vice can never resist" (pp. 106-107). At various times Clara fixes too quickly on conclusions, for example, that she is protected by a heavenly voice, that Carwin ordered her brother to commit murder, even that Wieland is right in thinking heaven demanded the blood sacrifices. Only as the mysteries expand, as Clara is forced to shed tears not delicious but desperate and to feel contradictory and passionate emotions does she come to realize that wisdom is unobtainable.

Three scenes in Wieland—the one in which Pleyel accuses Clara of profligacy (chapters 13 and 14), the one in which Wieland kills his wife, and the one in which Wieland threatens to kill Clara—are raised from the level of literary cliche by the epistemological drama underlying the stock situations. In the scene between Clara and Pleyel far more than
a sentimental love debate is at issue; the real issue is when ought a person to make up his or her mind, how much evidence is sufficient. Pleyel, in love with Clara, fears what he sees as her growing attachment to the mysterious Carwin. In the spirit of a fair, impartial inquirer, Pleyel investigates Carwin's history, examines newspaper stories and interviews people who may be able to shed light on the rogue's character and past life. On the basis of a questionable report, Pleyel adopts the view that Carwin may be a thief and a murderer. As he hastens to Clara's house to give her this news, he overhears what he believes is a clandestine discussion between Clara and Carwin. In this discussion Pleyel hears Clara's voice refer to "former deeds of dishonour" (p. 156). Many other circumstances conspire to mislead Pleyel, including the fact that Clara seems not to be in her room when Pleyel knocks on her door shortly after overhearing "her" talk with Carwin, and that Pleyel hears what he assumes is the sound of Clara entering a little later.

When Pleyel explains at great length the grounds of his conviction, the reader sympathizes not with him but with Clara. Insofar as Brown shows us Clara's actions on the night in question before he lets us hear Pleyel's interpretation, we know before he starts that Pleyel is wrong. Pleyel falls into the trap of thinking in absolute terms: either Clara is saintly or Satanic. The horror of the scene is not based on any sense we might have of star-crossed lovers (it is difficult
to care about Brown's characters as persons) but on a sense that the more dangerous and unsatisfactory an explanation is, the more difficult it may be to assail it. The scene is an epistemological puzzle as tangled as any in Gothic fiction. Clara is correct when she observes before talking with Pleyel that she "was to plead the cause of her innocence against witnesses the most explicit and unerring of those which support the fabric of human knowledge" (p. 133). Pleyel is similarly right when he asserts that he "yielded not but to evidence which took away the power to withhold his faith" (p. 157). When Pleyel resists all of Clara's denials of wrong doing, the reader's frustration leads to a scorning of all evidence as conclusive and a feeling that the fabric of human knowledge is spotty, at best, and torn.

In Wieland's courtroom statement we are shown a man's headlong pursuit of certain knowledge of God's existence, a pursuit which costs him everything. Although he studies religious questions constantly, Wieland never arrives at true faith:

It is needless to say that God is the object of my supreme passion. . . . I have thirsted for the knowledge of his will. . . . My days have been spent in searching for the revelation of that will; but my days have been mournful, because my search failed. . . . I have not been wholly uninformed; but my knowledge has always stopped short of certainty.

(p. 188)

Because he scorns all passions and joys not derived from God, Wieland yearns for some "unambiguous token" of God's presence
in the world (p. 190). And so, when he hallucinates the
celestial command to murder his family, Wieland is filled
with gratitude even though it means the end of all earthly
happiness. It is important to a reading of the epistemologi-
cal issue underlying Wieland's murder of his wife and children
and his attempted murder of Clara that as a preparatory meas­
ure for these deeds the killer consciously tries to avoid
thinking:

It was the scope of my efforts not to think; to
keep up a conflict and uproar in my mind in which
all order and distinctness should be lost; to
escape from the sensations produced by her voice.
I was therefore silent. I strove to abridge this
interval by my haste, and to waste all my attention
in furious gesticulations.

(p. 193)

Wieland's courtroom account of his crimes prepares us
for his final assault on Clara. The last scene of Wieland,
which Clara suggests it has all along been her purpose to
prepare the reader for, is the most striking confrontation
in Brown's work between a character (Wieland) who believes he
knows something with certainty and a character (Clara) who
can only speculate about what is really happening. This con­
frontation between deluded villain and harried virgin might
seem a re-working of similar scenes in Otranto and a hundred
other thrillers, if it were not for the contrasting mental
outlooks associated with the principal agents, not their ideas
but their ways of using ideas. Wieland has escaped from pris­
on for the third time and run directly to Clara's house,
hoping to find her at home and finish his God-given task.
Clara, whose recovery from diseases mental and physical is still incomplete, has returned to her old house to shed a few tears over her murdered nieces, nephews, and friends. They meet, brother and sister, heirs to a legacy of strange disasters, late at night in a dark bedroom earlier associated with mysterious voices and a puzzling recess. A witness to this meeting is the bizarre Carwin, a man whose nature has baffled everyone but whose meddling has been ruinous. Wieland enters, convinced of the importance of his mission: "Father I thank thee. This is thy guidance. Hither hast thou led me, that I might perform thy will" (p. 246). In a state verging upon madness, Clara notes the "fallen condition of her brother, and tries to shift Wieland's attention from herself to the lurking biloquist: "Oh, brother! spare me! spare thyself! There is thy betrayer. He counterfeited the voice of an angel" (p. 247).

Wieland's response to this startling news of the role Carwin played in his undoing is remarkable. He had assumed the voices he heard were angelic. With a swiftness that precludes reflection, Wieland concludes that those voices were of a radically different kind. When Carwin refuses to answer, Wieland poses a series of rhetorical questions: "Thou falterest. Faltering is ominous. Say yes or no; one word will suffice; but beware of falsehood. Was it a stratagem of hell to overthrow my family? Wast thou the agent? (p. 248). As this speech indicates, thinking for Wieland is a matter of
absolutes: yes or no, heaven or hell, good or evil. To both Carwin and Clara the situation seems more complicated. Carwin stutters out a response showing the confusion of his thoughts: "I meant nothing—I intended no ill if I understand—if I do not mistake you . . . The contrivance was mine, but—" (pp. 248-249). And Clara wonders whether her blaming of Carwin was unfortunate: "Carwin may be innocent, but the impetuosity of his judge may misconstrue his answers into a confession of guilt" (p. 248).

For a few minutes Wieland becomes calm, is sobered by the thought that a human voice tricked him into his murders. But Wieland's calm is deceptive; he does not recognize the moral and epistemological ambiguities of his own conduct: "If I erred, it was not my judgment that deceived me, but my senses. In thy sight, Being of beings! I am still pure" (p. 254). And, in a moment, Wieland once again comes up with what he regards as a perfectly true account of his experiences. Whether the voices were angelic or demonic, they were used by God, and so were proper guides to moral action:

Clara, I must not leave thee in doubt. . . . For a time I was guilty of thy error, and deduced from his /Carwin's/ incoherent confessions that I had been made the victim of human malice. . . . The form thou hast seen was the incarnation of a demon. . . . The Minister is evil but he from whom his commission was received is God.

(p. 255)

It is not enough to say that Wieland is insane. In the many months following his murders, he is sustained by a righteous sense of his innocence, a sense which allows him to mock the
shallowness of his judges during the trial. And, even when he is confronted by the shocking news of Carwin's trickery, Wieland is only partially shaken from his certainty for a few moments. Wieland's insanity is, whatever its causes, a thinking disorder, an inability to take more than one side of a question seriously. Whatever he is told, whatever new facts or observations penetrate his defenses against new ideas and sensations, only serve to confirm him in his monomaniacal conviction that God is in direct communication with him. For Wieland, as for a number of other characters in American fiction, the desire to act on certain knowledge proves fatal.

While Wieland is rushing from crime to crime as a result of his convictions, Clara is learning how to accept life's uncertainties, how to survive by using a flexibility of mind. The value of this mental dexterity is apparent in this her final meeting with her brother. Clara notices that as Wieland is preparing to murder her Carwin has returned. Completely unsure about Carwin's role in the crimes, Clara is, nevertheless, filled with hatred for the skulk. And yet, unlike Wieland, she is willing to put aside her hostility for a moment to make use of the ventriloquist's powers. When she notices that Carwin has returned, she begins to speculate:

The sight of him awakened new and rapid thoughts. His recent tale was remembered; his magical transitions and mysterious energy of voice. Whether he were infernal or miraculous or human, there was no power and no need to decide. Whether the contriver or not of this spell, he was able to unbind it, and to check the fury of my brother.

(p. 256, italics mine)
Carwin's final interposition between Wieland and "God" saves Clara, but even this indicates Wieland's mental rigidity. For when Carwin thunders out a command to Wieland not to take Clara's life, Wieland accepts the divinity of this new voice without question. In fact, Wieland does all he can to avoid thinking: "If he walked; if he turned; if his fingers were entwined with each other; if his hands were pressed against opposite sides of his head with a force sufficient to crush it to pieces, it was to tear his mind from self-contemplation" (p. 261). Clara, though she continues to love and honor her brother for the "sanctity" of his motives, thinks of Wieland finally as one who is destroyed by his inability to speculate:

He reflected not that credit should be as reasonably denied to the last as to any former intimation; that one might as justly be ascribed to erring or diseased senses as the other. He saw not that this discovery in no degree affected the integrity of his conduct; that his motives had lost none of their claims to the homage of mankind . . .

(p. 260)

And Clara, who had taken a lively interest in all points of intellectual debate and religious controversy, comes to have little interest in the truth about Carwin's purposes and acts (p. 263).

It is worth noting that in addition to Pleyel and Wieland Brown offers at least two minor instances of characters who act on the basis of insufficient information and leaves the possibility of obtaining sufficient information unsettled. Carwin, although all his activities inspire more questions than answers, clearly gets more than he bargains for. He
wants to spy unmolested and have private access to the temple and Clara's recess, so he impersonates supernatural voices warning the Wielands away from these places. The result is terror, irrationality, and even murder. He wants, in the last instance, to cure Wieland of his madness; he causes Wieland's suicide. It is a shame Carwin does not take the very good advice he gives the troubled Clara, Catharine, Pleyel, and Wieland. When they inform him of their encounters with strange noises, he urges them not to be too quick to judge or act. "How imperfectly acquainted," he remarks, are we "with the condition and designs of the beings that surround us!" (p. 89). Brown also introduces rather late in the novel the character of Clara's uncle whose name—Dr. Thomas Cambridge (a nice piece of self-parody)—indicates his bias toward a rational, scientific analysis of experience. According to Cambridge, Wieland is suffering from an easily understood form of insanity. "These delusions," he insists, "are all reducible to one class, and are not more difficult of explanation and cure than most affections of our frame" (p. 204). But this same man of the Enlightenment, puffed up with confidence in his psychiatric powers, foolishly allows Clara to read the manuscript of her brother's testimony, which causes a relapse in her condition. Though mentally disturbed at the time, Clara embraces an uncertainty about her brother's condition which seems to be a more appropriate response than her uncle's easy answers to the chaotic world Brown presents. Like Clara,
the reader finds it difficult to "account for appearances" (p. 204). Brown's purpose seems to be to fill the reader's mind, like the mind of the narrator, with ideas which it is difficult, if not impossible, "to disjoin or to regulate" (p. 204).

Too much has been said about the didacticism and resolution of mysteries in Wieland. It is true that Clara, at the outset, offers a moral lesson to be derived from her narrative, that it will show the "immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous and imperfect discipline" (p. 11). And it is true that the hastily concluded Conway-Maxwell sub-plot offers, in the pedantic tradition of Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe, a restatement of one of the novel's obvious lessons: the folly of indulging passions. Like Godwin's, Brown's fiction is at least in part didactic. But by the end Clara is less interested in morals and lessons, and challenges her readers to "moralize this tale" (p. 275). Moreover, the three most central mysteries—Clara's moral character, Wieland's insanity, and Carwin's powers and motivations—remain at least partially unelucidated.

A strong supporter of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Brown was virtually incapable of creating a purely passive sentimental heroine. In Clara Wieland he sees a woman "accomplished and wise," possessed of "the sublimities of rectitude and the illuminations of genius," remarkable for her "powers of invention and reasoning" (p. 135). Clara is, however,
not only more active, more capable than the standard heroine, she is also more complex, more subject to vagaries of desire and passionate responses. Obviously Clara is not responsible for the conversation Carwin stages to amuse himself at Pleyel's expense. At the time of this conversation, she is shivering in terror in her own room, having just escaped from what she regards as the clutch of the lustful Carwin. But the typical sentimental heroine is pure not in acts alone but in thoughts, and Clara's mind is too conflicted for this.

When she first sees Carwin Clara is overwhelmed by the power of his appearance, by his penetrating voice and his deep probing eyes. She is temporarily obsessed with his image; she draws his face and spends hours staring at the picture. This very interest sparks Pleyel's jealousy. Even more shocking than Clara's fascination with Carwin are her rather crass feelings toward her rival Theresa de Stalberg, Pleyel's fiance and later his first wife. When Clara hears the false report of Theresa's death, she devotes a second to pitying Pleyel but then exults at her own gains in a way which would make Clarissa Harlowe blush for its brazenness:

This woman was, then, dead . . . By her death, the tie that attached him to Europe was taken away. . . . Propitious was the spirit that imparted these tidings. Propitious he would perhaps have been, if he had been instrumental in producing as well as communicating the tidings of her death. Propitious to us, the friends of Pleyel, to whom has thereby been secured the enjoyment of his society; and not unpropitious to himself; for, though this object of his love be snatched away, is there not another willing to console him for her loss?

(pp. 58-59, italics mine)
Richardson's Clarissa would be no less shocked by Clara's deep hatred for Carwin, the man Clara comes to regard as the author of all her woes. At the beginning of the final scene discussed above, Clara notes that "the milkiness of my nature was curdled into hatred and rancour," that her "soul was bursting with detestation and revenge" (p. 245). It is typical of Brown that he first has Clara forget this Christian-sentimental ethic of forgiveness and then has her question her own severity, revoke her former plot to turn Wieland's rage against the biloquist. Clara, in summary, is no paragon of virtue; nor is she, as Pleyel, drunk with conviction, asserts, the most profligate of women. She remains something of a puzzle to herself and to the reader.

Wieland's insanity is another central mystery. Brown carefully avoids showing us the malady as it develops in the murderer's mind. By concentrating on Clara's problems during the period between the first voices and the murders, Brown withholds information which might make the crime and the criminal less surprising. We know of Wieland's early contact with religious fanaticism, and of his father's mysterious death. We know that Wieland aspires to have a personal relation to God. And we know that some combination of Carwin's deception and Wieland's thirst for knowledge of God's will brings about the fatal acts. Brown goes some way toward explaining Wieland's disease as the result of imperfect discipline and of an hereditary mental disorder, but a few questions

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
remain. What is the source of the power (repeatedly called "almost supernatural" and miraculous) Wieland uses to escape from prison three times? How does Wieland, who has been informed that Clara is not living at Mettingen, know to go there when he escapes the third time? "Father," he says when he sees his victim trembling before him, "this is thy guidance." Is it? A number of critics have noted that Brown's Edgar Huntly begins by pursuing a sleepwalker but ends up becoming one himself; Wieland goes through a similar process when he is first plagued by a "double-tongued deceiver" but then develops a second voice of his own. In the final scene and in the murder scene, Wieland apparently engages in conversations with God, conversations in which the madman speaks for both parties. But can we be sure that the only real voices are those of Carwin and Wieland? Wieland raises a bigger question than Brown answers when he suggests (with an irony that breaks over Wieland's own head) that all human knowledge is limited and that only God knows "what actions are evil in their ultimate and comprehensive tendency, or what are good" (p. 201). Wieland's experience raises the traditional theological problem of evil in both theological and psychological terms, and Brown insists that this is still a problem which cannot be solved.21

Much of the confusion surrounding what Wieland does or does not hear, what he invents and who is responsible for the killings relates to Carwin's activities. Clara notes
early in the narrative that Carwin is "fatal and potent," but also that he is "unfathomable." More like Godwin's St. Leon than Caleb Williams, Carwin does harm by experimenting with human beings. A masterful contriver of unsatisfactory explanations, Carwin finds it difficult to understand the consequences of his own actions. Clara and Wieland are confused by Carwin and even the rational Pleyel finds him perplexing:

. . . his eyes and voice had a witchcraft in them which rendered him truly formidable; but I reflected on the ambiguous expression of his countenance . . . on the cloud which obscured his character, and on the suspicious nature of that concealment which he studied.

(p. 144)

Clara's uncle, Dr. Cambridge, exonerates Carwin of any truly culpable acts, but this is not the last word on the subject. Carwin is repeatedly associated with witchcraft and demonology in the thinking of all the other characters. He plays Moby-Dick to Wieland's Ahab and Clara's Ishmael. He exists within a context of such miraculous coincidences that a supernatural controller of his actions might serve as a coherent explanation of what Carwin does. And, of course, the very last reference to Carwin as "the double-tongued deceiver" is ambiguous. Brown knew very well that both biloquists and serpents are double-tongued. I am not suggesting a supernatural or traditional horror Gothic reading of Wieland; that would be as great a distortion as the view that it is a piece of Radcliffian terror.
fiction. For both the horror Gothic and the explained supernatural are, finally, coherent and didactic. Brown is not so much asserting, as he is asking questions about, the limits of human knowledge. Wieland is philosophic not in any systematic sense of the word but only (to use a phrase a friend of Godwin's applied to Caleb Williams) for its "energy of mind."

It is fair to say that Wieland is concerned with problems in epistemology; it would be a mistake to try to draw a thesis out of the book. Problems in perception, in seeing and hearing especially, are all over the work, but do they suggest any obvious lesson? Pleyel's error about Clara suggests that it is folly to rely in matters of any importance on one sense alone, but Wieland's errors result from both visual and auditory distortions. Look before you leap cannot summarize Brown's thesis because characters in Wieland constantly look and then leap into disaster. The value of speculation as opposed to conviction is apparent in places, but it is important to remember that, in a way characteristic of a number of later experimenters in American fiction (e.g., Ormond, Ethan Brand) Carwin's mischief is mostly based on his effort to study humanity. In considering the problems men have in coming to know the world, Brown creates a world about which it is difficult to generalize.22

As Clara comes to see only too clearly, the man who believes he possesses knowledge may be the greatest fool:
Let that man who shall purpose to assign motives to the actions of another blush at his folly and forbear. Not more presumptuous would it be to attempt the classification of all nature and the scanning of Supreme intelligence.

(p. 168)

If an omniscient narrator were speaking these words, they might carry the force of argument. When the vulnerable Clara speaks them, they are only suggestions, as is her earlier meditation on this subject:

What is man, that knowledge is so sparingly conferred upon him! that his heart should be wrung with distress, and his frame be exanimate with fear, though his safety be encompassed with impregnable walls! What are the bounds of human imbecility!

(p. 119)

Wieland, Carwin, and Pleyel are all misled by exempting themselves from this all too human imbecility. Wisdom, for Brown, to the extent that he allows for it, paradoxically consists of the acceptance of ignorance.

What happens in Wieland, however new it was to American literature, is typical of the speculative Gothic mode. Mysteries which at first seem the consequence of tawdry contrivance (for example, the result of biloquism or foolishly mistaken identity) prove, after the contrivance is revealed, still to be mysterious. Consider, for example, the narrator of Poe's "Ligeia" who designs an atmospheric room but whose response to the room is in excess of its built-in stimuli. Or think of Chillingworth's studies in medicine in Europe and among the Indians: does his knowledge explain his power over Hester's lover or his own psychological deterioration?
Or, in Melville's *Pierre*, Isabel may, as an elaborately contrived set of circumstantial evidence suggests, be Pierre's sister; but does this explain Pierre's behavior toward her? As though the artist has been unable to contain his own art—Daedalus lost in the labyrinth—the complexities of the fictional world defy explanation. In most cases, however, this is not the result of the writer's inability to control his material. Rather it is a redirecting of the purposes of fiction away from argument toward careful observation and speculation: the major achievement of the American Gothic tradition.

**Edgar Huntly and the Journey Out of Knowledge**

Critics have frequently seen in Brown's address to the public in *Edgar Huntly* a defense of didacticism and a repudiation of the Gothic. After referring to the novelist as a "moral painter," Brown continues:

One merit the writer may at least claim: that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end. The incidents of Indian hostility and the perils of the Western wilderness are far more suitable. Although this comment rejects the Gothic trappings of ghosts and castles, it in no way scorns the deep mysteries at the heart of all Gothic fiction. Moreover, Brown's view of his own work here should not be taken too quickly to heart. For one who finds the devices of Walpole and Radcliffe exploded,
Brown is willing to employ not one but two secret chests in *Edgar Huntly*, containing two equally secret manuscripts. He uses Gothic phrases such as "clattering teeth," "mangled corpse," and "banquet of blood" with alacrity throughout *Edgar Huntly*. In antecedent action, he allows Sarsefield, the narrator's mentor, to be captured by banditti and shows us a minor character's captivity and abuse at the hands of "bigoted, sordid, and fanatical monks." Brown causes Edgar to sleep, like any Lewis victim, on a corpse and awake to a full sense of the horror of his situation:

> My head had reposed upon the breast of him whom I had shot in this part of the body. The blood had ceased to ooze from the wound, but my dishevelled locks were matted and steeped in that gore which had overflowed and choked up the orifice. I started from this detestable pillow . . . (p. 186)

If Brown's only innovation in using the Gothic were the fact that Edgar's pillow is not a dead knight but a dead Indian, his Americanization of the Gothic would be superficial indeed.

Like *Wieland*, *Edgar Huntly* offers an exploration rather than an explanation of human experience. Perhaps Paul Witherington expresses the relation of the themes in these novels most accurately when he notes that *Wieland* "is a metaphysical detective story, while *Edgar Huntly* is an exercise in psychoanalysis."24 The only problem with this characterization, as Witherington knows, is that there is no infallible detective in *Wieland* and the analyst in *Edgar Huntly* turns out to be his own patient. Leslie Fiedler argues that *Edgar Huntly* is
Brown's most successful Gothic novel and that it starts out by looking for answers but arrives only at riddles. Dieter Schulz argues that Edgar Huntly is a subverted quest romance in which the hero sets out to learn who killed his friend but is lost in a pit of his own destructive passions. According to Schulz, Edgar's knowledge is defective even at the end and his return to a normal world is imperfect. Robert D. Hume sees Edgar Huntly as a "bungled Bildungsroman" because Edgar does not learn from his experiences. Although these ingenious genre classifications are too negative, they all point to a lack of an orderly conclusion, an avoidance of an objective frame of values and perceptions within which actions can be judged.

Edgar Huntly has been praised for its proto-Freudian insights into the workings of the unconscious mind, and it is true that Edgar sets out in the spirit of a rational humanist to understand Clithero Edny's mental illness and to cure him. Edgar is convinced at first that all the actions of a sleepwalker are understandable; that is, can be reduced to lawlike patterns. Edgar's faith in the power of his own rational mind is, in fact, inflated until the end of the book. But the reader soon realizes that there will be no rationally deduced escape from the mazes into which Edgar, with all the best intentions, blunders, no clear, scientific or systematic approach to the irrational or the unknown.

At the outset Edgar is rather cockily convinced of his own capabilities as a man of reason. Even as he is arriving
at the unsatisfactory deduction that Clithero is the killer of Waldegrave, Huntly is congratulating himself on his ability to scrutinize Clithero, and by a series of "minute inquiries and seasonable interrogatories" to arrive at "absolute certainty" about Clithero's condition (p. 39). "Knowledge," the aspiring ratiocinatory suggests, "is of value for its own sake, and pleasure is annexed to the acquisition" of it (p. 40). Edgar will learn the hard way what Melville's Ishmael knows: there is a knowledge that is woe.

Edgar is confident that the mysteries surrounding Clithero's behavior and Waldegrave's death will vanish after he confronts the sleepwalker:

Nothing now remained but to take Clithero to task; to repeat to him the observations of the last two nights; to unfold to him my conjectures and suspicions . . . and to extort from him a disclosure of all circumstances connected with the death of Waldegrave.

(p. 46)

This conversation, Edgar believes, will "dissipate" his uncertainty (p. 50). The scene in which the two men discuss Clithero's incriminating behavior is the first strong indication Brown gives us that Edgar's faith in his own reason is misplaced. For several nights Edgar has seen the sleeping Clithero wander around the forest area in which Waldegrave was murdered. Clithero is obviously distressed, driven by guilt and self-hate. Huntly, who is perhaps the first character in literature to assume that the criminal always returns to the scene of the crime, mistakenly concludes that Clithero
is the murderer. With all the self-confidence of a rhetorical question, Edgar asks Clithero: "Am I not justified in drawing certain inferences from your behavior?" (p. 52). But Clithero is unable or unwilling to discuss Edgar's inferences on the spot and Edgar's uncertainties are suspended beyond this first interview.

Clithero begins their second discussion with a response to Huntly's question:

You are unacquainted with the man before you. The inferences you have drawn, with regard to my designs and my conduct, are a tissue of destructive errors. You, like others, are blind to the most momentous consequences of your own actions. (p. 55)

And the story Clithero goes on to tell of his past life indicates that Clithero is as blind as Edgar and that both are victims of their own unsatisfactory inferences. It turns out that Clithero is innocent of Waldegrave's murder, that his incriminating behavior is the result of his guilt over having killed the brother of his patron, Mrs. Lorimer, and his false conviction that he is responsible for the death of Mrs. Lorimer herself. Clithero had been rescued from poverty as a boy by Mrs. Lorimer who educated and raised him in her own home. As he grows into a man of "inflexible" moral principles, Clithero is trusted by Mrs. Lorimer to run her large household. And, as he wins (without trying to win) the love of Mrs. Lorimer's niece, Clithero prepares to be finally elevated from the servants class through marriage to the lovely Clarice. Blocking this happy event is the return of Mrs. Lorimer's
sadistic brother, the father of Clarice, Andrew Wiatte, who had been reported dead at sea many years before. Wiatte attacks Clithero in a dark alley and in the ensuing struggle the wicked assailant is killed. At first Clithero is confused, but then he is struck by the obsessive view of his patroness that her fate is inextricably intertwined with that of her brother, that they shall die on the same day. As Clithero, overwrought with his violent conflict, fixes on this idea, he falls deeper and deeper into a trancelike logic (later Edgar will call it a "series of ideas") which leads to the conviction that it would be charitable to murder Mrs. Lorimer to save her the shock of learning of her brother's death at the hands of her beloved protege.

