The Norton Antkology of English Literature

EIGHTH EDITION

VOLUME 2

Stephen Greenblatt, *General Editor*
COGAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF THE HUMANITIES, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
M. H. Abrams, *Founding Editor Emeritus*
CLASS OF 1916 PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH EMERITUS, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York* • *London*

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The Nortons soon expanded their program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By mid-century, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Editor: Julia Reidhead
Managing Editor, College: Marian Johnson
Developmental Editor: Kurt Wildermuth
Electronic Media Editor: Eileen Connell
Production Manager: Diane O'Connor
Associate Editor: Erin Granville
Copy Editors: Alice Falk, Katharine Ings, Candace Levy, Alan Shaw, Ann Tappert
Permissions Managers: Nancy Rodwan, Katrina Washington
Text Design: Antonina Krass
Art *Research:* Neil Ryder Hoos

Composition by Binghamton Valley Composition
Manufacturing by RR Donnelley

The Library of Congress has cataloged another edition as follows:

The Norton anthology of English literature / Stephen Greenblatt, general editor ; M.H. Abrams, founding editor emeritus.—8th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-393-92713-X (v. 1) — ISBN 0-393-92531-5 (v. 1:pbk.)
ISBN 0-393-92715-6 (v. 2) — ISBN 0-393-92532-3 (v. 2: pbk.)

1. English literature. 2. Great Britain—Literary collections. I. Greenblatt, Stephen, 1943- II. Abrams, M. H. (Meyer Howard), 1912-
PR1109.N6 2005
820.8—dc22
2005052313

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London WIT 3QT

4 5 6 7 8 9 0

The Gothic and the Development of a Mass Readership

Strictly speaking, the Gothic is not "Gothic" at all, but a phenomenon that originates in the late eighteenth century, long after enlightened Europeans put the era of Gothic cathedrals, chivalry, and superstition behind them—a phenomenon that begins, in fact, as an embrace of a kind of counterfeit medievalism or as a "medieval revival." As a word they applied to a dark and distant past, Gothic gave Romantic-period writers and readers a way to describe accounts of terrifying experiences in ancient castles and ruined abbeys—experiences connected with subterranean dungeons, secret passageways, flickering lamps, screams, moans, ghosts, and graveyards. In the long run Gothic became a label for the macabre, mysterious, supernatural, and terrifying, especially the *pleasurably* terrifying, in literature generally; the link that Romantic-period writers had forged between the Gothic and antiquated spaces was eventually loosened. Even so, one has only to look, in post-Romantic literature, at the fiction of the Brontes or Poe, or, in our own not-so-modern culture, at movies or video games, to realize that the pleasures of regression the late-eighteenth-century Gothic revival provided die hard. Readers continue to seek out opportunities to feel haunted by pasts that will not let themselves be exorcised.

The Gothic revival appeared in later-eighteenth-century English garden design and architecture before it got into literature. In 1747 Horace Walpole (1717—1797), younger son of the British prime minister, purchased Strawberry Hill, an estate on the river Thames near London, and three years later set about remodeling it in what he called a "Gothick" style. Adding towers, turrets, battlements, arched doors, windows, and ornaments of every description, he created the kind of spurious medieval architecture that survives today mainly in churches and university buildings. Eventually tourists came from all over to see Strawberry Hill and went home to Gothicize their own houses.

When the Gothic made its appearance in literature, Walpole was again a trailblazer. In 1764 he published *The Castle of Otranto*, a self-styled "Gothic story" featuring a haunted castle, an early, pre-Byronic version of the Byronic hero (suitably named Manfred), mysterious deaths, a moaning ancestral portrait, damsels in distress, violent passions, and strange obsessions. Walpole's gamble—that the future of the novel would involve the reclamation of the primitive emotions of fear and wonder provided by the romances of a pre-Enlightened age—convinced many writers who came after him. By the 1790s novels trading on horror, mystery, and faraway settings flooded the book market; meanwhile in theaters new special effects were devised to incarnate ghostly apparitions on stage. It is noteworthy that the best-selling author of the terror school (Ann Badcliffe), the author of its most enduring novel (Mary Shelley), and the author of its most effective send-up (Jane Austen) were all women. Indeed, many of Radcliffe's numerous imitators (and, on occasion, downright plagiarizers) published under the auspices of the Minerva Press, a business whose very name (that of the goddess of wisdom) acknowledged the centrality of female authors and readers to this new lucrative trend in the book market. William Lane, the marketing genius who owned the Press, also set up a cross-country network of circulating libraries that stocked his ladies' volumes and made them available for hire at modest prices.

This section offers extracts from some of the most celebrated works in the Gothic mode: Walpole's *Otranto* as the initiating prototype; William Beckford's *Vathek*

(1786), which is "oriental" rather than medieval but similarly blends cruelty, terror, and eroticism; two extremely popular works by Radcliffe, the "Queen of Terror," *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries ofUdolpho* (1794); Matthew Lewis's concoction of devilry, sadism, and mob violence, *The Monk* (1796). We also include an essay of 1773 in which John and Anna Letitia Aikin provide justification after the fact for Walpole's rebellion against the critical orthodoxies. According to most early critics of novels, the only *moral* fiction was probable fiction; the Aikins, however, make the business of the novelist lie as much with the pleasures of the imagination as with moral edification and the representation of real life.

Their essay suggests why Gothic reading was appealing to so many Romantic poets—visionaries who in their own way dissented from critical rules that would, drearily, limit literature to the already known and recognizable. Signs of the poets' acquaintance with the terror school of novel writing show up in numerous well-known Romantic poems—from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to *Manfred.* For instance, in Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes,* a poem that in many respects represents an idealized tale of young love, Porphyro's invasion of Madeline's bedroom has some perturbing connections with the predatory overtones of our extract from *The Monk.* And Keats's enigmatic fragment "This living hand" can be read as a brilliantly abbreviated version of the kind of tale of terror that aimed to make its reader's blood run cold.

