CHAPTER FOUR
The Progress of Romance: The Gothic as an Institutional Form

From Marxism to Formalism

The Marxist literary historiography I have been developing in the last two chapters allows one to understand some of the preconditions allowing the vogue of the Gothic to flourish and affecting in some sense its generic form. There was clearly a growing ideology of affective individualism, a sense that individuals had the right to autonomy, which clashed with residual forms of control imposed by families, organized religion, and other social institutions. One outgrowth of this was sentimentalism; the Gothic, with its themes of imprisonment and deprivation, control by unnatural beings and forces, was the nightmare underside of the same development. But there are a number of questions that it cannot begin to answer, about the way the Gothic developed as a genre within the contemporary literary system, how and why it presents the sort of pattern of growth and decay that it did. For this we must turn to the formalist literary history shaped by my own neo-Aristotelian forebears, Ronald S. Crane, Wayne Booth, Sheldon Sacks, and Ralph Wilson Rader.

Chicago formalism’s version of literary history has already been discussed above, in chapter 2. Briefly, the novel was identified by R. S. Crane with an action structure that induces, develops, and finally cathartically resolves in the reader an active concern for a protagonist that results from the tension between what the reader is led to believe will happen to the character (his or her fate) and what the reader is led to think ought to happen (his or her desert). In *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*, Sheldon Sacks extended Crane’s model to include two alternative fictional models, those of the apologue and the satire, two didactic forms popular in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Crane and Sacks were able to use this model to analyze the novels of
Richardson, Fielding, and Austen, among others, and a number of their students have used the model effectively with certain fictions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To my present way of thinking, there are a number of weaknesses with the Crane-Sacks model. One is that it presumes that novels have a single protagonist and a single plot, and hence the model fails to deal with such important forms as the Victorian multiplot novel. The model also fails to account for a number of fictions that are unequivocally registered as novels but that fail to fit into the action model, including among others the novels of Defoe, written before the action model came into existence, and the novels of Joyce and Woolf, in our own century, which do not fit the pattern of “objective fantasy” that the action model requires.

Most important, especially for the present subject, the Crane-Sacks model implicitly presumes that literary texts are written and interpretable entirely within the confines of one or another generic model. For Crane, mimetic novels were by definition not didactic. Sacks, who was more explicitly aware of the role of messages implicit in novels of action, was nevertheless convinced that a novelist’s beliefs, indeed, his explicitly didactic intentions—such as Fielding’s intention “to recommend goodness and innocence” in Tom Jones—could be integrated with seamless perfection into his objective fantasy. As Ralph Rader has put it, Sacks had an almost structuralist faith in fixed and finite genres without which he was afraid we would be unable to explain some of the common facts of our literary experience; this faith, however, blinded Sacks to some of the other equally elementary facts of experience. One obvious fact is that mixed forms combining an action with satirical or didactic elements, like Humphry Clinker, Amelia, and The Vicar of Wakefield, are considerably more frequent within the literary canon than masterpieces of comic form like Tom Jones and Emma. Authors may try to create unified works, but they have multiple motives, which may or may not be well integrated with one another. Rader has suggested that the Crane-Sacks model of the “action form” would be “explanatorily more useful if we think of it as an abstract and in practice malleable one which can accommodate (at an affective price) many extraformal intentions which the creative freedom of writers may bring to it.”

Starting with Pamela

It has long been recognized not just by formalists but by every other sort of critic as well, that the Gothic romance stems, like so much of English
fiction, from the pioneering work of Samuel Richardson. I argue in this
chapter that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other novels of its ilk were rein-
scriptions of *Pamela*, revisions of it that were designed to eliminate one form
of internal conflict that Richardson had intentionally installed within that
text, but that inadvertently created other forms of internal conflict that were
far more difficult aesthetically to resolve. Some critics of the Gothic like
Coral Ann Howells have suggested that the first Gothic novel is *Clarissa* and
that Radcliffe rewrote Richardson by giving *Clarissa* a happy ending. I think
that it is far more plausible to suggest that what Radcliffe did was to rewrite
*Pamela* in such a way as to separate structurally two elements of Richardson's
first predatory male character.

In *Pamela*, Mr. B. has a dual function: he is at once the hero and the vil-
lain, the threat to her virtue and its eventual reward as her husband, and this
dual role is registered almost simultaneously within Pamela's first-person
narrative. "I pulled off my stays, and my stockings, and all my clothes to an
under-petticoat; and then hearing a rustling again in the closet, I said,
Heaven protect us! but before I say my prayers, I must look into this closet.
And so was going to it slipshod, when, O dreadful! Out rushed my master in
a rich silk and silver morning gown" (59–60). The tension between love
and fear that the reader experiences vicariously throughout *Pamela* is essen-
tially implicit in Mr. B's dual role. And if this duality produces a tight and
economical framework of events, it also helps to produce an uncomfortably
sleazy moral atmosphere that was, from the outset, noted by many readers
of the story, readers such as Henry Fielding, who wrote *Shamela* and *Joseph
Andrews* in response. Part of this sleazy aura derives unavoidably from
Richardson's puritanical identification of virtue with sexual inviolateness
and of ethical excellence with worldly success. But part of it is an unin-
tended consequence of the point of view. Richardson wrote the novel in
the form of letters and diary entries for the sake of the nearly unbearable
intensity with which he could render his heroine's self-recorded plight.
There is also, however, an unintended consequence that appears in the
quotation above. Because the wealth and luxury in which any future
Mrs. B. will live must be rendered for us by Pamela herself, and because
these silky and silvery facts are presented without being registered by her as
relevant to the ultimate fate we foresee for her, Pamela is inadvertently rep-
resented as a hypocrite.

For the eighteenth-century reader, there was yet another problem with
the dual threat and reward in the structure of *Pamela*, for it is clear that, the
more seriously we take Mr. B. as a threat to Pamela's virtue, the less willing
we are to accept him as a potential husband for her. One reason the second half of *Pamela* reads more comfortably than the first half is that by a sleight of hand Richardson has succeeded in transferring the role of threat to Mr. B.'s proxy, the sexually disgusting Mrs. Jewkes, a trick that cleverly allows the novelist to sanitize Mr. B. in time for his repentance and his final, sincere proposal of marriage.

While *Pamela* was a celebrated and much imitated novel in its own time, its effect as an influence, as both a positive and negative model of fictional structure, extended for decades. One could claim in its line of descent not only the sentimental fiction of the 1770s and later but also the morally serious comedies like *Evelina* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the latter written over half a century later. This is in effect what Ralph Rader has done in his essay "From Richardson to Austen," which traces the line of morally serious comedy from its beginning to its conclusion.

**The Incoherence of Gothic Conventions**

I would comprehend one major strand of the Gothic novel in this pervasive skein of influence, and I would like to suggest that the Gothic romance is a way of reinscribing the basic *Pamela* situation, in which a young lady is cut off from the controlling and protecting influence of her parents, is threatened (in life, limb, and virtue) by a villain; partly by good fortune and partly by the skillful use of her own native resources, the young lady is ultimately able to overcome and surmount the threat and is rewarded by being married to a young man of good family, wealth, and ethical standing. As I will show later, a great many of the most famous Gothic romances take either this form or an easily recognizable variant of it.