Clithero is filled with conflicting thoughts, most of which tend to confirm his acceptance of Mrs. Lorimer's prediction of her life-and-death tie to Wiatte. And, unfortunately for himself, Clithero does not allow "the incoherencies of speculation" to "influence the stream" of his actions and sentiments (p. 69). Instead, assuming that Mrs. Lorimer is already dead, has died through the severing of a mystical knot to her now dead brother, Clithero sneaks to his patroness's bedroom in the middle of the night to confirm his worst fears or, to use Brown's phrase, to "convert tormenting doubt into ravishing certainty" (p. 92). In an extremely well written passage, Clithero moves from a tentative consideration of the truth of Mrs. Lorimer's belief to a horrifying acceptance of that belief himself:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
She has been deceived. It is nothing more, perhaps, than a fond imagination. It matters not. Who knows not the cogency of faith? That the pulses of life are at the command of the will? The bearer of these tidings will be the messenger of death. A fatal sympathy will seize her. She will shrink, and swoon, and perish, at the news!

(p. 89)

This passage, like "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter in Moby-Dick is interesting because it shows a character moving dangerously from speculation to conviction. In this passage Clithero moves from weighing alternatives, to a series of rhetorical questions, to assertion and exclamation. The very punctuation marks show the drift of his mind. When he decides to visit Mrs. Lorimer's bedroom, it is with the desire--always dangerous in Brown's fiction--of learning the truth. "I was insensible to all consequences," he tells the curious Edgar in the Norwalk wilderness, "but the removal of my doubts" (p. 91).

Clithero does not murder Mrs. Lorimer, although in confusion he almost kills his fiancee Clarice. During his attempted murder, Mrs. Lorimer rushes in, deflects the falling blade, and faints. In despair Clithero concludes that Mrs. Lorimer has died of shock, and that he is responsible for her demise. He runs from the room, escapes to America, and begins his career as a guilt-ridden sleepwalker in Pennsylvania.

Both Clithero and Edgar, in reflecting on this story, leap to unsatisfactory opinions. Clithero, ignoring his own mental shortcomings (for example, his inclination to make self-fulfilling prophecies or to allow prejudice to distort
his perceptions) is convinced that his life was overthrown by supernatural, demonic forces. Ironically, Clithero mocks Edgar for questioning this interpretation:

I know what I am saying. I do not build upon conjectures and surmises. I care not, indeed for your doubts. Your conclusion may be fashioned at your pleasure. Would to Heaven that my belief were groundless, and that I had no reason to believe my intellects to have been perverted by diabolical instigations!

(p. 83)

Clithero is rather inconsistently also convinced that he deserves to suffer for his actions. "I have immersed myself . . . deep in crimes. I have trampled underfoot every motive dear to the heart of honor. I have shown myself unworthy of the society of men" (pp. 88-89). On the other hand, Edgar, who is ready to abandon the mystery of Waldegrave's murder for the more interesting mysteries of Clithero's madness, concludes that Clithero is innocent of any moral outrage:

He acted in obedience to an impulse which he could not control nor resist. . . . Is it possible to regard this person with disdain or enmity? The crime originated in those limitations which nature has imposed upon human faculties. The light in which he views this event is erroneous. He judges wrong, and is therefore miserable.

(p. 101)

The truth, so far as it is possible to judge, probably lies somewhere between Clithero's guilty verdict and Edgar's verdict of temporary insanity and delusion.

In considering Clithero's experience, Edgar is able to note that the "grounds of all our decisions" are imperfect (p. 101), and that Clithero's story shows "the perniciousness
of error" (p. 124), but in resolving to end Clithero's misery by changing his views Edgar shows that his own decisions are still too precipitous, too simple minded. Complacently Edgar asks:

Could I not restore a mind thus vigorous, to tranquil and wholesome existence? Could I not subdue his perverse disdain and immeasurable abhorrence of himself? His upbraiding and his scorn were unmerited and misplaced. Perhaps they argued frenzy rather than prejudice; but frenzy, like prejudice, is curable. Reason was no less an antidote to the illusions of insanity like his, than to the illusions of error. (pp. 103-104)

Like Clara Wieland, Edgar must learn that reason is not a certain cure for either delusion or depravity. In pursuit of Clithero, who flees into the wilderness to hide his shame, Edgar wanders into dark caverns and dangerous ravines. When after a long struggle against human and natural obstacles, Edgar meets Clithero again, Huntly still hopes to cure the madman. In the interim, having learned that both Mrs. Lorimer and Clarice are still alive, Edgar had hoped to rescue Clithero's mind by giving him the good news. But Clithero proves as obsessed as Wieland, and equally invulnerable to reason. On hearing Mrs. Lorimer's new address, Clithero sets out to find and kill his old patroness, to fulfill what he calls his "evil destiny." The result of Clithero's rampage is not Mrs. Lorimer's death but her miscarriage (she has, coincidentally, married Sarsefield, Edgar's old tutor). But the disaster which follows Edgar's straightforward effort to cure Clithero is a last sour note, a final illustration of the illusory
nature of knowledge.

There are several other instances of speculation and of dangerous convictions in the book. Edgar's massacre of a number of Indians is based in part on his having "no doubts" about their hostile designs (p. 169). He is driven to revenge by his unsatisfactory deduction that these very Indians murdered his sisters. At a later time Edgar admits that he should have "admitted some doubts" about the propriety of his conclusion (p. 178). At another time the weary Edgar hears a noise in the night, and assuming it is the sound of a creeping Indian, shoots at it. The man making the noise, as Edgar later learns, is really Sarsefield, out looking for Huntly. And Sarsefield makes the same mistake when he shoots at Edgar whom he takes for an Indian.

The failure of Sarsefield to represent an ideal alternative to the error-prone Edgar and Clithero indicates the lack of any clear didactic teaching in the book. Sarsefield is a man of the world, a physician, a teacher, but his shooting at Edgar is only one of his actions based on unsatisfactory conclusions. Sarsefield upbraids Edgar for the latter's tendency to adopt unacceptable views, but Sarsefield himself erroneously believes that Edgar is dead when the boy is only unconscious. And Sarsefield is unfair in his contempt for Clithero whom he believes became the "engine of infernal malice, against whom it was the duty of all mankind to rise up in arms and never desist till, by shattering it to atoms,
its power to injure was taken away" (p. 248). Because he believes Edgar is dead, Sarsefield leaves his "corpse" in a pile of dead Indians; because he believes Clithero is demonic, Sarsefield refuses to attend to the maniac's wounds. If these are the acts of a wise, experienced man, no wonder Edgar and Clithero wander benighted through a wilderness of confusion.

Mrs. Lorimer, though she never appears in the present action of the book, is another character who, in spite of many virtues, is led into danger through her unsatisfactory conclusions. Described by both Clithero, her adopted son, and Sarsefield, her second husband, as a paragon of enlightened benevolence and compassion, Mrs. Lorimer forsakes her usual open-mindedness when it comes to her brother, the villain Wiatte. She tells Clithero in all seriousness to "touch not my brother. . . . Despise me; abandon me; kill me. All this I can bear even from you . . . The stroke that deprives him of life will not only have the same effect upon me, but will set my portion in everlasting misery" (p. 88). If ever a woman was made miserable by having her own opinions taken too seriously, it is Euphemia Lorimer.

The reverse of destructive conviction is not mental indifference (which Brown, through Edgar, mocks in a farm hand named Ambrose, a man with an "extremely narrow range of reflection") but active inquiry, observation, and speculation. In the introduction I discussed the scene in the pit, in
which Edgar saves himself from a horrible death by paying very careful attention to his sensory impressions and by refusing to accept any conclusions too quickly. It is important to notice that in a similar way the explosive potential of Edgar's interaction with Clithero is contained so long as Edgar keeps thinking and delays acting. Edgar's first discovery of the sleeping Clithero establishes a pattern Brown follows throughout. When Edgar finds Clithero digging in the soil over the spot where Waldegrave was murdered, Huntly resolves to accost the sleepwalker. But before Edgar can act, before his "resolution is formed," Clithero stops digging and begins to sob. "What should I think?" muses Edgar whose "astonishment and uncertainty" prevent him from grabbing hold of Clithero. "This demeanor confounded and bewildered me. I had no power but to stand and silently gaze upon his motions" (p. 36). At another time Edgar who has been ruminating "incessantly" decides that rather than awaken the sleeping Clithero he will simply follow and observe (p. 45). At a still later time Edgar follows Clithero into the deepest recess of the Norwalk ravines and calls out to him. When Clithero disappears, Edgar concludes that he has driven the criminal to commit suicide. But Edgar is rescued from fear and guilt by the "new conjecture" that Clithero may have only withdrawn behind a rock (p. 112).

Surrounded by dangerous mysteries of the internal and external world, it is no wonder that Edgar, though he is a
masterful speculator, every now and then tries to stop thinking and act. But it is not his "lawless curiosity" that gets him into trouble. Edgar, like Godwin's Caleb, is led into dangerous knowledge by his curiosity, but there is a more important similarity between the two protagonists: both are led into their greatest acts of folly not by curiosity but by conviction. Only when Caleb decides to prosecute Falkland does the hitherto persecuted but self-respecting servant sink into self-hatred and guilt. Similarly, only when Edgar stops observing, stops questioning and decides to act does he set in motion destructive forces. It is not curiosity that hurts Edgar, but his illusion of having satisfied curiosity.

Perhaps Edgar's increasingly pessimistic view of the scope of human understanding is his only real achievement in the book. Edgar's Ahab-like cry against the very nature of life may be his most impressive utterance:

Disastrous and humiliating is the state of man! By his own hands is constructed the mass of misery and error in which his steps are forever involved. . . . How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances!

(p. 250)

But Brown, by placing this exclamation just before Edgar's disastrous final discussion with Clithero, prevents the reader from seeing in Edgar's pessimism any saving wisdom. Edgar began his story (supposedly written for his fiancee, Mary Waldegrave) by announcing that, at last, light had burst upon "my ignorance of myself and mankind! How sudden and enormous is the transition from uncertainty to knowledge" (pp. 31-32).
But this "knowledge" too, though it follows Huntly's wilderness rambles and savage deeds, precedes his last act; that is, his telling Clithero Mrs. Lorimer's address. So, not even the conviction, acquired through numerous errors, that man knows little saves Brown's characters from the ruin based on ill-considered action.

**Brown and the American Speculative Gothic Tradition**

It would be less true of Brown than of any other major early American Gothicist but Irving to say that he denied the possibility of arriving at any truths. In the course of a long process of observation, inquiry, and speculation, Edgar Huntly does finally learn the truth about Waldegrave's murder; that is, that he was killed by Indians. And Clara Wieland, rendered almost insane by the slaughter around her, finally learns who the killer was and is given some idea of the role of Carwin in the tragedy. But these truths seem almost trivial, no longer pressing, when they become known. Characters sometimes assert truisms with which Brown obviously agrees, as when Clara notes that the harm done to her brother is partially at least his own fault. But these assertions rather than offering solutions usually point to the complexities of given events. What Edgar Huntly says of his narrative is true of Brown's fiction in general, it offers only "glimpses of the truth" (p. 154).

The process of inquiry is Brown's greatest interest and the truths which this process yields seem less interesting.
than the ever new questions it leads to. As the letter quoted above suggests, Brown would like to have been able to arrive at and argue for some set of ideas. Even the epigraph to Wieland suggests this:

From virtue's blissful paths away
The double-tongued are sure to stray;
Good is a forth-right journey still,
And mazy paths but lead to ill.

But the strength of Brown's fiction is his refusal to avoid mazy paths, his willingness to admit that the simple road to truth is lined with hazards which even the most forthright find it almost impossible to avoid.

My intention in this chapter has been to go some way in the direction of satisfying Paul Witherington's call for a re-valuation of Brown's use of the Gothic:

We need . . . an understanding of Brown's Gothic that goes beyond the prevailing haunted stair-case approach. We need to remind ourselves that Brown was less a follower or leader of some literary movement than a rebel experimenting with new techniques and radical ideas.32

That the mysterious occupies so large a ground in the two novels discussed above justifies the application of the term Gothic. That the mysteries remain always in part unsolved suggests that Brown is very far from the world of Otranto. Brown has done more than Americanize the Gothic in setting; he has, even more than Godwin, allowed the inexplicable its due, given mystery a full development. It is not necessary to follow this idea to an illogical extreme, to commit the imitative fallacy by suggesting that all of the confusion in
Brown's quickly written work results from his presentation of confusing realities. But it is necessary to insist on the positive value of Brown's intentional rejection of easy answers. What did Ann Radcliffe really know about her evil characters? What did Horace Walpole know about the application of divine justice on earth? How many murders went unsolved, how many acts of depravity and violence were and still are impossible to understand? By refusing to settle every question, Brown leaves open the possibility of further thought. And by acknowledging the limits of knowledge, Brown avoids errors which might have led him, as they lead his many opinionated characters, into simple-minded conclusions. If Brown's books often seem to stop, rather than reach an ending, it is not because Brown could not tie up loose ends. Rather, the reader of "soaring passions and intellectual energy" to whom Brown addresses his works will see the lack of neat resolution as an invitation to become involved in those "subtleties of reasoning" which make Brown's work, even when most silly, most rushed, most implausible, worth reading.

In her brief but telling study of the influence of Elizabethan tragedy on the English Gothic novel, Clara F. McIntyre quotes the following definition from Clarence Boyer's The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy: "We may say, then, that a villain is a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully and deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader." McIntyre is correct when...
she notes that "every one of Mrs. Radcliffe's stories presents a character who satisfies pretty thoroughly this requirement"; in fact, each of the didactic Gothic works considered above places a major character of this type at the center of its mysteries. The gulf between the didactic and the speculative modes, however, is suggested by the failure of this definition to apply to the latter. Brown's Gothic novels were written almost as a conscious challenge to the world view implied in Boyer's definition. Who is selfish in Wieland and Edgar Huntly? Carwin? Wieland? Clara? Edgar? Clithero? And what moral standards can be clearly seen in Brown's work as providing an objective background for all action? In a variety of moods, the Elizabethan dramatist or didactic Gothic novelist can characterize man as a "paragon of virtue" or a "quintessence of dust." How hard, Brockden Brown suggests, it is to stop speculating and settle on any one such view.

American Gothic fiction did not simply begin thirty years after its English sources, it used those sources as a foundation for experimentation. By accepting the nightmare vision of life as dangerous and confusing, American Gothicists following Charles Brockden Brown developed two alternative responses to the threatening puzzle of existence. On the one hand Brown and his followers imagined characters (for example, Wieland, the speaker in "The Raven," Chillingworth, Ahab) who refuse to accept the mystery, who through an
obsessive limiting of their thinking and/or feeling arrive at monomaniacal "solutions" to life's complexities. These characters are often dangerous to themselves or others because the price they pay for "answers" is dear; they sacrifice all sense of proportion and humor. On the other hand, American Gothicists return to characters (for example, Clara, the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher," Holgrave, Ishmael) who accept the uncertainty as a challenge, who find in detailed speculation a substitute for unobtainable truth. These characters fail, when indeed they do fail, not out of malice or obsession, but out of an inability to act, so paralyzing is their sense of the unknowableness of life. These two groups of characters (and, as Melville's Pierre, who yearns for Ahab's TRUTH but cannot even find a white whale, suggests, they are not mutually exclusive) correspond roughly to the two functions of the speculative Gothic mode. The monomaniacs show the folly of all pat and simple-minded solutions; the explorers suggest, if not the ultimate mysteriousness of the universe or the human mind, then at least the need for study, for deep reflection and investigation before meaningful answers can be found.34
CHAPTER V

RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX:

EDGAR ALLAN POE AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC TRADITION

Irony, Ambiguity, and Speculation in the Gothic Tales

Edgar Allan Poe was the single most devoted American Gothicist, the most serious adherent and parodist of a tradition extending at least as far back as Otranto. Perhaps because his own youth was a Gothic tale of a dying woman and an arbitrary tyrant, or perhaps because he was involved in the world of commercial fiction which feasted on the bizarre, Poe returned again and again in a variety of moods to the extreme, the strange, the improbable, the absurd, the mysterious, in a word, to the Gothic. As the title of Daniel Hoffmann's sympathetic study suggests, there are many Poes to be found in the volume of the collected tales and poems: Poe the critic, Poe the detective, Poe the trickster, Poe the ghoul. The single connection between these various stances is an energy of intellect, an intensity of thinking which, even when it is only three fifths genius, characterizes all of Poe's work. It is this speculative force that gives Poe so important a place in the American Gothic tradition.₁
Until recently, critical discussions of Poe's Gothic fiction have been confused by a faulty understanding of Gothicism and Poe's relation to existing models. Stephen L. Mooney's discussion of the English Gothic tradition is typical of the preconceptions of Poe critics up to about 1973:

We may quickly discriminate between two varieties of the Gothic that depend upon the writer's point-of-view: supernatural Gothic and rational Gothic. The former view regards the events of the fiction as ultimately beyond the reach of human understanding and therefore admits inexplicable and fantastic details into the design; the latter, while admitting many of the same details and perhaps even more horrible ones, reserves an explanation that, in the end, by subterfuge and ingenious devices, clears away the mystery altogether and accounts for it on rational grounds.2

Critical controversies based on Mooney's traditional distinction have developed around each of Poe's Gothic tales. Is the house of Usher the scene of a lunatic's delusion or is it haunted? Is Ligeia's ghost responsible for the death of Lady Rowena or is the narrator a murderer and madman? Whose tell-tale heart beats so loudly? And who, or what, are the second Morella and William Wilson? All of these specific controversies lead to a too schematic question about Poe's use of the Gothic: is Poe a rational, i.e., scientific and psychological, or an irrational, i.e., supernatural, writer?

The problem with this either/or perspective is that it ignores the complex development of Gothic fiction which preceded Poe's career as a writer, as well as Poe's shifting, synthesizing relation to that tradition. As I have shown above, Poe did not inherit a Gothic tradition divided between rational and irrational moods; he was heir to an increasingly

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
speculative genre. Both the supernatural and the scientific work of the English Gothic tradition are rational in the sense that explanations are offered in each for mysterious phenomena. Only in Godwin, Lewis, and Brown did Gothic fiction move in the direction of both the irrational and the speculative. And it is this direction which Poe responded to with such original energy.

In recent years two critics have approached Poe's work as a total unit and attempted to see connections between the different moods and motifs in tales as seemingly unconnected as "Ligeia" and "Loss of Breath." For Daniel Hoffman, Poe's central concern is the escape from time and mortality, from the material world and the material body. For G. R. Thompson, Poe's fictions both grotesque and arabesque express the principles of German Romantic Irony. Thompson sees Poe as neither a serious supernaturalist nor a serious terrorist, but as an ironist who explodes the various levels of reality in his Gothic tales to bring his readers to a sense of epistemological uncertainty and a yearning for unobtainable ideals. For Thompson there are levels of response (increasingly perceptive) to a tale like "The Fall of the House of Usher," the lowest being a credulous supernatural reading, the next a psychological interpretation, and the last (and most correct) the comprehensive view which arrives, by way of a failure to synthesize the first two, at a feeling of ultimate subjectivity and a scorn for so shifting a world of sweets and sours.
The problem with Thompson's view is that, for all its subtlety and complexity, it fails to profit sufficiently from the solid critical perceptions developed by past critics. Thompson is right when he argues that Poe (like Henry James) is neither a simple supernaturalist nor a straightforward psychologist. But Thompson is wrong when he goes on to insist that finally Poe is not at one and the same time both of these things. The very real worlds of psychological perversity and supernatural horror in tales like "Morella," "Ligeia," "The Black Cat," and "The Tell-Tale Heart" do not dissolve because we cannot deduce which version of the tale is most true. The ironic perspective Thompson sees as controlling Poe's Gothic fiction is, significantly, absent from the minds of the narrators who find the horror more horrible for its incomprehensibility. For these characters, the inability to understand what is happening becomes a final torment.

Daniel Hoffman's humane and intelligent study of Poe falls into a similar pattern of response when it argues that in his arabesques Poe strives to escape the "dull realities of this world, toward the transcendent consciousness of a 'far happier star.'" It is true that many of the characters in the Gothic tales are stripped of a local habitation and a name, that they appear to exist in a void, separated from the details of common life which create a setting in more realistic fiction. But, as Francis R. Hart points out, Gothic fiction does not, for all its strangeness, divorce itself from the real world:
the central "love" relationship in Gothic novels is a mystery in which autonomous natural existences—characters—come to assume demonic roles. Hence, it sheds as ambiguous a light on human character as the central question we have already identified: are demons real after all? Is there a supernatural that is part of the natural world? What manner of being is this? . . . What gives the point its full and terrifying truth in an enlightenment context is that the demonic is no myth, no superstition, but a reality in human character or relationship, a novelistic reality. . . . Are there really ghosts? asks Carlyle-Teufelsdrockh. We are ghosts. 5

As Hart observes, the willingness of Gothic writers to consider ghostly visions and supernatural events does not prevent their work (as a too rigid insistence on the novel-romance distinction might suggest) from considering the "real" world. Poe is not in the Gothic tales exploring a different universe than, say, Howells explores, but only asking questions about aspects of human experience not generally considered.

I am insisting on this point, in relation to Thompson and Hoffman, because their otherwise excellent studies lead us too quickly away from Poe's serious speculation on both psychology and the occult. In one sense Poe's earlier critics were correct, except in their mutual scorning of each other: Poe is a terrorist, a psychologist, and a supernaturalist. His fictions present fully imagined visions of madness and demonism side by side. Insisting on a unity of effect—namely horrified questioning—Poe's Gothicism is related to that of Brown, Hawthorne, and Melville, not so much by its ambiguity, but by the questions that ambiguity stimulates in the minds of Poe's characters and readers alike.
Thompson's identification of uncertainty as a principle in Poe's fiction is an important discovery. But Thompson is wrong to see Poe's uncertainty as a part of an Idealist philosophical program. Poe's great subject is man thinking--attempting to understand a threatening world. And more often than not, in the Gothic tales, this attempt fails; Poe's characters are left confused, deluded, doomed. But there is no reason to universalize this failure. The energy of thought Poe breathes into his characters, their ratiocinative intensity, even when most unsuccessful, is inspiring. Poe's ambiguity, his uncertainty, do not conclude the process of thought. Still less do they lead to an Idealist longing for things-in-themselves. Rather, Poe's purpose is to stimulate in his readers both horror and a consideration of the sources of horror. Thompson and Hoffman would have us as readers pass too quickly out of the House of Usher, would encourage us to flee like the terrified narrator from the smoking ruins. But the urgency of these tales, their completeness as both supernatural and psychological stories, forces us to remain and contemplate the holocaust.

Poe wrote almost every possible kind of Gothic tale: tales of perverse violence (e.g., "Bernice" and "The Tell-Tale Heart") and tales of explicated violence (e.g., "Murders in the Rue Morgue"). He wrote tales burlesquing the horror Gothic ("Loss of Breath" and "A Predicament") and others satirizing the tradition of the explained supernatural ("The
Sphinx" and "Thou Art The Man"). But Poe's real contribution to the Gothic is his joining of seemingly irrational experiences with a clever, intense, and rational mind. In tales like "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," and "The Black Cat," Poe inverts the Radcliffian pattern: he gives us first the attempted explanation and then the supernatural event. The more a Poe character reasons, the more deeply he is caught up in the events he is attempting to explain away. Perversely, like Arthur Pym on the cliff, the more the narrators of the Gothic tales try to avoid the fears that seem capable of overwhelming them, the more well founded those fears appear to become. The quality of the reasoning in these situations is not facile; it is desperate and rather contagious.

The Fall of Reason in the House of Usher

Critics of Poe's greatest Gothic tale have returned again and again to the question posed by J. O. Bailey: "What happens in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'?" What causes Roderick Usher's strange disorder? Is he a hypochondriac, as the narrator repeatedly suggests, or does Roderick, by virtue of his heightened sensory faculties, see clearly the evil around him? Is Madeline buried alive? Or is she some vision of the narrator and Roderick's "dual hallucination"? Is the house itself really alive, as Roderick claims? Or is the entire experience simply a dream for the narrator, a
dream within a dream for Roderick? These questions, and many others in relation to particular events in the story, are pondered not only by Poe's critics, but perhaps with no more success by the narrator of the tale.

At least two scholars in the past few years have called attention to the pattern of failing reason and rising irrationality in "Usher." The narrator of this tale is above all a foil to Roderick Usher. Usher is passionate; the narrator is rational. Usher is intuitive; the narrator is analytical. Usher reads abstruse mystical and metaphysical writings with great interest; the narrator is familiar with such writings (as a footnote he supplies suggests) as a scholar. The ultimate source of horror in the tale is simply that two men of such different character (like Brown's Pleyel and Wieland) should, through a failure of reason that parallels Usher's overthrow of "Monarch Thought's Dominion," come in the end to share the same vision.

Thompson and Bailey emphasize the narrator's unsuccessful attempt to explain what he sees in the opening scene of the story. The narrator is drawn deeper and deeper into the gloom of the landscape as he approaches the ruined house: "I know not how it was— but with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit." He tries to understand through analogy why he feels so oppressed (e.g., he compares his sensations to those of an awakening "reveller upon opium"), and he tries through
analysis (e.g., he wonders whether the house and tarn are not simply a combination of "natural objects which have the power" of "unnerving men"). But he is left grappling with "shadowy fancies," "accepting unsatisfactory conclusions," and trapped in a "mystery all insoluble." This attempt to explain, in failing, allows for the narrator's irrationality (fear and confusion) to grow, as Thompson suggests. What Thompson does not suggest is that this pattern continues throughout the story and that each time the narrator fails, both his and our sense of horror expands.

The narrator understands his old friend no better than he understood his feelings on first seeing the house. He describes Roderick's features and tries to see in them a clue to his character:

Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely modelled chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more web-like softness and tenuity;--these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten.