Yet it simplifies matters to characterize the Gothic only as an influence on Romanticism. As the concluding pieces in this section suggest, the poets had a love-hate relationship with Gothic writers and, even more so, with Gothic readers. Many contemporary commentators objected to the new school of novels on moral and technical grounds: they complained, for instance, about how plot-driven they were and how cheaply they solved their mysteries. But questions about social class and literary taste were also important. In an era of revolution, in which newly literate workers were reading about "the rights of man" and crowds were starting to shape history, the very *popularity* of Gothic novels, the terror writers' capacity to move and manipulate whole crowds with their suspense and trickery, itself represented a source of anxiety. As the twentieth-century critic E. J. Clery explains, the "unprecedented capacity of the market to absorb at great speed large amounts of a particular type of literary product, the 'terrorist' novel, shook old certainties."

Many of the Romantic poets comment, accordingly, on what is scary and pernicious *about* the Gothic as well as what is scary and pernicious *in* the Gothic. And throughout their writings, the tales of terror are invoked in ways that enable the writer to construct a divide between "high" and "low" culture and to play off the passive absorption associated with the reading of the crowds against the tasteful, active reading that is (according to the writer) practiced by the elite few. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* for instance, Wordsworth identifies as a cause of English culture's modern decline the "frenetic novels" that have blunted their consumers' powers of discrimination and reduced them "to a state of almost savage torpor" (a negative version of the regression that William Hazlitt, for instance, celebrates as he describes how Radcliffe "makes her readers twice children" while she "forces us to believe all that is strange and next to impossible"). Wordsworth follows a hint that he may have found three years earlier in Coleridge's review of *The Monk* (extracted near the end of this section) and suggests that such readers inevitably need higher and higher doses of the "violent stimulants" that novelists—drug pushers of sorts—have supplied them. In this way the Preface pioneers an account of a mass readership addicted to what will kill it. In similar fashion "Terrorist Novel Writing," the short anti-Gothic satire we include near the end of this section, makes it seem, as does our extract containing Coleridge's very funny tirade against the patrons of circulating libraries, that Gothic novels were objects of utterly mindless consumption (absorbed, imbibed, but not *read),* and that terror was a commodity produced on an assembly line. The extracts with which we close this section register, in other words, a recoil from the Gothic. But Gothic themes frequently come back to haunt the critics of the mode. When they depict popular,

commercialized culture's threat to individual autonomy and describe consumers as if they were zombies sunk in trances, the critics appear to rehearse nightmarish scenarios straight out of the tales of terror.

HORACE WALPOLE

Walpole's landmark work *The Castle of Otranto* initially purported to be a translation from (as the title page of the first edition put it) "the original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto." The events related in it were supposed to have occurred in the twelfth or thirteenth century. In the second edition, however, Walpole renounced the hoax and confessed his authorship. Rather than presenting the narrative as a remarkable historical discovery, a manuscript from the lost barbaric past, he cast his "Gothic Story" as a novelty: an experiment in blending, he explained, "the ancient and modern" romance, and in combining the realism that was the hallmark of the up-to-date eighteenth-century novel with the imagination that had flourished in medieval romance and that this realism had suffocated.

When the story opens, the villainous Manfred, prince of Otranto, to get an heir to his estate, has arranged a marriage between his only son, Conrad, and the beautiful Isabella. But on his wedding day Conrad is mysteriously killed, victim of a giant helmet that falls from the sky and crushes him. Lest he should be left without male descendants, Manfred determines to divorce his present wife, Hippolita, who is past childbearing, and marry Isabella himself. In the extract given here, Isabella learns of his intention and decides to flee the castle by night. The account of her flight suggests how the Gothic novelists, lavishing attention on architectural details, make experiences of terror inseparable from the walls, ceilings, floors, and doors enclosing them.

From The Castle of Otranto

From *Chapter 1*

As it was now evening, the servant who conducted Isabella bore a torch before her. When they came to Manfred, who was walking impatiently about the gallery, he started and said hastily, "Take away that light, and begone." Then shutting the door impetuously, he flung himself upon a bcnch against the wall, and bade Isabella sit by him. She obeyed trembling. "I sent for you, lady," said he,—and then stopped under great appearance of confusion. "My lord!"—"Yes, I sent for you on a matter of great moment," resumed he,—"Dry your tears, young lady—you have lost your bridegroom.—Yes, cruel fate! and I have lost the hopes of my race!—but Conrad was not worthy of your beauty."—"How! my lord," said Isabella; "sure you do not suspect me of not feeling the concern I ought. My duty and affection would have always—" "Think no more of him," interrupted Manfred; "he was a sickly puny child, and heaven has perhaps taken him away that I might not trust the honours of my house on so frail a foundation. The line of Manfred calls for numerous supports. My foolish fondness for that boy blinded the eyes of my prudence—but it is better as it is. I hope in a few years to have reason to rejoice at the death of Conrad."

Words cannot paint the astonishment of Isabella. At first she apprehended that grief had disordered Manfred's understanding. Her next thought sug-

she should proceed. Her dread of Manfred soon outweighed every other terror. The very circumstance of the person avoiding her gave her a sort of courage. It could only be, she thought, some domestic belonging to the castle. Her gentleness had never raised her an enemy, and conscious innocence bade her hope that, unless sent by the prince's order to seek her, his servants would rather assist than prevent her flight. Fortifying herself with these reflections, and believing, by what she could observe, that she was near the mouth of the subterraneous cavern, she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness.

1764

ANNA LETITIA AIKIN (later BARBAULD) and JOHN AIKIN

In the following essay John Aikin (1747–1822) and his sister Anna Letitia (who appears earlier in this anthology as a poet and under her married name, Barbauld) engage a question philosophers and psychologists continue to debate: why do people who listen to ghost stories around the campfire, or read Gothic novels, or watch monster movies find such frightening experience pleasing? The Aikins, members of a prominent family of religious dissenters and educators, begin by observing that it is easy to explain why we might feel satisfaction when we feel pity—that emotion is necessary for the well-being of the human community, which would fall apart were it not somehow in our own interest to feel for others. But it is by contrast more difficult to understand how morality is advanced when we delight in objects of terror. As they map out an alternative way of accounting for that amoral delight, the Aikins write an early Romantic description of the glory of the imagination; the reader's encounter with what is unknown and amazing elevates and expands the mind. The fragmentary story of a medieval knight errant that the Aikins appended to their essay was meant to give their readers a chance to test this thesis, but thanks to its handling of suspense "Sir Bertrand" soon came to be celebrated in its own right.

