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IDEOLOGY OF GOTHIC AESTHETICS :

A Reading of Four Gothic Novels

恐惧审美与意识形态

十八世纪末四部哥特小说之解读

刘 旻 / 著



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序

对外经济贸易大学最近组织出版《外国语言文学学术文库》，借此机会，我谈谈个人对外国语言文学研究的一些认识和感受。综观21世纪的外国语言文学研究，就语言学研究而言，形式语言学理论和功能语言学理论继续对抗和对话，认知语言学理论和社会文化理论发展迅速，各种语言学的理论思潮试图从不同的角度解释语言事实；在应用方面，语言学更加广泛地与多学科交叉，运用和借鉴包括数理逻辑、计算机科学、心理学、神经科学、认知科学、生态科学、经济学等各学科在内的研究成果和方法，不断凸显出语言学作为人文科学和自然科学交叉学科的地位。就文学研究而言，英美文学研究受经济全球化浪潮的冲击，文学及文论研究都关注文化全球化与本土性的关系。文化全球化的研究引发了文学现代性、后现代性和后殖民性的思考，文学和语言学的研究相互影响和交融日益明显，文学研究越来越多地引入语言学研究的方法，如话语分析等，反之亦然。我国的外国语言文学研究在全球化和中国人世以后与国际学术界的交流更加密切，发展更加迅速，同时，我们仍清楚地看到，国内的外国语言文学研究依然存在“三张皮”现象，第一张皮是“汉语与外语”研究的合作与交流不够；第二张皮是“语言与文学”研究的沟通与对话不够；第三张皮是“英语与其他外语”研究的来往和交叉不够，“三张皮”极大地阻碍着外国语言文学学科的发展。

这套《文库》体现包容并蓄、博采众长、学科融通的思想，是一个开放和创新的学术平台，是各种研究的阵地，各位学者的家园，进入文库的研究成果都经过精心挑选，出自学有专长的博士和学者。我衷心地祝愿这朵“原

创的小花”在繁花似锦的学术花园里开得绚丽灿烂，愿更多的学者关心和呵护它。

对外经济贸易大学英语学院

教授、博士生导师

王立非

2008年3月4日于北京

前 言

哥特小说在18世纪末19世纪初的英国经历了一个短暂的兴衰过程，这一浪潮同样波及同时期的美国和法德等欧洲国家。作为一个转“瞬”即逝的文化现象，哥特小说如此大规模的泛滥，被理所当然地与其所处的历史“瞬间”联系起来。很多评论家因而认为哥特小说中的暴力、纵欲、毁灭和恐惧隐喻了法国大革命给社会生活各个层面带来的前所未有的冲击。而哥特式的恐惧审美趣味则被阐释为传统文化机体对启蒙、工具理性和工业化趋势的反弹。基于这种理解，哥特小说往往被视为18世纪启蒙理性主义的他者和反面，哥特小说里阴暗的地牢、墓穴以及频频出现的鬼神幻影是对启蒙之光的刻意反拨。

然而，哥特小说本身首先是一种依赖现代视觉技术、现代流通手段和城市娱乐文化而得以流行的大众文化形式。无论是作为魅影憧憧的哥特戏剧，还是畅销一时的通俗读物，哥特文化都很难扮演一个反潮流的先锋角色。因此，本研究正是以对上述“反理性”立场的怀疑作为立论的出发点。笔者认为，哥特小说在某种程度上的确是宗教传统深厚的英国文化在理性化、现代化过程当中的阵痛反应，但它并非如某些评论所言，以超灵的、鬼神的信仰世界来对抗理性的世俗世界。相反，在一定意义上，哥特小说及其文化衍生物甚至帮助了现代世界的“解魅”，使启蒙框架下的现代图景得以更好地展开。

在现代社会，随着宗教中神秘主义和形而上的成分被有意识地祛除或淡化，宗教逐渐变成一个以行善向善、节制自省为重心的行为自律系统，一个能被纳入理性化经济生活中的道德伦理范畴。而与此同时，通过18世纪沙夫茨伯里等人的阐释，道德则越来越趋向于一个审美化的概念。尤其在感伤作