(p. 234)

It is important to note that the above is not simply a description of an ambiguous character, not only a flattering self-portrait of the author. This kind of detailed, conjecturing observation is, like a scientist's examination of contradictory information, constructive even when it fails.
to arrive at the truth. The narrator sees an obvious connection between Roderick's large eyes and extreme sensory perceptions. He calls attention to the phrenological significance of the shape of Usher's skull, deduces from the withdrawn chin a lack of moral energy and from the large sensory organs an increased sensitivity. But, in spite of his painstaking consideration of Roderick's features, the narrator arrives at the view that his friend is incoherent and inconsistent.

While the narrator is attempting to account for what he sees, Usher is wallowing in obsessive terror, a terror increased by his own awareness of it. He says: "I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate unto this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror" (p. 235). It is by trying to explain Roderick's struggle with "the grim phantasm, FEAR" that the narrator is himself drawn deeper and deeper into the grip of that very same phantasm.

The narrator's mind continues to follow this pattern. When he sees Madeline for the first time, he regards her "with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread; and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings" (p. 236). When the narrator looks at Roderick's paintings, he is horrified most by their vagueness: "I shuddered more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why" (pp. 236-237). Later, when the narrator listens to Roderick's music, he tries with
little success to understand its haunting sound: "It was perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his performances. But the fervid facility of his impromptus could not be so accounted for" (p. 237, Poe's italics). The narrator is quite willing to accept Roderick's assertion that "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature" existed between Madeline and her brother. Everything the narrator has seen or felt since arriving at the House of Usher has been, to himself at least, scarcely intelligible.

The narrator's final collapse into terror comes as a result of his last attempt to account for what is happening around him. On the night of the storm, he is awake in his room, pacing as Roderick paces, trying to understand why Usher is so upset:

There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness.

(p. 241)

The narrator struggles to "reason off" his "nervousness." He attempts to convince himself that only the moving draperies or gloomy furniture or raging storm are frightening him. And yet, as the sensitive reader is well aware, all the narrator's efforts are "fruitless." The narrator, overpowered "by an intense sense of horror," begins to hear noises rising from Madeline's tomb.
By the time Usher enters, he and the narrator have all but merged into a quivering mass of frenzy. Usher, long obsessed by the "knowledge" that Madeline has been awake in her tomb for days, is reduced to mental collapse. The narrator, preserving only the habit of trying to explain, becomes more and more transfixed by "a thousand conflicting sensations in which wonder and terror were predominant" (p. 244). And wonder is the glazed stare of amazement that follows the collapse of reason.

Throughout the reading of the Mad Trist, the narrator makes repeated efforts to understand what he hears. The first sound (that of Madeline knocking open her iron casket) is, to the narrator, a product of his "excited fancy."

"Surely," he suggests with more hope than conviction, there is nothing in the sound to occasion alarm. The second sound is not questioned by the narrator who is at the point of abandoning his faith in reason. The final sound completely unnerves the narrator who, having failed repeatedly, must now accept the horror he tried to explain out of existence. He is (like Pleyel after overhearing "Clara's" conversation with Carwin or Ishmael at the close of the chapter on "The Whiteness of the Whale") no longer open-minded or speculative when he sees Madeline covered with gore rush into Roderick's arms. And the narrator, running in terror from the room, casting quick glimpses over his shoulder at the exploding house, is no longer a man of reason. He has looked into the depths of an apparently incomprehensible horror.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
A close reading of the narrator's characteristic way of thinking supports what I have said about his drift from reason to horror. Characteristically, the narrator's sentences are long and contain a number of subordinate clauses.

These sentences about the house are typical:

I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. . . . What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?

(p. 231)

The narrator is always classifying, analyzing, speculating. He does not ask what is unnerving about the House of Usher; he asks what is unnerving about his contemplation of the house. He moves not like the opium reveller from dream to cold reality, but in the reverse direction from reason and objectivity to terror and confusion. The complicated pattern of subordination in these sentences draws the reader and the narrator away from assertion toward a wallowing in gloomy sensations and feelings. The multiplication of images and the rephrasing of ideas leads not to understanding but to a final question. The narrator's favorite word must be "perhaps." "Perhaps" Roderick's music is strange because it stays within narrow limits of range on the guitar. "Perhaps" the narrator is alarmed by Roderick's poem because it reveals Roderick's mental decay. And "it may be," says the narrator.
to Roderick, that the source of their fear is the "rank miasma of the tarn." We become so accustomed to the narrator's habit of turning ideas over and over that at the end of the story when he says there is "surely" nothing disturbing in the sounds from the crypt, we know he really means "perhaps" again.

The narrator's transformation, his final inability to bring reason to bear is seen in the shift of his language pattern as clearly as it is seen in his final vision of Madeline:

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse.

(p. 245)

The writing here is straightforward. Facts are reported, actions occur without interpretation. Madeline is not "perhaps" at the door. It is not "as if" she destroys her brother. The narrator has been stripped of his ability to speculate; he can only look and tremble.

Critics have seen in the narrator's development either a psychological or supernatural interpretation of the story. Some critics argue that Poe does not want us to take the supernatural events at face value. Rather, we are given a study in a contagious mental disease. Perhaps the tarn itself, as J. M. Walker suggests, throws up vapors which cause the symptoms of fear and fixation both Roderick and
the narrator experience. Perhaps the atmosphere of the building (in a less literal sense) works upon the impressionable narrator, as the atmosphere of Udolpho works on Emily St. Aubert. Other critics take the supernatural overtones more seriously. To them, not even Roderick goes far enough in seeing the horror surrounding him. Perhaps Madeline is a spiritual vampire, the prototype of Morella and Ligeia. Or, perhaps as Bailey suggests, the house is a vampiric entity, sucking up first Madeline's and then Roderick's spiritual energy. Poe would undoubtedly be pleased to know that his critics have continued speculating just where his narrator leaves off.

Poe does more than furnish enough clues to support a variety of radically different interpretations; he bodies forth both the natural and supernatural possibilities in full detail. When they work, Poe's Gothic tales present a full exposition of their uncertainties. The "tarn theory" is, e.g., not casually proposed by Poe, but lingered over and returned to. Poe's use of the Gothic house as villain here is also fully explored--from the narrator's initial description of the human features of the house to Roderick's assertion of its sentience to the final lines describing its fall. And a variety of psychological readings (e.g., that Roderick is insane, that both Roderick and the narrator are insane, or that the story is a dream vision in the narrator's mind) are all built into Poe's story.
In this sense, then, "Usher" is a many sided mirror, each side throwing off a different image of the basic experience. The narrator's descent into horror, like Wieland's, is paralleled by his decreasing ability to see various possibilities. But this is not to say the tale is in any sense "uninterpretable." We do know, finally, what happens in the House of Usher, because what happens to the narrator happens, in a less intense way, to us as readers. That is, both the narrator and through him Poe's readers are forced to bring their intellects to bear on an extremely complex situation. Trapped in a world of failing reason and obsessive emotions, we are thrust into a final horror. We cannot, perhaps, know with certainty what has brought the narrator and Usher to their final terror; but for this reason the horror is more real. We cannot escape the horror by explaining it away. We are left, unlike the narrator who has come to accept Roderick's view, thinking.

A Question Not Yet Settled in Ligeia

...the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence. (from "Eleonora," p. 649)

Like "Usher," "Ligeia" is at least two stories. On the one hand, it is a supernatural story about the return to life of the narrator's first wife. In this story, Ligeia's will is triumphant and "dieth not." On the other hand, "Ligeia" is a psychological thriller. The narrator, driven
mad by grief, murders the Lady Rowena and hallucinates the revivification of her corpse. In this story, the narrator's will is triumphant, at least over his own perception of his world. He wants so much to bring Ligeia back to life that he sees her return. Does Ligeia really return to life? Is the narrator insane in an understandable way? What really happens in "Ligeia?"

There is some reason to accept at face value the supernatural elements of the plot. D. Ramakrishna argues that since both the narrator and Rowena see and hear the shadowy presence of Ligeia, Ligeia's rebirth must be an "objective occurrence." Indeed, a variety of witnesses would ordinarily strengthen our credulity even in a bizarre or supernatural occurrence. When Macbeth and Banquo see the witches, we believe those witches are, among other things, real witches. However, when Macbeth starts receiving ghostly visitors he alone perceives, we wonder about his sanity. But there is a deeper problem here. Macbeth is not narrated by Macbeth. We have only the narrator's word to trust on the question of Rowena's perceptions and fears. And both the narrator and Rowena spend those last days in a room specifically designed to stimulate the most fearsome sensations.

Critics who reject a supernatural reading of "Ligeia" point out that the narrator, driven by obsessive grief, contrives his bridal chamber so that it will be conducive to hallucination, terror, and fantasy. James Gargano, for
example, argues that Poe's Gothicism is "puerile and shabby;" and therefore, if we are to see anything in it, we must see the story as a "dream experience" of the longing for a lost ideal. It is clear that for Gargano "puerile and shabby Gothicism" is a redundant phrase; for him all Gothicism is shabby. But there is much to be said for a psychological reading of this tale. The narrator's state of mind in the last pages very carefully parallels the return and departure of Ligeia's "spirit." When he thinks about reviving Rowena, the corpse hardens. When he returns to his monomaniacal reveries on Ligeia, the corpse first blushes, then stirs, and then stands up wrapped in a shroud and walks to the center of the room. In the final lines, the narrator dissolves, like Poe into the tresses of Annie, into the raven curls of Ligeia.

What do we know about this narrator? He begins by telling us that his memory is "feeble through much suffering" (p. 654). He cannot remember how he first came to know Ligeia. Like the narrator in "Usher," the narrator of "Ligeia" speculates, tries to understand, for instance, why his memory is weak:

Or, perhaps, I cannot now bring these points to mind, because, in truth, the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive, that they have been unnoticed and unknown. (p. 654, Poe's italics)
Perhaps these things explain his mental failure. Or, perhaps, his long study, both with Ligeia and alone after her death, of mystical writings has deadened his "impressions of the outer world." With Ligeia at his side, the narrator felt close to understanding a "wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (p. 657). After her death, he falls back into hopeless ignorance; he becomes a "child groping benighted," a speculator not a knower. And, of course, Ligeia fails also, fails to prevent her death in the first place. She dies, all unwilling, and becomes another victim of the "conqueror Worm."

The narrator moves from his failed mystical quest into depression. He becomes a "bounden slave in the trammels of opium" (p. 660). Surely, the many reminders about the fact that the narrator is using opium serve to make us question everything he says. We doubt his explanations of the supernatural no less than we doubt his acceptance of the supernatural at the end. When Rowena hears ghostly noises, but the narrator does not, we do not simply believe the narrator. When the narrator sees the poison drops being added to the wine but Rowena does not, we do not simply believe the narrator. The narrator's untrustworthiness, his distorted vision of life, his final wallowing in supernatural horror, do not allow us either to accept or to reject what he says, except as indications of what he believes. Is it possible for a perfect will to overcome mortality, or is even the yearning for such power a sign of insanity? Which is more
probable: that the soul of a dead woman would return to occupy the body of another, or that an obsessive wish aided by opium should come to dominate a man's sensory and rational faculties? These questions are not yet settled in "Ligeia." We are left, again unlike the narrator who has settled on one view, thinking about what has happened; our experience of the story is complex. We see Poe moving the curtains with "artificial" winds, we go round and round the questions the critics have raised (questions that occur to the narrator and to most readers,) but we are drawn, nevertheless, deeper and deeper into the horror.

Poe's speculative re-working of traditional Gothic themes in "Ligeia" can be seen by comparing Poe's tale with an older work by J. L. Tieck, "The Bride of the Grave." Tieck's tale, which was available to Poe in at least one English translation and possibly was a source for "Ligeia," also deals with a man's yearning for his dead first wife and the tragic consequences of that yearning. Walter, Tieck's protagonist, prays over the grave of his dead wife Brunhilda, calls out for her to return to him. Although he has remarried and had two children with his second wife, Swanhilda, Walter scorns the fair mother of his babes, and longs for the raven-haired beauty to return and ravish him. When Walter moans over Brunhilda's grave, it is her dark tresses and deep, passionate eyes that he recalls.

Walter comes increasingly to despise Swanhilda for her temperance, domesticity, and lack of ardour. At the same
time he groans for the peculiar blend of sexuality and spiritual insight he had known with Brunhilda, for "the enjoyment of a passion that rendered them reckless of aught besides, while it lulled them in a fascinating dream" (p. 94). Walter begins to hate his present life, to cry out for the past. Over his first wife's grave he calls, night after night, "Wilt thou sleep forever?"

Finally his nocturnal vigils are interrupted by a sorcerer who advises him to forget about Brunhilda, but who also says he can help raise her corpse. Walter, whose lust blinds him to the sorcerer's advice to "wake not the dead," insists that the magician revivify Brunhilda, and, on the third night after they first meet, the deed is done. Born again, Brunhilda becomes a vampire who draws her life, specifically her sexual energy, from the blood of the living. She forces Walter to divorce Swanhilda, takes up her old residence in the palace (after Walter redecorates their bedroom with flowing purple curtains), and begins to drink the blood of servants and neighboring children. Slowly she turns the castle and its environs into a wasteland: people are either murdered or they move away. Meanwhile, Walter is overwhelmed by the beauty and wisdom of Brunhilda, whose sexual passion is exceeded only by her spiritual profundity:

Never till now had her voice sounded with such tones of sweetness; never before did her language possess such eloquence as it now did. . . . Only when speaking of her affection for him, did she betray anything of earthly feeling: at other times, she uniformly dwelt
upon themes relating to the invisible and future world; when in descanting and declaring the mysteries of eternity, a stream of prophetic eloquence would burst from her lips.

(p. 102)

Before she will sleep with Walter, Brunhilda demands that Swanhilda be banished from the castle. After granting this, Walter enters a mesmeric state of bliss in which he fails to see the decay of his household, the many strange deaths, and, even, the connection between these events and the death of his own children. The fact is that Brunhilda must have more and more blood to sustain her sexual vitality. Finally she runs out of alternatives and starts to feed on Walter himself. Gradually weakening, but unaware of the problem (because Brunhilda uses hypnotic powers over him), Walter wanders through the forest seeking health. Again he meets the sorcerer who, after upbraiding Walter for fooling around with the dead, offers to help kill Brunhilda once and for all. This is accomplished by driving a dagger into her heart.

After the second death of his first wife, Walter returns to Swanhilda, hoping she will forgive him. But when she learns of the death of her children, she spurns him forever. Depressed, Walter returns to his castle. He knows that he can achieve divine mercy if he repents, but he also knows that mere repentance will not restore him to his former happiness with either Brunhilda or Swanhilda. His mournful thoughts are disturbed by still another woman, a woman who
resembles both of his wives. Walter invites this new beauty to his desolate castle, revels with her, begins to fall in love again. When he confesses his old guilt to this new "fair unknown," the woman reassures him by saying there is no guilt in murdering the dead and that he has lost nothing irreplaceable. "There are beauties who will gladly share thy couch, and make thee again a father" (pp. 120-121). In the end Walter proposes to this woman, but is unpleasantly surprised when, instead of joining him in nuptial lust she turns into a monstrous serpent and carries him off to hell.

Many of the similarities and differences between this tale and "Ligeia" are apparent from the summary given above. Both deal with a man's conflict between morality and passion, mundane concerns and spiritual study, both summarized in the choice between a fair and dark woman. In both the man chooses, even after the dark beauty has died, to revive, at any cost, the dead lover and teacher. Both men are reduced to near madness and trance-like mental states by their association with the un-dead. The correspondence of several minor details--e.g., the redecoration of the bedrooms, the hair colors of the two women, and the first wives' peculiar combination of metaphysics and desire--suggest Poe's familiarity with Tieck's tale.

Even more important, because they suggest Poe's creative use of old materials as well as his casting of these materials in a new Gothic mode, are the differences between these tales. Most notable is the objectivity Tieck builds into his
codification of German folk motifs by using an external narrator and an external time scheme. We can never be sure of the veracity of the assertions of Poe's narrator because he is doped up and quite possibly insane. In "The Bride of the Grave," even the most bizarre events are presented in a calm, even tone. When he sees Brunhilda rise from her casket, Walter cries "Is it reality? Is it truth? . . . or a cheating delusion?" (p. 101). But Brunhilda's response is clearly intended as a statement of fact: "No, it is no imposition: I am really living." The supernatural characters and events in this tale are meant (like similar characters and events in Lewis' *The Monk* or Maturin's *Melmoth*) to be taken at face value. We are told matter-of-factly that Walter's servants deduce Brunhilda's secret by noticing that a number of children have died mysteriously, that Brunhilda hates the daylight and refuses to wear gold: sure signs of vampirism. When Walter asks Swanhilda to leave his castle, she easily explains his seemingly strange behavior:

"Too well do I conjecture to whom I am indebted for this our separation. Often have I seen thee at Brunhilda's grave, and beheld thee there even on that night when the face of the heavens was suddenly enveloped in a veil of clouds. Hast thou rashly dared to tear aside the veil that separates the mortality that dreams from that which dreameth not? Oh! then woe to thee, thou wretched man, for thou attached to thyself that which will prove thy destruction."

(p. 104)

How different Swanhilda's question—so rhetorical, so easily answered—is from the questions raised by the narrators of Poe's Gothic tales.
Tieck's story is a vivid, vampiric recasting of the traditional temptation and fall pattern of so much Gothic literature. Like Walpole's Manfred and Lewis's Ambrosio, Tieck's Walter is seduced into damnation by his own lust and the supernatural forces eager to exploit human frailty. The didactic impact, supported by the straightforward supernaturalism which clearly identifies spiritual friends and foes, is everywhere felt in this tale. The fixed theological values are explicit from the start where the very stars are said to hide their "mild beams" from the "unholy and impious" incantations of the sorcerer. Repeatedly the narrator comments on Walter's delusive pursuit of pleasure:

Unfortunate Walter! revelling in bliss, thou beholdest not the abyss that yawns beneath thy feet, intoxicated with the luscious perfume of the flower thou hast plucked, thou little deemest how deadly is the venom with which it is fraught. . .

(p. 105)

And the narrator several times enlarges on the meaning of Walter's experience by asking rhetorically, "yet do we not all aspire after that which conducts us to the grave--after the enjoyment of life?" (p. 110).

Poe, of course, has no interest in drawing such a conventional Christian lesson out of "Ligeia." For reasons of his own Poe accepts Tieck's identification of sexuality and death, but he rejects the opportunity this identification provides for moralizing about the temporal nature of all worldly pleasures. Instead, Poe contracts the time scheme (Tieck's tale takes place over a period of years, thus
providing distance and an illusion of greater normalcy) to a single night's vigil, the scribblings of a brooding enthusiast. In place of the coherent supernaturalism of Tieck, we are given an ambiguity so richly imagined as to defy resolution but excite inquiry. Poe's narrator is not carried off, like Tieck's in technicolor, to damnation. Rather, Poe's tale ends where Tieck's begins, with the narrator confronted by the reborn Ligeia beaming at him with her dark eyes. And the question so easily answered in Tieck's tale is left to haunt Poe's readers: Is this reality? Is this truth or a cheating delusion?

**Natural Causes and Phantasms in The Black Cat**

Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

(from "The Black Cat," p. 223)

Although the narrator of "The Black Cat" professes not to understand the terrifying events of his life after marrying, he does present two explanations for his criminal conduct. He argues first that he murdered Pluto, his first cat, and then his wife because the "spirit of PERVERSENESS," the "unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself," (p. 225) drove him to it. Later, at the close of the narrative, he boldly asserts what he had earlier only hinted, that Pluto, a fiend, a "hideous beast," had through craft seduced him
into murder. However, as the critics who reject straightforward supernaturalism in Poe's tales might argue, we can hardly trust the narrator, who acts out of fear and frenzy, to distinguish between a ghost and an unironed sheet.

The problem in interpreting this story is that neither of these explanations explains much. The very unfathomableness of the perverse faculty makes it inaccessible to reason. That is, Poe builds into this concept the inability of reason to control or to understand the primal drive toward self-destruction. Poe's attitude toward the perverse is like his attitude toward the other puzzling mysteries he explores in the Gothic tales. Although he presents the perverse as an irreducible, unanalyzable impulse, he returns to an analysis of it over and over. The perverse is offered not only as a source of terror but as an intellectual problem.

For all of his ultimate untrustworthiness, the narrator is extremely clever and rational. He admits at the outset that his tale is incredible. He does all that he can (and goes far beyond anything Ann Radcliffe would have tried) to explain scientifically the apparently supernatural image of his cat that appears in the wet plaster of his bedroom wall:

The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden must have been immediately filled by the crowd--by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty.
into the substance of the freshly, spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

(p. 226)

The narrator thus "readily accounted" to his reason. But his explanation is absurd. If someone in the crowd had hurled the dead cat through his bedroom window, the cat would surely have landed on the floor of the bedroom. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine (even accepting Poe's chemistry) how the falling walls could have lifted the "compressed" carcass and printed the enlarged impression on the wet plaster. To make the narrator's explanation work, we must see the falling walls somehow bouncing the dead cat up and onto the wet wall. It would be easier to believe in witches than in such a bounce!

And yet, if this explanation fails, must we see Pluto as an agent of the Devil? Poe is careful to gather witnesses around the bas-relief, witnesses who are struck by the strangeness, the singularity of the image. Must we see Pluto as a feline Matilda? There is other evidence of the supernatural nature of the cat(s). It is the narrator's wife, for example, who first notices the gallows forming on Pluto #2. The narrator insists, in fact, that he resisted the idea that a gallows was forming on the cat's forehead:

The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but by slow degrees—degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my reason struggled to reject as fanciful—it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline.

(p. 227)
But as rigidly as the narrator tried to avoid seeing the supernatural nature of his nemesis, so once he does see it, he is firm in his belief in it:

Upon its /his wife's corpse's/ head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.

(p. 230)

The narrator's shift from his first explanation (i.e., his act was perverse) to his second supernatural theory of his seduction into evil by a malignant, satanic temptress need not be seen as the final point of reference for evaluating the story. The narrator, after all, is the one who tells us about the external corroborating testimony in support of his final view of the cat(s). And it is, therefore, fair to ask what do we know about this narrator, what does he say about himself and what can we infer from what he does?

The narrator begins by saying that he was from infancy noted for his "docility and humanity." There is some suggestion that his love of "brute" animals was carried to extreme because of a latent misanthropy. He observes: "... There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man" (p. 223, Poe's italics). This conflict in the narrator's personality is one of several conflicts that leads him to self-destructive indulgence first in "the Fiend Intemperance" and then in intemperate violence.
If we can take the narrator at his word (which is difficult because he keeps changing his mind), then we must accept his notion that he kills Pluto because he does not want to kill Pluto:

One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it because I knew that it loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin.

(p. 225)

One critic has challenged the theory of the perverse by suggesting that the narrator (a thorough and deliberate villain) presents it as a justification of his wickedness. This narrator, however, is not the only advocate of the existence of a perverse (amoral) faculty. Poe himself deals with this idea in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and in "The Imp of the Perverse." Moreover, since the perverse leads the narrator (by his own account) first to crime (immoral action) and then to self-incrimination (a moral act), his appeal to this faculty not only tends to exculpate him, it also strips him of his claim to having done one virtuous deed. Finally, all of the narrator's explanations are equally self-serving, but they are also very strange. No rational killer would offer such bizarre explanations simply to exonerate himself after he had been caught and convicted. Why should he want to offer deceptive exculpatory explanations anyway? He is scheduled to die, and we must, I think, accept his word at least when he says he neither expects nor solicits belief.
Although the narrator burns, blushes, and shudders when he thinks of his relatively "minor atrocity," he moves to even more intense states of fear and self-hate later on. If the first cat angered him, the second one becomes an object of obsessive terror:

Alas! Neither by day nor by night knew I the blessings of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone, and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of unutterable fear to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight . . . incumbent eternally upon my heart!

(p. 228, Poe's italics)

It is only when he is staggering under "the pressure of torments" that the narrator kills his wife and walls her up. And, even after he has been reduced to truly sinful action, he remains an extremely dexterous ratiocinator, as when he ponders the question of how to dispose of his wife's corpse:

Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again I deliberated about casting it in the well of the yard--about packing it in a box, as if merchandise, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house.

(p. 228)

The number of cover-up ploys the narrator has hit on here which went on to become stock-in-trade for mystery writers is an indication of his effectiveness at times as a thinker.

The narrator, then, is complex. Torn between "docility" and misanthropy, between impressive rational powers and overwhelming passions, between a moral sense and a spirit of perverseness, he cannot explain even to himself why he has
behaved the way he has. He shifts about, is unsure about whether he has been the victim of satanic forces or of his own self-loathing. As readers we cannot either accept or reject out of hand the testimony of this deeply troubled man. In this narrator Poe gives us not only another character who is led, by the most convoluted, dexterous reasoning, into confusion, fear, and doom, but also several possible ways of seeing this character. Is the narrator the hapless victim of malevolent forces, lured into crime through his at first innocent, if bizarre, acts of violence? Is he a sadistic misanthropist who kills his pet and his wife with similar thoughtlessness but then ponders his irrationality endlessly? Or are we shown some strange combination here of Satanism and madness? Do devils plague the insane or is insanity a consequence of evil? At the end of "The Black Cat," the police tear down the wall, expose the corpse, and release the cat. But Poe's most sensitive readers will remain locked within the tomb of an exquisite horror that is, finally, based on a subtle transferrence of the narrator's speculations to their own minds.

Poe's Humor and Unity of Effect in the Gothic Tales

In Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales, G. R. Thompson presents a sophisticated view of Poe's relation to Gothicism and German Romantic Irony. Thompson argues that Poe self-consciously manipulates and satirizes Gothic
conventions even in his most serious tales to achieve an effect of epistemological skepticism and comic absurdity. As I said above, Thompson sees Poe's tales working on different levels like Shakespeare's tragedies. The first level is supernatural terror, the next is psychological subjectivism, the third and final is ironic detachment. The second explodes the first and the third collapses both into a final state of doubt.