Published in 1773 in the Aikins' *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose,* "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" built on Walpole's innovation in *Otranto.* It gave the next generation of Gothic authors a critical justification for their engagement with the supernatural and for their swerve away from the didacticism that had valued fiction writers only when they seemed to be educating readers for real life. Family tradition ascribed the essay to Anna and "Sir Bertrand" to John.

On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, a Fragment

That the exercise of our benevolent feelings, as called forth by the view of human afflictions, should be a source of pleasure, cannot appear wonderful to one who considers that relation between the moral and natural system of man, which has connected a degree of satisfaction with every action or emotion productive of the general welfare. The painful sensation immediately aris-

ing from a scene of misery, is so much softened and alleviated by the reflex sense of self-approbation on attending virtuous sympathy, that we find, on the whole, a very exquisite and refined pleasure remaining, which makes us desirous of again being witnesses to such scenes, instead of flying from them with disgust and horror. It is obvious how greatly such a provision must conduce to the ends of mutual support and assistance. But the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror, where our moral feelings are not in the least concerned, and no passion seems to be excited but the depressing one of fear, is a paradox of the heart, much more difficult of solution.

The reality of this source of pleasure seems evident from daily observation. The greediness with which the tales of ghosts and goblins, of murders, earthquakes, fires, shipwrecks, and all the most terrible disasters attending human life, are devoured by every ear, must have been generally remarked. Tragedy, the most favourite work of fiction, has taken a full share of those scenes; "it has supt full with horrors"[1]—and has, perhaps, been more indebted to them for public admiration than to its tender and pathetic parts. The ghost of Hamlet, Macbeth descending into the witches' cave, and the tent scene in Richard, command as forcibly the attention of our souls as the parting of Jaffeir and Belvidera, the fall of Wolsey, or the death of Shore.[2] The inspiration of *terror* was by the antient critics assigned as the peculiar province of tragedy; and the Greek and Roman tragedians have introduced some extraordinary personages for this purpose: not only the shades of the dead, but the furies, and other fabulous inhabitants of the infernal regions. Collins, in his most poetical ode to Fear, has finely enforced this idea.

> Tho' gently Pity claim her mingled part,
> Yet all the thunders of the scene are thine.[3]

The old Gothic romance and the Eastern tale, with their genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations, however a refined critic may censure them as absurd and extravagant, will ever retain a most powerful influence on the mind, and interest the reader independently of all peculiarity of taste. Thus the great Milton, who had a strong bias to these wildnesses of the imagination, has with striking effect made the stories "of forests and enchantments drear," a favourite subject with his *Penseroso*; and had undoubtedly their awakening images strong upon his mind when he breaks out,

> Call up him that left half-told
> The story of Cambuscan bold; &c.[4]

How are we then to account for the pleasure derived from such objects? I have often been led to imagine that there is a deception in these cases; and that the avidity with which we attend is not a proof of our receiving real pleasure. The pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity, when once raised, will account for our eagerness to go quite through an adventure, though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it. We

1. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 5.5.13.
2. The mentions of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Richard III are followed by references to the doomed husband and wife in Thomas Otway's tragedy *Venice Preserv'd* (1681); the royal advisor whose fall from grace centers the action of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII;* and Jane Shore, title character of Nicholas Rowe's tragedy of 1714.
3. Lines 44^15 in William Collins's "Ode to Fear" (1746), slightly misquoted. The speaker of this poem anticipates the Aikins in marveling over the allure of fear and its potency as a source of art.
4. Quoting lines 119 and 109-10 of Milton's poem on the delights of studious melancholy. The story of Cambuscan was left half-told in Chaucer's unfinished *Squire's Tale.*

rather chuse to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire. That this principle, in many instances, may involuntarily carry us through what we dislike, I am convinced from experience. This is the impulse which renders the poorest and most insipid narrative interesting when once we get fairly into it; and I have frequently felt it with regard to our modern novels, which, if lying on my table, and taken up in an idle hour, have led me through the most tedious and disgusting pages, while, like Pistol eating his leek, I have swallowed and execrated to the end.[5] And it will not only force us through dullness, but through actual torture—through the relation of a Damien's execution, or an inquisitor's act of faith.[6] When children, therefore, listen with pale and mute attention to the frightful stories of apparitions, we are not, perhaps, to imagine that they are in a state of enjoyment, any more than the poor bird which is dropping into the mouth of the rattlesnake—they are chained by the ears, and fascinated by curiosity. This solution, however, does not satisfy me with respect to the well-wrought scenes of artificial terror which are formed by a sublime and vigorous imagination. Here, though we know before-hand what to expect, we enter into them with eagerness, in quest of a pleasure already experienced. This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of "forms unseen, and mightier far than we," our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.

Hence the more wild, fanciful, and extraordinary are the circumstance, of a scene of horror, the more pleasure we receive from it; and where they are too near common nature, though violently borne by curiosity through the adventure, we cannot repeat it or reflect on it, without an overbalance of pain. In the *Arabian Nights* are many most striking examples of the terrible joined with the marvellous: the story of Aladdin, and the travels of Sinbad are particularly excellent. The *Castle of Otranto* is a very spirited modern attempt upon the same plan of mixed terror, adapted to the model of Gothic romance. The best conceived, and most strongly worked-up scene of mere natural horror that I recollect, is in Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom-*,[7] where the hero, entertained in a lone house in a forest, finds a corpse just slaughtered in the room where he is sent to sleep, and the door of which is locked upon him. It may be amusing for the reader to compare his feelings upon these, and from thence form his opinion of the justness of my theory. The following fragment, in which both these manners are attempted to be in some degree united, is offered to entertain a solitary winter's evening.

