



**Chapter I**  
**A General Description and History**  
**of**  
**Gothic Romances.**

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



The extraordinary artistic and intellectual changes which took place in the last quarter of the eighteenth century are hard to define because the Romantic movement was essentially complex, and difficult to explain because the changes in sensibility were gradual and had been long in progress. The heart of the matter was a profound reaction against the long domination of reason and authority. By the middle of the century, the classical enthusiasms, which in their day had been an inspiration to loving craftsmanship and formal beauty and had revitalized European taste had become set. The influence which had once restored self-respect and alertness to a flaccid culture had now become a cause of impotence. In the eternal swing from liberty to discipline and back again the pendulum of taste had arrived at the extreme limit of narrow perfection. It paused, turned slowly on its tracks and then, swinging ever more rapidly towards luxuriance and freedom once again, swept artists, writers and political philosophers into the boiling excitement of a new Romanticism.

For over a hundred years imagination and fancy had been regarded with distrust by the disciples of Reason, for whom "reality" was strictly limited to what could be experienced by the senses. Gradually the old intellectual approach to life gave way to a wider outlook which admitted the claims of passion and emotion and accepted the sense of mystery in life. In literature, criticism and satire—perhaps the greatest literary event of the first half of the eighteenth century in England was Pope's Dunciad (1728) which is both literary criticism and satire—were replaced by a more creative spirit, and wit was superseded by humour and pathos. The widespread admission that there was a mystery in life that reason could not fathom led men to reject many of the Augustan standards and to welcome others that the age of Reason would

have frowned upon. Romantic souls preferred Rousseau's<sup>1</sup> idea of natural goodness to Lord Chesterfield's<sup>2</sup> chilling scepticism. Men began to think that human beings were noble by nature, were innately good and therefore capable of perfection once the system which hindered their development was reformed or swept away. That is to say, man was good, but human institutions were often bad, and would thus corrupt him.

A striking characteristic of the approach to the Romantic period was the strong interest shown in the past. It was a feeling that manifested itself in many branches of the arts and literature. And of all the various periods which the past had to offer, that which afforded the greatest satisfaction was the Middle Ages, a period which, to the Augustans, had seemed merely "dark" and "barbaric". It may be said that one of the chief features of the renaissance of imagination consisted in the literary and artistic discovery of the Middle Ages, which lived again as a period of faith, of picturesqueness, of simplicity, of pathos—in fact, of all the qualities lacking in the Age of Reason, at the heart of which was growing a weariness and even a violent distaste that led it to turn against itself.

The passionate idealization of the Middle Ages was encouraged by mental faculties to which veracity of detail was irrelevant. The one main idea was that the past should differ from the present; the Middle Ages were hailed as a reality, once alive, whose revived existence was now to be mysteriously blended with the life of the present. Closely associated with the spirit of wonder awakened by the Age of

---

1. Rousseau, J.J. (1712-1778) A French Philosopher whose works have much influence on the French Revolution.

2. Chesterfield, (1694-1773) A clever essayist and epigrammatist : Letters to His Son is considered the best.

Faith was the revival of interest in magic and witchcraft. Men were obviously tired of being wholly reasonable. The new-found appreciation of Nature in her wild and savage aspects was yet another sign that an emotionally starved generation was beginning to seek inspiration far from familiar scenes and everyday life.

Mystery and Wonder, Fear and Suspense and Terror are some of the labels affixed by different historians to the romantic novels that traded in one or another, or in all these excitements, during the last few decades of the eighteenth century. Extremely significant at this period was the sincere delight in "ruins". The convention of the "ruin" played a great part in creating a special atmosphere of awe and horror and of stimulating the emotion of fear that was constantly evoked by the poets of the "Churchyard"<sup>1</sup> school of poetry and the terror novelists. In particular ruins seemed to symbolize the impermanence of human life and effort; there was an inexpressible sadness in the spectacle of an ivy-covered tower, once the guard and the fortress of a flourishing and vital system, now given over to owls and weeds. After so many decades devoted to praise of town life, to enjoyment of the brightly lit salon or the social coffee-house, men began deliberately to seek different sensations. They wanted to be alone, to give way to pleasurable musings as they wandered along some lonely strand or sat in the evening in an old churchyard or gazed out over a solitary moor. A special type of poetry, the elegiac, reflective, came into existence which sought to heighten the sensibilities and induce moods of contemplation and sombre sadness.