But given the textural and ethical problems attendant on using a single character as simultaneously threat and reward, hero and villain, the Gothic novel refused that option. Starting with *The Castle of Otranto* and continuing in the work of Radcliffe, Lewis, and their epigoni, these fictions featured separate heroes and villains of contrasting moral nature. Such structural changes have always the defects of their virtues, and this change started the Gothic romance on the road toward incoherence.²

One cause of this incoherence is the fact that, in effect, the threat is (however credible) unrelated to the protagonist's character or actions. As an innocent, exemplary character, the protagonist has not, and indeed cannot have, done anything to deserve the lengthy torment the novel chronicles.
Although the villain's motivations vary from book to book, in some deep sense they are never fully rationalized.

Let me give one example of this feature. In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Melmoth's first victim, an Englishman named Stanton, is imprisoned in a madhouse by a cousin who hopes thereby to inherit Stanton's fortune. This fails to connect, however, with the Stanton the reader knows, who has been represented as a sensible and sympathetic gentleman of sufficient means to be traveling throughout Europe, but certainly not as either particularly wealthy or eccentric. Both Stanton's cousin and his enviable fortune have apparently been conjured out of nowhere as mere contingencies of plot. Nor are we told why someone would go to the immense trouble of kidnapping and wrongfully imprisoning another, when having him murdered would probably have been cheaper and easier as well as no more felonious in Restoration England. Nor is the resolution of the story any clearer or more rational: Stanton, after rejecting Melmoth's bargain of life, freedom, and power in exchange for eternal damnation, is simply released from his private Bedlam. Maturin never tells us how or why.

The irrationality of the persecution and the equally irrational release from persecution form a fascinating feature of the Gothic romance. The result is to give the narrative a dreamlike quality, in which emotional states are experienced vividly without any consequences and without the circumstances attendant upon the emotion making coherent sense.

Thus in *The Castle of Otranto*, Isabella is pursued and imprisoned by Prince Manfred of Otranto in order that she might bear him a son and heir, though it is not clear why any other bride would not have done as well, or why a more willing bride of noble birth could not have been found. Isabella does not, through her own ancestry, shore up Manfred's title to Otranto, the defects of which are precisely what all the supernatural manifestations in the novel have been hinting about. Thus in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily is imprisoned by Montoni for reasons that are never made rationally clear. Ambrosio, who has gazed on Antonia once in a crowd during one of his penitential sermons (in *The Monk*), pursues, imprisons, rapes, and finally murders Antonia as a result of his insatiable lust—despite the fact that this lust is presented as already satiated, and indeed more than satiated, by his affair with the beautiful Matilda. In Radcliffe's *The Italian* Ellena is pursued, imprisoned, and nearly murdered by Schedoni to prevent Vivaldi from soil­ing his family name by marrying her—even though it is not clear how wip­ing Ellena out of existence would prevent Vivaldi from concluding another equally degrading misalliance. Since an exemplary heroine by definition can
never do anything that would merit the threats posed against her, there must always be something accidental or incidental about the central tension of these stories.

On the other side, in those novels in which the threats are unrealized, the heroine's romantic rewards seem to be equally problematic. Theodore’s relationship to Isabella is essentially forced by circumstances: she is, in fact, very much a second choice, his first being Manfred’s daughter Matilda, who delivers him from prison but who is accidentally stabbed to death by her father. The concluding lines of The Castle of Otranto, which imply that Theodore and Isabella spend their marriage alternately mourning the loss of Matilda, suggest at best a marriage of convenience and at worst a tying up of loose ends by a novelist at a loss to know what to do with his less menacing characters.

Similar problems plague Emily from Udolpho, whose shadowy, inexplicit attraction to Montoni sometimes seems more intense and real than her theoretical attachment to her lover, Valancourt. The plot of Udolpho in fact depends upon her refusal to agree to marry Valancourt before her abduction to Udolpho; the cause of her reluctance is certain rumors about Valancourt’s morals. At the end of the novel, we are told that those rumors are found to have been exaggerated, which allows what many readers have felt a very perfunctory happy ending. Only the marriage between Vivaldi and Ellena seems made in heaven rather than in a novelist’s commonplace book. But even so, there is no connection made between the various plots. Vivaldi tries—but fails—to get Ellena released from her confinement (ultimately it is Schedoni who releases the girl, who has turned out to be his niece); and when Vivaldi himself is picked up by the Inquisition, there is no connection between Ellena and his deliverance.

Thus even in the most canonical of the Gothic romances, the threat against the heroine seems arbitrary, and the romantic reward—the marriage to a noble gentleman—is achieved for reasons unrelated to the bravery and self-possession with which the heroine meets the threat. When I say that such plots are not coherent, I do not mean that they fail to make any sense at all—though indeed some Gothic plots have gaps and holes that have long puzzled their commentators. But what is produced is the sort of plot Aristotle would have called epeisodic: a series of events whose linkages operate without an organically coherent plan (Poetics, chaps. 6, 15). A threat is posed for one reason and is later dismissed for another; a marriage with an attractive young man is postponed for one reason and later celebrated for another. Aristotle explained two thousand years ago how such
plots can be made to seem more rational by the cunning use of thematic coincidence, and the Gothic novelists have taken these devices very much to heart, but there is nevertheless a difference between these ragged machineries and the clarity and economy that characterize the plots that Coleridge admired, those of *Oedipus the King*, *Tom Jones*, and *The Alchemist* ("Table Talk" 437).

Instead of clarity and economy, the Gothic romance developed a progressively more baroque proliferation of complications. We cannot blame this sequel upon Richardson, for despite his prolixity, which even his admirer Clara Reeve thought intolerable, Richardson had employed an almost classical directness and simplicity of action as a plot maker in both *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Our impression of complexity in Richardson stems from the endless elaboration of analysis and sentiment. Mr. B. and Lovelace generally know what they want and use whatever means are available to attain their ends, plotting intrigues that the heroines meet with their own steadfast fortitude and equal invention.

