



Chapter II

The Relationship of Gothic Romances

to

Romanticism in general

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During the 1750's sentimental poetry sank to rather low levels, and its productions are noteworthy only as signs of the times and presages of the future. Superstitious horrors were known to require for effective treatment an atmosphere of gloom, most readily produced by fierce - torrents, forbidding mountains, ravens, moping owls, and ivy - mantled ruins. These became the traditional stage properties of romanticism. The practical dilemma of the sentimentalist, —drawn toward solitude by his worship of Nature, and toward society by his love for Man, —was described by Whitehead in The Enthusiast, the humanitarian impulse being finally given the preference. None of these writers had sufficient warmth to compel attention; and if sentimentalism had not been steadily disseminated through other literary forms, especially the novel, it might have been regarded as a lost cause.

The remarkable poets of this period were Thomas Gray (1716-1771), Edward Young (1681-1765), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Robert Blair (1699-1734). Gray's Elegy written in a Country Churchyard, by many held the noblest English Lyric, appeared in 1751. His classical ideal of style, according to which poetry should have, in his words, extreme conciseness of expression, yet be 'pure, perspicuous, and musical', was realized both in the Elegy and in the otherwise very different Pindaric Odes. The ethical and religious implications of the Elegy, its piety, its sense of the frailties as well as the merits of mankind, are conservative. Nor is there in ^{the} Pindaric Odes any violation of classical principles. The poem, in short possesses the chief Augustan virtues, as Dr. Johnson's praise of it would suggest. Gray never deviates into a pantheistic faith, a belief in human perfection unrestrained, or any other essential tenet of sentimentalism. Yet the influence of the new spirit upon him may be discerned. It

modified his choice of subjects, and slightly coloured their interpretation, without causing him to abandon the classical attitude. The Elegy treats with reverence what the Augustans had neglected,—the tragic dignity of obscure lives; The Progress of Poesy emphasizes qualities (emotions and sublimity) which Pope's Essay on Criticism had not stressed; and The Bard presents a wildly picturesque figure of ancient days, which, not surprisingly, failed to win Johnson's approbation. Gray felt that classicism might quicken its spirit and widen its interests without surrendering its principles, that a classical poem might be a popular poem, and the admiration of posterity supports his belief.

The Elegy, then, was in no respects an unusual poem, but Gray there preserved what is of lasting value in the graveyard sentiment of the time. Part of his success lies in his reconciliation of the general and the particular. The images have almost all been used before in this context, but the poet had seen them anew. Indeed so 'particular' is the beech 'that wreathes its old fantastic roots so high', so peculiar is it to the woods at Burnham, that Gray was censured by a contemporary for not recording those features only which characterize the species. The critic might have taken as much exception to the 'straw - built shed', and equally unusual features of the landscape. It is in part his freshness of vision and in part the rhetorical skill shown in varying caesura and accent that gives life to these divine truisms "to which every bosom returns an echo"¹

" The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing head winds slowly o' er the lea,

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;
Save that from yonder ivy - mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.
Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.
The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shade,
The cock's shrill clarion, on the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed"¹

For our present purpose we need only call attention to such phrases as "Yonder ivy - mantled tower," "The moping owl", the "mouldering heaps" of dead, for their relation to the 'Graveyard School' and the cult of ruins, and to the fresh appreciation of the natural scene, shown especially in the second and the last stanzas of this passage. At the same time it is obvious that the poem is Augustan in its moralistic tone :-

1. The beginning of Gray's Elegy

"Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor"¹

and that the poet is out to inspire thoughtfulness rather than fear. At no point is the Elegy morbid.

Of the other outstanding poetical names of this age the two most considerable are those of Young and Thomson. Dr. Edward Young, the celebrated author of the Night Thoughts, was born in 1683 and lived till 1765. His work represents the real beginning of the literature of sensibility. Necessarily subjective in principle, it tends with all its might to bring about the overthrow of the barriers of intellectuality, measure, and order as well as the general self - effacement, by which classicism limited, repressed and transposed the troubled, impatient flow of the inner life.

