LA GRATITUD AL INVENTOR INGLES DEL TORO ESPAÑOL.

GOTHIC ROMANTICISM

Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form

TOM DUGGETT

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For Qian

It may be proper to state whence the Poem, of which The Excursion is a part, derives its Title of The Recluse.—Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native Mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own Mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in Verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them...—The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Anti-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses ordinarily included in those Edifices...It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself.

—*William Wordsworth, Preface to* The Excursion *(1814)*

[The Excursion] affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one.

—*William Hazlitt,* The Spirit of the Age *(1825)*

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seek prowess in my chosen field, and to my brother, Joe, who has also been my greatest friend, an unfailing support in times of need. But not a word would have been written without the love and belief of my wife, Qian, who carried me even when she was weary, and comforted me even when she needed comfort most. To her, and to our little Wilma, this book, and every moment's time and effort that it represents, is dedicated.

Abbreviations

BL—Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (London: Princeton University Press, 1983)

CLSTC—*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71)

EY—*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edition, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

FN—*The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993)

GM—*Gentleman's Magazine*

LY—*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edition, rev. Alan G. Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88)

MW—*William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

MY—*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edition, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–70)

Prose Works—*The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

QR—*Quarterly Review*

SPP—*The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975)

WDR—*The White Doe of Rylstone; or, The Fate of the Nortons*, ed. Kristine Dugas (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988)

1799; *1805*; *1850*—*Prelude* texts from Jonathan Wordsworth, ed. *The Prelude: The Four Texts*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

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INTRODUCTION

Amid the wreckage of the towers, the pointed arches stood. Ground zero looked strangely like a Gothic ruin. And in the aftermath, as the airborne dust of the pulverized buildings settled in silence across America, architecture assumed a cultural importance that seemed without precedent. Endlessly replicated in the photography, the film, and the television of the years before 2001, the twin towers of New York's World Trade Centre continue to haunt us in their simultaneous presence and absence—like a twenty-first-century version of the ghost in *Hamlet*. After President Bush misspoke of a "crusade" against Islamic terrorism, and cultural figures such as Don DeLillo wrote of the terrorist attacks as an attempt "to bring back the past," to make the American dream of the future yield "to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cut-throat religion" (2001, 37), we found ourselves living in a sort of new middle ages. The recrudescence of a faith-based politics gave an obvious contemporary relevance to the historical events and cultural formations of the medieval period. And the clock-and-calendar-time, the "homogeneous empty time" of western modernity, seemed suddenly shot through by an apocalyptic consciousness of a sort disowned by cultural memory. As the political scientist Jenny Edkins puts it, the events of September 11, 2001 saw "trauma time collid[e] with the time of the state, the time of capitalism, the time of routine," producing a "curious unknown time, a time with no end in sight" (qtd. in Simpson 2006, 4). The events of that day were, as David Simpson notes, "widely interpreted" as a hiatus in "the deep rhythms of cultural time, a cataclysm simply erasing what was there rather than evolving from anything already in place...an unforeseen eruption" of regressive elements into the "steady-state progressivism" of post–cold war America (Simpson 2006, 4). The strange absence (and hallucinated presence) in the Manhattan skyline was the (in)visible symbol of the traumatized feeling that the time was out of joint; that America had, impossibly, fallen into history. Indeed, part of the uniqueness of the phenomenon was the way the fall of the towers entered instantly into the consciousness not only of New Yorkers or Americans, but of anyone in the world

with access to a television, a computer, or a newspaper—and emerged almost instantly as mythic, rubbed smooth overnight into the uncannily resonant cultural coin, 9/11.

But we don't have to go far in the study of British Romanticism to find a cultural obsession with architecture—and particularly Gothic architecture—that is equally pervasive, equally politically charged, and, this book argues, equally definitive of a cultural moment. When, in the wake of the fall of the Bastille, Edmund Burke meditated upon the "fresh ruins," the "chasm that once was France," and urged the French nation to rebuild the edifice of its old "Gothic" constitution, Tom Paine painted him as immured "in the Bastille of a word" (Burke 1987, 31–34 and 1790, 5; Paine 1995, 188, 132). When, in 1792, Hannah More sought to show the resistance of the English commons to French rationalist philosophy, she used the allegory of a virtuous blacksmith refusing to destroy a "fine old castle" merely on account of "a dark closet, or an awkward passage, or an inconvenient room or two" (qtd. in Gilmartin 2007, 94). When, in 1794, the Pitt ministry prosecuted radicals for treason, it accused them of imagining and seeking to contrive the "horrible ruin and devastation" of the British constitution, with the king buried under the rubble of a "glorious fabric... cemented with the best blood of our ancestors" (qtd. in Pfau 2005, 163). When, in 1807, the Ministry of All the Talents initiated a program of constitutional reform, its conservative opponents pictured its policies as a new Gunpowder Plot, as a mine laid underground to blow up the Gothic edifice of government. And when in 1814 William Wordsworth likened his poetic oeuvre to a "gothic Church," William Hazlitt figured him as one of the hirelings of old corruption supporting the restoration of the old Gothic order of Europe—complete with a revival of Jesuitism and the Spanish Inquisition—with the "chaunting of *Te Deums* in all the churches of Christendom" (*The Examiner*, August 28, 1814, 558).