What Thompson does not emphasize strongly enough is that the shifting levels of meaning in the Gothic tales work to stimulate and strengthen the same basic effect, terror. We are horrified to contemplate the supernatural collapse of Usher's house, more horrified to think it may be the distorted perception of two madmen, and even more horrified to realize that we cannot easily determine what really happened. We are not smiling at the end of this interpretative process. We are not primarily struck by how foolish our faith in the supernatural was, or how gullible our acceptance of a psychological reading was. We are, rather, in a frame of mind like that of the speaker of "The Raven" by the end of the poem. Is the bird a demon or just a bird transformed in the speaker's obsessed mind? Each question we ask about the Gothic tales leads to only another question; there is no last question that can place the story at ironic distance.

The irony, the humor occurring in the Gothic tales, in fact, increases the horror. If all of Poe's Gothic tales
contain elements of self-conscious hoax, it is still necessary to distinguish between the satiric hoax and the terror hoax, between the tale in which the humor is healthy and removes us from the predicament of doomed characters and the tales in which the humor is sick and serves only to draw us into the doom. The humor in Poe's "The Raven" functions in a way that is characteristic of Poe's humor in the Gothic tales. When the troubled, grief-oppressed student first sees the raven, he is struck by its regal bearing. The "Ghastly grim and ancient Raven" beguiles the student into smiling. But the student's attempt to regard the raven as a joke, like his attempt to explain the bird's utterance as "stock and store," does not work. And when the humor fails, the horror of a mind destroying itself is all the greater. Similarly, when Montresor jokes with Fortunato about being a mason, we laugh, but only for a minute. We are sharing a madman's pun (since Fortunato is about to be bricked up by "mason" Montresor)--and, of course, the wild jest of a homicidal maniac is more horrifying than the same man's serious assertions. Finally, when the narrator is "ushered" into the presence of Roderick Usher, we laugh at the pun, but then wonder about our laughter. The narrator, of course, is to become more and more like Usher in the course of his stay; and this shift in personality is largely the result of his inability to explain what he sees in the house. His failure to understand Usher is turning him into Usher; i.e., he is
being ushered into an Usher-like state of mind. What was at first an absurd pun becomes more and more sinister. And this is the consistent effect of humor in the Gothic tales, not to separate us from the final horror, but to absorb us all the more completely into its seemingly unfathomable abyss. We may wonder what really happens, as indeed Poe's narrators wonder about what is happening to themselves and the other characters, but we do not wonder about how the story makes us feel.

The genius of Poe's manipulation of the conventions of both psychological and supernatural Gothicism is not, as Thompson argues, that the tales affect different readers differently—but that, like Shakespeare's tragedies, Poe's tales have the same emotional effect on readers at every level. The more we see in Poe, the more horrifying the picture becomes.

Poe uses humor in his Gothic and mock Gothic tales, then, not primarily to lampoon his own horror motifs but to stimulate a process of questioning about terror and terror fiction. This distinction can be clearly illustrated through a comparison of Poe's "A Predicament" and E. S. Barrett's The Heroine; or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader (1813), a traditional didactic mock-Gothic novel. Barrett's The Heroine is a sustained assault on the Gothic and sentimental novels. Its aspiring heroine, Cherry Wilkinson, animated by her imagination, rejects her honest middle class father,
changes her name to Cherubina, and runs away to find her "real" parents and recover her "lost" property. Cherry goes through the world with double vision. She regards everyone she meets (whether they are tradesmen, actors, or madmen) as potential characters in the romance of her life. Preparing to board a coach, Cherry muses: "I shall find in the coach . . . some emaciated Adelaide, or sister Olivia. We will interchange looks—she will sigh, so will I—and we will commence a vigorous friendship on the spot."16

Barrett's satire is, if consistently clever, also heavy-handed. When Cherry, a guest in Lady Gwyn's mansion, hears strange music coming from a piano, she raises the cover and finds—not a decayed skull (like Radcliffe's heroine)—but a mouse. Barrett mocks Lewis' version of horror Gothicism when he describes Cherry's "mother," supposedly a prisoner in subterranean caverns:

She was clad in sackcloth, her head was swathed in linen, and had grey locks on it, like horses' tails. Hundreds of frogs were leaping about the floor; a piece of mouldy bread, a mug of water, and a manuscript, lay on the table; some straw, strewn with dead snakes and skulls, occupied one corner, and the farther side of the cell was concealed behind a black curtain.

(p. 153)

When Cherry wanders at night into an unfinished building which she assumes is a ruined castle, she trips over some sheep which she assumes are banditti, and falls against two statues which she assumes are corpses. When she realizes her errors, she sees that she has wasted a "great deal of good fright."
Barrett's message is that the fright excited by Gothic fiction is a waste which "when indulged in extreme . . . tends to incapacitate us from encountering the turmoils of active life" (p. 293). As the book's sensible hero, Stuart, says, Gothic fiction teaches its readers "to revel in ideal scenes of transport and distraction; and harden our hearts against living misery, by making us so refined as to feel disgust at its unpoetical accompaniments" (p. 293). Through a growing awareness of the pernicious consequences of her indulged fancy, Cherry comes to see the value of living in the real world. Ashamed to have been the butt of the jokes and impostures of many other characters who humored her for their own profit or amusement, and horrified by the harm she has caused a pair of rustic lovers (whose estrangement she contrived) and her father (whom she had committed to an asylum) -- Cherry comes to regard her fantasy life "with abhorrence and disgust" (p. 292). Finally, she adopts "new principles of conduct," and is happy to marry, not Lord Altamont Mortimer Montmorenci (a fortune hunter who pursues her) but plain old Stuart.

Two short passages— one from The Heroine, one from "The Raven"— illustrate the difference between Barrett's and Poe's use of the Gothic:

It was on a nocturnal night in autumnal October; the wet rain fell in liquid quantities, and the thunder rolled in an awful and Ossianly manner. The lowly, but peaceful inhabitants of a small but decent cottage, were just sitting down to their homely, but wholesome supper, when a loud knocking at the door alarmed them.

(p. 158)
Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart,
I stood repeating:
"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
. . .This it is and nothing more."

(p. 943)

In each passage inflated language is used to suggest the extreme state of mind of the speaker or narrator. But in the passage from The Heroine, all possible terror and mystery is stifled by a sanative sense of humor. Poe is often considered an excessive stylist, but the effusions of his writing—even when terror is curiously juxtaposed with humor—rarely lead to a facile rejection of fear. Rather, like the student in "The Raven," Poe's readers begin by laughing at fear, but then are led through a series of contrasting moods deeper into horror and puzzlement.

In Poe's "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "A Predicament," the narrator, like Barrett's Cherry, "heroineizes" her name, by changing it from Suky Snubbs to Signora Psyche Zenobia and sets out to experience horrid sensations so she can imitate Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine stories like "The Dead Alive" and "The Man in the Bell." "A Predicament" begins as straightforward satire:

On a sudden, there presented itself to view a church--a Gothic cathedral--vast, venerable, and with a tall steeple, which towered into the sky. What madness
now possessed me? Why did I rush upon my fate? I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to ascend the giddy pinnacle. . . . I entered the ominous archway.

(p. 347)

The sense of order provided by the ironic distance between Poe and his narrator, however, collapses when Zenobia mistakenly gets her head caught in the tower clock. When she first realizes her predicament, Zenobia moves from terror to insane amusement and then to happiness over the release from pain. On the one hand Poe is mocking the cult of sensations, but on the other he is revealing its strength:

But now a new horror presented itself, and one indeed sufficient to startle the strongest nerves. My eyes, from the cruel pressure of machine, were absolutely starting from their sockets. While I was thinking how I should possibly manage without them, one actually tumbled out of my head, and, rolling down the steep side of the steeple, lodged in the rain gutter which ran along the eaves of the main building.

(p. 351)

When Zenobia's head is severed, Poe presents a comic but troubling image of the division of mind and body. How are we to think of Gothic fiction which amuses the intellect with its excesses but horrifies the heart? What Poe leaves us with is a question. Psyche Zenobia may be "done," but for the reader there is no easy resolution, no return to simple irony and satire.

Barrett's didactic lampoon carries the self-consciousness of Gothic fiction to an extreme, and through a reductio ad absurdum overthrows the conventional rhetoric and sentimentality. Terror, in Barrett's novel, dissolves in laughter
or in a sense of the power of reason. This is surely not the effect of the pieces of self-conscious mockery and humor in Poe's complex Gothic tales. If we laugh at the reading of the Mad Trist in "Usher," we are laughing with (and not at) Roderick Usher. We do not laugh for long at the ridiculous decoration of the bridal chamber in "Ligeia." We are struck by the inflated parallels and language, but we are also swept along to the inevitable conclusions, conclusions that do not, through mockery and explanation, restore order, but rather use operatic Gothic techniques and humor to heighten our sense of horror and to keep us guessing.

Riddles of the Sphinx: Poe's Commitment to Continuing Speculation

Axiom: The happy characters in Poe are those who use their heads; the tormented, those who lose their minds.

(Daniel Hoffman, in Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe, p. 135)

What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.

(Sir Thomas Browne, quoted by Poe at the beginning of "The Murders in The Rue Morgue")

...if doubt it ye cannot, then play unto its riddle the Oedipus.

(from "Eleonora," p. 649)

It is ironic that a writer who busied himself with attempts to understand and explain everything from contemporary politics and literature to the origin and structure of the universe should be seen as having felt complete
despair over the limits of the human intellect. For all the failure of intellect in the Gothic tales, there is an implicit affirmation of the human mind as well. Bury it prematurely, torment it with visions of sadistic violence, allow it to wallow in obsessive images, visit upon it demons—and, for all that, it goes on thinking. Enough has perhaps been done in connecting Poe the joker and Poe the Gothicist. We need now to appreciate the close connection between the tales of ratiocination and the terror tales.

Poe's creation of the detective story, like most of his innovations, was an act of synthesis. More than thirty years before Poe wrote "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" Ann Radcliffe's most popular novel of the explained supernatural defied its readers to understand the disappearance of a servant from an apparently sealed "haunted chamber." This cliche-in-the-making (i.e., the hermetically sealed room) suited both Radcliffe's purpose and Poe's by offering an apparent contradiction between reality and appearance, a contradiction requiring ratiocinative powers to resolve. Poe's development of detective fiction is based on his location of intuitive and deductive thought processes not in an external narrator but in the figure of the detective.

Hoffman, in the sentence quoted above, goes too far in distinguishing between Poe's thinkers and madmen. There is a bit of the madman in Dupin whose nocturnal and isolated life style is suspect; and there is a bizarre concentration
of intellectual power in the insane narrators of the Gothic tales. There are few happy characters in Poe, and many of those who go mad do so by way of using their heads: they literally think themselves into insanity. It is no coincidence that, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin begins by deducing the thoughts of the narrator and ends by deducing the identity of a murderer. These two areas of concern—the inner mind and the outer world—are the subjects of Poe's Gothic work. And it is to these questions—what and how do men think, how do they act, why do they act—that Poe draws his readers, calling on us to observe, like Dupin, characters whose motives are as concealed as Achilles' name in hiding.

Hoffman calls attention to Poe's obsessive interest in the process of thought and in secret codes, ciphers, and forgotten languages. According to Hoffman, Poe saw these mysterious messages as puzzles and the possible code cracking as a "solution to the mystery of the universe." This interest in soluble (if not always solved) codes, containing clues to the puzzles of physics and metaphysics, is, however, typical of the speculative Gothic tradition. In Otranto, no codes are needed because the truth about God and man is as obvious as the crash of a huge helmet. But what are Judge Pyncheon's smile and the smile on the face of Pierre's father's hidden portrait, or the markings on the foreheads of sperm whales but secret codes? And how careful is Poe,
like Hawthorne and Melville, to suggest both the importance and the difficulty of trying to read the often confusing messages around us.

In his effort to see the German influence on Poe, G. R. Thompson devotes only a small space to Poe's relation to the American Gothic tradition. In discussing this relation Thompson notes that American Gothic writers characteristically rejected the neat supernatural or scientific frameworks of the British models and embraced ambiguous and subjective explanations of the bizarre and supernatural. It is clearly true, as Fiedler and others have argued, that American Gothic fiction takes abnormal psychology more seriously than did Walpole, Radcliffe, or Lewis. In the British Gothic novel, the villain is often a part of the conventional setting, a pop-up menace to frighten the heroine. But in the American works considered here there is no such predictable villainy, no easy solution to the psychological and philosophic questions raised by the existence of evil and delusion. It is important, however, to go beyond the critical commonplace that sees American Gothicism as ambiguous. Ambiguity suggests a lack of resolution, an unwillingness to answer questions. Characteristically, the major works of 19th century American Gothicism use ambiguity as a framework for speculation. Brown, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville do not only avoid answers, they delight in examining questions. Ambiguity in these authors is more than an evasion of conclusions; it is an invitation to thinking. The narrators
in Brown's and Poe's Gothic fiction serve the same purpose as the cetology chapters in *Moby-Dick*: by adding substance and intellectual drive, they exploit the inherent potential for speculation of any ambiguous set of facts.

In terms of the relation of Poe's work to the development of Gothic fiction, this chapter should conclude this study. For Poe, far more than Hawthorne or Melville—is to the speculative Gothic mode what Walpole is to the didactic mode—not the first, but the most extreme, writer in the tradition. It is impossible for a Gothicist to go beyond Poe in rejecting straightforward explanations and lessons. While Walpole allows an objective, external narrator to reveal the meanings of his story, Poe prevents meanings from emerging by having even the story itself obscured by radically untrustworthy narrators. And it is impossible for a writer to do more than Poe to stimulate frenetic questioning. Hawthorne and Melville return, in phrases Melville applied to Hawthorne, to both a "conjectural" frame of mind and a sense, like Poe's, of the "power of blackness." But, for whatever reasons (perhaps because their Gothic works are longer or told by third person narrators), neither Hawthorne nor Melville achieves the concentrated speculative power—the horror-stricken thinking—of Poe's Gothic fiction.
CHAPTER VI

MOURNFUL MYSTERIES:

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, HERMAN MELVILLE, AND

THE AMERICAN GOTHIC TRADITION

To tell the truth, it is a positively hell-fired story into which I have found it almost impossible to throw any cheering light.

(Hawthorne on The Scarlet Letter)

I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb.

(Melville on Moby-Dick)

It is difficult in 1977 to understand what Hawthorne and Melville are talking about in the passages from their correspondence quoted above. The Scarlet Letter and Moby-Dick, though they deal with love and death, as Fiedler points out, have become standard reading for high school and junior high school children. No one has suggested (as Coleridge did of The Monk) that these classics were written by "jaded voluptuaries." Nor has anyone seriously contended that a consideration of Hester's plight or Ahab's purposes will stimulate lust or hate in a reader's mind. And yet neither Hawthorne nor Melville is exaggerating the sense in which, to a conventional but perceptive reader of 1852, these books might have seemed to wander into Satanic realms.
Asking a fundamental question is the single most revolutionary act possible. What did Socrates do, or Jesus, or Copernicus, or Marx, but call into question the way in which the world is perceived? What did Satan do but wonder whether he would rather serve in heaven or rule in hell? According to Emerson, the right questions can lead to the destruction of an entire way of seeing the universe and the creation by mental force of a new vision:

The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses is to forego all low curiosity, and, accepting the tide of being which floats us into the secret of nature, work and live, work and live, and all unawares the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition, and the question and the answer are one.¹

Hawthorne and Melville were less optimistic about the possibility of using questions to arrive at new visions of the truth. Their Gothic masterpieces seemed Satanic to them because each begins but refuses to resolve a speculative process that calls into question established ideas about human and divine justice. Both Hawthorne and Melville, in Melville's phrases, repudiated the truisms of the "yes-gentry," and said, "NO! in thunder."

The Gothic fiction of Hawthorne and Melville is interesting in the context of this study not primarily because it helps (like the work of Walpole or Brown) to define the two modes distinguished earlier, but because as the work of second generation, self-conscious Gothicists it manipulates and combines the conventions of both modes. Both Hawthorne
and Melville divide humanity into speculators and people who think they know. A great many of their characters (for example, Rev. Hooper, Chillingworth, Matthew Maule, Miriam's monk, Col/Judge Pyncheon, Westervelt, Fedallah, Ahab, and Pierre) seem when they are confronted with mystery to function or want to function within the fixed value systems of didactic Gothicism. Many of the situations and actions these characters become involved in (for example, seeking revenge, making prophecies, pursuing narrow self-interest, manipulating other people) are close to the actions of the Manfreds and Schedonis of early Gothic fiction. But balancing this yearning for certainty is the speculative impulse sometimes located in the narrators (as in Hawthorne's short stories, The Blithedale Romance, Moby-Dick, and Pierre) and sometimes located in the characters (for example, Holgrave, Clifford, Hester, and Kenyon). For these characters, the consideration of mystery does not lead to lessons but to other mysteries.

In dealing with Hawthorne and Melville in the context of this rather sweeping study, I cannot possibly hope to be exhaustive. Much excellent work, some overlapping with what I will suggest, has already been done on the subject of the use to which these authors put literary Gothicism. What I will attempt in the following discussion is to suggest an approach and to relate the Gothic work of the two most substantial pre-Civil War American writers of fiction to the existing English and American Gothic traditions.
Hawthorne's Use of the Two Gothic Modes

in the Short Fiction

Critical discussions of Hawthorne's use of the Gothic have generally been superficial, focusing on Gothic conventions and images. Thus, in her study of Hawthorne's relation to European literary tradition, Jane Lundblad first enumerates twelve Gothic devices or motifs (for example, the castle, blood, crime, ghosts) and then quickly reviews Hawthorne's fiction noting the use of a particular image. "Young Goodman Brown" is Gothic, in Lundblad's view, because it contains magic, a natural setting, and blood; while "Rappaccini's Daughter" is Gothic because of its references to a sorcerer (Rappaccini), a devil's elixir, and various Italians. Similarly, Neal F. Doubleday notes Hawthorne's use of what he calls three Gothic patterns: mysterious portraits, witchcraft, and the esoteric arts which break through the limitations of mortality.

Critical commentary on Hawthorne's general purposes in writing fiction is divided between those who see him writing to express moral truths and those who see him writing to raise questions. Richard Chisholm McKay argues that Hawthorne uses Gothic materials to "present truths of the human heart." In a study of Hawthorne's prefaces, James Bier notes that, in spite of the many negative statements Hawthorne makes about moralizing, "no one can seriously doubt
that moral truth was a prime purpose in Hawthorne's whole career." On the other hand, Arthur Hobson Quinn, in an early study of American Gothicism including Hawthorne's work, notes that the attraction of the supernatural "lies in its lack of comprehension. It springs from the ever present demand for what is strange and new." We need to arrive not at a synthesis of these views of Hawthorne's intent but at an appreciation of the diversity of his purposes. Extreme Gothicists (for instance, Walpole or Poe) use mystery either to establish a thesis or to raise questions. In contrast, Hawthorne, like Godwin and Brown, uses Gothic mystery in both of these ways in stories like "The Wedding Knell," "The Birthmark," "Rappaccini's Daughter," "Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil," and in the romances.

"The Wedding Knell," an infrequently anthologized story from Twice-Told Tales, has been considered Gothic because of its focus on funeral rites and a shrouded bridegroom. It is, however, necessary to go beyond this observation of conventional images if we are to appreciate the relation of this story to existing Gothic works. In "The Wedding Knell," mystery is aroused by the strange intrusion of a tolling funeral bell and mourners at a wedding, followed by the appearance of a walking corpse. The bride is an old, twice-widowed woman named Mrs. Dabney who returns to the town of her youth to marry at last her first love, a Mr. Ellenwood. Mrs. Dabney's one great weakness, in Hawthorne's view, is her unwillingness
to accept the inevitable process of aging with its culmina-
tion in death. Refusing to grow old and ugly, she "struggled
with Time, and held fast to her roses in spite of him, till
the venerable thief appeared to have relinquished the spoil,
as not worth the trouble of acquiring it."8 The key word in
this sentence is "appeared"; although she resists aging first
by marrying a Southern gentleman much younger than herself
and then by wearing gay clothing and make-up, Mrs. Dabney is,
in fact, "wrinkled and decayed," a walking lesson to the
beautiful young people around her.

If Mrs. Dabney is old after her time, her bridegroom,
Ellenwood, was old before his. Never having recovered from
his first love's rejection, Ellenwood became reclusive, mor-
bid, scholarly, eccentric, and possibly insane. Hawthorne
notes that the wedding was undoubtedly the bride's idea,
since the bridegroom, long stripped of any romantic feelings,
would be the last person to indulge a "specious phantom of
sentiment and romance" (p. 27). But the bridegroom goes
along to teach his old love a lesson.

Ellenwood's use of graveyard mysteries to make a moral
and theological point is typical of the didactic Gothic mode.
When the first funeral knell tolls, a guest at the wedding
understands its ironic lesson: "I believe the bell has the
good taste to toll of its own accord. What has she to do
with weddings . . . It has only a funeral knell for her"
(p. 27). And the Episcopalian minister, although startled
by the sound, sees in its mingling of marriage and mortality a "sad but profitable moral" (p. 28). When she first becomes aware of the ringing bell, Mrs. Dabney tries to ignore it, but eventually her mind turns to thoughts of her dead husbands and her own old age. She wonders whether her former spouses will accompany her new husband into the church to join in a dance of death. And when she finally sees her old and now decrepit friends and her bridegroom's deathlike features, Mrs. Ellenwood's sense of horror deepens. She becomes a "dead man's bride" trapped in a vain struggle to oppose "infirmity, sorrow, and death."

The resolution of this struggle is reminiscent of the graveyard verse of Parnell and Young. When Mrs. Dabney accuses Ellenwood of cruelty, he reminds her of her own past cruelty to him:

"Heaven judge which of us has been cruel to the other! In youth you deprived me of my happiness, my hopes, my aims; you took away all the substance of my life and made it a dream ... But after forty years, when I have built my tomb, and would not give up the thought of resting there ... you call me to the altar ... Other husbands have enjoyed your youth, your beauty, your warmth of heart ... What is there for me but your decay and death?"

(p. 30)

Stripped of her worldliness by this stern lesson, Mrs. Dabney embraces her earliest lover as her husband for eternity. Rescued from his death-in-life despair, Ellenwood weeps, embraces his fiancee, and joins in a spiritual compact, saying "what is Time, to the married of Eternity?" (p. 31). The lesson
of the tale is obvious: Mrs. Dabney had tried to conquer
time by ignoring its ravages; Mr. Ellenwood had wasted his
life in morbid gloom. Now they can join to triumph over time
through Christian love. The pealing of organ pipes in the
final sentence both drowns out the funeral knell and allows
the souls of those assembled to look "down upon woe" (p. 31).

Like such stories as "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment,"
Knell" is in the didactic Gothic mode because its mysteries
are solved and placed within established ideational contexts
shared, in Hawthorne's phrase, by all who "feel aright." At
the start we are forced to ask: is the bridegroom insane and
what is causing the bell to toll? By the end we understand
Ellenwood's motives and we know both why the bell tolls and
that, in the deepest sense, it is tolling for everyone,
Hawthorne's readers included. In defense of both this story
and the mode it exemplifies, it should be noted that, like
most didactic Gothic fiction, it provides a "stern lesson"
in "the strongest imagery."

Hawthorne's use of allegory has often been criticized," but this tale is typical of Hawthorne's work for its forceful
and moving use of allegory within a credible realistic set-
ting to make a point. The following passage, a description
of the bride's colorful wedding party as it hears the tolling
bell, is an example of Hawthorne's allegorical writing at its
best:
This time the party wavered, stopped, and huddled closer together, while a slight scream was heard from some of the ladies, and a confused whispering among the gentlemen. Thus tossing to and fro, they might have been fancifully compared to a splendid bunch of flowers, suddenly shaken by a puff of wind, which threatened to scatter the leaves of an old, brown, withered rose, on the same stalk with two dewy buds,—such being the emblem of the widow between her fair young bridesmaids.

(p. 28)

Poe regarded this use of allegory by Hawthorne as indefensible, and he had passages like the above in mind when he said that the happiest allegory is the result of a writer's misplaced ingenuity. Although Poe's view would probably be accepted by most critics today, it represents a bias against didactic allegory which is a matter of aesthetic preference and not universal truth. There is a delight (like that of reading an extremely effective editorial in support of one's own position) in seeing a cleverly worked out emblem. And the above passage is not only clever, it is strikingly beautiful in its floral detail.

Moreover, Hawthorne characteristically places his allegorical equations (for example, Mrs. Dabney equals foolish old age and Ellenwood equals the dead-in-life) within a plausible psychological context. Ellenwood appears as a ghost because his life has been haunted by unrealistic desires and frustrated love. Like May Bartram, the heroine of one of Henry James's most Hawthornian tales, Ellenwood has spent his life waiting, standing vigil over lost opportunity, living "a dream without reality enough even to grieve at--
with only a pervading gloom, through which I walked wearily, and cared not whither" (p. 30). He contrives the mock funeral out of spleen, but when his bride-to-be's spirit is broken he relents and forgives her. Locked into an unnatural role and then after forty years released from it, Ellenwood becomes a real person to himself and to his wife. "How strange," Hawthorne concludes, "that gush of human feeling from the frozen bosom of a corpse" (p. 30). In this story at least Hawthorne is not, as Poe argued, unconcerned with "Nature." Rather, "The Wedding Knell" deals with a man and a woman who, in different ways, have been severed from the natural processes of living and dying, stuck in absurd postures, but who achieve a final acceptance of the human condition and their own limited but real potential. For characters like Mrs. Dabney and Mr. Ellenwood and for many of the characters of didactic Gothic fiction, life becomes a kind of allegory.

"The Wedding Knell," insofar as it is representative of one way in which Hawthorne uses allegory, offers an opportunity to discuss the bias among contemporary readers and critics against allegorical didacticism. Since Poe's famous essay on Hawthorne, many readers have felt that Hawthorne's inclination to use allegory to inculcate virtue is somehow tawdry. Richard Chase argues that "allegory flourishes best . . . when everyone agrees on what truth is, when literature is regarded as exposition, not as discovery."¹⁰ But recent discussions suggest that, as a mode of seeing, allegory can
be a process either of discovery or of instruction. Hawthorne clearly appreciated the complex possibilities of allegory, as any reading of his most frequently anthologized tales will show. But as readers we will not be able to appreciate the very real success of one part of Hawthorne's work (the part closest to his English Gothic sources) unless we can temporarily put aside our delight in complexity, ambiguity, subjectivity, and paradox. Although there is nothing finally confusing or complicated about "The Wedding Knell," it does achieve its author's purposes, purposes all but unchallenged until the twentieth century. In this tale of misguided vanity and tormented sterility, we have both a striking set of incidents and a convincing and clear lesson. When Clara Reeve wrote her comprehensive study of narrative form in 1785, she could not imagine two more useful or delightful objectives for fiction. It is just possible that one reason for the decline of interest in serious art in our time is the scorn most writers now feel for the aesthetic theory that sees the artist as combining what is engaging with what is useful and so serving as "the moral legislator of mankind." Can we be certain that Hawthorne's didacticism, and not our cynicism, is tawdry?