Young provides an outlet for this tumultuous tide. But he does not let it pour freely. Just as much as with Thomson,² his is a double temperament, which by culture is bound up with tradition, at the same time as instinct inclines it towards the future. The education of his art has been exclusively classical; the whole of his work belongs to the forms and spirit of the age of Pope. The powerful initiative of the Night Thoughts is wholly psychological by nature; the language,

1. Gray's Elegy.

2. James Thomson (1700-1748) whose Winter was first published in 1726, Summer and Spring followed in 1727 and 1728, and Autumn appeared for the first time in the first collected edition of The Seasons in 1730.

subservient to rules, is in no way renovated. The signs of a weakening inspiration, of a style that is cut off from its vital roots, the abstraction, the false and merely verbal intensity, come to spoil at every minute his most vigorous accents. An imperious discipline weighs upon his expression, contracting it, concentrating it, and giving to his poem an extreme and often obscure terseness; while on the other hand the discontinuity of thoughts is seen in the absence of any plan, and produces incessantly the impression of jerkiness, of themes taken up again, and of a broken line of development.

The Night Thoughts are a long meditation in nine cantos. Three successive bereavements have darkened the poet's soul; the nocturnal hours are in keeping with his sorrow; pensive and alone he abandons himself to the reflections it suggests; and it is a whole treatise on life, death, and immortality which thus issues from a personal emotion, displayed as it is beneath a light veil of reticence; the modesty of private life is still too strong and so fictitious names serve to designate those who have died. The development is more than didactic; it is controversial. The inconstancy and illusion of human happiness, the illogicalness of infidelity, the rich certitudes of faith, such are the very orthodox doctrines that Young demonstrates with untiring zeal. An imagination interlocutor lends a surface animation to his monologue. Though this rather pale personage, who seems to represent the spirit of the century, it is against the error of moral flippancy that Young raises the protestation of experience and good sense: and it is in the name reason that he upholds a rational thesis. The departed are evoked, one after another; a fund of bitterness felt everywhere confirms the sincerity of the Christian pessimism which is expressed; the lyrical setting of night and death is never allowed to be forgotten; but the poem has only at moments the character of an effusion; it is a series of

religious commonplaces and philosophical debates. Its relationship to The Gothic Novel is, we should add, far slighter than its title might suggest.

From a certain point of view, the feeling for nature with Thomson springs from that realism of concrete description which is an essential element of classical art and which already, even with the masters of the school, was sometimes tinged by a complacent fondness for natural scenery. Thomson's inspiration is a realism that has blossomed out into a keen, coloured and glowing sensation. This ardour of sensuous perception is an undoubted originality in itself; besides, it is accompanied by a general tone of deeply moved sensibility. But we are here only in the rather exterior regions not be connected with the fact that form, with Thomson, is still very closely allied to the intentions and devices of classicism.

The scenery of the Seasons, as Thomson paints it, is composed of still general touches; a mind guided by literary memories, by time consecrated models, constructs its main framework. It is the course of the sun through the signs of the zodiac which sets moving this changing sequence; the Muse presides over all the transitions; mythology is the background of the modern and real horizon in which the festivities or the sorrows of heaven and earth unfold themselves in all their grandeur and brilliance.

Thompson's taste for 'sublimity', his melodramatic treatment of the more sensational of nature's phenomena (which we encounter of course in the Gothic novels), is displayed in this passage :-

"'Tis listening fear and dumb amazement all :
When to the startled eye the sudden glance
Appears far south, eruptive through the cloud,
And, following slower, in explosion vast
The thunder raises his tremendous voice.
At first, heard solemn o'er the verge of heaven,
The tempest growls; but as it nearer comes
And rolls its awful burden on the wind,
The lightnings flash a larger curve, and more
The noise astounds, till overhead a sheet
Of livid flame discloses wide, then shuts
And opens wider, shuts and opens still
Expansive, wrapping ether in a blaze.
Follows the loosened aggravated roar,
Enlarging, deepening, mingling, peal on peal
Crushed horrible, convulsing heaven and earth."¹

No doubt our imaginary reader would have been pleased by the tender contrast of innocent love which follows, describing the fate of Amelia caught in the storm and struck by lightning from the embrace of Young Celadon, and by the concluding lines of description in which the sublimity of the storm gives way and

