Notes, Documents, and Critical Comment

1. A FACT WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN “WHITMAN’S EARLIEST KNOWN NOTEBOOK: A CLARIFICATION” BY JOHN C. BRODERICK

IN the second paragraph of “Whitman’s Earliest Known Notebook: A Clarification” by John C. Broderick (PMLA, 84, Oct. 1969, 1657), relating the history of the Harnd Collection at the Library of Congress, after the phrase “throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s,” this statement, or a statement to this effect, should have been included: This particular notebook was made unavailable by the Library of Congress on 18 August 1939, on advice of the Consultant in English Poetry that it and the other Whitman material then in the Division of Manuscripts should for the time being “remain sequestered from public use.”

On 25 August 1939, I received from the University of Washington Library, from the office of the Librarian, Charles W. Smith, a copy of a letter he had received from the Library of Congress, which is dated 18 August 1939, and which reads as follows:

My dear Mr. Smith: Your letter of August 4, regarding the order submitted in June by the University Book Store for a film copy of the Whitman Notebook, was duly received.

The request has been carefully considered by me in consultation with the Consultant in English Poetry, Dr. Auslander, and I am inclined to agree with him that the Walt Whitman material now in the Division of Manuscripts should remain sequestered from public use, until it has been thoroughly organized and examined by Dr. Auslander.

With regret that we are unable to meet the needs of your patron, Mrs. Shephard, at the present time. Very truly yours,
Martin A. Roberts
Chief Assistant Librarian

That such restriction of Whitman materials was not a permanent policy of the Library of Congress is evidenced by the fact that later, in the middle 1940’s, when the Librarian of San Jose State College Library asked for microfilm or, if film or other copy could not be furnished, then answers to certain questions of fact about the appearance of the notebook, officials in various departments wrote of efforts they were making in trying to comply with our request. At last, in a letter dated 16 December 1946, the Chief of the Division of Manuscripts stated that the notebook in question could not be located.

The actual copy of that letter from the Library of Congress to the University of Washington Library which is quoted in this Note is bound in a volume now, and permanently in the San Jose Collection of the San Jose State College Library. The title of this volume is Letters (1939–1961) to and from Dr. Esther Shephard with Enclosures and Documentation Relating to Ten Notebooks and a Cardboard Butterfly Missing from the Walt Whitman Papers in the Library of Congress: Assembled in September 1962 and Presented to the San Jose State College Library (San Jose, California, 1962).

I presented a photostated copy of this volume of Letters (1939–1961) to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress; to Mr. Verner W. Clapp, President, Council on Library Resources; to Harcourt, Brace & World, publishers of my Walt Whitman’s Pose; and to the University of Washington Library.

ESTHER SHEPHARD
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2. “GOTHIC VERSUS ROMANTIC”: A REJOINER

I QUITE AGREE with Robert D. Hume, author of “Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel” (PMLA, 84, March 1969, 282–90) that a revaluation of the Gothic Romance is necessary, but I find his attempt somewhat less than satisfying. Hume’s argument proceeds from faulty (if not erroneous) assumptions about the generic character of the Gothic Romance and the nature of literary Romanticism. Let me examine these premises briefly.

The distinguishing traits of any genre ought to be as unambiguously defined as possible, a rather imposing project when one considers to what extent the Gothic Romance is a conglomerate of literary “kinds,” grafting character types and melodramatic devices of Jacobean drama and sentimental fiction onto a sensibility derived largely from graveyard poetry and the cult of the sublime. Given the synthetic character of this genre, one is obliged to isolate what is conspicuously “gothic” in the Gothic. Commendably, Mr. Hume discards the indiscriminating categories of Montague Summers and demands a more rigorous analysis of those singular departures from sentimental or historical fiction of the late eighteenth century than can be found in Tompkins’ otherwise exemplary study. Some profound dislocation of sensibility evidently occurs within the half-century or so that witnessed the development and decline of the Gothic Romance, which the older types of formalist criticism do not
articulate. Granted, then, the generic instability of the Gothic—its tendency to decompose into the simpler types of mystery tale or sentimental romance—can we legitimately extend the range of the historical Gothic to embrace works as dense in social as well as metaphysical realities as *Wuthering Heights*? The Yorkshire countryside is not all that visionary, though no one would deny the dissociative and even other-worldly fantasies that pervade the work.

What any student of the Gothic must account for at the very first, before drawing hair-fine distinctions between “terror” and “horror” (largely irrelevant anyway, at least as far as the Radcliffean romance is concerned), is the singular quality of evil that distinguishes the Gothic vision from all other types of fantasy literature—i.e., crime fiction, utopian romance, and the more sinister variety of pornography—that bear some like relation to the Gothic genre.

