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*The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*  
edited by John Richetti

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO THE  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
NOVEL

EDITED BY  
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University of Pennsylvania

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## I 2

JAMES P. CARSON

### Enlightenment, popular culture, and Gothic fiction

In Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), shortly after having escaped from her imprisonment in the monastery of San Stephano, the heroine, Ellena di Rosalba, accompanied by the hero, Vivaldi, and his garrulous servant, Paulo, travels toward Naples through the pastoral mountain scenery near Celano. In this scene between two imprisonments (the hero will shortly be confined in the prisons of the Inquisition in Rome), Ellena and Vivaldi, two characters whose aesthetic sense is a function of their genteel social status, admire the ruins of an ancient castle and the sublime and beautiful landscape. But their aesthetic sense is also determined differentially by gender. Vivaldi is typically more sensitive to the sublime, noting how the mountains appear "threatening, and horrid," "barren and rocky," "mighty" and dark.<sup>1</sup> Ellena observes how the beautiful – that which is sweet, soft, elegant, under cultivation, and under human control – contrasts with "the awful grandeur" of the mountains (158). The third observer, Paulo, apparently as a natural consequence of his low birth, sees nothing in these scenes to arouse aesthetic appreciation, ~~stating in the prospect only the things that remind him of his native city of Naples.~~

Two value systems intersect in the figure of Paulo, given the conjunction of cosmopolitanism and sentimentalism. Radcliffe awards Paulo for his narrow nationalism and praises him for his local attachment. Vivaldi, the enlightened citizen of the world, bestows a patronizing smile "at this stroke of nationality" in his servant (159). Vivaldi's smile would seem to compliment the conventional critical judgment that the British Gothic novel indulges in popular chauvinism directed against despotic judicial and penal systems, papist superstitions, and, later, revolutionary mob violence in Italy, Spain, and France. Marilyn Butler, for example, sees Radcliffe as a political conservative and the Gothic novel as a form safely distanced, temporally and geographically, from progressive ideology, at least until the early nineteenth century and the appearance of books such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Charles Robert Maturin's *Memoirs of the Wanderer*

(1820).<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, in *The Italian*, rather than betraying her own British chauvinism or appealing to that of her "popular" audience, Radcliffe gently mocks the Neapolitan chauvinism exhibited by precisely the character most representative of the "people." But, along with a ludicrous patriotism, Paulo exhibits the sentimental virtue of local attachment. The period in which the gothic novel flourished witnessed a decline of cosmopolitanism based on stoical ethics and a philosophical appeal to universal principles in favor of a local attachment associated with subjective responsiveness, sympathy, and the virtues of simplicity.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the second value system, Paulo's homesickness manifests, on a humbler level, the very same sensibility and capacity for humane feeling that the more refined characters reveal through the mode of aesthetic appreciation.

What Paulo recalls most fondly when he thinks of Naples is the "good" Mount Vesuvius, which provides a brilliant and impressive display on some dark nights. Vivaldi feels compelled to remind his servant of the great harm that a volcano can do. But within a few paragraphs, when darkness has obscured the beautiful and sublime scenery near Celano, Paulo reiterates the virtues of the good volcano: "here we have no mountain, that will light us on our way! Ah! if we were but within twenty miles of Naples, now – and it was an illumination night!" (160). The volcano, a figure for the sublime from the time of Longinus, proves to be a good mountain in two senses: first, it provides a spectacular show of light that fascinates the populace, and, secondly, this very show has the potential to guide benighted travelers. Radcliffe would like to make a similar claim for her Gothic novels: they simultaneously fascinate and provide moral guidance for the reader, though they fascinate more by means of darkness than light.

The Gothic novel, then, would resemble Paolo's "illumination night." In this chapter, I shall trace the associations of this Radcliffean phrase in order to define the Gothic novel, to explore its relation to popular culture and to the genre of the romance, and to attempt an account of why it arises when it does. Most critics tend to regard the Gothic novel as symptomatic of a discontinuity or sharp historical break, as a new development in fiction, an adumbration of the psychological focus of the nineteenth-century novel. I shall stress on the contrary the very apparent continuities between eighteenth-century "realistic" fiction and the Gothic form. There has been a tendency to structure books on the nineteenth-century novel with an initial chapter or two on the Gothic, as if it were merely a precursor form, bearing a relation to the great novelistic tradition as what used to be termed "romanticism" bears to Romantic poetry.<sup>4</sup> In emphasizing instead the continuity between eighteenth-century fiction and the Gothic, I am ques-

tioning the claim that there is a sharp break between the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

The phrase "illumination night" leads from the general atmospherics of an eighteenth-century aesthetic characterized by the appreciation of sublime landscapes, ruins, graveyard poetry, and "Gothic" architecture and literature, to the general aims of Enlightenment science (with an emphasis on combustion and electricity), to the specific institutions designed to promote universal visibility, to the peculiar phenomenon of "illuminations" – a phenomenon that embodies sometimes the cooperation of, and sometimes a conflict between, official festivity and popular culture. A reexamination of the relationship of Gothic fiction to both popular culture and Enlightenment thought will enable an assessment of the extent to which it is appropriate to term the eighteenth-century Gothic novel a "conservative" form.