But melancholy soon gave way to the stronger emotion

---

1. The "churchyard" school of poetry: Edward Young, Thomas Parnell, Robert Blair, etc. See chapter II.

of fear. Fear acted as the powerful solvent of all that was reasonable in the eighteenth century, for fear reduced man to a condition of primitive helplessness<sup>and</sup> forced on him a complete revaluation of his universe. The stimulation of fear and the examination of the mysterious provided the raison d'être of the Gothic novelists, who took an important part in releasing the emotional energies that had been so long re-  
-strained by way of the deep psycho - physical disturbances that occurred when man was confronted by the supernatural—the most terrifying of all experiences. They provided a new thrill and simultaneously prepared the way for the true Romantics. The fine flowering of Romantic sensibility took place in soil which had been cultivated by these novelists. For there was a connecting link between the crude sensationalism of The Monk<sup>1</sup> and Wordsworth's highest conception of the part played by nature in educating the soul.

Although the discovery of terror as a source of pleasurable emotion was not completed until the end of the eighteenth century, there were various indications that the subject aroused the interest of writers. Most writers of the century knew very well that their readers had little defence against scenes of menace and ferocity and that deep sympathy for innocent victims held captive in haunted castles would be readily forthcoming. People enjoyed mystery and darkness. They experienced great pleasure even though they were weeping. Therefore, in order to entertain such readers, such a kind of fiction was written. And in fact, the literary reign<sup>2</sup> of terror was actually began by Horace Walpole in The Castle

---

1. The Monk, or Ambrosio (1795) written by Matthew Gregory Lewis ( 1775 - 1818 )

2. Horace Walpole (1717 - 1797) whose work The Castle of Otranto is the prototype of Gothic Romances.



of Otranto which was published in 1764. Walpole believed that the scope of naturalism in fiction had been exhausted by Richardson<sup>1</sup> and if the novel was to survive it must be revitalized from other source. In spite of the keen interest inspired by the Middle Ages a return to the naive adventure stories that amused the age of Caxton was out of the question. Yet there were possibilities in a type of romance that should combine the new realism with the old freedom of imagination. The result in Walpole's hands was a good - humoured essay in fiction that obtained its effects by a very mild use of the supernatural, but which twenty years later inspired a series of novels relying on sheer sensationalism to hold their readers' attention.

With Walpole, the rather absurd term "gothic" is perhaps more convenient, and may be allowed to include among its followers both those that contented themselves with a prudent use of fear and suspense, and also those who sought the grosser sensations of terror and brutally aimed to make the flesh creep. The word "gothic" was applied first in derision to the taste for ruins and picturesque survivals, especially from the Middle Ages, which the Augustans regarded as barbarous and rather ridiculous. But it was accepted amiably by Walpole and others who confessed to a fondness for what they called "Gothic", little as they understood the real nature of what they admired, and grotesque as were their attempts to imitate it. In due time, it became one of those vague descriptive words like "romantic", which offer such facilities for a useful if inexact classification. The importance of Walpole's effort in the style, The Castle of Otranto, subtitled in the second edition "a Gothic Story," is that it showed what gothic meant and gave the name free currency,

---

1. Richardson, Samuel (1689-1761) got a lot of fame from Pamela (1741)

After Walpole, the most interesting writer of this kind of novel was a woman, Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823). She possessed a highly romantic temperament, an intense love of all that was beautiful, a passion for the mysterious and a taste for solitude that had been fostered during a lonely girlhood passed among elderly people. Her interest in the supernatural and other strange phenomena was strong, but always controlled by reason. She was too lofty and idealistic to exploit the purely horrible. Instead she specialized in studies of the psychology of fear when it is aroused by happenings that are only apparently supernatural. She rationalized terror and excelled in creating atmosphere and in describing the awe - inspiring aspects of nature.