For it is the mystery of evil or the “power of blackness” which the truly Gothic writer seeks to discover, a belief in the reality and even the omnipresence of the demonic that the unarguable logic of “enlightenment” had challenged, and challenged successfully. Nor can we simply equate the demonic and the irrational and then declare the Gothic just another variation upon the Romantic theme of psychomachia. Terror is not merely a syndrome of delusions embattled heroines are somehow caught in as long as they remain within the Gothic world of labyrinthine castles and impenetrable darkness (although it is that, too), but rather the subjective mirroring of an objective state. Reality is alien, menacing, whether the footsteps heard upon the secret passageway be real or imaginary. It is the discovery that evil is *constituтив* of reality, that it can never be reduced to a hallucinatory fantasy or to a form of social pathology that renders the Gothic romance so ultimately sinister—even lurid. Furthermore, figures like Melmoth are what they are by reason of their satanic lusts (erotic and/or metaphysical) and not simply by virtue of their moral complexity; in fact, it would be an error to single out the latter as the quintessence of the Gothic male. For torn though Melmoth may be between light and darkness, and ambivalent as we no doubt are toward the spectacle of his self-damnation, we are never confronted by a dramatic situation that might properly be called moral “confusion.” Melmoth knows he is a devil just as surely as Milton’s Satan “knows” why he is fallen. In Conrad’s terms, it is the “fascination of the abomination” that each Gothicist uncovers as well as exploits, but moral or psychological *paradox* is scarcely “confusion.”

But I find Hume’s attempt to place the Gothic Romance in terms of a Coleridgean aesthetic, and from that point to differentiate the mythopoeic tendencies of Gothic and Romantic literature, even less satisfactory than his superficial catalogue of Gothic “effects.” For one thing, the transcendental metaphysics of the *Biographia Literaria* just cannot be imposed upon so complex and turbulent a period of literary history as the Romantic era without distortion. Only the most selective reading of Coleridge himself would yield evidence for Hume’s assertion that the imagination serves the romantics as their vehicle of escape from the limitations of the human condition.” But I doubt even more strongly that this statement could be taken seriously when applied to the later Keats or Shelley. No reader taught by Earle Wasserman (among others) to perceive the dialectical processes of the Romantic imagination or the recurrent ontological crises that constitute the ironic depth of “Prometheus Unbound” or Keats’s Great Odes would thoughtfully entertain the theory of imaginative withdrawal from reality that Hume apparently assumes to be the only condition tolerable to the Romantic sensibility.

The exclusion of Byron from the Romantics is, of course, predictable—his poetry is not sufficiently affirmative to conform to Hume’s rather limited notion of “transcendence”—and I would suspect that any reader sufficiently familiar with Harold Bloom’s intensive and precise analysis of Byron’s response to the “existential predicament” (The Visionary Company, Ch. iv) would perceive quickly enough why even Byron’s radical skepticism assumes its necessary position along the continuum of Romantic creativity.

But even if we were to concede this arbitrary analytical context, can we then assert that the Gothic imagination, in contradistinction to the Romantic, remains “strictly within the realm of this world,” and is therefore “confined to the limits of reason”? Are the nightmare settings or the manifestly unreal time sense of this genre, or the recurrent preoccupation with the occult, all proof of an empirical restraint imposed upon the Gothic “fancy”? I doubt that the very evidence cited by Hume in the earlier part of his discussion will bear out that hypothesis. In fact, insofar as one can trust the Gothicists to formulate the esthetic basis of their art, one can find no more definitive rebuttal to Hume’s belief that the Gothic Romance explores only regions that lie “strictly within the realm of this world” than in the terms in which Schefold reproaches Vivaldi’s susceptibility:

“...what ardent imagination ever was contented to trust to plain reasoning, or to the evidence of the senses? It may not willingly confine itself to the dull truths of this earth, but, eager to expand its faculties, to fill its capacity, and to experience its own peculiar delights, soars after new wonders into a world of its own.”

(The Italian, Oxford Univ. Press, 1968, pp. 397-98)

I think it wiser to pursue the line of inquiry opened up by Northrop Frye in his recently published study of
the varieties of Romantic "myth" (A Study of English Romanticism, New York, 1968) and locate the major thrust of all Romantic literature in the search for "superior forms of consciousness and perception" (p. 29) which often involve some form or other of epistemological idealism; one can therefore expect to find at stress points in either a Gothic Romance or a Keatsian ode an identification of consciousness and reality. That such a unification of self and object, however transitory, is achieved by both poet and romancer (although obviously not with the same degree of insight, self-consciousness, depth of feeling, or range of expression) should suggest that Gothic fiction and Romantic poetry represent cogitate impulses of the visionary mind to repossess a universe it perceives as resistant or inimical to consciousness. That Byron and Coleridge can be at once "Romantic" and "Gothic" or that individual poems like "The Ancient Mariner" or "Manfred" can project an image of the mind both alienated and transcendent, eluding thereby any rigid system of classification, should further suggest the degree of continuity that actually exists between Gothic quests and Romantic epiphanies. In fact, the persistent receptivity of the Gothic imagination to the affective or cosmic sublime can be seen as an almost Manichean struggle that embodies in mythic form a more familiar conflict of psychological states within the mind of the Romantic lyricist: the dialectic of dejection and joy.