But in the Gothic romance the plots become both complex and vague. David Punter credits "Radcliffe's skill" for keeping us mystified by the "many and terrifying dangers" that threaten Emily at Udolpho (67), but in fact we never learn whether Emily is being threatened with a forced marriage to Murano, with attempted rape, with supernatural spirits, or (most plausibly) with being forced to make over her estate to her villainous uncle. All these dangers percolate around Emily, producing a global atmosphere of terror so thick that we never discover precisely how much danger she is in, and from what. When Radcliffe allows Emily to escape from one haunted castle, at Udolpho, she is forced to immure her in another, at Le Blanc, with another set of specters in order to keep the narrative going for another volume. *Udolpho* is a model of unity, however, compared with *The Monk*, in which Matthew Lewis installed two plots running in parallel: in the main plot, Ambrosio rapes Antonia, and murders both her and her mother, Elvira, while in the subplot, the love of Agnes and Raymond is threatened by banditti, by a spectral Bleeding Nun, and then by an evil prioress. In addition to multiple threats and multiple plots, the Gothic romance employs, as many observers have noted, multiple narratives, all nested like Chinese boxes. Perhaps the most famous instance is that of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in which "The Tale of Guzman's Family" appears within "The Tale of the Indians," copied out by Juan de Monçada from "The Spaniard's Tale," all within the framing story of John Melmoth and his spectral inheritance.
Multiple threats, multiple plots, multiple narratives: What was the purpose of these complications? Well, one obvious motive was to keep the story going, to keep it within what Peter Brooks calls the realm of the narratable, for when we run out of instabilities, the story has to come to an end. To say this is to suggest that Gothic novelists were paid by the word, but there was a far more rational reason than that. In the majority of Gothic romances, which were structured as serious suspense stories, there was always a danger of anticlimax: as each episode involving threat to the protagonist was surmounted, the audience would begin to discount the threats, or, even worse, would begin to develop expectations appropriate to a comedy. Like addicts, audiences become acclimated to a particular cause of suspense; one must escalate the situation merely to maintain a given level of tension. If Cary Grant is pursued by villains in cars at the beginning of North by Northwest, he must be chased by a homicidal airplane in the middle of the film, and by the end he must be hanging by his fingernails from Mount Rushmore.

Genuinely baroque exemplars of the Gothic novel, like Mary-Anne Radcliffe's Manfroni, or, The One-Handed Monk (1809) might have taught this principle to Hitchcock: here the heroine, Rosalina, is subjected to "four kidnappings, two imprisonments, two attempted rapes and four miscellaneous attacks" before she is rescued by her lover, Montalto (Tracy 138). The supernatural aspect of the Gothic (which I have not emphasized here, as it is not central to the form as I have defined it) developed primarily out of Radcliffe's use of the explained supernatural, as a quick and cheap way of creating suspense without the necessity of manufacturing genuine plot complications requiring resolution. It is my impression—and it can only be an impression—that the Gothic plot becomes progressively more baroque, complicated, multifarious, and incoherent in the decade after Radcliffe's best work, with the apogee coming somewhere around 1809. At this point the Gothic is at the peak of its popularity, but the authorship has passed from the canonical authors (Walpole, Radcliffe, Reeve, Lewis) into the lesser hands who wrote for William Lane's Minerva Press.

**Johnson's Rule**

If we were to ask why the eighteenth-century audience that so prized elegance, form, and unity tolerated the degree of discontinuity that seems to have been inevitable within the Gothic plot, we might suggest that the
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reason stems from what Ralph Rader has called Johnson's Rule (see "From Richardson to Austen"). Rader refers to an axiom of eighteenth-century aesthetic ideology that held not only that virtue must be rewarded and vice punished but also that both the hero and the heroine should if possible be exemplary characters. As Johnson said in Rambler no. 4, "In narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and the purest that humanity can reach, which exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it may, by conquering some calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform" (qtd. in Richter, Critical Tradition 227-28).

This stricture became part of the literary scene. It is intensely present in The Progress of Romance, a pioneering history of the novel published in 1785 by Clara Reeve, who was also, as the author of The Old English Baron, one of the pioneers of the Gothic novel. The Progress of Romance is written in the form of a dialogue in which three polite readers, one male and two female, examine the history of narrative from the time of the Alexandrian romance to that of their contemporaries. Reeve's chief spokesperson, Euphrasia, is a lively and unprejudiced guide to the varieties of opinion about the art of fiction prevalent in England at the historical moment when the Gothic novel was about to flower, and a very reliable indicator of what Terry Eagleton would call the aesthetic ideology of the age.

Euphrasia is particularly down on novelists like Henry Fielding, whose "writings are as much inferior to Richardson's in morals and exemplary characters as they are superior in wit and learning.—Young men of warm passions and not strict principles, are always desirous to shelter themselves under the sanction of mixed characters, wherein virtue is allowed to be predominant.—In this light the character of Tom Jones is capable of doing much mischief. . . . On the contrary no harm can possibly arise from the imitation of a perfect character, though the attempt should fall short of the original" (Progress of Romance 139). But if characters like Tom Jones and Booth offended Johnson's Rule, so too did characters like Mr. B. and Robert Lovelace, who were sufficiently attractive and sharply drawn to serve as ambiguous models for young men. Indeed, as we learn from one of Richardson's letters to his Dutch translator Stinstra, Richardson created the character of Sir Charles Grandison to be the exemplar that his predatory male characters could not be, and a counterpoise against them.6

The Johnsonian formula of a perfect character "conquering some
calamities and enduring others” was imported into the Gothic romance in the construction of the heroine. The difficulty, for the formation of a fully coherent plot, was, as I have already shown, the fact that there can therefore be no rational reason for the heroine’s torments. Being exemplary, she can have done nothing to warrant persecution; she is thus in some sense an arbitrary victim of others more powerful and wicked than she. And given another feature of eighteenth-century aesthetic ideology, the belief in distributive justice, with the good ending happily and the evil unhappily, the threat cannot ultimately be carried out. Few novels violated this rule. The result was that the reader could not help becoming aware that, whatever the intensity of the heroine’s sufferings, they must be temporary, and that the hero will receive her intact in mind and body. Enormous threats may be explicitly or implicitly made, and the heroine made to suffer in the most intense agonies of suspense, but the blow never falls.

Nor does the suffering experienced by the protagonists generally produce any consequences to their character. The Isabellas and Matildas, Emilies and Ellenas whose torments we have experienced vicariously remain emotionally as well as physically virginal. They are not hardened, deepened, or changed in any other way by the experience. Again, Johnson’s Rule may be responsible here. A flawed hero like Fielding's Tom Jones could be made more prudent by his frightening stay in Newgate; a flawed heroine like Austen’s Emma could be made less self-centered by her own éclaircissements. But for the heroines of the Gothic romance such transformations are not in the cards. Because they are exemplary in their innocence to begin with, any change in character must be for the worse, and therefore none occurs. The lack of consequences to the Gothic plot gives that plot a dreamlike quality. I shall have more to say about this quality later.

Keeping the plot of the Gothic romance free of any permanent consequences for the hero and heroine occasionally took some doing. One of the problems Walpole ran into with *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, had to do with the fact that he had made Manfred the hereditary prince, and a prince can be a very powerful character when he turns his hand to villainy. Theoretically he has only to say “Off with his head” and his servants will make ready the block and sharpen the ax for the unfortunate prisoner. As a result, Walpole must either represent Manfred as dithering constantly—so that he never gets his intentions clear to his menials—or he must represent those menials as endlessly frustrating Manfred’s design through their incompetence and folly. The result of either choice, though, is comedy, for perhaps nothing is funnier than the impotence of the powerful. Later writers
tended to avoid the problem by making the principal villain less powerful in status. Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a mere condottiere, and better still was making the villain a monk or a friar, as Lewis and Radcliffe did in *The Monk* and *The Italian*: the villainy was more surprising in a clergyman, and much of it would have to be exercised secondhand by persuading secular personages to act for him. (By the time of Mary Anne Radcliffe's *Manfroné, or, The One-Handed Monk* [1809], the convention of both princely and monkish villains had become so well established that we quickly recognize the prince in disguise beneath the monk's cowl, which he wears "as a cloke to the forwarding of his unfathomable schemes" [97].)