The name of Mrs. Radcliffe has become almost a synonym for Gothic romances, and her novels do represent the best phase of the kind, before it began to degenerate into the ghastliness<sup>1</sup> of "Monk Lewis", and the complicated terrorism<sup>2</sup> of Maturin. Her first important novel, A Sicilian Romance (1790) was distinguished by a picturesque setting of romantic decay which soon became an inseparable part of every story she wrote. The horror in A Sicilian Romance is aroused partly by the pathetic history of a lady who is immured in the depths of a vast castle by her wicked husband so that he can pursue a secret love affair with a younger and more beautiful woman. There is no violent action but a clever exploitation of the vague fears awakened in a sensitive nature by its

---

1. Monk Lewis: (1775-1818), owing to his famous book The Monk, Matthew Gregory Lewis was called and well-known by the name of Monk Lewis.

2. Maturin, Charles Robert: (1782-1824) An Irish novelist and dramatist. His famous book is Melmoth the Wanderer (1820).

exposure to the apparently inexplicable.

In The Romance of the Forest (1791), we can see how completely Mrs. Radcliffe has surrendered to the spell of Alpine scenery. Descriptions of mountains are tediously prolonged and there is a suggested anticipation of Wordsworth in her belief that magnificent landscapes exercise an influence over the human mind. Natural grandeur and sublimity, thundering torrents, flaming sunsets, and dark shadows played their part in heightening sensibility and provided the right setting for strange and terrible experiences.

Mrs. Radcliffe's outstanding work, The Mysteries of Udolpho, appeared in 1794. This novel enjoyed a wide fame and was followed by scores of imitators. Her supernatural scenes and the magic landscapes again were tremendous, the atmosphere of the castle was chilly, the interior of it was somewhat frightening. That was why this novel was greatly applauded at that time, though it is now nearly forgotten by the general public, being chiefly of concern to students of the period and more particularly, those interested in mapping that vast and variegated region of the mind which we call "Romanticism".

The beginnings of The Gothic romance come with the novels of Prévost<sup>1</sup> which contain all the materials for the novel of sensibility. They have in them a good part of the material which was soon to be utilized in what was called

---

1. Prévost. A.F. (1697-1763) a French writer whose works were enormously popular and were quickly translated into English; Les Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde (1728-1731), the seventh and the last volume of which consisted of his masterpiece Manon Lescaut.



the Gothic novel. His gloomy scene - painting : The grim shades of the forests that feed his reveries, the murders and carnage, and miscellaneous adventure, are all the raw stuff of Gothic romance. Even those tiresome explanations which were to be a concession to sense and credibility appear already in Prévost. He also has an earnest belief in the perfectibility of the savage which reached such ludicrous lengths later. He was less than half a realist, and much more than half a romancer, the romanticism of his fabulous adventures overshadowing the honesty and lack of reserve with which he emptied out for all to see the contents of his palpitating heart or those of his sentimental kindred. He was too deeply immersed in what he was describing to be very clear - sighted.

The successor to the chair so long and so successfully held by Prévost was his understudy Baculard d' Arnaud,<sup>1</sup> who was recognized as the great master of Le Ténébreux. His novels and especially the manifesto introducing his play Comminge (1765) gave a great impetus here to both the novel of sensibility and sensationalism. He exaggerated the melodramatic element in Prevost, and tried to out-do his pathos by sheer gush and bombast, the insincerity of which did not entirely escape detection.<sup>2</sup> Yet his devotees put him beside Prévost and Richardson and Rousseau, as one of the great painters of virtue and sentiment, and found his stories heart-rending, thrilling, and full of inspiration to the elect.

---

1. François - Thomas Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud (1716-1805)

2. The verb "bacularder" for his emotional rant, and the byword "darnauderie" for his hysterical sentimentality, were coined by modern critics, the latter, in fact, by Servais Etienne (Le Genre romanesque.)

The exciting adventures, the violent emotions, the gloomy scenes, forests and antres, castles, dungeons, and graveyards in the Abbé's novels and the plays and stories of Baculard, were to be the distinctive features of Gothic romance throughout its course. It was all a derivative of the cult of emotion; and, the more morbid and coarse the sensibilities to be stirred, the more heady the variations and exaggerations of these stimulants. Some novelists sought only to conjure up an atmosphere of awe and vague apprehension; others employed the most violent shocks of physical anguish and fear. They all dabbled in the supernatural, either playing upon or playing with feelings of superstition, and later on, those who had become acquainted with German folk-lore and its Ghosts and elves and goblins found their account in satiating the greediest appetites for crime, diabolism and nameless horrors.

