THE EXPLICABLE AND THE INEXPICABLE: GOTHIC MANIFESTATIONS
IN FOUR OF THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

Jane Louise Liljedahl
Department of English
University of Leicester

68,050 words
July 2002
Abstract of
THE EXPLICABLE AND THE INEXPLICABLE: GOTHIC
MANIFESTATIONS IN FOUR OF THOMAS HARDY’S NOVELS
by Jane Liljedahl

In this thesis I will examine how Hardy uses Gothic manifestations within his novels to allude to the inexplicable—objects and events that defy rational explanation. The Gothic is a medium of faith that alerts us to the mysterious unknown that is real, but elusive, gesturing toward a reality that is not itself. By acknowledging the non-rational, the Gothic liberates feelings and emotions, leading to an expansion of consciousness with no restrictions or boundaries.1 In turn, Gothic literary themes, tropes, and representations offer limitless possibilities that evade language. Unable to express his quasi-religious intuitions in a scientific, philosophical or religious creed, Hardy used the crude machinations of Gothic literary convention to express these intuitions.

By introducing examples of Gothic writing in Hardy’s novels and comparing them with conventional Gothic literature, I will provide a general overview of how Hardy utilizes Gothic conventions to express his own sense of the Gothic. Establishing a historical account of the term “Gothic”, the corresponding literary genre will be studied, introducing specific examples of writing from some of the leading practitioners of the Gothic literary period—Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin—giving special attention to the related ideas of Edmund Burke. Jane Austen’s parody of the formulaic Gothic will also be a focus.

Although Hardy is not a Gothic writer in the manner of the eighteenth-century Walpole or Radcliffe, he uses traditional and non-traditional Gothic literary conventions in his novels. Like most Gothic authors, he often alludes to the existence of an inexplicable entity, possibly of supernatural origin. In his earlier novels, he discounts the power of such a force and offers reasonable explanations for events that appear inexplicable. However, no similar clarification is offered in his later novels. Meanwhile, nineteenth-century adaptations of Gothic convention give Hardy the opportunity to overturn and subvert assumptions, beliefs and authoritarian traditions. He initially expresses muted criticism of institutions, especially the Christian church, but as his novel-writing career progresses, his reproach turns to condemnation.

This study will concentrate on four of Hardy’s published works; a pair from the beginning of his nove-writing career and two from the later stages. Desperate Remedies (1871) and A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) display his early attempts at exploring Gothic themes and imagery. The Woodlanders (1887) and Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891) show his progress in achieving coalescence and coherence with Gothic concepts and figures, as Hardy utilizes themes, images, conventions, and manifold allusions to express his sense of the Gothic. Yet, by its very nature, the Gothic remains inexplicable, for if it can be fully explained it is no longer Gothic.2

---

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Faculty of Arts at the University of Leicester for a research grant that enabled me to study primary material at the Dorset Museum in Dorchester and the British Library of Periodicals and Newspapers in North London. I am grateful for the assistance of Lilian Swindall at the Dorset Museum and the efficient and kind staff at the Dorchester Library, whose services above and beyond the call of duty included finding a reel-to-reel tape player within twenty-four hours of my request.

Thanks also to Phil Hayman, M.C.I.T., M.I.L.T. for his elucidation of perplexities involving the eclectic mix of transport, the British monarchy, and military history. I am grateful to Joyce Belanovic, grammar queen and walking thesaurus, for sustaining me with tea, Doritos, and chocolate.

Peter Widdowson deserves recognition for his useful suggestions, while I very much appreciate the helpful comments and unwavering support of Joanne Shattock. I am in debt to Bill Myers for his encouragement, his time, and his thoughts on the Gothic. To Vince Newey I give the greatest thanks of all, as I never left a meeting with him without learning something of value. He also gave me the time and space to simply read and think, and when it came to helping me shape the thesis, he allowed enough distance to ensure that the pages reflect my own thoughts and ideas. His assistance and support have been invaluable.

Jane Liljedahl
Leicester
CONTENTS

Introduction 1-15

Chapter One—Origins and Transformations: Gothic Fiction in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Gothic Literature 16-66

Chapter Two—Desperate Remedies: Hardy’s Most Gothic Novel 67-88

Chapter Three—Gothic Integration in A Pair of Blue Eyes 89-108

Chapter Four—The Woodlanders: An Amalgam of Simple and Sophisticated Gothic Conventions. 109-148

Chapter Five—The Prominence of the Gothic Past in Tess of the d’Urbervilles: 149-183

Conclusions 184-188

Bibliography 189-220
THE EXPLICABLE AND THE INEXPPLICABLE: GOTHIC MANIFESTATIONS IN FOUR OF THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

INTRODUCTION

GOTHIC ROOTS

Alarming and terrifying tales are nothing new, but the distinct literary genre designated as "Gothic" is relatively modern. The Gothic has got to reach towards what cannot be spoken; if all can be spoken, then there is not gothic. It can gesture towards the sublime, towards the blasphemous, or towards the magical, but it must never fall into the prosaic: the gothic has to alert us to the presence of agencies we cannot explain. We cannot explain them because they lie outside the realm of the explicable, outside of language. It's not that we don't know enough, knowledge is not the issue. If the gothic can be explained it is no longer gothic. That's why the endings of gothic novels, the explanations, are always read by good readers as parodic. They expose the inadequacy of explanations.

Published in 1764, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is commonly assumed to be the first Gothic novel, serving as the prototype for later Gothic fiction. While the book is crude, with only perfunctory characterization, it is in the pages of *Otranto* that Walpole first introduces literary motifs and devices that we now distinctly recognize as Gothic. He employed what came to be known as traditional Gothic settings: wild mountainous regions, gloomy forests, subterranean passages and vaults, ancient buildings, and decaying ruins. Thematically, Walpole highlights the importance of time and the inescapable nature of the past. Using the narrative technique of a story-within-a-story, he also focuses on the battle between virtue and villainy. The story includes suggestive hints of supernatural powers, mysterious events, strange apparitions, improbabilities, and coincidences.

However, *The Castle of Otranto* is not Gothic by what it refers to—underground passages, crumbling castles and particular modes of thought and feelings—but by the means it uses to make that reference. Gothic conventions, tropes, and representations point towards limitless possibilities that evade language. Gesturing towards something that is not itself, the Gothic is a medium of expression that alerts us to the mysterious, inexplicable other that is real, but elusive.

Sedgwick says the function of the gothic is to "open horizons beyond social patterns ... and institutionally approved emotions" and to liberate feelings by acknowledging the non-rational. By accepting this definition, we also have to accept "the discontinuity between ... a sense of the gothic" and

---

Gothic conventions, modes, representations, and the like. In the Gothic, the natural and supernatural are merged into a "continuous realm", where the separations between physical and spiritual or holy and profane are violated to create a single greater domain. ... this double expansion produces the simultaneous investigation of inner complexities and a supernatural grandeur beyond human life ... temporally, it reaches towards archaic memories, ancestral remains ... and towards the future destruction of death.

The augmentation of the consciousness obliterates all boundaries and limitations, setting the mind free. The strictures of time are shattered, as the expansion reaches towards the original formlessness of the primordial past and the chaotic disorder of the future. Because death is the ultimate loss of form, the Gothic is "drawn to death as well as life in its drive for inclusiveness". This compulsive double expansion of consciousness and reality may lead to riot, but the Gothic celebrates extremes of all kind, including anarchy.

Beginning in 1764, the formally defined Gothic literary period terminated in 1820 with the publication of Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Many refinements took place in the intervening years, as Ann Radcliffe—the leading practitioner of the era—built upon Walpole's incipient methods of allying inner moods with outer landscapes. She cultivated expansive natural scenes that both affected and reflected the emotions of her

---

3 Sedgwick, 3.


5 Ibid., 144.

heroines. Authors such as Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin sensationalized the genre by introducing eroticism and violence into their novels, but they also began to provide psychological insight into mental torment and physical suffering.

Gothic fiction enjoyed its greatest popularity in the three decades following 1790, as "between 1796 and 1806 ... at least one-third of the novels published in Great Britain" were Gothic in nature. Remaining in vogue for almost thirty years, such offerings began to receive a bad name in the early nineteenth-century. Sheer repetition contributed to the decline, while the reputation of Gothic fiction was further tarnished by the fact that many alleged Gothic novels were merely the "the mechanical outpourings of second-rate authors". Such stories written in a formulaic manner became targets of ridicule, with Jane Austen's parody of the Gothic genre, *Northanger Abbey*, among the most notable. Sold in 1803, it was only published posthumously in 1818. Two years later, Maturin's *Melmoth* marked the end of the Gothic literary period. However, the Gothic tradition continued to influence fiction writers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries and still does so today.

CRITICISM

Filtered and distilled through more than two hundred years, the Gothic is in a continual process of change, with the literary Gothic being reclaimed and reconstituted in response to contemporary literary theories and

---


different critical approaches. The term “Gothic” comes from the Goths, a Germanic tribe who flourished during the early Middle Ages. Later generations considered the race to be ignorant, barbaric and uncivilized; thus, in the Renaissance, “Gothic” began to be used in a pejorative manner, taking on negative connotations that still linger in the field of literature. Even at the height of Gothic fiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, “critics were almost univocal in their condemnation of what was seen as an unending torrent of popular trashy novels”.9 Victorian novels in the Gothic mode were similarly denounced, as it was feared that the overall low moral tone of such books would encourage readers to indulge in immoral acts themselves. In the twentieth-century, science fiction, horror films and the many serious and comedic cinematic permutations of Frankenstein, Dracula and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde have helped sustain Gothic fiction. Visual mediums have largely replaced the written word, “and in this respect, Gothic, always nourished in popular culture, is perfectly at home”.10

There has been a critical prejudice against Gothic literature since the 1920’s, partly because of its association with mass culture, but also due to the fact that “non- or anti-realist forms (gothic melodrama, etc.) have been regarded as seditious and imical by the dominant literary culture and have been marginalized”.11 The Gothic literary period has been persistently viewed as an anomaly, a literary curiosity, and an inferior and hackneyed genre, though attitudes have slowly been changing.

---


10 Ibid., 156.

11 Peter Widdowson, Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology (London: Routledge, 1989), 76.
Although Gothic novels continued to be largely disregarded through the pre and post-war eras, Montague Summers' *The Gothic Quest* (1938) and Devendra Varma's *The Gothic Flame* (1957), stood out as two of the more favorable and influential studies concerning the development of the Gothic novel. Both critical histories were republished by Russell and Russell in 1964, anticipating Jacqueline Howard and Anne William's proposal that the rehabilitation of Gothic actually began with Robert Hume's 1969 *PMLA* article, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel". Similarly G. R. Thompson's collection, *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (1974), renewed interest in the Gothic by exploring its relationship with Romanticism. Published in 1978, Coral Ann Howell's *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* was one of the first book-length re-evaluations of Gothic literature.

Recent critical theories and altered values further aided the reputation of the Gothic genre. Assisted by Gilbert and Gubar's seminal feminist text, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Ellen Moers' concept of the female Gothic opened up one of "the most significant directions in recent Gothic

---


criticisms". Attitudes and practices continued to shift, as David Punter and Jeremy Hogle examined the Gothic in relation to power and desire. Judith Wilt, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Kate Ferguson Ellis enlarged the critical horizons by discussing issues of control and sexuality, distinguishing between a female and male mode of written Gothic; the former “indulging ... [in] imaginative excess” and the latter “rationalizing”. Other critics who have influenced my own understanding of Gothic literature and concepts are Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, who discussed the importance of imagination and expansion in Gothic art, and Julian Wolfreys, who identified Victorian Gothic literary conventions. I am indebted to Frank Botting’s historical overview in Gothic (1996), and found Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith’s views in Modern Gothic (1996) invaluable.

The Gothic factors in Hardy’s poetry and fiction have not gone unnoticed. Taking a general approach, James F. Scott and F. B. Pinion identify and briefly discuss the Gothic imagery that Hardy employs in his prose. In specific novel criticism, Kevin Moore suggests that Gothic conventions and the detective tradition propel Desperate Remedies. Meanwhile, S. F. Johnson studies Hardy and the sublime in relation to Edmund Burke, the philosopher.


17 Bayer-Berenbaum; and Wolfreys, Victorian Gothic.

whose ideas greatly influenced the late eighteenth-century concept of
Gothic.\textsuperscript{19}

There are other critical works that focus on Hardy’s Gothic mode, but
because of the pejorative perception of the Gothic that has only recently
abated, many critics remain loath to bring up the subject or use the term in
their discussions. For example, allusions to the supernatural are an essential
element of Gothic literature. In her seminal, \textit{Folkways in Thomas Hardy},
Ruth Firor explains how Hardy evokes an aura of suggestive supernaturalism
in his writings, but she does not acknowledge any Gothic influence. J.O.
Bailey also addresses the issue of the supernatural in “Hardy’s
Mephistophelian Visitants”, emphasizing the strange and satanic
endowments of some of Hardy’s protagonists, but he does note the effect of
the Gothic either.\textsuperscript{20}

Similarly, prompted by \textit{The Monk} and \textit{Melmoth}, the erotic became a
Gothic principle in the early nineteenth-century, but no contemporary critic
connects Gothic eroticism with Hardy. The sexual elements in his fiction
attract comment, as Richard Taylor points to the pervasive presence of sexual
pressure in the lesser-known novels. Rosemarie Morgan’s work, \textit{Women
and Sexuality in Thomas Hardy’s Novels} and Marjorie Garson’s \textit{Women},

\textsuperscript{19} Scott, “Thomas Hardy’s Use of the Gothic: An Examination of Five Representative
Works”, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Fiction} 17 (1963): 363-80; and Pinion, \textit{A Hardy Companion}
(London: Macmillan, 1968), and “Spectacle and Symbol in Thomas Hardy’s Fiction”,
\textit{Philological Quarterly} 44 (1965): 527-44; Moore, “The Poet Within the Architect’s Ring:
Desperate Remedies, Hardy’s Hybrid Detectve-Gothic Narrative”, \textit{Studies in the Novel} 14
(Spring 1982): 31-42; and Johnson, “Hardy and Burke’s Sublime”, chap. in \textit{Style in Prose Fiction},

\textsuperscript{20} Ruth Firor, \textit{Folkways in Thomas Hardy} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania
Press, 1931); and J. O. Bailey, “Hardy’s ‘Mephistophelian Visitants’ ”, \textit{PMLA} 61 (1946): 1146-
84.
Body, Text, are among the most influential in this context, but they also ignore the effect of the Gothic.21

As highlighted by Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, subversion is another feature of Gothic literature. Roy Morrell was one of the first critics to recognize Hardy's tendency towards subversion and, more recently, Vince Newey discusses how Hardy uses subversion to overthrow the idea of redemption through self-sacrifice. Joe Fisher promotes the idea of a sexually subversive Hardy, while Peter Widdowson maintains that the author subverts the verisimilitude of his novels, arguing that in doing so, he "destabilizes the realist myth as whole".22 Eagleton agrees that Hardy is an anti-realist, pointing to the macabre and furious images that permeate his novels.23 Nevertheless, no one postulates that the unrealistic aspects of Hardy's fiction stem from the Gothic tenet of subversion.

Studying thematically Gothic aspects of Hardy's writing in isolation has some value, but such an approach is limited. Hardy's Gothic images, language, and tropes are not independent entities themselves; rather they are interwoven in the text itself. His Gothic medium of expression is "made up

---


of many mingled ideas, and can consist only in their union”.24 It is though this coalescence that his novels can be best understood.

In light of the recent renaissance of Gothic studies, the present study aims to go beyond the mere identification of Gothic elements in Hardy’s writings. Instead, I will discuss how his employment of Gothic plots, characters, images, and representations changed during the course of his career. More importantly, I will explore how Hardy found a medium of faith in the Gothic, using its conventions to express his sense of the Gothic.

HARDY AND THE VICTORIANS

Hardy was only one of many Victorians who rejected Christianity. As their trust in a benevolent God faded or altogether disappeared, many people found it difficult or impossible to sustain their belief. Geological and evolutionary theories furthered the loss of faith, casting serious doubt upon the concept of divine creation. Traditional religion was being displaced, with nothing offered in its place except uncertainty. At the same time, there was a deeply embedded belief espoused in the views of Victorian thinkers, such as John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, and Herbert Spencer, that religious belief was an imaginative necessity for man, but God could be eliminated from the equation. Fellow man, lover, or mother could serve as appropriate objects of worship, while other spiritual needs could be satisfied by a host of things, including poetry, music, and art.

However, this was unacceptable to Hardy, as he condemned analogous beliefs such as “labour-worship” and “wealth-worship” as superstitions that,

like Christianity, should be discarded. To him, reverential impulses could not be sustained without religious truth, but this created a dilemma, as there was no such truth. As a "man of strong religious needs and feelings", he required some sort of belief system to replace what he felt to be an untenable Christianity; some sort of faith that could sustain his emotional and spiritual needs while he waited for the "Immanent Will" to become fully conscious.

While he rejected dogmatic Christianity, Hardy was not an atheist, but an agnostic with a "profound sense of the numinous". He believed in an unknown, nebulous force or entity, calling it the First Cause, or Immanent Will: a continually evolving consciousness with "creative and destructive energy" that would eventually recognize the misery of humankind, and act to alleviate the pain. His intuitions could not be contained in a religious, philosophical, or scientific creed, but he found a medium for communicating possibilities in the crude machinery of Gothic conventions and its allusions, using it to "express the belief of the spiritual in the absence of belief in a benevolent spirit".

"Hardy's lucid recognition of the enormous losses which follow from the vanishing of belief in God motivates his attempts to see ghosts and to talk...

---


28 J. Hillis Miller, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Repetition as Immanent Design", in Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels (Oxford: Blackwell Press), 1982, 123.

29 Bayer-Berenbaum, 37.
himself into some sort of belief.”

Intellectually, he did not believe in the naïve and superstitious credulity of the Gothic—the hidden voices and ghostly powers—although he admitted;

half my time (particularly when I am writing verse) I believe—in the modern sense of the word ... in spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, haunted places, & c., & c. But then, I do not believe in them in the old sense of belief any more.

Hardy did not subscribe to the superstitious “old sense of belief”. However, having spent his childhood and adolescent years “among a people who still thought in a primitive way ... and in whose hearts lingered the dark, inexplicable fears of prehistoric man”, he recognized its appeal. The idea that there was some inexplicable controlling power in the world was especially attractive to many Victorians. Hardy noted “that, beyond the knowable there must always be an unknown”. The medium of the Gothic, and what it alluded to, lent itself to the attempt to comprehend an unknown nebulous force.

Although Hardy expressed an interest in “non-rationalistic subjects ... a principle for which there is no exact name”, it remains doubtful that he ever consciously formulated a coherent Gothic theory. He was aware of it though, relating that as an architectural pupil, he trained in “the Gothic-art

---

30 J. Hillis Miller, “Fiction and Repetition”, 145.


32 Firor, 304.

33 Thomas Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928) (London: Macmillan, 1930; reprint, London: Studio Expressions, 1994), (reprint page numbers identical to original edition), 168. Title subsequently referred to as LY.

34 Thomas Hardy, LY, 90.
principle ... the principle of spontaneity, found in mouldings, tracery, and such like".35 He emphasized a direct connection between his instruction in architecture and the writing of poetry, recognizing:

in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous worth, and ... he carried on into his verse, perhaps in part unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle ... resulting in the 'unforeseen' character of his metres and stanzas.36

Although he never explicitly declared a similar correlation of architecture to prose, a Gothic presence is discernible in his novels and short stories, as well as his poetry.

Hardy is not a Gothic writer in the tradition of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers such as Radcliffe or Maturin, nor does he work exclusively in the genre. Just because a novel is called Gothic, it does not automatically exclude it from all other genres. His novels are alternatively romances, and/or comedies, tragedies, pastorals, mysteries, and myths, and in them, he expresses his sense of the Gothic, with its belief of an unknowable power, its expansion of consciousness and reality, and its acknowledgment of the sometimes unfathomable strong impulses of man.

OVERVIEW

Chapter One will lay the foundations for the study, giving a historical summary of Gothic and its changing definitions over time, with a special emphasis on the traditional Gothic literary period and Victorian Gothic fiction. Beginning with the origins of the term "Gothic", I will briefly trace its evolution through the Renaissance and Enlightenment. A more extensive

36 Ibid.
survey of the formally defined Gothic literary period (1764-1820) will follow, concentrating on the improvements and advances made in the genre.

Some of the more notable authors discussed include Ann Radcliffe, who understood the value of the Burkian sublime and utilized it to great effect in her novels, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Attention is also given to the inception of sensational and erotic aspects of Gothic fiction, as displayed in *The Monk* (1796) and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), although the latter focuses on Gothic emotions and the human mind. Finally, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818) shows how the Gothic formula can be subverted through irony and parody.

The first chapter will conclude with a discussion of Victorian Gothic fiction. Nineteenth-century Gothic novels expanded to include more morbid and furious episodes, with an additional emphasis on the psyche. Metropolitan locations became the focus of terror, largely replacing the gloomy forests and underground vaults of the conventional Gothic. Full of “uncanny shadows”, doubles, and vampire-like figures, Gothic fiction reflected the particular Victorian anxiety and concern with dualities: reality and unreality, natural and unnatural, reason and passion.

The next four chapters will concentrate on Hardy’s novels, and explore how and why he manipulated themes, tropes and content to express his sense of the Gothic. I have chosen a pair of novels from the beginning and end of his prose-writing career to illustrate how he moves from the simple utilization of typical Gothic tropes, to the more complex merger of these conventions with serious Gothic themes. *Desperate Remedies* (1871) is the subject of the second chapter, while *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) is discussed in

---

37 Botting, 15.
chapter three. These novels display his first tentative attempts at exploiting Gothic images. He is able to merge Gothic convention with serious theme in isolated scenes, conveying a simple sense of the Gothic, but he is unable to consistently sustain such an approach. Chapter five focuses on The Woodlanders (1887) and chapter six delves into Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), showing how Hardy's use of the Gothic altered during his novel-writing career. The Victorian Gothic obsession with dualities becomes more dominant in these later novels, as he deals with the unnatural and natural, dream and nightmare, and fantasy and reality. Grotesque and macabre images reflect the more disturbing and extreme elements of Gothic spirituality, while irony plays a large part, especially in Tess. In the conclusion, I briefly review Hardy's Gothic mode and look to the future, beyond his novel-writing career.

Some readers will be puzzled by the exclusion of Jude the Obscure. This novel was not selected because an examination of Hardy's last written novel (penultimate in publication date) would be limited without a concomitant review of the architectural Gothic Revival. Such a survey is beyond the scope of this study and, as Timothy Hands indicates, the connections between Hardy's architectural background and his writing deserve distinct specialist treatment. His poetry also warrants more attention, as do the other excluded texts, such as The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, and The Dynasts, among others. These will be studied more extensively in the future, but in light of Hardy's prolific literary offerings, my current work must necessarily be selective.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATIONS:
GOTHIC FICTION IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURIES

ORIGINS

The term “Gothic” was originally a reference to the Goths, a Germanic
people—possibly from the Baltic region—who progressively moved south,
reaching into the regions around the Black Sea by the third century. They
invaded the Roman Empire periodically over the next two hundred years
and, in the aftermath of Rome’s decline in the fifth century, went on to
establish kingdoms in Italy, France, and Spain until they disappeared “into
the ethnic melting-pots of the southern Mediterranean”.39

---

University Press, 1993), xii.
“Gothic” became a disparaging term during the Renaissance, as the Goths were considered to be uncivilized, uncouth, and combative. Holding primarily negative connotations, the term became synonymous with medievalism. It reflected the perception that the early Middle Ages, when the Goths flourished, were a barbarous period where ignorance, fancy, and wild extravagance held sway; where religious superstition, strange rituals, and a belief in magic coexisted with faith in an omnipotent Judeo-Christian God. Displays of the unenlightened Gothic past—romantic literature, medieval sculpture, music, and architecture—were usually thought of as examples of an inferior civilization, produced by an irrational and ignorant people.40

In contrast, the people of the Renaissance felt they belonged to a more refined era. In their time, the arts, literature, and politics all flourished and prospered. An emphasis was placed on the human power of expression and thought, although the power and authority of the Christian church remained unquestioned. The Age of Enlightenment similarly celebrated rational humanism, but faith was viewed with more skepticism. Attempting to temper a religion they saw as full of superstition, the ruling classes discounted the idea of a superhuman or supernatural God, preferring to place their faith in human reason. Ordered on Greek and Roman culture, artistic extravagances or excesses of any kind were looked upon with disfavour. All arts had to conform to an aesthetic and moral code, based on harmony and order. Buildings with regular proportions and a sense of uniformity were preferred over the jagged irregularities of Gothic architecture, while literature was seen as a vehicle of education, not entertainment.

40 Botting, 22. I am indebted to Fred Botting’s Gothic for my understanding of Gothic.
The definition of Gothic expanded in the late eighteenth-century, as the previously privileged classical values, in turn became the archaic products of the past, at odds with a new cultivated and discerning age. No longer referring to the Goths alone, Gothic became a general derogatory term used to describe "the tyranny and barbarity of feudal times"—the unrestrained excesses, irrationality, and immaturity supposedly prevalent in the Middle Ages.41 Catholicism, with its elaborate rites, strange rituals and connections to Rome, also became associated with the Gothic, as did the primarily papal Latin South. Paradoxically, at the same time, characteristics like extravagance, superstition, fancy and wildness, which were initially considered in negative terms became associated, in the course of the eighteenth century, with a more expansive and imaginative potential for aesthetic production.42

A romantic fascination with the intemperate exuberance of the Middle Ages developed in the late eighteenth-century. The new enthusiasm for the arts, manners, and perceived chivalry and values of this era manifested itself in Gothic literature and the architectural Gothic Revival. Full of mystery, imagination, and emotion, the Gothic novel freed readers from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, providing a welcome, albeit temporary, respite. Medieval Gothic architecture, which "obeyed no rules" and "no cannons of proportion", became popular primarily because of its association with literature, but it was also related to an emerging interest in Gothic archeology.43

41 Botting, 5.
42 Ibid., 22.
The repudiation of the medieval Gothic age, with its irrationality, fancy, and superstition, was tempered by the increasing allure of these very excesses. Similarly, the dismissal of the archaic Gothic ideals and institutions that supported and fostered these excesses was at odds with the nostalgic attraction of these values and structures. An ambivalent attitude towards the Gothic emerged, which had implications not only for Gothic literature, but for the very nature of Gothic itself.

THE LITERARY GOTHIC

The formally defined British literary Gothic period lasted slightly more than half a century, beginning with the 1764 publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and concluding with the 1820 edition of Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*. These dates loosely correlate to the end of the neoclassical era in the mid-eighteenth-century and the inception of the Romantic age in the early years of the nineteenth-century. (Engrossed in writings of revolutionary fervor during the late-eighteenth century, America’s Gothic period began later, culminating in the 1850s with the tales of Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.) It was a time when literature itself was undergoing a major change, becoming less didactic as authors moved away from the paradigms expressed by the dominant literary class, and paid more attention to the tastes of the reading public. Literature still held its alleged cultural superiority, while thriving Gothic fiction was linked with supposedly inferior mass culture.

Derived from myths, romances, supernatural stories, Renaissance drama, and the eighteenth-century graveyard poets, traditional eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Gothic fiction relied on conventional plots, themes, settings, and techniques, many of which can be traced directly to
Intended to provoke terror and alarm through fearful suspense, the conventional Gothic novel was located in the Middle Ages and set in a foreign country, with common landscapes such as ancient castles, ruins, and sublime environments augmenting the fright and mystery. “Ruined vestiges of archaic religious or social institutions”, such as cathedrals, churches, convents, and monasteries, were also typical. A preponderance of strange events, coincidences, improbabilities, apparently supernatural occurrences, and ominous prophecies were standard in the Gothic tale. Prevalent themes included time, particularly the haunting of the past and the inability to escape previous deeds; issues which often manifested themselves in forbidding predictions. Violence, or more often, the possibility of violence was a common thread, as was the fear of confinement.

Typical Gothic characters and plot devices included the archetypal model of an innocent young woman, cut off from familiar surroundings with little hope of escape, and threatened with evil, real or imagined. This potential menace usually came in the form of aristocratic male interlopers, so there was always a danger—rarely acknowledged in early Gothic fiction—of excess passion, leading to uncontrollable violence directed at the female. Often assisted by an unknown chivalrous man, the emphasis was on the restoration of the heroine to her proper place, maintaining the rightful line of succession.

Many devices and machinations that we now consider “Gothic” can be directly traced to Horace Walpole. He set the terms for defining what Gothic signified in fiction. He referred to *The Castle of Otranto* as “‘a Gothic story’” because it was

---

set in (and in its original ruse, hailed from) some time between the
eleventh and the thirteenth-centuries. It was 'Gothic' because it was
'Medieval'; and whilst the supposed original was printed in the 'black
letter' (Germanic) type, its events took place in Italy.\textsuperscript{45}

Walpole retained the Renaissance meaning of Gothic as a descriptive term,
but stripped it of its negative connotations. Since the novel was ostensibly
penned in the Middle Ages, it was accordingly Gothic. By asserting that the
tale was merely a translation of an Italian manuscript, written "between 1095
... and 1243", but only recently discovered "in the library of an ancient catholic
family in the north of England", he set up the narrative convention of a
story-within-a-story.\textsuperscript{46} At the same time, he effectively placed the story in
medieval Italy, a Catholic quasi-fantasy land, far away from the gentle
Protestant shores of England.

The medieval trappings of ancient palaces or dilapidated churches
were ubiquitous in Gothic novels. Not only were they the repositories of
ancient culture, but also strange and frightening places of mystery.
Subterranean dungeons or vaults, crypts, and graveyards were common,
along with castles that had trap doors and secret stairways. These objects
became collective Gothic tropes, while the definition of the Gothic novel
expanded to include the "emotional effect of weird, supernatural, fantastic,
and terrifying events in a work of literature in which the Medieval cathedral
or castle served as a theater for such events."\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Robert Mighall, \textit{A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's

\textsuperscript{46} Horace Walpole, \textit{The Castle of Otranto} (1764) (London: Oxford University Press,
1969), "Preface," 3. All subsequent references to \textit{The Castle of Otranto} are parenthetical, with
page number.

\textsuperscript{47} G.R. Thompson, "Introduction" to \textit{The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark
All these Gothic elements are in place in *The Castle of Otranto*. Set in a medieval castle with underground labyrinthine passages, it includes violent deaths and false imprisonment, along with supernatural events such as large floating statues. It also features an innocent propriety-bound maiden, pursued by a fraudulent prince who is intent on producing a male heir, with the attendant threat such a plan entails. The enigmatic and portentous prophecy is stated on the first page, while the one-dimensional character types are quickly sketched in.

Without even the pretext of a setting, Walpole begins the novel with the intoned prediction, *"That the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it"* (16). Manfred, the villain of the piece, is the tyrannical patriarch of "the present family" occupying the castle. He loses his bridegroom son on the eve of his nuptials, as, most improbably, the heir is "dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, a hundred times more large than any ever made for a human being, and shaded with a proportional quantity of black feathers" (17). This huge head-piece belongs to a nearby larger-than-life statue that commemorates Alfonso the Good, the previous legitimate prince of the castle.

Manfred wrongfully accuses a young man named Theodore of causing his son's death and imprisons him. Left with only one daughter to carry on his name, Manfred decides to divorce his own wife and marry his dead son's former fiancee, Isabella, in an attempt to produce a male heir. She flees from his advances and ventures into the underground vaults of the castle, where she is assisted by a mysterious man: Theodore, escaped from his captivity.
Although preposterous, a colossal guillotining helmet covered with tufted decoration renders the enigmatic forecast recited at the beginning of the novel more understandable. The prophecy is meant to be taken literally, with the huge casque prefiguring the appearance of a similarly oversized individual. Equally ridiculous, “overgrown parts of Alfonso’s body keep popping up around the castle.”

The theme of large proportions continues, as a knight recently returned from the Crusades visits the castle with a “hundred gentlemen bearing an enormous sword”, pronouncing to all present that Manfred is not the true lord of Otranto (62). Theodore is revealed as the genuine prince, Manfred murders his own daughter in a case of mistaken identity, and the castle walls crumble while the giant statue of Alfonso ascends to heaven. The distraught Manfred admits that his grandfather obtained Otranto by nefarious means. Reconciled with his wife, they retire relatively unpunished to a contemplative religious life. Eventually, Isabella marries Theodore, the legitimate heir, and order is restored “to a world in which an usurper has broken the natural line of descent and seized possessions that are not rightfully his.”

If judged solely on literary merits, The Castle of Otranto would have faded into obscurity long ago. A ludicrous novel, it has a perfunctory plot and simple characterization. However, at the time of its original publication in 1764, The Castle of Otranto was very popular with readers of the late eighteenth-century, who were “hungry for magic and mystery after many

---


decades of rationalism".50 As the first experimental Gothic novel, it accommodated emotion and imagination and allowed for a reality beyond the corporeal world; a realm that could not be explained by reason.

Initiated by Walpole in 1764, the Gothic genre had become a dominant force in English fiction by the late eighteenth-century. Initially, it was "women writers ... who took up his literary curiosity and transformed it into a vehicle of didacticism as well as entertainment".51 Ann Radcliffe, the foremost practitioner of Gothic novels in the 1790's, was one of the few authors working in the genre who met with critical and popular favor. Her novels were a perfect example of the female Gothic and she was praised for her decorous plots and flowing style. In addition, her chaste heroines and gallant heroes embodied eighteenth-century ideals, so impressionable readers could identify with them without any danger of falling into immoral behavior. Although associated with moral degeneration and irrationality, most early Gothic novels advocated morality and reason.

Like Walpole before her, Radcliffe's novels are set far away from England, with the locales of some of her novels—A Sicilian Romance (1790) and The Italian (1797)—obvious. She gains more distance by guiding the reader into a world of fantasy, as "the formal elegance of her prose lifts the narrative out of the real world and into a distanced literary mode of existence".52 This remoteness from reality, an escape from everyday concerns, was a central feature of early Gothic literature.

---

51 Ellis, 52.
52 Howells, 29.
The action in Radcliffe's most popular novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), takes place in France and Italy. Ostensibly set in the sixteenth-century, the tale opens with an idyllic scene at the family home of Emily St. Aubert, the French heroine. However, her comfortable and stable life is soon shattered by the precipitous death of her parents. The newly orphaned Emily is snatched away from her home by the villainous Montoni—the new husband of her guardian aunt—and carried off to an isolated castle in the mountains of Italy. Confined in the dismal Udolpho with only the dubious comfort of her aunt, she finds her virtue and fortune threatened by her step-uncle. Terror remains her constant companion and at every turn she views supposedly supernatural sights and hears strange sounds.

Following the untimely death of her aunt, she begins to fear for her own life. She escapes from the clutches of Montoni and returns to France, living under the protection of a neighboring family. She eventually reclaims her family estate of La Vallee and is reunited with her former suitor, Valencourt. Meanwhile, the treacherous Montoni dies a nebulous death in Italy.

Radcliffe follows many Gothic conventions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with a typical plot involving a virtuous heroine threatened by a male interloper. She utilizes the Gothic tropes of underground passages and crumbling castles, and includes purportedly supernatural events. However, her most singular contribution to the Gothic novel is her alliance of atmosphere and mood, as she employs landscapes within her texts, not only to mirror her protagonist's state of mind, but also to quietly manipulate the reader's own responses. Improving upon Walpole's primitive use of natural scenery to portray the feelings of his characters, she wrote novelistic tableaus
which “arouse the reader’s emotions while at the same time ... reflect the feelings of the characters involved”.53

Radcliffe usually begins and ends her novels with beautiful and gentle pastoral scenes, which inspire the emotion of love. The first pages beautifully describe the familiar mannered world from which the heroine hails, while in the conclusion, the orderly sphere to which she has been restored is portrayed in glowing terms. Following this pattern, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily’s family home is initially presented as a place of natural splendor. The grounds surrounding La Vallee, have
green woods and pastures; the flowery turf; the blue concave of the heavens; the balmy air; the murmur of the limpid stream; and even the hum of every little insect in the shade ... made mere existence bliss. (8)

Radcliffe appeals to the senses with “flowery turf”, gentle “murmurs”, “hums”, and “balmy” breezes. The incipient use of simple symbolism is evident, as the “blue concave of heaven” conveys a quasi-religious feeling, evoking the image of Eden.

When Emily returns from her trials and settles in France, the environment is equally pleasant. Safely living under the protection of the Dupont family, she travels along paths where the “fresh dew still hung under every flower that peeped from among the grass; and now tripped sportively along the path, on which the sunbeam darted and the chequered foliage trembled” (146-7). Released from the terrors of Udolpho, the heroine’s happiness is affected and mirrored by the pleasing atmosphere.

However, in her trip through the subterranean labyrinths at Udolpho, Emily is filled with a nameless dread and fears for her own life. The terrifying

53 Ibid., 33.
and suggestive presence of death reflect the heroine's concerns for her personal safety. Confined underground in a clammy atmosphere,

they proceeded through a passage ... the walls of which were dripping with unwholesome dews, and the vapours, that crept along the ground, made the torch burn so dimly Emily saw, by uncertain flashes of light, the vaults beyond, and near her, heaps of earth, that seemed to surround an open grave. (345)

The symbolism is difficult to miss, as such macabre trappings are obviously associated with death and mortality. Emily does not actually see any skeletons or decaying remains in the vaults; thus, she cannot be horrified at sights she does not see. However, Radcliffe notes that “obscurity leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate”54, as the indistinct views afforded by the “uncertain flashes of light” and the suggestive “heaps of dirt” only serve to increase her fear. In Emily’s state of terrified anticipation, she dreads seeing or experiencing horrible things that exist only in her imagination.

The visual view of a vast area of timberland also fills her with terror, but this time it is combined with awe. Terror alone is not a source of the sublime: it must be combined with amazement.

the immense pine forests ... the cliffs aspiring above ... now and then, an opening through the dark woods allowed the eye a momentary glimpse of the country above. The gloom of these shades, their solitary silence ... the tremendous precipices of the mountains ... each assisted to raise the solemnity of Emily’s feelings into awe. ... She saw only images of dreadful sublimity. (224)

This landscape reaches to infinity, with the human eye unable to perceive the boundaries. The forests indistinctly merge into mountainous

54 Radcliffe, 150.
regions, while the “dark woods” gloom and silence add to the “dreadful sublimity” of the scenes. There are aspiring cliffs and “precipices of the mountains”. The “momentary glimpse” through the trees impresses upon the imagination the possibility of even more fascinating and extraordinary landscapes beyond. The vastness of the woods stretching towards the heavens, the dimness, and absence of sound are all sources of the sublime. Combined, they serve to overwhelm Emily. Both affecting and reflecting her feelings of fright and awe, the entire atmosphere transports her to an higher area of awareness, where the mind is filled with a sense of solemn reverence and wonder: a state of sublimity.

While Ann Radcliffe produced both idyllic and threatening environments, she was more interested in terror and horror, the primary sources of the sublime and the main ingredients of Gothic literature. She was influenced heavily by the philosopher Edmund Burke, who developed an aesthetic theory of the sublime and beautiful in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (1757). Although better known for his writings on the French Revolutions, his *Enquiry* became a standard reference for many Gothic writers.

He attempted to define the sublime and the beautiful, noting that each was built on different principles.

The great has terror for its basis; which, when it is modified, causes that emotion in the mind, which I have called astonishment; the beautiful is founded on mere positive pleasure, and excites in the soul that feeling, which is called love.55

The delight derived from beautiful objects or pleasant experiences induces love, a calming influence that soon lapses into a state of indifference and is

---

rarely a source of the sublime. On the other hand, sheer terror, when combined with a sense of astonishment, is a source of the sublime. The sublime, i.e., "the great", uses terrifying views and encounters to encourage feelings of amazement.

One of Burke's "grander passions", the sublime is an object or experience that tends to inspire intense emotions because of some elevating quality of grandeur beyond corporeal life. Acknowledging the omnipotence of God and the power of the scriptures, he argues that both "sacred and profane writers" established the sublime as a "general sentiment of mankind". Terrifying, solemn, or austere landscapes are a source of the sublime, as they can generate awe, wonder, terror, or horror. These profound emotions expand consciousness and reality, uplifting the soul with a sense of infinity and empowering the imagination to realize its own strength.

According to Burke, these strong feelings are inseparable from "our idea of the divinity", and he further insists, "some sort of approach towards infinity" is necessary to "form the grander passions". The cathedral with its spires ascending towards heaven, the mountain soaring into the clouds, the blue ocean merging into the horizon, and the forests stretching as far as the eye can see are all sublime landscapes, provoking awe and wonder as they reach towards infinity.

Burke also asserts that whatever triggers "the idea of pain and danger ... or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is a productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of

56 Burke, 83.
57 Ibid., 64.
58 Burke, 64, 58.
Forbidding castles and ancient cathedrals—products of an ancient and mysterious past—provoke feelings of terror and astonishment. Graveyards and underground vaults can prompt similar emotions, as they are representative of death, the final mystery. However, in many cases tombs and sepulchers lead only to terror, as characters confront their own mortality.

Burke produces an extensive list of terrifying objects and experiences that are explicitly productive of the sublime. Lightning and thunder are frightening, but also inspire awe. So too does the opposite: utter darkness and universal silence. Any “greatness of dimension” of length, height or depth is a source of the sublime, as is the minuteness of dimension. Furthermore the “apparent disorder” of the biggest of objects—such as the stars in the heavens—“augments the grandeur”. Never weak or mediocre, the sublime is profound and powerful, and is inherently linked with the sublime, the Gothic, which has “a preference for power over beauty”. A state of terror and awe is the mark of the sublime, while the attendant expansion of consciousness and reality is expressive of the Gothic, as it frees the mind to explore inner and external space, with no boundaries. The Gothic reaches towards infinity; something beyond the physical world; an unknown realm outside the ken of human understanding.

Sublime landscapes and environments feature so largely in Gothic fiction because Burke gives writers the language and images to generate imposing atmospheres that are linked with particular emotions. Authors no

59 Ibid., 36.
60 Burke, 66.
61 Burke, 66.
62 Bayer-Berenbaum, 144.
longer need to explicitly "insist on the intensity" of their protagonists' emotions because they had already "depicted them by means of ... depiction of the setting." Since Gothic literature takes place in an artificial world, authors can create and manipulate their own aesthetic and fictive environments. If the narrative demands a nightmarish, frightening, and sublime scene to reflect the protagonist's mental state, the author is able to offer one. If it necessitates a dreamlike and attractive setting to mirror a character's happy attitude, this is easily available. Sites of terror and beauty are plentiful in Gothic novels.

Radcliffe further developed Burke's aesthetic of the sublime in her posthumously published essay, "On the Supernatural". While he never made explicit the difference between terror and horror, she made an important distinction between the two, asserting that

terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life, the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them.

She promotes terror over horror as the more active emotion, as the latter results in inertia and a state of passivity. In moments of horror, the body becomes restricted in movement and the ability of the mind to transcend its condition is negated. Thus, the subject remains unable to overcome any danger. However, terror animates. As action and movement returns to the body, the acuity of the mind is heightened, giving it a sense of its own power. This state of mental and physical activity enables the subject

---


to recognize and expel the threatening object, restoring order. Paradoxically, it is through active terror that the object of terror is removed.65

The goal of Gothic writers is to terrorize and horrify their readers by sustaining an air of suspense. One of the major uncertainties in Udolpho involves an appalling and horrific sight that Emily has seen behind a veil in a disused room of Udolpho. Radcliffe continually refers to this subject: is it the corpse of Emily’s aunt, the mummified remains of a long dead individual, or perhaps an sickening instrument of torture? Not until the final pages does the readers discover that this shocking sight is a waxen figure wrapped in a shroud, with the face slowly being eaten away by worms. While an unpleasant sight, suggestive of death, the figure is not horrific in itself. Its effect on Emily was so powerful only because she was already in a state of terror.

In the end, this final mystery is solved. The supposedly supernatural horrors that Emily encountered are explained away quite naturally and logically. With her fortune restored and her honour intact, she is reunited with her lover, while the villainous Montoni dies in Italy. To a current reader the denouement is disappointing, but this compromise—however inadequate it appeared to later generations—was highly popular it its own time.

An eighteenth-century reader would be pleasantly terrified by Emily’s trials. Vicarious experiences “are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances.”66 Readers of The Mysteries of Udolpho were doubly removed from any threat, reading a work

---

65 I am indebted to Fred Botting for the genesis of this argument.

66 Burke, 47.
of fiction that was set two hundred years ago in the past and located in a foreign country. The readers would also applaud what they perceived to be a happy ending, although Ellis sees a subversion of domestic ideology in the sentimental conclusion of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.\(^{67}\) While Emily has escaped from the confines of Udolpho and returned to a stable family life, she is still imprisoned. She is in a comfortable and large cell, but she is still trapped, marginalized by the conventional role of women in eighteenth-century society.

Emily's remains a static character and it quickly becomes tedious to read about the many troubles she passively endures. Her characterization ensures that she neither grows, nor learns anything from her experiences. Instead, as Coral Ann Howells notes, her behavior is only "a linear series of responses to outlandish situations".\(^{68}\)

While Judith Wilt and Kate Ferguson Ellis agree that the heroine is "tiresome as a literary character", they point to her interest "as an ideological character".\(^{69}\) Presented as the embodiment of eighteenth-century ideals, the conduct of Radcliffe's heroines is always flawless and beyond reproach. Therefore Emily, the image of purity, cannot have any knowledge of sexual desire; she cannot "suspect the presence of *that* nature in the minds of men".\(^{70}\) As a moral heroine, she must be innocent. The only terror she is allowed to feel must come from the fear of being imprisoned and then forgotten. Why then, is she worried by the fact that her bedchamber in

\(^{67}\) Ellis, 57.

\(^{68}\) Howells, 48.

\(^{69}\) Wilt, 134.

\(^{70}\) Ellis, 46.
Udolpho lacks an internal lock? Having accepted that she has “no hope of succour”, and prepared to endure “whatever punishment” Montoni might inflict, why does she still attempt to secure the door by placing a heavy chair against it? (224-5). Emily’s actions subvert her presentation as a proper heroine, raising questions about her perceived naiveté, but it is doubtful this was Radcliffe’s intention. The author “scrupulously repressed” the concepts of eroticism or desire in her novels, but later Gothic authors were not so reticent about exploring the “murmier neurosis” of the carnal mind.71

Despite being associated with immorality and extravagance, the intent of Radcliffe and many other Gothic authors, was to defend virtue and reason. Yet, their novels were full of frenzied emotion and irrational fears. Set in lands of fantasy, they were also burdened with unrealistic plots. This resulted in an unresolved tension within the text, as the aim of the novel was often at direct cross purposes with the fictional mode of presentation. Gothic literature internalized the ambivalence that developed towards the Gothic in the late eighteenth-century.

Already marked by uncertainty in the literary arena, the term “Gothic” became a political site of conflict. Both sympathizers and opponents of the French Revolution invoked Gothic ideals to support their arguments. Edmund Burke, whose theories of the sublime and beautiful had a major effect on Gothic writers, was better known for defending the rights of the monarchy in Reflections of the Revolution in France (1790). Ignoring the fact that Marie Antionette was deeply unpopular, he turned the events of 1789 into a Gothic romance, casting the French queen as the heroine, threatened by the villainous National Constituent Assembly. Lamenting the passing of the

71 Howells, 62.
age of chivalry, he expressed his disappointment that no attempt was made to
defend or safeguard her when she and Louis XVI were seized by a ferocious
and unruly crowd in Versailles, and forced to return to Paris. Displaying a
nostalgia for the Gothic tradition, he argued that the institutions associated
with the past—gallantry, the monarchy, hereditary privilege, and the Church—
were essential to ensure order. By transforming the revolt into a tale of good
versus evil, with all things French considered evil, Burke implicitly endorsed
the status quo in England.71

Condemning the same Gothic institutions that Burke deemed
indispensable, Thomas Paine—who returned to England in 1787 after agitating
for American independence—denounced France’s “despotic government and
its arbitrary power, religious authority ... hereditary privileges”.72 He saw
them as the outmoded remnants of a barbaric and irrational age. Also using
Gothic affiliations as a form of scorn, Mary Wollstonecraft supported the
overthrow of Louis XVI and the subsequent formation of the French
Constituent Assembly, rhetorically asking:

'Why was it a duty to repair an ancient castle, built in barbarous ages, of
Gothic materials?...
You mourn for the idle tapestry that decorated a Gothic pile, and
the dronish bell that summoned the fat priest to prayer.'73

Employing the Renaissance meaning of Gothic, with all its negative
connotations, she equated the French monarchy with an ancient Gothic
building; an outdated structure that needed to be destroyed, not rebuilt.

71 Botting, 86.
72 Ibid., 88.
73 Ibid., 88-9.
Chivalric values, the "idle tapestry" of the court, and the devotion to a hypocritical church belonged to an ancient age of feudal injustice.

Wollstonecraft and Paine used the term, "Gothic", in defense of revolution, but their writings were published before the Reign of Terror. As the full horrors of the bloodletting across the channel became clear, a fearful Britain quickly discarded such radical thoughts in favor of the more conservative views espoused by Burke. Paine himself, who fled from England to France in 1792, later voiced his opposition to the 1793 beheading of Louis XVI and barely escaped execution himself.

While Radcliffe's response to the French Revolution and Reign of Terror was to ignore it, other Gothic novels reflected its passion and violence. Male writers especially, less constrained in matters of propriety than their female counterparts, were able to exploit literarily the excesses and fury displayed by the riotous French mobs. Matthew Lewis', *The Monk*, is a case in point. Published in 1796, only two years after *Udolpho*, the violent novel is about extremes. It marks a transition in the Gothic novel in its exploration of the psyche.

As opposed to Radcliffe's female Gothic mode, Lewis exemplifies the male Gothic. He often preferred to present sensational and lurid scenes purely for shock value, but he also examines the "the dangerous and violent excesses of the erotic imagination". The suggestive terrors of earlier Gothic fiction give way to genuine fear, as the exaggerated "paranoid apprehensions of the Radcliffian heroine become the real crimes of an Ambrosio". The main protagonist is not a trembling naïve heroine with an overactive

---

75 Howells, 62.

imagination, but an arrogant and sophisticated anti-hero who has real interchanges with credible supernatural beings. At the same time, in an innovation that comes to typify the Gothic novel, Lewis implies that many of the objects thought to be anomalous are in fact misperceptions of reality, caused by an agitated mind.

The themes of eroticism and perception added another layer of complexity to the Gothic novel, but they did not displace traditional Gothic conventions. Lewis continued to follow Gothic custom in the setting of his novel, locating his tale in a foreign country and far in the past: Madrid at the time of the Inquisition. Like earlier Gothic novels, the events took place at “a safe distance, both temporally and spatially from the English present”.76 Readers could read the novel as an escape, secure that it was placed in a remote world.

The author also knew that he could depend on his readers’ response to the staging of his tale in a Roman Catholic country, “which from the Protestant perspective was uncivilized, unenlightened, and regressive”.77 By placing the story in a monastery, during the superstitious and irrational time of the Middle Ages, he implicitly warned his readers that this was a barbarous tale. Indeed, The Monk includes rape, murder, incest, and incidents of general depravity. One of the first Gothic novels where an overt strain of malevolence is evident, it also rails against the injustice and abuse of power that many saw as endemic in the Catholic religion. Even after the Middle Ages, Catholicism was still viewed with suspicion, with the 1780 Gordon riots demonstrating that a strong antipathy persisted.

76 Ellis, 146.

77 Mighall, xvii.
Lewis terrified and titillated his readers, by introducing an erotic element into his novel, scandalizing the literary and political establishment in the process. The young author had recently been elected a member of parliament and many reviewers considered it disgraceful and shameful that a legislator would write such a salacious book. Under political pressure, Lewis vigorously bowdlerized later editions of the novel, but there is no denying the popularity of the original text.

The main focus of the novel is the downward moral spiral of Ambrosio. Under the tutelage of monks since he was a boy, "The Man of Holiness" rose to become the Abbot of the most important monastery in Spain. Self-controlled, self-confident, and self-congratulatory, he retained an appropriate touch of humility, while a certain "severity in his look and manner ... inspired universal awe" in the eyes of his audience.79

Seduced by the female demon Matilda, who enters the monastery disguised as a young male novice, Ambrosio forgets his "vows, his sanctity, and his fame" for a moment of desire (90). Initially aghast at his loss of self-control, once his previously repressed desires are unleashed, they appear uncontrollable. Over the course of the novel, the abbot becomes increasingly corrupt, committing rape and murder before his sins are discovered by the officials of the Inquisition. Imprisoned, tortured, and sentenced to die at the stake, Ambrosio conspires with the devil, selling his soul in exchange for freedom. The fiend keeps his end of the bargain by magically freeing the former holy man, but he spends the rest of his short corporeal life as a "blind, maimed, helpless" wretch (442). He escapes the fires of earth, but cannot avoid those of hell.

79 Matthew Lewis, The Monk (1796), ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18. All subsequent references to The Monk are parenthetical, with page number.
The Monk contains the usual Gothic tropes, although instead of a prison or other confined space, the novel features a monastery, "the quintessential repressive institution" for the "eighteenth-century Gothicist". The requisite underground vaults are included, with the "various narrow passages" and "damp vapours" reminiscent of Radcliffe (275). Many of Lewis' landscapes are full of fury, reflecting the violence of the novel, while his sublime and beautiful locales are subversive. Even the few apparently pleasant scenes within the pages produce disquieting feelings.

Early in the novel, a solitary and untainted Ambrosio is shown in a contemplative mood in the abbey gardens, where

the choicest flowers adorned it in the height of luxuriance, and though artfully arranged, seemed only planted by the hand of Nature ....The full Moon ranging through a blue and cloudless sky, shed upon the trees a trembling lustre, and the waters of the fountains sparkled in the silver beam: A gentle breeze breathed the fragrance of Orange-blossoms along the Alley; and the Nightingale poured forth her melodious murmur from the shelter of an artificial wilderness. (50)

Combining visual, olfactory, and auditory senses, Lewis presents a calming and inviting environment, with the night orb casting its glow over the glittering water and the pleasant flower blossoms perfuming the air, all to the accompaniment of bird song. Yet, duplicitous notes within the passage disrupt the peacefulness. The gardens aspire to look natural, when in fact they are artificial. The blooms appear to grow unconstrained by careful cultivation, but the opposite is true. Additionally, in the context of the perceived austerity of monastery life, it is strange to describe flowers as at the "height of luxuriance". Beautiful but false, seemingly free but fettered, the extravagant grounds reflect Ambrosio's hypocrisy. The gardens inspire

---

79 Ellis, 186.
feelings of incongruous "voluptuous tranquillity" within the soul of the monk, mirroring his fraudulent mien and divided self (50). A supposedly virtuous man of holiness, he presents a serene face to the world, masking an inner sensuality and an excessive indulgence.

The "melodious murmur" of the nightingale is pleasing to the ear, but it also contains an ominous warning in its allusion to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In one scene, just before dawn in the Capulet orchard, Juliet entreats Romeo to stay, trying to persuade him that the nightingale still sings. However, he knows that daybreak is not far off, and he "must be gone and live, or stay and die".80 Traditionally, the lives of lovers are in peril if they listen to the nightingale, because "the beauty of its song ... makes his hearers oblivious of the dangers of the day".81 If they remain permanently apart they remain safe. Although Ambrosio escapes discovery in this instance, the presence of the nightingale at this early stage of the novel foreshadows the eventual fate of Ambrosio and Matilda. Continuing to meet in secrecy, they are doomed to be exposed eventually.

As in the garden of Eden, doubleness and deceit intrude into the grounds of the monastery, where things are not as they seem. The serpent in this simulated perfect world is Matilda, disguised as the novice Rosario. Upon entering the grotto in the garden, Ambrosio greets the youth, gently chastising him for his apparent melancholy. The poseur's attitude of lament is designed to appeal to Ambrosio's sense of compassion, for despite all his faults, he does possess some fine qualities, including solicitude.


In fact, the monk was presented as a Faustian hero-villain, although instead of selling his soul for long life and forbidden knowledge, Ambrosio compromised his salvation for forbidden desire. However, Lewis suggested that the monk's crimes were not completely of his own making. Left on the doorstep of the monastery as a child, he already had the admirable traits of generosity and compassion. Enterprising, firm and fearless, "had his Youth been passed in the world", Ambrosio would have developed many other "brilliant and manly qualities" (236). He grew up in cloistered existence though, where

He was taught to consider compassion for the errors of Others as a crime of the blackest dye: The noble frankness of his temper was exchanged for servile humility; and in order to break his natural spirit, the Monks terrified his young mind, by placing before him all the horrors with which Superstition could furnish. ...[which] rendered his character timid and apprehensive. (237)

Unlike Walpole's Manfred and Radcliffe's Montoni, whose treacherous actions were due to greed and ambition, the social influences of the religious community are implicated in the degeneration and collapse of the abbot's moral standards. So busy were the monks in dampening Ambrosio's spirit and destroying his virtues, they allowed his vices to flourish. His natural good qualities of pity and unselfishness still surfaced at times, but he also became proud, arrogant, jealous, and vain. The older monks' greatest educational transgression was their neglect to address the issues of emotion, desire, and the need for self-control. They failed to provide Ambrosio with the inner resources and resolve to deal with the strength of his own passions.

Living in monastic seclusion, far removed from secular influences, Ambrosio "never saw, much less conversed with, the other sex", thus evading temptation (238). When his resolve was tested in the form of
Matilda, he reasoned that there was greater merit in vanquishing temptation, rather than avoiding it altogether. His pride prevented him from asking for God's help, while his arrogance convinced him that he could withstand the inducements of a mere woman, not realizing that she was demon-inspired. Even so, Ambrosio was not easily seduced by Matilda's considerable charms, her seeming innocence, or her willingness to risk her life to save his. He was well aware of the danger she represented and he "struggled with desire and shuddered when He beheld, how deep was the precipice before him" (78).

He finally succumbs to Matilda's enticements, but even then, Lewis exculpates him. In the company of a willing, young, and beautiful woman who adores him, Ambrosio, in the "full vigour of Manhood", yields to the extreme provocation of Matilda's erotic entreaties (90). Nevertheless, after the moment passes, he becomes "confused and terrified at his weakness" (224) He does not fear God's wrath, but he is afraid of being exposed. Denying his own responsibility, he blames Matilda for betraying him, but once more displaying her personal allure, she persuades him that the satiation of his desires is not wrong.

This sequence of events illustrates Ambrosio's divided thought process—from initial confidence, inner struggle, final capitulation, regret, and finally, to blame. In Udolpho, the reader only observed Emily's reactions to abnormal events. However, Lewis allows his readers full access to Ambrosio's thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The reader hears the justifications he employs to continue his affair. The monk decides he might as well abandon himself again to the lustful pleasures of Matilda, who displays all of her erotic arts to transport him to a state of bliss. "His vows were already broken", and those who have already transgressed find it easier to do so again (224).
The pattern of conflict, surrender, dismay, and reproach continues throughout the novel. Even when he becomes attracted to Antonia, one of his young female supplicants, "no voluptuous desires rioted in his bosom" (249). Only over the course of time does his passion become inflamed. While Matilda satisfies his lust, Antonia’s enticing charm lies in her purity, as “erotic appeal depends on the vision of pristine perfection”. He is foiled in several initial attempts to destroy Antonia’s virtue, so his demonic mistress uses all her wiles—seductive entreaty, obsequious flattery, logical reasoning, and threat—to convince him that the only way he can possess Antonia is through sorcery.

As she urges him to follow her underground, where she can perform her incantations in secret, the reader once more becomes aware of Ambrosio’s self-deception. He abjures Matilda, declaring, “I still have sufficient grace to shudder at Sorcery” (269). Then he vacillates, justifying to himself that as long as he signs no formal paper renouncing his claim to salvation, he can benefit from witchcraft. Opening the door of the sepulchre and descending into the vaults, Ambrosio is left in darkness as Matilda continues further down. In the middle of labyrinthine passages, his doubts begin to resurface, but he has no way out.

Gladly he would have returned to the Abbey; But as He had passed through innumerable Caverns and winding passages, the attempt of regaining the Stairs was hopeless. His fate was determined: No possibility of escape presented itself. (273)

In the Gothic novel, labyrinthine subterranean passages were associated with “fear, confusion and alienation ... darkness, horror and

---

83Garson, 12.
desire". The despondency, hopelessness, and lack of escape that Ambrosio experienced in the underground passages, rendered him passive, like a Gothic heroine. Physically, Ambrosio wished to go back to the security of the Abbey, but he could not navigate the vaults alone. Figuratively, he wanted to revert to his past state of grace, to return to the safety of the Abbey, where he was free from temptation.

The demonic intervention invoked through Matilda gives Ambrosio power over Antonia, and just as importantly, provides him with the ability to escape undetected afterwards. All misgivings gone, he is led out of the vaults. Usually, after escaping from such depths, Gothic heroes, heroines, and readers “manage to return with an elevated sense of identity to the solid realities of justice, morality and social order”, but this is not the path Ambrosio chooses. He knows right from wrong and can distinguish between immoral and moral actions, but all conscience flees from him. Even as he recognizes that his attempts upon Antonia are “highly criminal”, an excess of passion drives him (257). He ultimately resorts to murder in his bid to possess her, smothering to death her suspicious mother.

Descending down to the vaults again, Antonia is dead to the world of civility and order. In complete control of her fate, the monk resolves to destroy her honor. However, “scarcely has he succeeded in his design, than he shuddered at himself and the means by which it was effected” (384). The pattern of regret and blame resurfaces, this time accompanied by a sense of shame and confusion. In a genuine state of remorse and contrition, he “would have given worlds, had He possessed them, to restore to her that

84 Botting, 81.
85 Botting, 8.
innocence”, but hypocritically, he refuses to allow her to threaten what he still possesses: his good reputation (386). In a final desperate attempt to ensure her permanent silence and effect his escape, he fatally stabs her.

Lewis created a threatening atmosphere by relying on his readers’ response “to the gloomy horror of echoing vaults and funeral trappings”.85 The real horror was that in an area inhabited by death and dissolution, Ambrosio embarked upon a course which led to something much worse than his physical demise: the loss of his soul.

When Ambrosio’s crimes are discovered, he is led away to the prisons of the Inquisition to be tortured. The physical details of his external pain are described precisely in order to emphasize the extent of his internal suffering. His “dislocated limbs, the nails torn from his hand and feet, and his fingers mashed and broken by the pressure of the screws”, are easier for him to bear than his extreme inner torment (425).

Misery alternates with anger. Persuaded that he can never be saved, he raged in his cell, uttering blasphemies and curses. His dreams reflected his fury, as, in his sleep, he dwelled in Gothic “sulphurous realms”, attended by various demons “who drove him through a variety of tortures” (426). Yet, even as he despaired of ever reaching heaven, he stood firm against the arguments and entreaties of a dazzling Matilda, and refused to follow her lead and sell his soul to Satan in exchange for freedom. She left him a book of spells, which Ambrosio later picked up, “but immediately threw it from him in horror” (432). Still divided, he summoned the devil, but resisted him, affirming, “I will not give up my hope of being one day pardoned. ... Begone” (434-5). Again, as he heard the midnight bell begin to toll, signaling the time

85 Howells, 73.
for him to be led to the stake, he called back Lucifer for the last time and renounced all claim to salvation.

The demon transports him to the precipice of a mountain. A fierce location, its wildness reflects Ambrosio's disordered state of mind. One moment he is suffering terribly in the prisons of the Inquisition, and then, at the last minute, he is saved from a horrible death. However, the surrounding landscape does nothing to calm his nerves and the high price he has paid for his freedom weighs heavily on his mind. At this height:

By the gloomy Caverns and steep rocks, rising above each other, and dividing the passing clouds, solitary clutches of Trees scattered here and there, among whose thick-twined branches the wind of night sighed hoarsely and mournfully; the shrill cry of mountain Eagles, who had built their nests among these lonely Desarts; the stunning roar of torrents, as swelled by late rains they rushed violently down tremendous precipices. (439)

A savage but sublime picture of nature, the mountain stretches upwards toward infinity, but in a subversion of the sublime, the elevated altitude is not associated with heaven. The scene may have been created by God, but the devil is in control. In his care the sublime is not a conduit to the divine, as Burke affirms, but a connection to the eternity of hell. The scattering of trees clinging to survival on the mountain is indicative of the tenuous nature of all life, while the magnificent eagles represent the majesty and power that the monk has ceded to Satan. If these symbols are not enough to frighten Ambrosio, the striking invasion of sounds—the moans of the night wind, the piercing calls of the eagles, and the striking clamor of the swollen river as it falls down the mountain—are sufficient in themselves "to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror".87

87 Burke, 75.
In stark, unfamiliar surroundings, accosted by loud noises, Ambrosio does not feel the awe, terror, and wonder generated by the sublime, but the horror which freezes the soul and blocks out every other emotion. All alone and alienated from society, family, and God, Ambrosio “sank upon his knees, and raised his hands towards heaven”, but such supplication comes too late (441). The demon throws him from the mountain.

The height that Ambrosio is dropped from echoes his fall from grace. However, the discomfort caused by the blazing rays of the sun and the pain of his broken and dislocated limbs are minimal, when compared to the agonies that he will endure in hell. The insects drinking the blood flowing from his wounds inflict upon him the “most exquisite and insupportable” tortures, so the paralyzed Ambrosio can only imagine how much more intolerable his suffering will be after his death (442). In an inversion of the creation, he endures six days of severe pain, all the while realizing that death will bring him greater torment.

In addition, pointing clearly to the Promethean myth, “the Eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks (442). Influenced by Goethe, in the late eighteenth-century the Titan was seen as a positive symbol of man’s ambition and his rebellion against the constraints of society and life. Ambrosio revolted against religious repression, successfully freeing himself from the rules of society for a brief amount of time. However, even Prometheus’ admirable qualities did not prevent him from being condemned to eternal torment for his presumption. The same punishment applied to Ambrosio, not only for assuming that he

---

could use his position of power to satisfy his lust without fear of discovery, but also for believing that, once caught, forgiveness was still possible.

Lewis cannot fully commit to the image of Ambrosio as a tragic anti-hero. His offenses are even more corrupt and terrifying than he thought. In Gothic fiction, terror "depends on things not being what they seem", and although unknown to Ambrosio at the time, his lust compelled him to commit matricide and incest.\textsuperscript{88} He and Antonia had the same mother, and by raping the young woman, he broke one of the most sacred religious, moral, and social taboos. His desire for her was forbidden not only because she was an innocent supplicant, but because she was also his sister. Incest leads to a "dark mixture of unnamable things".\textsuperscript{89}

Just as institutional repression—like that perceived to be imposed by the Catholic church—leads to an abuse of power, so are Ambrosio's "sexual crimes caused by distortion of natural drives".\textsuperscript{90} His passions are forced down and repressed, and accordingly, he physically descends to commit an act of violence. His "sexual fantasy becomes truly Gothic, with forbidden desire driven underground"\textsuperscript{91} into the domain of death, with funeral trappings all around.

Nevertheless, there is a limit to how far society or institutions can be held responsible for Ambrosio's transgression. He consorted with Matilda and allowed her to call up supernatural powers on his behalf, while he committed murder and rape, all in order to satiate his lust. His voracious

\textsuperscript{88} Botting, 170.

\textsuperscript{89} Girard, 75.

\textsuperscript{90} Elizabeth MacAndrew, \textit{The Gothic Tradition in Fiction} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 88.

\textsuperscript{91} Howells, 73.
sexual appetite raises a number of questions. What if unbidden inner desires cannot be controlled? What if the self can never be satisfied? The nineteen year old author stops short of answering these questions, perhaps realizing that erotic desire and excess passion hold "dangers more real than can be registered by a pleasurable shudder".93

The failure of resolution within The Monk may indicate that the author did not want to deal with difficult moral issues. In most cases, Lewis rejected "emotional complexity for the shock value of dramatic scenarios".94 In addition, by using violent nightmare imagery, utilizing plausible supernatural beings, and allowing Ambrosio to incur damnation by the hands of a vengeful devil, he came into conflict with "the emerging concept of novelistic realism: verisimilitude will not immediately admit of the magical appearance of superhuman forms".95 Nevertheless, the Gothic alludes to possibilities; to a "presence in the world of forces which cannot be accounted for by the daylight self and the self-sufficient mind.96 By its very nature, a Gothic novel always lacks sufficient explanations at the conclusion, because "if the gothic can be explained it is no longer gothic".97

---


94 Howells, 66.


97 Kincaid, 3.
Published in 1820, *Melmoth the Wanderer* is the last work of the literary Gothic period. The author, Charles Maturin, merges conventional Gothic images and tropes with the suggestive terrors of Radcliffe, and fuses the intense horrors of Lewis with his own “profound psychological insight into torture and suffering”. In doing so, he created a Gothic novel that is widely considered to be “the highest artistic achievement of the genre”.

Maturin delves into the darker impulses of man, exploring the psychological complexity of the inner psyche, especially the divided self. He develops the theme of alienation that Lewis introduced in his presentation of Ambrosio, but concentrates on the misery that accompanies the outcast. The Promethean connection between the expelled member of society and the forsaken god is intensified in *Melmoth*, as Maturin focuses on the individual.

A quintessential example of the complexity and mystery of Gothic narratives, the novel consists of tales nested one within another, with each successive story related in the first-person by a different character. Despite the multiple voices, the narratives are connected by similar themes and plots, each underscoring in different ways the cruelty of unjust authoritarian systems, particularly religious and social institutions.

Melmoth’s own story gradually appears through the relation of all the tales. In each story, Melmoth—the Faustian title character who has sold his soul to Satan in exchange for long life and forbidden knowledge—appears to distressed individuals suffering from various acts of injustice, offering them instant relief if they will change places with him and take over his infernal deal. He presents this option to Stanton, a sane man imprisoned in a lunatic

---

97 Axton, xiv.

98 Axton, xviii.
asylum, but he prefers to gradually descend into true insanity than spend an eternity in hell. Moncada, confined in the prisons of the Inquisition, and Wahlberg, who sees his children dying of starvation, are also tempted, but they both decline his proposal with horror. As Melmoth becomes increasingly desperate to relieve himself of his burden, the plights of the characters he bargains with become more appalling, leading to an escalating stream of torments.

The novel is originally set in Ireland in the year of 1816, when John Melmoth, a distant relative of the title character, temporally quits his studies in England in order to attend to his dying uncle. On his deathbed, the old man abjures him to burn an ancient manuscript in his study, but his request is not honoured. Upon inheriting all of his uncle's money and property, the young man is seized by a wild and awful curiosity about his antecedent—John Melmoth the Traveler—so he reads the yellowing pages he was advised to destroy. Dated 1676, the tale is the account of an Englishman named Stanton, who describes his relentless quest to find and bring to justice the villainous Melmoth.

In the story, Stanton related how he was tricked into imprisonment in Bedlam. Confined to a cell, he was surrounded by the cries and raving of others. Fastidious at first, after a period of time spent in the madhouse, he "passed half the day in bed ... declined shaving or changing his linens". At this low point, Melmoth appeared magically in the man's cell and warned him that his continuing mental deterioration would soon cause him to "echo the scream of every delirious wretch that harbours near you", with his condition worsening until "all humanity will be extinguished in you" (42).

100 Charles Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 41. All subsequent references to Melmoth are parenthetical, with page number.
Rejecting his offer of freedom in exchange for his soul, Stanton was eventually released from the madhouse with his sanity intact and became intent on tracking down his tempter. Ironically, his pursuit of Melmoth was so "incessant and indefatigable,—that it became a species of madness" in itself (44).

The young Melmoth reads the story of Stanton, but the remaining narratives are related by Moncada, the sole survivor of a shipwreck that improbably took place near the coast of Melmoth's house. Recovering at the home of the former student, the stories Moncada tells to his host are from other manuscripts that he has been forced to copy in the past, resulting in a multiplicity of voices and wide-ranging dates of composition, with some of the tales containing references to the Spanish Inquisition of 1668.

The seafaring Spaniard's accounts of tortures are even more lamentable than Stanton's. As the illegitimate son of a noble family, he is sent to a monastery, while the second son is groomed as the true heir. Subsequently renouncing his vows, he becomes imprisoned in a vault on the charge of heresy. He and his cell-mate manage to escape from their cell, and as his companion leads him through subterranean passages, the former novice monk imagines all the dreadful things that could happen.

In an allusion to The Monk, Moncade has "heard stories of infernal beings who deluded monks ... seduced them into the vaults of the convent, and then proposed conditions which it is almost horrible to relate" (148-9). As he and his guide traverse the path, his mind is filled with gruesome and macabre Gothic images. In a corruption of the Eucharist,

I thought of being forced to witness the unnatural reels of a diabolical feast,—of seeing the rotting flesh distributed,—of drinking the dead corrupted blood,—of hearing the anthems of fends howled in insults (149).
Temporarily diverted from imaginary supernatural horrors, Moncada confronts the reality of attempting to squeeze through a small underground opening. Crawling through the narrow route, the guide recalls a story about a traveler who got stuck in a passage when exploring the pyramids of Egypt. Unable to move either way, his trapped companions discussed cutting off his limbs so they could pass. Hearing this, the explorer contracted in agony and was able to be dragged back, giving the others room to advance. In the process though, he was suffocated to death. After the relation of this horrific account, Moncada and his guide are then forced to wait in the dark confinement of the vaults until they can effect their own escape.

Their flight is ultimately thwarted and Moncada is thrown into the prisons of the Inquisition. The terrible tales he has heard and the scenes he has imagined appear insignificant when compared to the prospect of being burnt at the stake. He dreams of how

my feet were scorched to a cinder,—my muscles cracked, my blood and marrow hissed, my flesh consumed like shrinking leather, the bones of my leg hung two black withering and moving sticks in the ascending blaze;—it ascended, caught my hair,—I was crowned with fire,—my head was a ball of molten metal, my eyes flashed and melted in their sockets;—I opened my mouth, it drank fire (182).

Awakened by his own screams, he sees Melmoth in his cells and impulsively implores him to save him, but when the tempter lays down the conditions, even the Gothic images of macabre and gruesome suffering cannot compel him to accept.

The evocative physical details of the burning are “so precise in order for the reader to understand more fully what is happening to Moncada
psychologically". Tortured and then condemned as a heretic, the imaginary fires represent not only the terrible means of his own death, but also serve as the symbol of hell. Enduring concentrated physical pain, his confusion and agony is reflected in his nightmare. Under extreme duress, it is uncertain whether his mind can distinguish between reality and unreality. His sense of perception is flawed, so the subsequent appearance of Melmoth to him may only be a nightmare or fantasy caused by his agitated mind.

Maturin differs from Lewis in his use of macabre, fierce and disturbing images. Rather than presenting lurid pictures for their shock value, he utilizes Gothic spectacle as a way of grappling with psychological issues. Depicting the misery of Melmoth's prospective victims, Maturin analyzes the deterioration of the mind through intense agony and strain, acknowledging "that many of the objects thought to be supernatural are nothing more than projections of the disturbed mind of the perceivers".

Although Melmoth's seemingly opportunistic appearances may be imaginary, he is presented in the novel as a real figure. As a Gothic villain, his possesses satanic characteristics, but he is presented as a "spectral double of the human" who is attempting to disavow his demonic role. Like Faust, he possesses forbidden knowledge and has passed one hundred years on the earth "without a hair on his head changed, or a muscle in his frame contracted" (20). While his special powers raise him above his fellow human beings, they also cut him off "from their saving communion".


101 Hennessy, 26.

102 Botting, 107.

103 Ringe, 391.
In a reflection of the ambivalence that remains a feature of the Gothic, later villains like Melmoth are treated in a more sympathetic manner. Influenced by the age in which it was written, Maturin’s anti-hero possesses qualities usually associated with tortured Romantic characters. Similar to Coleridge’s ancient mariner, or Byron’s Manfred, Melmoth is an isolated individual on an elusive quest. A rebel and non-conformist, he is linked to Prometheus.

As a Promethean figure, Melmoth “is more a psychological projection than realistic representation, for he personifies the moral rebellion of his times” against restrictive rules. However, while Lewis’ text questions the role of society in shaping Ambrosio’s extreme behavior, Maturin is reluctant to assign blame. The stifling authoritarian tradition creates, and then constrains Melmoth, but he also makes a conscious decision to sell his soul. There is a moral ambiguity in his character, which leads to a confusion of purpose within the novel.

There are no answers or explanations to be found in the ambiguous and inconclusive endings of The Monk and Melmoth the Wanderer. This confusion of purpose is the point, for there are no patent answers to the questions that the authors are posing. Unlike earlier Gothic novels, there is no moral message or mystery to explain, but a complicated “chain of events without unity or meaning”, indicative of the chaotic and fragmented nature of human life. Through Gothic conventions, authors such as Lewis and Melmoth can allude to the human predicament and the cosmic condition, and alert us towards that mysterious other which is real, but evades language.

104 Anderson, x.

105 Botting, 108.
On the other hand, many authors of Gothic fiction merely followed a formula, using tired clichés and conventions. Austen's parody of the formulaic Gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey*, foreshadowed the death of the Gothic literary genre. Sold in 1803, it appeared posthumously in 1818, and mocked the stock Gothic tropes and images that easily lent themselves to parody and irony. The inherent duplicitness of parody and the doubleness of irony exploit the subversive potential of language.

*Northanger Abbey* is set in England, where the "mannered social order ... precludes Gothic horrors". The plot features Catherine Morland, the daughter of a wealthy clergyman. Spending a season in Bath with friends, she meets Henry Tilney, and both she and her confidant, Isabella, fall in love with him. They are invited to the medieval estate of the Tilneys, Northanger Abbey. Seduced by Radcliffian tales, Catherine expects the Abbey to be a Gothic structure dating back to the Restoration era, with a "portion of the ancient building still making a part of the present dwelling", while the rest remains in ruins (142). She is disappointed to find the Tilney's dwelling large and comfortable, with light streaming in from glass windows. She had hoped to find heavy stone work, dim recesses, and antique stained-glass windows covered in cobwebs.

Both Catherine and Isabella are assiduous readers of delightfully "horrid" Gothic novels with titles such as *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Mysterious Warnings* and *Necromancer of the Black Forest*. Unduly influenced by these tales of terror and horror and undeterred by the fact that the Tilneys do not live in a Gothic castle, Catherine constructs a Gothic

---


107 Wiesenfarth, "Intro.", 3.
fantasy around the older man. She suspects him of murdering his wife, while a document that she finds written in a foreign language appears equally menacing.

Due to her flawed perception, Catherine has exaggerated things out of all proportion. Mortified when her suspicions are exposed and proven false, she learns that the mysterious paper is only an old laundry list. She earns the disapproval of General Tilney, Henry’s father, and further falls out of his favour when he is mistakenly informed that her parents have little money. After she departs from the estate, Henry ignores his father’s instruction to have nothing more to do with her and follows her home, where he proposes. She accepts, and the older Tilney gives his consent to the marriage when he discovers that her family is actually wealthy.

Catherine is the de facto heroine of the novel, although Austen ironically notes that no one “would have supposed her” to be so. The role of male scoundrel falls to General Tilney, while Henry Tilney is the hero. However, General Tilney is not a murderer and the young Henry is a pusillanimous man who declares that his perusal of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* had his “hair standing on end the whole time” (40).

The plot is a subversive mockery of the typical Gothic novel. Catherine is so involved in imaginary crimes and mysteries that she fails to notice Isabella’s self-interest, hypocrisy, and cowardice, all in evidence when she asks Catherine to intercede for her with Henry Tilney. The real evil of the educated middle-class has nothing to do with murder or secret

---

documents, but is social in nature, where "dishonesty, greed, affectation and vanity" are the prevailing crimes.\textsuperscript{109}

With the assistance of Austen, subversion became a feature of Gothic fiction. The Gothic novel still relied on the traditional tropes that Walpole introduced, including prisons, chains, strange apparitions, and references to the supernatural. However, in the half-century that separated \textit{The Castle of Otranto} and \textit{Melmoth}, many more elements were added to the Gothic novel.

In the evolution of the genre, Radcliffe was primarily responsible for establishing the technique of allying mood with scenery, adding emotive power to the basic gothic vocabulary. Concomitantly, sublime landscapes also came to be associated with Gothic literature.

As \textit{The Monk} shows, near the end of the eighteenth-century, the Gothic novel became more violent and macabre. The brooding atmospheres and the typical images of death remained, but authors began to tentatively move towards an exploration of mental states. Anti-heroes replaced stock villains and the repressive medieval values of modern society were implicated as a source of perversion. Lewis alluded to incorporeal demonic realities and strengthened the illusion with his use of graphic picture. Unlike his predecessor, Maturin did not exploit explicit gruesome scenes for their sensational effects; instead he concentrates on how perception and psychological states can produce and magnify imaginary horrors.

The Gothic genre began to weaken in popularity in the early nineteenth-century and the formally defined literary Gothic period ended with the 1820 publication of \textit{Melmoth}. "Although repetition and the generally poor quality of writing led to the decline of the Gothic genre, a

\textsuperscript{109} Paul Lewis, 316.
contributing factor was the assimilation of many Gothic tenets into Romanticism".\textsuperscript{111} Gothic features such as desire, mystery, and awe were easily absorbed into the Romantic movement, and persisted into the Victorian era.

\section*{VICTORIAN BELIEF AND THE PROTEAN GOTHIC}

The Gothic novel, full of mystery and emotion, gave late eighteenth-century readers a respite from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, providing a welcome, albeit temporary, escape. Fifty years later, many Victorians were similarly looking for a release from the rigorous scientific methods employed by men such as Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin.

The hypotheses of Lyell and Darwin were among the most influential scientific theories that questioned the belief in divine creation. In \textit{Principles of Geology} (1830-33), Lyell provided a geological account of the earth, claiming that it was millions of years older than the book of Genesis suggested and casting serious doubt on the credibility of the Old Testament as true history. Similarly, Darwin's \textit{Origin of the Species} (1859) challenged the idea that Adam and Eve were created by God. Instead he argued that there was a continuous struggle for existence and that those creatures who had more advantageous traits were more likely to survive and pass on these beneficial characteristics. Therefore, the survival of the fittest was ensured by natural selection. In a Darwinian universe, man was the highest form of beast, not because of divine providence, but because he was furthest along in the race for survival. Ultimately he remained subject to the same impulses as any

\textsuperscript{111} Bayer-Berenbaum, 20.
other living being: the assuaging of hunger and thirst, the search for shelter, and the drive for reproduction, among others.

Lyell and Darwin alone did not destroy the authority of the Christian church. The rationalism of the Enlightenment, with its central belief in human reason, had already partially displaced organized religion as the decisive and authoritative mode of elucidating the ways of the universe. Yet, many traditional beliefs and establishments were also changing. The Industrial Revolution transformed the economic climate, as millions of laborers flowed into urban areas in search of work. Mechanization vastly increased the production of goods, as well as the speed of travel and communication. The political landscape slowly shifted, as the divisive Reform Bills of 1828 and 1867 gave more than a million men the right to vote, while 1884 saw the enfranchisement of approximately two million more male agricultural laborers. Literacy increased among the middle classes and as a wealth of scientific knowledge became available, the tenuous validity of the Bible and Christianity as a whole weakened even more. Many reasoning people already had doubts and misgivings about the veracity of the Judeo-Christian version of the world and the findings of science merely confirmed their skepticism.

For many Victorians, the problem with religion was Christian theology. Hardy deplored the "terrible dogmatic ecclesiasticism—Christianity so-called ... a dogma with which the real teaching of Christ has hardly anything in common".111 Carlyle asserted that the major need of the age was to dismiss the antiquated rules of medieval Christianity, to cast off what he

---


As the statesman and poet Edward Lytton lamented:

We live in an age of visible transition—an age of disquietude and doubt ... to me such epochs appear ... the times of greatest unhappiness to our species.\footnote{Lytton, England and the English (1833) (London: n.p., 1874), 284; qtd. in Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 65. I am indebted to Walter Houghton for much of the background information relating to the religious concerns of the Victorians.}

Victorians lived in an age where old traditional beliefs, institutions, and ideals were disappearing and the new emerging values were often confusing or incomplete. The discoveries of Lyell and Darwin were destructive to the social fabric, not only because of the fear of total chaos and degeneration, but because it destroyed all moral, religious, and historical absolutes, and took much of the mystery and poetry out of life. The disintegration of established, time-honored tenets, combined with religious doubt and the weakening power and status of the clergy, meant individuals had no one to depend upon but themselves. They had to struggle alone with questions: does man have an innate morality or is it God-given, does he have free will, or is he simply a product of evolution, is there a god or gods, is there a force of good and evil, or does heaven and hell exist? If they believed in the Christian faith, they had to choose between Catholicism—a more
acceptable option following the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829—or the Church of England, and then decide on high or low church. These complexities were not only distressing, they also showed that man’s reason could prove erroneous or even powerless, so “men were glad enough, in many cases, to exchange their vaunted private judgment for a divine teacher”. This readiness to shed religious responsibility and pass it to some external agency was one reason why both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church paradoxically increased their numbers during the middle decades of the nineteenth-century. The Victorians’ “need for faith was stronger than that of their forebears, simply because the grounds of faith now had become so elusive.”

However, where was an individual to look if he could find no satisfaction in the Godhead? It was a frightening and confusing process for most, although George Eliot was relieved to discard her Evangelical faith and replace it with a different set of beliefs, based on human kindness. However, unlike Eliot, Hardy was not necessarily relieved, but ambivalent about his decision to reject Christianity. He abhorred Christian theology and “the medieval concepts [that] are the groundwork of modern middle-class respectability”. However, he respected the general sense of religion, “as being expressive of nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness”. In response to a surreptitious interviewer’s question in 1905, he answered:

116 Houghton, 200.


119 Thomas Hardy, *L Y*, 121.
Don’t suppose for a moment ... that I am opposed to the Christian religion. I often wish I had lived in the Middle Ages, when the Church was supreme and unquestioned .... before doubts had arisen .... Christianity appeals very powerfully both to my emotional and artistic faculties.120

Nevertheless, he admitted that “intellect cannot be stifled, and we cannot ignore the revelations of geology and history”, even if, “what we gain by science is, after all, sadness”.121 Hardy wanted to be re-enchanted, to regain a sense that there was some force controlling the world, a deeper reality. He found a medium of faith in the Gothic, and he expressed that belief in his writings.

Hardy is not alone in promoting the Gothic. It is pervasive in Victorian fiction, although there is not “one undifferentiated Gothic nineteenth century, homogenous from beginning to end”.122 The Brontë sisters’ novels show distinct Gothic influences. The dark atmosphere of Emily’s Wuthering Heights (1847) blends with and augments its suggestive supernaturalism. Charlotte’s Villette (1853) displays the anti-Catholic trend prevalent in late eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, while Jane Eyre (1847) blurs nightmare and dream, presenting the fears and actualities of imprisonment, insanity, and bigamy, all underpinned by a strong erotic undercurrent. Dickens infuses much of his fiction with grotesque images


121 Smithland, 4; and T. Hardy, CL III, letter to Edward Clodd, 27 Feb. 1902, 5.

and an atmosphere of gloom, strengthened by his settings of prisons and
dismal houses. In a modification of the characteristic Gothic theme
concerning the inability of man to escape his past, he emphasized individuals
who chose to live in the past, best exemplified by Miss Havisham in Great
Expectations. As the modern city replaced the old castles and mansions as the
focus of terror, Elizabeth Gaskell explored the dark side of urban life,
particularly the daily struggle to keep body and soul together in the mills.
Gaskell's ghost stories, such as "The Old Nurse's Story" (1852), and George
Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" (1859) are more similar to eighteenth-century Gothic
fiction in their dependence on supernatural explanations, as are Sheridan Le
Fanu's tales of terror.

Victorian Gothic fiction expanded to include more macabre and
violent episodes, with an additional emphasis on psychological states and the
sense of perception. Reality was blurred, as "the social bearing[s] in which a
sense of reality is secured" were "presented in the threatening shapes of
increasingly dehumanized environments, machine doubles and violent,
psychic fragmentation."122 Cities and urban locations became the
nineteenth-century loci of terror, rather than the dark forests and
underground crypts of the conventional Gothic. In the late nineteenth-
century, the familiar figures of doppelgängers, alter-egos, and vampires re-
emerged, along with the grotesque, reflecting a major Victorian anxiety and
concern with dualities. Passion combated reason, civilization opposed
wilderness, and the natural confronted the unnatural.

*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is a metaphor for
the individual's divided self and the continual internal struggle between

---

reason and passion, good and evil. The physical form of the human
grotesque is exposed, as it is in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Oscar
Wilde's novel brings up the concept of a possessed body, governed by elusive
forces outside the realm of human knowledge. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)
is a story of the supernatural, highlighting the difference between the natural
and unnatural. Merging dream with nightmare, it also introduces an erotic
subtext.

Sexuality was also a major source of conflict for the Victorians. They
were concerned about the difference between male and female, human and
nonhuman. Victorian Gothic novels reflected “the fears, anxieties, and
terrors that pervade[d] such male-female interactions” in the nineteenth-
century.\textsuperscript{124} As the belief in a benevolent God waned, the thought of
unnatural, depraved and nonhuman influences became more frightening. If
there was no powerful good force in the world, divine or not, how could man
counteract bad or aberrant ideas and deviant behavior?\textsuperscript{125} One answer was to
stamp out and obliterate the subversive ideas that clashed with society's
morals; to state that those who had such thoughts were “not only evil but
unnatural: she/he/it has no right to exist at all”.\textsuperscript{126} However, the repressive
morality that distinguished between good and evil by setting up “taboos and
prohibitions”, also produced “desires that can only be manifested secretly”.\textsuperscript{127}
Thus, there is a profound tension in many Victorian Gothic novels.

\textsuperscript{124}Norma Goldstein, “Thomas Hardy's Victorian Gothic: Reassessing Hardy's

\textsuperscript{125}Meg Moring, “The Dark Glass: Mirroring and Sacrifice on Shakespeare's *Othello*
and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Conference of College Teachers of English Studies 56
(1991):15; and Kathleen Spencer, “Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late
Victorian Degeneracy Crisis”, *English Literary History* 59 (Spring 1992): 203.

\textsuperscript{126}Spencer, 208.

\textsuperscript{127}Botting, 142.
Wolfreys suggests that there is a distinct Victorian Gothic which manifests itself as “both a subversive force and a mechanism for social critique”.128 These dual impulses manifest themselves in Hardy’s fiction, as he continually subverts the Gothic tradition and confounds his readers’ expectations. In his earlier novels, he implicitly criticizes authoritarian institutions, while in his later novels, he directly rails against the tyranny of social laws. Wilt insists that “as a social impulse", the Gothic advocates riot, not reform,129 and as Hardy’s vision changes, disorder and confusion begin to reign in the pages of his books.

Hardy and other Victorian writers had “not inherited a culturally shared belief system” and thus were forced to use prose and poetry “as places to work out their beliefs”.130 Hardy explores the Gothic to assess its suitability as a faith to fill the spiritual vacancy created by a loss of belief in a benevolent God. By adopting a Gothic premise, he was able to make allusions to a higher power and expand his imagination and sense of reality. He found its gestures to possible truth, and the credence of real belief, attractive. At the same time, he found that traditional and nineteenth-century interpretations of Gothic forms and figures enabled him to overturn and subvert assumptions, beliefs, and authoritarian institutions. Although it was not a conscious desire, like Arnold and Carlyle, Hardy was moving towards a place where literature itself replaces religion as a place where we look for possibilities that verge on truth, however unpalatable these truths may be.

128 Wolfreys, “Preface”, xvi.
129 Wilt, 46.
CHAPTER TWO

DESPERATE REMEDIES: HARDY'S MOST
GOTHIC NOVEL

Desperate Remedies was Hardy's first published book, although it was actually the second one he wrote. His first novel, entitled The Poor Man and the Lady, was refused by Alexander Macmillan, but the publisher encouraged him to continue with his writing, noting "if this is your first book I think you ought to go on".130 Never printed, the manuscript of this initial offering was eventually destroyed.

Hardy's first published novel, Desperate Remedies, was released in three-volume form in 1871. His most Gothic novel, it contained many conventions typical of the Gothic genre: confused identities, mysterious actions, suggestively supernatural terrors, and incredible coincidences.

Instead of being set in the foreign lands favoured by Radcliffe, the principal action took place in and around an old manor-house located on the fictional Knapwater Estate in the south of England. As common in late eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, the plot portrayed an innocent maiden menaced by a purportedly villainous rake and a "lonely, embittered, and haughty" woman of nearly fifty (6-1, 63).

Hardy deliberately invokes the Gothic tradition in *Desperate Remedies*, as his de facto heroine, Cytherea, asks the coachman if "horrid stories" are told about the old manor house on the Knapwater estate where she has been offered employment.¹³² He answers in an offhand and casual manner that "'Tis jest the house for a nice ghastly hair-on-end story ... Perhaps it will have one some day" (5-1, 48). The Gothic tradition is introduced and then skeptically overturned. Hardy pokes fun at the conventional dismal and abandoned old mansions that are so often the province of Gothic writers. However, the outbuilding of the old manor house proves to hide, and literally hold, a grisly secret, thus fulfilling the coachman's supposition. While promoting the authentic Gothic provenance of *Desperate Remedies*; Hardy parodies its features at the same time, revealing the artificially and artifice of the Gothic genre. This enables him to set a tone of uncertainty and ambiguity that resonates throughout the novel.

Alongside the shifting pattern of vacillation, the author makes a largely unsuccessful attempt to merge Gothic themes with images. He introduces many traditional Gothic themes, such as the issues of the inescapable past and the battle of virtue versus villainy, but he also addresses

---

¹³² Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* (1871) with an introduction by C.J.P. Beatty (London: Macmillan 'New Wessex', 1975, reprint 1986). 5-1, 48. All subsequent references to *Desperate Remedies* will be parenthetical, with the chapter, sub-chapter, and page number.
the Victorian Gothic concerns about sexuality and the difference between the natural and the unnatural. Richard Taylor notes that Cytherea “confounds the traditionally simple and virtually asexual role of the naïve young heroine”.133 When the storm forces Cytherea to take refuge in Manston’s manor-house, the tumultuous and sublime weather provokes the incipient stirrings of desire—a feeling that the virtuous Radcliffian heroine never experiences.

D. H. Lawrence considers Manston to be Hardy’s “blackest villain”, but Manston is not the standard stock villain of melodrama because he possesses human feelings and emotions.134 His passionate feelings for Cytherea are genuine, but excessive, and it is this immoderation that prompts him to take extreme actions. When his prime objective of securing Cytherea is threatened by the reappearance of his wife, he takes steps to prevent this. She symbolizes his former life—a life that he must conceal—and her intrusion into the present is unexpected. Manston realizes that her very existence will nullify any chance of marriage. Erroneously, he believes that if he disposes of his wife—the physical evidence of the past—then the past itself will also be erased and he can proceed with his plans. He fails to understand that the past continually encroaches upon the present and can never be obliterated.

Alongside traditional Gothic themes, Hardy uses late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century extensions of the literary Gothic in the novel. While not consciously using the techniques of specific Gothic novelists, he utilizes the macabre images first presented in Lewis’ Ambrosio to heighten suggestive

133 Richard Taylor, Neglected Hardy, 19.

terrors. Rather than constructing simple stock villains, he creates complex
anti-heroes, similar to Maturin's Melmoth. Integrating later interpretations,
his exploration of desire and depravity reflects the Victorian Gothic
preoccupation with the natural and unnatural.

Nevertheless, in most instances Hardy remains content to rely upon
non-integrated Gothic paraphernalia without expanding into the
complexities that later Gothic fiction explored. The initial interment of
Manston's murdered spouse in a large oven—later mortared over—points to
the conventional Gothic fear of confinement and imprisonment, but no
linkage is made to Cytherea's later isolation at the Knapwater estate. The
manor house is a place of terror and mystery for Cytherea, but also erotically
energizing, as she becomes more aware of her sexuality. Nevertheless, the
issue is never fully addressed. Meanwhile, while Manston's divided self is
well documented in the earlier portions of the novel, he inexplicably
transforms into a stock Gothic villain in the concluding pages. Most
puzzling though, is the convoluted story-line's fragmented allusions to
homosexuality, incest, and other depraved practices.

Hardy's stated objective in Desperate Remedies was "simply to
construct an intricate puzzle which nobody would guess till the end",
although he later admitted that he had concentrated too much on "mystery,
entanglement, surprise, and moral obliquity". The Athenæum agreed that
the main interest in the novel was in the detection of crimes, but one


important reviewer had moral reservations about the book before it was published. John Morley, a man of letters, personal friend, and in-house reviewer of Macmillan, read the original draft that Hardy submitted. Disapproving of the lavish scenes between Cytherea and Miss Aldclyffe, he cautioned the publisher, "Don't touch this", and the novel was refused. Hardy then paid Tinsley seventy five pounds up front to publish it, and less than a year after Macmillan's initial refusal, the novel was released.

Beginning the story in archetypal Gothic fashion, Hardy supports the characteristic pattern of virtue endangered by villainy. In many ways Cytherea is a typical Gothic heroine, passive and naïve. Newly orphaned, she takes up a position as a lady's maid twenty miles away from the home she shared with her brother. Similar to the grim settings of cloistered monasteries and convents that Gothic writers employed, Knapwater House is a remote and isolated place. Cytherea is hidden away from everyone and everything that is familiar to her. Miss Aldclyffe, who promised "to be exactly as a mother to you", does not protect the young girl from the threat that Manston represents, but encourages his suit and pressures her to marry him (6-1, 70).

Much like Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, Cytherea is subject to recurrent Gothic terrors which have no basis in fact. Many are pure fabrications, affected by her sense of perception. On her first night at Knapwater House, Cytherea marks the "the gushing of the waterfall ... [and]

---


metallic creak" of the water wheel (6-2, 71). These sounds take on a menacing tone, as she creates visually threatening Gothic images to accompany them. She imagines that through a crevice in the engine-house she can "see" a "glistening water wheel" and "observe" the moon shining in "skeleton-like rays, striking upon portions of wet rusty cranks and chains". Simultaneously the water wheel was "turning incessantly, labouring in the dark like a captive starving in a dungeon" (6-2, 71).

Restricted by the circumstances of her life and confined to the Knapwater Estate, Cytherea's feelings of imprisonment surface in her mind. This results in illusory images of chains, prisoners, and dungeons. In an alliance of emotion with atmosphere, her own despair about her situation accounts for the gloomy aspects of her mental pictures; the glimmers of the attenuated moon and the attendant shadows.

Out walking with Manston, who continues to press his suit, her eyes fall upon some mandrakes growing in the middle distance and she "could almost fancy she heard their shrieks" (12-6, 186). She identifies with the mandrake: a forked root which resembles the human body, it was supposed to scream when pulled out of the ground. She has similarly been torn away from her base. Left fatherless, deserted by her former lover, and compelled to provide for her newly incapacitated brother, she is circumscribed by her role as a single Victorian woman. If she wishes to escape poverty and help her brother, the only recourse available to her is to accept Manston's offer of marriage.

Manston proposes in the fetid atmosphere of a church building in decline, with "wormy pews" and "mildewed walls" reflecting and affecting her feelings of despair (12-8, 190). By marrying a man she does not love, she heightens the sense of futility and meaninglessness of participating in what is
considered to be a central Christian sacrament. In her acquiescence, she makes a travesty of the marriage vows and consents to the forfeiture of her own self. In “the dank air of death” that permeates the decrepit church, she agrees to the death of her soul (12-8, 190).

Gothic images connected to death dominated her thoughts. The night before her marriage to Manston, Cytherea was troubled by a noise below her bedroom windows. It sounded like switches being beaten against the wall. In a disturbed sleep, she dreams she was being

whipped with dry bones suspended on strings,... she shifted and shrank and avoided every blow, and they fell then upon the wall to which she was tied. She couldn’t see the face of the executioner ... but his form was Manston’s. (13-1, 195)

Typical of a Gothic heroine, Cytherea had a penchant of imagining horrible scenarios and sensing danger where it did not exist. These fears manifested themselves in her nightmare, where she suffered at the hands of an executioner who had the power of death over her. The unknown stranger’s shape are likened to her fiancée’s, and just as she tried to avoid his “blows”, she was also desperate to evade Manston’s own efforts to subdue her and coerce her into marrying him. However, she could not escape from either situation because in her dream she was “tied” to a wall, while in real life she remained trapped by circumstances. The gruesome physical images of torture also reflected her feelings of mental torment—the despair she experienced when considering her imminent marriage. Despite her indifference to the future and her reasoning that “even Christianity urges me to marry”, she still shrank from the idea of a soulless union with Manston (12-7, 188).

There is a Gothic suggestiveness that the ominous noises Cytherea hears are caused by an external force. The trees around the house are planted
far away from the structure and never touch the walls, even in tumultuous wind, so they are not the source of the troubling sounds. Inexplicable by normal means, this anomalous sound alerts her to the possible presence of outside agencies. However, as Taylor posits, Cytherea has “already revealed herself as something of a masochist”,\(^{137}\) so the more likely explanation is that her faulty perception and sense of foreboding are manifesting themselves in a horrific imaginary manner (13-1, 195).

Macabre forms and figures continue to influence her. After her marriage to Manston is irrevocably concluded, she glances through the scrollwork of a small chapel attached to the church, and behind the screen saw

the reclining figures of cross-legged knights, damp and green with age, and above them a huge classic monument ... heavily sculptured in cadaverous marble.

Leaning here—almost hanging to the monument—was Edward Springrove, or his spirit. (13-3, 201)

Her former lover has merged into the statue, with his “spectre-thin” figure pressed into the stone. His face was “of a sickly paleness” and his hair “dry and disordered”. The only life appeared to be in the “wild” eyes (13-3, 201).

The Gothic effigies of the long-dead knights and the memorial made of “cadaverous” marble are emblematic of death. Leaning upon them, the phantom-like Springrove appears to be dying himself. His flesh matches the color of the pallid marble and he is “spectre-thin”. His unkempt hair and the wildness of his eyes are expressive of frenzied emotion, but no verbal communication passes between Cytherea and Springrove. Manston fails to notice anything amiss and when Owen tries to find the “apparition” who

looked like Springrove, “he had gone, nobody could know how or whither” (13-3, 201).

Despite suggestions to the contrary, this figure of Springrove is not a figment of Cytherea’s imagination. His physical presence is finally verified by Owen, who angrily observes that Springrove “had no business to come here as he did” (13-4, 202). Her past suitor’s ghostly countenance is embellished by Cytherea’s feelings of guilt and her assumption that she caused his apparent suffering. His unexpected arrival awakens dormant emotions in her and she realizes that she still loves him. Nevertheless, like Radcliffe’s Emily, Cytherea is subject to social convention and, as a married woman, her primary duty is to her husband. When Springrove approaches her, she informs him that the marriage is sealed; “the deed is done—I must abide by it. I shall never let him know that I do not love him—never” (13-4, 207).

Despite this declaration, Cytherea tightly grasps the reprieve she is given in the form of Owen’s information that the marriage may be bigamous, and therefore, neither legal nor binding. Seeing a possible escape from a soulless marriage,

there arose in her a personal fear of him. ‘Suppose he should come in now and seize me!’ This at first mere frenzied supposition grew by degrees to a definite horror of his presence ... Thus she raised herself to a heat of excitement. (18-7, 220)

Cytherea has distanced herself from the physical side of the relationship, even denying Manston a kiss at the moment of their betrothal. Given the opportunity of delaying or possibly even escaping her marital duty, she becomes haunted by the fear that this chance will be taken from her.

Cytherea raises herself to a heightened “frenzied” emotional state. The fear that Manston might forcibly “seize her” mixes with the “heat of
excitement", as she is both afraid and thrilled by the possibility of Manston’s presence and what it might lead to; namely, the consummation of the marriage. The physical and emotional strains of the day’s events leave Cytherea “almost delirious”, with the landlady thinking her “half-insane” (18-7, 220, 221).

The final Gothic terror that Cytherea encounters is a ghostly visitor. At night, although she is

most probably dreaming, she seemed to awaken—and was immediately transfixed by a sort of spell ... At the foot of her bed, looking her in the face ... was the form of Mrs. Aldclyffe—wan and distinct (21-4, 323).

An hour later it transpires that Mrs. Aldclyffe had died that morning at approximately the same time that her figure had appeared to Cytherea.

The appearance a ghost can rationally be explained as the result of Cytherea’s skewed sense of reality, but this incident also contains supernatural intimations. While Hardy indicates that the vision of the old woman is “probably” a dream, he does not exclude the possibility that the sight is real. Gothic ghosts and visions, “defy rational explanation and suggest a realm not governed by laws understandable by reason.”139

While Cytherea has inexplicable experiences possibly caused by unknown sources, Manston appears to actually possess supernatural powers. In outward appearance he is an “extremely handsome ... well-dressed” man, with an articulate and elegant manner (8-4, 109). Apparently twenty-seven years old, he has unusually flawless skin of an “almost preternatural clearness”, with no “blemish or speck of any kind to mar the smoothness of its surface” (8-4, 109). With no wrinkles and no other clear indication of age,

139 Kevin Moore, “The Poet”, 34.
Manston bears some resemblance to the perpetually youthful and satanic Melmoth.

The Mephistophelian aspect of Manston's character comes into view most strongly in a Gothic episode, when Cytherea takes reluctant refuge in the old manor-house to escape a brief thunderstorm. As she walks towards the old manor house—Manston's new living quarters—the structure rises eerily "before her against the dark foliage and sky in tones of strange whiteness" (8-4, 108). An alien place, the building's aura of "general unearthly weirdness", reflects Manston's own strange nature (8-4, 112). The disproportionately large windows in the manor house provide ample ingress for lightning, and in a suggestion of supernatural ability, Manston deliberately shows Cytherea that he has the Satanic ability to look directly at the flashes of light with no ill effect. Jean Brooks likens Manston to a "demonic Fiddler of the Reels", who has the power of "sexually fascinating an impressionable girl by his music".140

Manston does have an inexplicable bewitching power. In their first direct encounter, he entices Cytherea into his converted parlor and starts to play an organ. Executed with "the completeness of full orchestral power ... the tones ... [are] heightened by the elemental strife of light and sound outside" (8-4, 113). The tumultuous weather serves to accentuate his ability. The organ peals and the thunder combine with the intense visual forks of lightening to create a awful, terrifying, and therefore, sublime experience that

---

140 Jean Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 154. This particular quotation is referred to by C.J.P. Beatty in the notes of the 1975 edition of Desperate Remedies [note 112, 339]. Interestingly, the endnote omits the word "sexually" with no ellipses in its place. It seems that even in 1975, Macmillan was still imposing their own moral standards on Hardy's novels.
that is expressive of the Gothic. Her soul expands and contributes to the
"gnawing thrill" that Cytherea feels (8-4, 114).

Mesmerized, she is "swayed into emotional opinions concerning the
strange man" (8-4,113). Her surging emotions and the music, an "explicit
metaphor for sexual attraction", combine with the striking invasion of sight
and sound to heighten the power of Manston's and Cytherea's erotic
encounter.140 The sexual connotation of Manston's musical instrument
anticipates her incipient sensual awakening, as, in a double entendre, he
assures her "she would soon acquire the touch for" his organ (8-4, 111).

Combining ambiguity, terror, awe, and sublimity, this Gothic storm
scene is one of Hardy's finest, but Joe Fisher contends that the "melodramatic
imagery" of this episode conceals the sexual element.141 Ignoring the
significance of Manston's covert invitation to Cytherea, Fisher considers his
organ playing as a form of male-dominated foreplay; an "auto-eroticism" that
gives a

pejorative and accurate introduction to his character; and so does his
egotistical notion of foreplay, metaphorically turning the woman into
an unwilling voyeur while he masturbates his 'organ'.142

However, while Cytherea is an unwilling audience to Manston's self-centered
musical foreplay, the voyeuristic role in this scene clearly belongs to him. His
eyes hold a "steady regard" for Cytherea as she approaches his lodgings. He is
"looking in her eyes" while he plays the organ and when she departs, his gaze

140 A. Aziz. Bulaila, "Desperate Remedies: Not Just a Minor Novel", The Thomas

141 Fisher, 27.

142 Fisher, 29.
remains upon her until she "become[s] hidden from his view" (8-4, 110, 113, 114).

Fisher's interpretation of Manston's organ playing is also problematic. There is no denying that Hardy tested further limits of acceptability in his later works, where the erotic was always a subtext. As a successful author he courted controversy, but at the time of Desperate Remedies, he was just another writer struggling to establish himself. It is questionable whether he would seek the kind of dubious attention that would be accorded to an author who alluded to such a subject. Nevertheless, this uncertainty over Hardy's intentions increases the overall ambiguity of the text.

Indeed, in the tone of doubleness that typifies the entire novel, Richard Taylor considers Manston's masculinity suspect. In appearance, his lips were "full and luscious to a surprising degrees, possessing a woman-like softness of curve", while he also has a "too-delicately beautiful face" (8-4, 109, 112). While his passion for Cytherea is presented as genuine, he leaves his new wife alone in a hotel on their wedding night, suggesting that his sexuality is "less potent than might be expected".144

Manston desires Cytherea, but he also wants power and control over her, resolving after the abortive marriage that he "will claim the young thing yet" (14-1, 227). The next time he appears in the novel, it is as a "panting and maddened desperado-blind to everything but the capture of his wife" (20-2, 310). Turning into a common criminal, he breaks into her lodging, cruelly "seizing one of her long brown tresses" to draw her into his arms (20-2, 311). When the hero Springrove enters to rescue her, "a desperate wrestle" ensues, with Manston trying to incapacitate him with a knife (20-2, 311).

144 Richard Taylor, Neglected 55.
Due to the contradictions surrounding his characterization, the reader is not fully able to accept Manston's final degeneration into a standard Gothic villain who has no compunction against using violence to secure Cytherea. Although his preternatural flawless skin and alluring power indicate a possible Satanic link, his ardour for Cytherea is presented as real and he is drawn to her by “an irresistible attraction, rather than inherent villainy”.  

While an initial lack of restraint caused him to impulsively kill his first wife, Manston does possess a certain amount of self-discipline, especially when it comes to saving his own life. When unable to disprove Owen's mistaken idea that his marriage to Cytherea is bigamous, he controls his rage by “pacing up and down the room till he had mastered it” (13-10, 223-4). Therefore, the insinuation that he lost all self-control in his pursuit of Cytherea, to the point of becoming “blind to everything”, rings false.

Manston also retains human frailties, admitting to being “troubled” and plaintively wondering why he is unhappy. Looking into a rainwater-butt, he sees

hundreds of thousands of minute living creatures [as they] sported and tumbled in its depth with every contortion that gaiety could suggest, perfectly happy, though consisting only of a head, or a tail, and all doomed to die within the twenty-four hours ... [He asks] 'Why shouldn’t I be happy through my little day too?’ (12-3, 178)

Manston longs for the sensual existence of the organisms, not understanding that there are various levels of life. “Hypersensitive of multiple scale, multiple time”, Hardy stresses that no life is of any greater or less significance than another. After all, he notes, “to insects the twelve months is an epoch,

to leaves a life, to tweeting birds a generation, to man a year”.\textsuperscript{145} Epheremons and other diminutive beings cavort on their own small scale and have unflagging enjoyment because they know “nothing of their brief glorification”, but man has “the unique problem [of] consciousness”.\textsuperscript{146} As self-aware creatures, humans cannot exist in a simple state of constant pleasure, although this is a fact Manston fails to recognize. He eventually resorts to violence in his attempt to enjoy the pleasures of an unwilling Cytherea.

Displaying the constraints imposed by the demands of a Gothic narrative, Hardy is unable to “adequately prepare” the reader for Manston’s descent into violence.\textsuperscript{147} His degradation exposes the artificiality of the stock Gothic villain. Though a criminal man with satanic traits, he is too interesting and complicated to serve as a standard Gothic villain. His character has to be manipulated, and no matter how implausible it seems, Manston’s passion for Cytherea must change into uncontrollable brutality. At the same time, this inexplicable alteration of his character enables Hardy to destabilize the concept of villainy by questioning the distinction between desire and depravity, the natural and the unnatural.

Bulaila asserts that, much like Ambrosio, Manston is a victim of “society’s moral conventions which cannot accommodate his healthy


\textsuperscript{146} Thomas Hardy, \textit{Tess of the d’Urrbervilles}, XXXII, 169; Beer, 252; and Thomas Hardy, \textit{LY}, 168.

\textsuperscript{147} Webster, 98.
sexuality". His repressed desire bursts out in the form of attempted rape. Richard Taylor claims that Miss Aldclyffe is also a victim of "repression and frustrated sexuality". She attempts to appease these feelings by showering Cytherea with excessive and inappropriate displays of affection, but unlike Manston, she can camouflage this depraved gratification under the guise of motherly love.

Catherine Neale notes that Miss Aldclyffe and Manston are "each sensually attracted to Cytherea". In possession of a special "flexibility and elasticity", this attribute of Cytherea first attracts Miss Aldclyffe's attention (1-3, 5). After observing the refinement and precision of her physical exit from the room where she has interviewed her, the older woman saw her as "a creature who could glide round my luxurious indolent body" (4-2, 45). Miss Aldclyffe is also intrigued by Cytherea's other qualities. She likes the way the young girl looks at her and feels pleasure at the presupposition that her fingers would be "light ... upon one's head and neck" (4-2, 45). Does Miss Aldclyffe view Cytherea only as a servant who, in a visually pleasing and graceful manner, would "glide round" her body, whilst performing the usual toilery duties of a lady's maid, or as someone who would give her personal pleasure?

The coachman who delivers Cytherea to Knapwater House on her first day of work considers Miss Aldclyffe to be "an extraordinary picture of womankind", but even her "quick temper" cannot fully explain why the previous seven lady's maids left her employment after only one night (5-1,

---

148 Bulaila, 71.

149 Richard Taylor, Neglected, 16.

49). Miss Aldclyffe’s disquieting behavior to Cytherea on her first evening goes some way to understanding why they left so quickly.

The older woman comes to Cytherea’s bedroom late at night and asks if she can sleep in her bed, imploring, “I want to stay with you Cythie” (6-1, 64). The instant they are in bed, she throws her arms around the young girl and presses “upon Cytherea’s lips a warm motherly salute”, asking her why she cannot return her kisses with the same earnestness (6-1, 65). Discovering through intense questioning that Cytherea has been previously kissed by a man, Miss Aldclyffe berates her for not being the innocent she thought she was, then entreats her to “love me more than you love him .... don’t let any man stand between us” (6-1, 67). Angry at Cytherea’s negative response and regarding her as damaged goods, the older woman feels a fool for “sipping at your mouth as if it were honey, because I fancied no wasting lover to know the spot” (6-1, 68). Her temper spent, Miss Aldclyffe reverts to her motherly role and requests that Cytherea put her “hands round your mamma’s neck” (6-1, 70).

Miss Aldclyffe acts like a lover, but Hardy begins and ends this episode by concentrating on the mother-daughter link, thereby channeling the lavish affection of Miss Aldclyffe into an acceptable ideology. Yet, Macmillan refused to publish *Desperate Remedies*, largely due to the “highly extravagant” scene “between Miss Aldclyffe and her new maid in bed”.¹⁵¹ There are unquestionably lesbian overtones in the older woman’s desire for physical contact, especially passionate kissing. The “sipping” of Cytherea’s lips is highly homoerotic, while her appeal to Cytherea to love her more than any man indicates an obsessive need to be the sole focus of attention.

¹⁵¹ Charles Morgan, 94.
The homosexual aspects of their relationship were not overt. *The Saturday Review* characterized Miss Aldclyffe as "a haughty but affectionate patroness", suggesting that they did not view the warmth shown by the older woman towards the younger one as aberrant.152 *The Athenæum* commented on the "occasional coarseness" of the novel but did not censure Hardy for alluding to unnatural relations.153 The servants note that a "secret bond of connection existed" between the two, but since they were "woman and woman, not woman and man", it appears transparently evident to them that two females would not be lovers (8-1, 94).

Some recent critics disagree with this complacent attitude. Joe Fisher argues against the assumption that "no lady would make love to another lady, so the scene must mean what it says, not what it implies".154 He insists that Hardy is testing the "gullibility" of the Victorian ideology. Judith Wittenberg allows that there is a "sexual component" in the words and embraces that the two woman share on the night before Mr. Aldclyffe's death.155 Hardy notes that upon hearing the news of her father's death, Miss Aldclyffe, held Cytherea "almost as a lover", but thereafter the homosexual implications are muted, as if the after effects of the old man's demise mitigate

---


154 Fisher, 27.

155 Judith Wittenberg, "Early Hardy Novels", 158.
her sexual interest in Cytherea (6-4, 78). Once Miss Aldclyffe learns that the young woman's late father was her former suitor, she comes to view her as the daughter she might have had, if her previous relationship with Mr. Graye had not been cut short. There is nothing inappropriate about Miss Aldclyffe's subsequent "doting fondness" for Cytherea (8-1, 93). Her sole objective in life becomes the arrangement of a union between her perceived daughter, Cytherea, and her son, Manston.

By inheriting the Knapwater estate, Miss Aldclyffe challenges the preconceived roles of Victorian women, as it allows her to adopt "a powerful patriarchal role", which enables her to recall her illegitimate son and coerce Cytherea into marrying him.\footnote{Neale, 118.} Still, a vague disquieting sense of impure intimacy pervades the relationship between the trio. Balaila argues that by bringing Manston and Cytherea together "through the agency of Mrs. Aldclyffe", Hardy introduces the theme of incest.\footnote{Bulaila, 67.} The older woman promotes the idea of a union between her former maid and Manston, but she regards Cytherea as her own would-be daughter. Through incest "the violent abolition of all family differences is achieved", rendering the difference between mother and surrogate daughter negligible.\footnote{Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred (1972), trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 74.}

Adding to their similarities, the two female protagonists share their same unusual forename with a Greek goddess. (To readers versed in the classics, the names of the main characters would provide an early clue to the novel's denouement.) As legend has it, the Phoenicians who colonized the island of Cytherea introduced the worship of the Greek goddess of love,
Aphrodite, and re-christened her "Cytheraea", after their new home. The mythical divinity had a magic transfixing power which was presumed to be due to the belt of mandrake roots she wore, and she also had a son called Æneas.

Like the goddess, Miss Aldclyffe has a son with the name of Æneas, while Cytherea Graye's linkage to the mythical divinity is achieved through mandrake imagery. The young Cytherea identifies with the plant early in the novel, although she does not wear a belt of roots like the goddess of love. However, mandrakes were traditionally believed to be a powerful aphrodisiac, so her association with them provides one possible reason for Manston's erotic attraction to her.

Manston's dual role as son/fascinated lover further binds the females together. As Cytherea Gray and Cytherea Aldclyffe become increasingly indistinguishable, the threat of incest emerges in a monstrously Gothic manner. A person in the throes of passion will willingly accept a substitute if "the object to which it was originally attached remains inaccessible".159 With Cytherea unavailable to Manston, Miss Aldclyffe becomes an alternative object of desire for him. This idea is never developed; indeed, such a plot complication would never have been conceived by Hardy. Nevertheless, in his unconscious allusion to incest he unleashes "a dark mixture of unnamable things" that, like the Gothic, gestures to the unknown, the inexplicable.160

---

159 Girard, 35.

160 Girard, 75.
Hardy consciously experimented with a combination of traditional and modern Gothic themes and images in *Desperate Remedies*. He created a Gothic plot, concentrating on the theme of the inescapable past, with a mystery that is only explained at the end. He effectively exploited the suggestive supernatural elements inherent in Gothic fiction. There are eerie and ominous sounds, ghostly images, and macabre nightmare images. These conventional tropes are only vacuously Gothic though, because they fail to gesture towards further possibilities. Instead, they simply create "undue sensationalism or distraction from the essential plot".161

Cytherea is the traditional passive heroine of Gothic fiction, threatened by Manston, the male interloper. However, unlike the classic Radcliffian heroine, she experiences feelings of desire. Similarly, Manston is more complex than the standard Gothic villain. His final descent into depravity lacks credence, but it also reveals the limits of the Gothic genre. At the same time, his degeneration gives Hardy the opportunity to explore the difference between natural and unnatural behaviour.

The novel offers many alternatives to the "contracted state of sexual relations" with ambiguous allusions to bigamy, adultery, illegitimacy, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality.162 The romantic love that exists between Cytherea and Springrove is evident early on in the story, but then it disappears, re-emerging only in the last chapter. As in traditional Gothic fiction, the novel concludes with marriage, but the union of Cytherea and Springrove, based on love and affection, clashes with the sexually subversive tone of the novel.

161 Goldstein, 89.

Despite the manifold Gothic vehicles present in the novel, there is little attempt to merge Gothic images with serious Gothic themes. The storm scene is expressive of the Gothic, as terror and awe lead to a sublime environment that expands Cytherea's consciousness. However, Hardy appears to be unsure of where to go with the Gothic. He suggests that Manston is able to harness supernatural powers, but there is no mention of the numinous; no allusion to another reality beyond human comprehension.

_Desperate Remedies_ was a necessary first step for Hardy. At the time of its writing, he was just formulating his ideas of the Gothic, and the novel served as a template for Gothic atmospheres, images, tropes, and themes. He had to learn how to utilize standard Gothic modes of representation before he could express his sense of the Gothic.
CHAPTER THREE

GOTHIC INTEGRATION IN A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

Desperate Remedies and Under the Greenwood Tree were published anonymously, but Hardy openly claimed authorship of A Pair of Blue Eyes. His third published novel was the first to be serialized, running in Tinsley’s Magazine from September 1872 to July 1873. Released in book form in late 1873, the Pall Mall Gazette praised it as “charmingly written”, but “undeniably sad”. John Hutton of the Spectator agreed, “we would willingly have compounded for a happier conclusion”.163

F.B. Pinion maintains that the story is initially “a comedy of jealous lovers”, turned into “solemn tragedy”.164 However, Elfride can not be


164 Pinion, Companion, 25.
considered a tragic figure, especially as she disappears from the novel in the last four chapters, only reappearing as "a coffined corpse" in the concluding pages. Casagrande contends that the author "penetrated to the tragic substrata of comedy" in the novel, and indeed; Hardy asserted that tragedy "always underlies comedy if you only scratch it deep enough".

Millgate insists that the tragedy and humour in the novel are not integrated and have no relationship to each other. Under the pressure of serialization, he notes that the novel becomes a "rag-bag of information, ideas, [and] descriptive vignettes", with little cohesion. As is customary in most of Hardy's novels, A Pair of Blue Eyes features highly improbable incidents and contrived coincidences. Mrs. Jethway's haunting and "inexorable presence at crucial moments" is implausible, while Knight's connections to Elfride as step-relative and reviewer of her novel are unlikely. His roles as mentor, friend, and ultimate rival to Stephen are also amazingly coincidental. Stephen himself is conveniently sent off to India one third of the way through the novel, and improbably, upon his return, both he and Knight travel on the same railway coach to Endelstow to claim Elfride. In a contrived manner, the young woman is in a separate carriage of their train, but in a coffin, as death has already claimed her. Despite the improbabilities and the novel's lack of synthesis, in specific scenes

---

166 CLIII, letter to J.B. Priestly, 8 Aug. 1926, 38; and Peter Casagrande, Unity in Hardy's Novels: 'Repetitive Symmetries' (London: Macmillan, 1982), 115.
167 Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (London: Bodley Head, 1971), 67. Subsequent references will be abbreviated as His Career.
168 Richard Taylor, Neglected, 53.
Hardy effectively integrates images with themes and further develops his skill at allying landscape with mood.

Ronald Blythe asserts that although Hardy has difficulties trying to stretch out a plot that contains the emotions and impulses of a ballad, the novel reflects the disturbed reality that characterizes folk ballads.\textsuperscript{169} Although Hardy makes no direct references to the Gothic genre, he claims the novel is set in a "region of dream and mystery".\textsuperscript{170} Some of the action takes place in urban areas, but the novel's main setting is the fictional isolated district of West Endelstow, located on the south coast of England. (The location is based on St. Juliet, a small village near Boscastle where the young author first met his future wife.) The novel contains mysterious events and grotesque characters, while the symbols, images, and sounds of death resonate throughout the text, intruding even into the most incongruous places. Intimate talks are conducted on top of tombs, and both humorous and serious conversations take place in the Luxellian family burial vault.

The plot depicts a young girl threatened by a shadowy villainess. The heroine wishes to erase the very recent past, but "the vengeance-seeking mother of her first admirer" plans to publicize her dubious past.\textsuperscript{171} She first informs the hero, who is the girl's fiancée, and he breaks off their engagement. However, he is able to suppress the potentially scandalous knowledge concerning his former sweetheart and stop it from being disseminated.

\textsuperscript{169} Ronald Blythe, "Introduction", in Thomas Hardy, \textit{A Pair of Blue Eyes} (1873) (London: Macmillan 'New Wessex', 1975, reprint, 1986), xv.

\textsuperscript{170} Thomas Hardy, \textit{EY}, 299.

\textsuperscript{171} Blythe, xv.
Hardy uses the Gothic villainess, Mrs. Jethway, as a symbol of the fatal past, which can never die. In a more skillful integration of themes with images, he also utilizes Knight's face-to-face encounter with a fossilized trilobite to expose the vastness of the past. Graveyards, coffins, and crypts also serve as tangible evidence of the inexorable passage of time. A haunting figure, a prehistoric fossil, and the trappings of death represent the inescapable, immense, and physical aspects of the past: a past that reminds man of his own mortality and highlights the fact that neither death nor elapsed time can be changed or evaded.

The maturation in the union of ideas and images coincides with an improvement in the visual sharpness of Hardy's scenes. There is an austere and sublime beauty in the "starved herbage" and foaming ocean that surround the 'Cliff without a Name' (21, 169). A new tactile acuity is also displayed, with the tempestuous wind and sea serving as a reflection and expression of Knight's erotic desire. Furthermore, when Knight appears to be facing certain death, in an alliance of landscape and mood, the deep blue sea and surf metamorphose into funereal black and white.

As in Hardy's first novel, the presence of supernatural powers is implied, with even Elfride possessing an amount of unusual prescience. The enigmatic Mrs. Jethway, "flitting through the shadows of the story", haunts the graveyard where her son is buried "almost ghoulishly". This strange obsessive aspect of her character reflects the Victorian Gothic concern with abnormal behaviour and mental aberrations. Like a conventional Gothic villainess, she seems to possess unusual abilities and knowledge. Creating an aura of mystery, Hardy alternately promotes and discounts the

---

172 Pinion, Hardy Companion, 25.
possibility that the widow has special inexplicable powers. However, unconsciously echoing Austen and Maturin, he implies that misperception and the disturbed psyche are the sources of most Gothic terrors in the novel.

Mirroring the era's divisions over religious beliefs, Hardy's first sustained criticism of Christianity occurs in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, as he compares the decaying grounds of the church to the sublime and powerful forces of Nature. The latter inspires feelings of awe and wonderment, but the former only generates a sense of apathy or indifference. The West Endelstow place of worship is the emblem of a weak and dying authority, while the indolent representative of the church, Mr. Swancourt, further symbolizes the hypocrisy and spiritual barrenness of the Christian religion.

The principal action of the novel begins when a young man with a "handsome boyish face" arrives to attend to the drawing and measuring necessary to restore Endelstow Church. Elfride's widowed father "habitually neglects her" and she leads a "lonely and narrow life" (10, 76; 11, 80). Therefore, it is not surprising that she develops an infatuation with the young male visitor. Stephen is "a youth in appearance, and not yet a man in years", while Elfride is still a girl in a woman's body (2, 7). Although she is nearly twenty years old, she only possesses the social skills of a fifteen-year old. Yearning to be loved, her adolescent love is "rooted in inexperience and nourished by seclusion".173 Her father's opposition to their courtship and the seemingly hopeless nature of the situation increases her ardour.

---

173 Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) (London: Macmillan 'New Wessex', 1975, reprint, 1986), 10, 76. All subsequent references to *A Pair of Blue Eyes* will be parenthetical, with chapter and page number.
Millgate comments on the “distractingly provocative behavior” Elfride exhibits while Stephen attempts to do his work in the church. Left alone with him, “what could she do but come close – so close that a minute arc of her skirt touched his foot – and ask him how he was getting on with his sketches” (4, 19). “Was she flirting?” (20, 151). This is the question Knight later asks himself, but he reasons that her “little artful ways which partly make up ingenuousness” are genuine. “Simplicity verges on coquetry” and Elfride has a simple childish need to be the centre of attention (20, 151).

When her new stepmother introduces her to the London summer scene’s practice of taking an evening airing in a carriage, she is gratified to see “several ladies and gentlemen looking at her” (14, 110). On one of their rides, the new Mrs. Swancourt unexpectedly encounters Henry Knight, her nephew, and invites him to visit them in Endelstow. When he appears at the village, Elfride is piqued by the thought that he does not seem to think she is worth talking to. In a successful bid to gain his notice, she deliberately walks on the outside walls of the church tower, but stumbles and falls towards the inner edge. Shaken by the close proximity of the “Shadow of Death”, Elfride becomes “sick and pale as a corpse”, an image later reflected in the “pale countenance” of Mrs. Jethway’s body (18, 31). In a foreshadowing of Knight’s arrested fall off the ‘Cliff with No Name’, Elfride shows prescience, as she tells him of her premonition that “something similar to that scene is again to be common to us both” (18, 131).

Gothic tropes of death and reminders of the past surround Elfride and suggest that all of her romances are doomed. She and Stephen confess their love for each other while sitting on Felix Jethway’s tomb in the graveyard.

---

174 Millgate, Biography 143.
Near the end of her affair with Knight, he is shocked by Elfride’s revelation that she has “a lover in the tomb and a lover on it” (32, 257). He gazes at the church graveyard, where the impassive grave of Felix Jethway “stood staring them in the face like an avenging ghost” (32, 257). Minutes later, the ghostly figure of Mrs. Jethway is laid out upon this same tomb. In a highly ironical moment, the widow is crushed to death by the crumbling church tower and carried to her dead son’s final resting place. Even in death Mrs. Jethway, the symbol of the fatal past, is able to avenge herself and destroy Elfride’s chance for happiness with Knight.

While Mrs. Jethway is a conventional Gothic villainess, Elfride is not a traditional Gothic heroine. In typical Gothic novels, such as Radcliffe’s Udolpho, the heroine is usually an naïve, irreproachable, and compliant young woman who reflects the ideology of the eighteenth-century. In the archetypal plot, she is threatened by a male stranger and spirited away to unfamiliar territory. After undergoing frightening trials and viewing alleged supernatural apparitions, she is rescued and restored to her mannered world, where all unusual experiences are shown to have logical explanations.

Elfride is a naïve girl, but she is not irreproachable. Aside from her poor judgment in accompanying Stephen to London, she actively rebels against parental authority—a common trait of post-Radcliffe Gothic heroines—and in a determined manner, refuses to submit to her father’s dictate to forget Stephen. Yet, on her way to St. Launce, where she will take a train to meet him, she passively decides to go “whither the horse should take her—back to Endelstow or towards the station (11, 87). Unwilling to accept responsibility, she persists in a “dreamy fancy that to-day’s action was not her own”, until she reaches London, where the clang and clamour of Paddington station
rouse her (11, 86). In one of her few active moments of resolution, she chooses to return to Endelstow.

In a variation on the common Gothic plot, Elfride is endangered, not by a male interloper, but by a vengeful woman armed with an archaic moral code. The widow’s ability and desire to widely disseminate her knowledge of Elfride’s indiscretion is a very real threat. Although guilty of nothing more than a lapse in judgment, Elfride is condemned by the medieval laws of Christianity. She has spent the night in the company of a man and has not married him. According to the prevailing moral code, this behaviour is base, immoral, and scandalous. Mrs. Jethway, a “crazed, forlorn” woman, who, according to Saxelby, “lived with the object of doing her [Elfride] an injury”, manages to deny the young woman’s chance of happiness with Knight by disclosing her past actions to him. He cancels their engagement, but does not disclose the true reason to anyone. Thus the heroine is restored to her proper place.

In a subversion of Gothic convention, Elfride’s return to her original status is not a positive development. Her family treats her with silent reproach, implicitly blaming her for her failure to secure Knight. In the face of her stepmother’s “cold politeness” and her father’s harshness, Elfride becomes more compliant, like a conventional Gothic heroine (40, 307). “Surrender[ing] in the face of despair”177, she placates them and regains their conditional love by marrying Lord Luxellian. A better match than Knight in terms of lineage and money, he is also a “splendid courtier” who gives her “the beautifulllest presents” (40, 307). He knows she will be “the most tender


177 Bayer-Berenbaum, 51.
mother" to his two young daughters and hopes that she will do better than his late wife, who had shown "an inclination not to please him by giving him a boy" (40, 307; 5, 29). However, she does not love the nobleman.

Transforming into a submissive heroine, Elfride's new role reflects nineteenth-century ideology. As a mother and wife, she is expected to care for the existing children and produce a male heir. In "gross inversion" of archetypal Gothic "endings of reward through marriage", Elfride suffers a fatal miscarriage in attempting to fulfill the child-bearing expectations thrust upon her.177

Mrs. Jethway indirectly helps to kill Elfride. As a one-dimensional Gothic villainess, she displays little of the ambivalence or doubleness that characterizes Manston in Desperate Remedies. In the matter of writing, Hardy believed "human nature must never be made abnormal",178 but Mrs. Jethway is a strange individual who exhibits aberrant behaviour. Often found in the vicinity of her son's grave, Taylor likens the older woman to a haunting "Gothic voyeuse".179 Described not in terms of shape, size, or hair colour, her main distinguishing feature is her grotesque "red and scaly eyelids and glistening eyes"(12, 90). These same eyes are "steadily regarding" Elfride at every opportunity (27, 232).

The widow sees the opportunity to avenge herself when she observes Elfride and Stephen disembarking from the early morning train at St. Launce. The couple arrive shortly after dawn, and if not for the presence of Mrs. Jethway at the station, Elfride's overnight absence would have passed

177 Vince Newey, "Thomas Hardy and the Forms of Making", 221.

178 Thomas Hardy, EL, 194.

179 Richard Taylor, Neglected, 53.
unnoticed. The impetus for the widow's early morning journey to the railway station is unknown, unless she possesses some foreknowledge that allowed her to catch the couple in a compromising position. After all, it takes Elfride more than ninety minutes on horseback to travel from her house to a hotel near the station. The older woman would have had to cover a similar distance on foot in order to be present at the train platform shortly after sunrise. She must have started walking extremely early in the morning, unless, as Hardy implies, Mrs. Jethway uses some special powers that enable her to discover harmful information about Elfride.

Despite already holding harmful information about Elfride's dubious past, Mrs. Jethway continues to stalk the young woman. Brooks comments on her "unmotivated appearances", while Taylor contends that her "inexorable presence at crucial points is contrived", with her "dark form" haunting the railway station, the churchyard, and the sea passage.\(^\text{181}\) Undeniably, the widow appears on the train platform and frequents her son's grave, but the assumption that the widow pursues Elfride on water is questionable. Planning to sail with her stepmother and Knight from London to Plymouth, Elfride sees "a veiled woman walk aboard .... she was clothed in black silk, and carried a dark shawl upon her arm" (9, 231). Disturbed, she immediately concludes that this woman is Mrs. Jethway, who "seemed to haunt her like a shadow" (29, 231). Upon further thought, she considers it unlikely that the woman is deliberately following her and presumes that she is traveling to Southhampton, "her original home", which she often visited in her "restlessness" (29, 231). Surmising that "she chose water-transit with the idea of saving expense Elfride fails to note that there is no reason for the

\(^{181}\) Jean Brooks, 150; and Richard Taylor, \textit{Neglected}, 33.
woman to even be in London (29, 231). She could travel from Endelstow to Southampton without venturing north into the capital city. Coming up to London means she has to retrace her steps south to Plymouth, paying an additional fare, which in her straitened state, is unlikely.

Even Elfride’s claims of seeing “Mrs. Jethway, or her double ... sitting at the stern”, are doubtful because of her flawed sense of perception. As darkness closes in, she becomes convinced that “her enemy” is nearby (27, 232). Going to sleep in a below-deck berth, Elfride is awakened by

   a sense of whispering in her ear.
   ‘You are well on with him, I can see. Well, provoke me now,
   but I shall win, you will find.’
   Elfride became quite awake and terrified. She knew the words,
   if real, could be only those of one person, and that person the widow
   Jethway. But she might have been dreaming only...
   Mrs. Jethway might have stealthily come in by some means and
   retreated again, or else have entered an empty berth next to Snewson’s.
   The fear that this was the case increased Elfride’s perturbation, till it
   assumed the dimensions of a certainty. (29, 233)

At first, Elfride believes she is imagining these threatening words, but in the gloom of the night, her fear increases until the half-formed idea that Mrs. Jethway was the speaker becomes “a certainty”. Hardy affirmed that “apprehension is a great element in imagination. It is a semi-madness, which sees enemies” all around.182

Did Mrs. Jethway contrive to get into the next-door berth, or did she sneak into Elfride’s own cabin to interfere with her sleep? Or, as Norma Goldstein postulates, was it all a dream fostered by her “sense of guilt for not telling Knight everything about her past”?183 Is she unconsciously punishing

182 Thomas Hardy, EL, 265.
183 Goldstein, 70.
punishing herself for the "intense agony of reproach" she saw in Stephen's eyes, when he found out she had deserted him (27, 214)? Is Elfride's worry that Mrs. Jethway might divulge hurtful knowledge manifesting itself in a nightmare?

When the steamer reaches Plymouth in the daylight, Elfride's fright of the night before seems unwarranted. There is no sign of the older woman anywhere, suggesting that, like a wraith, she has left the boat unobserved, or was never there in the first place. Hardy avoids any definitive explanation, preferring to promote a typically Gothic aura of mystery and uncertainty.

In another technique that earlier Gothic authors employed, Hardy allies landscape with mood by creating specific visual scenes to reflect mental states. This interplay between environment and emotion is central in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, especially in the powerful scenes involving the 'Cliff without a Name', where the desire of Elfride and Knight is set against the tempestuous, tumultuous atmosphere surrounding the cliff. Hardy approaches the erotic in a direct manner, displaying a new tactile acuity, as the couple's passion is prefigured in the erotic images of the "thrust[ing]" wind and the sea, rubbing its restless flank" against the rocky cliff (22, 173).

While Knight literally hangs onto life by his fingertips, the sublimity of the atmosphere and the power of the natural surroundings emerge. The landscape surrounding the 'Cliff without a Name'--the "haggard cliffs" with the "outlying knots of starved herbage" and the foaming ocean of "white border to a black sea"--has an austere beauty (22, 170; 21, 169; 22, 173). The deep blue sea and surf metamorphose into an ominous black and white--Knight's "funereal pall and its edging" (22, 173). As he continues to clutch a tuft of grass, the inverted cascade of a summer shower ascends upwards, hitting him feet first. Even though he understands the scientific rationale
behind the rain’s movement, it still has “a torturing effect”, as Nature appears to contravene the laws of gravity (22, 172). His distressed state of mind distorts his sense of perception, as the soft summer rain and temperate temperature seem to transform into lashing arrows of cold water (22, 173). As Richard Taylor remarks, the neutrality of Nature becomes as “frightening as active hostility”.183 Meanwhile, the sky above Knight stretches away to infinity, emphasizing his sense of confinement:

The cliff formed the inner face of the segment of a hollow cylinder, having the sky for a top and the sea for a bottom, which enclosed the bay to the extent of nearly a semicircle [and] he could see the vertical face curving round on each side of him. He looked far down the facade, and realized more thoroughly how it threatened him. (22, 170)

Rather than viewing an endless open expanse of sky and sea, Knight discerns only the walls of the cliff closely crowding in upon him, like a semi-circular prison, with no means of escape. Once he realizes the seriousness of his predicament, Nature appears to take on a distinctly malevolent form: “unfriendly” and “pitiless”, it leaves him “spitted upon a rock” (22, 170, 172-3). Just as the gods punished Prometheus for his audacious action, Nature is the “cosmic agency” smiting Knight for his presumptuous attitude (22, 172).

The realization that his own death appears inevitable leads Knight to “contemplate the Dark Valley and the unknown future beyond”. The narrative voice interrupts, informing the reader that into “these speculations we will not follow” (22, 174). Although some critics see this obscurity as a fault, Hardy was often intentionally vague about a character’s inner turmoil,

183 Richard Taylor, Neglected, 41.
considering that “to indulge in psychological analysis ... in a crisis of an emotional scene is fatal”.\textsuperscript{185}

Instead, like Gothic writers, Hardy used atmospheric images to depict Knight’s varying emotions of terror, wonder, and amazement. While he was not necessarily conscious of the source, Hardy utilized Burkean tenets when introducing terror as a source of the sublime. Burke noted that when someone or something has the “power of inflicting either [pain or death] it is impossible to be entirely free from terror”.\textsuperscript{186} Furthermore, “we are more struck at looking down from a precipice”, height being less imposing than depth.\textsuperscript{187} The cliff was potentially deadly to Knight and his life was certainly in danger, so that was one source of fear. Looking two hundred yards down at “the sheer perpendicularity” of the cliff at half-tide, and noting the blackness of the bluff constituted an “added terror” for Knight (21, 167). The colour and altitude of the cliff engenders terror and awe, which is a principal source of the sublime.

In addition, Knight’s encounter with the fossilized remains of a diminutive, long extinct creature is sublime. In fact, “the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime”, especially “when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organized beings”.\textsuperscript{188} Clinging to the side of the cliff, Knight contemplates “animal life”, while the dead stone eyes of the long dead Trilobite stare at him.


\textsuperscript{186} Burke, 59.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{188} Burke, 66.
The expansion of reality and consciousness, engendered by feelings of sublimity, is expressive of the Gothic. Transcending the present, Knight gains an extraordinary glimpse into the beginning of the world. His consciousness also reaches towards the future destruction of humankind; to a realm than cannot be explained by knowledge or language. "Face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously", he follows evolution in a reverse fashion (22, 171). His imagination amplified and his limited scope of reality augmented, he thinks of cavemen, preceded by the dinosaurs, and before them, birds with huge bills and large "swinish creatures". Even further back, he pictures in his mind the more grotesque forms of life with "sinister crocodilian outlines ... and other uncouth shapes", huge lizards, dragon-like things, reptiles that fly, and "fishy beings of lower development". He recalls the prehistoric past, with the inchoate "uncouth shapes" and primordial "fishy beings" that existed eons ago (22, 171).

Through all the billions of years of evolution, creatures lived and died; from the Archeozoic period with its ocean algae, to the Paleozoic, where amphibians emerged from the sea and reptiles came into being, to the Mesozoic, where cold-blooded dinosaurs took over, only to be replaced by mammals, and finally the Cenozoic, when the first humanoids appeared (22, 171). The small Tribolite, dead and extinct, still represents "the modern condition of things", because mankind too will eventually vanish, leaving behind only fossilized remains (22, 171). Ruminating on his own mortality, while Knight believes "his death would be a deliberate loss to the earth of good material", on the evolutionary time scale, his life and death will not even register (22, 174). He is only an infinitesimal part of mankind, which in turn is a minute part of the universe. Man is simply "another facet of nature and not the pinnacle of a creation which existed for his comfort and
honour. His existence is no more and no less important than that of the Tribolite.

Reaching back towards the past and forwards to the future, the Gothic gestures to the existence of an inexplicable, unknowable power. Christianity also embraces a higher order and can induce sublime feelings of passion, awe, and reverence. It provides for an augmentation of life, insisting on the existence of a benevolent god and a heavenly arena where the spirit resides in eternity. However, this doctrine and other dogmatic Christian beliefs were untenable to many Victorians. Amid a growing disbelief, discontent with organized religion increased. Hardy uses the figure of Mr. Swancourt to highlight one of the reasons behind this dissatisfaction.

As the representative of Christianity, the rector of Endelstow is a less than imposing figure. He has his share of physical infirmities—quite deaf, he also suffers from gout—but most dispiriting is the air of spiritual barrenness surrounding him, which seems indicative of the church in general. He thinks nothing of breaking the second commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain", by swearing at his only child, "'Od plague you' ", when she displeases him (1, 3). After wasting "a good deal of his [first] wife's money", his second marriage is one of financial convenience, suggesting that he is more interested in the material than the spiritual (26, 202). In addition, he is so indifferent and indolent about his post that he often lets his daughter write his sermons.

The vicar represents the hypocrisy and decay of Christianity, while the physical church highlights its decline. The West Endelstow place of worship is not a fine structure or a sublime ruin that can serve as a visible symbol and

188 Blythe, xviii.
icon of a divine force; instead it is an emblem of a dying power. Described in stark terms, the edifice is

lonely … black and bare, cutting up into the sky from the profile of a hill. It had a square mouldering tower, owning neither battlement nor pinnacle, and seemed a monolithic termination, of one substance with the ridge. (3, 15)

Standing on a gloomy location, the structure lacks any decorative features or magnificent summit. It has only an uninspired tower that is slowly wearing away, with the word “mouldering” giving the impression of decline and decay, and “termination” signifying inevitable dissolution. Built on the slant of a hill, the church is subsumed into the mountain and thus has no recognizable apex or individuality. Located on desolate ground, with no tangible material presence, the decrepit building reflects the general spiritual bleakness Hardy saw in Christianity.

Paradoxically, the graveyard is a place of sombre beauty. Set on the top of the hill above the church, it contains

wild, untutored grass, diversifying the forms of the mounds it covered,—themselves irregularly shaped with no eye to effect; ... Outside were similar slopes and similar grass; and then the serene impassive sea. (4, 19)

Hardy interjects an ironic narrative voice, noting that the West Endelstow graveyard seems a “delightful place to be buried in” (4, 18). The grass softens the uneven protrusions caused by the coffins, and the graves themselves are not set out in neat rows or encircled by sticks or stones. The only adornment is “Nature in her most negligent attire”, with the wild grass and sea reaching out to the horizon, indicating an expansion of the mind and spirit (25, 197). There is an indication that the grave inhabitants are experiencing what
Marshall Brown terms "a mysterious residual freedom of the spirit [that] arises from the petrified corpse".190 The graveyard of West Endelstow and the underground residents appear to possess a vital energy not usually associated with the trappings of death.

Hardy introduces the conventional Gothic environment of a graveyard and, defying expectation, imbues it with sense of grandeur. Nature enhances the majesty of the burial ground and produces sublime emotions. These feelings of awe and amazement amplify the soul and enlarge the imagination, enabling the mind to acknowledge the existence of the numinous. In utilizing Gothic tropes and atmosphere and merging them with significant themes, Hardy offers other possibilities that verge on truth. While death is the "the ultimate loss of form", it is not the end.191 In its pursuit of the infinite and its "drive for inclusiveness" the Gothic is drawn to life and death.192 Christianity promises heavenly life, but the Gothic offers limitless opportunities.

In contrast, the cemetery located in the estate of Lord Luxellian has "carefully tended" grass and "the few graves visible were mathematically exact in shape and smoothness" (25, 197). The power and magnificence of Nature is constrained by the fettered and encumbered arrangement of the graves, negating any sense of the sublime. Hardy is protesting against constraint in all forms, including what he saw as the constricting rules of Christianity; the medieval laws that condemn a young girl like Elfride, who is guilty only of a naïve mistake.

190 M. Brown, 277.
191 Bayer-Berenbaum, 144.
192 Ibid.
In the final reckoning Elfride gains and loses four suitors; her quasi-sweetheart, Felix Jethway, fiancées Stephen and Knight, and her husband Lord Luxellian, although her departure from him is unexpected. Millgate postulates that Death is her fifth and final successful suitor, as the novel concludes with death and its associated symbols. There is the shiny coffin plate, coronet, and the new casket, "bright and un tarnished in the slightest degree", across which the lord morbidly flings himself in a paroxysm of grief (40, 308). Yet, the glittering coffin inscription and the flawless box that contains Elfride's body will not remain unblemished for long. In a reminder that the passage of time cannot be delayed, even the newest coffin in the sealed crypt, that of previous Lady Luxellian, has "lost some of its lustre", while

those of an earlier period showed bare wood, with a few tattered rags dangling therefrom. Earlier still the wood lay in fragments on the floor of the niche, and the coffin consisted of naked lead alone; whilst in the case of the very oldest, even the lead was bulging and cracking in pieces, revealing to the curious eye a heap of dust within (40, 308)

Elfride remains only one of a long line of Luxellians and her death is of little consequence in the general passage of time. Soon her coffin will suffer the same degradation as those of former generations.

Elfride's death is at odds with Hardy's earlier association of death with grandeur. "Less an unknotting than an axe-stroke", the conclusion shows a lack of preparation that cannot be completely blamed on Hardy's unfamiliarity with the demands and limitations of serialization. At the

192 Millgate, His Career, 73.

193 Richard Taylor, Nelgected, 75.
same time, her demise further subverts the Gothic formula, as the heroine is not expected to die.

As in his first novel, many of the episodes in A Pair of Blue Eyes are "inadequately integrated with other elements of the narrative".\textsuperscript{195} The merger of Gothic convention with serious Gothic themes meets with limited success. He effectively utilizes the haunting figure of Mrs. Jethway to symbolize the fatal past, and uses the obvious tropes of graves and tombs to signify death. However, he still uses gratuitous Gothic gimmicks, and employs a grotesque Gothic villainess to propel the plot forward.

The scenes from 'The Cliff without a Name' are some of his best, although he does not explicitly connect feelings of terror and sublimity with expansion. Through Knight's experience on the cliff, Hardy is able to introduce the idea of an expansion, which is expressive of the Gothic. Still, he remains unsure of how to consistently use Gothic conventions to express his own sense of the Gothic.

Hardy wrote A Pair of Blue Eyes at the age of thirty-two, and his private experience had not yet fully provided the "philosophy which he used to control his later novels".\textsuperscript{196} In the next decade and a half, his vision matured, and in future novels he was able use Gothic conventions to allude to the possible credence of a numinous power and real belief.

\textsuperscript{195} Wittenberg, "Early Hardy Novels", 156.

\textsuperscript{196} Blythe, xv.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE WOODLANDERS: AN AMALGAM OF SIMPLE AND SOPHISTICATED GOTHIC CONVENTIONS

Penned at different dates, *The Woodlanders* is distinct from all of Hardy's other novels. He conceived and partially wrote "a woodland story" in the waning months of 1874, but set aside the draft in the new year.\(^{196}\) He did not resume work on the manuscript until more than ten years later, and in the interim, published six other novels.

Hardy suspended the initial writing of his forest story in early 1875, largely due to the success of his previous novel, *Far From the Madding*  

\(^{196}\) Thomas Hardy, *EL*, 135.
Crowd. It was serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine* from January to December 1874, while the book was released in its entirety in November, one month before the conclusion was printed in the monthly. Encouraged by the generally favourable reviews of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Leslie Stephen—the editor of the *Cornhill*—requested another story from Hardy as soon as possible. The author agreed, but instead of continuing in a pastoral vein, he decided to set his next story in the city.  

While the success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* enabled Hardy to marry Emma in September of 1874, it also prompted him to stop work on his unfinished woodland manuscript and proceed in “a new and untried direction”. He wanted to avoid being classified as a rural or regional writer; the fate that ultimately befell his friend and fellow poet, William Barnes. Moreover, he had no desire to write “forever about sheepfarming”, so in January of 1875, he started *The Hand of Ethelberta*, an ironic comedy of manners based in London. He wrote five more novels in the next decade and in 1885 returned his attention to the original draft of what was to be entitled *The Woodlanders*. The first of its twelve installments was published in the May 1886 issue of *Macmillan’s Magazine*, although Hardy did not actually complete the novel until February of 1887. The entire book was then rushed into print in March of 1887, one month before the last serialized section appeared.

---

198 Thomas Hardy, *EL*, 135.
199 Ibid., 173.
200 Ibid.
Due to the disparity in the book's writing dates, the novel contains an amalgam of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Gothic conventions, showing how Hardy changed his utilization of Gothic elements over a ten year period. The Gothic villain and heroine retain many of their typical traits, but new dimensions are added to their characters. Gothic themes remain constant, but the manner in which they are presented is altered. Certain tropes that had not changed since Walpole's time are reshaped.

The *Woodlanders*' plot and characters are reminiscent of the Gothic conventions Hardy employed in his earlier novels, with crude villains and standard story-lines. In a typically Gothic plot, Grace is the de facto heroine of the novel, endangered by the mysterious stranger, Edred Fitzpiers. An interloper in Little Hintock, his mere presence arouses suspicions, but Mrs. Charmond—another newcomer—presents a greater danger to the community. As the imperious lady of the manor, her actions and attitudes disrupt the pattern of village life and jeopardize the life of the resident hero, Giles.

Grace and Fitzpiers are modified Gothic characters. Unlike the typical Radcliffian heroine, Grace is not entirely pleased to leave her finishing school environment and return to her place of birth, with an attendant reduction of status. Her return to Little Hintock unsettles and disappoints her, as she has become an outsider in her native land. Fitzpiers is also a stranger, but his presence in the village is more threatening.

J.O. Bailey argues that the doctor's character was created in 1874, maintaining that it is "hardly conceivable" that an initial draft of the novel was written "without having someone perform the function in the plot that
Fitzpiers does in the published work". William Rutland contends that the doctor was constructed in 1885, in the later incarnation of *The Woodlanders*, because at this time, Hardy was studying and thinking about the same kind of philosophies that the doctor espouses in the novel. Bailey is correct, in that Fitzpiers initially performs a simple role as a stock villain. However, Rutland is not wrong either, for as the novel progresses, Hardy enlarges the doctor's interests and revises his manner, allowing him to transcend his original diabolical role. Fitzpiers is an amalgam, with dual production dates of 1874 and 1885.

The traditional Gothic plot devices of *The Woodlanders* include mysterious actions, seductions, secret encounters, and improbable deaths. Fitzpiers has several private liaisons with different women before his marriage and, after his union with Grace, embarks on an affair with Mrs. Charmond. Later in the novel, Mrs. Charmond and Grace share a close embrace, mirroring the lesbian incident between Cytherea Graye and Miss Aldclyffe in *Desperate Remedies*. Fitzpiers and Grace have clandestine meetings after Mrs. Charmond is implausibly killed by a spurned lover on the continent. (Page wryly chuckles that the use of "a passionate globetrotter from South Carolina is a fairly desperate remedy".202) Millgate points to the "unexpectedness of such plot devices in a work written so late in Hardy's career", suggesting that these elements of the novel were written in 1874.203

Suggestive of a later conception, Hardy handles thematic concerns differently. In contrast to many of his other novels, time is not a haunting

---

201 Bailey, 1165; and Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (Blackwell: Oxford, 1938), 212-3; qtd. in Bailey, 1165.

202 Page, "Hardy's Deathbeds", 104.

203 Millgate, His Career, 249.
presence in *The Woodlanders*. The past still intrudes into the present—a former promise vexes Mr. Melbury and Grace has difficulties reconciling her recent life with her present—but there are no mysterious or potentially scandalous events hidden in the past. The conventional Gothic tropes of crypts, tombs, and coffins are replaced by the figures of distorted and deformed foliage. These Darwinian images of nature do not signify death, but point to the possible existence of an inexplicable and incorporeal force: the numinous.

Hardy also integrates Gothic images with significant theme in multiple sections of the novel. This unification is limited to single scenes in Hardy’s earlier novels—e.g., Manston’s organ-playing incident in the early pages of *Deperates Remedies* and ‘The Cliff without a Name’ chapter in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. The effective connection of Gothic figures with Gothic themes is sustained for a longer period of time in *The Woodlanders*.

By using a mixture of Gothic symbols and modes of representation, Hardy is able to expand his imagination and explore the possibility of a higher and unknowable power. At the same time, he allows that the mind plays a part in perception, and supposed inexplicable events and experiences are sometimes nothing more “than projections of the disturbed mind of the perceivers”. Under duress, ordinary sights and sounds can be misconstrued and the mind can provide further analogous, but imaginary, noises and images.

Hardy makes it clear that some of the apparently irregular aspects of *The Woodlanders* are the results of misperception. The “grotesque image of the tree vocalizing and shivering” by John South’s dwelling is an illusion terrifying only to him, and his demise is “too clearly demanded by the plot to

204 Hennessy, 26.
let us place too much stock in his terror". However the woods are more enigmatic, sometimes painted as "soft, idyllic, and tender", but more frequently as "dark, sinister, and full of dreadful mystery", with an emphasis on "the gloomy, the deformed, and the diseased". By emphasizing the crippled and disfigured, the author introduces tension right from the beginning of the novel. A tangible sense of unease accompanies Mr. Melbury and Grace as they wind their way though the "sylvan masses" of the trees and tread "noiselessly over mats of starry moss", but then the grotesque intrudes (7, 64). On the trees:

The leaf was deformed, the curve [of the branch] was crippled,...the lichen ate the vigour of the sap, and the ivy slowly strangles to death the promising sapling. (64-5)

Hardy clearly departs from the Romantics, who considered nature to be "a beneficent, all-providing, Wordsworthian projection of the deity". Using his "genius of the macabre", Hardy subverts the pastoral ideology of the novel, using twisted images to creates an aura of weird unreality and alluding to the presence of an unknowable power that appears to collude and collide with Nature. The spectral forest is truly Gothic—frightening, disturbing, but also sublime—it alerts the reader to that mysterious other which is real, but which evades language.


206 Firor, 246; and John Goode, Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1988), 95.


208 Ibid., 230.
Just as the manor house in *Desperate Remedies* is a place of terror, mystery, and sexual awakening for Cytherea, so too are the forests for Grace. Allying atmosphere with mood, Nature affects and reflect Grace's emotions. Its uncontrolled fury is erotically energizing, although she is not consciously aware of this specific effect. Further weaving an ironic erotic subtext into the novel, Hardy constructs a death scene that offers a "perverse eroticism", while in Marty's final words there are intimations of necrophilia.

Confounding all expectations, there is no moment of epiphany in the novel. Shelagh Hunter argues that Hardy offers a "morbid perception without resolution". Ross Murfin contends that the novel's conclusion is marred, due to Hardy's confusion about Giles and his self-destruction, while Garson postulates that the author's "lack of commitment" to Grace results in an "anticlimactic, even cynical" conclusion.

Hardy admitted that "Grace never interested him much", and by returning to Fitzpiers, she met "her retribution for rejecting Giles". The author wanted his audience to realize that Grace was destined to live with an unfaithful husband, although he rightfully feared that this point was lost on most of his readers and some reviewers. He claimed that the "convention of the libraries, etc." prevented him from stressing the doctor's continued

---


infidelity in the first 1887 publication of the novel.\textsuperscript{213} Still, he left the ending unchanged and in later years, "often said that in some respects \textit{The Woodlanders} was his best novel".\textsuperscript{214} Some nineteenth-century critics praise his "perfectly wholesome" and "sympathetic treatment of the landscape".\textsuperscript{215} For example:

the gorgeous autumn landscape of White-Hart Vale, surrounded by orchards lustrous with the reds of apple-crops, berries, and foliage .... In the poorest spots the hedges were bowed with haws and blackberries; acorns cracked underfoot, and the burst husks of chestnuts lay exposing their auburn contents (28, 189-90).

This passage highlights the fertility and beauty of Nature, but it does so with mocking irony. The glut of berries and the spoiled chestnuts are the results of nature's excess. There is an oppressive sense of fecundity, with even the "poorest spots" heaving with produce. Hardy's subversiveness surfaces in many areas of the novel.

Still, the \textit{Athenaeum} proclaimed the novel to be a" masterly work" of fiction, albeit with an "unsatisfactory ending". Wallace Williams of the \textit{Academy} called it one of Hardy's "best and most powerful" books, but also "his most disagreeable", with R. H. Hutton of the \textit{Spectator} agreeing with this assessment.\textsuperscript{216} Some of these same reviewers also criticized Hardy's low

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{213} Thomas Hardy, \textit{EL}, 289.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 243.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Wallace, (Review of \textit{The Woodlanders}), \textit{Academy}, 9 April 1887 XXXI: 251-2; and Hutton, (Review of \textit{The Woodlanders}), \textit{Spectator}, 26 March 1887: 419-20; qtd. in \textit{Thomas Hardy: Critical Assessments}, vol. 1, "The Contemporary Response", ed. Graham Clarke, The
moral tone, with Coventry Patmore condemning Fitzpiers as an

Certainly, in the beginning pages of the novel, Fitzpiers is characterized as a stock Gothic villain. He is linked to Lucifer three times in the first four chapters. Gossip from a larger nearby town tells of “certain books on some mysterious black art”, covertly ordered by the doctor and leading to “good reason for supposing he has sold his soul to the wicked one.”\footnote{Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (1887), with an introduction by David Lodge (London: Macmillan ‘New Wessex’, 1975; reprint 1985), 4-46. All subsequent references to The Woodlanders will be parenthetical, with chapter and page number.} Neighborly rumour in Little Hintock suggests that Fitzpiers is “in league with the devil” (1, 28). A few pages later, Hardy specifically points out that midnight oil is burning in the residence of that “young medical gentleman in league with the devil” (2, 33).

Furthering his demonic image, Fitzpiers has an unnatural and morbid “association with death and dissection.”\footnote{Jean Brooks, 221.} After he drops his pursuit of Grammer’s head, Fitzpiers presses Grace to view a slide under a microscope and then informs her that she is looking at a slice of John South’s brain. She wonders, not unreasonably “how it should have got there” (18, 230).

However, Bailey contends that Hardy was “working away from the more literal application of the Mephistophelian pattern he had employed in
earlier books". D. H. Lawrence agrees that Fitzpiers is "less villainous and more human" than Manston. Indeed, although the doctor is never going to transform into the hero, the author revises the his character as the novel progresses, allowing him to transcend his initial satanic role.

As late as November of 1885, Hardy's working title for the novel was 'Fitzpiers at Hintock', indicating "that this was, for him, the central source of conflict and interest in the story". Portrayed as a "shabby Faust" who trifles with the black arts and dabbles with the philosophies of Spinoza and Plato, the doctor is given some admirable qualities. He is a skilled physician, even though his careless diagnosis of South kills him, and he never stops loving Grace in "his selfish way" (29, 194). Harvey Webster contends that Hardy treats Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond sympathetically, as if "they cannot be blamed for following the laws of their own nature".

Despite his perceived interest in the black arts, there is nothing Satanic about Fitzpiers' physical appearance. He is "a finely formed, handsome man" with "dark and impressive eyes". His face is "artistically beautiful ... while the classical curve of his mouth was not without a looseness in its close" (14, 105). Mallory postulates that Hardy provides the details about the lax mouth

---

220 Bailey, 1164.


222 David Lodge, "Introduction" to The Woodlanders, by Hardy (London: Macmillian, 1974), xiii; and Millgate, Biography, 269.

223 Millgate, His Career, 252.

to indicate moral weakness, although Fitzpiers is not troubled by the immorality of his various amorous affairs.\footnote{225 Thom as M allory, "The Devil and Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Manifestation of Supernatural in Hardy' Fiction:, unpub. Ph.D. diss, University of Illinois, 1987, 50.}

He also had no compunction about entering into what he admitted was a "fiendish" agreement with Grammer Oliver, offering her ten pounds for the rights to examine her head after her death (118, 128). Although she initially agreed, the old woman later had second thoughts, but when she asked him to nullify the pact, he laughed "cruel-like" (17, 120). Denying her request under the guise of academic study, Fitzpiers told her that "science could not afford to lose" her "fine brain" (17, 120). However, when Grace appealed to him, Fitzpiers destroyed the contract unhesitatingly. Willing to do anything to oblige the young woman, he even refused a refund of the money he had already paid to Grammer.

On her visit of intercession, Grace was first mistakenly ushered into a room where Fitzpiers was napping on a couch. As she prepared to leave, she glanced at him in a nearby mirror and "an indescribable thrill went through her as she perceived that the eyes of the reflected image were open, gazing wonderingly at her" (18, 126). However, when she turned back to look at him, his eyes were closed. Confused, Grace exited as silently as possible.

The narrator interjects that what Grace saw was no mystery. Fitzpiers opened his eyes for a few seconds, but not "positively awake", immediately reverted back to a state of slumber (18, 126). Grace's departure roused him, but as she reconsidered and retraced her steps up his path, a newly awakened Fitzpiers met her and eagerly invited her in. After clearing up the matter of Grammer's contract, he says in some puzzlement:
'I fancied in my vision that you stood there. ... reflected in
the glass. I thought, what a lovely creature! The design is
for once carried out. Nature has at last recovered her lost union
with the Idea! ... it made me scarcely able to distinguish between
reality and fancy. I almost wept when I awoke and found that
you had appeared to me in Time, but not in Space.' (18, 128-9)

Fitzpiers believes that the object of his dream has magically
materialized. However, the image of Grace was imprinted upon his
subconscious mind during the brief time his eyes were open. He remains
oblivious to the very real fact that even when awake, he is still unable to
"distinguish between reality and fancy", projecting his desire onto a beautiful
vision who he believes to be the Platonic ideal of the female form. However,
no matter how lovely she is, Grace is only a timber-merchant’s daughter. As
in a typical Gothic novel, appearances are deceiving and things are not as they
seem.

Fitzpiers “preferred the ideal world to the real” (16, 115). An
intellectual dilettante, he rattled off Spinoza’s ideas one month ("Me and Not
Me"), embraced Plato the next ("Nature Has at last recovered her lost union
with the Idea!"), and at another time, accepted the optimism of an unnamed
"transcendental" thinker (6, 62; 18, 129).226 In the course of a year, his
academic interests passed through the “zodiac of the intellectual heaven”—
one month poetry, the next alchemy, then literature, metaphysics, astronomy,
and anatomy (17, 122). It was during a period of “anatomical ardour” that he
offered to purchase Grammer’s head (17, 122).

Even before they met, Fitzpiers found Grace appealing. Displaying a
voyeuristic fascination with her, he used an eyeglass to spy upon her from a

---

226 In his notes to the Penguin Classics edition of The Woodlanders, James Gibson
identifies the unnamed philosopher as "almost certainly Kant". 456.
distance. When she walked down a footpath near his lodging, he stealthily and "steadily watched her out of sight" (16, 115). Once they became slightly acquainted, he took advantage of every opportunity to be near Grace when she was in the forest. In a timber clearing, when a horse became restless in his gig-harness and frightened her, Fitzpiers was promptly and familiarly "assisting Grace to descend" from the carriage—she was "very nearly lifted down in his arms" (19, 134). Returning to the same spot in the evening to look for a lost purse, she stirred up a fire to get more light and then screamed at the sight of his "illumined face", unnaturally fixed "precisely in the spot where she had left him" a few hours previously (19, 137). In a strange and sinister manner, Fitzpiers remained hidden and silent as Grace approached him, but when his sudden presence alarmed her, he "lost not a moment in rising and going to her side. ... actually supporting her with his arm" (19, 137). In addition, when the unmarried women of Hintock attempted to cast a Midsummer's Eve spell— an "ungodly performance" that would help them identify their prospective husbands—Fitzpiers "intently" observed Grace and ensured that she ran into his arms when she scrambled down the hill with the others (20, 140). He told her he would keep her "all our two lives", but after Grace's rebuff, the doctor pursues another village girl and "it was daybreak before Fitzpiers and Suke Damson re-entered Little Hintock" (20, 143, 144).

Fitzpiers realizes that socially, he can never be intimate with Grace, and "anything like matrimonial intentions towards her ... would be absurd" (19, 130). Instead, he views Grace as "an object of contemplation" who would serve to energize his soul and relieve the boredom he suffers in Little Hintock. The village
may have beauty, grandeur, salubrity, convenience; but if it lacks
memories it will ultimately pall upon him who settles here without
opportunity of intercourse with his kind.

In such circumstances, maybe, an old man dreams of an ideal
friend, ... a young man ... likewise, by some humour of the blood will
probably lead him to think rather of an ideal mistress, and at length the
rustle of a woman's dress, the sound of her voice, or the transmit of
her form across the field of his vision, will enkindle his soul with a
flame that blinds his eyes (17, 123).

Little Hintock is an attractive place, with moments of brilliance and
sublimity. However, for Fitzpiers, it is "a miserable little hole" (35, 229).

There are no shared memories, no learned medical men to exchange notes
with, no urbane men to engage in conversation, and no beautiful socialites to
admire. Even his own interests fail to erase the ennui of life in such an
isolated place. Having no previous opportunity to meet Mrs. Charmond, he
fixates on Grace. She assumes the shape of "an ideal mistress", a woman he
can enjoy a "mild flirtation" with (17, 124). But even with all her charms, he
wishes that Grace is the secret owner of the Hintock House mansion.

During the course of winter, through seemingly chance encounters
lasting no more than a minute or so, a "mutual interest" emerges between
Fitzpiers and Grace (19, 131). By springtime they are no longer mere
acquaintances, but friends. Hardy's innocuous portrait of the changing of the
seasons turns into a form of covert eroticism, with the female fertility of "the
unsealing of buds" and the seminal "rush of sap in the veins of the trees"
constituting a prelude to the pair's future marital consummation (19, 131).

By this time, Fitzpiers had became "irretrievably committed in heart to
Grace", forcing him to rethink his matrimonial intentions towards her
(20, 139). He "was enchanted enough to fancy" that "the Idea had for once
fulfilled itself in the objective substance" (20, 139-40). His initial dream-
influenced assessment of Grace was accurate: she was the embodiment of the
ideal woman. Carried "away on the wave of his desire", he asked Mr. Melbury for permission to come courting (22, 148).

Even though Grace raises "genuine emotions" in his heart, Fitzpiers senses that his impulses are overruling his judgment (23, 155). While Grace feels she is too good for Giles, Fitzpiers in turn feels superior to her and privately derides her merchant class. He struggles with the fact that no matter how educated or cultivated Grace is, he is still "endangering his professional and social chances by an alliance with the family of a simple countryman" (24, 162). Indeed, once she overcomes his objections to a public marriage, his fears are borne out. After his union with Grace, the town people no longer treat him with deference and his professional reputation plummets.

Just as Fitzpiers had never viewed her as a wife, Grace had "never regarded him in the light of a destined husband" (22, 151). She never even considered it until her father told her that the doctor had asked his consent to marry her. She was unable to explain to her father how Fitzpiers possessed an inexplicable "compelling power" over her, "an almost psychic influence", similar to the domination of Manston over Cytherea in Desperate Remedies (18, 129; 22, 151). However, when not in his company, his influence over her diminished and she often regretted the confusing emotions he awakened in her (22, 151).

Grace is bewildered by the feelings his presence evokes and is confused by the emotional aspects of their relationship. She has no words to describe desire; indeed Fitzpiers' touch "stirred her feelings indescribably" and his mere presence excited her (22, 151). On the occasion of their first kiss, she "broke from him trembling ... and turned aside, hardly knowing how things had advanced to this point". During the course of the afternoon, she
had somehow become engaged to the "handsome, coercive, irresistible Fitzpiers" (23, 156).

Once her initial surprise passed, Grace found the prospect of marrying Fitzpiers appealing. She knew that she had been originally promised to Giles, and had she remained in Little Hintock, she would have happily married him. However, her father wanted more for her and sent her off to be educated. At the end of her schooling, Grace was not entirely happy to return back to her home in Little Hintock; a "small place...[where] you'd need to have a candle and lantern to find it if ye don't know where 'tis" (1, 25) On her final journey back home, while Giles saw apple trees and farms, she recalled the " broad lawn in the fashionable suburb of a fast city, amid which bounding girls ... were playing at games with laughter and chat". Her friends at finishing school were the same young women "whose parents Giles would have addressed with a deferential Sir or Madam" (6, 56). So she felt privately that she was too good for him.

Fitzpiers, on the other hand, was a "specimen of creation altogether unusual in that locality" and "the possibilities of a refined and cultivated inner life" were pleasant concepts to contemplate (23, 156; 18, 125). Her father was gratified, for he had invested a significant investment of time and money into Grace's education. Although he did not dislike Giles, he wanted more for his daughter and was not content to let her sink back into the old Hintock ways. He was delighted that through her marriage she would "be restored to the society" she had "been taken away from" (22, 151).

Mr. Melbury also respects Fitzpiers' noble ancestry, although Grace is more intrigued than impressed by his past. Paternally, the Fitzpiers' family were lords of the manor for hundreds of years and founded the nearby village of Oakbury Fitzpiers. On his maternal side, he was connected with the
aristocratic Baxbys, although the fortunes of both families had long since declined. When Grace first saw Fitzpiers, he was dozing on a couch “like a recumbent figure within some canopied mural tomb of the fifteenth century (18, 125). This glimpse of him prefigured her visit to the Gothic ruins of Sherton Castle, where Fitzpiers’ maternal ancestors had lived. Only a few vaultings and arches of the medieval castle had survived and now they were used as a shelter for a neighbouring farmer’s calves, who cooled “their thirsty tongues by licking the quaint Norman carving, which glistened with the moisture” (23, 154). As she views the degradation of his ancestors’ home, reduced to serving as a cattle barn, “the aspect of Fitzpiers assumed in her imagination the hues of a melancholy romanticism” (23, 154).

A ruined Gothic medieval castle possesses vestigial traces of culture and mystery, and its slow obliteration can produce emotions that mere language cannot encompass; feelings of sublimity. There is a concomitant allure attached to persons who have a direct link to an ancient ruin, but at the same time, a crumbling palace represents failed ambition and squandered splendor. The degeneration of Sherton Castle highlights the steep descent in the Fitzpiers fortune, but the contrast between the medieval days—when the Baxbys, Fitzpiers’ maternal ancestors, were amongst the greatest people in their small realm—and the present—where the decrepit vaultings are the only material reminders of the family’s former status—only serves to increase Grace’s interest in Fitzpiers.

As for Mr. Melbury, he still holds a “touching faith in members of long-established families ... irrespective of their personal condition or character”. He blithely assumes that, since his daughter’s suitor is “descended from a line ... once among the greatest”, nothing could “be amiss” in their
relationship (22, 152). Grace and her father fail to recognize that Fitzpiers' blue blood is diluted.

Illustrating the danger of trusting a family line, rather than an individual, trouble occurs during their engagement when Grace sees Suke Damson leaving Fitzpiers' lodging at dawn. She is unaware of their previous intimacy, so when the dissembling doctor smoothly and logically explains the reason for her early morning presence, Grace's suspicions disappear. Although she experiences "a curious fatefulness" and is unable suppress her feelings of anxiety, she is ultimately seduced by the idea of being the "heroine of an hour. ... proud, as a cultivated woman, to be the wife of a cultivated man" (24, 164, 163).

Grace considered Fitzpiers "greater than herself" and more "her ruler ... than her equal, protector, and dear familiar friend" (24, 158). While such feelings do not preclude marriage, "awe towards a superior being" requires a reciprocating "tender solicitude ... of love", otherwise such reverence will disappear (28, 188). While Fitzpiers loves Grace "in his own selfish way", whether or not she loved Fitzpiers at the time their marriage, "she was pretty sure to do so in time" (29, 194; 23, 156).

However, once the initial novelty of the marriage passes on both sides, no fellow feeling springs up to take its place. Grace's affection for Fitzpiers never gets a chance to grow, for soon after meeting Mrs. Charmond he begins to talk to Grace with "the scrupulousness civility of mere acquaintanceship" and he no longer feigns interest about "her little doings" (23, 156; 28, 187).

Easily bored, Fitzpiers suffers from a short attention span. Although he still loves Grace, he feels compelled to continually seek out new emotions and experiences, so when his intercourse with his wife becomes familiar, he looks elsewhere for fresh stimuli. Mrs. Charmond's request that he attend to
her "at once" comes at an opportune time and sparks his interest, as he claims to have "had a presentiment that this woman and I were to be better acquainted" (25, 173).

When Fitzpiers arrives at Mrs. Charmond’s dwelling, Hintock House, he expects to treat an injured or ill woman. Instead, he sees "by the light of the shaded lamp",

an elegant figure reclining upon a couch in such a position as not to disturb a pile of magnificent hair on the crown of her head. A deep purple dressing-gown formed an admirable foil to the rich brown of her hair-plaits; her left arm, which was naked nearly up to the shoulder, was thrown upwards, and between the fingers of her right hand she held a cigarette while she idly breathed from her delicately curled lips a thin stream of smoke towards the ceiling. (26, 175)

Her presentation could not be more theatrical or rehearsed. Her experience on the stage has taught her how to make a dazzling impression, with her clothing complementing her colouring. However, the "magnificent hair" is not her own, but Marty’s. Moreover, the smoke wafting upward seems an affectation, especially in light of her claim that is just learning how to smoke. As a former actress though, she understands the importance and power of illusion.

Seeing Mrs. Charmond in this staged pose, the doctor momentarily forgets his errand. As he views the attractive woman, with her beautiful head of hair and elegant manner of dress, he recognizes the artificiality and fantasy of the moment. "The sentiment and essence of the moment were indescribably familiar" to him because Mrs. Charmond’s theatrical display subconsciously reminds him of his first meeting with Grace, when she appeared to him like a dream (26, 175).
Mrs. Charmond soon replaces Grace as the object of his interest and her presence at Hintock House causes him to change his plans. Fitzpiers had planned to buy a practice in Budmouth for eight hundred pounds and had suggested to Grace that her father help him buy it. Amenable to the prospect of moving away, she thought the matter was settled, but after Fitzpiers met Mrs. Charmond, he decided that he did not want the practice. Even though the surgery now only costs seven hundred and fifty, he considered it "too large a sum" (27, 183).

Mrs. Charmond does not have aristocratic blood, but her wealth confers status. As an added attraction, Fitzpiers discovers that they have shared memories. When she was in her "girlhood" and he was "an impecunious student" living in Heidelberg, they had became infatuated with each other (26, 177). However, her mother interfered and she had to leave without saying her farewells to him. Fitzpiers says they were predestined to meet again after such an unfortunate parting, and in a burst of enthusiasm, tells her: "You may have outgrown the foolish impulsive passions of your early girlhood. I have not outgrown mine" (26, 177).

Fitzpiers past feelings her had been "evanescent" at best, based on one evening's conversation (26, 179). His resurgent feelings for her are not based on her seductive powers, but on her proximity and her status. Mrs. Charmond is neither a femme fatale, nor an imperious Gothic dowager, but is a sad and lonely twenty-eight year old widow with "a heart capable of quick, extempore warmth - a heart which could indeed be passionately and imprudently warm on certain occasions" (5, 54). Not deliberately disruptive, it is her ignorance of the woodland code and her financial strength that makes her dangerous.
Annoyed at Giles previous refusal to back his loaded wagon down the road so her carriage could pass, she punished him for his perceived slight by tearing down the life-holders' cottages (15, 108). She did not understand that Giles had “a moral right” to live in his father’s cottage for the rest of his life (15, 108). Since the leases had lapsed, she saw “no reason for disturbing the natural course of things”, ignoring the fact that in the “natural course” of time, Giles or his father would have renewed their life-hold.227

By consorting with Fitzpiers, Mrs. Charmond is also driving a “destructive wedge between the kinship loyalties” that are “sacred to the woodland code”.228 Initially she toys with him, enjoying their casual flirtation and doing nothing to dampen his ardour. Only when Mr. Melbury visits Hintock House and implores her not to harm Grace does she become aware of how improper her conduct is. At the same time, she realizes that she has passionate feelings for Fitzpiers, and further perceives now that “a fascination had led her on”, Subconsciously, “her soul was being slowly invaded by a delirium, ... she was becoming ... an animated impulse only, a passion incarnate” (32, 213).

Like Grace, Mrs. Charmond is fascinated by Fitzpiers and has unwittingly fallen in love with him. Upset and troubled by Mr. Melbury, she ventures into the woods to clear her mind and encounters Grace, who is also unsettled. Impulsively falling into conversion, Mrs. Charmond stresses, as much to herself as to Grace, that she does not love Fitzpiers and only “trifled with him” (33, 217). The scorned wife, who had called the doctor a “foolish man – the plaything of a finished coquette”, suddenly realizes that the


228 Jean Brooks, 223.
situation is changed and that Mrs. Charmond really does care for Fitzpiers (33, 218). Instead of despising her, Graces finds herself pitying her. The older woman will “suffer most” for loving Fitzpiers, because, as Grace has learned from personal experience, “he will get tired of you soon and then you may wish you had never seen him” (33, 217).

Still insisting that Fitzpiers was only a friend, Mrs. Charmond turns away and Grace resumes her own course. However, the “old trees, which once were landmarks had been felled or blown down”, and the formally small “bushes, ... now long and overhanging”, are no longer familiar” (33, 218). With a start, Grace realizes that she is lost. Although she grew up in the forest, she has been away for a long time. As the darkness closes in and the “night-moan” of the wind begins to sound, she becomes actively frightened (33, 218). She stumbles into Mrs. Charmond, who cries that she too “has lost my way” (33, 219). This statement takes on a much larger resonance—Mrs. Charmond is indeed lost, not only physically, but emotionally, for she has fallen hopelessly in love with another woman’s husband.

Clinging to each other for warmth, they ensconce themselves in the nook of a tree. Reflecting the distressed state of the women, the trees above them appear “funereal”. The noise of the wind rustling through their branches is likened to the sound of “chanted dirges”, foreshadowing ominous news (33, 220). Millgate and Garson both note the similarity of this scene to the lesbian episode in Desperate Remedies. However, Grace and Mrs. Charmond both have heterosexual relationships and, as Rosemarie Morgan contends, “there is nothing bi-sexual” about Mrs. Charmond.229

---

229 Millgate, His Career, 249; Garson, 87; and Morgan, 162.
Still, there is a sense of close intimacy in Mrs. Charmond's furs, which "consoled Grace's cold face", while the older woman takes "luxurious comfort in opening her heart" and unburdening herself to her lover's wife (33, 220). "Thunderstruck by a revelation transcending her utmost suspicion", Grace exclaims: "'O, my great God ... He's had you! Can it be – can it be?' " (33, 221).

In her shock, Grace releases Mrs. Charmond and the miserable elements immediately start to pummel her. In an alliance of atmosphere with emotion, the weather affects and reflects her mood. As the "deep darkness circled her about" and "the cold lips of the wind kissed her", Grace physically feels cold (33, 221). The blackness and chill mirror the bleak interior state of her mind as she attempts to take in Mrs. Charmond's confession, while the icy gust that touches her lips reflects the frosty and uncaring reception that she has become accustomed to from her husband.

John Sutherland suggests that Grace's shock is due to the fact that the older woman has confessed to more than adultery. After all, as an actress, she has had many lovers and is "no ingénue".230 He postulates that Fitzpiers had overcome her and reduced her to the "degraded condition of a sexual slave".231 When Mrs. Charmond asks Grace if she "means war", Sutherland posits that perhaps the older woman is implying that, were she able "to face the horrible publicity", Grace would have grounds to sue for divorce under the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act.232

Mrs. Charmond concerns about exposing a secret she should have "kept silent as the grave" may be warranted (33, 221). If Grace provided


231 Ibid.

232 33, 221; Sutherland, 187; and Rosemarie Morgan, 134.
evidence of her husband’s “Sodomy or Bestiality, or of Adultery coupled with such cruelty”, she could have obtained a “Divorce a Mensa et Thoro”. 233 Yet, even if Grace was unaware of this law, or if she had knowledge of it and kept silent, she would still realize that Fitzpiers had committed perverted sexual acts with someone else. It would be highly unlikely that she would countenance a reconciliation with her husband.

Grace already knows that Fitzpiers lied to her about the reason for Suke’s early morning presence at his house prior to their marriage. She realizes that “she has made a frightful mistake” and experiences an “acute regret” that the “homely sylvan life of her father ... would probably be denied her” (29, 193; 33, 215). When Fitzpiers deserts her to follow Mrs. Charmond to the continent, Mr. Melbury tells Grace that “she need have no further concern about Fitzpiers’ return; that she would shortly be a free woman” (37, 246). Her affection for Giles is reawakened, but just as she romanticized Fitzpiers before marrying him, she makes the same mistake with the apple farmer.

Grace began to view Giles with a new reverence, as he “rose upon her memory as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation” (39, 256; 38, 248). Her “fancy wove about him a more romantic tissue”, but their renewed romance came to an abrupt end, as Mr. Melbury returned with the news that Grace was required to remain Fitzpiers’ wife, at least in name (38, 248). First her father persuaded her to accept Fitzpiers, then he told her that she need have nothing more to do with him. He urged her to pursue Giles, but then suggested reconciliation with Fitzpiers. No longer believing in her father’s “judgment and knowledge”, she refuses to heed his request. Like a typical

233 Qtd. in Morgan, 134, from the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act.
post-Radcliffian Gothic heroine, she defies parental authority and heads into "the depths of the woods" (40, 266). In a regression to early Gothic fiction, the forests become the locus of terror.

The plantations were always weird at this hour — more spectral. ... The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak, lidless eyes: there were strange faces and figures from expiring light that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity ... peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of the boughs sat faint cloven tongues. (40, 266)

Nature alone is not grotesque, but the forced combination of nature and man is. At twilight, eerie Gothic images emerge and strange associations are made. The lustrous leaves of plants transform into grotesque "weak, lidless eyes", turning a benign plant into a grotesque representation of deformity. Ghostly figures flit underneath the trees, as if unable to escape the overhanging branches. The shadowy figures and disturbing silhouettes that linger where only a cloudy haze should be visible, and the "strange faces" and "sheeted shapes" strike discordant notes. The image of "cloven tongues" is weird, although the phrase comes from the second book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit settled on the apostles in the form of "cloven tongues like as of fire".235 In this scene Hardy is not referring to the heavenly Christian domain, but to an otherworldly realm. Rather than engendering terror, the suggestive ghostly presences and queer images augment the aura of unreality.

Grace's "fear was not imaginative or spiritual" and she "heeded these impressions but little" (40, 266). The grotesque and macabre figures did not

234 Thomas Hardy, *LY*, 58.

235 *King James*, Acts 2:3.
bother her, but she was alarmed by the return of her wandering husband. Her fright of him had previously manifested itself in feverish dreams, when she would cry: " 'O – he [Fitzpiers] is coming'... and in her terror" jump "clean out of the bed upon the floor" (37, 245). When he reappeared in Little Hintock, her nightmare became her reality, and in order to escape him, she physically fled. As she passed though the woods, she fancied "that she could hear, above the sound of her strumming pulse", Fitzpiers entering the grounds of her father's house (40, 266). The surreal landscape, with its eerie and ghostly shapes, holds less fear for her than the possible physical presence of her errant husband.

Logically, Grace knows that her respite can only be temporary, as she has " 'vowed myself [to Fitzpiers] ... and cannot be released' " (41, 273). Emotionally, she cannot blind herself to the attraction Giles holds for her. She tells him that she has feelings for him that she has " 'felt for no other living man, what I shall never feel for a man again' " (41, 273). Giles returns her affection, but although she yearns to let him into the cottage to spend the night with her, she is still bound by Christian views of morality. Despite the example of the woodland creatures she has viewed—the "small members of the animal community ... neighbours who knew neither law nor sin", she " 'must behave as I do behave, and keep that vow' " (41, 272, 273).

Grace is torn between religious doctrine and erotic impulses, and this strife manifests itself physically in the night time storm. With the wind howling and the rain pounding on the roof, it seems as if some supernatural being was attempting to break into her dwelling.

It was difficult to believe that no opaque body ... was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, popping its head into the flue, and shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the walls....the assailant was a
spectre which could be felt but not seen. She had never before been struck with the deviltry of a gusty night in a wood, because she had never been so entirely alone in spirit as she was now. (41, 273-4)

Savage weather, weird chimerical forces, and Grace's own confused feelings combine to create a sublime atmosphere. In an alliance of atmosphere and mood, the fury of the storm frightens Grace, but also reflects her own emotions. Never having been alone in the woods during a storm, she is alarmed by the violence of the tempest and struck by her sense of isolation, but it is not mere solitude that disturbs her. Langbaum suggests that the woods "symbolize her erotic unconsciousness", and the external turmoil mirrors her internal tumultuous erotic impulses.\(^\text{237}\) Her desire is analogous to the elusive spectre that can be "felt but not seem", assailing her with a passion barely held in check. She hears agonizing "shrieking and blaspheming", while the pounding, howling, and screaming sounds increase the sense of unreality. The striking invasion of sound and her confused emotions combine to temporarily blur her "clear intentions", and although pausing for a moment in "agonizing thought", she opens the door and calls to Giles (41, 274).

The darkness outside is "intense" and the rainfall extremely "heavy", while the wind causes the "wild brandishing" of tree branches (41, 275). The savagery of the elements reflects Grace's emotions, for "like violence, repressed sexual desire accumulates energy that sooner or later bursts forth".\(^\text{238}\) First, she "cried loudly" for him, then again an entreaty, "with the full strength of her voice, and without any of the shamefacedness that had

\(^{237}\) Langbaum, *In Our Time*, 121.

\(^{238}\) Girard, 35.
characterized her first cry" (41, 275). The final desperate appeal after his continued refusal—"'Come to me dearest! I don't mind what they say or what they think of us anymore'"—is an indication of Grace's extreme longing for him (41, 275). Throwing off the shackles of Christian morality, she no longer cares about her vows. However, Giles, who once "thought how hopelessly blind to propriety he was beside" Grace, refuses (38, 253).

The next morning, Grace views the evidence of Nature's fury. The violence and desolation resulting from Nature's fierce acts deepens Grace's already despondent mood into utter despair (42, 276). Reflecting her depression, there was

an old beech, with vast arm-pits, and great pocketholes in its sides where branches had been removed....trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows... the rotting stumps [of others]... rising from their mossy setting like black teeth from green gums. (42, 276)

Furthering the image of decay, the evening sun throws macabre "gory hues" upon the shedding leaves of the beech (42, 476). Again and again, Hardy comes back to the Gothic nightmare, the contorted, distorted, deformed and diseased. The violent, macabre and repulsive images further increase the sense of grotesque fantasy.

Hardy commented, "nature herself is absolutely indifferent to justice", but in a Darwinian universe, she sometimes "appears actively hostile". Nature's rain and wind produce the cold and wet condition that damage Giles' already fragile health. When Grace realizes his life is in danger, all fear of Fitzpiers is dismissed and she gives no further thought to concealment.

---

She rushes to get medical assistance from the one man who has “the brain most likely” to save Giles, if such an act is possible (42, 279). However, providing a gruesome and morbid foreshadowing of Giles’ death, the “puddles and damp ruts” that she encounters on her journey have “a cold corpse-eyed luminousness” (42, 280).

Subversively, the actions of outsiders cause the death of Giles, the native. Not realizing the “totemic significance” of the grotesque tree that torments Giles’ elderly father, Fitzpiers orders it to be chopped down, causing the death of the old man.240 Mrs. Charmond then refuses to renew the life-holding on the cottage and evicts Giles, while later, Grace ousts him from his shelter. Both women contribute to his demise, but Giles’ adherence to an outmoded moral code is self-destructive.241 His death constitutes a subversive mockery of Victorian views on morality, as “the cultivated woman responded with loving-kindness, the natural man with suicidal discretion”.242

However, Giordano disagrees with the view that Giles sacrificed himself on the altar of social convention. He wonders how Giles could “deny himself the erotic satisfaction he consciously seeks and needs”, by declining to come to the cottage even when Grace calls him.243 He speculates that Giles harbours an unperceived enmity towards Grace. While he is ostensibly preserving her virtue, his refusal to join her might be an “unconscious


241 Casagrande, Unity, 151.

242 Ibid., 150-1.

retaliation against her" for marrying Fitzpiers instead of him.244 Far from sacrificing himself, he takes upon himself the role of martyr, making Grace's suffering appear insignificant in the face of his death.

Grace declares to her husband that he could draw "the extremest inference" from her statement that Giles "is everything to me" (43, 284). She allows him to assume that she and Giles were intimate, which suggests that her turn to Giles was sincere.245 Ironically, "Grace's finest act is a lie about her purity",246 but any personal satisfaction she gains from this falsehood is denied when she admits the truth to Fitzpiers. Although Marty had already told him that Grace's escapade in the woods was harmless, he is still gratified by her confession and begins his campaign to win her back.

His early attempts to revive their marriage are unsuccessful. Grace has changed from the impressionable and pitiable "deserted girl-wife" of Fitzpiers into a more resigned practical woman of "tougher fibre" (33, 217; 38, 250). Questioning Christian sacrament, she wonders "how far a person's conscience might be bound" by marriage vows if they did not realize the full import at the time of making them (47, 312). She recognizes that she is no longer obligated to remain with Fitzpiers, after the way he has treated her. In a renunciation of the sanctity of marriage, she does not believe that "God really did join" her and Fitzpiers together in the first place (47, 312). Furthermore, the enigmatic qualities that first attracted her to him are useless. His romantic past, quasi-academic studies and beliefs—none of them is of any tangible or material value and she suggests that he "concentrate on your

244 Ibid.
245 Casagrande, "Shifted", 122.
246 Matchett, 251.
profession, and give up those strange studies that used to distract you so much" (46, 304). He gives her those assurances, declaring that he is now a "practical man" (46, 304).

Fitzpiers does love Grace "in his way, and had by no means ceased to love her" during his infatuation with Mrs. Charmond (29, 194). He writes, "I have never loved any woman alive or dead as I love, respect, and honour you at this present time", and tells her face to face, "I love you more than ever I loved you in my life" (45, 296, 300). However, Grace retains her love for a dead man, telling Fitzpiers, "My heart is the grave with Giles" (45, 301). The doctor is content to wait for the time being; indeed, he intentionally cultivates the "strange and mournful pleasures" produced by Grace's renunciation of him. He finds "solace" in "the soft miseries" she inflicts upon him (45, 298). Constantly searching for new concepts and sensations, he "would not willingly let die" these foreign and fascinating feelings (45, 297).

While he takes a certain satisfaction in these emotional tribulations, his cry as he surveys part of Grace's dress in the man-trap was "like one in corporeal agony. In his "misery", he falls to the ground, "writhing and rocking", as if in physical pain (47, 313). Fitzpiers' suffering is real, but Grace hears the loud "voice of his distress" and quickly acts to relieve his fear (47, 313). He nearly sheds tears of "delight and the relief at the horror of his apprehensions" not being realized (47, 314). He seized her, "pressed her to his breast, and kissed her passionately", murmuring, "you are mine" (47, 314, 315). Having overheard his lamentations when he thought she was injured, Grace admits that he must indeed care for her, and they make plans to start a new life together at a new practice Fitzpiers has purchased in the Midlands.
Bailey contends that their “final reconciliation depended upon his abandoning those abstruse studies”, as Grace suggested. Schweik speculates that Grace’s primary reasoning behind her return to Fitzpiers is her desire for “some semblance of the common life and ordinary sexuality which she had temporarily renounced” after Giles death. Drake assumes that they can “resume their marital relationship with some prospect of quietly growing devotion ... and at the novel’s end they go forth from the Eden of little Hintock ... like a chastened Adam and Eve.”

However, the doctor’s fickle nature is well documented. He dabbles in various intellectual and philosophical studies, and has an inability to remain faithful to one woman. He became bored with Grace soon after their marriage, and the attentive interest he took in the ‘injured’ Mrs. Charmond eventually turned stale. Once the novelty of his reunion with Grace wears off, his ennui will return, and he will again engage in a search for fresh stimulation.

Moreover, responding to a query about adapting the novel into a play, Hardy replied: “The ending of the story – hinted at rather than stated–is that the heroine is doomed to an unhappy life with an inconstant husband”. He alleged that “literary convention” prevented him from asserting that

\begin{itemize}
  \item[247] Fisher, 141.
  \item[248] J.O. Bailey, 1167.
  \item[250] Robert Drake, Jr., "Traditional Pastoral", 257.
  \item[251] Thomas Hardy, EL, 289.
  \item[252] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Grace was destined to live with an unfaithful husband, but such a conclusion is implied in Mr. Melbury's assessment after he ascertains his daughter's desire to remain with her errant husband. He laments to himself, "the woman walks and laughs somewhere at this very moment whose neck he'll be culling next year ... as he did Felice Charmond's last year; and Suke Damson's the year afore!' ... It's a forlorn hope for her" (48, 320). Grace's father hints at the inevitability of Fitzpiers' continuing womanizing, but "the matter is not made manifest", and many of Hardy's readers believed that Fitzpiers had been reformed.252

The novel does not end with the couple, but with Marty. Waiting at Giles' grave, she realizes that her former fellow mourner is now "in the arms of another man than Giles", and echoing Fitzpiers' claim of possession just a few pages earlier, whispers, "you are mine" (48, 323). Taylor claims that "a philosophical compromise is found in Marty's morbid consolation", but Marjorie Garson notes that her words about Grace are "strikingly graphic ... in view of the fact that if Grace were in Giles' arms, she would be embracing a corpse".253 Equally startling is the necrophilic intimations in Marty's assertion that Giles is now all hers. Just as Grace had a depraved erotic experience with a dead man, so too will Marty.

Squires asserts that "Marty, Giles and Grace tends to deny life" while "the passion of Mrs. Charmond and Fitzpiers asserts life...and it becomes, finally, more attractive to the reader".254 Yet, Mrs. Charmond is a sad character who inspires pity, while Fitzpiers is not an admirable character.

252 Weber, Hardy and the Lady, 90.
253 Garson, 92.
254 Squires, 190.
Originally identified with the demonic, he is widely rumored to deal in the black arts. He is slightly unnatural, with his weird interest in brains. Like the devil, he has a transfixing power, although there are no other indications that he possesses supernatural ability. In fact, as the novel progresses, the satanic aspects of his charter are muted. A physically attractive man, with a pretty, or artistic face, rather than a powerful one, he has a large appetite for physical intercourse. There is nothing wrong with his intellect or his professional ability, but he is not practical.

Although shallow and promiscuous, with a certain resemblance to the devil, Fitzpiers is not a traditional Gothic villain. He experiences varying human emotions, including lust and passion, apprehension and satisfaction, joy and anguish, but little remorse. With his superior attitude and pride, it does not enter his mind to feel sorry for his actions or seek forgiveness, because he has no sense of guilt, no moral compass. He savours the sorrowful and melancholy emotions that result from the transient loss of Grace. His suffers real distress, but then relief, when he discovers that she has not been hurt in the man-trap. This expression of genuine concern for her well-being is diluted by the fact that he has lied or withheld the truth throughout the entirety of their relationship, and previously displayed a total disregard for her feelings. One declaration of caring does not cause the reader to view him with any less uncertainty and distrust.

Yet, Fitzpiers escapes any real punishment, leading Giordano to argue that Hardy ended the novel with “conflicting intentions”. Jean Brooks sees a “confusion of purpose” within the text, reflected in the woodland’s dispersal of characters. However, Langbaum asserts that the death scene

---

255 Giordano, 56.

256 Jean Brooks, 217.
"concentrates the novel's conflicting tones and values as does no other single episode". The reader wanted Grace and Giles to have one grand erotic encounter in the woods, but Hardy shatters that expectation. Instead, the intensity of their sexual repression results in a "perverse eroticism, whereby sickness and a love-death substitute for consummation". There is no poignant climax where one might be expected; no sense of high tragedy. Millgate considers Giles' self-sacrifice "almost comic in its strict observation of the proprieties", while Widdowson questions whether Mrs. Charmond death should be classified as tragedy or "self-Parodic burlesque". Hardy shifts between comedy and tragedy, with one genre subverting the other.

Subversion is a common feature of Gothic fiction, but Hardy was not happy with the ending of The Woodlanders. He claimed that convention prevented him from stressing that "Fitzpiers goes on all his life in a bad way". Despite Hardy's claims of interference, Casagrande argues that it was "something more than editorial or lending library" concerns that troubled the author. He posits that the reason that author was unable to conclude the novel to his satisfaction was because he could not find the suitable sentiments and emotions to describe Grace's return to Little Hintock. However, he

---


258 Ibid.


260 Langbaum, *In Our Time*, 128.

261 Weber, Hardy and the Lady, 89.

262 Casagrande, "Shifted", 124
contends that this failure led to the success of Tess and Jude, where the journey became more important than the outcome.

Nevertheless, the ending is not necessarily a failure. In overthrowing the traditional Gothic formula, the hero died in a futile attempt to help the heroine, while the villain triumphed and reclaimed the reluctant hand of his wife. The virtues of love, loyalty, and simplicity went unrewarded. There is no formal conclusion but as Maturin and Lewis displayed, a lack of closure is a feature of later Gothic novels. There was no need for Hardy to explain his intentions.

In fact, Hardy succeeds in expressing his intuitions of the Gothic by subverting the pastoral ideology of the novel. Through his portrayal of the woods, he creates "an iconography, a language of images", not only visually, but in the "‘moods' or ‘spirits' themselves—the powerful expositions" of emotion—terror and calmness, cruelty and tenderness, lust and love.263 However, with his language, he conveys an atmosphere of dark fantasy, amplified by grotesque images of Darwinian nature.

Carpenter contends that "despite the unreality—or perhaps because of it", the storm scenes involving Grace are the best in the novel.264 The convulsions of the weather illustrate her psychological torment, while the strife of the wind and rain contributes to the overall air of confusion and disarray. Overlaying it all is an image of nightmarish unreality, exemplified by the phantasmal sounds that Grace hears, and the grotesque anthropomorphizing of the woods, with the plant leaves' "lidless eyes" and


the "rotting stumps" of old tress, which look like "black teeth from green gums (40, 266; 42, 276).

Hardy places Grace in this terrifying and sublime environment, and although it leads her to discard Christian morality, it does not expand her mind. Unlike Knight in A Pair of Blue Eyes, such an atmosphere does not lead to an augmentation of her imagination or reality: she has no transcendent experience expressive of the Gothic. Instead, the woods themselves seem to be amplified, with ghosts, and possibly supernatural beings, frequenting the premises. In addition, the grotesqueness of the trees suggest a "presence in the world of forces which cannot be accounted for by the daylight self and the self-sufficient mind."

With its "connotations of perversion, of violent connections between the real and the unreal, the mundane and the surrealistic", the grotesque is expressive of the Gothic. Using reshaped conventional Gothic images of grotesque foliage, Hardy is able to blur reality, explore the unfathomable, and shatter boundaries and demarcations, reaching towards something that is not itself, pointing not to the Gothic, but his sense of the Gothic.

The Woodlanders is Hardy's only novel where he makes the woods and their grotesque and "Darwinian aspects the main setting for his story. In his next novel, he reverts back to traditional Gothic figures of tombs and graveyards, while the typical theme of the past is given greater importance. However, despite a return to more familiar Gothic modes of representation, Hardy is unable, or unwilling to express his sense of the Gothic in Tess.

265 Peter Brooks, 249.
266 Ibid., 225.
267 Pinion, Companion, 65.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROMINENCE OF THE GOTHIC PAST IN
TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

_Tess of the d'Urbervilles_ is Hardy's most powerful and controversial work. He started writing it in the fall of 1888 for the Tillotson and Son newspaper syndicate, with serialization expected to begin in the later months of 1889. However, they canceled their contract with Hardy after the first two Phases had been set in type because he refused to revise certain portions of the novel. In October of 1889, the author submitted the still unfinished work to _Murray's Magazine_, but due to its “improper explicitness”, the editor refused it.²⁶⁸ It was next offered to _Macmillan's Magazine_, which rejected it for the same reason. Eventually, the _Graphic_ agreed to carry the story on the condition that everything related to Tess’s violation was omitted: “she returned home after discovering that she had been tricked into a bogus marriage” and “no child was born.”²⁶⁹ The installments ran from July to


²⁶⁹ F.B. Pinion, _Hardy the Writer: Surveys and Assessments_ (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1990), 345.
December of 1891, with the complete novel, as originally written, published one month before the serialization ended.

Hardy discovered early in his novel-writing career that he could not "speak the truth of love, of its essential sexuality", without making himself "the target of many a Text-painter." Such constraints forced him to resort to forms of covert eroticism in order to express desire, but in *Tess*, he refused to sublimate his female protagonist's passion. Radically, he stressed "the sensuality of Tess's beauty" and acknowledged her erotic impulses. In an age where only the "diseased female" took pleasure in sex, he created a sympathetic heroine who could not repress or deny "her pleasure in her sexuality." In doing so, he greatly offended the social decorum of the day.

The *Saturday Review* considered *Tess* to be "an unpleasant story [told] in a very unpleasant way", while the *Quarterly Review* echoed: "Mr. Hardy has told an extremely disagreeable story in an extremely disagreeable manner". The novel was excoriated as "a failure" by the *Fortnightly Review*, but praised as "one of the greatest novels of this century" in the

---


Westminster Review.\textsuperscript{274} The Bookman asserted that it was "second to no work of its time" and the Pall Mall Gazette applauded it as "the strongest English novel of many years".\textsuperscript{275} The Athenæum described Tess as "great", but the reviewer also asked, "Why should a novelist embroil himself in moral technicalities?",\textsuperscript{276} rather suggesting that s/he missed the entire point of Hardy's career as a novelist.

In Tess, Hardy initially employs an innocuous traditional Gothic plot, featuring a young girl threatened by a male interloper. Alec d'Urberville is both intruder and impostor, having, "bought the d'Urberville name and estate with the new money of mercantile exploitation", while Angel Clare is an "urban invader" who disrupts village life with his modern ideas.\textsuperscript{277} In an abrupt shattering of Gothic convention, the threat presented by the villain is carried out and the innocent maiden is sexually assaulted. However, the purported hero's subsequent emotional and spiritual betrayal of her is the most heinous violation.


\textsuperscript{277} Allan Brick, "Paradise and Consciousness in Hardy's Tess", Nineteenth-Century Fiction 17:2 (Sept. 1962): 118; and Jean Brooks, 238.
The tale is set in the Vale of Blackmore, a region in the south of England. Alec seduces Tess in the Gothic primeval forests of the Chase, eventually causing her to leave her home village of Marlott for the fruitfulness of Talbothays' diary. After Angel repudiates her, she returns briefly to Marlott, and then travels to the harsh landscape of Flintcomb Ash. Although she is summoned back home by her mother, she and the rest of the Durbeyfield family are thrust out of Marlott when her father dies, and they are forced to seek refuge at the ancient d'Urberville vaults at Kingsbere. To ensure her family's survival, Tess resigns herself to living with Alec at Sandbourne, until Angel intervenes. She spends the happiest time of her life with him in the New Forest and her peregrinations finally end at Stonehenge.

As in traditional Gothic fiction, the novel features confused identities, incredible coincidences, and fantastical scenes. Alec appears in many guises, making it difficult to identify his real character. Tess is alternatively identified as the "unfallen Eve or an Eve who willingly accepts the serpent", while Angel is hero and villain.\textsuperscript{279} There is an emphasis on the grotesque and the macabre, often manifested in the author's discordant language, while the indistinct nightmarish scenes in the novel increase the sense of disorder.

Gothic images of tombs resonate through the novel, beginning with John Durbeyfield's imaginings of his ancestors in "'gr't lead coffins'".\textsuperscript{280} A somnambulistic Angel places a living Tess into an empty stone coffin.

\textsuperscript{279} Laura Claridge, "Tess: A Less than Pure Woman Ambivalently Presented", \textit{Texas Studies in Literature and Language} 28 (Fall 1986): 331.

\textsuperscript{280} Thomas Hardy, \textit{Tess of the d'Urbervilles} (1891), ed. Scott Elledge, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), 1-1, 8. All subsequent references to \textit{Tess of the d'Urbervilles} are parenthetical, with phase, chapter, and page number.
signifying her death to him. At a later date, Alec follows the Durbeyfield family to the ruined d’Urberville vaults at Kingsbere. Ignoring the solemnity associated with a place of death, he lies on an altar tomb in their debased ancestral sepulchre and frightens Tess by pretending to be an effigy. At Stonehenge, an ancient site of sacrifice, the heroine elects to give up her struggle for life.

Mirroring the anxiety of the age, the novel questions the difference between the natural and unnatural, particularly in the relationships between male and female. Alec’s animalistic ardour is excessive, but so to is Angel’s spiritual passion. Tess is pulled in different direction by both men and is not sure what is natural. Meanwhile, society insists that her own erotic impulses are unnatural, because women are supposed to “exalt the emotional side of love”.280

The novel has a strong ironical tone and is itself an ironic attack of the reader’s expectations. The villain dies at the hands of the heroine, while subversion of the Gothic formula that first asserts itself with Tess’s violation, is also evident in her final fate: execution. As in The Woodlanders, there is no resolution in Tess. When Tess she says “I am ready”, she does not mean she is ready to die, but ready to discontinue the battle to live (7-LVIII, 328). She does not expire fittingly on the stone altar; she is not swept up in a moment of epiphany. The black flag starkly signifies her death. While some critics view the final scene of Angel and Liza-Lu walking off hand-in-hand as

---


281 Carpenter, 229.
hopeful, others see it as simply a repetition of the same event. There is no closure.

The central Gothic theme of the novel revolves around time, concentrating particularly on the ability of the past to reassert itself in the present. Throughout the text, Hardy emphasizes the fact that the past is inescapable, but he is also conscious of the power of language. Tess is undone, not by the past, but by the utterance of that past.

Pastor Tringham, the official representative of Christianity in Marlott, forces the past to intrude into the present with one word. On the first page of the novel, following a greeting from John Durbeyfield, he reciprocates, wishing “Sir John” a good night. When the haggler questions his use of the title, the enthusiastic genealogist warms to his theme, elaborating:

‘Your ancestor was one of the twelve knights who assisted the Lord of Estremavilla of Normandy in his conquest of Glamorganshire. ... in Edward the Second’s time your forefather Brian was summoned to Westminster to attend the Great Council ... and in Charles the Second’s reign you were made Knights of the Royal Oak.’ (1-I, 7)

Durbeyfield’s knightly ancestors go back centuries, from 1066 and Lord Estremavilla—a Norman invader who conquered Celtic/Welsh land—to the reign of Charles II, whose rule ended in 1665. John Durbeyfield, only “a little debased” in physical features, is descended from a medieval noble family with his forebears lying in copious “‘rows and rows of ... vaults’”, clothed in “‘coats of mail and jewels” (1-I, 6, 7, 8).

Although he had not intended to disturb the villager with “‘such a useless piece of information”, the clergyman notes that “‘our impulses are too strong for our judgment sometimes’”, a statement that resounds

---

282 See J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire; and Curry.
throughout the novel (1-I, 7). The d’Urberville’s illustrious past is a meaningless fact of history, but paradoxically, this information becomes meaningful in the present. Through verbal references to medieval knights and ancient vaults, the deadness of the Gothic past is reanimated, with disastrous effects for the Durbeyfield family. 283

“Sir”’ John welcomes this news of the past and has no intention of trying to escape from it. The new-found knowledge of his heritage causes him to wonder if a brass band playing in the distance for the May-Day dance is “‘on account o’ I?’”, and in an effort to aggrandize himself, superciliously announces that he might “‘drive round and inspect the club [of dancers]’’ from the carriage he has extravagantly ordered (1-XI, 9). Durbeyfield attempts to reclaim the past, when the d’Urberville family had money and status, are doomed to fail.

The past cannot be redeemed. Being addressed as ‘Sir’, giving himself airs, or spending money in an improvident manner will not elevate Durbeyfield to the former stature of his antecedents. Indeed, Tess’s friends laugh at him for riding by in a coach. Neither bragging about the ancestral vaults at Kingsbere, nor offering to sell the family name, will bring him any wealth. In fact, he denies his family some much needed money on account of the past—refusing to sell Prince to the knackers because “‘when we d’Urbervilles was knights in the land, we didn’t sell our chargers for cat’s meat’” (1-IV, 28). Prince’s name is another reference to the d’Urberville’s noble past, but far from being a stallion fit for a king’s stables, like the family, he has deteriorated in health and esteem.

283 Sage and Smith, eds., 4.
Worn and tired as he is, Prince is still the corporeal mainstay of the family's haggling business. The entire description of his last journey is very dream-like, while his death initially appears unreal. Due to her father's inebriated state, Tess is forced to take the bees to market in the early hours of the morning. As Prince pulls the wagon carrying the hives down the road, Tess slips "deeply into reverie", a semi-conscious state not unlike the alcoholic "occidental glow" that placates the senior Durbeyfields at Rolliver's inn (1-IV, 26; 1-III, 18). As she experiences a double expansion of consciousness and reality, the passing scenery becomes "fantastic ... outside reality", while the wind transforms into "the sign of some immense sad soul". Even the sudden and violent death of Prince, occurring in the dim morning twilight, retains a shadowy quality (1-IV, 26). As dawn breaks, a sense of fantasy remains, as the pool of the dead horse's blood assumes an "iridescence" with "a hundred prismatic hues ... reflected from it". However, Tess's expansive state is quickly destroyed as horrifying reality reasserts itself. In the daylight, Prince laid "still and stark; his eyes half open ... [with a] hole in his chest" (1-IV, 27).

As illustrated by this incident, Tess remains trapped in a triple bind, "doomed by the potent power of the past (heredity), caught in the social and economic relations of her present class (family), and subject to the potentially destructive forces of modern change (the mail-cart)".284 Her father's exultance over his prestigious ancestors (heredity), and his subsequent indulgent inebriation (family), forces Tess onto the country lane early in the morning, where Prince is killed by the pointed shaft of a relatively new innovation (the mail-cart). The "crucial acts of violence", like the slaying of

---

284 Widdowson, Hardy in History, 121.
Prince, the violation of Tess, and the murder of Alec, are repetitions of previous turbulent times of the past, when d’Urberville soldiers were reputed to have their way with country girls. The common theme of piercing runs through all these incidents, as the past penetrates the present in more ways than one.

At Prince’s burial, in a foreshadowing of Tess’s eventual role, her face “was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess” (1-IV, 28). She accepts the blame for his death, believing there is “no excuse” for her own negligence (1-IV, 27). The family is not as troubled as Tess though, as the lackadaisical state of the household means that they view Prince’s death with only mild perturbation. Nevertheless, in an attempt to alleviate her feeling of guilt, she acquiesces to her mother’s desire to claim kin and travels to the d’Urberville country estate in Trantridge. Like a typical Gothic heroine, she submits to parental authority.

Contrary to her expectations, there is no Gothic mansion on the d’Urberville grounds. She uneasily murmurs, “I thought we were an old family; but this is all new” . The brick house, the stables, and the glass green houses are all of recent construction, and everything “looked like money” (1-V, 31). Furthermore, the man who introduces himself as Mr. d’Urberville does not have an “aged and dignified face”, like she has imagined, but is a young man with a “swarthy complexion” (1-V, 33).

Alec is initially typecast as the typical Gothic villain of melodrama, for along with his dark colouration, he has “full lips, badly moulded, ... above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points” (1-IV, 32). Within hours of his first meeting with Tess, he evokes the image of the fall,

as, in an erotic inversion of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he coerces her to eat out-of-season strawberries. She does so in "a half-pleased, half-reluctant state. ... like one in a dream" (1-V, 34). Helena Michie posits that the berries, forced between her teeth, not only foreshadow his rape of her, but also "silence her protests and effectively prevent her from expressing her own desire from then on".²⁸⁶ In this case, her passivity is no match for his "aggressive demeanour".²⁸⁷

Before she left that day, Alec chided Tess, telling her that d'Urberville and Durbeyfield were two different names, even though he himself had no legitimate claim on the d'Urberville name. His late merchant father picked the archaic surname out of a British Museum book that "was devoted to extinct ... obscure and ruined families" and annexed it to his original name when he moved to the country (1-V, 32) Parson Tringham knew very well that the Stoke-d’Urbervilles were no more related to the Durbeyfields than he was, but neglected to share this information. The clergyman’s silence was just as dangerous as his utterance.

Alec is not her "Coz'. He is strongly attracted to her because of beauty, not her bloodlines. He arranges for her to come work for his mother as a poultry farm/bird assistant. She is identified with birds, with the tame chickens and bullfinches in the Stoke-d’Urberville house later giving way to injured pheasants, hurt, as she has been, by humanity. The latter winged creatures die because of their "inability of nature to bear more", and in a prefiguration of her own death, Tess breaks the necks of those who are still


²⁸⁷ Deborah Collins, *Thomas Hardy and His God: A Liturgy of Unbelief* (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1990), 129.
alive, to stop the torture of these “kindred sufferers” (5-XLI, 232). (Tongue-in-cheek, Millgate comments that “Hardy’s feelings about bloodsports almost makes it possible to speak of Tess’s plight as dramatizing that of the birds”.288)

She is also compared to animals. When Alec presses her for a kiss, her eyes were like those of “a wild animal” (1-VIII, 45) As Clare secretly observes her, he likens her to a “domestic animal”, docile and submissive, or so he thinks (3-XIX, 102). She changes to “a wary animal”, rather skittish when she finds herself in the company of other men, and when Clare teases her about not loving him, she is referred to as “a wounded animal”, highlighting her sensitivity (4- XXXI, 163; 4-XXXIV, 184). John Humma posits that her “wild animal aspect” causes her to kill Alec, as she abandons self-restraint.289

Alec himself has little self-control and his animalistic passion for Tess puts her in danger. An ambiguous figure, his character is constantly shifting, from ‘Coz’, to sexual aggressor, and then, briefly, to religious fanatic. Late in the novel, he becomes a caricature of Satan, with the requisite flames and pitchfork. Dorothy Van Ghent argues that “when Alec plays his last frivolous trick on Tess”—springing up at her from one of the slabs in the ruined d’Urbervilles vault—“his neuroticism finally wears ... the deeply convincing character of insanity”.290

In contrast, Pinion considers such behaviour “sadistic”, contending that this tendency of Alec’s is first revealed by his mad galloping “when he

288 His Career 268.


conveys Tess and her luggage to the Slopes. After the incident with Prince, Tess is uneasy on anything with wheels, and she asks Alec to go slowly. Once he reaches the top of a hill, he ignores her request and recklessly spurs his horse, speeding down so quickly that Tess is obliged to hang on to his waist to keep from falling out. At the top of another incline, he does the same thing, but promises to stop if she allows him to kiss her. With tears of desperation, she agrees and, pitilessly, Alec gives her “the kiss of mastery”, prefiguring his ultimate mastery of her (1-VIII, 45). Yet, in the end, he is murdered, as the victim turns on her aggressor.

Once her harrowing journey is over, Tess settles into a routine at Trantridge. Although she is dependent upon Mrs. d’Urberville for her employment, the old woman’s invalidism requires her to deal mainly with Alec. Therefore, his influence over her is greater than that of mere companionship. As he becomes familiar to her, she loses much of her shyness of him, even though a hint of her “original mistrust” still remains (1-X, 54, 55).

Tess was unsure of why she felt uneasy around Alec. The looks from him that made her blush, and the “sly regards from loungers in the streets of the town”, troubled her, but being only “on the momentary threshold of womanhood”, she was uncertain what such glances meant (1-X, 52). Kristen Brady argues that the Trantridge farm-workers seek to educate and introduce Tess into the “world of sexuality” hours before her ride into The Chase.

After the weekly Saturday pilgrimage to a nearby town, Tess waits for her fellow-workers to retire from a rousing evening dance, as she is

---

291 Pinion. Hardy the Writer, 62.

unwilling to walk home alone. She recognizes the fact that in the dark "the roads were dotted with roving characters of possibly ill intent", but the consideration of Alec as one of these peripatetic persons of dubious motives never seems to cross her mind (1-X, 54).

A young man urges her to join the dance, but she refuses to indulge in the general revelry going on; the "turbulent feet" kicking up "a sort of vegeto-human pollen" and the "rushing couples ... indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nymphs". In clearer light "the demigods resolved themselves into the homely personalities of her own next-door neighbors", but in the haze, identities become inexplicably confused (1-X, 53). The real becomes surreal, as she watches dancers through the fog of "vegeto-human pollen" (10X, 52). The invocation of Greek sylvan deities accents the fantastical element of the revelry, and foreshadows Tess's own later linkage with Grecian goddesses. For the moment, she remains in the familiar corporeal world, but she has caught a confusing glimpse of an exotic and alien world.

The dual views and blurred visual images suggest that Tess is still too young to enter the adult world of sexuality. She does not understand the time during the dance when "every couple had been suitably matched. ... [and] the ecstasy and the dream began", when the conscious mind gives in to unconscious desires (1-X, 54). Bewildered by the "complexities of an adult world that entices by its ecstatic wildness", she is unable to respond to Alec's query. Asking her if he may treat her as a lover, she asks, "how can I say yes or no when--", leaving the question unanswered (1-XI, 61). Does he want to escort her into this mad world that both fascinates and frightens her, or does he wish to romance her in a gentlemanly manner? She is not quite sure

---

293 Brady, 141.
what he is asking, or what she herself wants, and therefore cannot reply with any certainty.

Her nascent erotic impulses, nudged into life by the dance, are further awakened on the homeward journey, a scene which Hardy loads with sexual innuendo and imagery. The phallic image of molasses "oozing" like "a slimy snake" down Car's back is suggestive, as she attempts to get rid of this stain in a parody of violent sexual contortions. Laying on her back, she wipes "her gown as well as she could by spinning horizontally on the herbage and dragging herself over it upon her elbows" (1-X, 56).

Tess joins the others in laughing at Car's behaviour, but it is doubtful she fully understands all the connotations of the scene, only chuckling because "'t 'others did'" (1-X, 57). Angry at being made the object of fun, Car focuses angrily on Tess, who has supplanted her in Alec's affections. She exclaims, "I'm as good as two of such!" , and proceeds to bare her "neck, shoulders, and arms (1-X, 57). Hardy indicates that she possesses the "faultless rotundities of a lusty country girl", suggesting that Car's "two of such", is a reference to her breasts, which she believes are the equal of Tess's (1-X, 57).

Brady suggests Tess's mirth indicates "a readiness for the sexual experience", although she is scandalized by "such a whorage" as the display of Car's naked upper torso. She is also artless enough, not only to give voice to the thought, but also to "majestically" decline to fight her rival (1-X, 57). Tess superior tone angers the rest of the female farm-workers. The male work-folk try to defend her, but this only increases the hostility. Even as Tess realizes that "the better among them would repent of their passion the next

---

294 Brady, 141.
day", at that moment, her only desire was to get away from their invective (1-X, 57).

While the excited impulses of the work folk are caused by the sin of drunkenness, Tess’s impassioned action is caused by the sin of pride—the mastery over one’s enemies. She asserts her independence of the other workfolk by retreating, but at the same time, feels compelled to withdraw because she has been beaten into submission. As she rides off with Alec, the intuition that she is—as Carr’s mother says—jumping “out of the frying-pan into the fire!” is eclipsed by the triumph of her successful flight away from her tormentors (1-X, 58).

The fog that envelopes the couple reflects Tess’s own hazy state of mind. Exhausted, she is unaware that Alec has taken her far past the turn-off to Trantridge. They are in the Chase—

a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primeval date, wherein Druid mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew. (1-V, 31)

Alec is genuinely unsure of what part of the forest he is in, so he makes a nest of leaves for Tess, gives her his coat, and then tries to ascertain their location. When he returns, the blackness is so complete that he has to walk with his hands outstretched, so as not to run into any trees. Seeing a “pale nebulousness at his feet” and hearing “a gentle regular breathing”, he finds Tess asleep and lays his cheek on hers, while “darkness and silence ruled everywhere” (1-XI, 63). The narrator likens Alec’s actions to those of the ancient soldiers—the Gothic knights who symbolize the inherent violence of the d’Urberville past. There is a
possibility of retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d’Urberville’s mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. (1-XI, 63)

Hardy ironically notes that the favored old testament policy—to visit the sins of the father upon the sons—“may be a morality good enough for divinities”, but for mere mortals such a method is renounced (1-XI, 63). An offense committed against the current generation cannot erase or correct any misdeeds that occurred long ago at the hands of antecedents. It does not make things rights, for “the past cannot be either escaped or redeemed by action. ... because it is not a single event located in time”.295

Critical views vary markedly on whether Tess was raped or seduced on that night in the Chase.296 No matter what words one uses, Tess’s experience is ambiguous and cannot be summed up in language—that is Hardy’s point. He is reticent about what happened in the Chase in order to press home the understanding that the critical choices Tess makes in her life—including the decision which led to her presence in the Chase—are complex and equivocal. The “thick darkness” and “obscurity” not only physically screen Alec from any passersby, they also prevent the reader from distinguishing the truth.


Critics who believe she was raped include: F.B. Pinion, Hardy the Writer, 106; and Richard McGhee, “‘Swinburne Planteth, Hardy Watereth’ ”, 91.

Newey notes that "there is no ideal truth, only a range of truths", and all are true, or rather, none are false.297

The attitude of some of the villagers reinforces the belief that Tess did not go along willingly with Alec's actions. When she goes back to work in the Marlott fields after the birth of Sorrow, one of the farm-workers reflects that:

'...a little more persuading had to do wi' the coming o' [Tess's baby], I reckon. There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in The Chase; and it might ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along...'. (2-XIV, 76)

Nevertheless, while a physically and emotionally exhausted Tess was overwhelmed by Alec in the darkness, the novel quietly notes, for "a few weeks subsequent to the night ride in The Chase" she was Alec's mistress (2-XII, 63).

Through Alec's interference, Tess was plunged into an exotic world of sexuality.

She winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away.... Hate him she did not quite. (2-XII, 69)

Ian Gregor remarks that "Alec brings to consciousness [her] own sexuality", and McGhee agrees that through the actions of Alec, she "realized something in herself that she cannot accept, cannot repress, and finally cannot deny--her pleasure in her sexuality".298 Still, self-reproachfully, she

297 Newey, "Thomas Hardy and the Form of Making", 229.

does not hate Alec as much as she does herself, for submitting to his advances. Upon leaving Alec, Tess says to him, "I didn’t understand your meaning until it was too late", to which he replies, "That’s what every woman says". Indicative of her strong feelings, she swears at him, "My God! ... Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women feel?" (2-XII, 65).

Yet, Alec did not force Tess to stay with him in the weeks after their first sexual encounter. Recognizing this, Laura Claridge stated that the heroine did not, “in the end deserve the full sympathy that the thrust of the dominant narrative” called for. At the same time, she pointed to the subtitle of the novel as proof that Tess’s “innocence” was “important to Hardy”.299 He noted ironically that the term, “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented”, was “a mere description unlikely to be disputed, as one might say ‘an accomplished lady’ or ‘a man of wealth’ ”.300 However, the author’s presumption of her guiltlessness is supported by the text, as her vulnerability and purity are highlighted by the images of “the beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow”, which was “traced [by] such a coarse pattern” in the darkness of The Chase (1-XI, 62). Shanta Dutta insisted that Hardy fully supported Tess,301 and the ambivalent tone that Claridge perceived may have been due to the changes in the story from serial to novel version. (Tess was unequivocally blameless in the former, where she and Alec were married in a sham ceremony and no baby was born.)

Nevertheless, Garson finds it

299 Laura Claridge, 325 and 327.

300 Thomas Hardy, letter to Henry Jones, 2 Dec. 1909, CL IV, 62.

hard to believe that an adolescent girl brought up by Joan Durbeyfield would be as ignorant as Tess seems to be of the nature of the threat posted by Alec, yet Tess reluctantly surrenders to a number of overtures without any apparent sense of where they are leading.\footnote{Garson, 137.}

Upon leaving Alec and telling her mother of her troubles, she asks in anguish, ‘Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me?’ (2-XII, 70). However, her mother knew that Alec would make advances. In fact, she counted upon it and naively expected that after the fact, he would marry Tess. She did not educate Tess, because she thought her daughter would act too proud if she counseled her about what the man’s “fond feelings” might result in. She concludes that ‘“Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!”’, unaware of the irony evident in such a statement (2-XII, 70).

The Gothic past that John Durbeyfield embraced provided the impetus for Tess to claim kin and gain employment at the Slopes, which in turn led to her violation, and the subsequent birth and death of the infant, Sorrow. She physically buried the product of the past, but she also wanted to forget her former actions. “To escape the past and all that appertained thereto, was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away” from Marlott (2-XV, 84). Therefore, a year after Sorrow’s death, she accepted employment at Talbothays dairy, which was located near some of the former grounds and vaults of the ancient d’Urbervilles. Oblivious of the damage her Gothic past has already caused her, she wondered “if any strange good things might come of her being in her ancestral land” (2-XV, 85).
At the same time, despite her feelings that the proximity of her ancestral home might lead to "good things", she refutes any connection with them. When Dairyman Crick says that he once heard that "a family of some such name of yours ... came originally from these parts, and 'twere an old ancient race that all but perished", she denies any knowledge of such a story (3-XVII, 91). Along with the story, Hardy invokes Gothic images of long-forgotten estates and ancient sepulchres, still extant, to illustrate the "peculiar unwillingness of the past to go away".

Unaware of her past and lineage, Angel views her as "a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature", and seems "to discern in her something ... which carried him back into a joyous and unforeseeing past, before the necessity of taking thought had made the heaven gray" (3-XVIII, 102). He thinks she retains a certain innocence and naiveté, with her faith in a provident God remaining uninfluenced by the troubling ideas of Darwin. Her belief is more ambiguous, with the idea of a "vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other" (2-XIII, 72). Tess possesses more complex feelings that he realizes, and he is surprised and slightly troubled by her comment that the "hobble of being alive is rather serious" (3-XIX, 105). Her thoughts suggest she is not the old-fashioned and God-fearing country maid he wants her to be.

Like Fitzpiers, Angel objectifies Tess as "a visionary essence of woman" (3-XX. 131). He prefers the abstract to the physical, which is why he likens her to imaginary Greek deities, like Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, and Artemis, the moon goddess and virgin huntress. He also credits her with

---

303 Sage and Smith, 4.
admirable physical attributes, with a face of “real warmth” and a perfect mouth, except in the lips, where “the humanity was found in the “touch of the imperfect” (3-XXIV, 127). Physical flaws are acceptable to him, but he expects her to be morally perfect, like the pre-lapsarian Eve.

Angel and Tess’s duties of milking the cows together made them feel “like Adam and Eve”, while the diary itself has Edenic associations (3-XXX, 110). Tess has an spiritual experience in the fields, as her encounter with Angel and his harp is much like Cytherea’s enthralling experience with Manston and his organ. As the wildflowers’ “waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound” from Angel’s harp, Tess becomes unaware of her surroundings, and her “physical sensations are translated into a spiritual dimension”.305 The music from his harp sounds majestic, and indeed; Tess tells Angel that he “‘can raise up dreams with your music’”, similar to the Fiddler of the Reels, (3-XIX, 104-5). Yet, the “instrument and execution” are “poor” and the notes of the harp are merely “thin” (3-XIX, 104). The sublime storm in Desperate Remedies causes Manston’s organ playing to appear better than it really is, but in Tess, her own fascination with the musician influences her perception of the melodies.

However, there is a disturbance within the fields, as Hardy juxtaposes “hints of decay in the midst of growth”.306 In what Tomlinson calls the “oppressive fruitfulness”307 of Talbothays, some wildflowers produce “dazzling” red, yellow and purple blooms, but the strong rank smells of

305 3-XXX, 104; and Humma, 74.


uncultivated wild plants are also in evidence (3, XIX, 104). There is an element of disquietude in the author’s grotesque language—the animal excreta of “cuckoo-spittle” and “slug-slime”, and the “sticky blights” which discolour Tess’s skin (3, XIX, 104).

Hardy also utilizes discordant images. When Tess emerges from an afternoon nap and yawns, Angel notices “the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake’s”. In case the readers miss the potential threats inherent in snakes—their venom and their associations with Lucifer—he also makes note of her “coiled-up” hair (4-XXVII, 143). Innocuously, the narrator compares Tess to “a sunned cat” a few sentences later, which causes the reader to consider Angel’s views as all the more strange and memorable, although he misses the sinister intimations (4-XXVII, 143).

Immediately following this jarring imagery, both point of view and language insistently shift from Angel’s views on Tess’s external appearance to the narrator’s views of her internal vitality. As she moves from sleepiness to awareness,

the brim- fulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a women’s soul is more incarnate than at any other time: when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation. (4-XXVII, 143)

This is Hardy’s ‘pure woman’. Her soul, her essence, her “spiritual beauty” shines forth through her corporeal body, accentuating her physical beauty, which is of secondary importance.

This portrait is bracketed by disturbing images. As Tess become aware of Angel’s scrutiny, she looked at him “as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam”, when “the eyes of them both were opened, and they
knew they were naked". Kaja Silverman mentions the "curious instability about Tess’s image". Is she the woman with the radiant inner spirit, the "unfallen Eve", or is she the one who is associated with snakes—the "Eve who willingly accepts the serpent"?

As their relationship deepens, their erotic impulses become difficult to contain. In one instance, "the influence that had passed into Clare like an excitation from the sky did not die down", and when he "clasped her in his arms" she "sank upon him in her momentary joy, with something very like an ecstatic cry" (3-XXIV, 127). While she expresses her passion, Angel chastely pulls back from even kissing her, but from this moment forward, he tells himself that her loves Tess for herself "her soul, her heart, her substance" (4-XXVI, 139).

Feeling unworthy, Tess refuses his first marriage proposal, but he persists and she eventually accepts, thinking she can escape her past. She tells him about her lineage and he presses her "to spell your name correctly—d’Urberville—from this day". Minutes later, he appropriates her and the name, saying, "Mistress Teresa d’Urberville, I have you" (4-XXX, 159, 160). However, Tess wants to invalidate the Durbeyfield/ d’Urberville link, for it is this surname that sent her to the Stoke-d’Urberville estate. She wants Mrs. Angel Clare to replace Mrs. Alexander d’Urberville, which she felt was her true name, despite the lack of a marriage ceremony. Like a saviour, Angel’s words offered her an escape, a chance to nullify the past: "‘Take my name and so you will escape yours! The secret is out so why should you any longer

---

307 3-XIX, 143; and King James. Genesis 3:7a.


309 Claridge, 331.
refuse me?" (4-XXX, 160). What he considers their "secret" is their love for each other, and once exposed, he sees no reason why they should hide it. Tess holds onto another secret though, and when it comes to light, it is he that refuses her. Nevertheless, as she agrees to marry him, she throws her arms around his neck and kisses him with passion, and only then did he seem to fully recognize her as a real, physical woman, with desires.

Feeling guilty, Tess intended to tell him about her past before the wedding, and even slipped a letter under his door detailing the difficulties of her earlier life. Hours before the ceremony, she realized that he never received her note, and it was too late to disclose its contents. She could not bring herself to renounce her "one desire ... to make herself his, to call him her lord, her own-then, if necessary to die" (4-XXX, 178). Nevertheless, as Sedgwick notes, by closing off language, i.e., not telling Angel, she had rendered her knowledge even more "furtive and explosive" than it originally was.311

Many portentous omens follow their wedding. The coach in which they leave the church fills Tess with a nameless dread, which she cannot explain or understand, until Angel tells her the superstitious legend of the d'Urberville Coach, which dates back to the sixteenth century. Trembling, Tess asks if members of her family see it when they are about to die, or if they have committed a crime, but he dismisses her concerns. As they drive away, the cock crows three times, the last time at Angel. Like Peter, he will renounce someone who he pledged "to defend under any condition" (4-XXIX, 153). In addition, the farmhouse they are staying in once belonged to a d'Urberville and there are immovable portraits of ladies of the ancient family.

311 Sedgwick, 18.
on the landing. Tess dislikes the pictures of "those horrid women ... with their long pointed features ... suggestive of merciless treachery", especially because, even in her beauty, she resembles them (4-XXXIV, 183). Although she is now Mrs. Angel Clare, she is still surrounded by her Gothic past, seemingly unable to escape it.

Upon being informed of the suicide of one her fellow dairymaids by the man who delivered their luggage, Tess is consumed by guilt and resolves to tell Angel the truth. He forestalls her by telling of his own past indiscretion which is, as Tess sees it "just the same" as hers (4-XXXIV, 190). Yet, in an ominous allusion to Milton, as she tells her story, "each diamond on her neck gave a sinister wink like a toad's" (4-XXXIV).

After her confession "nothing has changed from the moment when he had been kissing her", but for Angel "the essence of things has changed" (5-XXXV, 191). Tess's impurity in and of itself does not directly result in Angel's distancing himself from her. It is by giving voice to the circumstances of that blemish that drives him mentally and physically away. She has become different, only "through the power construct of language", by giving voice to an act that occurred in "obscurity. ... darkness and silence" (1-X, 62).

In the morning after the revelation she still looked "absolutely pure", and at that moment, Angel might have "willingly taken a lie from her lips, knowing it to be one", because he did not want to admit that his image of her was wrong (5-XXXVI, 199). When he discovered that Tess had an infant and that the father was still alive, all hope died in him. He was unable to adjust to the image of her as a woman who has been the object of another man's passion, or who might even have felt a moment of passion with this other

---

311 Goode, *The Offensive Truth*, 123.
man herself. As Rosemarie Morgan contends, he "cannot credit her with an existence out of his power".312

The second night after their wedding, Angel entered Tess's bedroom in a somnambulistic state and stood over her, murmuring "dead, dead, dead". He picked her up and "rolled her in the sheet as in a shroud" (5-XXXV, 207). He carried her downstairs and across the grounds until he reached the ruins of an abbey. Still sleeping, he carefully laid her in "the empty stone coffin of an abbot", kissed her and walked away (5-XXXV, 209). Goldstein contends that this incident "goes beyond any credibility except as Gothic drama", but it illustrated Angle's unconscious desires.313 He wanted Tess to be pure, but the only way she could be regain her purity would be to die. He was unable to admit in his conscious state that he wanted Tess to be dead and therefore, beyond all reproach.

When Angel leaves Tess, Moring posits that he is fleeing from more then his knowledge of Tess's affair. He may not want to acknowledge his own erotic impulses. Despite his own forty-eight hours of debauchery with an older woman in London, Angel "fears any kind of lapse into barbaric, animalistic passion" because of the anxious Victorian indistinction "between male and female, natural and unnatural, civilized and degenerate, human and nonhuman".314 He is "more spiritual than animal ... less Byronic than Shelleyan", with "a love more especially inclined to the imaginative" (4-XXXI, 162). Hardy felt that "the animal side of human nature should never be dwelt upon except as a contrast or foil to its spiritual side"315, but the narrator

312 Morgan, 105.
313 Goldstein, 147.
314 Meg Moring, 15.
significantly suggests that "more animalism" would have made Angel a "nobler man" (5-XXXVI, 205). Excess spirituality can be as dangerous as excess passion.

Angel is dangerous, even though his name and skill with a harp ironically suggest an affinity with heaven. His renunciation of Tess is an action of "priestly villainy", as is his hypocrisy. He "evince[s] considerable indifference to social forms and observances" yet he forsakes Tess because of social and moral convention (3-XVIII, 99). He claims to love the Church and its history, but can not tolerate its theology, although he is still "the slave to custom and conventionality" (5-XXXIX, 221). He dislikes the "material distinctions of rank and wealth", yet delights in the knowledge of Tess's ancient lineage (3-XVIII, 99). However, when she tells him of her past, he turned around and calls her "the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy", with her decrepit family "imply[ing] decrepit wills, decrepit conduct" (5-XXXV, 195).

Ever the humble and submissive wife and servant, Tess believes that Angel, her lord, knows "best what my punishment ought to be" and her "long-suffering" attitude allows her husband to leave her with little remorse (5-XXXVII, 212). He love of Angel remains steadfast and her idolization of him continues long after he has left her. No longer possessing any faith in a benevolent God, or in a bountiful, charitable Nature--she has already "learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing"--she must believe in

---


317 Mallock, 65.
something and Angel fulfills that need, his very name ironically implying an alliance with a divine power (2-XII, 64). Collins comments that she credits him with a "godlike omnipotence" and still perceives him as her saviour.318 The perfect disciple, she worships him, "as if she saw something immortal before her", and unlike Peter, she would never deny him, but would fact would die for him (5-XXXVII, 212). She is willing to sacrifice herself for him, but Angel cannot even defy social convention for Tess, let alone die for her.

As with the death of Prince, she takes all the blame upon herself, and is unwilling to admit to anyone, least of all herself, that he has deserted her. When she returns to Marlott, she gives her parents twenty-five pounds with an "assertion of her dignity", or pride, "as if the wife of a man like Angel Clare could well afford it" (5-XXXVIII, 216). She is unwilling to remain in her hometown, but a return to Talbothays is rejected because it "might bring reproach upon her idolized husband" (5-XLI, 230). She obtains work at Flintcomb Ash and when her mother writes to request twenty more pounds, she omits to tell her parents the truth about her poverty because "it might have brought reproach upon him" (5-XLII, 237). She does not correct Joan's impression that her husband was "a man of means and had doubtless returned by this time", and she duly sends off money she can ill afford to lose (5-XLI, 228). Meanwhile, pride prevents her from making a financial appeal to Clare's parents. Marion, a former dairymaid at Talbothays, observes that Angel's treatment of her "seems hardly fair", but Tess contends that his actions are "quite fair; though I am unhappy. ... Wives are unhappy sometimes; from no fault of their husbands—from their own (5-XLII, 236).

---

318 D. Collins,134, 132.
She will do her penance in the hell of Flintcomb Ash, hoping that in her suffering she will gain absolution from her lord.

Still attempting to escape her past, Tess erases her physical identity because “her fine features were unquestionably traceable” in the portraits of past d’Urberville women. This is past she wishes to invalidate (4-XXXI, 183). In addition, when a few young men are “troublesomely [sic] complimentary to her good looks”, she views it as a hazard (5-XLII, 233). After all, Alec took an interest in his “pretty Coz” because of her “luxuriance of aspect” and this led to her violation, and indirectly, to Angel’s repudiation of her (1-V,34, 35). The men’s favorable remarks disturb her further because she feels that in hearing them she is somehow being unfaithful to Angel. To prevent any more expressions of manly admiration and to keep herself ‘pure’ for Angel, who has already rejected her for a lack of purity, she puts on her most faded and ancient clothes, hides half her face behind a handkerchief, and brutally cuts off her eyebrows (5-XLII, 233).

There is a limit to what a human being can endure. To highlight Tess’s pain at Flintcomb Ash, Hardy introduces the Gothic image of “gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes . . . these nameless creatures” who have seen “scenes of cataclysmal horror . . . in curdling temperatures that no man could endure” (5-XLIII, 240). (Hardy later professed that he could not remember what “gaunt” birds he was specifically referring, but he was probably thinking of snow buntings319) The desolation and climatic shifts these Arctic birds have endured and been witness to, “heightens the reader’s sense of Tess’s

unrelieved anguish, past and present, and hint at her being on the edge of the unendurable".\textsuperscript{320}

Tess asked him not to make her punishment " 'more than I can bear!'," but Giordano posits that since "she persists in considering Angel her lord, she must endure humiliation, deprivation, and further sexual abuse".\textsuperscript{321} Newey comments that the idea of "redemption through self-sacrifice" is "part of an aberrant mentality".\textsuperscript{322} Still, Tess continues to wait for the return of her saviour.

At the same time, Alec, who she has not seen since she left Trantridge, shows up near Flintcomb Ash in the role of preacher. In his new-found religious fervor, he seeks out Tess and gives her the message of salvation, which she rejects. Ironically, while she suffers and undergoes her penance at the hellish post-lapsarian farm, he is delivered simply by renouncing "the old Adam of my former years". His declaration that conversion seemed like "a jolly new idea" reminds one of Fitzpiers and his jaded search for fresh concepts (6-XLV, 255, 256).

His faith is suspect, for he gives her the responsibility for his behaviour. Putting the onus upon her, he makes her swear " 'never [to] tempt me—by your charms or your ways' again (6-XLV, 258). Even after she tells him, " 'Do not again come near me' ", he returns to see her again at Flintcomb Ash in January, trying to make atonement by proposing marriage to her, but again she implores: " 'Go—I beg you' " (6-XLV, 258; 6-XLVI, 264). She pleads with him to leave her alone, before "any scandal spreads that may do harm to his

\textsuperscript{320} F.B. Pinion, \textit{Hardy the Writer}, 97.

\textsuperscript{321} 5-XXXVII, 212; and Giordano, 175.

\textsuperscript{322} Newey "Thomas Hardy and the Forms of Making", 215.
[Angel’s] honest name” (6-XLVI, 268). But Alec continues to pursue her relentlessly.

When he next visits her in February on the day of the Candlemas Fair, he is no longer a believer and blames her for the destruction of his newfound faith. Candlemas is a festival in honor of the purification of the Virgin Mary, but he ironically calls her a “temptress” and “dear damned witch of Babylon”, described in the Bible as the “mother of harlots and abominations of the earth”. He accuses her of placing temptation, in the form of her beauty, in his way—no matter that he sought her out against her express wishes. He charges her with being “‘the innocent means’ ‘of his loss of faith, amending, ‘‘I do not blame you. But the fact remains’’” (6-LVI, 268).

He denounces the traditional faith of Mr. Clare, the man who first charged him with this fervent but brief evangelicalism, avowing that there is no God. Alec refuses to “‘feel responsible for my deeds and passions if there’s nobody to be responsible to’”, and he advises Tess to do the same (6-XLVII, 274).

However, Tess feels it is her responsibility to continue to wait for Angel and believe she was “very wrong and neglectful in leaving everything to be done by him!” (5-XLI, 245). In her penultimate letter to him, she pleads as if to a New Testament god, “not to be just—only a little kind to me. ... If you will send me one little line and say I am coming soon, I will bide on”, reiterating that she could die happy in his arms (6-XLVII, 279). But she has already been condemned by the Old Testament law.

Tess manages to wait for the return of her human lord for fifteen months, despite no word from him and with all indications pointing to

---

323 King James, Revelations 17:5b; and (6-XLVI, 268).

324 From her marriage on Christmas Day until the next year’s Lady-Day in late March.
the reality that he has permanently deserted her. Finally, in a subversion of
the archetypal Gothic ending of “salvation through penance”, she bitterly
admits to Alec that “I have no husband”. Seeing her weakness, Alec
presses his advantage and applies emotional blackmail. He mentions her
parents and siblings and says he could make them comfortable if only she
would “show confidence” in him. This prompts her to plead with him to be
silent and not mention them to prevent her from “break[ing] down quite’ ”.
Although she admits that he may be “a little better and kinder than I have
been thinking you were” , she refuses to take anything from him, “either for
them or for me” (6-XVII, 278).

After rebuffing Alec, her family once more appeals to her for help,
summoning her home. She returns to Marlott, where her mother lies very
ill. After nursing her back to health, Tess turns her hand to practical matters,
e.g., providing food for her family. While her father works in their garden,
she prepares their nearby allotment for planting. She and many of her
neighbours enjoyed working on into the night, with the fires of refuse and
dead weeds burning on many of the plots, illuminating “the fantastic
mysteries of light and shade” (6-L, 288). On evening, as Tess is working the
soil with a steel fork, she sees another man working on the same allotment,
also employing a pitchfork. She thinks nothing of it, assuming that her
father had sent him, until she goes to throw some unwanted weeds into the
fire. Her fellow worker does the same.

The fire flared up, and she beheld the fact of d’Urberville.
The unexpectness of his presence, the grotesqueness of his
appearance in gathered smockfrock ... worn by only the most old-
fashioned of labourers, had a ghastly comicality that chilled her as to its
bearing. D’Urberville emitted a low long laugh....

326 Ibid., 217; and 6-LI, 290.
'this is just like Paradise. You are Eve, and I am the Old Other One come to tempt you'. (6-I, 291).

In the flames, with weird attire and pitchfork in hand, Alec appears as a otherworldly and grotesque caricature of Satan. He tempts Tess once more, telling her he has been thinking about her siblings and the poor health of her father. Once more, she refutes him. A few minutes later, she discovers that her father is dead, and with him goes the freehold.

Firor believes that the eviction of the Durbeyfield and their search for a place to sleep is "a picture that is drawn perhaps in too strong a light and shade".326 Once they are thrust out of Marlott, her family ends up staying by the Gothic d’Urberville vaults in Kingsbere. Tess’s mother declares, "’Isn’t your own family vault your own freehold’ .... that’s where we’ll camp’ " (6-LII 300). The four poster bed is pulled from the wagon and put under the south side of the church, making a nest for the children. Alter making them comfortable, she walks around the churchyard and enters the crumbling chapel. She sees the tombs of her ancestors.

They were Canopied, altar-shaped and plain; their carving being defaced and broken; their brasses torn from the matrices; ...

As she turned to withdraw, passing near an altar-tomb, the oldest of them all, on which was a recumbent figure. ... She discovered all in a moment that the figure was a living person ... she was quite overcome, and sank don nigh to fainting, not however till she had recognized Alec d’Urberville in the form.

He leapt off the slab and supported her. (6-LII, 302)

Here, with ancestors moldering in their tombs, and amongst the trappings of death, Tess faces her mortality and is offered a stark choice. She can chose to follow the fate of her ancestors, or she can finally accept Alec’s offer of

326 Firor, 259.
assistance. She offers a token resistance, but her belief in Angel has finally cracked. No longing waiting for her lord, she surrenders to Alec. In exchange for her submission, he will take care of her family.

Rosemarie Morgan suggests that Tess' spirit remained intact even if Alec "appropriated" her body. However, he has broken her spirit by killing her hope—destroying any expectation of the return of her god. But Angel does return to reclaim her, in the process paradoxically proving that Tess’s faith in him was not misplaced, but also intensifying her guilt over her capitulation to Alec. Her realization that Alec has deceived her causes her "unspeakable despair" and she lashes out at him—"'You said my husband would never come back. ... at last I believed you and gave way. ... [you] made me be what I prayed you in pity not to make me be again!'", i.e., impure.

Tess stabs Alec to cancel "the blood seal ..., given under the mistletoe in the darkness of the Chase, and consequently never revoked". By killing the one who caused her to sin, she believes she has erased the sin altogether, and thus made herself acceptable to Angel. He denied her as an impure woman, but he appears to accept her as murderer. They have a "strange suspension within a kind of social and moral vacuum" in their brief interlude after she kills Alec. However, Moring suggests that he leads her to where she can easily be seen and apprehended. In an unconscious version of the Judas kiss, he leads her to Salisbury plain and Stonehenge, where the landscape is flat for miles around.

---

327 Morgan, 95.
328 Gose, 269.
329 Millgate, His Career, 276.
330 Moring, 16.
Clearly, Tess's happiness cannot last, and Hyman maintains that if she cannot "have happiness, she prefers to escape her life altogether." Tess never actively seeks suicide. At times she feels undeserving of life, and her continual bewailing and bewilderment concerning her very existence echoes throughout the novel. Disgusted with herself for accepting Alec's favors in the weeks following his direct transgression upon her person, she laments, "I wish I had never been born" (2-XII, 65). Angel's later marriage proposal causes her to voice the exact same words to him, in this case due to a sense that she does not deserve to be happy. Aside from brief interludes with Angel, she silently mourns "the plight of being alive", thinking that the "one thing better than leading a good life ... was to be saved from leading any life at all" (2-XIII, 72; 5-XXXVI 204). Following his cruel treatment of her, she wishes her "bone[s] would be bare. ... now", and in the aftermath of the macabre vault scene with Alec, on the brink of realizing that she will have to go back to him, wonders "Why am I on the wrong side of this door?" (5-XLI, 232; 6-LII, 303).

Even when the policemen come for her she does not say "I am ready to die", but "'I am ready'", which is a significant difference (LVIII, 328). She simply decides to cease the struggle of life. But where does she die? Did she seal her fate when she determined to carry the bee hives to market? Or was it the moment she decided to escape from the Car women on Alec's horse? Did Angel's repudiation kill her? The murder of Alec was suicidal, but was she capable of reasonable thought at the time? There is no answer. Just as Tess's experience in the Chase cannot be identified or labeled by language, Tess's point of death cannot be determined by language. There is a "presence of

---

331 Virginia Hyman, "The Evolution of Tess", chap. in Ethical Perspectives in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (New York: Kennikat Press, 1975), 120.
multiple incompatible explanations of what happens to Tess. They cannot all be true, and yet they are all there in the words of the novel”.332

Critics constantly misconstrue the penultimate chapter. The novel does not end at Stonehenge. Millgate is one of the few critics who realizes that “there is no sacrificial apotheosis”.333 She lies on the sacrificial stone, but no matter how fitting it might be, she does not die there in one splendid transcendental moment. Tess is not swept upward in a moment of glorious epiphany. Judith Bill says of Stonehenge, that “this place of sacrifice and worship has fittingly welcomed a wandering pagan home”, and Casagrande agrees that she has returned to the “home of her maternal ancestors, and a reawakening of strength”.334 Friedman comments on her spiritual journey through the novel, ending in her “Druidical sacrifice to the sun”.335 One of my undergraduate professors told an entire class of forty students that the last chapter of Tess was a mistake, and that very few authors can make such a blunder and still be considered great. However, Hardy confound her reader’s expectations. Tess she is executed by a society that has already condemned her for her past.

Kaja Silverman sees “nothing redemptive” about the final chapter, or the “joined hands” of Liza-Lu and Angel.336 (7-LIX, 330). In an adherence to Tess’s last wish, he is “watch[ing] over ‘Liza-Lu” (7-LVIII, 326). As Angel


333 Millgate, His Career, 272.


335 Alan Friedman, 56.

336 Silverman, 25; and (7-LIX, 330).
pointed out to Tess at the time, he cannot marry his sister-in-law; the
Marriage Act forbade such arrangements. However, Liza-Lu "carries more
genetic similarity" to Tess than anyone else—only an identical twin would be
closer, but repetition is inevitable. For Hardy, "everything already exists
before happens and goes on existing after it has happened in history." In a
final cosmic irony, "the President of the Immortals ... had ended his sport
with Tess", but the game is not over (7-LVIII, 330) Liza-Lu is next.

If we accept Julian Wolfrey's definition of the Victorian Gothic novel
as "both a subversive force and a mechanism for social critique", then Tess is
Hardy's most Victorian Gothic novel. He overthrows the Gothic tradition
and confounds the reader's expectations, beginning with Tess's violation and
ending with her execution. He subverts the idea of redemption through self-
redemption; instead, Tess's tormented efforts to atone are indicative of an
aberrant mentality.

In the novel Hardy is consumed by the tyranny of social law, and uses
irony and sarcasm to highlight its faults. Society condemns his heroine on
the basis of a "self-righteous, attenuated and misapplied Christianity". Tess
can only gain temporary happiness by consciously and deliberately breaking
the law and discarding "civilized self-restraint".

337 Kevin Padian, "'A Daughter of the Soil': Themes of Deep Time and Evolution in Thomas
Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles. The Thomas Hardy Journal 13:3 (Oct, 1997), 77.
338 J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, xi.
341 Gose., 271
In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Woodlanders*, the cliffs and the woods enhanced the fantastical and unreal elements of the novel, and led to the double expansion of reality and consciousness, which assisted Hardy in expressing his sense of the Gothic. However, the author cannot express his sense of the Gothic in *Tess* because he denies this experience to his characters. *Tess* has an incipient augmentation of her mind and reality during her morning journey to the market with the bees, but the mood is shattered by the stark reality of Prince’s death. The farm-workers dance at Trantridge merges fantasy and unreality, and *Tess* is enticed by such a world. However, Alec’s subsequent actions taint her feelings. The music of Angel’s harp translates Tess’s physical sensations into a spiritual dimension, but such transcendence ends with the cessation of the music, and any sense of sublimity is negated by the blighted garden. The scene of planting fires also has sublime potential, but Alec’s ghastly appearance destroys that chance. Meanwhile, the Gothic images he employs simply highlight the reality that the past is inescapable.

In place of sublimity, Hardy offers grotesque discordance. In place of limitless expansion, Hardy offers harsh reality. As, J. Hills Miller notes that “reality is without order. It is an amphorous mass in random movement”.\(^{342}\) In *Tess*, the Gothic fails as a medium of expression, as Hardy can only express the disorder inherent in the Gothic.

\(^{342}\) J. Hills Miller, *Distance and Desire*, 255.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Matthew Arnold noted that post-romantic writers, like Hardy and himself, inhabited, "‘a pause in which the turn to a new mode of spiritual progress is being accomplished’".343 Hardy explored the Gothic as a medium of faith, a way to express his spiritual intuitions in the absence of belief in a benevolent God. Paraphrasing Byron, who in turn paraphrased Shakespeare, he declared: “the material world is so uninteresting, human life is so miserably bounded, circumscribed, cabin’d, cribb’d, confined. I want another domain for the imagination to expatiate in”.344 A ready domain presented


344 This is a paraphrase from Lord George Gordon Byron, “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”, Canto IV, Stanza 127, who in turn paraphrased it from Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act III, Scene I, line 24. The actual quotation is from William Archer, “Real Conversations:
itself in the Gothic. Through the Gothic, he could allude to cosmic conditions and the human condition, acknowledge the numinous, expand his imagination and reality, and explore possibilities that verge on truth.

Gothic modes of representation enabled him express his sense of the Gothic, but they also served another purpose. Through eighteenth and nineteenth-century tropes, figures, themes, and interpretations he was able to offer covert or overt social commentary. Instead of supporting the ideologies of the time, as Radcliffe did, Hardy questioned Victorian convictions. Often employing an ironic tone, he was able to subvert authoritarian and autocratic institutions and beliefs. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy implicitly criticized archaic medieval codes and highlighted the circumscribed role of women in the Victorian era—they were either wife or mother, or in Elfride’s case, dead. Through dramatizing Grace’s plight in *The Woodlanders*, Hardy was able to imply that the rigid religious laws that forbade divorce were themselves immoral. In *Tess*, Hardy overtly condemns medieval Christian dogma and the tyrannical social law that dooms Tess.

Aside from questioning established beliefs, Hardy differed from traditional Gothic writers in his use of the supernatural. Brooks noted that “Hardy had to deny himself the aid of the supernatural in persuading his readers to accept strange events”. While many of his poems and short stories acknowledge the presence of otherworldly forces, his novelistic presentations are more subtle, as he generates an aura of implicative supernaturalism to accompany his implausible events and improbable coincidences.

Recorded by William Archer, conversation I.—With Mr. Thomas Hardy,” *The Critic* XXXVIII April 1901, 316.

345 Jean Brooks, 140.
Like Lewis and Maturin, Hardy suggests that many apparently supernatural events are the products of an agitated mind. In *Desperate Remedies*, he postulates that the allegedly unusual sounds and sights that Cytherea perceives throughout the novel are projections of her imagination. However, he also raises the possibility that Cytherea's faculties are intact; that her anomalous experiences are real. Unexplainable by any normal means, they may alert her to the presence of outside agencies. Similarly, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, he intimates that excess pressure causes Elfride to believe erroneously that Mrs. Jethway is following her. Yet, Hardy also appears to allow that the widow may actually possess the supernatural ability to appear and disappear at will, and she is using this power selectively to unnerve Elfride. In presenting the inexplicable, Hardy neither denies nor affirms any supernatural influence. He does not explain any mysterious events in his novels because "if the Gothic can be explained it is no longer Gothic".347

While Hardy looked to the Gothic as a medium of faith in 1869, Thomas Carlyle had affirmed in 1836 that literature was the new spiritual belief. In the guise of Professor Teufelsdröckh, he asked:

'But there is no Religion?' reiterates the Professor. 'Fool! I tell thee, there is. Hast thou well considered all that lies in this immeasurable froth-ocean we name LITERATURE? Fragments of a genuine Church-Homiletic lie scattered there, which Time will assort: nay fractions even of a Liturgy.'348

---

347 Kincaid, 3.

In other words, surveying the ruins of one disintegrating religion, man will rebuild it in a different manner, choosing a different prayer book and liturgy from the chaos of literature.

Whether Hardy thought literature should replace the liturgy cannot be determined, but he did think that it played an important role in life. He came to this view gradually, over the course of time. Early in his career, he told Leslie Stephen that he only wanted to be considered “a good hand at a serial”.\(^\text{349}\) He further noted, that “living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled myself little about theories.\(^\text{350}\) He insisted that his novels were personal impressions only and expressed displeasure that some contemporary critics regarded his “works of art as if they were a scientific system or philosophy”.\(^\text{351}\)

Nevertheless, in a surreptitious interview in 1905, he condemned current literature for “the absence of a philosophic standpoint”, maintaining that most writings lacked “some sustained criticism—the outcome of modern knowledge—on the relations of man to the universe ... [which] are essential in literature”.\(^\text{352}\)

Although he did not explicitly express such an idea, Hardy was moving towards a place where literature took precedence over religion; where literature offered profound truths, no matter how unpalatable that truth might be. With *Tess* and *Jude*, he believed he had pushed that truth as far as he could in the novelistic form. The Theatre of the Absurd was still

\(^{349}\) Qtd. in Millgate, *Biography*, 173.

\(^{350}\) Thomas Hardy, *EL*, 201.

\(^{351}\) Thomas Hardy, *LY*, 175.

\(^{352}\) W. Smithland, 4.
fifty years away, although Hardy had already incorporated some of its themes in his fiction—the irrationality and unreality of life and the doubleness in people and language, manifested in unstable irony. In fact, Jean Brooks contends that time has shown that Hardy's probabilities and coincidences, his "anti-realistic devices, to be imaginative truths about cosmic Absurdity rather than the author's incompetence".353

Financially secure, Hardy gave up novel-writing in 1896 to return to his first love, poetry. His belief in the existence of what he termed, "non-rationalistic subjects ... lying at the indifferent point between rationality and irrationality", i.e., the Gothic, still persisted, with many of his poems testifying to that fact. In his verse, he was able to bring in magic, fantasy, and the supernatural, elements that would not fit into the Victorian conviction that novels should have at least the appearance of verisimilitude.354 Freed from the constraints of the narrative form, only in his poetry was Hardy finally able to truly express his sense of the Gothic.

353 Ibid., 7.
354 Thomas Hardy, LY, 90.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Anonymous. (Review of Desperate Remedies.) The Athenæum ,No. 2266, 1 April 1871: 399.


Beer, Gillian. "Finding a Scale for the Human: Plot and Writing in Hardy’s Novel." Chap. in *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin,*


Under the Greenwood Tree: A Novel About the Imagination.”


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


"Why I Don't Write Plays." Pall Mall Budget 1 Sept. 1892: 1313-4.


_____. "Topography and Topography in Thomas Hardy's 'In Front of the Landscape.'" In Identity of the Literary Text, eds. Mario J. Valde and Owen Miller. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985): 73-91.


—. "Spectacle and Symbol in Thomas Hardy's Fiction." *Philological Quarterly* 44 (1965): 527-44.


_____.

_____.

_____.


_____.

_____.

_____.


_____.