The Gothic novel arises in 1764 with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) is a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose," and Fielding makes the Miltonic claim that this kind of writing has been "hitherto unattempted in our Language,"<sup>5</sup> and after Fielding claims in *Tom Jones* (1749) to be "the Founder of a new Province of Writing,"<sup>6</sup> Walpole with equal self-consciousness, in the preface to the second edition (1765) of his short novel, asserts his own originality. Walpole's "new species of romance"<sup>7</sup> reconciles the faithful representations of human nature from the new "realistic" novel with the extensive imaginative resources of the old romance. In the next major identifiable Gothic novel, *The Old English Baron* (first published as *The Champion of Virtue* in 1777), Clara Reeve situates her work in a tradition initiated by Walpole. In the 1790s the Gothic novel becomes the major fictional form in English, with the publication of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799), five novels by Ann Radcliffe (1789–97), and the American novels of Charles Brockden Brown. After Mary Shelley and Charles Robert Maturin the Gothic novel declines, or undergoes transformation into such genres as ghost stories, vampire tales, sensation novels, historical romances, and detective fiction.

The Gothic novel is usually defined by its stereotyped characters, or formulaic plots involving the usurpation of a title or an estate, a hidden crime, or a pact with the devil. However, we might equally well define this fictional form in terms of the almost mandatory prefatory justifications for combining a representation of the manners of real life and the imaginative appeal of the marvelous. In their prefaces, Gothic novelists frequently claim to have undertaken a quasi-scientific investigation into natural human responses when characters are confronted with situations of apparently supernatural stress. Such prefatory justifications define Gothic fiction as a

combination of novel and romance. The practice of early eighteenth-century novelists would not warrant a sharp distinction between these two terms. Moreover, few critics today would be tempted to use the identification Gothic fiction with the romance form to dismiss it from serious consideration in the history of the novel.

Sail, we need to account for Ann Radcliffe's insistence on the romance in the titles and subtitles of her novels: *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Roman and The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents: A Roman* and Radcliffe would seem to be drawing upon the distinction between novel and romance that Clara Reeve outlined in her 1785 work of literary theory and literary history, *The Progress of Romance*. Although Reeve attacks circulating libraries and the indiscriminate reading of novels and romances that they promote, she seeks to correct the sexist English misconception that romances are "proper furniture only for a lady's Library."<sup>8</sup> While Reeve echoes Fielding in her definition of romance as "an Epic in prose," she criticizes him for having "painted human nature as it is, rather than as ought to be" (*Progress*, I: 13, 141). This distinction between realism and idealism, between mixed characters and exemplary ones, is fundamental to Reeve's opposition between novel and romance. Reeve quotes approvingly from Dr. John Gregory's *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man, with Those of the Animal World* (1766): "Notwithstanding the absurdities of the old Romance, it seems calculated to produce more favorable effects on the morals of mankind than our modern Novels. If the former did not represent men as they really are, it represented them better" (II: 86).

Like other Enlightenment authors, Reeve worries about the enthusiasm and heightened imagination fostered by romance reading. However, she sees worse dangers than these, for when the enthusiasm that inspires glorious actions comes to be ridiculed, people will immerse themselves "in low, groveling, effeminate, or mercenary pursuits" (I: 103). Avarice, hedonism, and a decline of public spirit harm the state far more than the absurdities individuals may be led into by enthusiasm and an overactive imagination. Reeve's use of the word *effeminate* and her advocacy of public spirit indicate that she is drawing upon the classical republican critique of the corrupting effects of commerce on the once-autonomous citizen. Recourse to the romance form, for Reeve and Radcliffe, can potentially serve to mitigate the effeminating and corrupting effects of life in a commercial world.

However, women writers such as Reeve and Radcliffe are not attracted to the romance solely for its capacity to rehabilitate a masculinity threatened

by commerce. The "Gothic" romance, in opposition both to the Greek and Roman classics and to life in eighteenth-century England, appears to offer women substantial power and respect. Reeve attributes to the "Gothic" age and to the later feudal institution of chivalry "that respectful complaisance to the fair sex, (so different from the manners of the Greeks and Romans)" (I: 34). In this respect women readers and writers would have been attracted to the Gothic romance for many of the same reasons that Arabella in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) was attracted to seventeenth-century French romances. In these huge tomes Arabella found an idealized world of heroic women and men who lived lives and experienced adventures worth recording in history. In the eighteenth-century society of Bath and London, on the contrary, Arabella finds women who trifle away their lives in dressing and dancing, while they enviously compete in the marriage market, and men "with Figures so feminine, Voices so soft, such tripping Steps, and unmeaning Gestures" that they could never exhibit military virtue.<sup>9</sup> As Janice Radway has shown in her influential study of the readers of modern romances, twentieth-century women readers of "popular" fiction are less passive, escapist, and complicit with patriarchy than has usually been claimed.<sup>10</sup> The romance form in the eighteenth as in the twentieth century offers the potential for female creativity and the subversion of conventional gender roles.