Apart from a few odd instances in which events or characters from the past happened, almost by chance, to be the subject, there had hitherto been no historical fiction in English. The ancestry of the historical novel must be sought in the same quarter as that of the novel of sensibility. Then came the anti-romantics with their romances based on fact giving precise circumstances and portraits that had to face the test of recognition and criticism. So far as local colour and adequate allowance of facts were concerned, it has been observed that Prevost's fiction is a kind of historical romance. Of much the same composition is the first of the English historical romances. It was the work of an Irish clergyman, Thomas Leland, who among other historical works wrote later a History of Ireland from the invasion of Henry II (1773). Whatever Leland knew of the times of that monarch, there are few facts and very little historical colouring in

this story, although it is fiction in the guise of history rather than history in the guise of fiction. It gives the apocryphal career of William de Longespée, third Earl of Salisbury, the natural son of Henry II and Fair Rosamund, who comes back to England, after a campaign in Gascony, imprisonment and many perils, to find his countess persecuted by a nephew of Hubert de Burgh, who covets his estates. Longespee defeats his enemies, and marries the girl who had followed him as a page to her lover, the Lord of Poitiers. Several of the characters are historical, the incidents are fictional and at variance with fact.

The successors of Abbé Prévost and Baculard d'Arnaud as the writers of the genre who should be mentioned briefly here were Henry Mackenzie, Horace Walpole, Mrs. Clara Reeve, Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Mrs. Shelley and Charles Robert Maturin. Here again the preparation in literature for the coming of Romanticism is through its early stages consciously artificial. The transformation longed for in style is yet so slow a process that men of letters with a gift of discernment take it upon themselves to satisfy this need, even by the most superficial means. Intellectually alert and clear-sighted, they also experience what others feel, but not to a greater degree. Thus with Walpole, the creator of the novel of Terror, it is not so much an exceptional susceptibility to emotion which prompts his pen, as a distinct sense of what is wanted in literature, coupled with a bold, versatile mind.

In the process of its development, this particular kind of novel goes through the stage of sentimentalism, it is the cultivation of feeling for its own sake that in turn leads to the search for the semi-morbid forms of emotion.

The systematic enjoyment of intense feeling brings about a complete moral inversion: the love of that pleasing kind of mental suffering, a sense of terror skilfully suggested. In this respect, the work of Mackenzie although later in date by several years and very different from that of Walpole, must nevertheless be directly connected with it.

Mackenzie (1745-1831) had no original talent. He is the disciple of Sterne, and owes much to Rousseau. His best-known novel—The Man of Feeling (1771)—is mediocre. It is a deliberate imitation of Sterne's novel The Sentimental Journey; but the discontinuity which Sterne, with his exquisite feeling for nuance and detail, had transformed into a resource of art, here loses its value, and nothing redeems the thinness of the theme. The psychology also is lacking in subtlety. The hero of Mackenzie is not complicated; he becomes the easy victim of the paralysing emotion which sensitiveness experiences at every turn of life. For the world, as Rousseau made out, is here the triumph of a cruel corruption; and the soul that nature has formed of necessity finds itself continually struggling and suffering. Thus the pessimism of the Romantics definitely shows itself to be the inevitable fruit of too keen a sensibility.

In other respects, it is to Richardson that Mackenzie owes most, although he never ceases to be the ardent admirer of Rousseau. A theme of social philanthropy—an appeal against slavery—adds more variety to the pathos of his Julia de Roubigné (1786) which is, perhaps, on the whole his best work. But here again we have the skilful adaptation of another's ideas, without the least real originality. His sentimentalism is rather shallow; and although much of his inner self is concerned in the exalted feelings, it is still obvious that the exaltation is largely affected and artificial.



The Man of Feeling betrays a kind of secret hesitancy; it is at once a passionate defence of sensibility, and yet a denunciation of the conflict between sensibility and the instinct to survive which arises when once sensibility is given over freely to its own devices, uninhibited by reason, common sense or humour.

Mackenzie's work is chiefly interesting as a sign. With him, and considering only the more obvious trend of his novels, we find that the pleasure of feeling and suffering is proclaimed as an end sufficient in itself. Thus sentimentalism, as a free and dominant psychological tendency, comes into still greater relief here than in the pages of Sterne; and the close association of grief and joy, which at times seem to blend into one indistinguishable feeling, is brought to such a degree, as to render not only possible but logical all the moral complexities, all the paradoxical perversions of the emotions, in which Romanticism will like to indulge.