5. Alluding to a comic scene of force-feeding in Shakespeare's *Henry* V (5.1.36—60).

6. The brutality of the public torture and execution in 1757 of Robert-Francois Damiens, the would-be assassin of Louis XV of France, was commented on across Europe. An act of faith, or *auto dafe,* was the form of execution that the Spanish Inquisition inflicted on heretics: the condemned were burned alive.

7. Tobias Smollett's 1753 novel of villainy and picaresque adventure.

Sir Bertrand, a Fragment

After this adventure, Sir Bertrand turned his steed towards the woulds,[8] hoping to cross these dreary moors before the curfew. But ere he had proceeded half his journey, he was bewildered by the different tracks, and not being able, as far as the eye could reach, to espy any object but the brown heath surrounding him, he was at length quite uncertain which way he should direct his course. Night overtook him in this situation. It was one of those nights when the moon gives a faint glimmering of light through the thick black clouds of a lowering sky. Now and then she suddenly emerged in full splendor from her veil; and then instantly retired behind it, having just served to give the forlorn Sir Bertrand a wide extended prospect over the desolate waste. Hope and native courage a while urged him to push forwards, but at length the increasing darkness and fatigue of body and mind overcame him; he dreaded moving from the ground he stood on, for fear of unknown pits and bogs, and alighting from his horse in despair, he threw himself on the ground. He had not long continued in that posture when the sullen toll of a distant bell struck his ears—he started up, and turning towards the sound discerned a dim twinkling light.

Instantly he seized his horse's bridle, and with cautious steps advanced towards it. After a painful march he was stopt by a moated ditch surrounding the place from whence the light proceeded; and by a momentary glimpse of moon-light he had a full view of a large antique mansion, with turrets at the corners, and an ample porch in the centre. The injuries of time were strongly marked on every thing about it. The roof in various places was fallen in, the battlements were half demolished, and the windows broken and dismantled. A drawbridge, with a ruinous gateway at each end, led to the court before the building—He entered, and instantly the light, which proceeded from a window in one of the turrets, glided along and vanished; at the same moment the moon sunk beneath a black cloud, and the night was darker than ever. All was silent—Sir Bertrand fastened his steed under a shed, and approaching the house traversed its whole front with light and slow footsteps—All was still as death—He looked in at the lower windows, but could not distinguish a single object through the impenetrable gloom. After a short parley with himself, he entered the porch, and seizing a massy iron knocker at the gate, lifted it up, and hesitating, at length struck a loud stroke. The noise resounded through the whole mansion with hollow echoes. All was still again—He repeated the strokes more boldly and louder—another interval of silence ensued—A third time he knocked, and a third time all was still. He then fell back to some distance that he might discern whether any light could be seen in the whole front—It again appeared in the same place and quickly glided away as before—at the same instant a deep sullen toll sounded from the turret. Sir Bertrand's heart made a fearful stop—He was a while motionless; then terror impelled him to make some hasty steps towards his steed—but shame stopt his flight; and urged by honour, and a resistless desire of finishing the adventure, he returned to the porch; and working up his soul to a full steadiness of resolution, he drew forth his sword with one hand, and with the other lifted up the latch of the gate. The heavy door, creaking upon its hinges, reluctantly yielded to his hand—he applied his shoulder to it and forced it open—he quitted it

8. I.e., wolds: open, elevated ground.

and stept forward—the door instantly shut with a thundering clap. Sir Bertrand's blood was chilled—he turned back to find the door, and it was long ere his trembling hands could seize it—but his utmost strength could not open it again. After several ineffectual attempts, he looked behind him, and beheld, across a hall, upon a large staircase, a pale bluish flame which cast a dismal gleam of light around. He again summoned forth his courage and advanced towards it—It retired. He came to the foot of the stairs, and after a moment's deliberation ascended. He went slowly up, the flame retiring before him, till he came to a wide gallery—The flame proceeded along it, and he followed in silent horror, treading lightly, for the echoes of his footsteps startled him. It led him to the foot of another staircase, and then vanished—At the same instant another toll sounded from the turret—Sir Bertrand felt it strike upon his heart. He was now in total darkness, and with his arms extended, began to ascend the second staircase. A dead cold hand met his left hand and firmly grasped it, drawing him forcibly forwards—he endeavoured to disengage himself, but could not—he made a furious blow with his sword, and instantly a loud shriek pierced his ears, and the dead hand was left powerless in his—He dropt it, and rushed forwards with a desperate valour. The stairs were narrow and winding, and interrupted by frequent breaches, and loose fragments of stone. The staircase grew narrower and narrower and at length terminated in a low iron grate. Sir Bertrand pushed it open—it led to an intricate winding passage, just large enough to admit a person upon his hands and knees. A faint glimmering of light served to show the nature of the place. Sir Bertrand entered—A deep hollow groan resounded from a distance through the vault—He went forwards, and proceeding beyond the first turning, he discerned the same blue flame which had before conducted him. He followed it. The vault, at length, suddenly opened into a lofty gallery, in the midst of which a figure appeared, compleatly armed, thrusting forwards the bloody stump of an arm, with a terrible frown and menacing gesture, and brandishing a sword in his hand. Sir Bertrand undauntedly sprung forwards; and aiming a fierce blow at the figure, it instantly vanished, letting fall a massy iron key. The flame now rested upon a pair of ample folding doors at the end of the gallery. Sir Bertrand went up to it, and applied the key to a brazen lock—with difficulty he turned the bolt—instantly the doors flew open, and discovered a large apartment, at the end of which was a coffin rested upon a bier, with a taper burning on each side of it. Along the room on both sides were gigantic statues of black marble, attired in the Moorish habit, and holding enormous sabres in their right hands. Each of them reared his arm, and advanced one leg forwards, as the knight entered; at the same moment the lid of the coffin flew open, and the bell tolled. The flame still glided forwards, and Sir Bertrand resolutely followed, till he arrived within six paces of the coffin. Suddenly, a lady in a shrowd and black veil rose up in it, and stretched out her arms towards him—at the same time the statues clashed their sabres and advanced. Sir Bertrand flew to the lady and clasped her in his arms--she threw up her veil and kissed his lips; and instantly the whole building shook as with an earthquake, and fell asunder with a horrible crash. Sir Bertrand was thrown into a sudden trance, and on recovering, found himself seated on a velvet sofa, in the most magnificent room he had ever seen, lighted with innumerable tapers, in lustres of pure crystal. A sumptuous banquet was set in the middle. The doors opening to soft music, a lady of incomparable beauty, attired with amazing splendour entered, surrounded by a troop of gay nymphs far more fair than the Graces—She