Veil," and "The Birthmark," a clearly defined allegorical situation is presented but then regarded in a number of different ways. The general situation is similar in each of these stories: in each the protagonist is forced to deal with the inherent corruption or limitation of even the most exquisite men and women. Thus, an entire town seems Satanic, beautiful women are marred by poisonous breath or strange marks, and secret sins lurk behind righteous expressions. What, Hawthorne asks over and over, refusing to accept his own tentative answers, is the correct attitude to take toward an inevitably flawed humanity?

"The Birthmark," a conventional and yet original Gothic tale, is typical of the others in both its moralizing and its lack of a single point of view which supplants all others. This tale of a scientist's tragic desire to re-make his wife to meet his own high standards is like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in both its central character's excessive ambition and his final failure. Aylmer, Hawthorne's spiritual scientist, loses the woman he loves because he cannot love her as a woman of this world but tries to perfect her. But is Aylmer another Victor Frankenstein, driven by pride and arrogance into folly and sin, trying to achieve perfection with his own imperfect hands? Or is he an artist of the beautiful, triumphant even in failure, most demanding because most sensitive? Or is he, like so many of Poe's protagonists, a murderous young husband nauseated by his wife's material existence?
Each of these points of view is fully developed in the tale, and once the reader begins to ponder the possibilities, not even the closing attempt at a synthesis puts all doubt to rest.

Hawthorne also carefully distinguishes several possible views of Georgiana's birthmark. He tells us quite explicitly that it is an emblem of that inherent imperfection which man can triumph over, after pain and toil, in the next world only. But, having established the meaning of the hand, Hawthorne insists that "the impression wrought by this fairy sign manual varied exceedingly, according to the differences of temperament in the beholders" (p. 228). Georgiana's boyfriends thought of it as a good omen and "would have risked their lives" to kiss it. Aminadab (who is both an allegorical figure and the embodiment of one way of seeing the events of the story) finds it Georgiana's most appealing feature. And, of course, Aylmer finds it both a torment and an invitation to improve God's handiwork.

The final moral Hawthorne offers seems to argue for some middle position between Aylmer and Aminadab, a perception of eternal perfection at least in potential in the real but limited beauty and love of a woman. Aylmer might have accepted Georgiana, as Holgrave and Phoebe (in The House of the Seven Gables) accept each other, and have ideal moments in a corrupted world. Hawthorne promises us that the marriage of Aylmer and Georgiana will yield "remarkable consequences and
a deeply impressive moral." But the problem of accepting figuratively as well as literally the final words of the story as truly final is that they are at the same time too naive and too critical to summarize our experience as readers. Hawthorne writes: "Had Aylmer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life . . . with the celestial" (p. 238). If we see Aylmer as an arrogant scientist or as a misogynist, the destroyer of his wife's life or at least her happiness, then can we accept the view that he acted wisely but not wisely enough? If, on the other hand, we see him as a man driven to desperate deeds by his commitment to perfect beauty, to spirit over matter, then how can we not agree with Georgiana, who believes that her husband's failure is more noble than most men's success? When Georgiana's spirit ascends to a better world, we are left wondering.

"Rappaccini's Daughter" asks the same questions raised in "The Birthmark." Here a scientist plays at being God by transforming his daughter into a poisonous creature. In his effort to expand human knowledge, Rappaccini sacrifices the worldly contentment of the beautiful Beatrice. Giovanni's friend, Baglioni, sees Rappaccini as a monster creating monstrosities, but Giovanni wonders whether Rappaccini has "a noble spirit" and whether many men are "capable of so spiritual a love of science" (p. 261). Although he is forewarned by Baglioni, Giovanni finds himself falling in love with
Beatrice. But, although he promises Beatrice to believe only what she says (that is, her spirit) and not what he sees and hears of her (that is, her appearance), he cannot avoid wondering about her apparently fatal breath.

Hawthorne's use of speculative Gothicism is most obvious in those passages where Giovanni's circuitous thinking is expressed in terms of conventional images of serpents and horror:

At such times, he was startled at the horrible suspicions that rose, monster-like, out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face; his love grew thin and faint as the morning mist; his doubts alone had substance. But, when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror; she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

(p. 269)

Giovanni's failure to hold onto one "certain" image is the cause of his undoing, but can we really blame him for "grovelling among earthly doubts" (p. 272)? Beatrice, however innocent, is no ordinary woman. When, under Baglioni's influence, Giovanni resolves to put the matter to an empirical test, the result is one-sided, as all such tests, in Hawthorne's view, must be. "Accursed one," he calls her after she fails the test, "Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself--a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity" (p. 274). Giovanni goes much too far here, as he quickly realizes, but his words make
Beatrice long for death. As she dies she accuses her lover of having been the more poisonous of the two. But is this fair? Is Giovanni wrong to reject so flawed a woman? Do any unflawed men or women exist in the conspicuously post-Edenic world of Hawthorne's fiction? And, if not, who is to blame and what can be done about it?

In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne forces us to speculate about the plot and the theme. Concerning the plot, we wonder whether the experience as told actually occurs or is simply a dream in the protagonist's mind. At the climax of his vision, Goodman Brown, who seems to be surrounded by the elders of Salem and Satan himself, cries out to his wife Faith and suddenly finds himself alone in the "calm night air." Two views are possible: that Goodman Brown, having resisted temptation, is saved from damnation, or that his terror has shaken him out of his nightmare. And, of course, whether or not this is a dream, it has a profound impact on Goodman Brown. In response to his new doubts about the moral corruption of humanity, he becomes meditative, distrustful, and desperate. He dies gloomily many years later, having scorned his wife and neighbors for decades. For Brown the "deep mystery of sin" becomes an obsession, a blight. But, without asking explicitly, Hawthorne forces us to wonder whether Brown's response to the possibility of human corruption is appropriate or insane, whether he is a righteous judge or a man who has been "maddened with despair."
We wonder the same thing about the strange behavior of Rev. Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil." Poe offered what he took to be the key to understanding the story when he argued that Rev. Hooper is atoning for a specific secret sin of his own, but Poe failed to see that his key fits only one of Hawthorne's locks. Two other possibilities are clearly implied in the tale. First, Hooper may be a good preacher using the emblem of secret sin to frighten sinners and undermine the confidence of self-righteous Puritans. Second, he may, like the little boy who imitates the minister but soon scares himself, have been driven insane by the awareness of his own sin. It is obvious that Hawthorne agrees with Rev. Hooper that all men are secret sinners, but whether the minister's way of dealing with secret sin is appropriate or even sane is less obvious. Aylmer, Goodman Brown, and Rev. Hooper, like Melville's Ahab and Pierre, are driven to extreme responses by the mystery of sin. Hawthorne critics (Poe was perhaps the first) often limit the depth of these tales by insisting on one particular reading of the allegorical symbolism. But in these works of speculative Gothic fiction, emblematic characters and events become subjects of thought, not, as is often the case with allegory, object lessons.
The Scarlet Letter and the Use of Mystery in Hawthorne's Completed Romances

The Scarlet Letter is characteristic of Hawthorne's completed romances in that it moves in many directions at once to achieve different purposes. It is an historical novel about legal and social responses to crime in Puritan Massachusetts in the middle of the seventeenth century. It is a theological novel about the effects of sin on both sinners and those they sin against. It is a psychological novel about obsession and isolation, about the effects of growing up in an abnormal environment. And, to the extent that it contains fundamental mysteries about the motives and actions of its characters, The Scarlet Letter is a Gothic novel.

It is easy to see the trappings of Gothicism in this novel of passion, guilt, and suffering. Mistress Hibbins, the famous witch, leans out of windows, rambles through the forests with the black man, and looks deeply into the souls of hypocrites and sinners. Roger Chillingworth, suspected of having been involved in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, trades his old occupation as an alchemical scholar for a new one as a medical fiend. And Hawthorne sustains a world of legendary superstition, including miraculous omens, alongside the world of actual historical personages. But these references in themselves add only a Walpolesque feeling to the work.
The deep mysteries in *The Scarlet Letter* concern the consequences of Hester and Arthur's transgression, a particular example of what Hawthorne calls "the dark problem of this life," that is, the inherent imperfection of mankind. Within the merciless world of Calvinist New England (where civil and Biblical law are one and the same thing), Hawthorne creates a vision "stern and somber . . . ungladdened by genial sunshine." Like the letter on Hester's chest, much in the novel defies analysis but has "deep meaning." Driven into psychological and social exile, each of the major characters is twisted, becomes a ghost haunting himself and others. Standing apart from the life of the town, Hester becomes a "familiar ghost" who excites terror and horrible repugnance in those who meet her. Warped by the disparity between their public images and inner selves, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale become shadows of their own potential selves. In the maze of self-loathing, the minister wonders whether he has gone mad or is being tempted by Satanic powers. After years of torment, Dimmesdale begs Hester to identify his own personal tormentor: "Who is that man, Hester? . . . I shiver at him! Dost thou know the man?". In considering the minister's deceptive life, the narrator wonders how so contradictory a man as Dimmesdale can go on existing. And, of course, no one, not even Hester, comprehends Pearl. Chillingworth's question is typical of what everyone wonders about the child of sin: "What, in heaven's name, is she? Is the imp
altogether evil?" (p. 98). Hawthorne's Gothic prisons in *The Scarlet Letter* are, as he says in one of the forest chapters, "dungeons of the heart." His enigmas, like the "mysterious horror" of the letter on Dimmesdale's chest, pose questions about theology and psychology. And the lesson of *The Scarlet Letter* is not that a particular group of characters have been corrupted by their own folly but that all men are, in the most profound sense, "mournful mysteries" to themselves and to each other.

About each of the major characters Hawthorne tells us much but leaves much to be inferred. On the one hand, Hester seems to accept her punishment. Unlike Goodman Brown, she refuses to believe that she lives in a society of sinful hypocrites. But the fantastical embroidery of the letter and her unwillingness to name her partner in sin show Hester as a criminal alienated from the values of her judges. Her strongest repudiation of the community comes in her attempt to persuade Dimmesdale to flee "these iron men and their opinions" (p. 142). Hester is liberated from conventional intellectual constraints when she is removed from social intercourse, and her "latitude of speculation" (p. 143) leads her to question the theology and political structure of New England. She even looks forward to a reorganization of relations between men and women. But, although Hawthorne admires Hester's strength, he questions her judgment. Her "stern and wild" instructors, shame, solitude, and despair,
teach her "much amiss." It is typical of Hawthorne that he does not give us a detailed accounting of which of Hester's views were right and which were wrong. He allows us to follow Hester into a "moral wilderness," but does not lead us very directly out of it.

We hear only rumors about Hester's old husband Roger Chillingworth's early life in Europe. The most traditional Gothic character in the novel, Chillingworth also suggests an interesting difference between the nature of the villain in Hawthorne's and, say, Radcliffe's fiction. Why did the learned doctor come to New England, the settlers wonder. Is the appearance of this great healer among the chosen people a miracle of God's grace? Or is he an emissary of a different power, sent to attack a noble minister? Once a man of flesh and feeling, Chillingworth is reduced or reduces himself to the level of a monster. Although she knew him once very well, even Hester asks her gloating husband "Art thou the Black Man who haunts the forest round about us?" (p. 59). And this question, raised by Chillingworth's deterioration, is what distinguishes him from a Radcliffe or Walpole villain. Why Montoni is willing to steal and murder, why Manfred defies heaven in his effort to maintain power, are not central questions in Udolpho and Otranto. Villains will be villains, seems to be the accepted approach of these early Gothic novels which focus on action, not characterization, to maintain interest. Not so for Hawthorne who wondered throughout
his career whether the black man was an existing supernatural being or simply a vivid metaphor for the evil which can be either ignored, embraced, or resisted in every human heart.

It is indicative of Hawthorne's use of the speculative Gothic mode that the most sensitive character in *The Scarlet Letter*, Dimmesdale, is perhaps the least perceptive. Like Wieland and Ahab, Dimmesdale has a great capacity for feeling deeply and thinking profoundly, but, also like these characters, Dimmesdale is prevented by his obsession and guilt from seeing the complex situation he is in. He is too fixedly introspective to observe the external world. Like Pierre, Dimmesdale is brought by his sensitivity to a confused sense of life, a sense in which the longing for truth, hope, and light is accompanied by gloom, despair, and obscurity. The victim of self-deception and self-contradiction, Arthur "adores the truth" and reckons "all things shadow-like . . . that had not its divine essence as the life within their life" (p. 104). No wonder the narrator asks of this self-destructive man, "Then what was he?--a substance?--or the dimmest of all shadows?" Pearl asks with characteristic insight again and again the question Hawthorne will not finally answer: Why does the minister hold his hand over his heart? Of course, there is little mystery from the start about the fact that Dimmesdale was Hester's partner in sin. But the question Pearl asks is not only what bad thing has the minister done but also why is he so tormented by his guilt. Is Dimmesdale the victim of his own acute conscience or is he maintained at
a high level of nervous despair by his brooding companion? Or both? Hawthorne clearly wants us to celebrate Dimmesdale's release and death on the scaffold as his moment of truthfulness, but are we celebrating the eternal triumph of repentance over sin or the final liberation of a man from a psychological prison built by his own dishonesty and the malice of others? Hawthorne is never closer to the Gothicism of Brown and Poe than when he discusses the public response to the minister's letter. The people, he notes, give "more than one account," but all their explanations are "conjectural."

The character whose words and acts invite the most conjecture is little Pearl. Both Hester's torment and her soul (the pearl of great price), a product, like the woven A, of sin and yet innocent herself, Pearl is no ordinary—not even an ordinary Puritan—child. When we first see Pearl she is writhing in pain, "a forcible type" of Hester's moral agony. To Hester, Pearl seems the incarnation of her letter "only capable of being loved, and so endowed with . . . the power of retribution" (p. 83). But at various times even her mother wonders whether Pearl is "a human child," an imp, or a "half-fledged angel of judgment" (p. 75). The townspeople superstitiously assume Pearl is an offspring of the devil, and Hester, in her bleaker moments, sees her daughter's "fiend-like smile" and asks "art thou my child, in very truth?" (72).
The questions Hawthorne ponders about Pearl are related to her uncanny ability to identify moral weakness and to remind adults of it. She sees at once that Chillingworth is associated with Satan and that the minister is leading a duplicitous life. How does Pearl know these things, things which escape the notice of the Governor Bellinghams and Reverend Wilsons? And how does Pearl know that Hester must never forget the burden of the scarlet letter? Hawthorne carefully provides us with a number of possible answers to these questions. Most of Pearl's insights and attitudes can be accounted for in terms of her early childhood experiences. Pearl sees through the facades of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale because she is not a respecter of persons, nor has she been socialized into prejudice and deceit. As for her relation to Hester, Hawthorne describes the first object the infant Pearl notices:

One day, as her mother stooped over the cradle, the infant's eyes had been caught by the glimmering of the gold embroidery about the letter; and, putting up her little hand, she grasped at it, smiling, not doubtfully, but with a decided gleam that gave her face the look of a much older child. Then, gasping for breath, did Hester Prynne clutch the fatal token, instinctively endeavouring to tear it away; so infinite was the torture inflicted by the intelligent touch of Pearl's baby-hand.

(p. 71)

Pearl's interest in the letter is, as this incident suggests, a natural response to Hester's hyper-sensitivity. But what an explanation this is; in the passage above Hawthorne
undercuts his own psychology by insisting on an elfish gleam which precedes and in part causes Hester's response. The image of Hester in the mirror at Governor Bellingham's mansion is significant. Hester and Pearl haunt each other, seeming to lurk behind giant A's.

The psychological explanation of Pearl's peculiarities includes the observations that Pearl lacks a father and is isolated from and hostile toward other children. And it is important that Pearl is released from her role as a "messenger of anguish" when her father publicly recognizes her in the final scaffold scene. Although this way of understanding Pearl is not incorrect, it does seem limited. Dimmesdale argues plausibly that Pearl is God's agent working to save Hester from becoming an irredeemable sinner. And it is worth noting that, however natural the causes of Pearl's odd behavior may seem, her release on the scaffold is more of a "broken spell" than a psychological process. The feeling of the last scene and of many of the scenes in which Pearl plays a large part is that of ritual drama in which the line between theology and psychology is fuzzy. About Pearl we remain at least partially in a "Labyrinth of doubt" (p. 73).

The forest, emblematic of both wild nature and the power of evil, is the setting of the novel's most haunted confrontation. Here Hester and Arthur meet after a seven year's lapse of intimacy. When he first sees Hester by the
side of the path, Dimmesdale, used to mental agonies, wonders if she is a "specter" of his own mind:

"Hester! Hester Prynne!" said he. "Is it thou? Art thou in life?"
"Even so," she answered. "In such life as has been mine these seven years past! And thou, Arthur Dimmesdale, dost thou yet live?"

It is no wonder that two characters who, driven by overpowering emotions—guilt, shame, indignation—understand themselves and each other so poorly should appear to each other as ghosts, "each awe-stricken by the other ghost!"

(p. 136).

Before this meeting Hawthorne describes Hester's "tendency to speculation" in terms that make her intellectual life sound like the flight of a Gothic heroine through a dismal landscape:

Thus Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in a dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere. At times, a fearful doubt strove to possess her soul, whether it were not better to send Pearl at once to heaven, and go herself to such futurity as Eternal Justice should provide.

(p. 120)

This association of mental confusion with conventional images of terror, as Godwin, Brown, and Poe well knew, is at the heart of the speculative Gothic mode. Caleb Williams' greatest prison is not the cruel cell of English law but his own final self-accusing doubt. When his certainty is destroyed, Theodore Wieland chooses death. And, of course, the
greatest horrors in Poe's Gothic tales are not the premature burials of the walking dead but the groping desperation of characters trying to figure out what is happening. So, in the passage above, Hester wanders through a familiar forest, pursued by the intellectual demons of the speculative Gothic mode.

An indication of how little attention Fiedler gives this intellectual content of Gothic fiction is his attempt to see The Scarlet Letter as an American, "which is to say, a less violent and hopeless," version of The Monk. In defense of this association, Fiedler writes:

Like Lewis's horror novel, Hawthorne's book deals with a man of God led by desire for a woman to betray his religious commitment, and finally almost to sell his soul to the devil... it makes sense to compare the figure of Hester with that of Matilda, and Dimmesdale with the passive Ambrosio, who is seduced by her.14

Fiedler seems correct when, following D. H. Lawrence, he argues that Hester, like Matilda, must have overwhelmed Dimmesdale with her passion. But this hardly reduces Hester to the level of a fiend, nor does it place The Scarlet Letter in the rigid allegorical/theological context of The Monk. One pleasure derived from reading The Monk is the assurance that the polluted priest will be properly punished for his crimes. Hawthorne uses allegory, as I have suggested, sometimes as exposition and sometimes as discovery. Although at times Hester seems merely the tainted woman who has learned much amiss, and Dimmesdale only the hypocrite minister, and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Pearl only the messenger of God, and Chillingworth only an agent of hell, each proves to be more complex than these single perspectives suggest. While he allows Hester to re-deem herself in terms of the values of the Puritan community (the A shifting from Adulteress to Able), Hawthorne also invites us to join Hester in considering whether she or her society is most guilty. Although Hawthorne insists on the folly of hiding guilt, he invites us to speculate about whether the greatest harm in doing this will be caused by human conscience or demonic tormentors. In Lewis's world society is corrupt, mankind weak, but moral values firmly in place. In the world of The Scarlet Letter, the very weakness of the human mind and will make absolute assertions scarce. Hawthorne's most definite assertions suggest that "the truth seems to be" such and such.

For all its unresolved mystery, The Scarlet Letter does, as Hawthorne promises at the start, offer "moral blossoms" that "relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (p. 39). To prevent his readers from being as "perplexed as to the purport of what they" see as the spectators on Election Day, Hawthorne picks one "among many morals" suggested by his story: "Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!" (p. 183). Hawthorne clearly insists here and in his other work that all men are sinners and that a healthy sense of our moral and
intellectual limits is an important step toward maturity, sanity, and redemption. But this very sense of unavoidable weakness, or partial ignorance, also leads Hawthorne to avoid or at least qualify the self-confident certainties of the didactic Gothic mode. If, as Melville argued, Hawthorne accepted some variation of the idea of innate depravity, it was with a deep personal sense of guilt and modesty. He did not, like the onlookers at Hester's disgrace, allow himself the luxury of moral and intellectual self-assurance. And so, in most of his fiction he resists the temptation to offer easy judgments of his characters. On the contrary, in much of his Gothic fiction, he offers cautions against expecting total understanding and invitations to continuing reflection.

The use of Gothic mystery in The Scarlet Letter both to make points and raise questions is typical of Hawthorne's other completed romances. In The House of the Seven Gables, often considered the most traditionally Gothic of Hawthorne's works, mysteries of every kind abound. There are detective mysteries like the matter of who, if anyone, killed the uncle that Clifford was convicted of killing. There are social mysteries like the disparity between Judge Pyncheon's benevolent appearance and his blighted, grasping heart. There are mysteries of human identity like Holgrave's strange function as friend and cold observer of the contemporary Pyncheons. And there are Gothic mysteries surrounding the relations of all of the major characters to both their psychological backgrounds and a supernatural curse.
Both *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Otranto* are about inherited evil.\(^{15}\) In Walpole's book, the curse handed down to Manfred by his usurping grandfather is the source of God's retribution and of the scriptural lesson about the sins of the fathers being visited upon their children through the generations. Hawthorne had this same Biblical passage in mind when he was working on his story of the generations of Pyncheons and Maules, who through the centuries move in a ritual pattern of victim turned executioner turned victim once again. Unable to accept Walpole's facile theology, Hawthorne makes the continuing visitations of evil and the final partial release from the pattern his greatest subject of speculation.

As far back as Hawthorne traces the history of these two infected families, he finds corruption and immorality. The progenitor of the Pyncheon blood (a word associated, in typical Hawthorne fashion, with the family, the curse, and violent crime), Col. Pyncheon, hounded the original Matthew Maule to the scaffold in order to acquire his victim's land. But the son of the "wizard" Maule retaliated, if not by murdering the Colonel, then at least by stealing a deed to potentially valuable lands. And so the cycle of revenge begins. In a later generation the Maules perfect their revenge against the Pyncheons by capturing the fairest daughter of the aristocratic line. Matthew Maule, a man with strange hypnotic or demonic powers, uses the greed of Gervayse
Pyncheon as a tool in placing the latter's daughter Alice under Maule control. The conflict, as told by Holgrave (the contemporary Maule) to Phoebe (the contemporary daughter of the Pyncheon line), ends in the humiliation and death of Alice.

The two questions raised by this history of recurring criminality—why does it recur? and can an evil act once done ever be put right?—are not finally settled in the apparently happy ending of the book. Clifford, perhaps the greatest victim of treachery in the Pyncheon family, in a moment of exhilaration offers the view that history is an ascending spiral curve in which the same things only appear to be happening over and over, when actually things get better each time around. But the impact of this opinion is undermined by Clifford's own pathetic life and his situation at the time he offers it. He is running away from the corpse of his cousin on a train that is going nowhere in particular as far as he knows. At another time the narrator compares human life to the absurd figures going round and round on an organ grinder's box. And, indeed, the step-by-step similarities between the deaths of Col. and Judge Pyncheon suggest that the more things change the more they remain constant. As in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne here leaves room for both a supernatural and a psychological explanation of the behavior of his characters. At the start of the book we learn of Maule's ominous curse calling on God to give the Pyncheons
"blood to drink." But we also are told that each young Pyncheon through the years grew up hearing this story. And Hawthorne also notes that the missing deed to the Eastern lands created anew in each generation an acquisitive, disappointed Pyncheon.

It is true that the curse—whatever the reasons for its effectiveness—is, in one sense, ended with the marriage of Holgrave and Phoebe. Maule marries Pyncheon and there is even a property settlement of sorts to compensate Holgrave. But Hawthorne here as in his other novels is careful to take the sweetness and conclusiveness out of his "happy ending." The young lovers meet over a corpse. Their love begins as an Edenic moment which fades into "heavy earth dreams." Both Clifford and Hepzibah, though saved from spending their final years in prison and/or poverty, have been forced by injustice to spend much of their lives in isolation. The attentive love of Phoebe and Holgrave cannot undo the harm these twisted and half-insane siblings have endured. In fact, none of the truly great harms in this novel is put to right, and the feeling Hawthorne leaves us with is that, although the Pyncheon-Maule curse is over, the curse on all mankind continues.

In his last two completed romances, Gothic mysteries are used to draw attention to areas of intellectual perplexity. In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne concentrates on social interaction, on the efforts of a group of idealists to escape the imperfections and injustices of all old
societies. Although there are many mysteries concerning the past lives of the major characters and their present intentions, the main group of Gothic mysteries here has to do with the Westervelt/Veiled Lady sub-plot. Too easily dismissed as an intrusive piece of traditional melodrama, this sub-plot contains a perfect symbol of Hawthorne's unresolved views on the nature of relationships between men and women. For just as Priscilla is degraded into spiritual bondage, so are both Zenobia and Priscilla reduced to the level of servants by the demanding Hollingsworth. And Hawthorne is uneasy with both this servitude and the other extreme of feminine assertiveness as embodied in Zenobia in the early scenes of the romance. When the narrator, Coverdale, asserts in the final sentence of The Blithedale Romance that he too was in love with the submissive Priscilla, we are thrown back into the contemplation of the questions raised by the villainous hypnotist's control of his veiled assistant.

Similarly, in The Marble Faun, Gothic castles and catacombs and ancient crimes are used to get us thinking about what Hawthorne calls "the mystery of evil." As Marjorie Elder points out, "One can ask of The Marble Faun the large questions of life, though for answers he may well get 'mysteries'." Miriam's ghostly pursuer, Donatello's ears, Hilda's strange disappearance all lead us, as Elder notes, to questions about the nature of innocence, crime, and repentence. The concluding chapter which Hawthorne added to
explain such details as Hilda's absence and Miriam's real name resolutely refuses to answer the thematic questions. We are left with Kenyon's speculation that sin is a necessary step toward moral growth and a final refusal to describe Donatello's ears. As Murray Krieger suggests, *The Marble Faun* is "the clearest acknowledgment of the uncertainty with which its author maintained his ... Puritanical morality."\(^{17}\)

The world of these romances is inhabited by characters who "know" and characters who think. Holgrave is saved from acting the part of a villain by his sense of sympathy with the Pyncheons and detachment from his role as a Maule. His Protean mental flexibility saves him from a sterile reenactment of the old ritual murder/death; the lack of flexibility dooms Judge Pyncheon. Coverdale remains outside the action of *The Blithedale Romance*, while Hollingsworth and Zenobia act out of rigid emotions and ideas. In *The Marble Faun*, the innocent Donatello and Hilda luxuriate in certainty, while the older Miriam and Kenyon consider the nature of evil. Hilda emerges from her experience of human corruption with a new conviction; Kenyon continues to speculate. Hester in her social isolation takes to intellectual wandering; Dimmesdale at the center of the social world remains self-condemned by the morality, theology, and social theory he never questions. In these romances, as in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, those who think they know are not necessarily those who survive.
Since Melville published his short but perceptive study of "Hawthorne and His Mosses," it has been often said that Hawthorne accepted a modernized version of the Calvinist concepts of innate depravity and original sin. In this view, Hawthorne is seen as regarding the myth of the fall as a metaphor for the finitude and corruption of human life. For R. W. B. Lewis, for instance, Hawthorne is somewhere in the middle between the parties of hope and of despair which in the nineteenth century used Edenic symbolism to express various views of human potential. But an examination of Hawthorne's use of the Gothic suggests that he may have seen the Edenic story not only as a metaphor. Nature is as tainted as men and women in The Scarlet Letter and "The Lily's Quest." Pearl asks why the brook that does not carry off Hester's letter bubbles so sadly, and Lily Fay dies looking for an innocent plot of land on which to build her temple. There is a melancholy sense in Hawthorne's fiction that things went wrong a long time ago and have been missing the mark in every generation since. Although he is careful to provide individual psychological and sociological explanations for his characters, he leaves us with a sense of a larger theological context within which these explanations function or fail to function. And it is this tension between the specific and the general, the psychological and the theological, which forces us to continue wondering, even after the resolution of some mysteries leads to obvious lessons.
In a strange and infrequently discussed story called "The Ghost of Doctor Harris," Hawthorne, speaking in his own voice, tells of having encountered a ghost every day for months on end in the reading room of the Boston Athenaeum. Although the ghost expresses kindly feelings and a desire to converse, Hawthorne refuses to address the spirit. Hawthorne's reluctance is due, he says, not to fear but to shyness and perhaps to a certain coldness of heart which makes the reader wonder whether the dead Dr. Harris or the living narrator is less alive. But what makes the tale so "odd and strange" as a ghost story also places it at the center of Hawthorne's use of the Gothic. Traditionally ghosts, whether good or evil, speak ultimate truths about the human condition in this world and in the next. Hawthorne's failure to interrogate this friendly, yearning ghost is, then, a continuation of his habit of using Gothic mystery as a way of postponing, avoiding, or undermining final conclusions.

**Neither Belief Nor Unbelief: Melville's Use of the Gothic**

For both Melville's scholars trying to redeem the Gothic element in Melville's work and students of the Gothic trying to claim Melville as one of their own writers, *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre Or, The Ambiguities* have come to represent the strongest examples of a Gothicism with serious intellectual purposes. Both of these novels deal with traditional
Gothic themes: the battle with a monster, the pursuit and capture, the inherited curse, and the confrontation with cosmic order and disorder. But beyond these conventions, at the center of both *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* is the experience of profound mystery, the brain-cracking disruption of normal life. An indication of the rapid evolution of thinking about the Gothic is the fact that in 1949 Newton Arvin apologetically treated the Gothic strain in Melville's fiction as a "slight and minor element," while in 1962 Lowry Nelson regarded Melville's sense of moral ambiguity as "the heritage of the Gothic novel," and in 1969 Ruth B. Mandel argued that Melville was one of a few "pure" Gothicists because he accepts profound mystery as finally inexplicable. What this shift in critical thought represents is not a difference of opinion but a revaluation of Melville's relation to a school of fiction which has, in the interim, been redefined.

Mandel's study, based on the view that deep mystery characterizes the Gothic, is close to the approach I take to Melville's work. Mandel sees Melville as a pure Gothicist because, unlike the English sources, he repudiates final explanations and embraces what Mandel calls "the Gothic outlook," that is, an "encounter with the unknown" which leads to "intellectual helplessness" and allows "primitive, irrational emotions to dictate our response." Mandel further notes that in his Gothic works Melville distinguishes between characters who see the mysteriousness of life as threatening
or imprisoning and those who see it as "infinitely perplexing . . . a vast territory for endless investigation." And so, in Moby-Dick the active and assertive world of didactic Gothic fiction (as embodied in Ahab) is pondered by the most persistent speculator in American fiction.

One reading of Moby-Dick suggests that the primary tension in the book originates in the struggle with a monstrous and unknowable whale, but further readings reveal that a more significant thematic tension of the novel is between Ahab's monomaniacal self-assurance and Ishmael's pliable, non-judgmental meditations. Whatever Ahab is experiencing, his one object remains to find and to kill the white whale. Ahab's questions, his speeches to the crew, his cunning strategies of search all are directed to this end. For Ishmael, life is not so much a matter of ends to be achieved but of living to be done. If a savage appears in his bed, he adjusts to the situation; if he is on a whaling ship, he will ponder the leviathan. In spite of its voluminousness, Ishmael's study of the whale, as Mandel observes, leads not to conclusions but to more questions. In all but the chapters in which they briefly change place ("The Whiteness of the Whale" and "The Symphony"), Ishmael is as "open and flexible as Ahab is closed and fixed."²²

I am omitting a detailed discussion of Moby-Dick because Mandel's study (which I strongly recommend to other students of American Gothicism) anticipates many of the points
about Melville's use of the Gothic in *Moby-Dick* that follow from my own theoretical framework. Nevertheless, two passages deserve some treatment here because they so clearly show Melville's deliberate manipulation of the conventions of both Gothic modes.

The didactic and speculative Gothic modes co-exist in *Moby-Dick*, and Melville refuses to eschew either one. Ahab functions within a framework of established, if anti-Christian, ideas, lashing out at the injustice and irreponsibility of a universe which creates monsters and tortures human beings. In spite of the multiplicity of alternative perspectives that Melville suggests as approaches to whaling in general and Ahab's quest in particular, the twisted Captain's obsessive goal is never finally invalidated or rendered absurd. Unlike Walpole's Manfred, for instance, Ahab may be seeking revenge out of a sense of justice. In opposition to Ahab's rigidity of thought and action is Ishmael's speculative response to mystery. Profoundly intellectual, Ishmael is saved from the maddening consequences of the wisdom that is woe by his "humanities" and by his ability to accept uncertainty as unavoidable. Although he is a "subterranean miner," (that is, a speculator), Ishmael accepts the fact that he cannot reach all depths. These contrasting mental natures are typical of speculative Gothicism (for example, Wieland versus Clara, Roderick Usher versus narrator, Hester versus Dimmesdale, and the narrators in "Young Goodman Brown" and
Justified Sinner versus the main characters); Melville's contribution to the mode is his full development of both alternatives.

The passages in Moby-Dick which best reveal the boundaries between didactic and speculative Gothicism are those in which Ishmael momentarily shifts from speculation to opinion and in which Ahab stops raging long enough to consider the folly of his life. For in these moments Melville's main characters turn full astern to survey the contexts within which they have been functioning. I will quote at length because of the importance of these sections.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yes, and the gilded velvet of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtile deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before
us a leper; and like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps the prospect around him. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?

Forty—forty—forty years ago!—ago! Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep! . . . the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey—more a demon than a man!--aye, aye! what a forty year's fool—fool—old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now?

Behold. Oh, Starbuck! is it not hard, that with this weary load I bear, one poor leg should have been snatched from under me? Here, brush this old hair aside; it blinds me, that I seem to weep.

Ahab's passage is filled with exclamation points, as Ishmael's is with question marks. But in these sections Ahab's assertions represent doubt and speculation, while Ishmael's questions are increasingly rhetorical. Although Ishmael admits just before the passage quoted above that we have not yet "solved the incantation of this whiteness," and although he begins the passage by asking very real questions about the terror inspired by Moby-Dick, he ends with assertion and outrage. In these lines he moves (like the narrator in "Usher") from an appreciation of a monomaniac's vision of the world to a participation in that vision. But,
as he tells us at the start of this chapter, Ishmael sees Moby-Dick's colorlessness in this way only some of the time. Ahab, on the other hand, temporarily emerges from his delusion, long enough to see the sense in which his quest is absurd, self-destructive, and narrow-minded. For a moment, looking into Starbuck's compassionate eyes, Ahab is almost willing to renounce his certainty, to accept a life in which sharing human warmth is more important than battling the universe. But, true to his monomaniacal heart, to the pain in his groin, and to his acceptance of a didactic Gothic approach to mystery, Ahab uses his new perception of the absurdity of his life to justify and rekindle his old war. As his questions become increasingly rhetorical, he falls back into his habitual certitude, blaming a deterministic cosmos for his own wasted life: "Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? . . . Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to bar?" (p. 410). This resistance offered to omnipotent indifference or omnipotent benevolence is behind Ahab's quest, Manfred's treachery, Schedoni's last murder, and the self-hating laughter of Melmoth. All are defeated in their wars against the very forces that shape human existence.

Even more than Moby-Dick, Pierre is, in many ways, the quintessential work of American Gothicism because the contrast between two ways of dealing with mystery externally treated in Moby-Dick (in the Ahab/Ishmael contrast) is
internalized in the mind of a young and increasingly desperate idealist. In *Moby-Dick*, these approaches to experience seem at least at times heroic and meaningful. But in *Pierre*, Melville presents his most reductive view of human effort. In one sense Pierre is a failed Ishmael, unable to sustain a speculative process that might lead to less extreme action. In another sense he is a failing Ahab who assumes absurd and extreme postures in opposition to worldly and cosmic foes which refuse to appear to oppose him. How, Melville asks in what is probably the most disturbing work of nineteenth-century American literature, can either Ahab's or Ishmael's response be appropriate in a world without *Moby-Dick*, that is, in a world in which even mystery is elusive and unclear in its mysteriousness?

There are many passages in *Pierre* which through their images suggest how Melville thought of the Gothic. His association of traditional Gothic motifs with mental chaos is nowhere clearer, however, than in the chapter in which Pierre, having just seen Isabel faint, tries to understand who she is and why he is feeling so strangely. Like Emily St. Aubert who is dragged from her home and locked up in Udolpho castle, Pierre sees his familiar world collapse, only to be replaced by a world of horrors:

> Hitherto I have ever held but lightly, thought Pierre, all stories of ghostly mysticalness in man; my creed of this world leads me to believe in visible, beautiful flesh, and audible breath, however sweet and scented; but only in visible

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
flesh, and audible breath, have I hitherto be-
lieved. But now!—now!—and again he would
lose himself in the most surprising and pre-
ternatural ponderings, which baffled all the
introspective cunning of his mind. Himself
was too much for himself. He felt that what
he had always before considered the solid land
of veritable reality, was now being audaciously
encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded
phantoms, disembarking in his soul, as from
flotillas of specter-boats.24

Mandel notes that Pierre is a subverted bildungsroman
in which the hero is destroyed by his failure to learn "more
than the ambiguous nature of life,"25 and that this failure
is the result of Pierre's acceptance of absolutist, tradi-
tional, aristocratic values. What places Pierre within the
mainstream of American Gothicism is that the conflict be-
tween mystery and coherence occurs within the hero's mind
and is the main source of horror. Like Edgar Huntly desper-
ately trying to justify his desire to cure Clithero, like
Wieland yearning for the voice of God, like the narrator in
"Ligeia" waiting for a sign of his first wife's return, like
Goodman Brown using his dream walk to justify misanthropy,
and like Ahab hunting the whale, Pierre repeatedly imposes
value systems over his confusing experiences in an attempt
to understand them. Like all of these victims of mental
pride or mental impotence, Pierre pays the great price of
personal happiness to indulge his taste for order and mean-
ing. Like The Inferno, which the hero reads with great
interest at the start of the book, Pierre is a descent by
stages into deeper levels of despair, a despair born of the
effort to function morally and coherently in a world which
defies all efforts at control and understanding, in which
even God seems "inscrutable."

At the outset Pierre is the "fool of love," yearning
to contain his own passionate nature within the starched
artifices of sentimental, courtly emotions and rhetoric.
Making a religion of love, Pierre and Lucy Tartan, his blond
fiancée, regard each other as angels and saints. When the
narrator waxes poetic in praise of love, he is mocking both
conventional fiction and the conventional mold into which
Pierre is attempting to pour his desires:

Endless is the account of Love. Time and space
cannot contain Love's story. All things that
are sweet to see, or taste, or feel, or hear,
all these things were made by Love. Love made
not the Arctic zones, but Love is ever reclaim­
ing them.

(p. 57)

Without wondering who did make the Arctic zones, Pierre
tries to believe that the mere sentiments of love are "all
powerful." But he finds himself pressing Lucy for more
than mere sentimentality. And when Lucy, frightened, rebuffs
his passion, calling him "too ardent and impetuous," Pierre
is forced to repress himself.

It is, perhaps, the frustration of his pure love for
Lucy that makes him so vulnerable to the dark, sensuous
Isabel Banford. If Pierre sees Lucy surrounded by a "spangled
veil of mystery" (p. 59), he sees promises of overwhelming
passion in the flowing hair and melodious voice of his more
mysterious supposed half-sister. Or, perhaps, even more than the unconscious sexual attraction, Pierre is drawn to Isabel by the opportunity she affords him to embrace an even stronger and more righteous set of values. In one stroke Isabel overthrows Pierre's familial pride, his comfortable sense of aristocratic dignity, and his identification with father, mother, and ancestral home. The first minute after noon is, for Pierre, night. Pierre's dedication to absolutist ways of judging is clearly seen in the fact that even the possibility that his father was once in his lifetime a seducer is sufficient to overturn Pierre's entire world view, to make him scorn his haughty mother and the system that supports the hypocritical virtue of the Glendinnings. Prior to the appearance of Isabel, Pierre thought of his father as morally perfect, of his mother as a saint. And the fall from those pedestals is not to earth but to the blackest hole of hell. In one sense Pierre is the story of an adolescent ruined by his failure to regard his parents as neither gods nor fiends, but as fallible human beings.

What Pierre wants to do, what Melville insists the sentimental code requires of every young infatuate, is to give all for love. But in its complete acceptability, its smiling, parentally approved nature, Pierre's love for Lucy is too easy. Isabel offers Pierre a perfect opportunity to sacrifice his conventionality, and she presents the opportunity, as Melville cynically notes, in the form of female
loveliness. The combined seduction of absolutism and passion is, to a person of Pierre's ardent and yearning nature, irresistible.

Although Melville lets his readers peer into Pierre's complex motivations, Pierre remains for some time convinced that he is acting in obedience to principles alone. He sees his sacrifice of Lucy and association with Isabel as a move from love to truth, or from a lower to a higher (that is, more Christian) love. "Henceforth," he cries with typically inflated rhetoric, "I will know nothing but Truth; glad Truth or sad Truth; I will know what is and do what my deepest angel dictates" (pp. 90-91). Always striving to function as an angel in this world, Pierre fails to see his inner devils prompting him to "unprecedented" crimes. The scene in which Pierre crawls under the dangerous Memnon stone is Melville's image for Pierre's extreme longing for absolute principles. Under the massive boulder, Pierre soliloquizes:

... if Life be a cheating dream, and virtue as unmeaning and unsequeled with any blessing as the midnight mirth of wine; if by sacrificing myself for Duty's sake, my own mother resacrifices me; if Duty's self be but a bugbear, and all things are allowable and unpunishable to man;—then do thou, mute Massiveness, fall on me!

(p. 163)

In the end Pierre is doomed by the very conditional curse he calls down upon himself here. As his own acts seem less and less clearly related to higher duty and truth, Pierre becomes less and less able to tolerate existence.
While he is arriving at his shocking decision to "marry" Isabel, Pierre briefly sees himself as the only true Christian in a world of corrupt compromises and expedient virtues. He mocks the relativistic morality of Rev. Falsgrave, and, like Brown's Wieland, he claims to be acting on the direct counsel of "God himself" (p. 194). Pierre's dilemma of wanting to recognize Isabel without besmirching his father's name or mother's pride leaves him caught up in conflicting ideals, "dabbling in the vomit of his loathed identity" (p. 202). But this conflict Pierre believes he resolves by renouncing Lucy, claiming to have married Isabel, and leaving Saddle Meadows. Melville carefully undercuts Pierre's view of his own actions, however, by placing the reader at some distance from the hero's optimism:

Now he thinks he knows that the wholly unanticipated storm which had so terribly burst upon him, had yet burst upon him for his own good; for the place, which in its undetected incipiency, the storm had obscurely occupied in his soul, seemed now clear sky to him; and all his horizon seemed distinctly commanded by him. (p. 203, my italics)

Pierre sets out to battle all the world in defense of pure goodness, but, instead of "making war upon the creatures of the deep," he proceeds directly to a city of chaos and corruption. The Kafkaesque scenes in which Pierre argues with a hack driver, runs up to see Glen Stanley, is propositioned by whores, and enters a noisy and crowded police station all embody the world of moral and emotional
confusion which Pierre has unknowingly entered. Very slowly, over about two hundred pages in which Pierre resists the obvious, he comes to see the impossibility of his position, the absurdity of living perfectly as an imperfect being in an even more imperfect world.

Pierre resists recognizing his own complicated needs and goals because such recognition will lead him to self-loathing. Isabel strikes his "secret monochord," but is that chord sexual passion or the longing for an ideal? The conflicting attraction of these two primal drives in Pierre leads him to repudiate truth and duty, virtue and vice, and to wander in mental confusion. Unable to think things through, Pierre sits in his dingy apartment, being drawn closer to an incestuous relation with his half-sister, and yet being held back from this by conscience. It is typical of Pierre that his discovery of the moral imperfection of all men (himself included) becomes a polemical position; he pledges to "gospelize the world anew" with the lesson that "Virtue and Vice are trash!" (p. 310). A character less addicted to certainty would allow the refutation of old opinions to reduce his sense of intellectual power. Melville notes that although Pierre is "afloat in himself," he foolishly believes that he has seen through the world's surface to "the unlayered substance" (pp. 322-323).

More and more, however, Pierre is confronted with insoluble mysteries: the mystery of Isabel's past, of his
own unconscious sexuality, of Lucy's bizarre actions, and of the disastrous consequences of his own seemingly upright acts. And more and more these mysteries drive him toward a raving insanity. Using water symbolism reminiscent of *Moby-Dick*, Melville shows us a young man plunged in mysteriousness, drowning in the obscurity of his own life. And, though Pierre makes a final desperate effort to impose new, clear values on his experience, by seeing Lucy as his "good" angel, or by concluding that Isabel is not his sister, in the end life proves too shifting for such efforts to succeed. He embraces murder and death after rejecting both Isabel and Lucy and so, in effect, himself. Without truth, without virtue, without pure love, Pierre cannot live; and, since these things can never exist outside of fiction and fantasy, Pierre decides to die.

Why Pierre cannot accept the tainted flowers of an imperfect world and why the world and man's knowledge of it must be imperfect are the two great questions which Melville invites us to consider. Pierre's insistence on abstract ideals may be the result of his proud upbringing. The heir to the name and fortune of the Glendinnings, Pierre looks back through what he is raised to regard as generations of spotless nobility. Old Pierre, the Revolutionary War hero, seems to young Pierre to have been "majestic," "angelic," a "noble, god-like being," "made up of strength and beauty" (p. 52). And throughout his youth Pierre is urged to think
always of your "dear, perfect father" (p. 40). His mother is a beauty even in her early middle age, a woman who maintains rigid moral standards and enjoys a relation of "romantic filial love" with Pierre. Ironically Melville says of this relationship:

In a detached and individual way, it seemed almost to realize here below the sweet dreams of those religious enthusiasts, who paint to us a Paradise to come, when etherealized from all drosses and stains, the holiest passion of man shall unite all kindreds and climes in one circle of pure and unimpairable delight.

(p. 37)

Although this structure of divine ideality is almost pure facade, Pierre is bred from birth to link his identity with it.

Why, in this world, must human knowledge and action always fall short of perfect correctness? Plinlimmon's essay on horologicals and chronometricals is more of a metaphor for the question than an answer. In his anti-Idealist, anti-Platonic argument, Plinlimmon asserts that though there are pure ideals of knowledge and morality, the human mind is isolated from them and the human situation inappropriate to them:

When they go to heaven, it will be quite another thing. . . . For, hitherto, being authoritatively taught by his dogmatical teachers that he must, while on earth, aim at heaven, and attain it, too, in all his earthly acts, on pain of eternal wrath; and finding by experience that this is utterly impossible; in his despair, he is too apt to run clean away into all manner of moral abandonment, self-deceit, and hypocrisy . . . or else he openly runs, like a mad dog, into atheism.

(pp. 248-249)
Pierre runs not to atheism but to despair over his failure to align personal behavior with divine wisdom.

Pierre is caught in this contradiction so forcefully because, like a number of other characters in speculative Gothic fiction, he finds thinking an unacceptable alternative to knowing, and compromising an unacceptable alternative to bold, decisive action. More like Laertes than Hamlet, Pierre finds it impossible to consider in what ways the "time is out of joint" and how or if it is possible to "set it right." Instead, like Polonius' son at the head of his armed band, Pierre charges forward strewing corpses around him, moving at full speed into frustration and confusion.

Pierre is a knotty, ponderous book, but not because its main character is a dexterous reasoner. In fact, Pierre is conspicuous for his failure to figure things out, for his inability, chronic at times, to consider all sides of a question. Pierre's incompetence as a speculator often becomes the main focus of speculation in the reader's mind. The hero's most important meditation, if such it can be called, concerns the claim that Isabel is his step-sister. His reaction to Isabel's letter is about as well considered as Wieland's response to Carwin's thundering voice. The evidence on which he convicts his father is thin and circumstantial. No probate court would grant Isabel a claim in the Glendinning estate on the basis of her highly colored and possibly self-serving story. She remembers a sea voyage as

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
a child, a residence abroad, a residence in an asylum, and another in a farmer's house. She recalls having been visited by her father who unknowingly left his monographed handkerchief behind on one occasion. Pierre accepts all of this at face value and aligns the information with details from his father's life: that he died calling for his daughter, that he was rumored to have been infatuated with a French actress, and that Isabel resembles a smiling portrait taken around the time when this love affair was supposedly going on. Out of this tissue of memory and gossip Pierre builds the relation that will require his sacrifice of wealth, happiness, and normal life.

In fact, Pierre does not wait to hear the evidence before arriving at his conclusion. Isabel's letter containing only the assertion that she is his sister is sufficient to convince him. For one brief moment Pierre considers alternative explanations: that the letter is a "malicious forgery" and its claims vile deceptions (p. 91). But this is more of a reflexive cry of pain than a reasoned objection to Isabel's "revelations." And a few seconds later, without having considered the proofs to be presented, Pierre has gone from disbelief and horror to a full advocacy of his "sister's" rights:

"Now I feel that nothing but Truth can move me so. This letter is not a forgery. Oh! Isabel, thou art my sister . . . Oh! thou poor castaway girl, that in loneliness and anguish must have long breathed that same air, which I have only inhaled for
delight . . . sweet Isabel! . . . Thou movest before me, in rainbows spun of thy tears! I see thee long weeping, and God demands me for thy comforter; and comfort thee, stand by thee, and fight for thee, will thy leapingly-acknowledging brother, whom thy own father named Pierre."

(P. 91)

Pierre feels that only truth (with a capital T) can so move him because he has never recognized the force of passion within his own mind. He simply replaces the old saints (mother, father, Lucy) with a new, more tragic, more deserving, and more holy object of veneration: the sister he sees spun out of rainbow tears. If his acknowledgment of Isabel is leapingly swift, his thinking about her is stumblingly defective. Melville describes Pierre's thoughts as "serpentine" and proceeding by way not of deductive steps but of "irresistible intuitions," scorning to scrutinize "the small pros and cons--but in an impulsive subservience to the god-like dictation of events themselves, find the surest solution of perplexities" (p. 114). Pierre is, in a sense, crushed by small details and by the increasingly Satanic "dictation of events."

Pierre does not until much later consider several crucial ideas which occur to the reader at the time of Isabel's letter: that Isabel may, without lying, have created a fiction to fill the vacuum of her otherwise empty life; that Pierre is prejudiced in favor of finding a sister because he rather incestuously always longed for one; that any of the "facts" is soft as evidence in the sense that it could
support a number of different conclusions. As a witness of sound judgment Isabel is undermined by both her lapses of memory and her extremely doubtful conclusion that the guitar she buys from a travelling salesman once belonged to her mother. Pierre, desperately trying to sever his sibling tie to Isabel and commence a sexual relation, begins to doubt Isabel's conclusions toward the end of the book. He sees a European portrait resembling his father and uses this as material to attack the theory that Isabel and he are related. But he despairs of success when Isabel remembers the sound of waves. For Pierre the stakes are high—life and death—but the level of thought, as these final flip-flops suggest, is pathetically low.

Unable to define himself through unambiguous action, and unable to accept a flux of ideas, Pierre finds living less and less meaningful. He blesses Glen Stanly and Fred Tartan for appearing to oppose him; at last the world presents targets for his "pure" rage. But Glen and Fred are not Moby-Dick; their conventional morality does not deserve Pierre's ranting disgust. Again his reaction is excessive and again it fails to satisfy him. Frazzled by the search for the numinous in phenomenal realms, Pierre is an outcast of God, unfit for earth and bitter about heaven. His last thought is his most bleak: "Had I been heartless now, dis-owned, and spuriously portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long life on earth,
and perchance through a long eternity in heaven!" (pp. 402-403). This final anguished cry is Melville's backward sneer at all of the mutilated heroines—the Clarissas, Emilias, Antonias—who looked to heaven for a reward for worldly misfortune.