In contrast to the *novelty* of "realistic" fictions and their proximity to newspapers, the early Gothic novel distanced itself from the world of its readers temporally, geographically, and by disruptions of normal causality. The "Gothic" story was initially characterized by a setting in medieval or feudal times, frequently in exotic locales such as Italy, Bavaria, or the Scottish Highlands. Italy was the ideal scene, not only for picturesque ruins and the requisite banditti, but also for tracing the decline of classical Roman virtue into luxury. For example, in *A Sicilian Romance*, the unfeeling Duke de Luovo, while pursuing the heroine, encounters robbers in whom he "could almost have imagined he beheld . . . a band of the early Romans before knowledge had civilized, or luxury had softened them."<sup>11</sup> Even when set in the past, the Gothic novel typically differs from the historical novel in its tendency to ignore historical research, sometimes introducing anachronisms in the process. Fascinated with liminal states or with an undecidability between life and death, or between human beings and artistic representations, Gothic novelists tend to include in their stories statures and portraits that bleed, move, speak, or show other signs of animation. In many eighteenth-century texts the word *Gothic* was a pejorative term, synonymous with "barbarous," typically used as an epithet to modify "ignorance" or "superstition." However, even at the end of the seventeenth

century – for example, in the writings of Andrew Fletcher of Salton – “Gothic” age was sometimes idealized as an age of liberty, when war and warlike barons imposed limits on monarchical power.<sup>12</sup> To the extent that this conception of the Gothic age is operative in the Gothic novel, presentation of aristocrats who had not yet alienated their military cities might stand as a civic humanist indictment of the corrupt and which noble titles had come to be awarded for bureaucratic rather than military services or, worse yet, simply purchased.

The Gothic novel derives from Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic fascination with grotesque violence, and from erotic-sentimental plots that focus on a virtuous woman under sexual threat. The agent of threat is often, like Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747–48), a villain who would seem to be modeled partly on Milton’s Satan. The character of the hero/villain permits novelists to study heartlessness or join moral philosophers and proponents of solitary confinement in exploring the operations of the voice of conscience. The virtuous heroine, on the other hand, experiences her own insignificance in the face of sublimity and Nature’s God and learns of the transience of all human achievement. The Gothic novel thus explores the parallels between ethics and aesthetics upon which eighteenth-century moral philosophers insisted. The heroine’s fears – sometimes imaginary, sometimes legitimate – produce claustrophobia and terror in castles, prisons, and caves, in which she often discovers moldering manuscripts, sees mysterious lights, and hears mysterious voices. Representations of the heroine’s perspective and imagination reveal less a new psychological focus of the novel than they do a continuing exploration of the epistemological questions that dominate eighteenth-century British fiction.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to heroine and villain, Gothic novels usually contain talkative and superstitious servant, whose literary progenitors would include Sancho Panza from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Hugh Strap from Smollett’s *Roderick Random* (1748), and Benjamin Partridge from Tom Jones. That such servants tend also to be supremely faithful to their masters or mistresses permits Gothic novelists, like their counterparts in realistic fiction, to relieve the anxieties of general readers who may fear that paternalistic relations of deference and subordination are yielding to those of contract and the cash nexus, and that the vertical ties of master and man are being replaced by class solidarity. The idealization of selected semifeudal or “Gothic” social relations may permit a nostalgic or “conservative” critique of the social relations in a society in which labour has become commodified.

Roman Catholic European settings provide opportunities for a Protestant

attack on the apparatus of tyranny associated with papism and Continental absolutism. Still, the fact that the Reformation had reached England does not simply attenuate the criticism of despotism, as Judith Wilt would have it: “the point of the splendid overthrow of monkish tyranny that animates the early Gothic is surely that in the English mind it *has been overthrown*” (Wilt, *Ghosts*, 45). I would argue, on the contrary, that the Gothic critique is in no simple sense jingoistic, first of all because of the resemblance and, in some cases, indebtedness to the Continental Enlightenment and the revolutions it partly inspired. It has been long thought that the anticlericalism of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, for example, derives from “the French revolutionary theatre.”<sup>14</sup> (One should not, however, discount the influence of a popular, as opposed to *enlightened*, anticlerical tradition, featuring proud and lascivious monks and priests.) Secondly, novelists often redirect their critique of “Gothic” tyranny toward feudal or barbaric survivals in Britain’s own judicial or penal system. Hence Godwin and Mary Shelley echo the criticisms of the prison reformer John Howard, when they note the lengthy and inhumane pretrial imprisonment of Caleb Williams and Victor Frankenstein. Whereas the novels in which these title characters appear have contemporary settings, Godwin’s *St. Leon*, a narrative about the sixteenth century, establishes a clear analogy between the Spanish Inquisition’s suppression of heresy and the Pittite repression of political radicalism in the England of the 1790s.