" a glittering robe of joy,
Set off abundant by the yellow ray,
Invests the fields, yet dropping from distress.
'Tis beauty all....."²

1. Summer, Thomson's Seasons
2. Butt, J. The Augustan Age. p.81

In his section on the sublimity of obscurity, Thomson had noticed that 'how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger and how much the notion of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds, which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings.' And at the 'dead of night', the lovers in his poem wandering at night shun:-

" The lonely tower.....whose mournful chambers
So night-struck-fancy dreams, the yelling ghost"¹
hold,

While in the storms of winter: -

".....they say, through all the burdened air
Long groans are heard, shrill sounds, and distant sighs,
That, uttered by the demon of the night,
Warn the devoted wretch of woe and death."²

This is more clearly illustrative than anything in Gray or Young of the psychological appetites which found coarser provender in the tales of terror.

A Night - Piece on Death of Thomas Parnell (1721) is similarly more deliberate in its attacking the nerves rather than appealing to the reason or the reflective capacities.

1. Thomson's Summer.

2. Winter.

The evocation of death in connection with the horrid darkness became a powerful picture, well calculated to weaken and frighten the hearts of the readers of the time :-

"Hah ! while I gaze, pale Cynthia fades,
The bursting earth unveils the shades !
All slow, and wan and wrapp'd with shrouds,
They rise in visionary crowds,
And all with sober accent cry,
'Think, mortal, what it is to die.'

Now from you black and funeral yew
That bathes the chanel house with dew
Methinks I hear a voice begin :
(Ye ravens, cease your croaking din;
Ye tolling clocks, no time resound
O'or the long lake and midnight ground)
It sends a peal of hollow groans
Thus speaking from among the bones:
'When men my scythe and darts supply,
How great a king of fear am I !"

Even nearer to the technique of the Gothic romancers is this passage from The Grave (1743) by another 'transitional' poet, Robert Blair :-

"See yonder hallowed fane ;—the pious work
Of names once famed, now dubious or forgot,
And buried midst the wreck of things which were;

There lie interred the more illustrious dead.
The wind is up : hark! how it howls! Methinks
Till now I never heard a sound so dreary :
Doors creak, and windows clap, and night's foul bird,
Rooked in the spire, screams loud: the gloomy aisles,
Black-plastered, and hung round with shreds of' scut
cheons
And tattered coats of arms, send back the sound
Laden with heavier airs, from the low vaults,
The mansions of the dead, Roused from their slumbers,
In grim array the grisly spectres rise,
Grin horrible, and, obstinately sullen,
Pass and repass, hushed as the foot of night.
Again the screech - owl shrieks: ungracious sound!
I'll hear no more; it makes one's blood run chill."

So much of the apparatus of Terror is here: the wind blowing among the ruins; "night's foul bird" again; the "low vaults", the "grisly spectres " (more sensational than Parnell's "shades" who cry "with sober accent"), and, in case the reader has still failed to respond, the assurance by the writer that his own blood "runs chill". The "shreds of" scutcheons and tattered coats of arms" point forward to the richer and less simple-minded writing of Keats in The Eve of St. Agnes. At this point we should move to a brief consideration of the supernatural and associated subjects as they appear in the work of the great Romantic writers.

Coleridge, speaking of the plan of their first (and joint) book of poem, Lyrical Ballads (1798), tells how Wordsworth and he partitioned the field of poetry between them:-

"It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us"¹

Wordsworth, then, was to concern himself with the 'natural', and if Nature in his work exerts an influence on man which is comparable to the supernatural, even so he stands largely outside our present survey. As he himself said,

"The moving accident is not my trade;
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts"²

And, in his preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800), he refers contemptuously to "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse". It is true that Wordsworth modelled his blank verse tragedy, The Borderers (1795-6), partly on The Robbers of Schiller, partly on current Gothic

1. From Biographia literaria (1817), chap. XIV

2. From Wordsworth Hart-Leap Well (1800).

fiction. And two of his poems, Guilt and Sorrow and Peter Bell have something of a Gothic flavour.

In the former the Gothic atmosphere is obtained by description, and from the terror of a murderer who is flying from the scene of his crime, alone in a stormy of Salisbury plain. The landscape terrifies him. Wordsworth's ravens, gallows, shrieks, phantoms, darkness and storm, the red sun and ruined building, are reminiscent of The Mysteries of Udolpho.