This is the final point of speculation in *Pierre*: although Plinlimmon insists on the reality of pure ideals (chronometrical standards) in heaven, Melville, in Hawthorne's phrase, can neither believe nor disbelieve. Melville, unlike Plinlimmon, does not smile at the injustice of human life, and Pierre is not alone in despising the unjust treatment Delly Ulver receives from the Falsgraves of this world. Even at his most ridiculous heights of bombast, Pierre is both comic and tragic, a victim of the "woe that is madness," a woe born of his sense of the uncertainty of life. And the progress of this young didacticist's pathetic comedy and inconclusive tragedy is pondered by a speculative narrator who sees the futility of Pierre's efforts but cannot decide whether Pierre or the universe is more to blame.

An indication of the finally ambiguous and speculative nature of *Pierre* is Melville's unwillingness to promote Plinlimmon as an advocate of the truth. Clearly Pierre's life would have run more smoothly if he had taken Plinlimmon's advice, but it is also clear that that advice, though always available (hiding in a fold of the hero's trousers), is inappropriate to Pierre's serious, searching character.
Plinlimmon himself is an enigmatical figure, lurking in corridors at the Apostles' residence, seeming to haunt, but not support or aid, Pierre. And the characters who do embrace Plinlimmon's morality of convenience, Glen Stanly and Lucy's mother, for instance, are far less attractive than Pierre. Pierre himself is both pathetic and heroic; whom do we respect more, Melville asks with typical disregard for the yes-gentry, Satan or yonder sinful haberdasher?

Like Brown's reference to Carwin's double tongue, like Poe's multiplicity of explanations, like Hawthorne's unwillingness to say which of Hester's opinions are amiss, Melville's sympathy for Pierre even at his most absurd moments, Melville's simultaneous advocacy and mockery of Plinlimmon's ethics, places Pierre within the speculative Gothic tradition.

Pierre is frequently criticized for its overblown language and conflicting purposes. Even Mandel, usually so correct in her appreciation of Melville's use of mystery, finds Pierre an artistic failure:

What is wrong with Pierre is neither its conception nor its basic structure but its inability to find a language to produce the proper emotional equivalents for its vision . . . excesses dominate the book's rhetoric, appearing in its imagery, diction, and action. They seem to arise out of Melville's need and inability to find a controlled, dramatic embodiment for his extreme vision.

This same charge is often made against most speculative Gothic works. Melville is not trying to present "an extreme vision"; he is, like Godwin, Brown, and Poe, unravelling a process, and the confusion and excesses of the book are not
Melville's artistic lapses but Pierre's desperate grasping after perfect standards of behavior. It is not that Melville cannot find words that will express Pierre's problem; rather it is Pierre who cannot find objects that will support his idealism, define his goals, and help him evade mystery. Pure love, pure virtue, pure hate—the stuff of didactic Gothicism and of Christian literature generally—are very far from the shifting mysteriousness of life in this book. The Ahab-like thoughts Pierre has after first meeting Isabel are typical of Pierre's extremism and of Melville's control:

Guide me, gird me, guard me, this day, ye sovereign powers! Bind me in bonds I cannot break; remove all sinister allureings from me; eternally this day deface in me the detested and distorted images of all the convenient lies and duty-subterfuges of the diving and ducking moralities of this earth.

(p. 134)

This is the kind of prose that makes Pierre so unpleasant a book, at times, to read, but if it is unpleasant it is because we are being forced to witness unpleasant human activities: self-deception, posturing, and self-righteousness. Moreover, in a way characteristic of the mode of which it is the ultimate example, this passage shows a character's effort to avoid speculation by insisting on one vision of the truth. The multiplication of alliterative phrases is reminiscent of the speaker in "The Raven" who tries to dispel confusion by joking about the grim, gaunt, and ungainly bird. Like Wieland in the courtroom or Roderick Usher on the night of his
sister's rising, Pierre is driven to rhetorical explosions by the intensity of his (to the reader dubious) convictions. And the tension between a character's certainty and the reader's doubt is the starting point of all speculative Gothic work.

Like all Gothic fiction, Pierre begins with mystery; in this case a mysterious dark beauty, mysterious desires, a mysterious portrait, and a mysterious past. Like much American Gothic fiction, the bulk of the novel deals with a character's frozen responses to these mysteries, responses which by their apparent inadequacy, force us as readers to wonder what responses would be appropriate and what the real meaning of the mysteries is. Not many of us have to deal with mind-cracking perplexities like the appearance of an unknown half-sister, but all of us, at some time, must deal with the unknown.

In "The Apple-Tree Table," a story with both Gothic and mock-Gothic elements, the unknown temporarily disturbs the domestic peace of a middle class family when strange noises are heard from an antique piece of furniture. The narrator, the father, sits up nights listening to the odd ticking sound and moving back and forth in his mind between supernatural explanations (which he associates with Cotton Mather) and scientific ones (which he associates with Democritus). During his first night-long vigil, the narrator relates his Gothic terror to his inability to settle
on one view of the table. And when the noise turns out to be caused by a hatching insect imbedded in the wood, the speculative narrator realizes that even this event is subject to a variety of explanations. If they send for Madame Pazzi, the famous spiritualist, she will have recourse to a supernatural system of understanding life. If they send for Professor Johnson, the famous naturalist, he will explain everything according to the laws of physics.

One of the very few successful speculators in American Gothic fiction, this narrator sees that mystery offers an opportunity for self-definition: an invitation to impose our preconceptions on the unknown. Or, for the rare man (Ishmael may be the only perfect example), mystery offers freedom from preconceptions and from ego, the opportunity to experience the world with fresh eyes and to see limitless possibilities. The terror of this freedom from both self and past experiences drives most of the characters of American Gothicism to close off the process of thinking prematurely, to accept one view of life and to act upon it. This limiting of vision is generally disastrous, whether it leaves children murdered or whaling vessels sunk. The two sources of horror in Gothic fiction are intellectual certainty and its opposite, a sense of the sheer flux of ideas, the mental void or abyss. From these fundamental intellectual terrors, whether the specific form is the bewildered heroine's flight from a determined villain (as in *Otranto*) or the agony of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
not being able to understand what is happening to your childhood friend (as in "Usher"), Gothic fiction derives its universality.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Emerging from Delusion as a Pattern
in Gothic Fiction

On a clear blue day when the ocean and air seem to represent the creative life of nature and the only signs of whiteness come from peaceful snow-white unspeckled sea birds, Ahab leans over the desk of the Pequod and stares at his reflection in the water. Unable to "pierce the profundity" of his shadow sinking into the sea, he shakes off his battle-weary mood of defiance, looks around him at the beauty of the sea world, and sheds a tear, a tear Melville says is more precious than the riches of the deep. For that one drop of sorrow is Ahab's only moment of hesitation, of regret, of speculation. It is his brief emergence from delusion, an emergence rare in Ahab's experience but typical of the fate of Gothic villains and monomaniacs.

In order to pursue a single purpose in the face of universal opposition or indifference, villains are forced to direct their thinking and acting to one end. In the many Gothic works considered here, these ends range from power or
wealth to rather bizarre moral or religious goals: the attempt to hear the voice of God or to act purely in an impure world. But for each of these monomaniacs a moment comes when, emerging from his self-willed delusion, he sees the sense in which he has been a fool, a dupe, or a madman. And it is in these moments of emergence, of wider vision, that the differences between the two Gothic modes are most obvious. For what a character realizes in the process of emerging from delusion is indicative of both an author's use of Gothic mystery and his worldview.

In English Gothic fiction, a reversal occurs when the villain previously alienated from accepted theological and moral ideas perceives his tragic relation to the order of the universe. For Walpole's Manfred and Reeve's false Baron, the moment of emergence is one of sorrow and remorse. The pitifulness of their efforts to resist omnipotent benevolence becomes as obvious to these villains as it has been to the other characters all along. "My heart," cries Manfred after murdering his daughter, rejecting his loving wife, and losing his political power, "at last is open to thy devout admonitions." At last he swears not "to question the will of Heaven" (pp. 110-111). "The judgments of Heaven are fallen upon me," echoes Reeve's Lord Lovel after his defeat at the hands of Sir Philip Harclay.

For the villains of Radcliffe's and Lewis's fiction, the moment of emergence is avoided or delayed. Montoni, the
villain in Udolpho, dies off stage and frustrated; Schedoni, the vicious monk in The Italian, realizes almost too late that he has been working to ruin his own relative. A blackguard to the end, he finds it impossible to learn the lesson implied in this reversal. As readers, however, we emerge from this villain's rancorous demise to the happy wedding of the young lovers. For Lewis's Ambrosio the moment of emergence is almost simultaneous with his death. In spite of his temporary and material triumphs, he realizes that a higher judge has rendered a final decision. Desperately Ambrosio tries to turn away from Satan by offering prayers of penitence to the deity he has so grossly offended. But, when Satan mocks this as craven and hopeless, Ambrosio despair and curses himself. His six days of physical torture are intensified by remorse and agonizing self-recrimination.

Godwin's Falkland, Caleb, and St. Leon all recognize too late that their actions are morally suspect. Falkland appears in the final courtroom confrontation tottering like a corpse. Caleb's first glance at his persecutor changes his mind; the former servant sees that dragging Falkland into court is diabolical and hateful. Emerging from the resolve born of desperation, Caleb realizes that "there must have been some dreadful mistake" leading to his defiance. And the pain of this emergence, this regret, becomes a living hell for Caleb, greater than "the imaginary hell, which the great enemy of mankind is represented as carrying about with
him" (p. 330). Though Caleb began writing his history to vindicate himself, he finishes not to save his tarnished reputation but to provide the world with an unmangled account of his ruined existence. *St. Leon* is the narrative of a man who has emerged from the folly of a life wasted in pursuing wealth, power, and longevity, to write a work extolling familial love and domestic joys. His narrative is an account of the despair born of his perception of his folly, a nostalgic sigh over lost opportunities.

Hogg's young sinner does not, even after committing a series of "justified" crimes, see that his theology is somehow mistaken. Robert Wringham's shocking failure to emerge from delusion is the result of the strength with which he holds his obviously false and destructive views. After murdering his brother and mother, after seducing and murdering an innocent woman, he is persecuted by inner and outer demons. Surrounded by evidence of his corruption, Wringham begins "to have secret terrors that the great enemy of man's salvation was exercising power over me that might eventually lead to my ruin" (p. 165). Unfortunately for him, he regards these brief moments of emergence as "temporary and sinful fears." In the face of it all, even as he commits suicide, he continues to be certain of his election to eternal felicity. For everyone but Wringham, certainly for the reader, his true spiritual fate becomes clearer and clearer. And so the avoidance of emergence is exploited by Hogg for its
ironic power: an objective worldview is affirmed by this complete villain's failure to appreciate it. Maturin's Melmoth, the oldest villain in this group of novels, laughs so bitterly because he long ago synthesized his doomed but obsessive search for lost souls with the self-mocking lessons of emergence. His warning to Isadora to flee him as she would the most vile monster is indicative of one side of his personality. These villains come at least for a moment to see the sense in which they have been at odds with social, political, personal, or cosmic justice; and the shock of this realization—even if yelping fiends were not around to carry them off to eternal pain—would probably be enough to kill them.

In American Gothic fiction, characters emerging from delusion do not often find that they have been out of touch with clearly defined and objectively valid laws of theology and morality. Typically they look around, note that their previous obsession or certainty was erroneous, but do not then embrace a truth new to them but not to us as readers. Brown's Wieland and Edgar Huntly are the first clear examples. Wieland, in the last scene of the novel, wavers between various convictions: that God ordered him to commit murder, that Satan through Carwin tricked him into sinning, and, finally, that his own "misguided hand" was responsible. As he emerges from delusive certainty into painful confusion, Wieland holds his head and tries to "tear his mind from
self-contemplation" (p. 261). And while Wieland is avoiding answers, Brown, through his narrator, is raising a final question: is Wieland, in his misdirected piety, really evil? According to Clara, Wieland's motives deserve "the homage of mankind" because of his Christ-like "energy of duty" and "preference of supreme good" (pp. 260-261). Unlike Manfred or Ambrosio who finally accept the fact that they were wrong, Wieland chooses death to escape the agony of this realization. And what Wieland avoids in death we, as readers, are forced to contemplate. Edgar Huntly in a sense emerges from his delusive faith in both his own psychiatric capabilities and in the perfectibility of man when his "patient" Clithero responds to the "cure" with raving and attempted violence. "How sudden and enormous the transition from uncertainty to knowledge," he cries after learning of Clithero's second attempt to kill Mrs. Lorimer. But what knowledge has Edgar acquired? And when was he ever uncertain? If he is wrong about trying to help Clithero, is Sarsefield right in leaving the madman to bleed to death? Huntly characterizes his development incorrectly; he has moved from a false certainty to a shell-shocked intellectual modesty. This development is typical of the characters of American Gothic fiction.

Poe's Gothic tales, with their unity of effect, usually do not emphasize moments of emergence. Roderick Usher, for instance, never wonders whether it hasn't all been a bad dream, or whether he really should have the tarn cleaned.
The narrator in "Ligeia" moves between faith in Ligeia's return and loyalty to the living Rowena. But his emergence from obsession is never complete and he remains trapped by his final vision of Ligeia. At the end of "Berenice," Egaeus realizes that he has, in a state of trance, mutilated the body of his prematurely buried wife. But this shocking emergence comes too late to help, and rather than restoring him or the reader to a true perception of what has happened, it is a final burst of gore and horror. The difficulty of deciding whether Poe's characters do emerge from delusion is indicative of his use of speculative Gothicism. What can we think about Montresor, for example? As he relives his fifty-year-old torture-murder, has he emerged from delusive satisfaction in revenge or is he still crowing? And what about the narrator in "The Black Cat" who moves from one delusively opinion to another, never arriving at an objective sense of his actions? What makes Poe's tales so horrifying is that in them there are many ways for the characters to be wrong, but no clear way of getting at what is right, no easy emergence.

Many of Hawthorne's characters resist emergence. Both Rev. Hooper and Goodman Brown go to their graves convinced of the correctness of their responses to human weakness. Hawthorne uses those who do emerge in different ways, some to affirm a point, others to pose questions. Aylmer emerges from his obsessive loathing of Georgiana's "hand" only long
enough to kiss it once. Is this his best moment? Ethan Brand, after realizing that he has committed the "unpardonable sin," kills himself. Hawthorne clearly agrees with the suicide: a cold searching of souls in pursuit of great immorality is the greatest evil.

What of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale? Do they learn the truth when their own lives come into focus for them? After seven years of obsession and delusion, both the sinful minister and his medical companion are, at least briefly, released from the hell of their own mental traps. The minister, torn by guilt and fear, wanders in a maze of self-loathing after agreeing to elope with Hester, a move he sees as the repetition of his sin. Suddenly the lure of sin overwhelms him, and he just barely refrains from doing and saying impious things. But this dark night precedes Dimmesdale's dawn; he emerges from it into a new sense that his previous cowardice was folly. Instead of fleeing to Europe, he mounts the scaffold on Election day, shows his own scarlet letter, and dies a penitent. For old Roger Chillingworth, the moment of emergence comes earlier, before the forest scene, in the chapter called "Hester and the Physician." Although he begins the chapter by fiendishly reminding Hester of her sin, he ends by seeing his own moral decay. Chillingworth starts this scene by gloating over his torturing of Dimmesdale, by exulting in the fact that he has "grown to exist only by this perpetual poison of direct revenge." But even as he speaks
these remorseless words, the physician catches a glimpse of his true self; Hawthorne's account of this is one of the most clearly described moments of emergence in Gothic fiction:

The unfortunate physician, while uttering these words, lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass. It was one of those moments—when a man's moral aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind's eye. Not improbably, he had never before viewed himself as he now did.

(p. 124)

The result of this moment is that Chillingworth remembers his "old faith," a fatalism which exonerates all sinners as the illusory agents of a "dark necessity." Because Hawthorne is not writing a didactic Gothic novel, neither Dimmesdale nor Chillingworth emerges from delusion to embrace an objectively valid and universally acknowledged philosophy. Dimmesdale has probably done the best he could by confessing, but we are not sure of his eternal fate, as we are, for instance, of Manfred's or Antonia's. Another, and possibly a stronger, man might have gone away with Hester. And what of Chillingworth? His "old faith" is as cynical in its amorality as his new practice. Hawthorne creates a world in which all convictions seem at times delusive.

I have considered moments of emergence in Moby-Dick in my brief discussion of the novel in Chapter VI. Melville's religious skepticism and humanistic outrage are behind Ahab's short moment of emergence. For, unlike Walpole's Manfred
who comes to see his wicked life as a crime against God, Ahab sees his wasted life as God's crime against him. The idea of dragging the judge (God or the universe) to the bar is antithetical to the theology of the early Gothic novel and typical of speculative Gothicism in its assumption of the failure of traditional ways of judging. The gradual realization of this failure on the part of the protagonist makes *Pierre* a novel of emergence. The most resilient idealist in American literature, Pierre watches his numerous values demolished one by one. Only after ruining himself, his mother, and his fiancee, after suffering poverty and social ostracism, does Pierre finally emerge. And this emergence, his final surrender of all ideals, does not lead to a vision of the truth, but to a sense of the unobtainability of such a vision. Any villain in a didactic Gothic work could cry out that he has been rendered the "fool of fate"; only a character in a speculative Gothic work would, in final perplexity, bemoan having become the fool not only of fate, but of truth and virtue as well.

In the world of didactic Gothicism, the moment of emergence is always illuminating—if often disappointing—for the character who pierces the mystery only to discover that he has been associated with the side which must ultimately lose. God's in his heaven and the wicked tremble at the news. The wail of self-hatred that follows this realization echoes from Walpole's *Manfred* back to the villains of Jacobean
horror tragedy and forward to the villain-heroes of Gothic fiction. It is the sinking feeling that comes, in Shakespeare's phrase, from getting what you want without becoming content, of looking around to learn that your partners in life are fiends and that your destination is hell. In speculative Gothicism, the contrasting intellectual values are not specific systems of ideas (for example, Calvinism versus doctrine of works, sensuality versus asceticism) but ways of using ideas. Thus, when Wieland, Huntly, Chillingworth, Ahab, and Pierre emerge from the false security of delusive certainty about their relation to absolute principles (for example, God's will, the power of reason, pure love) into a moral, epistemological, psychological, and theological flux of ideas, they are set loose in a threatening world of confusing thoughts and events. They cannot, like Ambrosio and Melmoth sink into the flames of damnation; they must remain to contemplate a damnable state of mental chaos. And even when, in response to the terror of the unknown, the emerging characters opt for death, we, as readers, are left in a void created by failed thinking and bankrupt ideas.

Moving into and out of mystery is the business of Gothic fiction. The Gothic is not so much a "quest for the numinous," as D. P. Varma argues, as it is an assault on the phenomenon/noumenon distinction. When ghosts walk city streets, when the dead talk in groans, when devils carry sinners across the foggy sky toward hell, and giant helmets

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
crash in the courtyard of medieval castles, noumena have become phenomena. Or have they? The complex of emotions and ideas surrounding these Gothic mysteries includes not only fear and horror but also amazement and speculation. Not all Gothic fiction strives toward the noumenal because most Gothic fiction uses the intrusion of the unearthly into the lives of its characters as a starting point, and not an objective or goal. What am I to think about these strange events, wonders Manfred, asking a question returned to by dozens of characters in Gothic fiction. In didactic Gothic fiction, this question is answered and the answer brings the noumenal intrusions into focus as intelligible parts of an orderly universe. In speculative Gothic fiction, the intrusion of the noumenal is a starting point that leads to the consideration of whether the universe as reflected in the fictive world is coherent at all.

Because it raises and sometimes answers questions about a part of life largely ignored in other kinds of literature, Gothic fiction is important. Life is not only the social and moral world of Jane Austen and William Dean Howells. It is not simply the conflict of social and psychological forces of Emile Zola and Theodore Dreiser. These writers, for all the clarity of their work, ignore what might be called the Gothic mood, a feeling as old as Otranto and The Monk, as new as Absalom, Absalom! and "Ballad of the Thin Man," that, in the words of Bob Dylan, "something is
happening, but you don't know what it is." Because life includes nameless terrors, because we are, at least in part, mysterious to ourselves and to others, because death is a pit darker than the deepest dungeon—Gothic fiction speaks to all of us about our experience of horror and the unknown.
CHAPTER I - FOOTNOTES


In his unpublished dissertation, "Gothic to Fantastic: Readings in Supernatural Fiction," Sydney L. W. Lea distinguishes between two schools of supernatural fiction: the Gothic in which the attempt to approach and understand the supernatural always fails, and the fantastic in which the supernatural is available to man and inspirational. Poe is, to Lea, the prototypical Gothicist; E. T. A. Hoffmann the most outstanding writer of fantastic literature. The problem with this system of classification is that in associating Poe with writers like Walpole and Reeve, it fails to establish a sense of the difference between early and later Gothic works.


3 In The Nature of Narrative (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), Scholes and Kellogg define didactic fiction as "the extreme form of intellectually controlled fiction," whether it "may illustrate a moral truism, or put to the most strenuous kind of examination the most problematic and profound ethical and metaphysical question." This broad definition allows Scholes and Kellogg to distinguish didactic from empirical narratives (e.g., history or biography) and romance (esthetically controlled narrative). In terms of these broad categories of narrative form, Gothic fiction is romance. But Scholes and Kellogg point out that these forms are not pure, that often "Romance turns to didactic allegory or mimetic characterization . . . to enrich itself." Gothic romance is rarely mimetic in the sense in which realistic fiction imitates common experience, but in the early English works there
is a reliance on allegory. This study will, therefore, distinguish between works which illustrate moral, theological, or psychological truisms and works which examine problematic and profound questions without arriving at answers.


5 In his fascinating but brief article, "The Black Veil: Three Versions of a Symbol," English Studies, XLVII (1966), 286-289, M. L. Allen argues that English Gothic fiction uses mystery to make a social didactic point, while American Gothic fiction uses mystery to open a speculative process. While I accept Allen's thesis, I think it is necessary to see speculative moments in English Gothic work and didactic efforts by American writers like Irving and Hawthorne. In her dissertation on "Herman Melville and the Gothic Outlook" (Univ. of Conn., 1970), Ruth B. Mandel applies a similar system of classification to the work of Melville.


9 The Romantic Novel, p. 90.


11 Ibid., p. 132.
CHAPTER II - FOOTNOTES

1 Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New
York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1943), begins his chapter
on Gothic fiction with the following quotation from The
Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797:

Take
An old castle, half of it ruinous.
A long gallery with a great many doors,
some secret ones.
Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
As many skeletons, in chests and precess.
Assassins and desperadoes, quant. suff.
Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore
at least.
Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to
be taken at any of the water-places before going to
bed.

Cf. Ernest Baker's chapter on the Gothic romance in The
History of the English Novel (New York: Barnes and Noble,
Inc., 1929), and William L. Cross's The Development of the

Most recently, perhaps, Ellen Moers in Literary Women:
The Great Writers (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and
Co., Inc., 1976) tries to bolster the reputations of women
Gothicists by insisting that their greatness lies in their
having gone beyond the "jaded paraphernalia of the Gothic
mode . . . to a metaphysical profundity and a shrewd realism"
(pp. 99-100). Moers fails to see that from Walpole on Gothic
writers were trying to combine their "graveyard lusts and
wandering ghosts" with metaphysical profundity and a realis-
tic account of the encounter with mystery or the supernatural.
Ann Radcliffe, Emily Bronte, and Mary Shelley are not success-
ful in spite of their Gothicism, but because of it.


3 PMLA, XXXVI (1921), pp. 644-667.

4 In his introduction to A Sicilian Romance (New York: Arno
Press, 1972) p. xiii, D. P. Varma notes that "In the poetry
of death, the purpose of terror was to prepare the mind for
moralizing." For a more detailed discussion of the relation
between graveyard poetry and the Gothic novel see Vahe
Samoorian, "The Way to Otranto: Gothic Elements in English
Poetry, 1717-1762," Diss. Bowling Green State University,
1970.
I have discussed only two graveyard poems because they are typical. Other graveyard poems that would have been available to the 18th century Gothic writers include Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," and Edward Young's long Night Thoughts.


Samuel Richardson, Clarissa (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), p. 499. All references to Clarissa are to this edition.

Ibid., p. 514, Richardson's italics.

In his provocative study of the Gothic novel, The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 33, Robert Kiely argues that Walpole's purpose in writing Otranto was to "create a kingdom in which reason, love, and order have been overthrown." As a result of his failure to distinguish clearly enough between the early and late works of English Gothicism, Kiely does not see that the Romantic impulses in Otranto are stifled by Walpole's piety.

For a different view of the treatment of moral issues in Otranto, see Stanley J. Solomon, "Subverting Propriety as a Pattern of Irony in Three 18th century Novels: Otranto, Vathek, and Fanny Hill," Erasmus Review, 1 (1971), 107-116. In an elaborate argument, Solomon attempts to show that the excesses of Otranto are intended by Walpole as a satire of realism and didacticism, and are not, as I argue, the products of a head overfilled with "Gothic story." Solomon goes too far when he argues that Vathek is less ambiguous than Otranto "in regard to the author's intentions" (114). I am more in sympathy with B. G. MacCarthy's point in The Later Women Novelists, 1744-1818 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 136-137, quoted by Solomon, that the sheer silliness of Walpole's supernaturalism undercuts the serious moral lessons of his tale.

Kiely mistakenly argues that the Roman Catholic Church is "an emblem of the irrational" (31) in Otranto. This is a mistake because in a world of predictable miracles theology is a science not a superstition and faith is a matter of reason not of passion.

Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930). All references to The Progress of Romance are to this edition; The Old English Baron (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967). All references to The Baron are to this edition.