In its critique of Continental despotism and in the redirection of that critique toward Britain, Gothic novelists are pursuing rather than departing from the sociopolitical aims of eighteenth-century “realistic” fiction. In *Pamela* (1740), for example, Samuel Richardson situates the rakish Mr. B.’s interrogation of the heroine in the context of the use of judicial torture in Continental criminal proceedings, prompting her objection in favor of British liberty: “Sir, said I, the Torture is not used in *England*; and I hope you won’t bring it up. Admirably said! said the naughty Gentleman. – But I can tell you of as good a Punishment. If a Criminal won’t plead with us here in *England*, we press him to Death, or till he does plead.”<sup>15</sup> Although Mr. B. is merely making lascivious suggestions, the passage also reminds us of the menacing and archaic power of the law as it lingered into the eighteenth century. Pressing to death or the *peine forte et dure*, one American reminds us, “continued until at least 1741,” shortly after the publication of *Pamela*; and it was not until 1772 that a statute was passed making “standing mute of malice” result in an automatic conviction. To take one other example, within Fielding’s beautiful and awe-inspiring “Gothick” house of Mr. Allworthy, the young Tom Jones witnesses a hearing at the hands of his tutor, Mr. Thwackum, “so severe . . . that it possibly fell little

short of the Torture with which Confessions are in some Countries extirpated from Criminals" (*Tom Jones*, 14, 42; II.2, 122). What begins as praise of British justice modulates into a critique of an educational system which sadists may assume despotic authority even in England. In eighteenth-century fiction, then, appeals to British liberty typically serve corrective or reformist function, rather than simply a popular chauvinist one.

In an obvious sense, Gothic fiction has no better claim than any other kind of eighteenth-century novel to be considered part of "popular" culture. Given the high, though decreasing, rates of illiteracy among the "peasants" and the high prices of novels, it would neither have been possible for most common laborers to have read them nor for any but a small elite to have purchased them. For example, an admittedly long novel like Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* was published in 1794, in four volumes, at a cost of £15.<sup>17</sup> This amounts to more than a skilled English tradesman would have made in a week, and more than a common laborer would have earned in two. Even given the availability to a wider public through circulating libraries and in the form of reading aloud, Radcliffe could not be considered a "popular" artist in the sense, for example, that Peter Burke gives the term – one who, often anonymously and often in oral genres, "works mainly for a public of craftsmen and peasants."<sup>18</sup> In this sense, "popular" culture would include folk songs, folktales, broadsides, chapbooks, itinerant juggling, folk dances, alehouse games, animal bating, and seasonal festivals. In addition to impersonality, "popular" culture tends to be distinguished by a local or regional and sometimes by a formulaic character, and its "discovery" by the elite in the eighteenth century tends to be associated with the rise of nationalism.

Now, while the Gothic novel is not itself part of "popular" culture, it is clearly contemporaneous with both the reform of popular culture and its rediscovery. The Gothic novel, moreover, appears in England at a time when literacy rates are rising and when more members of the lower social orders are beginning to possess more than minimal reading skills. Indeed, the increasing diffusion of print culture is one of the causes for the waning influence of traditional popular culture. The Gothic novel is part of the project of the recovery of popular culture to the extent that it appropriates the marvelous and supernatural from folktales. Perhaps it shares as well with popular culture an indictment of corruption and capitalism based on a nostalgic appeal to an idealized past. (If so, the Gothic novel might well be "conservative" in the same way that traditional popular culture is – critically opposing an older "moral economy" to the new political economy.) Still, it would be overstating the case to regard the Gothic novel

as taking, in David Punter's words, "the form of an 'expropriated' literature," with middle-class authors self-consciously reviving materials of folk belief that are, in his view, the "property" of the people.<sup>19</sup> Such an account ignores the long history of interaction between elite and popular culture, and the way such interaction necessarily alters the dominant culture. The rise of the Gothic novel – indeed, the rise of the novel itself – bears a significant relation to the withdrawal of the elite from popular culture, for when the elite participated in both, they viewed learned culture as serious and popular culture as play (Burke, *Popular Culture*, 28). The novel, in general, represents one mode of inserting play into learned culture, while Gothic fiction specifically draws upon popular cultural sources to provide the elite with substitutes for the ludic opportunities that have been lost.

In making the claim that the phrase "illumination night" serves as a description of Radcliffe's novelistic practice, I am doing something more than reasserting the conventional view that the Gothic novel represents the dark side of the Enlightenment or that it arises in reaction to an age of reason and light. This argument is complicated by Peter Brooks, who, drawing upon Freud and Rudolph Otto, finds in the ghosts and diabolical agents of Lewis's *The Monk* a dramatization of the return of the repressed, in which the Sacred, having been denied by eighteenth-century skepticism, returns, "atomized," in a horrific and primitive form, and internalized as psychological terror.<sup>20</sup>

The philosopher Noel Carroll has challenged the return-of-the-repressed model for the relationship between the Enlightenment and tales of horror. Rejecting a psychohistorical account, Carroll argues that tales of horror may have arisen when they did because a broadly accepted set of natural norms, such as that established by Enlightenment science, was the prerequisite site for recognizing the category violations that define the impure objects that arouse the emotional state of "art-horror."<sup>21</sup> That is to say, the taxonomic project of eighteenth-century natural history by its very success created the potential for a new sort of monstrosity. In the course of denying the analogy between horror and religious feelings, Carroll revises our understanding of the literature of horror by focusing on its cognitive and ratiocinative components – emphasizing, specifically, both plots driven by curiosity and the numerous imitations of rationalistic explanations for the monstrous objects that defy categorization (Carroll, *Philosophy*, 163–66, 182). This account helps to explain the Gothic obsession with protagonists who seek "to penetrate the veil of mystery." Given Carroll's persuasive critique of theories of horror fiction built on Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, why should we revisit at this late date the account of the Gothic novel as representing a dark side of the Enlightenment?