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II

I am happy to find that despite his argumentative heat, Mr. Platzner is in complete agreement with the essential points of my article: that the Gothic novel is worth taking seriously, and that it should be considered in connection with "Romanticism." Our differences are far slighter than he imagines; for the most part they are a matter of details and perspective. I offer the following reply not as a contentious rebuttal but as a clarification and amplification of our basically similar positions. I think it will become clear that we have here a case of apparent differences getting blown out of proportion by a critic's failure to ascertain what another writer is doing before he springs to arms.

Mr. Platzner's objections are divided into two parts, based (a) on the "generic character of Gothic Romance," and (b) on "the nature of literary Romanticism." I will deal with them accordingly.

1

We are agreed that the "generic character" of the Gothic novel is hard to deal with. Even within the 1764–1820 period it is not a clearly distinct form. My "superficial catalogue" of its characteristics is an attempt to differentiate serious Gothic writing from what J. M. S. Tompkins calls "market-Gothics"—surely a necessary prelude to suggesting that Gothic writing be considered along with the work of the greatest "Romantic" poets. I am in perfect agreement with most of what Mr. Platzner says about the genre. I do think it useful to comment on three of his points.

1 "... can we legitimately extend the range of the historical Gothic to embrace... Wuthering Heights?" Obviously not, if by "historical Gothic" we mean works composed in the original (1764–1820) period of development. But as I said at the outset of my essay, my concern was not only "to analyze the characteristics and development" of the original Gothic novels, but also "to define the essence of that 'Gothic' which can be significant for Walpole, Melville, and Faulkner alike." And since I discuss Wuthering Heights in company with Moby Dick and Sanctuary, it should be obvious that I was exploring the mythopoetic thrust of a larger type, not trying to force Wuthering Heights into a pigeonhole. I would not for an instant suggest that this is the only—or the best—way to view these later novels. I do think we can learn something about them from noticing the resemblances. Equally, I must grant that the earliest Gothic novels possess only incipiently the characteristics I stress—but I think it useful to emphasize that the form was to have great possibilities.

2 Mr. Platzner grumbles about "hair-fine distinctions between 'terror' and 'horror,'" which, he says, are "largely irrelevant" to "Radcliffean romance." I have met this reaction elsewhere, and I think it reveals a serious misunderstanding of changes in esthetics during the later eighteenth century. In the novels of the 1764–1820 period the shift from "terror" to "horror" is probably the most important factor in the evolution of the genre. To Mrs. Radcliffe, the distinction seemed anything but "hair-fine," as the passage I quoted from her shows. Indeed, the whole modus operandi of her novels is postulated on the necessity of never crossing the boundary between the two. Except to the most superficial of observers (meaning some literary historians) the works of Radcliffe and Lewis appear strikingly different, and so they are, even when The Italian is taken into account. The evolution of the Gothic novel from suspense to shock should loom large to any serious student of the form, and I cannot go along with cavalier disregard of a distinction which these writers thought important and which is clearly reflected in the changing nature of their novels.

3 Most broadly, Platzner suggests that a "singular quality of evil" is the distinguishing mark of the Gothic novel. Here our differences are a matter of terminology and emphasis. Undeniably, Gothic novels are largely defined by the presence of their villains. But are these characters defined principally by their "satanic lusts"?
Surely not. The "fascination of the abomination" is undoubtedly, but Gothic villains are never merely abominable. Melmoth does know he is a devil, and it is the agony he feels at this knowledge that makes him more than a comic-book monster. Satan feels the anguish of his position all the more because he was once the first of angels. Victor Frankenstein is a man of great ability and high aspirations. In each case evil is a vital factor (particularly in the form of pride), but the man's attractiveness is vastly enhanced by his potentiality for good. A man who is evil and nothing else, however titanically so, feels no anguish in his position and elicits an uncomplicated response from the reader—loathing. I persist in maintaining then that these villains are "complex" figures, torn between their own conflicting impulses. I am prepared to grant that my uses of "confusion" and "ambiguity" are open to misinterpretation. The essential evil of these men is undeniable, despite the grandeur that their combination of good and evil elements gives them. The "ambiguity" lies in our responses to these villains (especially Ahab and Heathcliff). Their "fearsome attractiveness" persists despite what we admit to be admitted, in our own context, clear-cut cases for moral judgment—hence, of course, the necessity of the Gothic "distance."

2

"The nature of literary Romanticism" is not a subject which invites brief arguments. Therefore, I will content myself with trying to explain the differences of purpose and perspective which lead us in what may appear to be opposite directions.

First, is "Romantic" to denote certain characteristics of certain writers, or is it to stand as a general term covering the total literary activity of a period? I take the former view, Platzner the latter. If "Romantic" is to apply to everything as current between 1790 and 1820, then I can scarcely deny that the Gothic novel must be included. But to look for common ground and to define differences are both useful activities. My endeavor was to suggest that, historically, the Gothic novels have their genesis in some of the same problems and discontents that were producing what is commonly described as "Romantic" poetry, and to suggest further that though they do not rise to the same heights, they too are a serious endeavor. Few critics have emphasized this last point, and I can only applaud Mr. Platzner's willingness to go ahead and treat the novels this way as a "Romantic" phenomenon. I think that to call them "Romantic" outright is to broaden that term to the point of uselessness, but there we differ only in terminological degree. Obviously, I was treating the novels as "Romantic" in Platzner's sense of the term.

He objects quite fiercely to my use of Coleridge. Certainly my employment of the imagination/fancy distinction is a gimmick. Some readers have found it helpful, others have not. Personally, I think it is useful in differentiating the mythopoeic tendencies of two closely related but not identical literary responses to the same situation. I do not suggest that Coleridge's distinction adequately describes the totality of the poetic process for himself or for any other poet. I do think that it describes well the differences in results, which I was concerned. And whatever one accepts the gimmick or not, the differences I was trying to define are still there.

Platzner is needlessly upset by my statement that "the imagination . . . serves the Romantics as their vehicle of escape from the limitations of the human condition." He interprets this as meaning that I think the Romantics seek "imaginative withdrawal from reality"—although on the same page I explicitly denounced Montague Summers for making this admittedly fatuous claim. Some clarification is in order. To withdraw from reality is one thing; to seek to understand it from a higher vantage point, quite another. When the Romantics try to transcend or transform or "unify" the discordant elements of experience, they are trying to comprehend and understand, not escape them. I certainly do maintain that this applies to Prometheus Unbound and I consider the Hyperion poems a quintessential example of a desperate struggle to deal with the sensed limitations of imagination in the face of an overwhelming desire to find certitude with it. To "escape the limitations of the human condition" is to view those limitations from a perspective which makes them tolerable, not to leave the condition itself. And, in contrast to the characteristic Augustan acceptance of limitation, the "Romantic" poets do seem collectively to possess a strong drive to combat, to overcome, to fight for an understanding of experience which goes beyond the limits of reason. The "dialectical process of the Romantic imagination" is undeniable, but linking the efforts of a number of poets we can see a thrust toward a transcendent understanding which ranges from the largely internal struggles of Wordsworth to the almost metaphysical realms of Shelley. To call this escapism is indeed foolish. As Blake says, he does not deny the accuracy of his corporeal vision—he wants us to go beyond it. By no means, heaven knows, is all "Romantic" poetry "affirmative" in a "transcendental" sense, but behind it there is a strong urge for such an affirmation. In this respect Byron plainly does share "Romantic" concerns, as Gaskell's "ruins of paradise" thesis demonstrates. I think though that because the result in his poetry are notably different some differentiation is not out of place.

All this gets rather far from the Gothic novel itself, and from the essentials of my argument. My point in making the comparison was to show that starting from
some of the same discontents the poets strive for answers and resolutions, and occasionally at least manage to feel themselves successful, while the Gothic novelists never really seem to get off the ground in this respect. Platzner challenges my statement that Gothic writers “are confined to the limits of reason” by citing “nightmare settings” and “preoccupation with the occult,” and he goes on to quote from The Italian. This mistakes my point completely. If “fancy” is the Gothic vehicle, as I contend, then plainly its results are not subject to “empirical restraint,” as Platzner suggests I believe. And to quote one of the characters in a novel—the villain in fact—on the delights of imaginative flights says nothing about whether the author is actually attempting to practice them. Indeed, within Mrs. Radcliffe’s framework, it seems more probable that she is undercutting them. When I speak of confinement to “the limits of reason,” I am referring to the results the Gothic writers get when they struggle with the discordant elements of experience. “Fancy” cannot resolve serious conflicts and paradoxes posed by reason—and in this sense it is “limited” in a way that “imagination” is not.

With Platzner’s conclusion I am in complete agreement, and I welcome its emphasis on the close connection between the two forms. The Gothic novel is a variety of the “Romantic” quest (in his sense of the term); “Romantic” poetry does exhibit both alienation and transcendence; and both forms do have a place “along the continuum of romantic creativity,” as he convincingly puts it. Platzner helpfully emphasizes “the degree of continuity . . . between Gothic quests and Romantic epiphanies”—but in this very phrase is the essence of my distinction between the two: Gothic writers seek unavailability what “Romantic” writers sometimes find. Very different beasts can exist along the same continuum, and whether the critic emphasizes similarities or differences is a matter of choice. My arguments were for a distinction of results; his are for similarities in genesis. Both endeavors are useful; either by itself can be misleading. But Melmoth the Wanderer is not The Prelude writ in prose; Frankenstein is not The Triumph of Life. To seek the common ground among these works is exciting but can be overdone, for opposite ends of the continuum remain opposite, and to ignore this fact is to confuse quest with epiphany.

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III

Mr. Hume’s reply has indeed clarified his original position and confirmed my initial judgment that our differences both in regard to the nature of Romanticism and the character of Gothic fiction are substantive, not merely terminological. I fear, moreover, that some of the objections I raised and the hypotheses I advanced exist in an often caricatured form in Hume’s paraphrase of my argument—no doubt the brevity of my remarks invited reduction—and if out of no other motive than the desire for self-vindication, let me present my counterthesis in somewhat greater detail and scope.

I suspect that our basic quarrel arises out of a fundamental divergence of critical method: Mr. Hume regards both Romantic poetry and Gothic fiction from a consistently psychologicist perspective; I insist that neither Romantic nor Gothic can be adequately perceived until we discover the ontological qualities and structures that shape both. Neither of these methods is necessarily irreconcilable with the other, but within the dialectic we have established our modes of analysis and the conclusions we reach are markedly different.

Consequently, when Mr. Hume, in search of a theoretical model of the mechanism of Gothic sensibility, turns to the Burkean concept of the sublime and its attendant emotions, he finds in the distinction between terror and horror not only a satisfactory modus operandi for Radcliffean Romance but an adequate principle of differentiation for all Gothic Romance after Radcliffe. What I would object to in all this is not the very existence of an esthetic of terror or even the fact of its importance to Mrs. Radcliffe and her contemporaries—Tompkins, Spack, and in a larger context Nicolson (Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory)—have surely defined with such great precision the premises of the “esthetics of the infinite” that any demural from this position should seem by now benighted. No, what I propose to students of the Gothic is that any reinterpretation of this genre must proceed beyond or outside of the constricting framework of late-eighteenth-century esthetic theory, for if we are to establish the groundwork for a new appraisal of the Gothic imagination we will have to provide for the theoretical differentiation of mythopoetic tendencies that cannot be accounted for in terms of either “terror” or “horror.”

I would suggest, further, that there are reasons for doubting the final adequacy of neo-Burkean sensationalism, or any of the distinctions it makes possible between gradations of terror and their source, even if we restrict ourselves to the Radcliffe-Lewis-Maturin era. I, at least, remain unconvinced that Mrs. Radcliffe’s rationale for terror is in fact the governing principle behind all of her work. It appears, rather, that far from never crossing the boundary between terror and horror, Mrs. Radcliffe compulsively places her heroine in situations of overwhelming anxiety in which a gradual shift from terror to horror is inescapable. Let us agree, for example, to dismiss the notorious “veil” scene as too crudely melodramatic to
be properly representative, and focus on a more modestly terrifying episode that occurs sometime later in the same chapter:

A return of the noise again disturbed her; it seemed to come from that part of the room which communicated with the private stair-case, and she instantly remembered the odd circumstance of the door having been fastened, during the preceding night, by some unknown hand. Her late alarming suspicion concerning its communication also occurred to her. Her heart became faint with terror, . . . she saw the door move, and then slowly open, and perceived something enter the room, but the extreme darkness prevented her distinguishing what it was. Almost fainting with terror, she had yet sufficient command over herself to check the shriek that was escaping from her lips. . . . but then, advancing slowly towards the bed, [it] stood silently at the feet where the curtains, being a little open, allowed her still to see it; terror, however, had now deprived her of the power of discrimination, as well as of that of utterance.

(The Mysterious Udalphi, London: Dent, 1962, 1, 265)

How far is Emily from that annihilation of sensibilities that is characteristic only of pure “horror”—a hairbreadth? What is the practical utility of insisting upon a critical distinction that belies rather than discloses the dramatic character of events or sensations? No doubt some such dichotomy between titillation and revulsion is necessary to express the shift in tone and subject one encounters as one moves from the school of Radcliffe to the Schauerroman of Lewis or Maturin and its singular preoccupation with the perverse and the occult. Once again, however, I find (as in the relation between Gothicism and Romanticism) the continuity between Udalphi and The Monk at least as instructive as the discontinuity. Regarded in this light, Lewis’ marginally pornographic Romance is but an actualizing of the inquiet or imagined horrors of an Emily or an Adeline. Put another way, the paranoid apprehensions of the Radcliffe heroine become the real crimes of an Ambrosia, no slight distinction to be sure. But transcending even such a distinction is the undeniable presence of evil, whether manifest as free-floating dread or demonic temptation.

Perhaps the most compelling motive for subordinating if not dismissing this refinement of analysis is the practical irrelevance of any distinction between terror and horror fiction in the work of later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gothics: Poe, Le Fanu, Stoker, Lovecraft, for example. How can we even begin to deal with “The Fall of the House of Usher” or “The Dunwich Horror” as long as we reduce all investigation into the “essence” of Gothicism to endless elaborations of the dramatic possibilities open to novelists who “involve the reader in special circumstances”? Is there, incidentally, any form of melodrama or exoticism that cannot be so described?

If we are ever to perceive why the “insistence of horror” or persistence of the demonic (dramatized as either the irrational or the diabolical or both) lies at the roots of this evolving genre—and by “historical Gothic” I clearly do mean merely those romances appearing between 1764 and 1820—we must at least disengage ourselves from a mode of criticism that commits itself to what W. K. Wimsatt has spoken of as the “affective fallacy”: the work is what it does. The “distinguishing mark” of the Gothic Romance, early or late, is not simply its psychological impact. Wilkie Collins, Rider Haggard, H. G. Wells, W. H. Hudson are each, in different ways to be sure, capable of arousing readers to dread through the prolongation of suspenseful situations, and in spite of the fact that Collins and Wells dabbled in Gothic themes, none of these writers is, properly speaking, a Gothist. The Gothic imagination embraces, I believe, an anthropologically primitive concept of evil (see Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil), an intuition of some primordial separation of consciousness and reality against which the Gothic victim struggles to assert his unfallen longing for unity, psychological and cosmic. It is not only the intensity with which this condition is perceived, but even more significantly that sense of helplessness and the universality of fear that are the singular traits of the Gothic sensibility, and the more violent the dramatic representation of this condition, the more unmistakable the Manichean character of the Gothic universe becomes.