Isabella's Tale and Manfred's Tale

Before I go any further, I had better make a distinction between those Gothic novels where, structurally speaking, the protagonist is an exemplary woman or man and those novels where the protagonist is a morally reprehensible villain. Using the characters in *The Castle of Otranto*, I would like to call the former "Isabella's Tale" and the latter "Manfred's Tale." Isabella's Tale is a serious action—like *Pamela*—a melodrama arousing sympathy and suspense through the unwarranted persecution of an innocent; Manfred's Tale is a punitive tragedy—like Richard III or Macbeth—in which we are made both to desire and to expect the condign punishment of the central figure. The first subgenre includes *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, among so many others; the second includes the main plot of *The Monk*, sections of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. These subgenres exist in relatively pure form, but as the names I have given them suggest, some Gothic novels, including the very first one, have incorporated both plots into a mixed form whose focus shifts in different parts of the narrative.

In effect, *The Castle of Otranto* gives rise to both plots. One of the interesting features of that novel is the difficulty of locating the protagonist as the point of view shifts among Manfred, Matilda, Isabella, and Theodore. The result is a highly dramatic texture, with constantly shifting narrative focalization, but one suspects that the origin of the texture was less Walpole's admiration for Shakespeare than the difficulty he found in deciding whom the story was to be about. Walpole was not the only novelist to suffer from the problems of focus attendant on conflict of interest between his good and his evil characters. Though the structure of *The Italian* seems
designed to feature Ellena and Vivaldi as joint protagonists, Radcliffe's quasi-independent development of the villain Schedoni—arguably the best-drawn character in her corpus of work—shifts the novel toward the shape of a tragedy of deterioration, like *Macbeth*. Similarly, James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* starts out as a tale of the persecution and murder of George Colwan by his younger half-brother Robert Wringham, then suddenly shifts point of view to the fanatically religious Robert, whose conviction of unquenchable holiness leads him from one murder to another and finally to a desperate suicide.

Logically, Manfred's Tale is a development from Isabella's Tale, a way of evading the incoherence of that version of romance. Given the fact that Manfred is automatically the most interesting character in Isabella's story, the temptation is to reshape the story around the antagonist. The problem with this approach is that the antagonist is only the most interesting character from within the heroine's tale: he is fascinating because the evil he represents is (as it must be) incomprehensible to her. But from the perspective of evil, evil itself is necessarily banal.

The banality of evil seems evident enough in *The Monk*. Ambrosio's hypocrisy and lust generate a good deal of action: between acting out his relatively ordinary sexual impulses and struggling to keep his good name, a great deal can happen that is narratable. But as a character he is finally seen as pathetic and—hard as it may be to believe—passive. In the last signature of the novel, at the cost of all dramatic consistency, Lewis presents Ambrosio not as genuinely evil but as a flawed creature manipulated by demons to his damnation. The dramatic inconsistency has to do with the character of Matilda. In the first half of the novel she appears to be a woman who is irrationally but plausibly in love with Ambrosio, masquerades as a monk to be near him, and ends by seducing him; in the second half of the novel she is revealed to have been in reality all along an *âme damnée*. There is something psychologically appropriate about this—since women often appear to be demons to men—except that Lewis yielded several times in the first half to the temptation of presenting psychological views of Matilda genuinely concerned about Ambrosio that make her reinscription as a demon impossible.

Similarly, the multiple murderer Robert Wringham in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is made to seem at least as much a victim as a villain: tempted, then betrayed, then taunted and hounded to his death by the demonic Gil-Martin. The most puzzling question Hogg's novel raises is, of course, whether it is to be taken as canny or uncanny: whether Gil-Martin is to be taken as a literal demon exterior to Robert, the devil who possesses the
“unco guid”—or whether it makes more sense to see Gil-Martin as a part of Robert as Hyde is a part of Jekyll, and to view Robert as a victim of what today is called multiple-personality disorder. Whichever way the reader decides—and the novel leaves the question open—Robert has been turned into an object of pity. Horrible as he is at the beginning of the novel, he seems in his final flight and death a creature who experienced more suffering than he ever caused.

As we can see, many of the most celebrated authors of Gothic romance found Manfred's Tale a tempting alternative to the more common Gothic romance of victimization, but they were unable to present a fully effective villain as the protagonist. It is not entirely clear why not, but one problem they faced was distance. Renaissance dramas like The Jew of Malta and Richard III could focus effectively on genuinely evil characters because the exterior nature of drama made it easy to show the fascination of evil without moral ambiguity. Use of the soliloquy in Macbeth made it possible for Shakespeare to portray the moral collapse of a man who nevertheless possesses admirable and even sympathetic traits. But most of the novelists of the eighteenth century were unable to keep a proper distance from a villain-protagonist. There is a strong tendency for the narrative focalization to collapse the distance between the character and the implied author, to view the villain as justified in his own mind, or, more often, as himself a victim.

In The Monk Lewis made a good start but ultimately lost heart and turned Ambrosio from a devil incarnate to a mere pawn of devils. Maturin couldn’t do it either. In some technical sense, what holds the various stories contained within Melmoth the Wanderer together is Melmoth himself, the doctor angelicus who has sold his soul to the devil and wants to evade the consequences by trading his bargain to some other mortal. Melmoth thus seeks for individuals in the ne plus ultra of misery, for only those in bitter torment will be likely customers for his bargain. Given his need to witness and exploit human suffering, Melmoth is indeed a demon. But the point of view does not begin with Melmoth, nor does it stay with him for long. (In the section of the novel called “The Tale of the Indians,” Melmoth appears, speaks, and acts at length and in propria persona, and falls in love with the ultimately innocent Immalee. But once Immalee returns to Spain from her island and is rechristened Isadora, the point of view shifts from Melmoth to Isadora (or even to other members of her family), and we have what we had in “Stanton’s Tale” or “The Spaniard’s Tale” or the two tales intruded within “The Tale of the Indians,” in other words, a version of Isabella’s Tale, in which a victim is targeted for reasons hard or impossible to rationalize.
The Power of the Gothic Romance

To say that the Gothic novel is incoherent is not to say that it was ineffective. In *The Failure of Gothic* Elizabeth Napier conjectures that the strong sensations felt by the heroines were not communicated to the audience. Whatever today's reader of Walpole and Radcliffe may think—and we are jaded on even stronger sensations than Walpole and Radcliffe provided—I don't think, on the basis of the evidence of contemporary reception, that the Gothic was in any sense disappointing to its actual readers. Surely the Catherine Morlands and Isabella Thorpes of this world—and the Eleanor Tilneys as well—were transported, their feelings ravished; they even became addicted to the sensations. And even those who attacked the Gothic novel—and their name was legion—never questioned its power to carry the reader into its own realm. Indeed, this was precisely what was alleged against these works: that they were too effective. Unlike the morally serious comedies of the latter part of the eighteenth century, which according to Rader pay an affective price for their subservience to Johnson's Rule, the Gothic paid the price elsewhere: in structure rather than affect, in aesthetic form rather than emotional content.