ideal of coffeehouse conversation was developed by Scottish thinkers as Francis Hutcheson. In this view, Hutcheson is less a moral arithmetic and utilitarian predecessor of Bentham than an Enlightenment teacher sought to inspire his students with "a 'spirit of enquiry' and a low 'conversation' which would assist in the 'culture of the heart.'"26 Goethe, particularly those composed by Radcliffe and other eighteenth-century women writers, certainly participate in this culture of the heart to some extent partake of the spirit of rational inquiry as well. What is called "male" Gothic fiction (such as M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*) features horrific violence and destructive interaction between the natural and supernatural worlds; Gothic fiction by women such as Radcliffe stops well short of such terrors. Female Gothic fiction tends to depict the abuse of power by tyrannical patriarchs and their exploitation of women, and it is best understood as a subgenre within the novel of sensibility as it explores the sufferings of persecuted young women. To put it another way, the female Gothic focuses intensely on a violation of just those ideals of sociability and rational intercourse that the Enlightenment prized and promoted. These ideals of sociability and conversation were best realized in eighteenth-century Edinburgh in the form of elite clubs and improvement societies, which sought to assume "para-parliamentary" functions in facilitating the transition to a new commercial world (Phillipson, "Scottish Enlightenment," 27, 35). In this respect it would seem that it was the dark side not of rationalism and bourgeois individualism but rather of Enlightenment sociability of which Gothic novelists were aware — specifically, the danger that societies of intellectual elites might attempt surreptitiously to control an ostensibly open and increasingly democratic political process. Hence, the focus in many Gothic novels on secret societies such as the Illuminati: a utopian society, centered in Bavaria, that attacked the errors of religious establishments and corrupt political institutions in order to advance the goal of perfectibility.

In the transition to what we now think of as the modern period, Enlightenment intellectuals promoted a rejection of what they thought of as popular superstition, and for economic as well as political reasons there was an attempt by many governments to suppress or control traditional popular culture, which was often seen by the emerging modern European states as dangerously rowdy and potentially subversive. But the Enlightenment historical project also authorized the collection and preservation, often enough with nostalgic regret, of popular cultural artifacts. And historians of the time came to understand crowd behavior as not merely irrational and spontaneous but as governed by rituals that frequently created the discipline essential for effective social action. In his description of the Porteous riots in

*the Heart of Midlothian* (1818), Walter Scott shows that he recognizes what recent students of the crowd have maintained: *pace Foucault*, discipline is the product not only of modern carceral institutions designed on the model of monastic asceticism and military ranks, but also of bells, drums, horns, disguises, bonfires, and tar barrels — the ritual accoutrements of the early modern crowd.

Such popular accoutrements, especially bonfires and tarbarrels, lie behind Paolo's "illumination night." The fires of Vesuvius in *The Italian*, at once beneficial to mankind and potentially destructive, offer a symbol of Enlightenment very similar to the sublime flash of lightning that destroys "an old and beautiful oak" near Belrive in a later Gothic novel.<sup>27</sup> For, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), if the electricity associated with lightning does not actually provide the spark of life in Frankenstein's project of reanimating dead flesh, it at least inspires this scientific project designed for the benefit of the human race. In the context of Shelley's novel, the destruction of the venerable oak suggests the unnaturalness of Frankenstein's enterprise and the threat that Enlightenment science poses to natural beauty and fertility. So, on the one hand Mary Shelley is a critic of the Enlightenment. But the venerable oak surely also serves as a symbol of the British nation, and of its stability founded on naval strength and colonialist commerce (ships built of oak) and the hegemony of the aristocracy and landed gentry. Thus, on the other hand, Mary Shelley would have welcomed the power of Enlightenment to destroy the military force and the prejudices that sustained a corrupt political order. In *The Italian* the natural illumination supplied by the volcano are associated with popular patriotic spectacles, while the enlightened *Vulcani* objects that such sublime power may endanger human life. In *Frankenstein*, on the contrary, the sublime power of lightning is appropriated by the enlightened scientist, ostensibly for the benefit of the human race, while it threatens both the natural beauty that Shelley values and the patriotic prejudices that she does not. While there are certainly ideological differences between Radcliffe and Shelley, neither author can be adequately described as popular, patriotic, or anti-Enlightenment.

That the image of the volcano illuminates late eighteenth-century attitudes toward science and art has recently been shown in Susan Sontag's historical romance, *The Volcano Lover*, in which Sir William Hamilton notes that "like any object of grand passion, the volcano unites many contradictory attributes," among which he identifies the very ones Radcliffe found: "Entertainment and apocalypse."<sup>28</sup> Sontag, I think, has a better understanding of the relationship between the Enlightenment and popular superstition than many historians and critics. When her William Hamilton visits



the fortune-teller Efrosina Pumo, he "was feeling rather, well, Voltairian, an ethnological mood . . . disdainful of all superstitions, magic, zeal, irrationality, yet not averse to the prospect of being surprised, confounded (49). In October 1770 the musician and music historian Charles Burney visited Hamilton at his Neapolitan country house, the Villa Angelica, which occasion he compared the volcanic activity to fireworks,<sup>29</sup> and eighteenth-century form of illuminations. Model volcanoes featuring fireworks effects were constructed in the late eighteenth century most spectacularly at Wörlitz (near Dessau in Germany) and at the Ruggieri Gardens in the Paris suburbs. The Gothic novelist William Beckford, in addition to constructing a Gothic abbey at Fonthill, created in the 1790s a lake that hoped would look as if it had been formed in the crater of an extinct volcano ("Thacker, "Volcano," 77-81). Perhaps owing to the extreme volcanic activity of Mount Vesuvius in the last third of the eighteenth century (including major eruptions in 1767, 1779, and 1793),<sup>30</sup> elaborately designed models of volcanic eruptions formed a favorite subject of exhibitions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As Richard Altick notes, among the various spectacles of natural sublimity, "volcanic actions was second only to sea storms in popularity."<sup>31</sup> (Readers of the Gothic will recall the sea storms in such novels as *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *Melmoth the Wanderer*.)