In his introduction to The Baron, James Trainer notes: "Its importance in the history of the Gothic novel lay retrospectively in the attempt to temper some of the excesses of Walpole's Castle of Otranto and prospectively in the creation of a climate in which Ann Radcliffe's more sophisticated characters could survive."

George Saintsbury in The English Novel (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1913), p. 157 agrees with Walpole who found The Baron a boring book. Saintsbury notes that Reeve "escapes the absurdities of the copiously but clumsily used supernatural by administering it in a very minute dose." I am not interested in settling this point of taste, but I do want to emphasize the importance of the joining, apparently without contradiction, of the supernatural and the didactic in Otranto and The Baron. This combination is important to an understanding of both didactic Gothic fiction and speculative Gothic work, which begins its speculation by asking about the possibility of supernatural occurrences and of pat moral judgments.

The English Gothic novel has traditionally been divided into the horror Gothic and the terror Gothic schools, following the older division of German Gothic fiction into the rauber, ritter, and schaer romanes. These two systems of classification distinguish between Gothic works on the basis of subject matter and emotional impact. My approach to Gothic fiction centers on the intellectual effect of the works, and so rests on the view that these apparently trivial books are intended to have intellectual effects. Cf. my discussion below (pp. 60-62) of the differences between Radcliffe and Lewis.

See Clara F. McIntyre, Ann Radcliffe in Relation to her Time (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1920), pp. 34-56, for a summary of these reviews.


Literary Women, p. 126.

Ibid., p. 138.


Murray and Donald Thomas Reilly, "The Interplay of the Natural and the Unnatural: A Definition of the Gothic Romance," Diss. Univ. of Pittsburg 1970, (the abstract of which I have examined) are wrong in associating the supernatural with Radcliffe's evil characters. Often seemingly supernatural incidents frighten or frustrate a villain's plans; e.g., the voice of Du Pont which breaks up Montoni's party.

Ellena, in The Italian (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971) is a good example of a character whose moral certitude provides comfort in the midst of trials. When a corrupt abbess accuses her of deceit, Ellena is nonplussed "for she regarded only the censure of the good, to which she had ever been tremulously alive, as she was obdurately insensible to that of the vicious" (p. 85). For Ellena, as for all of Radcliffe's persecuted heroines, "the immortal love of justice" (p. 84) is enough to sustain an innocent mind through adversity.

The number of amazing coincidences in any Radcliffe novel is high. The Marquis in A Sicilian Romance is captured by banditti whose leader just happens to be his long lost son. Emily, in Udolpho, just happens to stumble across a dying nun Agnes who twenty years before had poisoned Emily's aunt. In The Italian, Ellena is befriended by a nun who turns out to be her mother. We must take one of two views of this kind of plotting: that Radcliffe had no clear sense of the probable or that the seeming miracles are in fact miraculous. Radcliffe no doubt wants us to accept the latter of these views, for she ends her books by asserting that they illustrate the working of divinity through nature.

New York: Arno Press, 1972, I, p. 128. All references to Sicilian Romance are to this edition.

The Italian, p. 122.

One interesting exception comes to mind: the account of Laurentini di Udolpho's childhood in IV, 17 of Udolpho.
Robert Kiely, whose study of the Gothic novel I will discuss below, takes a different view of Radcliffe's novels in his chapter on Udolpho. While he sees Radcliffe's indebtedness to Richardson, Kiely emphasizes Radcliffe's concern with individual minds, her interest in "irrational states." Kiely is correct, of course, when he points to the fact that Radcliffe's heroines have excessive imaginations, but Kiely fails to see that the ridiculing of such excess is one of Radcliffe's repeated themes. When the mysteries of Udolpho are all explained, Emily smiles at herself for having given in "to superstitious terrors," and is surprised "that she could have suffered herself to be thus alarmed, till she considered, that, when the mind has once begun to yield to the weakness of superstition, trifles impress it with the force of conviction" (p. 635). Kiely is right in suggesting that Radcliffe developed the irrational potential of the Gothic novel, but he goes too far when he argues that this irrationality is centered in individual minds. Radcliffe's heroines are types, even less differentiated than the villains.


Quoted by Varma in Gothic Flame, pp. 147-148.


Ibid., p. 108.

Ibid., p. 111.

Coleridge was one of many of Lewis' contemporaries who saw The Monk as an enticement to lust. But other readers and critics defended the book against this charge. Lewis himself asserts that the "tendency" of his story is instructive and that he had no idea when he published The Monk that it could inspire such an outcry. For a summary of the controversy surrounding the first editions of The Monk, see Varma, Gothic Flame, chapter 6, or Railo, Haunted Castle, pp. 92-96.

CHAPTER III - FOOTNOTES

1 Quoted by Varma in The Gothic Flame, pp. 150-151.


3 I am basically in agreement with the view Robert Kiely takes of the late works of English Gothicism. His study of the romantic novel, though always informative, becomes increasingly sensible as it moves further along in the 19th century. Its greatest weakness is its failure to see how sincerely committed the English Gothicists were to 18th century aesthetics.

4 C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), p. 139.


6 The Haunted Castle, p. 203.


9 Ibid., p. 119.

10 English Literature From the Accession of George III to the Battle of Waterloo (London: George Philip and Son, 1873), p. 193.


19. Quoted by Devendra P. Varma in his Preface to St. Leon, p. xxvii.


23. Melmoth, p. 5.


26. I agree with Louis Simpson who, in James Hogg: A Critical Study (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), argues, on the basis of internal and external evidence, for the straightforward supernaturalism of Justified Sinner. For another view see L. L. Lee's "The Devil Figure: James Hogg's Justified Sinner,"
Studies in Scottish Literature, III (1966), 230-239, which maintains that Hogg's devil is "intentionally ambiguous."


28 Ibid.


30 Justified Sinner, p. xii.

31 See Eggenschwiler's "James Hogg's Confessions" for an interesting discussion of the double figure in Justified Sinner.


33 I have excluded Wuthering Heights from this discussion of later (mixed didactic and speculative) English Gothic fiction because it is a speculative but very late work. Like the best American Gothic fiction, Emily Bronte's masterpiece attacks the rational, conventional mind in its treatment of Nelly Dean, the main narrator, and refuses to solve the mysteries created by the actions of its central characters Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Nelly, who sees herself as the "only sensible person" around, is frequently too quick to judge what she sees happening. Though the equally self-satisfied Lockwood calls her "a fair narrator," Nelly is like a character who has wandered out of Otranto into a world of truly strange events. When she tells Edgar Linton on his death bed that "all people who do their duty are finally rewarded," we are more struck with the shallowness of her response than with the cruel and twisted lives she has supposedly been watching. In the end, though Bronte shows the destructive effects of a loveless childhood, Wuthering Heights gains its power from darkness, from the questions it suggests. When she writes to Nelly after eloping with Heathcliff, Isabella Linton asks of her new husband: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (p. 164). Wuthering Heights is a speculative Gothic novel because these questions, among many others, are fully advanced but are also left unanswered. (References to Wuthering Heights above are to Washington Square Press, Inc. ed.: New York, 1960).

David Lee Clark, in Brockden Brown: Pioneer, p. 191, states the case against both the Gothic and the view that Brown is a Gothicist rather forcefully:
Students of Brown usually classify his novels with the Gothic romances. To do so is to use the term loosely. . . . This type of novel began as a joke and with an apology, and never associated with it any serious or high-minded aim. To shock, to thrill, to stimulate swoons --this was its sole purpose, and in that it succeeded admirably.

Arguing from a similar underestimation of the philosophic potential of the Gothic, David H. Hirsch, in "Charles Brockden Brown as a Novelist of Ideas," Books at Brown, XX (1965), 165-184, arrives at the opposite view; i.e., that Brown is not interested in ideas and therefore should be considered a Gothicist. The problem is that recent studies refining the definition of the Gothic have concentrated on English works, and the tendency to downgrade Brown's Gothic work has continued almost unabated.

Even those critics who see Brown's interest in ideas, his inclination to use fiction as a way of exploring ideas and asking questions, do not see the sense in which this is an extension of the philosophic mysteries of earlier Gothic works. In his ground-breaking study of Brown as a speculative novelist, "'A Lesson in Concealment': Brockden Brown's Method in Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XXXVII (1958), p. 46, Warner B. Berthoff distinguishes between Brown's hackneyed Gothic "sensation mongering" and his exploration of ideas. Berthoff sees Brown as having rejected the "obscurely physical" agonies of Gothic fiction to embrace "explicitly moral dilemmas." Donald A. Ringe, in Charles Brockden Brown (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), p. 64, goes along with Berthoff by arguing that Wieland offers an interesting set of questions, in spite of its "Gothic melodrama of the mysterious voices." William Hedges, in "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions," Early American Literature, IX (1974), 107-142, notes the reflection in Brown's fiction of the "constant flux" of the post-Revolutionary War "culture of contradictions," but he dissociates this thematic complexity from what he sees as Brown's interest in sensationalism and "run-of-the-mill" Gothicism. William M. Manley, in "The Importance of Point of View in Brockden Brown's Wieland," American Literature, XXXV (1964), 311-321, stresses the tension in Brown's work between reason and order, between madness and speculation, which makes the narrative point of view so important, but Manley sees the Gothic element of the work as apart from these intriguing dualities.

Several critics have considered Brown's use of the Gothic in detail. Oral S. Coad states the traditional view in his article on "The Gothic Element in American Literature Before 1835," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXIV (1925), 72-93, where he argues that Brown is an American Radcliffe who offers scientific explanations of his mysteries. Robert
Strozier, in "Wieland and Other Romances: Horror in Parentheses," Emerson Society Quarterly, L (1968), p. 26, accepts Coad's point, but notes that Brown is inclined to withhold explanations, "to suspend the reader in a limbo of doubt and anticipation."

Robert D. Hume, a student of the British Gothic movement, begins his study of Brown, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Uses of Gothicism: A Reassessment," Emerson Society Quarterly, XVIII (1972), p. 17, by offering a rather narrow definition of the genre. After listing several important Gothic "trappings" (e.g., setting, presence of villain-hero, the vulnerability of innocent victims), Hume argues that the Gothic novel is affective (i.e., interested primarily in stimulating emotional responses in the reader) and that Brown's work is primarily psychological (i.e., interested in its characters above all else). The distinction Hume offers between Gothic conventions and the Gothic novel is useful; but the definition he proposes for the latter is too limited. The intellectual content of Gothic fiction was, from the start, central; and the movement from Walpole and Reeve to Lewis and Godwin is toward both greater emotional impact and greater complexity of characterization. Brown's work, in its "increasingly exclusive concentration on psychological analysis at the expense of action," may be rather far from The Old English Baron, but it is quite close to St. Leon. It is not so much stock devices or emotional impact that defines the Gothic novel as it is the use of deep or drawn-out mysteries.


4 Ibid., p. 126.

5 Ibid., p. 132.

6 Ibid., p. 134.

7 Ibid., p. 146.


9 The Rhapsodist, p. 136.

10 Clark, Brockden Brown, p. 157.

11 The Rhapsodist, p. 40. Henceforth page references will be given in the text.
In an interesting study of Brown's villains and heroes, John Cleman, in "Ambiguous Evil: A Study of Villains and Heroes in Charles Brockden Brown's Major Novels," Early American Literature, X (1975), 192-219, notes that "the deceptive-ness of appearances" is a pervasive interest of Brown's. But Cleman, whose interest is Brown's ambiguous morality not his ambiguous epistemology, simplifies the question of illusion and reality in Brown when he argues that "in each of these four novels characters regularly appear who turn out to be something other than what their first impression would suggest" (p. 195). What makes the moral questions so complex in these novels is the difficulty of knowing what exactly happens and why. Cleman is right when he argues that Brown's fictions are "moral whodunits," in which a basic question is not who did the evil deed, but who is responsible. This question is so often unanswerable because the foundation of knowledge—sensations and the potential for arranging sensations according to law-like patterns—is so often disrupted.

In his penetrating study of Brown's development of "Image and Idea in Wieland and Edgar Huntly," Serif, 3 (1966), 19-26, Paul Witherington notes that a "persistent Brown theme is the disaster caused by failure to see more than one alternative in a given situation." (p. 24), that Wieland exemplifies this, and that Clara survives because her reason is not so rigidly fixed (p. 24). But, like most critics, Witherington divorces what he sees as an interesting contrast from Brown's use of "gothic gadgetry" (p. 20). Also, Witherington sees Brown as recommending "debate" (which I am calling speculation) as a means of reaching truth. There is little evidence to support the view that truth is reached or reachable in either Wieland or Edgar Huntly. Rather, speculation is important because it sustains a process which, if concluded, could easily lead to dangerous errors.

18 Larzer Ziff, in "A Reading of Wieland," PMLA, LXXVII (1962), 51-57, argues that Wieland is a book divided between a sentimental start and an anti-sentimental repudiation of 18th century empirical philosophy and affirmation of Puritan predestinarianism. While I accept Ziff's identification of
these important themes, I suggest that the sentimental situation is related to the rest of the novel by its epistemological implications. While Brown seems at one point to attack and at another to support either empirical or Puritan psychology, he is throughout using these systems of thought as starting points for speculation about how people come to know the world.

The self-serving logic of these thoughts and the repetition of the word propitious suggests that Clara may be trying to convince herself of the truth of what she is saying.

Those who attempt to deny even the possibility of supernatural agencies at work in Wieland should consider, in addition to the questions I raise above, the prophetic dream Clara has before the disasters have begun. That dream—with its explicit warning that Wieland will try to destroy her—returns to Clara's mind because it is so true. Of course there are many ways of accounting for such a dream, as there are many ways of answering the questions Brown raises throughout the book. But this very variety of explanations is the basis of Brown's speculative force. The number of different rather rigid explanations of the Clara-Theodore relationship which critics have offered suggests that scholars may be falling into the very frame of mind Brown warns us against.

Joseph Soldati, in "The Americanization of Faust: A Study of C. B. Brown's Wieland," ESQ, 74 (1974) 1-14, for example, argues that "to understand completely how and why Wieland operates, one must closely examine the major components of his Icarus complex—his Narcissism and Icarian ascensionism" (p. 6). On the other hand, David Brion Davis, in Homocide in American Fiction: 1798-1960 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1957), p. 90, sees Clara's dream as a metaphor for her incestuous love of her brother. Davis should note that, for Brown, the most obvious association of a summons into a pit would have been an invitation to hell.

For a further consideration of God's responsibility for human evil and the suffering it causes, see Clara's Ahab-like rage against heaven on pp. 219-220.

See footnote number 15 above.

Edgar Huntly (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1973), p. 29. All references to Edgar Huntly are to this edition.


Love and Death, p. 148.
When I call Hume's and Schulz's classification negative, I do not mean to reject them completely. But we do not call Macbeth a subverted comedy or bungled history. Edgar Huntly is not a straightforward quest romance or bildungsroman, but it is one of the first speculative Gothic novels. The protagonist's lack of maturity at the end and the failure of a normal world to replace or assimilate all deviation from social or moral norms are characteristics of the Gothic mode first explored by Godwin and Brown.

For Paul Witherington (in "Image and Idea") and Kenneth Bernard (in "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder," Literary Chronicle, XXXIII (1967), 30-53) Edgar is the psychic questor in pursuit of a unification of conscious and unconscious. Witherington argues that Huntly's Book II encounters with Indians are a sign of his acceptance of his own unconscious—an indication of psychic wholeness. Witherington also bemoans Brown's failure to allow Edgar to learn from his primitive existence as a failure to see the implication of his "images." But Huntly is not Ishmael. He cannot sleep with savages and study the whale. Rather, Edgar is closer to the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" who, in studying obsession and depravity becomes himself obsessed and depraved. There is no real sense in either Wieland or Edgar Huntly that characters can arrive at what Witherington calls "self-evident truth" because the more self-evident a proposition appears the less likely it is, in the world of Brown's speculative Gothicism, to be true. In his introduction to the novel, David Stineback observes that "Brown seems to be saying that . . . we risk insanity if we reject our animality," our instinct for unconscious violence. This view is probably too much of a modernization of Brown's exploration of ideas which in the late 1790's were still (and perhaps still are today) at the border between science, myth, and superstition. It is so difficult to see what Brown is saying about the unconscious that the likely conclusion is that he is not saying (i.e., arguing for a single view of it) anything at all. Is the unconscious good or evil, constructive or destructive in the book? Clithero acts out of unconscious forces when he attempts to murder Mrs. Lorimer: "My limbs were guided to the bloody office," he tells Edgar, "by a power foreign and superior to mine. I had been defrauded, for a moment, of the empire of my muscles" (p. 94). Edgar is preserved in the wilderness because his "muscles . . . acted almost in defiance of his will," but he is led.
into his dark Norwalk wanderings and Indian battles by his sleepwalking, a destructive result of unconscious guilt and anxiety. It would be convenient for the purpose of discussing Edgar Huntly to find Brown offering a synthesis of conscious and unconscious, instinct and reason. But Brown offers us only events and thoughts, forcing us to arrive, with great caution, at our own conclusions, or to continue thinking about the complexities of the human mind. Or perhaps each of these things—thought and action, speculation and conviction, instinct and survival, insanity and mental health—is a separate secret chest, so mysterious that even when the contents are removed and examined we can only wonder about what we have seen.

Clithero remembers that Mrs. Lorimer never believed the earlier report of Wiatte's death, but his recollection of his patroness's survival of that bad news does not help him avoid his "inevitable" conclusion.

I am excluding Irving's Gothic work from detailed consideration in this study because it is, though often entertaining, rather derivative. Most of it (including folk tales like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and English tales like "The Adventure of My Aunt," and Continental stories like the moody "The Mysterious Chambers") is didactic. Often Irving combines local color and psychological insight, as in "The Devil and Tom Walker." And, in the single story, "The Adventure of the German Student," Irving combines elements—an insane narrator, a seemingly impossible event, and the absence of objective frames—which are the stock-in-trade of the speculative Gothicist. But, with the exception of this story, Irving's work is closer to that of the generation of English writers who wrote before him than it is to the generation of American writers who were to write after him. Irving's place in a history of American Gothic fiction would probably be large; his place in this genre study is necessarily small.


Both of these responses to mystery exist in some way in the English sources, but, insofar as the mysteries are always explained, so these responses are less extreme. The monomaniacs in Radcliffe, for example, are obviously wrong; can we say the same of Ahab? The speculators (for example, Hogg's sinner, Godwin's St. Leon) almost always arrive eventually at easily evaluated positions.
CHAPTER V - FOOTNOTES

1 Charles Baudelaire emphasizes the same quality in Poe's work. In his brief study of Poe's life and works, Baudelaire speaks of Poe's "conjecturalism." (Baudelaire on Poe, /State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1952, /p. 69.)


3 I am referring to G. R. Thompson, Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) and Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (New York: Anchor Press, 1973). These two recent book length studies of Poe cannot be ignored by any subsequent student. Throughout this chapter I will return to cite, agree, or quarrel with both Hoffman and Thompson.


5 Experience in the Novel, p. 99.

6 J. O. Bailey makes this point briefly in a footnote to an article on "What Happens in 'The House of Usher,'" American Literature, XXXV, p. 448, n. 8. Bailey is commenting on Roderick's attempt to explain the apparent sentience of the house: "Poe here inverts a technique of Gothic fiction. . . . What Poe's narrator seeks to interpret as natural can only be explained as supernatural." As I will show, Poe goes beyond this simple inversion by providing both natural and supernatural explanations for the same events.


8 J. O. Bailey, in the article I cite above, argues that Poe conceals the real horror of the tale (i.e., that the house is a vampiric and supernatural entity in the story) by using a narrator "who was a rationalist and a skeptic regarding the supernatural--a man who habitually dismissed any explanation not in accord with commonplace fact" (p. 445). G. R. Thompson is surely closer to seeing how Poe uses this failing rationalist when he states that Poe "uses the rationality to heighten the irrationality" (Poe's Fiction, p. 91). My own treatment of this narrator is an extension of Thompson's, although I quarrel with Thompson about the final effect of the narrator's impotence of intellect.

10 As G. R. Thompson suggests, Poe was probably trying to suggest the possibility of an unhealthy "atmosphere" rising from the tarn. But J. M. Walker (in "The Legitimate Sources of Terror in 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" *Modern Language Review*, LXI (1966), 585-592) places too great an emphasis on this when he uses it to rule out the possibility of supernatural forces working in the tale. It is possible to imagine a completely shared hallucination, but a rather great amount of communication must go on between the deluded madmen. In this tale, while the narrator is hearing Madeline thrashing about, Roderick is leaning forward, mumbling to himself, and hearing Madeline too. They discuss it only after they have both heard the sound.

11 Bailey's argument, though ingenious, would be stronger if he had taken all his examples of vampire lore from sources that predate the composition of the tale. However orthodox Stoker's *Dracula* may be, it is Bailey's job to demonstrate Poe's familiarity with the orthodoxy Stoker draws on.


13 My source for this tale is *Gothic Tales of Terror*, vol. 2, ed. by Peter Haining (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1973). All references to the tale are to this edition. G. R. Thompson provides an exhaustive list of the translations of German Gothic fiction available to Poe (*Poe's Fiction*, pp. 204-207) and Henry A. Pochmann (in *German Culture in America*, Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin
Press, 1957) discusses Poe's familiarity with German Romantic writers. About Poe's having read the story by Tieck in question here I have been able to read nothing, but this is not conclusive because Poe, always busy accusing others of plagiarism, was careful to conceal his own borrowings. Tieck's tale is apparently included in S. J. Utterson's Phantasmagoriana, published as Tales of the Dead, London: White, Cochrane, 1813. And Poe undoubtedly read the review of this book in Blackwood's third number.


16 London: Henry Frowde, 1909, p. 27. All references to The Heroine are to this edition.

17 Poe is famous for regarding literature as a screen for concealing the author's true nature. His remark in the Marginalia that no author ever shows all of his heart is typical of Poe's conscious view of art as cipher. And, in a less well known passage from his review of Margaret Fuller's work, Poe makes a similar point:

The supposition that the book of an author is the thing apart from the author's self, is, I think, ill-founded. The soul is a cipher, in the sense of a cryptograph; and the shorter a cryptograph is, the more difficulty there is in its comprehension--at a certain point of brevity it would bid defiance to an army of Champollions. (The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry, New York: The Colonial Company, Ltd., 1903, p. 83).

Perhaps this is why Poe usually wrote short stories and even shorter poems.
CHAPTER VI - FOOTNOTES


3 Both Doubleday in "Hawthorne's Use of Three Gothic Patterns," College English, VII (February, 1946), 250-262, and Ronald Thomas Curran in "Hawthorne as Gothicist," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1969, argue that Hawthorne's originality lies in his use of Gothic devices to "imbue his works with religious, psychological, social, and political dimensions" (Doubleday, p. 262), that Hawthorne's Gothicism is atypical because of its appeal to the reader's intellect. This view of Hawthorne's innovativeness has been refuted by the recent re-examination of the Gothic. The English Gothic novels that Hawthorne devoured as a young writer use their images of chaos and violence to present problems of theology, psychology, and morality. Furthermore, Fiedler is wrong when he argues that Hawthorne was the first ambiguous Gothicist, the inventor of multiple explanations (Love and Death, p. 132). Hawthorne was drawing not only on the work of Brockden Brown (who is singled out for a special place in "The Hall of Fantasy") but also on Radcliffe's novels which maintain a balance between the supernatural and scientific perspectives until the latter triumphs at the end. Ambiguity and intellectuality are, nevertheless, important, if not conspicuously original, elements in Hawthorne's use of the Gothic.


7 Lundblad, Hawthorne and European Tradition, p. 97.

See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, pp. 242-252, for a discussion of the attacks made on Hawthorne's use of allegory. The distinction I am proposing between Hawthorne's use of the didactic and speculative Gothic modes follows Matthiessen's distinction between allegory and symbolism, but it is important to note, as Matthiessen does, that Hawthorne breathes life into even his allegorical characters.

10 *The American Novel*, p. 82.


13 Chillingworth's comment to Hester is revealing: "He knew, by some spiritual sense,—for the Creator never made another being so sensitive as this,—he knew that no friendly hand was pulling at his heart-strings, and that an eye was looking curiously into him, which sought only evil, and found it. But he knew not that the eye and hand were mine!" (p. 124).

14 *Love and Death*, p. 401.

15 Curran notes this similarity in his unpublished dissertation, the abstract of which I have examined.


21 Mandel defines the Gothic as depicting an encounter with the unexplained or unknown, but she stresses that the response to Gothic mystery is "a form of intellectual helplessness."
According to Mandel, only Conrad and Melville are pure Gothicists because all other Gothic writers offer "harmonious resolutions." This definition, though it leads Mandel to excellent readings of Melville's works, is suspect because it excludes the major body of works traditionally labelled "Gothic" from consideration. Mandel is too quick to describe a "Gothic outlook," for different Gothicists responded differently to the mysterious dangers in their works. A complete Gothic novel consists of both mystery and the response (emotional and intellectual). I devised my own set of categories (didactic and speculative Gothicism) to indicate the variety of "outlooks" that exist within the broad classification "Gothic." An acceptance of mystery is no more Gothic than a resolution of mystery, although the former is typical of speculative Gothic fiction, the latter of didactic Gothic fiction. We need to see this if we are to appreciate the diversity and richness of both the English and American Gothic traditions.


23 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or The Whale (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 156. All references to Moby-Dick are to this edition.

24 Herman Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities (Toronto: The New American Library, 1964), p. 73. All references to Pierre are to this edition.


26 Also like Brown's Wieland, Pierre insists on setting up absolute alternatives. He asks, for instance, in considering whether he should throw off his fiancee without even explaining his motives, whether his loyalty should be to Lucy or to God (p. 213).
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


_____. The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings by Charles Brockden Brown. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1943.


Davies, James. English Literature From the Accession of George III to the Battle of Waterloo. London: George Phillip and Son, 1873.


Doubleday, Neal F. "Hawthorne's Use of Three Gothic Patterns." College English, VII (1946), 250-262.


Lee, L. L. "The Devil Figure: James Hogg's Justified Sinner." Studies in Scottish Literature, III (1966), 230-239.


McIntyre, Clara F. "Were the 'Gothic Novels' Gothic?" PMLA, XXXVI (1921) 644-667.


Ramakrishna, D. "Poe's 'Ligeia.'" Explicator, XXV (1966), Item 19.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