家的笔下，善良悲悯的情怀成为美的内涵。审美主义对个体的、感性经验的关注逐渐形成了涵盖一切的趋势。实际上，在18世纪末的语境中，道德上的“善”和信仰上的“真”都融入了“美”的大范畴中。而这样一种泛审美化的文化非常轻松自然地掩饰了所有政治的、意识形态的痕迹，将作为社会主流的中产阶级的价值观、行为准则和政治统治都“归化”为一种自然常态。这就是Terry Eagleton所称的“审美的意识形态”。

哥特小说正是兴起于18世纪末期的审美浪潮中，向前承接了感伤文学、墓园派、幻象（visionary）派诗歌，向后开启了浪漫主义。一方面，哥特小说较其他文学形式而言提供了一个更“世俗”，更纯粹的“感官的盛宴”。另一方面，它又常常涉及信仰、救赎、惩罚等宗教主题，这也是哥特小说被贴上反启蒙理性主义标签的原因之一。实际上，笔者认为，哥特的恐惧审美只是通过造成一种关涉信仰、灵魂和敬畏的幻象，在上帝逐渐淡出、世界逐渐解魅的现代背景中，以最便捷的方式来处理人们信仰层面的问题。哥特小说的阅读使现代读者能以相对低廉的精神和智力成本得到一次似乎能触及信仰和超越现实的体验，从而让他们“无神”的现实生活得以更润滑更顺畅地进行，其本质更类似一种宗教的“模拟秀”。因此所谓哥特小说的宗教性更多的只是它的一种社会功用和招徕关注的幌子。哥特式的恐惧审美通过给平淡实际的现代生活偶尔注入一些精神活力，保证它能更有效地运转。而在此过程中，得到声张的仍然是中产阶级的道德权威和文化“霸权”，本研究对四部18世纪90年代的哥特小说的解读支持了这一观点。

刘易斯的《僧侣》和拉德克利夫的《意大利人》可以被视为一次关于“sensibility”的文本对话，前者的叛离和后者的修正，体现了哥特小说对于一种能使社会主流群体的权力和价值观自然化、普遍化的审美主义的思考。《僧侣》所引发的“众怒”或许并不单纯在于它情节中淫秽和渎神的内容，而在于它干扰了中产阶级道德美学的理想运作。而美国作家布郎在《威兰德》及其前传《卡尔维恩回忆录》中对宗教狂热和政治上的恐惧政策的平行展现，则体现了他对一个更健康、更理性的美国文化的设想。在布朗的哥特世界里，癫狂的宗教信仰和极端、机械的“理性”之间其实只有一步之遥，

都会招致非理性的灾难，而真正的理性则存在于开放的主体之间的包容和沟通之中。这些作品都从不同角度推进着同一个目标，即一个美的、道德的、现代的、理性运作的中产阶级社会。从这个意义上来说，哥特小说既不是反现代的文化返祖现象，也不具备所谓反启蒙的、反中产阶级理性主义的先锋姿态，相反，它是启蒙时期的西方“现代”社会塑型过程中的积极参与者。

与本书中细读的这四部小说相比，19世纪初的另一部哥特小说《流浪者麦尔摩斯》则更具复杂性，并为本书的论点提供了一个继续深入发展的方向。小说作者用不同人物的叙事声音讲述了麦尔摩斯因为一个神秘的灵魂交易被上帝惩罚要永世游荡于世间的故事。只有找到一个人愿意接受他曾经接受的交易条件，他才能脱身得到救赎。几个世纪以来麦尔摩斯不断游荡寻觅，但他所找到的每一个目标最后都宁愿承受现世的苦难而拒绝了他出卖灵魂的条件。这种痛苦的灵魂流浪在小说中一直重复直至其似乎已成为一个以自身为目的的自动机制，使故事情节在麦尔摩斯不断寻找不断被拒的过程中无限地片段化，无限地重复自己，一直延续下去。实际上，这样的结构正是许多哥特小说沿用的套路，从某种程度上来说，也是整个哥特文化内在体制的缩影——与其说哥特文化“反映”了某种原本存在的恐怖现实，不如说它在世俗化的现代社会中充当着主动制造恐惧，制造“仿真”精神体验的功能。这或许能更好地解释为什么哥特式的恐惧审美和想象模式，在1790—1820年之后的近两百年间仍然以不同的形式存在于西方世界的文化中，哥特的幽灵似乎已成为现代图景中不可或缺的一个角色。