French festivals in the 1790s likewise employed explosive models of volcanoes, as metaphors for revolution.<sup>32</sup> The juxtaposition of natural and political cataclysms appears in the typically self-referential manner of Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. As a dying monk explains how the inmates of a monastery manage to survive the monotony of their mechanical existence by ingesting the poison of "innutritive illusion," one cannot help but recognize the conventional subjects of Gothic novels, Maturin's included, in these improbable fictions: the monks "dream that an earthquake will shake the walls to atoms, that a volcano will burst forth in the centre of the garden. They imagine a revolution of government, — an attack of banditti, — any thing, however improbable."<sup>33</sup>

The Gothic volcano leads us, first of all, into the midst of powerful and mysterious natural electrical and igneous phenomena that, in the eighteenth century, remained at the intersection of science, alchemy, and necromancy. Far from representing a return of supernaturalism following the repression of the numinous by Enlightenment rationalism, the Gothic novel shares an Enlightenment preoccupation with exploring phenomena at the margins of scientific knowledge: ventriloquism, somnambulism, mesmerism, physiognomy, phrenology, and reanimation of the dead. Among the most interesting recent studies of such subjects are Terry Castle's explorations of

phantasmagoria and the "spectralization" of memory and thought. Castle apparently accepts a psychohistorical model not very different from Peter Brooks, in which "rationalists did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology";<sup>34</sup> however, she not only brilliantly explores the confounding of Lockean mental images with supernatural apparitions but also argues that such a conception of mental operations and the emotional investment in the mental pictures of loved ones called forth technological developments such as the magic lantern, photography, cinematography, television, and holography.<sup>35</sup> Castle thus explores the interactions among Gothic fiction, scientific knowledge that sometimes overlapped with pseudoscience, and technological capabilities that formerly seemed almost magical.

Students of Gothic fiction have only recently begun to appreciate the connections between eighteenth-century science, the occult, and radical politics, even though these connections are fundamental to an understanding of the novels of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley, and others. Marie Roberts has argued that the "Rosicrucian" novel in English, a subgenre of the Gothic, explores precisely the overlap that the historian of science Charles Webster has seen between scientific magic and Newtonian mechanistic science.<sup>36</sup> We can now understand in a new way the device of the explained supernatural. In some instances, Radcliffe and other Gothic novelists leave the reader hesitating between a supernatural account and an explanation that draws upon Enlightenment research that today strikes us as pseudoscience. It is precisely such hesitation between the marvelous (the actually supernatural) and the uncanny (the bizarre event rationally explained away) that would situate a Gothic novel, for Tzvetan Todorov, in the genre of the fantastic.<sup>37</sup>

But "*illumination night*," the term Paolo uses to describe the volcanic fires of Vesuvius, also leads us to the contested ground on which the official displays of the dominant culture encountered the volatile festivities of the people. Radcliffe italicizes the word *illumination* because she wishes to emphasize that it has been wrenched from its normal context, in which it refers, to quote the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to "The lighting up of a building, town, etc. (now usually in a decorative way, with coloured lights arranged in artistic designs, etc.) in token of festivity or rejoicing." In fact, the *OED* cites Paolo's speech from *The Italian* to supply an attributive example for this sense of the word.

In 1797, the year *The Italian* was published, the English reader would most readily have associated "illuminations" with the officially sanctioned celebrations on the occasion of military victories in the war with France. Such illuminations were generally characterized by the lighting of bonfires

and tar barrels in the streets, the placing of lighted candles in the windows of most houses, the firing of guns, the setting off of firecrackers, frequently official civic fireworks displays. Large crowds would generally roam the streets at night, sometimes extorting money from genteel passers-by and sometimes breaking the windows of houses that had not been illuminated by their owners or occupants. So for example in June 1794, following Lord Howe's naval victory over the French, "Three days of victory illuminations were ordered, and loyal mobs armed with sticks roamed the streets smashing any unit windows which betrayed lack of patriotic enthusiasm."<sup>38</sup> Earlier in the century, when the news reached London of the Duke of Cumberland's defeat of the Jacobite rebels at Culloden (1746), Tobias Smollett and his friend Alexander Carlyle thought it prudent to remove their wigs, carry their swords in their hands, and conceal their Scottish accents by maintaining perfect silence, in order to avoid the insolence of the riotous London mob. Making their way through back streets, Smollett and Carlyle were nonetheless asked for sixpence by some boys around a bonfire.<sup>39</sup> Hence, even in the case of officially sanctioned illuminations, there was always the risk of the poor destroying or appropriating the property of the rich.