If the recent prevalence of architectural imagery is thus not without precedent in the Romantic period, nor is its affiliation with the sense of history. The cultural phenomenon by which the multifarious and complex events of 11 September, 2001 were abbreviated by common consent into the calendrical cipher "9/11" was, indeed, newly theorized in the Romantic period. John Horne Tooke, one of the men accused by the Pitt ministry in 1794 of designing the ruin of the constitution, argued in his seminal treatise on "Winged Words" that the fundamental process of language was the communal, cumulative, and anonymous activity of abbreviation. Words were generated and refined by the compressive activities of

innumerable minds upon the common materials of historical existence (Manly 2007, 52). Language was not abstract, arbitrary and elite, but concrete, historical and popular in character. The way the cataclysmic events of the French Revolution were, by common convention, compressed into a catalogue of resonant "days," was a proof of the popular ownership of language; a proof that conservative thinkers such as Burke acknowledged even as they mocked the cant language of "the emancipating year of 1789" (Burke 1987, 32). Indeed, if the decade since 9/11 has sometimes been imagined as a compressed recapitulation of the middle ages, with a revival of the ideas of sacrifice and duty in America and in Britain, then the Romantic period, haunted everywhere by a sense of historical recurrence, and marked by all-out ideological warfare between the past and the future, between religiosity and atheism, was still more conscious of itself as a "Gothic" period. It was, as the hero of Walter Scott's novel, *The Antiquary* (1816), put it, a "Gothic generation" (Watson, ed. 2002, 150). Wordsworth wrote of France during the Revolution as possessing "the attraction of a country in Romance" (*1805* X, 697), and nowhere was the Gothic self-imagination of the period more pronounced than in poetry.

Long before there was any such thing as "Romanticism," there was a critical view of the gathering shift away from neo-classicism as the return of a "Gothic poetry." Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) helped lay the groundwork for this idea by developing a historicist account of poetic appreciation, according to which the poetry of the middle ages was to be read and appreciated by reference not to classical rules, but by reference to its circumambient social context. In anticipation of the modern discipline of "cultural poetics," Hurd suggested a reading of such poetry as a culturally legible encryption of historical conditions. In Hurd's words:

> When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules, by which, when it comes to be examined, it is seen to have its merit, as well as the Grecian...The same observation holds of the two sorts of poetry. Judge of [Spenser's] Faerie Queene by the classic models, and you are shocked with its disorder: consider it with an eye to its Gothic original, and you find it regular. The unity and simplicity of the former are more complete: but the latter has that sort of unity and simplicity, which results from its nature...The Faerie Queene...as a Gothic poem derives its *method*, as well as the other characters of its composition, from the established modes and ideas of chivalry. (Hurd 1811, IV, 296–97)

As Alex Davis notes, Hurd's positioning of Spenser as the last of the Goths generates a historiographically crucial double view of the age of chivalry as irretrievably lost, and as preserved for future restoration in the literature of the Elizabethan age (Davis 2003, 233). Thomas Percy took on these ideas in his massively influential collection of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The *Reliques* developed a view of England as a Gothic nation, and of English poetry as properly called "Gothic." Percy saw chivalry "as in embrio" among the ancient Goths, and traced the forms of the ballad and the Romance back "in a lineal descent from the ancient historical songs of the Gothic Bards and Scalds," and forward to the history plays of Shakespeare (Percy 1775, III, vi–viii). Percy's creative reconstruction of a Gothic tradition in English poetry is clearly visible in his choice of epigraph from one of the early editors of Shakespeare, Nicholas Rowe. As Christine Baatz has suggested, Rowe's prologue to the *Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714), inaugurates an important shift in literary perspective by grouping medieval writers with the "ancients" rather than (as was then conventional) with the "moderns" (Korte, Schneider, and Lethbridge, eds. 2000, 121). By imagining a division between "ancient" and "modern" English poetry, Rowe opened up the apparently paradoxical possibility of a renaissance from within the domestic vernacular tradition. The dawning possibility of a vernacular classic is poignantly articulated in the prologue's Augustan couplets on the "good old taste" of the medieval ballad:

> Those venerable ancient song-enditers
> Soar'd many a pitch above our modern writers…
> In such an age, immortal Shakespeare wrote,
> By no quaint rules, nor hampering critics taught;
> With rough majestic force he mov'd the heart,
> And strength and nature made amends for art.
>
> (Rowe 1791, x)