advanced to the knight, and falling on her knees thanked him as her deliverer. The nymphs placed a garland of laurel on his head, and the lady led him by the hand to the banquet, and sat beside him. The nymphs placed themselves at the table, and a numerous train of servants entering, served up the feast; delicious music playing all the time. Sir Bertrand could not speak for astonishment—he could only return their honours by courteous looks and gestures. After the banquet was finished, all retired but the lady, who leading back the knight to the sofa, addressed him in these words:—[9]

1773

9. The fragment ends here.

WILLIAM BECKFORD

Beckford's *Vathek* is regularly mentioned in discussions of Gothic romance, though its setting is Arabian rather than European, and its exquisitely detailed architecture is futuristic rather than imitation medieval. It also has more incongruity of tone—suppressed comedy along with melodramatic high-seriousness—than the other works included in this section; it is Gothic, that is, in the way *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is Gothic. *Vathek* was written in French—"at a single sitting of three days and two nights," according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*—and then published in English translation as *An Arabian Tale, from an Unpublished Manuscript* (1786). Byron was an enthusiastic admirer, drawing on the book extensively for his Eastern tale *The Giaour* (1813).

Besides *Vathek,* Beckford (1760—1844) was known in his time for building one of the most extraordinary and eccentric structures in the history of architecture: Fonthill Abbey, Beckford's Gothic palace, which he furnished with rare books; medieval, Islamic, and East Asian art; and other curiosities. Beckford endowed the Caliph Vathek with his own zeal for collecting, making him another connoisseur of the strange, as well as a tyrant who puts people, even little children, to death at the slightest whim. Sated with even these unorthodox pleasures, Vathek sets out in the course of Beckford's tale to find the city of Istakhar and "the treasures of the preadamite Sultans." In the extract we have selected from the final pages, he and his favorite companion, Nouronihar, daughter of the emir Fakreddin, arrive at the mountains surrounding Istakhar and, with the guidance of the Giaour (an evil magician), enter the underground realm of Eblis, prince of darkness. They achieve their quest but are doomed to suffer the agony of eternally burning hearts and, what seems even worse, the cessation of communion with anything outside their separate selves.

For discussion of the exotic geography of Beckford's fantasy, see "Bomantic Orientalism" at Norton Literature Online.

From Vathek

A deathlike stillness reigned over the mountain, and through the air. The moon dilated, on a vast platform, the shades of the lofty columns, which reached from the terrace almost to the clouds. The gloomy watch-towers, whose numbers could not be counted, were veiled by no roof; and their capitals, of an

Ambrosio struggled in vain to disengage himself. Elvira quitted not her hold, but redoubled her cries for succour. The friar's danger grew more urgent. He expected every moment to hear people assembling at her voice; and, worked up to madness by the approach of ruin, he adopted a resolution equally desperate and savage. Turning round suddenly, with one hand he grasped Elvira's throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour, and with the other, dashing her violently upon the ground, he dragged her towards the bed. Confused by this unexpected attack, she scarcely had power to strive at forcing herself from his grasp: while the monk, snatching the pillow from beneath her daughter's head, covering with it Elvira's face, and pressing his knee upon her stomach with all his strength, endeavoured to put an end to her existence. He succeeded but too well. Her natural strength increased by the excess of anguish, long did the sufferer struggle to disengage herself, but in vain. The monk continued to kneel upon her breast, witnessed without mercy the convulsive trembling of her limbs beneath him, and sustained with inhuman firmness the spectacle of her agonies, when soul and body were on the point of separating. Those agonies at length were over. She ceased to struggle for life. The monk took off the pillow, and gazed upon her. Her face was covered with a frightful blackness: her limbs moved no more: the blood was chilled in her veins: her heart had forgotten to beat; and her hands were stiff and frozen. Ambrosio beheld before him that once noble and majestic form, now become a corse, cold, senseless, and disgusting.

This horrible act was no sooner perpetrated, than the friar beheld the enormity of his crime. A cold dew flowed over his limbs: his eyes closed: he staggered to a chair, and sank into it almost as lifeless as the unfortunate who lay extended at his feet. From this state he was roused by the necessity of flight, and the danger of being found in Antonia's apartment. He had no desire to profit by the execution of his crime. Antonia now appeared to him an object of disgust. A deadly cold had usurped the place of that warmth which glowed in his bosom. No ideas offered themselves to his mind but those of death and guilt, of present shame and future punishment. Agitated by remorse and fear, he prepared for flight: yet his terrors did not so completely master his recollection as to prevent his taking the precautions necessary for his safety. He replaced the pillow upon the bed, gathered up his garments, and, with the fatal talisman in his hand, bent his unsteady steps towards the door. Bewildered by fear, he fancied that his flight was opposed by legions of phantoms. Wherever he turned, the disfigured corse seemed to lie in his passage, and it was long before he succeeded in reaching the door.

1795 1796

ANONYMOUS

The following discussion of the "fashion" for tales of terror appeared in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797*. Its wonderfully scathing humor aside, it is typical of the many Romantic-period commentaries that argued that the popularity of this new style of novel was a frightening symptom of literature's commercialization and of culture's degradation. The "recipe" with which the anonymous author concludes the squib,

and which makes the point that best-selling fiction is likely to be, in a precise sense, "formula fiction," is a frequent feature of satires on novelists (Coleridge, who in our next extract refers to novels as "manufactures," i.e., as things produced mechanically rather than as works that authors compose, elsewhere wrote his own recipes for Radcliffe romances and for Walter Scott poems). Also notable is the author's tacit suggestion that the political climate has helped make "terror the order of the day": that phrase appeared in the directive that was issued in September 1793 by Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety and that inaugurated the bloodiest chapter of the Revolution in France.