Handbills advertising late eighteenth-century illuminations reveal official awareness of the danger of riot. A notice for a general illumination, distributed in Bristol, England, on 5 September 1799, warned the people against the firing of guns and pistols in the streets, and "against committing any Outrage" on those "who, from religious Principles may not be disposed to testify their Joy by illuminations."<sup>40</sup> Illuminations, therefore, even officially sponsored ones, formed a site of contestation between expressions of popular sentiment and the increasing concern of the authorities to control the crowd. Thus, in *The Italian*, Paulo's affection for and Vivaldi's fear of volcanic illuminations play out a conflict between popular patriotic festivity and the concerns of the enlightened rich to protect the fragile property of landlords and householders, and to redirect and contain popular cultural manifestations within official channels.

But illuminations and bonfires were by no means confined to popular participation in officially sanctioned celebrations. They also served a ritual function in autonomous demonstrations of the early modern crowd and even in social and political protest. E. P. Thompson has argued that, from the time of John Wilkes, the English crowd used a threatening and seditious countertheater as a negotiating strategy against the patriciate's theatrical displays of paternalism. Thompson includes in the symbolic language of this countertheater "the illumination of windows (or the breaking of those without illumination)."<sup>41</sup> By the time of the French Revolution, the partici-

pants in British popular disturbances, even those supporting traditional grazing, gleaning, and provisioning rights, began to employ a new radical political rhetoric. In the political context of the 1790s, celebratory illuminations were occasionally held in Britain to mark not English victories but rather those of the armies of the French Revolution. For example, in Perth in 1792 an anonymous correspondent sent this report to the Home Office: "The Tree of Liberty was planted with great Solemnity in this town and a great bonfire with ringing of bells and a general Illumination upon hearing that General Dumourier had entered Brussels. The Lower Class of People talk of nothing but liberty and Equality."<sup>42</sup> The planting of the tree of liberty is itself a transformation of the traditional erection of maypoles, a transformation that indicates the politicization of popular culture (Burke, *Popular Culture*, 267). In 1797, then, an illumination night might not only be an occasion when the loyal ardor of "Church and King" mobs threatened to get out of control and put at risk the property and persons of gentry and householders. An illumination night might be the site of a fundamental clash of opposing social interests, which had come to be increasingly identified with opposing attitudes toward the French Revolution. Popular patriotic exuberance and popular revolutionary sentiment converge in the phenomenon of the general illumination, and hence, in the view of the authorities, this phenomenon had to be orchestrated and controlled.

The ideologically contradictory "illumination night" in *The Italian* does not lend itself readily to an account of Radcliffe as a conservative author, opposed to the French Revolution, writing an anti-Enlightenment fantasy, with a psychological focus. Rather, I have argued, the chauvinistic Paolo's local attachment to the Bay of Naples draws on similar Enlightenment sources to the contemporary Vivaldi's aesthetics of the sublime. Even while Radcliffe readily mocks and patronizes her Gothic manservant, she uses his unquestioning love for his master to relieve the anxieties aroused by the servant problem in the transition to capitalism. But the "illumination night" also hints at the power and potential threat of the crowd. As opposed to the dominant psychological tendency in criticism of the Gothic novel, which has shown how the subjective distortions of the heroine's vision derive from her simultaneous dread of and attraction to villainous paternal figures, historical criticism can reveal the way in which Gothic fiction participates in the social, political, and philosophical discourses of the late eighteenth century. As opposed to the psychohistorical model for conceiving the relationship between the Enlightenment and the tale of terror, the more local and particular insights of social history reveal the way in which Gothic novels give voice to social and political struggles.

*The Italian* ends with a paternalistic fete in celebration of Vivaldi and

Ellena's marriage. The setting is a villa, "a scene of fairy-land," where gardens are said to be designed not in formal Italian fashion but in the natural mode favored by English landscape gardeners: "On this just every avenue and grove, and pavilion was richly illuminated" (412). The fete is characterized not only by rich illuminations but by a mingling of social ranks, as if the elite could participate once more in the culture of people. Paolo dominates the fete with his celebration of universal history after the experience of old regime inquisitorial imprisonment. An Enlightenment science that borders on the occult also plays its part in the "fete-technology" of his sentimental communications: "the emotion which has nearly stifled him burst forth in words, and 'O! giorno felice! O! giorno felice!' flew from his lips with the force of an electric shock. They communicated his enthusiasm to the whole company, the words passed like lightning from one individual to another" (414).

Perhaps something of the difference between the female Gothic, or the Radcliffean tale of terror, and the tales of horror associated with male authors can now be illustrated through the treatment of illuminations. In contrast to the splendid illuminated groves and woods in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, the most striking reference to illuminations in *Melmoth the Wanderer* is at once more learned and more horrific. Instead of a nostalgic appeal to the festive mingling of elite and populace, Maturin's Melmoth undermines the sentimental idealism of Immael/Isidora, the child of nature who serves as the novel's major heroine, by offering as a comparison for the music of the spheres "the Christians, who had the honour to illuminate Nero's garden in Rome on a rejoicing night" (351). Maturin likely alludes here to Tacitus, who criticizes Nero, not for punishing Christians, which would have been in the public interest, but rather for indulging his private cruelty in the manner of their execution: "they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutions for daylight."<sup>43</sup> Maturin thus deploys his male educational privilege, his greater access, in the words of Clara Reeve, to "the manners of the Greeks and Romans," in order to reinscribe modern celebratory illuminations as a cynical and witty deflation of the sentimentalism to which he nonetheless remains attracted. In the matter of illuminations, Radcliffe makes a manifestation of natural sublimity congenial to humanity, transforming a volcano by cataplexis into a scene of popular festivity, whereas Maturin dehumanizes a modern celebration by alluding to a horrific ancient martyrdom.