And it would be a mistake to deny or degrade that emotional content, which kept the Gothic romance the most popular genre of its time. The first major source of its power is in the doubled situation of the heroine (in Isabella's Tale), which duplicated that of the family romance of its readers. One need not be a member of an analytic institute to recognize that most of Mrs. Radcliffe's readers were women who began their postadolescent lives, like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, at the mercy of a powerful and coldly incomprehensible older man who had shaped, without understanding and without meaning to do so, their notions of sexual desire. The most successful Gothic villains, the Montonis and Schedonis, are dark fathers, images of the demon lover or the destroying angel.

Within the plot structure of the romance, these figures are frequently the heroine's uncle—a displacement from literal fatherhood that underlines the incestuous basis of the fear and love they exact while making more probable the heroine's terrors of violation or murder. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Count Murano, attempting to account for the dismissal of his suit, accuses Emily of rejecting him because she hopes to replace her aunt in Montoni's bed. The accusation is repulsive and ludicrous but, as the reader must recognize, not completely irrelevant.

This is not to say that the Gothic novel literally represents the female Oedipus and figures forth the feelings daughters cherish for their fathers.
On the contrary, as Coral Ann Howells has noted, "There is no overt acknowledgment of sexual feeling in the novel at all; there is merely the recognition of a nameless power which is a frightening, potentially destructive force capable of assaulting both the body and the will" (52). In Gothic romances like *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, written by and largely for men, the Oedipal agon often takes the appropriately opposite form, with the male victim in thrall to a maternal woman. The female equivalent of the demon lover is found in Ambrosio’s Matilda—whose description significantly highlights her voluptuous breasts—and that of the destroying angel in Juan de Monçada’s mother, who, trading on his filial devotion, coldly consigns her son to be buried alive in a monastery to expiate her sins.

Compared with the passion of the daughters for the father figures, or the sons for the mothers, it is strange how tepid are the feelings between the youthful coevals, the heroines and the heroes whose rapprochement and subsequent marriage so often conclude the Gothic romance. In their reconciliation at the end of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily greets Valancourt with the following impassioned words:

> Valancourt! I was, till this moment, ignorant of all the circumstances you have mentioned [he had been slandered by the Count de Villefort]; the emotion I now suffer may assure you of the truth of this, and that, though I had ceased to esteem, I had not taught myself entirely to forget you... Is it necessary that I should say—these are the first moments of joy I have known since your departure, and that they repay me for all those of pain I have suffered in the interval? (668)

Emily’s felicity, in Radcliffe’s denouement, is characterized not as rapturous but as “tender and pensive” (670). Perhaps the safe harbor of marriage is always a bit flat after the intense struggle with the father: perhaps Emily even fears becoming in the long run as slight an object to Valancourt as her aunt had been to the demonic Montoni.

There are two other significant psychological sources of narrative power in the Gothic. One stems from the perplexity and subsequent revelation of secrets and mysteries—a sort of rudimentary version of the pleasure we seek and find today in the detective story, which stems from the so-called phallic phase of the pre-Oedipal period. The other seemingly rather perverse pleasure has to do with the motif of imprisonment that runs through most of the important Gothic texts. The motif of confinement in the pleasurable anticipation of release, the intolerable pressures of being held in, and the incomparable pleasure of being let go, seems to be a defended form of anal eroticism.
Probably the least well-understood and most embarrassing source of power in the Gothic romance is the stimulation it gives to the sadomasochistic desires of the implied reader. Like some of the more decadent works of the later nineteenth century, the Gothic stands in what Mario Praz called "the shadow of the divine Marquis." Some of the Gothic writers were reasonably aware of the pathology of their product and included in their tales some inkling of the source and significance of the pleasure they were providing. As the parricide monk in Melmoth the Wanderer, for example, tells Juan de Monçada:

I was anxious to witness misery that might perhaps equal or exceed my own, and this is a curiosity not easily satisfied. It is actually possible to become amateurs in suffering. I have heard of men who have travelled into countries where horrible executions were to be daily witnessed, for the sake of that excitement which the sight of suffering never fails to give, from the spectacle of a tragedy, or an auto da fé, down to the writhings of the meanest reptile on whom you can inflict torture, and feel that torture is the result of your own power. It is a species of feeling of which we never can divest ourselves,—a triumph over those whose sufferings have placed them below us. (207)

We distance ourselves from the parricide monk who recounts this joy in the suffering of others, but it is harder to distance ourselves from the feelings of Juan de Monçada, the narrator, as he describes his sensations fifty pages later watching a Spanish mob beat that same monk to death: "It is a fact, Sir," he tells John Melmoth, "that while witnessing this horrible execution, I felt all the effects vulgarly ascribed to fascination. . . . I echoed the screams of the thing that seemed no longer to live, but still could scream. . . . I actually . . . believed myself the object of their cruelty." And he concludes: "The drama of terror has the irresistible power of converting the audience into its victims" (256–57). This is the psychological key to Melmoth, and one of the keys to horror Gothic as a whole.11

But perhaps the most strongly marked source of pleasure in the Gothic romance, particularly Radcliffean terror Gothic, is the pleasure of passivity and irresponsibility. Gothic novels tend to be filled with events, but the events are ones that happen to the protagonist; they are seldom ones in which characters choose one course of action over another.

It has long been remarked that the traditional Gothic heroine is a passive creature,12 but we need to be clear that this passivity does not take the form of immobility but of indecisiveness, and her choices, once reached, tend less
to be decisions than abdications of the right to decide. In that locus classicus of the Gothic, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily St. Aubert is entirely under the tutelage of her wise and kind father for the majority of the first volume. Upon his death, her guardianship passes to his sister, Mme de Cheron, who is vulgar and selfish. Emily recognizes this, yet feels as constrained by duty to obey her aunt as to obey her dying father’s request to burn his private papers. Perhaps her one significant point of decision comes at the end of volume 1, when she declines to elope with her lover, Valancourt, despite her aunt’s decision to carry her away from him into Italy and despite her suspicions of her aunt’s new husband, Montoni. With eminent propriety, Emily decides that elopement would be precipitate and imprudent, while on the other side, her aunt is in loco parentis, and Montoni, however suspicious, has not yet been proved a villain. Her decision, in short, is to accede, however reluctantly, to the course of action that has been provided her by her elders; in effect it is no decision at all. This is the pattern Emily continues to follow: When her chateau at La Vallée is rented out, she thinks of protesting, mentions “some prejudices . . . which still linger in my heart” (196), but again accedes. To further Montoni’s plans for Emily, she is removed to Venice, then to Udolpho. There indeed she, like Pamela, resists all attempts made against her person, her virtue, and her fortune. This resistance is overlaid, however, upon a sense of her own powerlessness that is almost total, and an equally exaggerated sense of the omnipotence of her captor, Montoni.