Thus, the potency of figures like Melmoth or Zolfoya (they are not, of course, equally villainous) derives principally from their function as figures of evil energy, mortal and immortal, momentarily transcending (not vanishing) good. There is a sort of transvaluation of values, as Lowry Nelson argues, taking place both within the Gothic and Romantic movements, but the unique quality of the Gothic transvaluation is the gradual discovery of the irresistible and terrifying force of the demonic. Is it really necessary to assure Mr. Hume at this point that I am not suggesting that Melmoth is merely a demon or that, in his love for Immalee, he is not drawn irresistibly toward incorruptible innocence as the condition of his punishment? Evidently some such assurance is indispensable if I am to elude the charge of having transformed Maturin’s protagonist into a “comic-book monster.” Such a designation ought rather to be reserved for Vathek.

No, Melmoth at any rate is not a papier-mâché villain, and he is not a Heathcliff or an Ahab either—not even a first cousin to these revered gentlemen—although there is a strong yet distant family likeness among all three. But if the category of Gothicism is to have any critical incisiveness it will have to exclude, to use a Blakean term, its “emanations.” Poe reserved the writing of Eureka, his essay in speculative meta-
physics, until he had completed his major fiction, but Melville's metaphysics enter directly into our understanding of Ahab's obsession to "strike through the mask." At a slightly lower level of articulate self-comprehension we find Heathcliff assuring Nelly near the conclusion of Wuthering Heights that he has finally arrived at the threshold of the visionary world that holds Catherine captive and that he is determined to repudiate existence. This kind of philosophical self-consciousness is as foreign to Gothic Romance as it is necessary to the "metaphysical" novel, i.e., to that work of fiction which consciously chooses to explore the dimensions of reality or the ontological character of human existence. The authentically Gothic Romance resists self-comprehension, demands mystification in fact as a precondition for sustaining the illusions of terror and inscrutable menace. And while it is a definite relation between the metaphysical and the Gothic consciousness in prose fiction remains constantly discernible, neither Hardy, nor Conrad, nor Golding, nor Graham Greene, nor Iris Murdoch can be honestly regarded as anything less than a writer who has elected to write fiction as an act of metaphysical exploration: I imagine we can honestly say a great deal less for Algernon Blackwood. The naiveté, the fixedness of the Gothic imagination prevents it from attaining either the vision or epistemological scepticism of Melville's epic—and isn't that Mr. Hume's point when he offers to categorize the Gothic as a function of the Coleridgean fancy? It would seem self-contradictory to speak, in almost the same breath, of the "Gothic" tradition as at once so large it can engulf a Melville or a Faulkner, and yet so small it cannot withstand comparison to the great Romantic poets.

I would think it more profitable for critics of Romantic and Gothic literature to trace the process by which a transitional work like Frankenstein moves from the bocus-pocus of a quasi-Gothic tale of alchemy and sensibility (e.g., Godwin's St. Leon) to the discovery of the appalling metaphysical paradoxes that underlie the Promethean myth, particularly the moral inversion of creature and creator that renders Victor Frankenstein's vengeful pursuit of his monster so profoundly ambiguous. Mr. Hume's comments on Frankenstein are brief but subtly appreciative of the moral and psychological dualities of Mary Shelley's fable and seem curiously at odds with his final sense of the utter disparity between the Gothic and the Romantic imagination. Is it the defeat of Prometheus aspirations—the horror, in fact, that the sudden realization of human creative power provokes—that renders this novel antithetic to the mythopoeic thrust of Romanticism? Does Frankenstein fail to achieve that "transcendent understanding," which according to Mr. Hume all authentically Romantic poets attain, at the level of mythic conception or at the level of mere narrative execution? What I am posing in the form of a specific query is the larger question of the cultural heterogeneity of the Romantic movement. Perhaps Lovejoy's skepticism concerning the possibility of establishing a coherent, one might almost say "ideological," definition of Romanticism has left too profound an impression on my mind. In any event, I still perceive a more complex movement along that continuum of creative experience that both Mr. Hume and I agree exists, a persistent awareness of the fragility of the very metaphysical constructs—visions of identity and transcendence—Hume regards as quintessentially Romantic.

ROBERT L. PLATZNER

IV

At this point Mr. Platzner seems to have backed off from his first set of objections in order to try a new tack—methodological rather than interpretive. How are we to go about defining the Gothic novel? This seems to be his central question. My original endeavor was to offer a definition which did not rely on the presence of "mummery." Platzner's "counterthesis"—in part a reaction against what he calls my "psychologistic" approach—strikes me as a sincere but muddled attempt to find ontological certainty where none can exist. However unwilling he may be to admit it, our positions remain similar: we are basically agreed on taking the Gothic novel seriously, and (terminological problems aside) on its relation to "Romanticism." Obviously, then, I am generally sympathetic to his view of the subject. Nonetheless, I think it important to point out some serious flaws in both his thesis and his methodology. He announces at the outset that he wants to go beyond eighteenth-century esthetic theory, and that he proposes to ignore "affective" considerations in favor of the essential constitutive nature of the form. In the first section below I will deal with specific points of contention; in the second I will try to show that his procedures are methodologically unsound.

In his initial statement Mr. Platzner challenged the existence of the terror/horror distinction; here he retreats into a denial of its importance. His further attempt to discredit the distinction (based on a quotation from Udolpho) misfires completely. He asks, "How far is Emily from . . . pure 'horror'?" In his earlier quotation from Schodoni he mistook villain for author; here he mistakes heroine for reader. Emily may well be the victim of horror—but the reader is not, and this is what matters in the Burkean esthetic scheme in which Mrs. Radcliffe was working. In any case, though, the importance of this distinction has to
do with the development, not the definition of the Gothic novel. I am puzzled by Mr. Platzner’s pains to deny that the distinction can usefully be applied to later nineteenth-century work, for nowhere do I fear at such a silly idea. In my original essay I pointed out that both terror and horror can be aroused in “everyday” situations, and that consequently neither their presence nor the distinction between them can be regarded as the defining characteristic of Gothic form. On this we are agreed.

Deliberately ignoring criteria which he considers “affective,” Mr. Platzner attempts to describe the Gothic form in terms of “the presence of evil.” He is more specific when, in searching for a “distinguishing mark” of the Gothic Romance, he suggests that “The Gothic imagination embraces... an anthropologically primitive concept of evil... an intuition of some primordial separation of consciousness and reality against which the Gothic victim struggles...” This key statement demands careful disentanglement. When Mr. Platzner says “The Gothic imagination embraces” he is presumably speaking of the author, but “the Gothic victim” apparently refers to the villain. Are the two supposed to be in the same boat? As in his first response, Mr. Platzner seems beset by a fatal confusion of author and villain. Further, he equates “evil” with “separation of consciousness and reality.” I would say rather that an intuition of such separation may be supposed to lead the villain into evil, as in Ahab’s case. We seem to be agreed that, as I suggested originally, Gothic writers were (like the Romantics) working in response to such discontent with consciousness, but none of them, I think, upheld the evil they were driven to contemplate. We agree in finding many parallels between author and villain, but this is all the more reason not to ignore their differences. In the finished product the villain represents—often embodies—the evil which appalls his creator.

Mr. Platzner’s mishaps with quotation suggest to me that he has failed to make some necessary distinctions of perspective. We can talk about the author’s apparent purposes in writing (and here he comes quite as close to the “intentional” fallacy as I do); or we can analyze the villain and his agonies; or we can consider the responses the works seem designed to produce in the reader. Mr. Platzner tends to run the first two together while ignoring the third. Specifically, my objections are twofold: (a) he conflates “separation of consciousness” with the “evil” it gives rise to, and so blurs a vital distinction between author and villain; (b) he emphasizes the presence of evil at the expense of the way it is presented. Now the author conceives the evil and puts it into his book: presumably he does so with a definite purpose in mind. King Lear shows us evil quite as monstrous and pervasive as that in Gothic novels, but our response is wholly different. The context is all, and the context exists to channel the reader’s response. It really cannot be ignored, for the presence of evil matters less than the purposes to which it is put.

I am in perfect agreement with many of Mr. Platzner’s specific observations, but I am somewhat bothered by his attempt to characterize the “Gothic sensibility.” Because of his desire to define Gothic form sharply he is led to make a very exclusive and rather arbitrary definition. I would not call Ahab the “emanation” of a Gothic protagonist, even discounting sexual problems. But Ahab’s obsession with “striking through the mask” seems to me a quintessentially Gothic-Romantic response to the separation of consciousness and reality. And why is this kind of “philosophical self-consciousness” somehow “foreign” to the Gothic form, as long as the results are negative? Melville’s “epistemological skepticism” epitomizes the predicament of the fancy-bound Gothicist. Mr. Platzner accuses me of belittling “the Gothic tradition” by suggesting that “it cannot withstand comparison to the greatest Romantic poets,” but where do I say anything of the sort? Qualitatively I think this is true for the earlier Gothic novels, but I explicitly disavowed any comparative valuation when I made my imagination/fancy distinction. It is Mr. Platzner who belittles the form—by offering a definition which emphasizes “illusions of terror and inscrutable menace” and disallows “philosophical self-consciousness.”

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Turning from specifics to generalities of method, I think we find in Mr. Platzner’s assumptions some misconceptions which seriously diminish the value of what he has to say. He very grandly proposes that we should define Gothic and Romantic in terms of their “ontological qualities.” This is sheer nonsense: it rests on the supposition that Gothic and Romantic are discrete entities which have an essential nature and real existence. Obviously there is in an objective sense no such thing as The Gothic Novel; rather, there are a variety of novels from different periods and countries which, on the basis of similarities, we may want to categorize as a group. To get a group to be analyzed we have to define it: it does not exist by itself in any absolute sense. Even in the 1764-1820 period writers were working in what was only a very loosely defined mode, and certainly the trappings were widely employed for their entertainment value in various sorts of fiction.

