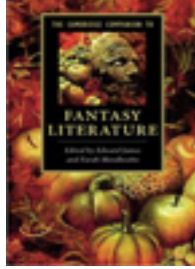


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The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature

Edited by Edward James, Farah Mendlesohn

Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521429597>

Online ISBN: 9781139014625

Hardback ISBN: 9780521429597

Paperback ISBN: 9780521728737

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Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521429597.004>

Cambridge University Press

2

ADAM ROBERTS

Gothic and horror fiction

The reputation of the Goths has followed a strange trajectory, such that the adjective formed from their name now means (variously): a people; their language; a medieval style of architecture; the modern revival of that architectural style; a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century mode of novelistic literature (the chief concern of this essay); a sanserif printing font; and a contemporary youth subculture centred on a particular sort of rock music and a penchant for black clothing and make-up. We might begin by asking: who were they?

Edward Thompson provides a textbook answer: the Goths were ‘a Germanic people who left their original homes in southern Scandinavia about the beginning of the Christian era, and settled around the lower Vistula [in Poland] . . . in the period AD 150–200 they migrated to the lands north of the Black Sea and in 238 at latest they began to raid the Roman Empire’.¹ They divided into two groups: Visigoths and Ostrogoths. The Visigoths, who warred and settled along the Danube, moved into Greece, and thence to Italy, where (under the leadership of Alaric I) they sacked Rome in 410, finally settling in southern France. The Ostrogoths built a large empire in what is now the Ukraine, and after various military victories their king, Theodoric, ruled Italy from the beginning of the sixth century. By the end of the sixth century rule in Italy passed to another Scandinavian/Germanic people, the Lombards; but by this time the Goths had colonized much of Europe and, through interbreeding with other peoples, became simply European.

This little narrative may seem to have little to do with the writing of that mode of fantastic fiction characterized by David Punter:

When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural. . . Gothic fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed upon by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves.²

Indeed, for most commentators the connection between the Goths and the Gothic novel is arbitrary or simply non-existent. But bear with me. The word *Goth*, according to etymologists, is derived from a Proto-Germanic word, **geutan*, meaning ‘to pour’ or ‘to flow’:³ and Gothic literature, like the Gothic people, has demonstrated a restless fluidity of situation, and signification that is as much a part of its meaning as its more familiar props, setting and metagenetic conventions. This essay seeks, taking this as a starting point, to explore some of the currents of that Gothic flow as they relate to fantasy.

The conventional way to draw the connection between the Goths and the Gothic novel is through architecture: from the 1140s, with the rebuilding of the French Abbey of Saint-Denis by Abbot Suger, until the sixteenth century, a new architectural style of pointed-arches and elaborate ornamentation replaced the round arches and plainer look of the Romanesque that had previously dominated European architecture. Thereafter it fell from favour, and a more austere neoclassicism became the order of the day. Janetta Rebold Benton notes that ‘in its own time’ Gothic was known as ‘the French style’ but that ‘sixteenth-century Italians thought the style barbaric, preferring instead the classical. Because the best known of the barbaric tribes were the Goths, the style was called Gothic, i.e. barbaric, the implication of the term definitely derogative.’⁴ Neoclassicism, with its aesthetic emphasis upon clarity, precision and the subordination of contemporary art and literature to the examples of ancient Greece and Rome, connected with the European scientific and philosophical revolution we call the Enlightenment and was the dominant cultural logic of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The primary signification of ‘Goth’ at this time was that of barbarous anti-enlightenment. When George Berkeley, the English rationalist and philosopher, pondered ‘whether every enemy to learning be not a Goth? And whether every such Goth among us be not an enemy to the country?’, he was using the sackers of Rome as a shorthand for ‘enemy of classicism’.⁵ Bishop Berkeley attacked Newton and Leibniz as ‘infidels’ because of their invention of mathematical calculus – the ‘fluxion’, as it was then called – considering its flow of infinitesimals corrosive of the solid foundations of Christianity. Poet William Cowper in 1782 praised John Milton in similar terms of enlightenment and order:

Thus genius rose and set at order’d times . . .
 He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose;
 And, tedious years of gothic darkness pass’d,
 Emerged all splendour in our isle at last.⁶

But even as he wrote this, Cowper's banishment of the barbaric violence and irrationalism of 'gothic darkness' was being contradicted by a revival of interest in Gothic aesthetics; and although this began, certainly, more out of romantic and slightly misty-eyed nostalgia for a medieval past than an outright hostility to the values of Enlightenment neoclassicism, it soon tapped a more barbaric cultural energy. In the words of Kenneth Clark, in 1750 the Middle Ages 'was still one dark welter from which the Goths alone emerged with a convenient name'.⁷ The old-fashioned focus of Gothic fiction (something which in turn informed the self-conscious medievalism of the dominant branch of later fantasy) was more a matter of mood – of, indeed, emotional affect – than of strictly historical or archaeological interest. When Horace Walpole, in 1748, renovated his villa at Strawberry Hill in west London in a self-consciously old-fashioned 'Gothic' style, he was aiming not at restoring medieval architecture so much as augmenting modern building with a glamour and modish fulsomeness coded 'medieval'. The same impulse was behind his decision to write a short novel in the Gothic mode.

One thing that almost all scholars of the Gothic agree upon is that it was this short novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which initiated the late eighteenth-century vogue for Gothic fiction. The anonymous first edition opens with a preface that presents the book as an actual eleventh- or twelfth-century story translated into English for the first time and apologizes for the supernatural elements of the narrative: 'Some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromancies, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote.'⁸ The immediate popularity of the book quickly prompted a second edition: Walpole added a second preface confessing to authorship and defending his tale against critics by explicitly siding with Shakespeare over neoclassical *philosophe* Voltaire. Overleaf is the third edition's title-page.

That the subtitle is printed in a slightly larger font than the title is not unusual for eighteenth-century novels; although of course it tends to draw out what would later become the generic quality, identifying the novel strongly with a signifier coded 'barbarous' and 'old-fashioned'. The Latin quoted does nothing to reassure the reader. It is from a portion of Horace's *Art of Poetry* in which bad writing is castigated: 'meaningless images are formulated in such a way that neither head nor foot can be rendered into a single shape'. Is this to be what the novel provides? A one-word answer might be: yes. In fact Walpole's epigraph can be read not as wry self-deprecation so much as self-knowing celebration of the anarchic imaginative possibilities his new sort of writing permits him – Walpole, after all, was also called Horace. *Otranto* is a book that literally disposes disembodied heads and

THE
CASTLE of OTRANTO.
A
GOTHIC STORY.

———*Vanæ*
Fingentur species, tamen ut Pes, & Caput unū
Reddantur formæ.———

HOR.

THE THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN MURRAY, Successor to Mr.
SANDBY, N^o 32, Fleet-street.

M DCC LXIX.

Fig. 1 Title-page of the third edition of *The Castle of Otranto*.

limbs and disposes of its characters and plot to resist the amalgamation of either into a readily comprehensible whole.

Otranto is a rather hectic story, as often laughable as alarming; yet for all that packing considerable imaginative punch. Manfred is the tyrant of Otranto, in southern Italy. The marriage of his sickly son Conrad to the beautiful Isabella, taking place in his castle, is interrupted when a gigantic helmet appears from nowhere to crush Conrad to death: ‘oh!’ gasps a servant, somewhat bathetically. ‘The helmet! The helmet!’ (4). It has come, magically, from the titanic statue of the dead Old Prince Alonso; other elements from the statue also manifest themselves about the castle. When wicked Manfred (who poisoned Alonso to seize the throne) decides that he will divorce his wife and marry Isabella himself, the portrait of his grandfather comes alive and beckons him away. Terrified, Isabella flees through a pungently described subterranean vault, and meets our hero Theodore, the true heir. There’s a good deal of toing and froing, mysterious friars, ghostly apparitions, fighting and the revelation of awful secrets before Manfred mistakenly stabs his own daughter to death, his castle collapses and the giant statue flies up in the air. Manfred confesses his crimes and dedicates himself to a religious life; Theodore marries Isabella and rules Otranto as rightful prince.

In *Otranto* we find, in nascent form, many of the props and conventions that were to reappear in the scores of novels published at the height of the Gothic vogue (from the late 1780s through, roughly, to the end of the century): moody atmospherics, picturesque and sublime scenery, darkness, buried crimes (especially murderous and incestuous crimes) revealed, and most of all a spectral supernatural focus. Many imitators tried to follow Walpole’s commercial success by littering their novels with similar props, settings and conventions – the haunted castle, the night-time graveyard, the Byronic villain and so on – although such a mode of apprehending the success of the book is necessarily reductive. James Watt makes the point that ‘the genre of Gothic’ is ‘itself a relatively modern construct’ (he dates its creation to critics working in the early twentieth century) and notes that the novels typically gathered together as Gothic vary greatly and manifest ‘often antagonistic relations’ to one another.⁹ More, *Otranto*’s success depended less upon the specificities of its spooky tricks and treats, all of which were standards of older romance (people have shared ghost stories since stories have been told, after all) and more upon a unique dynamic or quality the novel focused in itself: the same thing that Freud – whose theories have more often than any other been applied to interpreting the appeal of Gothic – labelled *uncanny*.

Fred Botting tries to put his finger on this quality when he writes that ‘Gothic signifies the literature of excess’; but he doesn’t specify the sort of

excess he is talking about (excessive what? Alexander Pope's poetry might be called excessively poised and classical, but is hardly Gothic). He continues: 'it appears in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality . . . [its] atmospheres – gloomy and mysterious',¹⁰ which might give the unwary reader the notion that he means excessively vague. Vagueness isn't a good way of talking about Gothic. It would be better to say that the strength of Gothic literature was in smashing the portals of classical restraint and grabbing at the intensities and vigour of a form specifically understood to be new.

Obscurity, of course, was part of it; and certainly more than one contemporary attempted to dignify the popularity of this form of literature by connecting it with the philosophy of the sublime – a venerable philosophical theory of conceptual elevation and refined aesthetic apprehension given new impetus in the eighteenth century by the youthful Edmund Burke's *On the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). For Burke, art was sublime if it evoked a sort of refining terror, or horror; if it filled people with awe; if it gave our mortal brains a searing peek at infinity. It was for him, in other words, a fundamentally *religious* matter. The sublimity evoked by a book, painting or landscape was a particular blend of inspiration and fear that had to do with the scale of representation, and the transcendent possibilities. Obscurity and the fragmentary were important to it because by their nature they hinted at the unrepresentable – God – instead of purporting actually to apprehend it. There was for Burke a gender component too: beauty, that other category of the aesthetically worthwhile (though for Burke small-beer by comparison to the sublime) was not only smaller-scale but also effeminate. A well-tended garden might be beautiful; the Alps are sublime; a river or a lake might be beautiful; the ocean is sublime. Day is beautiful, the night is sublime. Woman is beautiful; man is sublime.

Burke was not writing about Gothic as such (his treatise antedates the vogue) but his ideas were, and have continued to be, taken by defenders of the mode precisely because they offer a way of dignifying an otherwise derided genre. The scares, shocks and thrills Gothic provides are precisely *not* cheap (the argument goes); they are, in an admittedly populist way, attempts to open the mind to the awe and terror of the genuine sublime. It is a case that has continued to be made, *mutatis mutandi*, with Gothic's generic descendents: science fiction's 'sense of wonder' is in effect a straight translation of the Burkean sublime into a cosmic, scientific and materialist idiom; fantasy's 'magic' is understood as more than merely a narrative device: readers picking up fantasy titles in search of a 'magical' or 'Faerie' mood are acting upon a desire to be aesthetically sublimated into a state of mind that does not admit of rational reduction.

It is not that this philosophical recuperation of Gothic as a mode is in itself wrongheaded. But it is for all that an attempt to bring respectability to a disreputable mode of writing; a desire to dress the barbarians in togas and assimilate them to classical dignity. To reread *Otranto* in the hope of encountering the sublime is, largely, to be disappointed. It is, in fact, a novel that does a weird violence to many of our expectations, barbarically violating classical poise, unity, harmony, propriety, plausibility and taste. By the end of the book the Italian location of Otranto (once ruled by the Italian-sounding Alonso) becomes the kingdom of Theodore, a man named after that king of the Ostrogoths who conquered classical Italy.

The desire to elevate Gothic with the philosophical seriousness of Burke's sublime is in part a desire to order and control the mode. When Clara Reeve published *The Champion of Virtue: a Gothic Story* in 1777 (it was reprinted the following year under the title *The Old English Baron*) she conceded in her preface that her novel was 'the literary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*, written upon the same plan'. But she nevertheless attempted to distance her work from what she saw as the main flaw of Walpole's work: its *unfixity* of tone, the way it mixes the darkly thrilling with the merely risible:

We can conceive, and allow of, the appearance of a ghost; we can even dispense with an enchanted sword and helmet: but then they must keep within certain limits of credibility. A sword so large as to require a hundred men to lift it; a helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a courtyard, into an arched vault, big enough for a man to go through; a picture that walks out of its frame; a skeleton ghost in a hermit's cowl: – when your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness, destroy the work of imagination and, instead of attention, excite laughter. I was both surprised and vexed to find the enchantment dissolved, which I wished might continue to the end of the book; and several of its readers have confessed the same disappointment to me.¹¹

Reeve's novel, like many that followed during the great vogue for Gothic literature in the 1780s and 1790s, was simultaneously a work of creative imagination and a critical engagement with Walpole's originary text: a deliberate attempt to rectify the perceived faults in the original. In Reeve's case this resulted in a plodding historical fiction set in the England of Henry VI, a work that, whilst not purging itself of all supernatural elements, does limit them to one – haunting by ghosts – conventional and traditional enough not to upset her careful guarding of the borderline of tone and genre. Reeve seeks thereby to avoid the dangers identified with Walpole's proliferation of fantastical signifiers: that of bursting the limits of good taste. That Reeve's is a dull novel where Walpole's, though bizarre, embodies a palpable eldritch energy has little to do with the respective talents of these authors as writers,

and everything to do with Walpole's implicit understanding that the strength of his fiction lies in its *transgressive* intensity.

Reeve sought, in other words, to inoculate Gothic literature against the virus of ludicrousness: but this was, in an important sense, to miss the point. Certainly the continued success of *Otranto* owed as much to its almost harlequin quality as it did to more serious-minded dilute preparations of the Burkean sublime, something its many adaptations to the stage tend to make plain.

Gothic is often genuinely horrific and full of terrors. Fans of the Gothic (as of fantasy) genuinely prize the uncanny tendrils it can drag across the tender membrane of their imagination. But at the same time – and in ways that are, strange to say, specifically linked to that effect – Gothic (as fantasy) *is* ludicrous. Most modes of literature have been mocked and pastiched, but crime, or love-romance, or the cowboy novel (for example) have not provided writers with whole careers simply writing parodies of the form. Fantasy has. This is, indeed, a rich tradition, tolerated within the genre perhaps as a demonstration that its fans 'can take a joke' but actually speaking to a much deeper cultural logic. Diana Wynne Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1997) is a notable text in this regard; Terry Pratchett's important Discworld novels (1983–present) are even more significant. These marvellous novels began as parodies of the Fritz Leiber/Robert E. Howard school of heroic barbarian, and although they developed into something more than mere parodies they remain profoundly in touch with the unique combination of wonder and ludicrousness at the heart of fantasy as a genre. Less notable are the serial parodies of J. K. Rowling and J. R. R. Tolkien written by (respectively) Michael Gerber and the pseudonymous 'A. R. R. R. Roberts', although the fact of their existence, and many texts like them, is revealing. It is as if emphasizing the ludicrous aspects of the genre, rather than denigrating or diminishing the mode, actually *augments* it. Less robust cultural phenomena would be exterminated by such mockery; fantasy, on the contrary, thrives upon it.

This in turn reflects in the ways in which Gothic developed. Most of the very many Gothic tales published in England alone between 1780 and 1820 are now wholly forgotten. The ones that have survived, and which informed the developing traditions of fantastical, science-fictional and horror writing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are the ones that most fully inhabit the sack-of-Rome, sprawling, rhizomatic, trans-rational energies of Walpole's form.

In Ann Radcliffe's highly successful *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) the orphaned heroine (Emily St Aubert) is separated from her true love (the handsome Valancourt) and sequestered by her wicked aunt in the titular

castle, where her aunt's husband, the haughty and brooding Montoni, attempts to take control of her fortune. Emily is terrorized by a number of seemingly supernatural occurrences, but by the end of the novel all of these have been explained either as coincidences or as deliberate attempts by Montoni to intimidate Emily. The novel finishes, of course, with Montoni vanquished and Emily marrying Valancourt; and this narrative trajectory from irrational terrors to rational explanation, from the threat of transgression to the thumping reinscription of conventional values, marks the book's ambition as in effect *anti*-Gothic. (Radcliffe ends on an ethically utilitarian note: 'O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain.')12 But the book's considerable commercial success was not a function of this didacticism. Rather readers loved the prolonged quasi-erotic suspense of the heroine's predicament, and more importantly Radcliffe's considerable if over-boiled descriptive powers, her ability to evoke landscape in particular. Radcliffe's own subtitle identifies the novel as 'A Romance, Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry'; and the poetic effort to render an exotic, other and sublime southern European locale leaves its trace in the reader's imagination when other features of the strained narrative have long gone. John Keats (in a letter to J. H. Reynolds, 14 March 1818) responds to Radcliffe's power of landscape even, as Gittings argues in his introduction to his letters, he precisely 'parodies' it: 'I am going among Scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe – I'll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you. I'll make a lodgement on your glaxis by a row of Pines, and storm your covered way with bramble Bushes.'¹³ 'Damosel' nods to the insufficient authenticity of Radcliffe's historicizing (the faux-antiquity of her setting), but the running-on itinerizing of props from the repertoire of the Burkean sublime captures the feel of Radcliffe very well. More, this world-building – very much not limited to castles and subterranean passageways, as Keats's version makes plain – is one key way in which the Romantic Gothic opened imaginative spaces for fantasy in the broader sense.

Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), on the other hand, pours and flows through a number of quasi-pornographic intensities: Ambrosio, the hitherto virtuous titular cleric, is tempted by Matilda (herself disguised as a monk) into a sexual relationship. This debauchment leads to further lubriciously rendered sexually violent transgressions, including the rape and murder of the virtuous Antonia. Matilda is eventually revealed as being an agent of Satan, and the Devil himself makes an appearance late in the tale – Ambrosio signs away his soul in his own blood – in order to gloat in typically gnashing, over-strung

style: ‘Hark, Ambrosio, whilst I unveil your crimes! You have shed the blood of two innocents; Antonia and Elvira perished by your hand. That Antonia whom you violated was your Sister! That Elvira whom you murdered, gave you birth!’¹⁴ This climactic litany of violations of taboo retains its capacity to shock, and the nature of that shock is perhaps transgressive of more than conventional morality. When Satan goes on, amongst a welter of Capitalized Words and Exclamation Marks – ‘Inhuman Parricide! Incestuous Ravisher! Tremble at the extent of your offences!’ (440) – we may wonder whether the excitement of the moment, and the nature of the trembling frisson to which it adverts, isn’t precisely the point of the novel. It is true the book was widely condemned, and in places banned, on first publication; although by the same token it was enormously successful – not so much a paradox, this, as the typical dialectic reaction to the spectacle of the sack of respectable classical pieties. *The Monk* is not genuinely shocking (which is to say, it is not like Goya’s *Los desastres de la guerra* etchings) because it retains, in its very exuberance, a sense of the way dark sublimity and ludicrousness so easily interpenetrate.

Certainly the early years of the nineteenth century, as the first flush of the Gothic vogue in fiction was starting to burn itself out, saw as many parodies as original novels. Gothic in its original form had become an overcrowded and derivative genre. New novels gave themselves elbow room either by embroidering more extreme and shocking detail upon Gothic tropes, or else by reverting back upon the form as parody. The most famous example of this latter is Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (written 1798, published 1818), a work that is of a piece with all Austen’s novels in being, at root, an exercise in the subordination of sensibility to sense. Gothic here functions solely as an index to the heroine’s immaturity. Eaton Stannard Barrett’s *The Heroine, or Adventures of Cherubina* (1813) played the mode straightforwardly for laughs.¹⁵ More vigorous was Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), a work at least awake to the rhizomatic possibilities of invention and imaginative frisson the mode it parodies enables. Another influential late Gothic text was Charles Maturin’s version of the ‘wandering Jew’ myth, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820): a text whose over-arching narrative – the title character has made a pact with the Devil and, to his chagrin, is unable to die – pours and flows widely through myriad embedded tales, registers, modes and geographical locations. It would not be right to describe *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a parody, exactly; except in the rather specialized sense that Walpole’s *Otranto* already reads like a parody of the form that went on to initiate it.

Of all the Gothic novels from this period the one that proved most influential was Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Scientist Victor Frankenstein brings

an eight-foot-tall artificial man to life; terrified by his own achievement, he abandons his creation and temporarily loses his memory. The creature (it is never named) blunders about the world, learning from its experiences, mostly the experience of the hostility of other people towards its hideous appearance, something it pays back to society in acts of murderous violence. Much of this tale, not only its fantastical premise, edges the absurd: for example, the creature learns not only to speak but also (ludicrously) to read and write by eavesdropping unnoticed on a peasant family. But nevertheless there is genuine pathos in the monster's loneliness, and a flavour of sublime grandeur in the trans-European trek it – and its maker, Frankenstein – undertake, ending up in the enormous wastes of the North Pole.

In a way more significant than the novel itself is the considerable influence *Frankenstein* exerted upon nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture; the monster flowing and pouring into a variety of other cultural forms, from stage adaptations and allusions via Carlyle, Dickens, Marx and into the twentieth century in cinematic, televisual cartoon and general cultural form.¹⁶ These innumerable adaptations, which of course have rendered the story very well known, reflect both the continuing appeal of Shelley's core conceit and the ability of Gothic itself to flow into other modes of cultural representation.

More, Shelley's novel can be read equally as proto-science fiction (with the monster as the product of a strictly scientific endeavour) or horror (with the monster as an irrational eruption of the uncanny into ordinary life. Later Gothic novels spun variations out of their supernatural monsters, introducing different varieties of monster, as well as vampires – Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), or much more famously Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) – and shape-shifting beast-men, such as George W. M. Reynolds's *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* (1847) and Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). What all these monsters have in common is their protean ability to transform, to move from unexceptional 'human' behaviour to barbaric, violent, transgressive and unfettered. In this respect they are emblemizations of the protean force of the Gothic novel itself; a form capable of being associated with supernatural excess, but one that proved easily capable of assuming the shape of mundane Victorian domestic fiction. Many of the most successful nineteenth-century novels contain, coiled within them, a beating Gothic heart. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* family life and love receives a Byronic injection of Gothicized passion and terror in the form of Heathcliff; Dickens's novels try with varying degrees of success to contain grotesque, bizarre and eruptive urban forces within the narrative container of middle-class trajectories of life and love; Christina Rossetti wrote a great

many controlled poems of Christian-devotional and confessional type, but is remembered today for the vibrantly realized children's-Gothic of her long poem *Goblin Market* (1862). Almost any mainstream Victorian writer can be characterized along these lines. By the time of John Ruskin's influential account of 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853) it is clear that 'Gothic' had become a synonym for 'Victorian', and indeed for 'northern European': Ruskin is explicit that his focus is 'this grey, shadowy, many-pinnacled image of the Gothic spirit within us', and his intention to '[discern] what fellowship there is between it and our Northern hearts'.¹⁷

This adaptive colonization of other modes also manifested itself on the Continent. Late eighteenth-century European equivalents lack the distinctive barbarism of English Gothic. For instance, the French 'roman noir' was epitomised by François d'Arnaud (1718–1805), who specialized in rather stately, 'sombre' novels that were (in Théophile Civrays' words) 'imités de l'anglais' whilst also being 'surchargés de déclamation et de sensibilité', in the words of Rousseau.¹⁸ Germany was closer to the English situation with the 'Sturm und Drang' movement (the phrase means 'Storm and Drive' or 'Storm and Urge'); a movement particularly associated with Goethe, Schiller and Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, which was as fascinated with medieval culture, transgressive energies and passion as English writers of the period. But these works very often lack the specifically supernatural component that feeds into fantasy writing more generally conceived, and Sturm und Drang was much shorter-lived than Gothic ('After 1780,' Ernst Rose notes, it 'had practically passed').¹⁹

There are, of course, powerful examples of Continental European Gothic novels, but they all date from later in the nineteenth century and follow in the train of a specifically English vogue. E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815) is in effect a rewriting of Lewis's *The Monk* (something the novel itself acknowledges). In France Balzac admired Maturin and wrote a necessarily derivative sequel to *Melmoth the Wanderer* (*Melmoth Réconcilié*, 1835); and Théophile Gautier picked up the idea of a supernatural Egyptian Mummy from Jane Loudon's slightly far-fetched *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century* (1827) to write his own Gothic and historical versions of the trope ('Le Pied de momie', 1840; *Le Roman de la momie*, 1858). The Gothic elements of Polish author Jan Potocki's French-language *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (published after his death in 1815) are also parasitical upon earlier models. Guy de Maupassant's chilling 'La Horla' (1887), about an individual effectively driven mad by extra-terrestrial powers, combines Gothic with science-fictional logics. In Spain Benito Galdós's *La Sombra* (1870), 'a work that relies heavily on conventions of the Gothic tradition',²⁰ harks all the way back to Walpole, as the protagonist Anselmo

terrorizes the wife he believes has been unfaithful to him with a portrait of Paris, from Greek myth, magically come alive.

What I am talking about, then, is a process of cultural colonization, and one that specifically maps out the territory in which modern fantasy was later to grow. The Gothic was one of the major vehicles by which Romanticism poured out to dominate literature – and, although it would be foolish to pretend to be able to define *that* cultural form in a single phrase, it is not out of place to stress the link between Gothic and Romantic aesthetic logics. Romanticism is, amongst other things, the barbaric energies of an imagined past pouring and flowing disruptively through previously established canons of classical taste: a replacement of the classical Mediterranean world with a northern medievalized one as the ideal in art. Heinrich Heine's 1849 definition of 'the Romantic school' is relevant here, not least as a way of characterizing the subsequent evolution of Fantasy: 'die Wiedererweckung der Poesie des Mittelalters, wie sie sich in dessen Liedern, Bild- und Bauwerken, in Kunst und Leben, manifestirt hatte'.²¹ This, in their different ways, is what Bram Stoker and William Morris both were doing at the end of the nineteenth century. This, 'in Kunst *und* Leben', epitomizes Tolkien's ethico-aesthetic project, and the multiple interconnections between late twentieth-century fantasy and alternative and environmentalist lifestyles.

Which brings this essay back, finally, to Gothic, and the strange trajectory of its reputation. It began as a mode of fantastic writing confined to a small portion of land off the northern European coastline. But it poured; it flowed across the continent, overthrowing cultural logics predicated upon the ordered solidity of classical models and bringing a disruptive, sometimes violent and transgressive vigour. By the end of the century it had changed Greece and Rome from the rather frigid stasis of Winckelmann to the furious, sexually liberatory, sacred violence of Nietzsche, Swinburne, Wilde and E. R. Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1959) – a reimagining of Western culture's classical heritage that is, in effect, a Gothicization of its cultural assumptions. But, having sacked Rome, it spread further, under two different names. Visigothically speaking, a materialist Gothic-fantastic proliferated and came to be called (in the twentieth century) science fiction: a great tribe of works that find quasi-sublime obscurity not in dark woods, subterranean caverns and middle-European night-times but in space – which rationalized Gothic monsters as aliens; and which sensed wonder in the terrors of the Gothic uncanny. Science fiction pretended to replace Gothic fiction's passion for antiquity with a passion for imagined futures, although these – Asimov's Roman-imperial Galactic Empire, Frank Herbert's medievalized *Dune* universe – were often the past passing itself off as the future. One of the consistent lessons of Gothic is that, though we may

try, we cannot escape the past. Ostrogothically, though – and, eventually, to even greater commercial success – a different sort of Gothic spread (flowed, poured) over the cultural landscape: one that maintained Gothic’s archaic focus and built its uncanny into a world-logic that defied scientific reduction. It turned its back, largely, on the possibilities of Greek and Roman myth and took up instead specifically northern European portfolio of stories and archetypes. Relishing the medievalism of the Gothic outlook as a specific and barbed critique of modernity, as in the fantastical writing of Morris, Lewis and Tolkien; inhabiting gloomy, ornate architectural castles like Mervyn Peake and T. H. White; or emphasizing the horror of the unspeakable and obscure as in Poe, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos. By this point Gothic fiction had interbred with so many other cultural modes and genres as to become, effectively, simply Literature.

NOTES

- 1 Edward Arthur Thompson, ‘The Goths’, in N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 472. One of the editors wished to point out that this ‘text-book answer’ is probably quite wrong: see Edward James, *Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200–600* (London: Longman, 2009).
- 2 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1980), p. 1.
- 3 See Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Bern/Munich: Francke, 1947–66).
- 4 Janetta Rebold Benton, *Art of the Middle Ages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p. 11.
- 5 George Berkeley, *The Querist: containing Several Queries Proposed to the Consideration of the Public* (Dublin, 1735), p. 42.
- 6 William Cowper, ‘Table Talk’ (1782), in *Table Talk, and Other Poems* (London, 1825), p. 20.
- 7 Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 24.
- 8 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, 3rd edn (London, 1769), p. vii.
- 9 James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.
- 10 Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.
- 11 Clara Reeve, *The Champion of Virtue: a Gothic Story* (1777; reprinted 1778 as *The Old English Baron*), pp. iv–v.
- 12 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), ed. Bonamy Dobrée and Frederick Garber (Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 672.
- 13 Robert Gittings (ed.), *Letters of John Keats* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 75.
- 14 Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 439.

- 15 See David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen, *Romantic Parodies: 1797–1831* (London and Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), pp. 101–11.
- 16 See Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
- 17 John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic', in *The Stones of Venice: Volume the Second, The Sea-Stories* (London, 1853), pp. 151–231, at p. 153.
- 18 Théophile Civrays, 'Arnaud', in François Mourreau (ed.), *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le XVIII siècle* (Paris: Fayard 1995), p. 87.
- 19 Ernst Rose, *A History of German Literature* (London: Peter Owen, 1961), p. 162.
- 20 Sylvia López, 'The Gothic Tradition in Galdós's *La Sombra*', *Hispania*, 81 (1998), pp. 509–18, at p. 509.
- 21 Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: Alternative Perspectives 1985–2002* (Munich: Königshausen and Neumann, 2006), p. 25.