During the central section of the novel, Emily is not in the strict sense inactive: she nightly explores the castle, finding other prisoners, coming upon blood and arms that convince her (mistakenly) of the violent death of her aunt, and most memorably uncovering the horrendously, hideously anticlimactic mystery of the black veil. But she never takes responsibility for herself or her predicament.

The reader spends three hundred pages participating anxiously in Emily’s hesitations, observing her nocturnal explorations around the castle, fearing rape and murder at every noise, always looking for a way out until finally, in chapter 9 of book 3, she and her fellow prisoner Du Pont, together with assorted servants, do little more than simply walk out into the Tuscan countryside. “Emily was so much astonished by this sudden departure,” Radcliffe tells us, “that she scarcely dared to believe herself awake” (452). If Udolpho was a phony prison, so is Montoni a paper tiger: his fall from apparent absolute power, related in chapter 3 of book 4, is accomplished with such “celerity and ease” that it is unnoticed “even . . . in any of the published records of
that time" (522). This is another regressive aspect of the Gothic. Neither the moral nor the pragmatic vision of the focal characters is trustworthy; like children they tend to exaggerate enormously the power of their opponents, and like children they tend to see adults in black and white. The pleasures of the Gothic novel include a return trip to one's childhood, to a simpler if occasionally terrifying world.

Emily St. Aubert in her indecisiveness and irresponsibility about her predicament is merely a typical heroine of the Gothic romance. Even more striking abdications of responsibility could be chronicled, of victims who have it in their own power to resist their tormentors and control their own fate but who fail, until what is nearly the last moment, to do so—such as Juan de Monçada in the monastery in *Melmoth*, or Maud Ruthyn at Bartram-Haugh in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*.

Without belaboring this point further, it should be clear that the emotional participation in the Gothic is regressive. As a result of our involvement with the innocent heroines or heroes, we become like children, not just in the sense that we believe the unbelievable—the fairy-tale aspect of the Gothic—but that we take the moral perspective that our misery is never our own fault: it is always something wished upon us by persons more powerful whom we must obey. In the next chapter I quote a number of contemporary critics and journalists who attacked readers of the Gothic, especially female readers, for using reading as a way of running away from their responsibilities. While they probably meant that reading was taking time that could better be devoted to the pressing engagements of this world than to the fantasy world of fiction, they were right to emphasize this aspect of the Gothic. So although the turn taken by Walpole and Radcliffe—the separation of the hero and the villain, the reward and the threat—had the effect of insulating the Gothic romance from the sleazy moral atmosphere of *Pamela*, it also kept that genre from ever attaining the moral grandeur of *Clarissa*.

Perhaps one might mention that the primary function of the Gothic as a theme in *Northanger Abbey* is contrastive. Catherine Morland is between childhood and adulthood, not quite ready to take responsibility for her actions. Her attraction to the Gothic does not in itself constitute a moral flaw (the Tilneys read Mrs. Radcliffe as avidly as Catherine does), but her willingness to apply it to life suggests that she is not quite ready for life as a grownup. Attraction to the Gothic is associated with thoughtlessness and irresponsibility in the character of Isabella Thorpe. On the other side, Catherine's prompt rejection of John Thorpe's fib to get her out of her prior engagement to take a walk with Eleanor Tilney suggests that there is a firm
core to her character as well as possibilities for growth, possibilities that are further proved by her fortitude in making her own way back home after being rudely thrust out of the abbey.

Extrinsic Evidence for the Model

Any theory of the Gothic novel would be incomplete if it did not attempt to explain some of the peculiar features of the genre and its place in literary history. The first and most obvious feature is the fact that, while the Gothic was immensely popular in its own time (roughly 40 percent of the works of fiction published between 1795 and 1820 would be classified as Gothic novels), it was never esteemed. Reviewers for both highbrow and popular publications generally gave the back of their hand to the Gothic. Part of the reason for this has to do with what Ina Ferris has called gendered reading. As a genre the Gothic was considered female reading and for that reason considered inferior to other genres of fiction, such as the historical novel, which were considered either masculine or neutral (Achievement of Literary Authority). This reason alone does not, however, fully account for the low reputation of the Gothic, since other forms of “female reading” such as the social comedies of Burney and Austen were rapidly granted something approaching canonical status, insofar as the novel, always more resistant to the process of canonization than the poetical genres, was capable of achieving such status.

For that matter, one would have to say that, from its own time until the very recent past, there have been no genuinely canonical Gothic novels. Although Walpole and Radcliffe, Lewis and Maturin were reprinted often during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, none of the quintessentially Gothic novelists has achieved the canonical status of, say, Smollett and Sterne. The single exception to this, and it is a very recent exception, is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which has become a canonical novel in the last twenty years or so. Until the 1970s, that is, the Gothic novel was uncanonical, however interesting as a topic for literary historians and collectors of old volumes. Aside from a few pioneering studies by Edith Birkhead and the mad antiquarian Montague Summers, very little had been written about the Gothic. In the last twenty years, however, the Gothic has become fashionable. Over five hundred articles have appeared in the MLA Bibliography on Gothic topics since 1980. Why this should have been is worthy of some discussion.

The second feature of the Gothic romance is that it is one of the few
literary genres in which the fragment has flourished as a form. It is not merely Jane Austen's joke in *Northanger Abbey* that Gothic novels operate by means of fragmentary manuscripts. One of the most frequently reprinted, imitated, and parodied pieces of the period was "Sir Bertrand," either by Anna Laetitia Aikin, afterward better known as Mrs. Barbauld, or more likely by her brother John Aikin. "Sir Bertrand" is a Gothic tale about a knight confronting mysterious dangers to free a woman from a magical spell that begins in the midst of a confusing situation and breaks off, without any coherent explanation, in mid-sentence. Connected with this, as George Hagerty has pointed out in *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, is the fact that the Gothic operates as much as a "tale" as it does as a "novel"; Gothic fiction is in at the creation of the short story in English, which seems to derive, at least in part, from the interpolated Gothic stories in Scott and the short horror tales of Poe.

I would like to propose that it is no accident that it was in our own day, a period whose aesthetic ideology has jettisoned the ideal of organic unity and substituted difference, that the Gothic novel has become valorized as it had never been since the last years of the eighteenth century, and that a Gothic novel, *Frankenstein*, has become one of the canonical texts of pre-Victorian fiction. But in fact I would like to claim even more: that the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was radically incoherent, and that one can begin to account for the history of the Gothic novel as a form only when one begins to see that history as a search for form it never achieved.

**The End of the Gothic Romance**

In eighteenth-century terms, the word *progress* is ambiguous. It looks forward to a modern sense of development, improvement, gradual perfection, but it also looks backward to an earlier sense of a circular procession—the moving from one site to another of the royal court—ever onward and elsewhere but ultimately returning to its point of origin. The "progress of romance," in other words, was a progress primarily in the older sense of the term. From its beginnings in the novels of Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis, the Gothic novel does not rise to ever-greater heights. Rather it becomes in plot more and more baroque and fantastic, and in language more and more operatic, as the sources of stimulation pioneered by the founders wear ever thinner. In its last years, it throws out three magnificent specimens, still read-
able today as most of the works of its 1809 heyday no longer are: *Frankenstein*, *Melmoth*, and *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, but by this time the knell of the Gothic has already been rung. The ringer, of course, was Walter Scott.

Scott had already come to prominence as a poet in the first generation of Romantics when he turned to the novel, which has been the most lasting part of his fame. Beginning with *Waverley*, published anonymously in 1814, and continuing for two decades, Scott began to explore a vein of romantic fiction that abutted onto the Gothic novel—it even featured the superstitions and legends of the border country between Scotland and England. But within all the romance of Scott's fiction, the banditti, the Highland chiefs, and their clans, there was always an attention to concrete and accurate detail, to probability, to historical forces and causality, that was designed to appeal to a different sort of public. As the researches of Ina Ferris have shown, the reviewers of *Waverley* in contemporary magazines told its potential audience quite explicitly that the novel was designed for a *masculine* fancy, as opposed to the *feminine* reading demanded by the Gothic.

The popularity of Scott and historical romances like his was immense, because in effect Scott had, by his use of historical detail, licensed male readers to enjoy the romance, which otherwise they had despised—or pretended to despise—as a feminine aesthetic experience. But even as males were joining enthusiastically the ranks of the readers of romance, romance itself had been forced to change, to leave the realms of fantasy for the concrete and the historical. Publishers turned down the pure Gothic novel, with its principally female readership, for the historical romance, whose mixed appeal was wider and therefore more profitable. In granting a new and even wider audience to romance, Scott had given the Gothic as such its deathblow.

Scott's relation to the romantic and fantastic tenor of the Gothic novel is complex and not easy to define. Relative to the historical novels of Maria Edgeworth, Scott's main plots tend to be more adventurous and stirring while still keeping within the broad framework of naturalistic probability. One reason the relatively romantic main plots seem to be more-or-less realistic, though, is that within the novels, intruded as digressions, are included short narratives entirely of a piece with the Gothic romance, and it is by comparison with these that the main plot appears to accord with the strictest naturalistic probability. In effect the reader is the more willing to excuse Scott's elaborate use of chance and coincidence in the main plot because we are spared the far grosser suspension of disbelief that would be required to
credit the supernatural digressions. Edith Birkhead considered *The Bride of Lammermoor* "the only one of Scott's works which might fitly be called a 'tale of terror'" (153); and while there are links there, I would agree with David Punter's argument that that novel does not belong in the Gothic genre (164).

One can see how Scott characteristically uses Romance themes and structures of probability in one of his typical historical novels, *Redgauntlet*. *Redgauntlet* (1824) was Scott's third novel about the Jacobite rebellions. As in *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, it is about a romantic English gentleman, Darsie Latimer, who is accidentally caught up in a treasonous plot to put the Pretender on the throne. Unlike the Fifteen in *Rob Roy* and the Forty-Five in *Waverley*, the plot in *Redgauntlet*, set in the summer of 1765, has no basis in fact. Alan Fairford and Darsie Latimer, the dual protagonists, represent the two sides of the young Walter Scott: the hard-working man of sense and the irrepressible Romantic.

The events of the main plot are—abstractly considered—precisely of the sort one would expect in a plot by Radcliffe. The protagonist is kidnapped and is in the power of a nobleman of enormous power and ambiguous morality. Even his identity seems to shift as he moves furtively but easily around the picturesque landscape, linking up with outlaws and condemned traitors at every turn. The protagonist is becoming inexorably inveigled into a series of events that could easily lead to a violent and ignominious death. At the same time, the prospect is broached of a romantic attachment to an enormously attractive character of the opposite sex; the Other makes what seems to be unambiguous sexual advances, to the protagonist's shame and disgust: ultimately the relationship between them is revealed (with a shudder at the incestuous feelings the protagonist harbored) to be that of brother and sister.

But anyone who has read *Redgauntlet* will recognize that the tone of the novel entirely belies this Gothic summary. The fact that the kidnapped protagonist is a young and adventurous male himself running away from the longueurs of legal education (and getting a bit more adventure than he had bargained for) suggests at once that the emotional keynote of the Gothic—terror—is not a significant part of this novel. Even the romance of Darsie Latimer's involvement in the Jacobite plot, and of his attraction to the mysterious woman of the Green Mantle is tempered by the jocularity and realism of Scott's matter-of-fact narration, and the serious, almost melodramatic pursuit of Darsie by his alter ego, Alan Fairford, is balanced by the counterpursuit of solicitor Fairford by his ubiquitous legal client Peter Peebles, which moves this version of Gothic romance in the direction of farce.
The Gothic tale proper appears instead as a single intruded narrative, the justly famous “Wandering Willie’s Tale” of Steenie Steenson’s encounter with the ghost of Sir Robert Redgauntlet. Briefly, Steenie has fallen behind in his rent, borrows the necessary cash on the last possible day, and brings it to the laird, who is thought to have made pacts with the devil. Redgauntlet, in the midst of a carouse with his familiar (a hideous and malevolent pet monkey) takes the silver but dies of a sudden fit, screaming and wailing, before he can give Steenie a receipt. When the heir, Sir John Redgauntlet, takes over the estate, he finds no record of Steenie having paid his rent. Steenie explains what happened, but his lack of any receipt or witness to the payment leaves Sir John incredulous. All seems about to be lost when the despondent Steenie encounters in a forest a strange horseman who offers to help him. Immediately Steenie finds himself at the door of Castle Redgauntlet (though he knows the house to be miles away), enters, and finds his late master carousing once more, this time with a host of dead Scottish patriots (from Lauderdale to Claverhouse). Following the horseman’s advice, Steenie refuses food and drink, and he also evades playing on the bagpipes in homage to the demon (Stenie notes just in time that the chanter is white-hot with hellfire) and escapes with his receipt, which he takes to the living heir. Sir John is amazed by the receipt, clearly genuine though dated the previous day, but gives his own credit after he finds Steenie’s silver in an old disused turret of the castle, which Sir Robert’s ape had apparently been using to hide objects he had purloined in the hall.