Terrorist Novel Writing

I never complain of fashion, when it is confined to externals—to the form of a cap, or the cut of a lapelle; to the colour of a wig, or the tune of a ballad; but when I perceive that there is such a thing as fashion even in composing books, it is, perhaps, full time that some attempt should be made to recall writers to the old boundaries of common sense.

I allude, Sir, principally to the great quantity of novels with which our circulating libraries are filled, and our parlour tables covered, in which it has been the fashion to make *terror* the *order of the day,* by confining the heroes and heroines in old gloomy castles, full of spectres, apparitions, ghosts, and dead men's bones. This is now so common, that a Novelist blushes to bring about a marriage by ordinary means, but conducts the happy pair through long and dangerous galleries, where the light burns blue, the thunder rattles, and the great window at the end presents the hideous visage of a *murdered* man, *uttering* piercing groans, and developing shocking mysteries. If a curtain is withdrawn, there is a bleeding body behind it; if a chest is opened, it contains a skeleton; if a noise is heard, somebody is receiving a deadly blow; and if a candle goes out, its place is sure to be supplied by a flash of lightning. Cold hands grasp us in the dark, statues are seen to move, and suits of armour walk off their pegs, while the wind whistles louder than one of Handel's choruses, and the still air is more melancholy than the dead march in Saul.

Such are the dresses and decorations of a modern novel, which, as Bayes[1] says, is calculated to "elevate and surprise"; but in doing so, carries the young reader's imagination into such a confusion of terrors, as must be hurtful. It is to great purpose, indeed, that we have forbidden our servants from telling the children stories of ghosts and hobgoblins, if we cannot put a novel into their hands which is not filled with monsters of the imagination, more frightful than are to be found in Glanvil,[2] the famous *hug-a-hoo* of our fore fathers.

A novel, if at all useful, ought to be a representation of human life and manners, with a view to direct the conduct in the important duties of life, and to correct its follies. But what instruction is to be reaped from the distorted ideas of lunatics, I am at a loss to conceive. Are we come to such a pass, that the only commandment necessary to be repeated is, "Thou shalt do no murder?" Are the duties of life so changed, that all the instructions necessary for a young person is to learn to walk at night upon the battlements of an old castle, to creep hands and feet along a narrow passage, and meet the devil at

1. The ludicrously self-satisfied dramatist in *The Rehearsal,* a comedy by George Villiers, duke of Buckingham (1672).

2. Joseph Glanvill, author of *Saducismus Trtumphatus* (1681), which defended the belief in witchcraft.

the end of it? Is the corporeal frame of the female sex so masculine and hardy, that it must be softened down by the touch of dead bodies, clay-cold hands, and damp sweats? Can a young lady be taught nothing more necessary in life, than to sleep in a dungeon with venomous reptiles, walk through a ward with assassins, and carry bloody daggers in their pockets, instead of pin-cushions and needle-books?

Every absurdity has an end, and as I observe that almost all novels are of the terrific cast, I hope the insipid repetition of the same bugbears[3] will at length work a cure. In the mean time, should any of your female readers be desirous of catching the season of terrors, she may compose two or three very pretty volumes from the following recipe:

> *Take*—An old castle, half of it ruinous.
> A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
> Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
> As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
> An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.
> Assassins and desperadoes, *quant, stiff.**
> Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering places,[5] before going to bed.

1798

3. Annoyances, objects of needless fear.
4. I.e., *quantum sufficit* (standard Latin phrase used in medical prescriptions): "as much as suffices."
5. Seaside resorts. The suggestion is that readers choose novels of terror as vacation reading.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Many elements in Coleridge's poetry—the account of the skeleton ship in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* for instance, or the atmosphere, setting, and fragmentary plot of witchery and seduction in *Christabel*—suggest how absorbing he found the novels of the "terrorist school." His letters from the 1790s sometimes reveal him sitting up all night, trembling, he says, "like an aspen leaf" as he turns their pages. But elsewhere Coleridge's writings indicate how complex and ambivalent the Romantic poets' reaction to Gothic writing could be. As a first example we provide his scathing review, published in the *Critical Review* in February 1797, of *The Monk.* It should be noted that Coleridge's reaction to Matthew Lewis's novel is, for all its alarm, much more measured than those of most of his fellow critics.

Front Review of *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis

The horrible and the preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise and decline of literature. Most powerful stimulants, they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite. The same phenomenon, therefore, which we hail as a

favourable omen in the belles lettres[1] of Germany, impresses a degree of gloom in the compositions of our countrymen. We trust, however, that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that, wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, with shrieks, murders, and subterraneous dungeons, the public will learn, by the multitude of the manufacturers, with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured. But, cheaply as we estimate romances in general, we acknowledge, in the work before us, the offspring of no common genius. The tale is similar to that of Santon Barsista in the Guardian.[2] Ambrosio, a monk, surnamed the Man of Holiness, proud of his own undeviating rectitude, and severe to the faults of others, is successfully assailed by the tempter of mankind, and seduced to the perpetration of rape and murder, and finally precipitated into a contract in which he consigns his soul to everlasting perdition.

The larger part of the three volumes is occupied by the underplot, which, however, is skilfully and closely connected with the main story, and is subservient to its development. The tale of the bleeding nun is truly terrific; and we could not easily recollect a bolder or more happy conception than that of the burning cross on the forehead of the wandering Jew (a mysterious character, which, though copied as to its more prominent features from Schiller's incomprehensible Armenian,[3] does, nevertheless, display great vigour of fancy). But the character of Matilda, the chief agent in the seduction of Antonio[4] appears to us to be the author's master-piece. It is, indeed, exquisitely imagined, and as exquisitely supported. The whole work is distinguished by the variety and impressiveness of its incidents; and the author everywhere discovers an imagination rich, powerful, and fervid. Such are the excellencies;—the errors and defects are more numerous, and (we are sorry to add) of greater importance.