One year after *The Italian* was published, Nelson's victory in the Battle of the Nile (1798) was celebrated by a general illumination in London. The occasion was also marked by a work with a better claim to be considered

part of popular culture. Hawked on the streets of London was a one-penny broadsheet entitled *Illuminations, or The Orphan Boy and the Lady*, which, though it ends with the promise of paternalistic charity, looks upon patriotic celebrations from the sentimental but nonetheless critical perspective of the poor child of a sailor, one who was no doubt impressed into the King's service:

Poor, foolish child! how pleas'd was I  
When news of Nelson's vict'ry came,  
Along the crowded street to fly,  
To see the lighted windows flame!  
To force me home my mother sought—  
She could not bear to see my joy;  
For with my father's life 'twas bought—  
And made me a poor orphan boy!<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. Frederick Garber (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 158. All further references are to this edition.
- 2 Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 30, 50-51.
- 3 See Alan D. McKillop, "Local Attachment and Cosmopolitanism - the Eighteenth-Century Pattern," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Frederick W. Hillis and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 191-218.
- 4 See, for example, Elkhart B. Goss, Jr., *Imagination Indulged: the Irrational in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972); and *Justa's Work, Ghosts of the Gothic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- 5 Henry Felling, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Batestin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 4, 10.
- 6 Henry Felling, *The History of Tom Jones*, ed. Martin C. Batestin and Fredson Bowers (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2 vols., 1975), II: 1-77.
- 7 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story*, ed. W. S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 12.
- 8 Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt* (Colchester, 2 vols., 1785; reprinted New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1990), I: xi. All further references are to this edition.
- 9 Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 279.
- 10 Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance, new edition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- 11 Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, ed. Alison Milbank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 85.

- 12 See Nicholas Phillipson, "The Scottish Enlightenment," in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 23.
- 13 See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
- 14 Louis F. Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 22.
- 15 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 203.
- 16 J. H. Baker, "Criminal Courts and Procedures at Common Law 1550-1800," *Crime in England, 1550-1800*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 34.
- 17 See Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (London: Fortune Press, [1938]), 98.
- 18 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 92.
- 19 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman, 1980), 422.
- 20 Peter Brooks, "Virtue and Terror: *The Monk*," *ELH*, 40 (1973): 249.
- 21 Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 56-57.
- 22 Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power: a Conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michel Perrot," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 153-54.
- 23 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977); John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); and Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Armstrong explicitly states that "the novel provided a mighty weapon in the arsenal of Enlightenment rhetoric, which aimed at liberating individuals from their political chains" (98). For Armstrong, on the other side of such liberatory rhetoric lie new, and more effective, institutional strategies of control.
- 24 See Michael Ignatieff, "State, Civil Society and Total Institutions: a Critique of Recent Social Histories of Punishment," in Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull, eds., *Social Control and the State* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), 83.
- 25 Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment in England," in Porter and Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context*, 7.
- 26 Nicholas Phillipson, "Scottish Enlightenment," 29; Phillipson is quoting from W. Leechman, "Some Account of the Life, Writings and Character of the Author," in *A System of Moral Philosophy* by Francis Hutcheson (London, 1755).
- 27 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. James Kinsley and M. K. Joseph (1969; reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 41.
- 28 Susan Sonntag, *The Volcano Lover: a Romance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 129.
- 29 Christopher Thacker, "The Volcano: Culmination of the Landscape Garden," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 8 (January 1983): 75.
- 30 Fred M. Bullard, *Volcanoes of the Earth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 213-15.

- 31 Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978), 96.
- 32 Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 75.
- 33 Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. Douglas Grant (1968; reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 116. All further references are to this edition.
- 34 Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie," *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Autumn 1988): 52.
- 35 Terry Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," in Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, eds., *The New Eighteenth Century* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 247, 151, 310 n.28.
- 36 Marie Roberts, *Gothic Immortals* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5. "Rosicrucian" evokes a shadowy and secret society whose members share esoteric knowledge concerning such matters as the transmutation of base metals into precious ones, the prolongation of life, and power over the elements and elemental spirits. The name derives from the society's reputed fifteenth-century founder, one Christian Rosenkreuz.
- 37 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).
- 38 William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 125.
- 39 *The Autobiography of Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk*, ed. John Hillburton (London, 1910), 198-99; quoted in Lewis Mansfield Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 58.
- 40 Quoted in Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 238.
- 41 E. P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974): 400.
- 42 "To Alexander Todd," 15 December 1792, in the Home Office (Scotland) Correspondence, quoted in Kenneth J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 149.
- 43 Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), 354.
- 44 *Illustrations, or The Orphan Boy and the Lady* (London: Printed for J. M. Finladd, MD).

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