But “Wandering Willie’s Tale” is not merely intruded into the main action of Redgauntlet; it recapitulates its themes. Sir Robert, like the Young Pretender, is determined to have his own again; like Charles Edward Stuart, he has an unbreakable attachment to drink and women that ultimately proves his undoing; and he is associated with the whole band of Scottish patriots whose private morality clashed with their stern devotion to Scottish freedom and independence. Even the Scottish national attachment to papers, receipts, and dry legalities appears both in “Wandering Willie’s Tale”—as the central nexus of the story—and in the main plot with the Peter Peebles case and with Alan Fairford’s legalistic attempts to discover his friend Darsie. Formally, then, Redgauntlet inverts the situation of Northanger Abbey: instead of presenting a pseudo-Gothic situation whose absurdity is demonstrated by exposure to the matter-of-fact of quotidian life, here the Gothic tale—in its chilling apparent plausibility—exposes the absurd other-worldliness underlying Scottish revanchism.
The Brontës and the Gothic Aftermath

It would be wrong, however, to conclude this chapter with the notion that the Gothic novel never found a mode of coherence, never succeeded in arriving at a plot form that could simultaneously allow the play of feeling and the unity of wholeness. It found both, but only a generation after the heyday of the genre. The last Gothic novel, as has long been recognized, was *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë was able to restore coherence to the Gothic by recombining the hero and the villain, the threat and the reward. Both are embodied in the Byronic Edward Fairfax Rochester, who both terrifies and fascinates Jane, who attempts to inveigle her into a bigamous marriage, but finally, blind and punished for his hubris, as much for his virtues as his sins, calls to her and appears to her second sight to implore her to his side. Even more easily than in Mrs. Radcliffe, we can recognize in *Jane Eyre* a Gothic reinscription of *Pamela*, in which the part of Mrs. Jewkes, the sexually disgusting creature who threatens the heroine, is played by Rochester's mad first wife, Bertha Mason, and in which the fanatical missionary St. John Rivers plays the part formerly assigned to Parson Williams (as the Apollonian alternative whose value the heroine must acknowledge, though it is an alternative she must decline in favor of her more Dionysian fate).

One reason *Jane Eyre* could have been written in 1847 but not in 1797 or in 1817 is the passing of Johnson's Rule as an element of aesthetic ideology. By 1847 it was no longer required that either Jane or Rochester be perfectly virtuous, nor were the virtuous any longer required to detest the wicked. Rochester could offer Jane a bigamous marriage, and Jane come close to being willing to live with Rochester outside marriage without foreclosing the possibility of an essentially happy ending for them as a couple. The mixed state of sublunary nature, which Johnson had admired as the secret of Shakespeare's realism, had finally become a feature of the heroes and heroines of romance.

Furthermore, and as a consequence, desirable moral change, such as Austen had introduced into *Emma*, had become an important feature of the complex plot, so that, although Charlotte Brontë is supposed to have disliked Austen as a novelist, she nevertheless advanced her version of the female bildungsroman. The effect is that we witness Jane turning from a merely willful and rebellious girl to a woman of spirit and dedication, unlike the traditional Gothic heroine, swooning or pert, in that Jane takes the measure of her own life and assumes full responsibility for it. Like many a Gothic
The Progress of Romance

heroine, she aspires to a life that is simultaneously virtuous and happy. Her vision of virtue, however, is not a passive avoidance of sin but a life doing good in the world for others. The romance of her meeting with Edward Rochester resides less in any immediate attraction she forms for his Byronic countenance than in her own active part in helping the man, lamed by a fall from his horse, to recover himself. "The incident... marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life. My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory as the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive" (116–17). The other mainspring of Jane's existence is, of course, that others live to love her. This it is that makes her prefer the hardships—and companionship—of Lowood to life with the Reeds, and to restlessly advertise for a position as governess after her friend at Lowood, Miss Temple, marries and leaves.

The former value, developed at the Lowood School but most memorably expressed when Jane on the rooftops of Thornfield restlessly imagines "a power of vision" that will make her present to those "other and more vivid kinds of goodness" than she has experienced in her limited life, forces Jane to give up Rochester when she discovers that he can offer her only the life of a kept mistress at Marseilles. It is significant that she is tempted by his offer and rejects the life she would thus lead not merely for its immorality but for the desuetude and inanition it promises, which would destroy her self-respect. And it is equally significant that she is tempted by the life offered her by St. John Rivers as a Christian missionary in China and rejects that life, not because of its hardships or risk of death, but because, on the terms he insists are necessary, it will require her to violate her deepest self by marrying a man who cannot love her.

If Brontë has kept some of the traditional plot devices of the Gothic romance—ghosts, gytrashes, mysterious warnings, along with a plot that places a mystery about the heroine's birth that leads to discoveries of previously unrealized wealth—the ending of her novel is something genuinely new. Far from restoring the hero to the heroine as he was, Brontë presents Jane and Rochester as both changed not just materially but psychically by the experiences they have undergone after their parting, so that their union reinforces the protagonist's dedication to a virtue that is not merely rewarded but determined and achieved. It was from that new beginning—really a return with a difference to the form of Pamela—that the new Gothic novel took shape; and the romances published by Mills and Boon in England, or by the house of Harlequin in America, have tended to
be reinscriptions—the names and places changed to protect the innocent—of *Jane Eyre*.

It is also no accident that Charlotte's sister Emily's less often imitated masterpiece of Gothic epigonism, *Wuthering Heights*, was the fully formed Manfred's Tale neither Lewis nor Maturin succeeded in writing. Emily Brontë's bold step was in portraying her hero/villain as the heroine's truest lover, and revealing that the manifest cruelties he commits after her death (which operate primarily against her daughter and two nephews) are enacted as the tangible signs of the intense suffering he felt at her death and continues to feel during the years of separation from her. We understand that Heathcliff's rage at his separation from Catherine is as transcendent as his love for her, and we recognize his feeling as the heroic expansion of that impatience and envy of the untroubled that comes to us all in states of grief and loss. It is significant that we do not react to Heathcliff's machinations as betokening a change in character, but only a shift in his object relations. Rationalists like Arnold Kettle who see the bourgeois need to amass and concentrate capital in Heathcliff's conduct when he engrosses the landed and personal properties of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, strike one as essentially irrelevant to the case. Heathcliff amasses money and power not for the sake of gain but in order to become a combination of the Hindley Earnshaw who had beaten him and the Edgar Linton who had taken his Catherine, and we also understand that money and power are ultimately useless to the man who "cannot live without his life . . . cannot live without his soul."

What differentiates *Wuthering Heights* from other punitive tragedies of lost souls like *The Monk* is, of course, the denouement representing the transcendent love of Heathcliff and Catherine as fulfilled and completed, as it were, beyond the grave. "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab . . . un' Aw darnut pass 'em," the shepherd-boy tells Lockwood, and despite Nelly Dean's conventional skepticism about this ("The dead are at peace, Mr. Lockwood, and it is not right to speak of them with levity"), our satisfaction with the novel would be very different if we could not identify with certainty the unspecified woman with whom the ghostly Heathcliff haunts the Heights, and if we were not satisfied that they were as fulfilled in their spiritual union as the earthly lovers, Hareton and the younger Catherine, can be in their mortal life. Like her sister's novel, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* violates Johnson's Rule with a vengeance, combining the roles of the villain and hero and achieving in its complex and unique form a unity and coherence the Gothic novel itself never found.