All events are levelled into one common mass, and become almost equally probable, where the order of nature may be changed whenever the author's purposes demand it. No address is requisite to the accomplishment of any design; and no pleasure therefore can be received from the perception of *difficulty surmounted.* The writer may make us wonder, but he cannot surprise us. For the same reasons a romance is incapable of exemplifying a moral truth. No proud man, for instance, will be made less proud by being told that Lucifer once seduced a presumptuous monk. *Incredulus odit.*[5] Or even if, believing the story, he should deem his virtue less secure, he would yet acquire no lessons of prudence, no feelings of humility. Human prudence can oppose no sufficient shield to the power and cunning of supernatural beings; and the privilege of being proud might be fairly conceded to him who could rise superior to all earthly temptations, and whom the strength of the spiritual world alone would be adequate to overwhelm. So falling, he would fall with glory, and might reasonably welcome his defeat with the haughty emotions of a conqueror. As far, therefore, as the story is concerned, the praise which a romance can claim, is simply that of having given pleasure during its perusal; and so many are the calamities of life, that he who has done this, has not written uselessly. The children of sickness and of solitude shall thank him. To this praise, however, our author has not entitled himself. The sufferings which he describes are so frightful and intolerable, that we break with abruptness

1. Literature.
2. An Eastern tale published in 1713 and acknowledged by Lewis as one of his sources.
3. The mysterious villain of Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-seer* (English translation 1795).
4. Coleridge's mistake for Ambrosio.
5. "To disbelieve is to dislike": Horace, Art *of Poetry* 1.188.

from the delusion, and indignantly suspect the man of a species of brutality, who could find a pleasure in wantonly imagining them; and the abominations which he portrays with no hurrying pencil, are such as the observation of character by no means demanded, such as "no observation of character can justify, because no good man would willingly suffer them to pass, however transiently, through his own mind." The merit of a novelist is in proportion (not simply to the effect, but) to the *pleasurable* effect which he produces. Situations of torment, and images of naked horror, are easily conceived; and a writer in whose works they abound, deserves our gratitude almost equally with him who should drag us by way of sport through a military hospital, or force us to sit at the dissecting-table of a natural philosopher. To trace the nice[6] boundaries, beyond which terror and sympathy are deserted by the pleasurable emotions,—to reach those limits, yet never to pass them,—*hic labor, hic opus est.*[7] Figures that shock the imagination, and narratives that mangle the feelings, rarely discover *genius,* and always betray a low and vulgar *taste.* Nor has our author indicated less ignorance of the human heart in the management of the principal character. The wisdom and goodness of providence have ordered that the tendency of vicious actions to deprave the heart of the perpetrator, should diminish in proportion to the greatness of his temptations. Now, in addition to constitutional warmth and irresistible opportunity, the monk is impelled to incontinence by friendship, by compassion, by gratitude, by all that is amiable, and all that is estimable; yet in a few weeks after his first frailty, the man who had been described as possessing much general humanity, a keen and vigorous understanding, with habits of the most exalted piety, degenerates into an uglier fiend than the gloomy imagination of Dante would have ventured to picture. Again, the monk is described as feeling and acting under the influence of an appetite which could not co-exist with his other emotions. The romance-writer possesses an unlimited power over situations; but he must scrupulously make his characters act in congruity with them. Let him work *physical* wonders only, and we will be content to *dream* with him for a while; but the first *moral* miracle which he attempts, he disgusts and awakens us. Thus our judgment remains unoffended, when, announced by thunders and earthquakes, the spirit appears to Ambrosio involved in blue fires that increase the cold of the cavern; and we acquiesce in the power of the silver myrtle which made gates and doors fly open at its touch, and charmed every eye into sleep. But when a mortal, fresh from the impression of that terrible appearance, and in the act of evincing for the first time the witching force of this myrtle, is represented as being at the same moment agitated by so fleeting an appetite as that of lust, our own feelings convince us that this is not improbable, but impossible; not preternatural, but contrary to nature. The extent of the powers that may exist, we can never ascertain; and therefore we feel no great difficulty in yielding a temporary belief to any, the strangest, situation of *things.* But that situation once conceived, how beings like ourselves would feel and act in it, our own feelings sufficiently instruct us; and we instantly reject the clumsy fiction that does not harmonise with them. These are the two *principal* mistakes in *judgment,* which the author has fallen into; but we cannot wholly pass over the frequent incongruity of his style with his subjects. It is gaudy where it should have been severely simple; and too often the mind is offended by phrases the most trite and colloquial,

6. Subtle.

7. "This is the effort, this is the work.'

where it demands and had expected a sternness and solemnity of diction.

A more grievous fault remains, a fault for which no literary excellence can atone, a fault which all other excellence does but aggravate, as adding subtlety to a poison by the elegance of its preparation. Mildness of censure would here be criminally misplaced, and silence would make us accomplices. Not without reluctance then, but in full conviction that we are performing a duty, we declare it to be our opinion, that the Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale. The temptations of Ambrosio are described with a libidinous minuteness, which, we sincerely hope, will receive its best and only adequate censure from the offended conscience of the author himself. The shameless harlotry of Matilda, and the trembling innocence of Antonia, are seized with equal avidity, as vehicles of the most voluptuous images; and though the tale is indeed a tale of horror, yet the most painful impression which the work left on our minds was that of great acquirements and splendid genius employed to furnish a *mormo*[8] for children, a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee. Tales of enchantments and witchcraft can never be *useful:* our author has contrived to make them *-pernicious,* by blending, with an irreverent negligence, all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition. He takes frequent occasion, indeed, to manifest his sovereign contempt for the latter, both in his own person, and (most incongruously) in that of his principal characters; and that his respect for the *former* is not excessive, we are forced to conclude from the treatment which its inspired writings receive from him. Ambrosio discovers Antonia reading—

> He examined the book which she had been reading, and had now placed upon the table. It was the Bible.
>
> "How!" said the friar to himself, "Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant?"
>
> But, upon a further inspection, he found that Elvira had made exactly the same remark. That prudent mother, while she admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: every thing is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the *annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions.* Yet this is the book which young women are recommended to study, which is put into the hands of children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant, and which but too *frequently inculcates the first rudiments of vice,* and gives the first alarm to the still sleeping passions. Of this was Elvira so fully convinced, that she would have preferred putting into her daughter's hands "Amadis de Gaul," or "The Valiant Champion, Tirante the White"; and *woidd sooner have authorised her studying the lewd exploits of Don Galaor, or the lascivious jokes of the Damsel Plazer di mi vida.* Vol.11, p. 247.

