



<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz>

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form.

PAINTING LIFE IN EXTREMES
CHARLES MATURIN AND THE GOTHIC GENRE

by
Cathie Dunsford

A thesis presented to the
University of Auckland

for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June, 1983



The Rev. C.R. Maturin
Drawn by W. Brocas

"If I possess any talent, it is that of darkening the gloomy, and of deepening the sad; of painting life in extremes, and representing those struggles of passion when the soul trembles on the verge of the unlawful and the unhallowed."

- C.R. Maturin, Preface to
The Milesian Chief, Henry
Colburn, London, 1812,
pp.iv-v.

ABSTRACT

Charles Robert Maturin (1780-1824) produced a substantial body of writing that included six novels, three plays, and two collections of sermons. Despite the large audience he reached in his own time, and the interest he aroused in a number of later poets and novelists, Maturin's work has not received very much serious attention from critics. The present study attempts to take a fresh look at all Maturin's work, exploring it sympathetically from a variety of directions. Melmoth is included, but because it has dominated previous discussion of Maturin, I have chosen to concentrate on his neglected novels, Fatal Revenge, The Wild Irish Boy, The Milesian Chief, Women, or Pour et Contre, and The Albigenses.

Special attention is given here to Maturin's two volumes of sermons (a valuable but seldom used source of information about his religious philosophy) and, more generally, to the theme of religion, which links many of his novels. This aspect of Gothic literature deserves a closer study than it usually receives, particularly in the work of Maturin who was a minister of religion. My thesis proposes a new interpretation of Fatal Revenge based on the parallel that Maturin developed between the use of superstition by Orazio and its use by the Catholic church. In The Albigenses there is a similar parallel between the outlaws and the supposedly holy Crusaders. Maturin took the Catholic church so often as his subject, not simply because it provided a colourful, stereotyped background (as some have suggested), but because it was a context in which he could seriously investigate the psychological pressures that produced (and still produce) conformity, extremism, and sexual violence.

While his studies of oppressive societies may at times remind us of twentieth-century works such as 1984 or The Trial, Maturin's fiction is very much a part of its age. After a chapter that explores the history

of 'the Gothic', my thesis focuses on the particular context of Maturin's period, mapping it initially by examining the responses to his work that appeared in print during his lifetime. Those reviews and essays make visible the complex field of forces in which Maturin worked. The Gothic novel developed in an age of more than usual ferment - literary, religious, and political - including the first phase of what we would today describe as feminist rebellion. All this was accompanied, as we can see from the criticism, by a strong conservative reaction in defence of the threatened values. The present study emphasizes the ways in which Maturin's work shared the new energies associated with change, even though it also displayed signs of ambivalence. I consider the reasons for this ambivalence and argue that in many cases there is subtlety in what appears at first to be confusion. Maturin's fiction was a late addition to the Gothic tradition, but its particular kinds of complexity - such as its psychological depth - made it an important development of the genre and linked it with other innovative writing of the period.

Some admirers of Maturin have sought to play down the Gothic element in his work, which is understandable in view of the low esteem in which the genre has been held. The Gothic has often been seen, for example, as a confused rehearsal for Romanticism. While acknowledging the variety of Maturin's novels, I have sought to emphasise their continuing links with the Gothic genre and its special energies. During the past decade, new forms of Gothic criticism have appeared that treat the subject with greater seriousness. Today, interest in the Gothic genre seems to be springing to life again, and its relevance to our own time (which is also a period of complex social change and widespread ambivalence) has become clearer. I have attempted to contribute to this new type of criticism by pointing out the value of Maturin's studies of oppression and his ability to go beyond stereotypes in his treatment of women characters.

I have also suggested some links between Gothic literature and feminist science-fiction writing today. In general, the aim of this thesis has been to consider the most mature Gothic fiction (such as that of Maturin) not merely as fantasy but as an expanded vision of reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis, my child, is in her eighth year of growth, and I'm convinced will not stop developing just because she has chosen finally to 'come out' into the world. Her birth and development have mirrored my own rebirth, and for that I have many people to thank:

Aorewa McLeod, for the initial inspiration to delve into the Gothic genre and experience its delights; Dr Roger Horrocks for constant support and encouragement, and a Supervisory Wisdom which brought me back to the edge of the Precipice each time I was about to plunge into the Abyss, that I might see more clearly the perspective which drew me there in the first place; Dr Brian Boyd, for attempting to argue Reason in the light of Imagination and Fancy each time I took to Flight; Professor C.K. Stead, Sebastian Black, Alex Calder and Dr Michael Neill for the continual intellectual conflict which kept my wit sharp and my politics defined; Professor Don Smith, for pretending not to notice while I turned his Department Outside-In; Michael Giacon for his excellent wit in times of crisis; Drs Boire, Wright, Larsen and Lamb for their support; Paul Stone, University of Toronto, for his unforgettable loyalty and belief in my political vision; Dr Rod Edmond, University of Canterbury, Kent, for his seminar on Christina Rossetti, his advice and his deep care; Professor Rita Jacobs, Montclair University, for her stimulating inspiration and academic encouragement; staff and students of the Auckland University English Department who gave me necessary feedback when I presented variations on this thesis at Staff Seminars, and for keeping me employed as a tutor and lecturer since 1976; Mervyn Thompson, for his advice on drama; the English Department Women Students' Collective for their unfailing support; Professor Peter Godfrey and Margery Charlton for their faith in my ability.

Ellie Guthrie for her patient proofreading, challenging questions and support over the past three years; Cathie Hutchinson and Elva Leaming for their brilliant ability to get innumerable rare books into the country via the library interloan system; Clare Aspell for her care and energy on the final proofs; Denise Motu and Jane Adamson for their sense of humour and ability to put my thesis before departmental minutes; Beryl Stout for the massive effort of the final typed copy and her increasing interest in its content; Doreen, Noel, Kevin and Debbie Dunsford, for their emotional and financial support at all times; Sandi Hall, whose inspiration, insight and political vision have fired my imagination back to her Gothic heights constantly; Margo Oliver, Riemke Ensing and Dr Margaret McLaren, of the English Department Minority Group (Women staff members), for their belief in my work; Charmaine Pountney, Renée Taylor, Bernadette Doolan, Jenny Spring, Jo Crowley, Leah Poulter, Marianne Gardiner, Marie Neal, Miriam Saphira and Louise Rafkin, for their support and encouragement; Sandra Coney for her editing skill on my articles and her political insight; Donna Awatere, for making me think through the themes of oppression; Brigit Ikin, for her intellectual clarity; all the many women who make up the feminist movement in New Zealand who have invited me to lecture, provide resources and write articles, and without whose support I could never have integrated my scholastic work into an education system which is, at present, still largely alien to our political ideals, but in which it is essential that we succeed in order to progress beyond. I would particularly like to thank Adrienne Rich for her letter of support at a crucial stage of this work and her advice that we must all remain as "present to each other" as we possibly can, and especially in times of crisis.

I am indebted to the University Grants Committee for awarding me a Post-graduate Scholarship in 1976, which made possible the birth of this

thesis. I acknowledge also a generous Research Grant awarded to me in 1977 by the University Grants Committee to enable me to purchase micro-films and order copies of original Gothic texts, otherwise unavailable in New Zealand; and to make possible a research trip to Australian universities which have a fine collection of Gothic resources.

I am grateful to the English Department, University of California, Berkeley, who have appointed me 'honorary Research Scholar' for 1983-4, and by so doing have hastened a reluctant end to my first stage of Gothic explorations; and also the the New Zealand-United States of America Educational Foundation for awarding me a Fulbright Scholarship that I may accept this appointment.

Cathie Dunsford

University of Auckland,
June, 1983.

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I	: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II	: THE GOTHIC: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	29
CHAPTER III	: 'WITHOUT CONTRARIES IS NO PROGRESSION': MATURIN AND THE CONTEMPORARY CRITICS	50
CHAPTER IV	: THE SERMONS	88
CHAPTER V	: 'OF THE DEVIL'S PARTY?' RELIGION IN <u>FATAL REVENGE</u>	121
CHAPTER VI	: A TALE OF OPPRESSION: THE NOVELS BETWEEN <u>FATAL REVENGE</u> AND <u>THE ALBIGENSES</u>	150
CHAPTER VII	: CRUSADING CHRISTIANS OR AUTHORISED ASSASSINS?: RELIGION IN <u>THE ALBIGENSES</u>	169
CHAPTER VIII	: 'OMNIPOTENT TYRANTS': THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS	181
CHAPTER IX	: SEXUAL POLITICS	193
EPILOGUE	:	222
BIBLIOGRAPHY	:	228