When Mr. Platzner attempts to define the essence of Gothic as “an anthropologically primitive concept of evil” the weakness of his method becomes clear. He almost seems to grant objective existence to an appalling metaphysical evil which the writer then “discovers” and responds to in a certain way. He is then
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led to argue on the basis of what he calls “the fixedness of the Gothic imagination” (my italics). Now where does he get this? Whose imagination? Mr. Platzner gives an impassioned account of the Gothic writer’s supposed response to evil—but are all of these writers supposed to respond in the same way? This seems reductive with a vengeance. Both of us tend to work with theories that give short shrift to such early practitioners as Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin, and Poe conform to a neat and cohesive type? I think not.

Mr. Platzner speaks with sublime assurance of “the Gothic imagination,” but of course there is no such thing. There are individual writers—Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, Mary Shelley, Maturin, Brontë, Melville, and Faulkner were my selection. Each has his own distinctive characteristics and purposes. By demonstrating common ground the critic is entitled to discuss these or others, but to pretend that any resulting group possesses an independent existence is ridiculous. The critic analyzes not the essence of some mysterious totality, but rather has to deal with the characteristics of the group he has chosen to delimit. Consequently, I find Mr. Platzner’s grandiose explanations of the Gothic This and the Gothic That frustrating, for he never explains wherefrom or how he derives these finesounding truths. I make no claim for my “psychologically” derived grouping beyond the fact that it brings together a number of works which seem to me illuminated by the juxtaposition. I flatter deny that there is a “Gothic imagination” which can be defined with the “critical incisiveness” Mr. Platzner demands. We can make more or less inclusive definitions as we please, but the fact remains that we are making the categories—they do not exist independently. I do not demand that another critic accept for his own purposes the definitions I chose to work with, but I do think that I am entitled to make them.

I find odd Mr. Platzner’s complaint that I fail foul of the “affective fallacy.” There is a vast difference between reading one’s responses back into a work and seeking, on internal evidence, to determine the response it is apparently designed to elicit. (For a useful discussion of this point see Wayne Shumaker’s “A Modest Proposal for Critics,” in Contemporary Literature, Summer 1968.) The “catalogue” of Gothic novel characteristics to which Platzner previously objected is an attempt to isolate some of the essentials whose combination seems to be one of the defining features of the form—and they are all “objective” rather than “affective.” I make no apology, though, for discussing the response the novels were designed to elicit. This is indeed psychologic, but the psychology I employed is that of Burke, Radcliffe, and Coleridge. And I take it as a general principle that the critic is entitled to consider both contemporary statements on the writer’s aims and the responses a work seems intrinsically designed to produce. Perhaps because of his anti-psychologic bias, Mr. Platzner travesties my comments on “the involvement of the reader in special circumstances.” By “involve” I mean to interest and concern beyond the superficial level demanded for the enjoyment of melodrama. (Plainly this applies more to Melmoth and Moby Dick than to Oronte and The Monk.) By “special circumstances” I mean those in which ordinary standards of moral judgment can be suspended but not forgotten. The great Gothic villains lose their impact and allure if the reader is forced to render outright moral judgment on them; contrariwise, if he can forget morals entirely, the work loses its seriousness. The former happens in Caleb Williams, the latter in Varlet.

The definition I offered for the Gothic novel was primarily designed to separate serious or potentially serious works from those which utilized Gothic trappings merely for entertainment. I worked from two points: the conditions which seem to have generated novels of this sort, and the kind of impact they seemed designed to produce. Mr. Platzner and I agree with only minor differences on the relation of these conditions to “Romantic” writing, and all his squawks about my definitions should not obscure this point. For the second, I feel that there are striking parallels among the novels I discussed in the ways they present evil. The distant setting, the presence of a moral norm, the villain-hero, and the irrelevance of Christian standards add up to a surprisingly consistent method, considering the diversity of the novels involved. They vary greatly in the kind of evil presented, and in the characters’ reactions to it, but in all of the later examples there is a profound moral and psychological ambiguity. In varying degrees the reader is left unable to judge what he has been shown, at least in its own context. Mr. Platzner discusses at length the writer’s “discovery of the . . . force of the demonic”: my point is that these novels are set up to make this force felt by the reader, and that this is one of their principal points in common.

That the Gothic novel can usefully be viewed and defined in a number of ways I readily grant. It is a subject which has no “formal” coherence for the critic to seize upon, and rather little tidy historical evolution. It is evident that the serious Gothic works were written with “effect” very much in mind—terror, horror, mystery in a more than frivolous sense—and hence “affective” groupings have some justification. It is quite hopeless, though, to try to fathom a self-contained entity which does not exist. Mr. Platzner is welcome to indulge in an ontological hunt for the Platonic Form of the Gothic novel; personally, I’d just as soon have a try for the Holy Grail.

Robert D. Hume