Peter Bell reveals a similar use of landscape to evoke fear, and the poet consequently explains away the supernatural terrors. Peter, lost in a fearsome wood, comes upon a glade bathed in moonlight, in which stands an immovable, lovely ass. All is ghostly silent; Peter suspects witchcraft, grows afraid, looks into the pool, and drops into a swoon before an inexplicable thing of horror. Wordsworth does not hold us on tenterhooks long enough like Mrs. Radcliffe. He explains that Peter has only seen the face of the owner of the ass, drowned by accident. The second and the third part of Peter Bell accumulates a set of Radcliffian terrors. Peter, while riding home on the ass, is frightened by a scream emanating from a cave. Looking back Peter finds a stain of blood, which is explained away as coming from the wounded ear of the ass. Peter sees the ghost of his betrayed wife on the road, which the poet explains to be an optical illusion.

But these works rank among Wordsworth's least interesting and least representative: unlike, say, Christabel or The Eve of St. Agnes, which are genuinely typical of Coleridge and Keats respectively. To stress the Supernatural, in this sense of the word, in Wordsworth would be altogether misleading. Much more significant is this fact: the natural landscapes which Mrs. Radcliffe paints in as the backgrounds

to her novels are, in Wordsworth's poetry, transformed into spiritual agencies and moral forces. They take on an extra dimension.

Until the end of the eighteenth century German literature found hardly any appreciation in England, being eclipsed by the influence of French literature. The title pages of books coming from the Minerva Press display sub-titles like: "translated from the German", "a tale adapted from the German" Whereas in many instances the originals may be traced, in not a few the German ascription was labelled solely to enhance the popularity by giving a fashionable air to the work. Popular pamphlets, chapbooks, and translations from the German Volksbücher brought about the renaissance of the Wandering Jew in the eighteenth century. This legend had prospered in popular tradition since the Middle Ages and "was also nourishedby the picture of the Jew drawn in the early German Volksbücher of the seventeenth century." As early as 1787 an unknown writer in The Critical Review expressed a feeling of "congenial warmth for everything of German Origin." Later it speaks of "the daily extension of the German language amongst us." It is significant of the trend of the times that the books which were first translated were works dealing with the supernatural and the terrible, works which supplied a demand for mystery and excitement. The following were of importance: The Necromancer (1794), Herman of Unna (1794), The Ghost-Seer (1795), The Sorcerer (1795), The Victim of Magical Delusion (1795), Horrid Mysteries (1797) These translations as a whole gave impetus to the English Schauer-Romantiks.

German stories in verse were certainly one influence on Coleridge in his depiction of "persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic!" And Southey described The

Ancient Mariner, on its first publication as "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity". To this criticism Lamb, though he disliked the miraculous events of the poem replied: "I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German Sublimity." The judgement of posterity is with Lamb on this point, for The Ancient Mariner retains a paradoxical freshness and perennial fascination which by no means are characteristic of the works which German romanticism (and especially Burger's celebrated ballad of the supernatural, Lenore) inspired in Scott and in Coleridge's lesser contemporaries.

Admittedly the miraculous events of the poem are many:¹ the skeleton ship which moves without the help of wind or tide and bears a crew of two, Death and Life - in - Death; the possession by spirits of the dead sailor's bodies; the dialogue of the Spirit - voices; the supernatural motion of the ship; its sudden disappearance into the sea as the pilot's boat approaches. Moreover these events are reinforced by the "natural" descriptions, which have an hallucinatory clarity and vividness about them:-

"About, about, in reel and rout
The death - fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green and blue and white.

1. The Ancient Mariner himself is a version of the Wandering Jew, a man haunted by his crime—a favorite Gothic motif. The motif first enters Romantic Poetry in Wordsworth's The Borderers: "A wanderer must I go," says Marmaduke at the end of Act V.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water - snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared the elfin light
Fell off in hoary flakes."