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Introduction

The Gothic literature that flourished in the late 18th century, not unlike its wandering ghosts and monsters, had been stalking the periphery of literary history until the late 20th century. Despite sporadic publications and research efforts, Gothic studies did not become full-fledged scholarship till then. The 1980s saw a flourish of Gothic bibliographies, story collections and criticisms shedding new light on this wilfully interred and self-consciously dark genre. Drawing on classical studies in the early half of the century, including J. Tompkins's *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* and Montague Summers's *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel*, critics tried to approach this disreputably fascinating genre from various angles, especially through the inspiring lens of contemporary literary theories.¹ Prompted by the ascension of cultural and neo-historical studies in the theoretical environment of the 1980s, Gothic criticism tended to take a closer interest in the cultural aspect of Gothic fiction as a distinct historical phenomenon. One problem that figures large in many of these studies, and also that guides my own interest through all the readings on Gothic literature, is why there was such an explosion of Gothic at that particular time of history, the threshold moment of an industrialized modern society for Britain. Also, to take one step further, why has the Gothic form of terror haunted the "Anglo-European-American"² world in particular in the last two hundred years, as Gothic conventions, smartly transfigured, updated

¹ For an introduction to and comments on major Gothic criticism in the first half of the 20th century, see the first chapter "Introductory: Dimensions of Gothic" in David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition* (Harlow: Longman Group, 1996), and for a brief review of Gothic scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, see the "Appendix on Criticism" of this book.

² Jerrold E. Hogle uses the term "Anglo-European-American Gothic" to refer to the scope of Gothic literature as a literary phenomenon which is not merely English, but encompassing the Western Christian world. This consciousness to situate English Gothic fiction in the larger religio-cultural context has triggered new scholarship about French and German Gothic literature and Gothic literature from the former Western colonies. See Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

and innovated, keep returning in “high” literature, best-sellers, theatres, films and computer games of different periods? In order to approach these problems, I would first begin with a general account of the historical flourish of Gothic novels from the 1790s to 1820s, and the interpretations of this literary phenomenon by major critics.

I. The Term “Gothic”

The first thing to specify about Gothic novels is the term “Gothic”. It is a research-based consensus that “Gothic novel” is a title imposed retrospectively, “a twentieth-century coinage”¹. The type of readings we call Gothic now was variously referred to in their contemporary world as “historical”, “romance”, or “sentimental”. As E. J. Clery observes, the only major novels that used the label “Gothic” on themselves are Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, and Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story*.² The word “gothic”, however, was a frequently used and ideologically overcharged term in the 18th-century vocabulary. Its semantic complexity and multiple implications may account for the categorizing of a whole variety of novels under the same name of “Gothic”, and the ambiguous ideological commitment of those Gothic novels.

First, in the context of 18th-century Enlightenment, “Gothic” generally referred to the “superstitious”, “barbarous”, and “benighted” medieval age, stretching from the fall of Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, up to the Renaissance. The “Goth”s were those barbarous Germanic tribes who invaded Rome and ruined the great classical culture. For Britain in particular, “Gothic” denoted its Catholic past before religious Reformation and the country’s turn to Protestantism.³ With the heated atmosphere of Protestant nationalism in the 18th century, the word “Gothic” then signified the old, decayed, dark medieval past, contrary to both the Golden Age of ancient Greece and Rome, and the illuminated, rational British Augustan present. It is the antithesis to both the

¹ E. J. Clery, “The Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction”, in J. E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 21.

² Ibid.

³ See n.2 on p.1.

ancient and the modern, the classic and the neoclassic. Therefore, for those radical Enlightenment thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, "Gothic" is the byword for feudal servility, aristocratic decadence and superstitious religion of the past. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, for instance, Wollstonecraft relentlessly ridicules the "Gothic affability" advertised by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke is caricatured as a recalcitrant conservative who sees his interest being threatened by the Revolution, and therefore retrograde to the distant Gothic past in search of an ideal social value that prefers "the condescension of a Baron" to "the civility of a liberal man"¹. Indeed, for those anti-Revolutionaries like Burke, who are skeptical of the "rosy" prospect of an enlightened modern world and nostalgic for a supposedly more harmonious past, Gothic manners and chivalric codes offer an alternative system of social values and practices. In their appropriation of the word, Gothic represents the essence of a reverend tradition.²

The political repertoire of the term "Gothic" was also tapped in another way. Owing to an etymological confusion between Goths and Jutes, "Gothic", to the 18th-century contemporaries, was sometimes synonymous with the Anglo-Saxon ancestry of Britain. With the soaring nationalism and anti-Catholicism in the post-Glorious Revolution Britain, "Gothic" was upheld as a primordial Anglo-Saxon tradition of civil liberty and democracy, as against the despotism and tyranny of the corrupted continent. Englishmen particularly prided themselves on the ancient "Gothic constitution" and witenagemot (ancient Saxon parliament), and their invention of jury system in matters of justice, to fabricate a reverend native tradition of freedom and democracy.³ In this sense, "Gothic" served the loyalist/conservative purpose of reconstructing

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men & A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16.

² When Edmund Burke, in his highly controversial *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, draws on chivalric code and its implied paradox of "proud submission" to authority to mourn the murder of French Queen by the mob during the French Revolution, his "reactionary" argument is vehemently retorted by radicals like Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Christie as a politically atavistic defense of "Gothic" idolatry and servility. For a brief view of these Pro- and Counter-Revolution debates, see E. J. Clery and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 228-235, 236-245.

³ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 14.

a heroic national past and a distinct British ideal of civil liberty which transcended, and offered an alternative to, the violent revolutions going on in France. "Gothic", when used in this way, was part of the conservative agenda to hedge against the infection of continental revolution. This Gothic/Saxon freedom, however, was also a ready weapon for those advocates of social revolution and radical reform. The "beautiful system" of Saxon parliament, Gothic mechanisms of public debate and popular vote were not only superior to their ancient coevals, but also a possible source of inspiration for the urgent demand of parliamentary reform and social equality of 18th-century British society.¹

Therefore, politically and ideologically, the word "Gothic" carried both positive and derogatory connotations in 18th-century Britain, and was readily exploited by conservatives and radicals alike. The semantic field of this word is rather, as Maggie Kilgour terms it, "the territory for a political battle"². It is less a fixed reference than a convenient palimpsest for repeated ideological writing and rewriting.

Another dimension of the meaning of "Gothic", however, is apparently free of politics, namely, Gothic as a revived aesthetic taste. The 18th century witnessed a Gothic revival, first as a vogue in architecture and gardening, then as an extended taste in literature and art. Lord Kames, for instance, partly justified his penchant for the ruined castle of the Middle Ages by arguing that ruins were more appropriate to be Gothic than Grecian, because the debilitated traces of a barbarous past could best testify the "triumph of time", and glorify the progress of a modern world with superior reason and order.³ Though filled with neoclassical and enlightened complacency, these remarks were evidence of a more tolerant attitude or even veiled endorsement of "Gothic" in the latter half of the 18th century, when the irregular "Gothic" style in architecture and gardening had made considerable headway through the

¹ See an excerpt from "Demophilus", *The Genuine Principle of the Ancient Saxons, or English Constitution* (1776), and "Report of the Committee of the Revolution Society" (1789) in *Gothic Documents*, 223-227. Both pieces reflect 18th-century appropriation of Gothic/Saxon political and social structure to address contemporary political issues.

² Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 14.

³ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 31.

connoisseurship of fashionable society. The first important defender of Gothic taste in literature is Richard Hurd. In his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, he relativized the rigid single standard imposed on Gothic: "When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules [...]." ¹ He hailed Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queene* as an example of Gothic poem with its own singular beauty but which was often falsely denounced by the misapplied norms of neoclassicism. Hurd regarded Gothic as the champion of poetic imagination and fancy, just as classical and neoclassical arts are the stronghold of reason. He rued the gradual eviction of fancy and inspiration from literature by the domineering reign of modern reason in the 17th and 18th centuries. What we got from this reasonable revolution, he sneered, was "a great deal of good sense", but what we lost was "a world of fine fabling" and the real charm of poetry. ² Thomas Warton, then, in *The History of English Poetry*, reinforced Hurd's view, seeing the marvelous, spectacular and supernatural fantasies of Gothic, both in their subject matters of feudal customs and manners, and in their chivalric spirit and romantic devotion, as specially congenial to poetry. ³ Actually, beginning with the middle 18th century, there was a trend set by such "visionary" poets as William Collins, Thomas and Joseph Warton, of redirecting poetic taste from the "French School" of correctness, witticism and didacticism, which was exemplified in Pope and Johnson, to creative imagination and inspiration. ⁴ This change in aesthetic theory, symptomatic of the late 18th-century satiation of neoclassical "good sense", plain facts and insipid restraint, partly prefigured the end-of-century Gothic explosion. While seen in this context, "Gothic" then constitutes the flamboyant opposite to literary and aesthetic neoclassicism.

¹ For selections from Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, see Oliver F. Sigworth, ed., *Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800* (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), 376-384.

² Sigworth, *Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800*, 383.

³ Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents*, 78.

⁴ David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999). From the middle of the 18th century, poets like Collins and the Warton brothers began to re-evaluate the poetry of Pope and Johnson, and reconstruct a "true" line of native English poetry from Chaucer, Spencer to Shakespeare and Milton.

II. The Origins of Gothic Fiction

The flourish of Gothic fiction in the 1790s, sudden and strange as it seems, did not come out of nowhere. The influence of national literary ancestors like Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton is indubitably present in the first wave of Gothic fictions. The weird sisters in *Macbeth*, the ghost king in *Hamlet*, the macabre death in the tomb in *Romeo and Juliet*, the scary vision of the tent scene in *Richard III*, the sublimity of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, and the employment of the supernatural and fantastic in these writers' works, all these figure large in the latter-day terror literature. E. J. Clery mentions the fact that "the cult of Immortal Bard" (Shakespeare) was gathering considerable momentum with the inflated sense of national pride and popular francophobia during the Seven Years' War with France (1756-1763), when the French poet Voltaire denigrated English dramatic tradition.¹ Actually not only Shakespeare, but the fanciful literature of Elizabethan age as a whole was considered by Richard Hurd as the best in English literary history (obviously implying the inferiority of post-Restoration literature of "good sense"), since it was poised between the ancient and modern, and had "not yet been controlled by the prosaic genius of philosophy and logic"². David Punter, in his *The Literature of Terror*, dedicates a whole chapter to detailing the various origins of Gothic fiction. According to Punter, as a gesture to release the much repressed passion in an age of suffocating reason, the sentimental turn of novel writing in the latter half of the century signified a re-embracing of real human emotions, and a "moving back towards the notion of psychological depth which the bland superficialities of the Enlightenment had tried to obliterate"³. Sentimentalism, exemplified in the lachrymose novels of Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* or Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, prepared for the sadomasochist indulgence in fear and tear, and the frequent display of emotional extremes in later Gothic fiction.

¹ Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction", in J. E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 30.

² Sigworth, *Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800*, 374.

³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 27.

Concomitant with this distaste for literary realism, a new trend of antiquarianism challenged the Augustan adherence to Greco-Roman classics. Favourable attentions were either turned to the Middle Ages, “Gothic” manners, castles, romances of knights-errant, just as Richard Hurd had done, or to anything that was native, primitive and not accommodated by neoclassicist tradition, as the interest shown in Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, John Carter’s *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting*, and also, the famous fake “Ossian” poems.¹ The fashion of Gothic Revival in architecture led to Horace Walpole’s foppish experiment of his Strawberry castle, a deliberate, studied “medieval” ruin. And the burgeoning taste for the simplicity of primitive culture may account for the frequently interpolated ballads and folktales in Gothic fiction. This penchant for the ancient also anticipated the Gothic convention of situating its story in a distanced and therefore fantasy-prone past.

The deviation of aesthetic taste from rigid adherence to neoclassical principles engendered a radically new species of poetry, the “Graveyard School”. Famous pieces like Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, Robert Blair’s *The Grave*, and James Hervey’s *Meditations among the Tombs* ushered into poetry an unmitigated obsession with death, melancholy, darkness, mortality and fear.² In these poems, fear or horror frequently becomes the object of the poet’s passionate apostrophe. He either courts Fear, personified as a patron god of elevated poetry, for the emotional intensity and poetic vision it induces, or flirts with “sweet death” for a momentary transcendence of earthly cares, or haunts the haunted graveyard for a masochist pleasure in brooding over human mortality. The poet’s obsession with death and terror produces a rugged, morbid and uncomfortable beauty, which gradually becomes the vogue. This new aesthetics is best rendered by Edmund Burke as the sublime against the beautiful. To the Gothic writings of the 1790s, the influence of Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime*

¹ Punter, 27.

² For readings of Gothic-related poetry, see “Odes and the Taste for Terror”, in *Gothic Documents*, 136-163.