The impiety of this falsehood can be equalled only by its impudence. This is indeed as if a Corinthian harlot, clad from head to foot in the transparent thinness of the Coan vest, should affect to view with prudish horror the naked knee of a Spartan matron! If it be possible that the author of these blasphemies

8. Bogeyman, object of needless dread.

is a Christian, should he not have reflected that the only passage in the scriptures,[9] which could give a *shadow* of plausibility to the *weakest* of these expressions, is represented as being spoken by the Almighty himself? But if he be an infidel, he has acted consistently enough with that character, in his endeavours first to influence the fleshly appetites, and then to pour contempt on the only book which would be adequate to the task of recalming them. We believe it not absolutely impossible that a mind may be so deeply depraved by the habit of reading lewd and voluptuous tales, as to use even the Bible in conjuring up the spirit of uncleanness. The most innocent expressions might become the first link in the chain of association, when a man's soul had been so poisoned; and we believe it not absolutely impossible that he might extract pollution from the word of purity, and, in a literal sense, *turn the grace of God into wantonness.*

We have been induced to pay particular attention to this work, from the unusual success which it has experienced. It certainly possesses much real merit, in addition to its meretricious attractions. Nor must it be forgotten that the author is a man of rank and fortune. Yes! the author of the Monk signs himself a LEGISLATOR![1] We stare and tremble.

1797

From Biographia Literaria

From *Chapter* 3[1]

For as to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *pass-time,* or rather *kill-time,* with the name of *reading.* Call it rather a sort of beggarly daydreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole *materiel* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ah extra*[2] by a sort of mental *camera ohscura*[3] manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore*[4] fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. We should therefore transfer this species of *amusement* (if indeed those can be said to retire *a musis,*[5] who were never in their company, or relaxation be attributable to those, whose bows are never bent) from the genus, *reading,* to that comprehensive class characterized by the power of reconciling the two contrary yet co-existing propensities of human nature, namely indulgence of sloth, and hatred of vacancy. In addition to novels and tales of chivalry in prose or rhyme

9. Ezekiel, chap, xxiii [Coleridge's note],

1. Lewis, a member of Parliament, signed himself "M. G. Lewis, Esq., M.P." on the title page of the second edition of *The A'lonk.* Worried that the public outcry over the episode Coleridge here lambastes would lead to his being charged with obscene libel. Lewis cut the episode from the fourth edition.

1. This paragraph makes up the first footnote to the third chapter of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* the hybrid book in which he blended autobiography with philosophical speculations and favorite anecdotes. In the body of his text, Coleridge refers to the frequency with which his name has been before the reading public; the footnote (the text given here) then goes on to identify the sort of people who for him do not count as bona fide members of that public.

2. From the outside (Latin).

3. A device (forerunner of the modern camera) creating a special optical effect: light passes through a pinhole into a darkened room and creates an inverted image of the world beyond the walls.

4. For the time being (Latin).

5. A pun linking "amusement" and *a musis,* "away from the Muses."

(by which last I mean neither rhythm nor metre) this genus comprises as its species, gaming; swinging or swaying on a chair or gate; spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking; tete-a-tete quarrels after dinner between husband and wife; conning word by word all the advertisements of the *Daily Advertiser* in a public house on a rainy day, etc. etc. etc.

1815 1817

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON
1788-1824

In his *History of English Literature,* written in the late 1850s, the French critic Hippolyte Taine gave only a few condescending pages to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and Keats and then devoted a long chapter to Lord Byron, "the greatest and most English of these artists; he is so great and so English that from him alone we shall learn more truths of his country and of his age than from all the rest together." This comment reflects the fact that Byron had achieved an immense European reputation during his own lifetime, while admirers of his English contemporaries were much more limited in number. Through much of the nineteenth century he continued to be rated as one of the greatest of English poets and the very prototype of literary Bomanticism. His influence was manifested everywhere, among the major poets and novelists (Balzac and Stendhal in France, Pushkin and Dostoyevsky in Russia, and Melville in America), painters (especially Delacroix), and composers (including Beethoven and Berlioz).

Yet even as poets, painters, and composers across Europe and the Americas struck Byronic attitudes, Byron's place within the canon of English Bomantic poetry was becoming insecure. The same Victorian critics who first described the Bomantic period *as* a literary period warned readers against the immorality of Byron's poetry, finding in his voluptuous imagination and aristocratic disdain for the commonplace an affront to their own middle-class values: "Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe," Thomas Carlyle urged in *Sartor Resartus* (1834), meaning to redirect the nation toward healthier reading matter. After getting a glimpse of the scandalous stuff recorded in Byron's journals, Felicia Hemans ceased to wear the brooch in which she had preserved a lock of the poet's hair: she could venerate him no longer. Indeed, Byron would have had qualms about being considered a representative figure of a period that also included Wordsworth (memorialized in Byron's *Don Juan* as "Wordy") or Keats (a shabby Cockney brat, Byron claimed) or scribbling women such as Hemans. These reservations were reciprocated. Of Byron's best-known male contemporaries, only Shelley thought highly of either the man or his work (although there are signs that, among the naysayers, the negative reactions were tinged with some resentment at Byron's success in developing a style that spoke to a popular audience). Byron in fact insisted that, measured against the poetic practice of Alexander Pope, he and his contemporaries were "all in the wrong, one as much as another. . . . We are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself." Pope's Horatian satires, along with Laurence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy,* exerted a significant influence on the style that Byron developed for his epic survey of modern folly, *Don Juan.*

Still, even as he had recourse to old-fashioned eighteenth-century models, Byron cultivated a skepticism about established systems of belief that, in its restlessness and defiance, expressed the intellectual and social ferment of his era. And through much