Yet the poem is far from being another 'Tale of Terror'. It is, rather than that, an allegory, its moral significance brought forcibly home to us through a controlled use of the marvellous and the fearful. The explicit pointing of the moral at the end is not really necessary (and has often been objected to on this score):

"He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all"

Is this merely a piece of Sunday - school doctrine tacked on to the end of an exciting adventure - in - verse?. The answer must be in the negative, because the attitude of tenderness and respectfulness towards life, explicit here, is implicit in the whole poem, and especially powerful in the description of the albatross and at the moment when the mariner watches the sea - snakes:

"A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware"

This is not the supernatural for the sake of the supernatural, not terror for the sake of the thrills which terror gives us. The Ancient Mariner in fact is a good example of the supernatural pressed into the service of the natural, of human nature. Man's understanding of man is its real subject, as perhaps is the case with all true art. Of how many Gothic romances could one say the same?

What has been said above is true, in a greater or lesser degree, of the other 'supernatural' poems of Coleridge. Christabel, for example, confronts the pure Christabel with the evil Geraldine. Thus exploring the intuitive recognition of the latter by the former.

Byron acknowledges his debt to Gothic romance in speaking of Venice:

"Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art,
Had stamped her image in me."¹

The nature description of Childe Harold, in style, tone, and material is reminiscent of Mrs. Radcliffe. The poet pictures the elemental phases of nature, mountain, sea, and storm. The description of Venice in Canto IV, stanza 18, strikes a close correspondence between Radcliffe's prose and Byron's poetry. Also some passages in The Giaour, including one of a deserted palace, are of a Radcliffian turn.

Blessington reports, in Conversations that Byron had a mild prepossession for worms and special predilection towards vampires. "Do you know," said Byron, "that when

1. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Stanza XVIII.

I have looked on some face that I love, imagination has often figured the changes that death must one day produce in it—the worm rioting on lips now smiling, the features and hues of health changed to the livid and ghastly tints of putrefaction.....this is one of my pleasures of imagination."

Byron's Lines Inscribed upon a Cup formed of a Skull, his Siege of Corinth, some passages in The Giaour, and the Bride of Abydos abound in glory details.

This last is very much a versified Gothic romance: Giaffir kills his brother to gain power, and proposes to marry his daughter to a villain to gain still more power: In the Siege of Corinth, the Gothic spectre of a damsel appears to her lover after her death, though he thinks it is she in person. She chills him with a touch. In Lara, Byron makes use of a Gothic situation in which the terror is not explained away. Attendants rush in and discover Lara stretched on the ground in a semi - conscious state with his sabre half drawn; what has happened we are never told. Manfred abounds in Gothic machinery: a curse, remorse, large Gothic hills, a fiery star, an attempted suicide, spots of blood on the goblet, a hall filled with demons, a phantom, a tower with a secret chamber, a warning abbot, terror - stricken and chattering domestic servants, and a mysterious death by blasting.

Yet of all the Romantic poets it is the peace - loving, injustice - fighting Shelley who is most deeply given to the blood and thunder side of the Gothic phenomenon. As a youth he was an ardent follower of the romances and he retained far into his years of splendid and imaginative poetry the tricks of Gothic style, and the flavour of Gothic material. The effect of this riot of imagination exercised a potent spell on the impetuous spirit of Shelley, who, during his adolescence,

revelled in moon - illumined castles, saturnine monks, scowling desperadoes and obtrusive spectres. Urged by a restless desire, in quest of the supernatural, he haunted cemeteries in expectation of "high talk with the departed dead", dabbled in chemical experiments and read ancient books of magic by candle - light. Under the influence of "Monk" Lewis and Charlotte Dacre, he wrote two Gothic novels: Zastrozzi (1810) and St. Irvyne (1811) . These, says Lord Ernle, are "curiosities of literature of the melodramatic and blue - fire type." Shelley also wrote a Gothic fragment: The Assassin (1814)

Shelley's most striking Gothic description is to be found in Alastor.

These are descriptions of :

Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
In the light of evening.....

Its precipice, obscuring the ravine, disclosed above
Mid toppling stones, black gulphs and yawning caves,
Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
To the loud scream.....

And then finally " the howl of thander" and "the hiss of homeless streams," mingle in solemn song with

The broad river,
Foaming and hurrying o'er its rugged path
which
Fell into the immeasurable void
Scattering its waters to the passing winds.