After Mackenzie, there came a great Gothic Romancer of the time, Horace Walpole. His Castle of Otranto is the clever achievement of an inquiring mind, which had enough intuition to divine a widespread need of the public, but not enough genius—or might one say sincerity?—to create a convincing illusion.

Readers today are not likely to receive the novel on the conditions which it demands. But the success it enjoyed in its own day goes to prove how near the surface lay a still untouched vein of feeling and how willing the contemporary imagination was to meet the writer halfway. The setting chosen by Walpole for his novel is medieval Italy; this points to a close connection between the psychological origins of the novel of terror and those which prompted the evocation of a

picturesque past. As is shown by the term "Gothic novel," the strangeness and mystery of a distant age, itself a prey to superstition; and wonderfully fitted to re-create the atmosphere of emotional belief, served as a model and encouragement to an instinct in quest of new and more potent means of self satisfaction. In a first preface, rather interestingly Walpole avoided any reference to the reality of his facts; but in a second he admitted his invention, and sought to justify it by rather far-fetched arguments.

Stripped of all its atmosphere of witchcraft, the novel today is lifeless. Walpole with his clear and rational outlook upon life is by no means a poet; and when he attempts to deal with the mysterious, not only are his methods awkward, but he defeats his own end by placing his mystery in the broad light of facts, instead of leaving it enshrouded in a suggestive dimness. To make matters worse, he proceeds to pin on to the principal action of the story a kind of intrigue conceived in the worst pseudo-classical taste. The sentiment of the whole book is cold and remote. But we must not forget that in itself that general effort to rouse a pleasing anguish in the reader was a happy one, and the novel of Walpole retains all the interest attaching to the first work of a series. To it can be traced all those stories whose main interest centres round the medieval castle, with its grimy walls and its disturbing atmosphere of uncanny illusion.

Clara Reeve(1729-1807) has admitted her indebtedness to the work of Walpole, but this does not keep her from criticizing his novel with accuracy of judgement. Besides she is more than a mere imitator. The novel of terror as we have it from her pen is coloured with a sentimentality more purely middle class; it divests itself of the aristocratic and slightly free-thinking character that originally clung to it. Its

general tone is more sincere because, following the model of Richardson, the emotional element has in it something of a moralizing nature; it can henceforth strike root in great general needs of the soul, which conscience accepts, or regards as normal and necessary for its well - being. Then only does it take its legitimate place among the recognized literary kinds. Clara Reeve is more cautious in her use of the supernatural; she does not exclude it, but makes it more reconcilable with reason, and through that very means tends to spread it over the whole development of a plot, while the emotion itself assumes a more distinctly psychological character. As a work of art, The Old English Baron is decidedly mediocre; but it has this advantage over The Castle of Otranto, that it effectively prepares the literary public for the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, as well as for a type of feminine Romanticism which, since that date, has remained a distinct vein of English literature.<sup>1</sup>

The spell of Romanticism in all its potency was first brought home to English readers by Mrs. Radcliffe, a writer of original gifts, whose name to-day, however, is as good as forgotten among general readers of fiction.

The work of Mrs. Radcliffe owes its disappearance, as a popular work to internal failings; the diffuse length of her novels, the monotony of a style that is lavish in description and overloaded with detail, the air of timidity and convention in the characters, as well as in the philosophy of life. And more important still, the authoress is the victim of a decision which in the hands of a superior talent

---

1. The foremost authors to be mentioned in this context are, of course, Emily Brönte (Wuthering Heights 1847) and Charlotte Brönte (Jane Eyre, 1847). The romantic historical novel has for long been considered (and is still at the present time) a form of fiction particularly suited to women authors.

might have proved just and fertile, but which, imperfectly realized, only leads to disastrous results. Her reason and her conscience refuse to admit, except in one posthumous novel, the existence of the supernatural properly so called; and although in many of her pages she does create an impression of dread and mystery, she eventually reduces it, through a full explanation, to nothing more than an illusion.