Percy, writing in the wake of Hurd's thoroughgoing account of "Gothic" poetry, adapted these lines for his own collection of ballads. Altering "Those" to "These" so as to identify his collection with the whole body of ancient English song, Percy also elided the lines referring directly to Shakespeare, and amended "he mov'd" to "they mov'd." With these small but significant changes to Rowe's lines, Percy assimilated Shakespeare to a larger English Gothic tradition. By a further historical paradox, Percy contrived to give his anonymous medieval minstrels poetic priority over Shakespeare precisely by extending to

the corpus of old English poetry the kind of editorial procedures that Rowe and other eighteenth-century editors had previously developed in "constructing a literary monument" to "Gothic genius" out of the "shabby ruin" of Shakespeare (Groom 1999, 11).

Percy's creative antiquarianism was massively influential. It ramified throughout the myriad works of what James Chandler calls "novel antiquities" published around the turn of the century (Chandler 1998, 277), including John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (1813). As Susan Manly notes, antiquarians such as Brand identified the Reformation as the watershed moment in English literary history. The Reformation had seen "popular customs and rituals...expressive of national character" almost "obliterated" by "the weight of...book-centred authority." "[C]onsecrated to the fancies of the multitude, by an usage from time immemorial," in Brand's phrase, these rituals were thus forced underground, "committed as a venerable deposit to the keeping of *Oral Tradition*" at the very moment that they were "erased by public authority from the *written Word*." Catholic ritual was thus inscribed (or literally encrypted) in the rhythms of the common language with a permanency directly proportional to the virulence with which it was expunged from the historical record (Manly 2007, 70–71). With language thus conceived as an encryption of historical consciousness, the antiquarian cataloguing of popular song by figures such as Brand, Percy, and Joseph Ritson was a way of healing the historical breach, and reuniting the written and the spoken language. The ballad collection was a direct portal to what Sue Chaplin calls an "almost mystical" articulation of "the spirit of the English people" (Chaplin 2007, 43).

These ideas devolved upon James Mackintosh's stadial theory of English poetry in his 1813 review of Madame de Staël's *D'Allemagne* (1810) for the *Edinburgh Review*. Mackintosh called England "the most illustrious of German nations," distinguished by its "romantic and chivalrous" poetry, and continued:

> Nature produced a chivalrous poetry in the sixteenth century; learning in the eighteenth. Perhaps the history of English poetry reflects the revolution of European taste more distinctly than that of any other nation. We have successively cultivated a Gothic poetry from nature, a classical poetry from imitation, and a second Gothic from the study of our own ancient poets. (*Edinburgh Review*, October 1813, 207)

As Robert Miles notes, "Gothic poetry from nature" here denotes the poetry of the Elizabethan age, while "second Gothic" signifies

the Lake Poets, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, who drew inspiration from Shakespeare and the other "ancient poets" (Spooner and McEvoy, eds. 2007, 16). According to Miles,

> [i]t was the Victorians who dubbed this "second Gothic poetry" "Romanticism," and the tale of terror "Gothic." Thus we may say that it is an accident of literary history that we do not refer to the poetry of the early nineteenth-century as "the Gothic revival," just as we do its architecture ... [W]hile the poems and novels of the period shared the general taste of Gothicism, the later retrospective classifications of literary history dubbed the one Romantic, and good, the other Gothic, and bad. (Spooner and McEvoy, eds. 2007, 16)

While accepting Miles's broad claim that the poetry of the early nineteenth century needs to be understood in the context of the larger movement known as the Gothic Revival, this book also seeks to show that it was by no means simply "accident" or "retrospect" that led to the Gothic/Romantic split. Indeed, my argument throughout the book is that the first-generation Romantics were active participants in the creation of a wider "Gothic" culture—but that they were determined to create a distinctive, purer Gothic in literature, and thus to some extent put in place the distinction in taste that was, by a further irony of literary history, subsequently reified as Romantic/Gothic. The aim of much of my literary archaeology is to restore the fluidity of the distinction as it was in the period itself, and to show how the Romantics aimed to create a "second Gothic poetry" in order to bring into being a second Gothic culture, in the manner intimated by Hurd, and realized in Victorian culture through the work of revivalists such as Augustus Pugin and Kenelm Digby (Fay 2002, 87).

In this argument for the Lake Poets as initiating a schism within the "general taste" for the Gothic, my argument comes close to that of Michael Gamer's recent study, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000). But in fact this superficial similarity helps to bring out the distinctive concerns of this book. Where Gamer seeks to show the process of generic differentiation by which Romanticism emerged as a distinct literary discourse out of the larger cultural formation of the Gothic, and reflects this fact in his appositive title, this book seeks to trace the attempt of the Lake Poets to appropriate the designation of Gothic for their own cultural project, and argues that their literary creations became rather *more* than less self-consciously "Gothic"—an argument reflected in my adjectival noun of a title. Where Gamer

is concerned to reify and to hold apart two distinct genres, in order to excavate their genetic commonality, I am concerned to study an identifiably "Gothic" phase or strand within Romantic writing; to claim and to *qualify* a part of canonical Romanticism as Gothic in a hitherto underappreciated sense. In short, whereas Gamer sees Romanticism refining itself out of the Gothic, I argue that the phenomenon known as Romanticism is a reform movement within the Gothic—less a break-away reformation movement than a program for a counter-reformation.

Gothic Romanticism explores the nexus of architecture, politics, and literary form in order to read afresh the works of the Lake Poets—William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey. These three writers, friends, and neighbors for thirty years, had abiding interests in the correlation of politics with literary and architectural form, and all of them sought to create "Gothic" works better and purer than Ann Radcliffe's novels or the poetry of the Della Cruscan school; a project that might be expressed in the conceptual shorthand of refining "Gothick" into "Gothic." Whatever their rivalries and disagreements, the Lake Poets were thus always in some sense co-partners in what Nick Groom has called a wider "Gothic cultural enterprise" (Groom 2006, 182). But they were frequently quite self-conscious about it too. Perhaps the largest example of a self-consciously "Gothic" project is the scheme of Wordsworth and Coleridge for a collaborative philosophical epic to be entitled *The Recluse*—for which Wordsworth used the figure of a "gothic Church," and which Coleridge envisaged as resembling a Gothic cathedral in growing organically, with a "plan not distinct from the execution" (Raysor, ed. 1936, 7). An equally self-conscious Gothicism informed Southey's series of publications—"a long series of labours," as he called it (Southey 1855, 226)—on the literature and culture of medieval Spain, and his writings on English literary history. As David Fairer has shown, Robert Southey, poet laureate, promulgated a "Gothic" narrative of English literary history in 1814 (Pratt, ed. 2006, 1–17). Writing in the October edition of the *Quarterly Review*, Southey gave an account of English poetry that adapted the long-standing view of the British Constitution as transmitted from time immemorial, and as resembling a venerable Gothic edifice in its "varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression" (Burke 1987, 30). He claimed that in England's poetry, "as in our laws and institutions, however it may have been occasionally modified by the effect of foreign models, a distinct national character has predominated" (*QR* 12:23 (1814), 60). And, developing the latent Gothicism of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, with its account

of the way that "language and the human mind act and re-act on each other" (*Prose Works* I, 140), Southey went on to suggest that "our national character and our language" had "acted upon each other" so as to "purchase condensation and strength" at the slight expense of Latinate "euphony" (*QR* 12:23 (1814), 66). After tracing the unique resources of the English language back to an Anglo-Saxon base, treating the revolutions in poetry as an index of the spirit of English history, and portraying the literary-historical enterprise of Thomas Percy as serving to return English poetry into its rightful course, Southey concluded that, "[t]o borrow a phrase from the Methodists, there has been a great revival in our days—a poetry out of the spirit" (90).

Gothic Romanticism aims to document these "Gothic" projects, to investigate the interrelationships between them, and, further, to correlate them with a series of notable episodes in the development of a Gothic national culture. The largest argument of this book is that, from the mid-1790s until at least the early 1830s, British culture was self-consciously "Gothic," and that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey were instrumental in making it so. It is my contention that not only was there an identifiable cult of the Gothic—and that there is, hence, a sub-set of literary and social practice in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that might be called "Gothic culture"— but that the infiltration of Gothicism into the discourses of literature, architecture, and politics, and its osmotic passage between these discourses, makes it possible to speak of early nineteenth-century British culture at large as a "Gothic culture." In this, I seek to give form and body to Maurice Levy's general sense that "Gothic" was "the historically dated response of the English psyche to what was happening on the far side of the Channel" after 1789—a historically calibrated national-imaginary "regression" to the ethos of the period before the dawn of the Enlightenment (Smith and Sage eds. 1994, 2). Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) made precisely this "Gothic" response, decrying the French Revolution as the death-knell of the "age of chivalry," and opposing the "cold sluggishness" of an English "national character" unchanged since the fourteenth century, to the quicksilver experimentalism of the over-enlightened French (Burke 1987, 66, 75–77). From this caricature of contrasting national characters and contrasting feelings for history flowed many of the subsequent ideological attempts to position Britain as the "Gothic" anti-type to post-revolutionary France.

Wordsworth—in part because his Gothicism is both more subterranean and more thoroughgoing than that of his contemporaries— provides my core case study in the formation of a national Gothic