Similar Gothic descriptions abound in The Witch of Atlas, and also in The Cenci, where, " beneath the crag," "the melancholy mountain yawns" and

Below

You hear but see not an impetuous torrent
Raging among the caverns.

Horror was passion with Shelley. His verse is coloured throughout with a morbid relish for the ghastly, and "death's-head" allusions; charnel - house metaphors and fragments of cadavers are scattered throughout his work in consequence of his Gothic romance reading and writing. His vocabulary consists of a profusion of words like "ghosts", "shades", "tombs", "torture", "charnel" and "agony". His similes too have a supernatural tint. In Alastor the poet is:

an inspired and desperate alchemist
Staking his very life on some dark hope.

In Ode to The West Wind the dead leaves are compared to "ghosts from an enchanter fleeing." Shelley often attempted to work on the 'Gothic' emotion of fear; the lurid patches in The Revolt of Islam, the decaying garden in The Sensitive Plant, the tortures of Prometheus, or the agonized soul of Beatrice in The Cenci all are captured in words of anguish and despair.

At least four poems of Keats claim our attention on this point.¹ Lamia tells the story of Lycius's marriage to a beautiful woman, who is actually a serpent or lamia and

1. We know that Keats was familiar with Mrs. Radcliffe. There is a letter to Reynolds (14th March, 1818) in which he says:
"I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe-I'll covern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous-sound you, and solitude you."
(Gothic Flame p.195)

who vanishes during the wedding feast when her true nature is recognized by the philosopher Apollonius. Lycius dies of grief. The supernatural certainly features in the poem then, but there is no terror, except that inspired in Lamia by Apollonius. The villain of the piece, according to Keats, is in fact "The bald - headed philosopher" whose cold scientific eye destroys the lovers' bliss.

Isabella is a good deal closer to the Tale of Terror, although there is nothing supernatural in it apart perhaps from the vision (or dream) in which her murdered lover appears to her. To begin with, it is an "Italian" story. Isabella's brothers kill Lorenzo, her lover, because they wish her to marry some rich noble. The dead man appears to her and tells where he lies buried. She goes to his grave and recovers his head. The poem at this point turns towards the Grave - Yard School :-

"Who hath not loiter'd in a green church - yard,
And let his spirit, like a demon mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,
To see skull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
And filling it once more with human soul.?"

Isabella places Lorenzo's head in a flower pot and plants basil over it. She spends her time weeping over the basil, until finally her brothers steal the pot and examine it :

"The thing was vile with green and livid spot,
And yet they knew it was Lorenzo's face."

That could well come from a Gothic novel: we think of the waxen image of a decaying corpse which lies behind the frightful curtain in The Mysteries of Udolpho.

The Eve of St. Agnes. is a very rich and sensuous exercise in the evocation of a "medieval" atmosphere. For example, this description of the Lady Madeleine's Chamber :-

"A casement high and triple - arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot - grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger - moth's deep damask'd wings,
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Porphyro and Madeleine run away from the hostile castle : nothing else happens. It is interesting to note that Keats wrote to a friend, speaking of this poem and The Eve of St. Mark : "You see what fine Mother Radcliffe names I have."

Porphyro wakes Madeleine from sleep by playing on the lute:-

" an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence called, 'La Belle Dame sans mercy....."

In some ways, Keats's own ballad, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, is the most perfect manifestation of the Romantic poets'

interest in the medieval, in enchantment, and in the evocation of a mysteriously ominous melancholy. Keats's delicate creation of atmosphere stands in sharp contrast to the blood-curdling crude technique of the novelists. Keats's poem seems to mean much more than it says, whereas the average Gothic romance, in the end, means much less than it says, and says so noisily.

" I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death - pale were they all;
Who cry'd—"La belle Dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall! "

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam.
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing!"

In short, the poets, as one would expect, are altogether superior in sensibility and intellectual powers to the novelists, and their intentions and achievements are in fact different. Yet both the poets, finely, and the novelists, crudely, do express the romantic sense of mystery and the new curiosity towards the range of experience which lies beyond rational comprehension. Perhaps we should rather say that whereas the poets explore, the novelists (with a few honourable exceptions) exploit.