Mrs. Radcliffe was a quiet home - keeping lady, a good housewife, who travelled little till after she had executed her word - pictures of foreign lands; who had no adventures and but a restricted acquaintance with the world even of ordinary affairs; and who spun her romantic inventions out of an imagination dreaming over the works of her fellow - novelists and a few books of travel. She had as much knowledge of English literature, including Shakespeare and the poets new or newly discovered of her own time, as the average educated woman; but there is no evidence that she had read much history in which respect she compares poorly with the rest of her romantic colleagues. But she was well versed in the novel of sensibility, whether of domestic or foreign make, and all her heroines are formed in that mould. And in fact the dominant note of her romanticism—a sense of wonder and, above all, suspense—can be attributed to the extreme development of sensibility to the emotions of fear and awe.

006909

Her first novel is negligible. The Castle of Athlin and Dunbayne, a Highland Story (1789), was an essay in the manner of The Old English Baron, vaguely picturing Scotland in feudal times, with little local colour and that little erroneous. The plot centres in a missing heir, and there is the usual Gothic apparatus of secret passages and sliding panels, mysterious music, and the chill touch of a corpse in the dark, giving some foretaste of stronger sensations to



come. In the Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) her most famous book, long tours in quest of the picturesque alternate with exciting melodrama, and the two are skilfully harmonized by her sense of atmosphere. Some perfunctory incidents are a mere pretext for the journey from Gascony into Lanquedoc, and her descriptions of the Pyrenees and the vast areas of forest stretching from their slopes. Mrs. Radcliffe knew that fear and even repulsion may, like pathos and tears, be pleasant ingredients in a sensational dish. But probably her most lasting contribution to romance was simply that which we call 'atmosphere'. Landscapes, seascapes, pictureque ruins, skies and storms evoke it, and make the right psychical accompaniment to the emotional drama. It is interesting to note De Quincey's tribute to her, when, in a passing reference to the English Lakes, he writes:-

"..... all these, together with the ruins of the once glorious abbey, had been brought out not many years before into sunny splendour by the great <sup>1</sup>enchantress of that generation—Anne (sic) Radcliffe."

This was not something absolutely new in fiction, but no one had used atmosphere before as a principal element, and no one had used it so consciously.

Mrs. Radcliffe was also the last of the novelists of sensibility; it was her sensibility that responded so cordially to the dual appeal of romance and of natural scenery. Her stories are all sentimental dramas; the heroines—and her heroes are all heroines—are cast in one mould, sensitive,

---

1. Confessions of An English Opium - Eater (1822)

devoted, virtuous beings, of the well - known stamp. She was a firm believer in the sentimentalist doctrine that virtue never goes without its reward. She had plenty of imitators during her own lifetime, especially in the decade or so after The Mysteries of Udolpho had enraptured a host of sentimental readers. Many shameless plagiarists did not scruple to put their crude sensation novels down to her discredit by describing them as by the author of that famous book. Mrs. Radcliffe married strangeness and beauty; Monk Lewis divorced them again and flung beauty to the dogs, preferring the brute force of strangeness, violence and horror. So that his Monk (1795), though confessedly inspired by his enthusiasm for the Mysteries of Udolpho, with the saturnine and villainous Montoni, represents a schism, a dark heresy, in the romantic fold, and was to offer to those who dabbled in Gothicism an alternative pattern, to point to other attractions, which indeed proved more appetizing to tastes now growing jaded. A comparable phenomenon in our own time is the replacement of the 'intellectual' detective stories of Freeman Wills Croft and Agatha Christie by the deliberately sadistic blood - and - sex stories of Peter Cheyney and Mickey Spillane.

The influence of Lewis, whose talent is decidedly more sensational, appeared to be greater than Mrs. Radcliffe's in the eyes of their contemporaries; it is more on the surface and therefore easy to estimate. The Monk represents the work of a very young man: a fact obvious from the crude nature of the emotions he seeks to rouse, as well as from the naivete of the artistic means he employs. Without the slightest restraint he proceeds to exploit the thrill of conscious and pleasing terror, compounding it with others of a kindred nature, such as that prompted by sensual desire or by the loathsome sight of some physical horror. So that the psychological development begun by Walpole, but of which the seeds are

really to be found in the work of Richardson, here reaches its final stage of sheer unrelieved morbidity. The novel of Lewis enjoyed a success due to its fascinating power of striking a terror with which a secret feeling of repulsion was mixed; but very soon public taste turned away from so open a revelation of affinities about which consciousness preferred to remain in ignorance. Yet the Satanism of Lewis had now supplied the extreme stimulus which imaginations set loose longed after; from it were derived some of the essential elements of the darkest aspect of Romanticism; and thus its influence can be regarded in the light of a liberation, however dubious.

With Lewis we leave behind the mood of middle class sentimentalism, and come back to an artificial literature in the manner of Walpole. The Monk is destitute of all moral depth; its atmosphere is heavy and unreal; the characterization is over - simplified, like that of melodrama. Where Mrs. Radcliffe could often instil a fairly subtle effect into her suggestions of the supernatural, Lewis handles his subject matter directly and roughly. The juvenile ardour which lies at the core of his work, and which, unaware of its own secret nature, so clumsily conceals itself in the guise of a superficial didactic intent, no longer provokes any sympathetic response in us. But if the book is hopelessly lacking in warmth, it still preserves some strength in the intensity of vision which the author devotes to the portrait of his hero. The Monk forced itself, as it were, upon its generation. Even Mrs. Radcliffe may have been indebted to it for the conception of her Schedoni; and the imitators of German ballads, written in a language often vulgar, but not destitute of a certain sense of dramatic effect and rhythm, supplied the earliest models in England of the poetry of terror.

Mrs. Shelley (1797-1851) was another romancer to be mentioned here. Her style is rather different from others'. Her most famous book Frankenstein (1818) was an attempt in the same style which has added a misused word to the English language Mrs. Shelley, a young lady of nineteen who had feasted on German ghost stories, wrote this novel which was not likely to show much originality; yet it had some, and what it owed to current tradition was such a floating idea as the satanic malignity of her monster and the ghastly tension of flight and unrelenting pursuit. The idea came to her in a dream. Her preface tells the story of the competition proposed by Byron, when the party were staying on Lake Lemman in 1816. Her brain was at a standstill, until the dream gave her a starting - point; then she went straight ahead, from the words "it was on a dreary night of November," which now begin the fifth chapter. For later on, at her husband's suggestion, she unfortunately amplified what at first had been "only a transcript of the grim terrors" of her dream, and what should have been a powerful story was padded out to the dimensions of a novel.

Frankenstein, by the grace of Hollywood, is the widest known of all "tales of terror." The novel itself is considerably less sensational—and more philosophical—than the films based on it. Frankenstein was written for fun, to pass the time, not to secure, at any cost the attention of as many readers as possible. And Mrs. Shelley is at least as interested in the moral and philosophical problems attendant upon the scientific creation of a form of life as in the mere production of terror.

The masterpiece of the school of terror did not appear till the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, and was the most elaborate and, incomparably the finest work



Of Charles Robert Maturin, who wrote some plays, one of which, Bertram, or the Castle of St. Aldobrand (1816), was a great success both on the stage and in print, and several other novels besides the most famous, Melmoth the Wanderer (1820). Maturin was one of those talented men who make plagiarism a fine art justified by results. He took the Faust of tradition and of Goethe and cunningly blended him with the mocking spirit of Mephistopheles and into the same synthesis went the fearful conception of the Wandering Jew, as it had now been fused by time out of the three legends. He outdoes all other Gothic romanticists in the accumulation of blood-curdling and heart-shaking effects. And he fascinated the most fastidious judges. To give a straightforward account of this strange being and his centuries of torment would have been beset with obvious artistic difficulties; Maturin accordingly made his book the frame for six recitals. The tortuous involution of his reported narratives inevitably makes for obscurity. But, as in a nightmare, the transitions are swift and inexplicable yet the horror of each successive phase is none the less vivid and overpowering.

Mention of Mrs. Shelley reminds us that some—if not all—of the great romantic poets were drawn to the supernatural. But their dealings with this subject are much more refined, more thoughtful than the sensation-mongering to be found in the great majority of Gothic novels. Though both deal with strange and rationally inexplicable events, there is no comparison between Christabel<sup>1</sup> and Otranto for example. In the first, the supernatural is used to symbolise a spiritual state; in the latter it is merely used to "chill the blood" of its readers. Yet of course the gothic novel—however crude, however negligible as art—does show how the taste for the

---

1. Christabel (1798), poem by S.T. Coleridge.

supernatural and the revival of interest in the Middle Ages was common to all types of readers, the least refined as well as the most cultivated.



ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย