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CHAPTER NINE

SEXUAL POLITICS

The aspect of Maturin's novels that I have found most interesting, and have looked at most closely in this thesis, is the notion of a closed society, its methods of closure (or repression) and how particular psychological states flourish or wither within that society. In other words, I am considering Maturin's novels as forerunners of modern works such as Orwell's 1984, Kafka's The Castle, and modern feminist literature which also rebels against such a closed order. In addition, I am suggesting that Maturin raises the Gothic novel to a new psychological level by the detail and subtlety with which he explores the particular psychological jungle that grows in the soil of authoritarianism. The Catholic church, as Maturin presents it, becomes a symbolic example of a monolithic social organisation. Maturin's psychological study has strong political implications - not that he is advocating an end to all structures, but he is clearly questioning any structures that are too rigid and limiting.

Maturin's study of women in this society isolates one of the largest groups oppressed by the dominant social structure, and is remarkably detailed. The fact that he considers women to have a particular aptitude for religious feeling helps make him alert to this subject; and he is also aware of the fact that women are forced to live within particularly rigid stereotypes. Not, of course, that Maturin had a modern feminist point of view, but in the context of the period, his sensitivity to the issue is impressive, and in terms of female education, is more enlightened than similar aspects of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women. His awareness of gender oppression extends also to the conditioning men endure in a society that places disproportionate value on stereotypically masculine attributes.
Maturin's awareness of women, both in his novels and his life, relates strongly to his appreciation of the 'feminine' in himself and in his male characters. This appreciation is associated with the finest qualities of love and commitment, expressed in some cases between people of the same sex. Ormsby Bethel's deep and loving relationship with Hammond in The Wild Irish Boy, for example, begins in their youth, and Maturin feels the need to affirm that it is more than just an adolescent phase: "People who read this may smile at the eternal friendship of boys of ten and twelve, yet our friendship has been indissoluble".\(^2\) Brotherly love extends to a wider political level to express non-violent ideals which Maturin himself espoused, horrified as he was by the irrational violence of warfare as we have seen in his sermons and fiction. At a crucial moment in The Wild Irish Boy, Ormsby refuses a duel, considering it a ridiculous convention, and is horrified when his father takes up arms against Lord Roschamp in his place.\(^3\) Ormsby is scorned by his father with "inconceivable bitterness" and called a "coward".\(^4\) Ormsby's uncle is also incapable of understanding his chosen pacifism:

> My uncle had fought several duels, it was the habit of his country, his age, his profession. He could make no allowance, he had no perception for any other mode of expressing resentment, or adjusting differences between men.\(^5\)

Maturin shows us by the complexity of his characterisation that he understands the forces at work conditioning men to obey the call to fight, yet he also forwards the desirability of seeking alternative methods of coping.

Born into a country torn apart by religious warfare, Maturin chooses not to support one group over another, despite his strong religious views and chosen religious career, preferring to enter into dialogue as he does in his Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church. His notions about masculinity and death are strongly linked to his concept of love, itself associated with the female or 'feminine' aspect of our natures.
Consistent with his novels, his sermons tend to associate "hostility" with men:

The strenuous and tumultuous destination of man allows and requires a certain spirit of roughness - a preparation for self-defense - a kind of latent hostility about him - but the natural flow and tendency of the female character is in the channel of goodness.

The man is drawn to play the part of divider/destroyer, while the woman acts as provider/nurturer of society, with a seemingly inexhaustible capacity to cope with disasters:

In domestic life, it is women on whom we are dependent for the first years of existence, and for all its future felicity: it is she who tends us in sickness, who soothes us in care, who consoles us in calamity, to whom the heart instinctively turns in the hour of suffering, and never turns in vain.

This is an area where Maturin's philosophy, though in some ways limited by its period in terms of sex-role stereotyping, finds a parallel with modern feminist literature. As one feminist science-fiction author remarks in the introduction to her recent novel: "Feminists, globally, will have to be prepared, in the very near future, to stop the increasing warfare on this planet"; and as the women's movement to disarm the world is now gaining momentum, the links between pacifist ideals and gender roles are becoming more widely acknowledged, confirming the strength and accuracy of Maturin's insight over 150 years ago.

* * * * * * *

Who are they who are at the head of almost all the real good done in society? Who are they, who, even in this deserted country, move the great springs of every national institution that has been formed for the benefit or the relief of their fellow creatures? Women. Who, rejecting the fastidiousness of rank and the blandishments of pleasure, visit the school and the hospital, and the hovel and the prison; become conversant with misery in all her forms, and are neither repelled nor disgusted by the most frightful? Women. Who are they that are ready to do every good
word and work; who protect every weakness, and palliate every suffering, from the cry of the infant orphan to the wailing of dotage and decrepitude; who furnish instruction for the ignorant, refuge for the unprotected, and an asylum even for repentant vice? Who are they, who, in this metropolis, where every street is putrid with vice and wretchedness, have opened a thousand doors of mercy, and hover like presiding angels over those institutions which they have consecrated by their benevolence? They are women.


In 1800 Madame de Staël remarked in De la Littérature: "The social and political influences that affect the nature of literature have not been frequently analysed."\(^9\) Seventeen years later, Maturin made a similar observation:

To enable us to judge of the causes that rendered the early writers so eminent, we must take a view not only of their mental powers ... but also of the circumstances under which those powers were exercised, of the state of society, and literature under which they existed, of the prevalent habits of thinking at that period ...

At this time, as Drs Laurenson and Swingewood have pointed out:

No method had been devised for analysing the relationship between social structure and its art; there were few genuine insights. There were no mediating factors, and literature was simply the out-growth of climate, soil, and national spirit.

Both de Staël and Maturin played a part in this movement for change.

Although many of the links between literature and society suggested by Madame de Staël seem rather unsophisticated today, one significant aspect of her work is her concern with the status of women. Dr Laurenson and Dr Swingewood, in The Sociology of Literature,\(^12\) draw attention to de Staël's theory that Italians do not write novels because they are too 'licentious' and 'have little respect for women'. They add:
Madame de Staël has an interesting observation here, arguing that the novel form could develop only in those societies where women's status was fairly high and where a strong interest in the private life existed. Women, after all, she adds, know nothing of life 'but the capacity to love' and although England has a poetry full of 'gloomy imagination' it is the country 'where women are most truly loved' .... An awareness of the role of women in creating the novel as a literary genre represents a significant advance on the simplistic correlations of her predecessors and is truly social. Madame de Staël's concern with this topic has its parallel in Maturin's views. For example:

It is indeed amazing, that, even in the wildest regions of the earth, where religion and civilisation are alike unknown, the importance of women should not have forced itself upon man. Viewed in a public, a social, or a private aspect, her character is inestimably important.

And:

Look where you will, from the poles to the tropics, women are savages or slaves, illiterate, despised, half unsexed or half unsouled. Where Christianity is professed, there, and there alone, she is treated with respect, with tenderness, or even with decency.

While Maturin may have disagreed with some aspects of de Staël's work, we know that he was influenced by her since he quotes her frequently in his novels. More generally, he shows a strong 'awareness of the role of women' in the unusual prominence he gives to female characters in his novels, as well as his emphasis on education for women in his sermons.

In his personal life, as his contemporary biographer has noted: "He was a perfect bigot in his attachment to female society; and generally restless and dissatisfied in the exclusive company of men". Like de Staël, he stressed the female 'capacity to love', and this is related to his theme of oppressed or repressed love - for example, the repressed love of Roselia for Ippolito (in Fatal Revenge) which causes her to wear a male disguise to get nearer to her love, or that of the couple in Melmoth who are so persecuted by religious authority that they end up
literally devouring each other. Love which is blocked becomes self-destructive in Maturin's novels, and the ultimate victims are nearly always those with the greatest capacity to love: the female characters.

The theme of women as victims is common in Gothic literature, as Ellen Moers has pointed out in *Literary Women*:

> As early as the 1790's, Ann Radcliffe firmly set the Gothic in one of the ways it would go ever after: a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine.

Unfortunately, this theme has not been taken seriously by most critics, who have stressed its obvious or physical aspects rather than its psychological implications. Maturin tends to highlight the latter, though in some cases it is certainly difficult to separate the two. The time has come to inter-relate the novels in terms of this particular theme.

In Maturin's first novel, *Fatal Revenge*, women take less dominant roles than in his later novels. Yet their presence is, as in all of his works, crucial to the plot and character motivation. It is Orazio's deep love for Erminia, and his terrible jealousy towards her male companion, Verdoni, that motivates the plot for revenge. All the women in this novel are at some time physically confined, either in a convent or castle, and the most memorable female character, Countess Zenobia, confines herself further by attaching an iron instrument of penance to her body in a grotesque development of the religious attitudes around her. Maturin's psychological study of the way Zenobia arrives at this reversal of the positive, nurturing female role, is very interesting, as is his detailed description of her form of punishment which is specifically gender-based: she invents an instrument to cut into her breast, which causes what we would today term breast cancer. While the Count feels justified in using his wealth to employ a private confessor to attend him constantly to absolve his guilt, the Countess Zenobia cannot bring herself to feel worthy of that privilege.
Her sense of religious guilt is so strong that the worst punishment she can imagine is to attack her body in this way. Women who have had a mastectomy speak of the deep emotions stirred up because of the connections both with sex appeal and with motherhood. In creating such situations Maturin is carrying the physical violence of the Gothic genre into areas of deeper psychology.

In *The Wild Irish Boy*, Maturin depicts women as victims of society, and in particular, of men. While Maturin's attitude is sometimes ambivalent, revealing a basic acceptance of the notion that women are subordinate to men, his exploration of their psychological and social problems is detailed and often subtle, in terms of the genre and the period. While outwardly conforming to the dictates of fashion, the women characters in *The Wild Irish Boy* are inwardly miserable. Miss Percival cannot find a male companion with whom to share her intellectual interests. Lady Westhampton has intellectual wit and strong ideas about art and politics, yet she is deeply unhappy, for she is not taken seriously by society. As Ormsby Bethel remarks: "Perhaps she might have desired something more than the pleasures of vanity and admiration; perhaps she was not happy in her family". His male companion replies: "I imagine she was as happy as a woman of rank could expect". But, as he himself admits, her family "were mere fashionable expletives" and her husband kept his distance: "I don't think I ever saw them together for three years I was abroad with them. If they travel to the family mansion in the family coach, it will probably be the first hour they have passed together since their marriage".

Ormsby Bethel recognises that his mother is an individual, not bounded by the social roles she plays, and he loses his temper when Lord R. refers to her as a domestic:
"Your domestic, my mother your domestic", I roared, foaming with passion; "unhappy and fallen as she is, I will make you kneel and ask her pardon for the word before I quit your house". [Lord R. replies:] "My domestic! aye, my domestic, or, if you don't like that word, my wh..re".

Lady Montrevor speaks eloquently of the pressures on the woman in an unhappy marriage:

In a few weeks I was a bride - a peeress - a wretch! - Nor could all the glare and tumult of my other distinctions prevent my feeling the last. I believe there is nothing more decisive of the character than a conviction of certain and permanent misery. It must make us either saints or devils. I had too much humility for the former - and so I became what I am.

Maturin, while not condoning the excesses of his female characters, is well aware of the extent to which men create the rules of the game:

Yes, such is the fate of woman in countries where all the attention of man is given to their own indulgence - where woman, a dazzling victim, is arrayed and instructed in all that can dazzle the senses, and then led, a lovely, intoxicated victim, to the altar of sensuality, and sacrificed for ever. On the history of such nations, a mind that reflects will pause, and say to itself, where woman is thus degraded, man is a brute; - and it is true - awfully true.

Still, women have some choice in the matter:

I know this will be incompatible with the general habits and spirit of the world - well, let her choose this day whom she will serve. If the Baal of Fashion be God - worship him: but if the Lord be God - worship him.

Looking at the pressures of socialization on women, Maturin provides many examples of the wrong kind of religious education. Miss Percival raises this point with Mr Bethel in no uncertain terms:

It is impossible to reason with you. The woman who could communicate with your ideas, must be utterly destitute of any herself; she must be a domestic drudge, broken by the slavery of common life, and the misfortune of a religious education.

Bethel's reply shows his shallowness:
Religious education is no misfortune on earth to a woman. Some of the finest women I ever knew in France were immensely religious, and were just as punctual at mass as at their assignations.

In another argument with Miss Percival, he says: "By heaven, you talk of man as if he were a machine", to which she replies: "Tis you who rather wish to consider a woman as machine". He exclaims: "So I do".

Maturin describes the characters of a wide range of women, with some complexity. While he admires the strength and intelligence of Miss Percival, for instance, he does not like her stress on reason at the expense of passion. He paints a vibrant picture of Lady Montrevor yet shows the inner emptiness of a woman destined to obey the whims of fashionable society. The image of woman as captive to man, capable of outshining his dull possessiveness, yet unable to break out of the cage, is vividly painted by Lady Montrevor in a fairy tale she invents. Just as Maturin in his sermons advised mothers to warn their daughters against possible traps, he shows Lady Montrevor telling her innocent (and credulous) daughter the story of her own unhappy marriage. The demon Lord Montrevor is also listening, and his reactions show that he understands what she is getting at. In her story a giant keeps a lady locked up in a castle as his prisoner, and its climax is in the prisoner's revolt against her wrongful victimisation.

In The Milesian Chief, Maturin explores the fascinating personality of Armida Montclare, the character around whom the story revolves. As I suggested in an earlier chapter, Armida, far from being the glorious victor many of the other characters see her as, is in many ways the victim of her situation. The reader is caught between a feeling of attraction for her charm, wit, intelligence and exquisite musicianship, and an abhorrence of her colonialist attitudes toward the 'wild Irish'. She is, in some ways, very much her father's daughter, for he has taken over an Irish estate with little regard for its inhabitants and has educated her in a conventional
European style. Rose (or Rosine) St Austin is perceptive enough to recognise Armida's sense of dislocation, while watching her perform:

After much importunity she was prevailed on to sing: I saw she undertook it with despondency, as if wanting confidence in her hearers; she could feel none in herself, yet she began to sing, and then I first lamented my ignorance of foreign music, for though some passages made me shiver, and some made me weep, I felt I was not judge enough to appreciate the powers she displayed. In some parts of her voice I felt as if I was mounting a precipice with her, and grew bewildered and giddy... after all, there was one low and simple song, which a connoisseur would laugh if he heard me say I preferred, but it came over me like moonlight after the glare of a burning day, and drew from me the sweetest tears that pleasure ever shed.

Armida is blessed with talent, yet, like similarly endowed women in The Wild Irish Boy, she is not inwardly satisfied. As Rose observes:

She has been destroyed by flattery, intellectual luxury, and a too strong and too early excitement of her sensibility, that like a flower torn open in the bud, has withered before it has blown.

In Rose, Armida is befriended by a new type of woman, who can appreciate her talent, but also sees through her superficiality. Rose confronts Armida impulsively with a passage in "the beautiful tale of Almerine and Shelimah" which suggests that the heroine is being ruined by the effect of "perpetual adulation". It is a tense moment - Rose trembles at her own 'audacity'. But Armida recognises that Rose has shown her more respect than her army of educators: "The voice of sincerity ought to be pleasing to me," said she, "from its novelty, for from my birth till now I believe I have never heard it. You must stay with me." 33

Armida has been harshly treated by the critics, but at least she makes some effort to learn about Ireland; and if there are limits to her understanding, they are closely related to her educational conditioning. Her inner conflicts are fascinating because they evoke the wider conflict between 'cultivated England' and 'wild Ireland' familiar in any colonial situation,
such as here in New Zealand. Armida becomes alienated both from herself and from her environment. Only a woman equally alienated can help her to face the trials which Connal, and Ireland, have prepared for her. It is Rose who in times of need is always with Armida. On their journey with Wandesford, for example, we hear that "Armida leaned exhausted on the shoulder of Rosine", and "Armida and Rosine, who had sunk in the floor together, were left alone". Their mutual support in the midst of Civil War, where brother is fighting brother for possession of Ireland, looks forward to the remarkable relationship in The Albigenses, in the midst of the crusades, between the heretic Genevieve and the Catholic Isabelle.

Maturin traces a subtle development in Armida. How different is the woman whom Rose first confronted from the woman we see giving away her wealth later in the novel: "The proud daughter of Lord Montclare was seen dividing in a shed among female peasants the ornaments in which she had glittered in the view of princes". Armida exclaims: "... on the damp and bloody ground, with the curse of a rebel in my arms, I would not resign my place for empires: here is my last seat, and here I am more exalted than when I received the homage of a false world!"

It is in Women: or, Pour et Contre that Maturin most successfully explores connections between women and religion. It is interesting that Women was popular in its French version under the name of Eva; ou Amour et Religion. Maturin develops a great deal of sympathy for Eva's plight while also suggesting that her suffering - her conflict between love and religion - could be remedied by a more balanced view of life and spirituality. Maturin's sensitive treatment of this character may owe something to his feelings about his own niece, Susan Lea. His 'Sermon on the Death of Miss Susan Lea', and his reference to her in his 'Sermon on the Necessity of Female Education', raise similar issues:
She, she to whose beloved memory I dedicate this address - she, too, possessed acquirements and talents ... but she used them with such sweet and chastised enjoyment - with a pleasure that rose purely from the pleasure of others, that the exercise of her acquirements seemed like the practice of a virtue - her very indulgences were duties. She spent not the precious ointment on herself - she broke it at her Saviour's feet, and the incense of her heart went up along with it. 39

Susan's virtues could be carried too far - as we see in the story of Eva. All Eva's enjoyments are 'chastised' so that any pleasure 'rose purely from the pleasure of others'. In giving away everything, in breaking all her 'precious ointment ... at her Saviour's feet', she dies of a broken heart not for de Courcy, but for God. Her story shows how pointless a life of devotion to any ideal becomes if carried to extremes.

Christianity, as Maturin argued in his sermons, does not require human life to be exclusively a preparation for what is to follow it.

In Women, Maturin explores the minds of women in relation to various notions of spirituality. The detail with which he does so reinforces a statement in his 1819 Sermons: "... such is the felicity of the female character, that the closer it is inspected, the more advantageously it appears - like some fine piece of mosaic, whose minutest part is also its most exquisite". Zaira represents a complex mixture of earthiness and spirituality, perhaps more vividly than any of his other heroines. Like Eva she seems elevated above humanity at times - but not in the cool air of religious denial - rather, she inhabits the warm and intensely human world of opera where our passions and weaknesses are dramatised.

Critics appear to have overlooked the fact that Maturin was familiar with this milieu through his marriage to Henrietta Kingsbury, a successful Dublin opera singer and pupil of Mme Catalani.

Zaira is courted by Charles de Courcy but he is shown to be rather weak in comparison with the women characters in the novel. Zaira is,
however, deeply hurt when he leaves her. She suffers — one is tempted to suggest — as only an opera singer could. Torn apart spiritually and emotionally, she is driven to question the nature of religion and to consider the possibility of a monastic life. It is to Zaira's credit, Maturin implies, that she, unlike most Gothic heroines in her position (including some that he created) rejects the monastery by recognising its lack of true spirituality, its monotony, and its corrupt administration.

Maturin's characterisation is ahead of its time. As his most recent biographer has noted:

The latter part of the novel (Women) has been criticised for being too long and insufficiently integrated with the rest, but Maturin's analysis of Zaira's anguish contains some of his most astute psychological insights. Prefiguring some later nineteenth-century female characters, such as Flaubert's Emma Bovary and Hardy's Sue Bridehead, Zaira interprets the pain she suffers as arising from a personal transgression and consequently turns to religion in hopes of doing penance and alleviating her sense of guilt. This analysis of Zaira's religious anguish, of the spiritual and sensuous vying of power within her, stands almost by itself among nineteenth century British novels, since the depiction of religious experiences was traditionally left to poetry, confession and tract.

Maturin's skill in portraying conflicts in a woman's mind has also been acknowledged by Diane D'Amico, in her recent article. 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems':

The story of Isidora's troubled love brings us to the last and most important link between Maturin and Rossetti: the theme of the strong soul in conflict. It was not the sentimental, passive heroine who held Rossetti fascinated, but the active heroic woman. All of Maturin's novels have at least one passionate, independent woman whose very strength sets her at war with herself and, as suggested earlier, at times with her God. This passionate, strong-willed figure is not found in the rest of Rossetti's adolescent reading. If Rossetti had simply been looking for distressed females and unhappy love affairs of which to write, the works of Lewis, Radcliffe, Scott, and, later, Dickens, would have provided several; however, none of the characters from any of these novels, Gothic or otherwise, appears in Rossetti's poetry, but several of Maturin's strong-willed, tortured women do.
In his sermons Maturin stresses positive links between women and religion: "I have showed that her happiness and dignity are vitally connected with the existence of religion; with that alone they rise and fall". But his novels explore the possible problems and distortions. Earlier I made the suggestion that de Courcy seeks in Zaira what has been suppressed in Eva; and I would now add that this triangle seems to symbolise Maturin's own spiritual conflict. Eva seems to embody the spirituality he aspires to in his sermons, at their most intense, while Zaira seems to represent an attractive and sophisticated worldliness. She is a woman of honour, yet she has difficulty fitting in to the religious context in which she lives. It would be risky to pursue the analogy between Maturin and de Courcy much further, but this situation of the man torn between two women seems to touch some very deep chords, as though Maturin had found an 'objective correlative' for his own ambivalence. Of course, the conflict is not peculiar to Maturin but emerges from the surrounding culture. One might even trace it back to the conflicting images of woman as Eve, the difficulty for the man in choosing between the innocent Eve and the temptress associated with the Fall. Maturin does more than most of his contemporaries to break out from simplistic stereotypes of women, yet there are still clear limitations and tensions in his work. I leave Women: or, Pour et Contre with the suggestion that the Eva/Zaira/de Courcy triangle would be a particularly useful part of the literature of the period to examine, if a critic were seeking to analyse some of its deepest conflicts and also the signs that there were new energies at work.

* * * * * * *
We have been raised to fear the Yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. For the demands of our released expectations lead us inevitably into actions which will help bring our lives into accordance with our needs, our knowledge, our desires. And the fear of our deepest cravings keeps them suspect, keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, and leads us to settle for or accept many facets of our oppression ....

Two other relationships that are particularly evocative - that strain against the limits of Maturin's morality - are that of Cyprian and Ippolito in Fatal Revenge, and that of Desmond and Endymion in The Milesian Chief. Both relationships are apparently homosexual and therefore strictly forbidden in terms of Christianity.

Although Cyprian is really a young woman (Rosolia), she has disguised herself as a young man. The allusion to homosexuality grows stronger and stronger as her relationship with Ippolito becomes closer and more intense. The lyrical natural setting in which they find themselves heightens the intensity of their emotion. Their relationship remains platonic, but on a subconscious level Ippolito suffers from guilt. While apparently maintaining rational control, they feel themselves being drawn deeper into the whirlpool of forbidden desire. The general confusion of male and female qualities gives their relationship an air of androgeny: "Not of a sex to inspire love, and still too female-like for the solid feelings of manly friendship, Cyprian hovered round his master, like his guardian sylph, with the officiousness of unwearied zeal, and the delight of communicated purity". Their shared feelings of sexuality are transferred to a platonic level by substituting physical with emotional union through a sharing of literature. This can be seen in a general way when they go on an excursion, which is both a physical and an emotional journey, allowing them to explore their deepest feelings while alone together, and in a more specific way when a poem is used to communicate emotions which one
shares for the other, thereby distancing the subjects while also sharing the intimacy of feeling. The intensity of passion and awkwardness of their position, where loving is both desired intuitively and shunned as a result of conditioning, is revealed when they kiss, and Maturin is careful to show the pressures of religious conditioning on their attitudes toward this love which make it into a "guilty fondness". Yet the power of this love goes beyond the power of religious structures for Cyprian:

My love for you has made me almost annihilate the distinctions of good and evil.

Their powerful love results in a reversal of the usual or accepted notions of morality so the heterosexual passion which Cyprian fears Ippolito has when he imagines him with a woman becomes a "lawless passion". The passionate nature of this love, intensified by its repression, at one time causes Cyprian to state that he would die for his companion, perhaps with the knowledge he later gives that this is a "love, which is stronger than death".

Maturin explores the nature of 'forbidden' desire with genuine curiosity and an implicitly subversive questioning of religious authority, while at the same time adding complexity to the relationship by having Cyprian appear alternately as seducer and saviour of Ippolito's soul. He describes Cyprian's seduction of Ippolito in terms of a temptation, while Ippolito puts Cyprian in the role of his saviour. Both descriptions are apt, for Cyprian seeks to save Ippolito from falling from Grace by tempting him to explore their shared love further. In a less complex and more traditional work, Cyprian might be seen as the devil, but Maturin portrays him more as an angel. By so doing, he can explore the depths of an overtly homosexual attraction, while vindicating his own religious and personal position by revealing the loves to be 'safely heterosexual' after all. Yet the reader has already become captivated by the power of this intense
love, so that the revelation of it as heterosexual is about as satisfying as the superficial 'explanation' of the novel's previous supernatural force at the end.

In The Milesian Chief, Maturin presents a homosexual or androgenous relationship between Desmond and Endymion, but on this occasion the attraction is less platonic and more sexual in its expression. Endymion has been born a girl, Ines, but her mother has passed her off as a boy to please her father, who wanted a male heir. Endymion actually believes herself male and Desmond knows her only as a male. When Desmond sees the heterosexual Connal and Armida embrace, he recalls his homosexual love for Endymion and is immediately "Struck by a contrast he dared not even name". He is so agitated that he rushes from the cave (an image of female sexuality in this context) and throws himself "against a fragment of rock at its entrance". Desmond then hears the voice of Endymion "which the echoes of the cave made like fairy music". He associates the song with a woman, but is "startled from his dream by Endymion standing beside him".

Maturin provides a very physical setting:

It was twilight; a few stars twinkled in the blue east; where the sun had set, a broad mass of sanguine vapour flushed the water with its deep dyes, and made it resemble a sea of blood.

Desmond remarks:

"Oh torture me no more with this fantastic fondness, so unlike what we ought to feel for each other: this female fastidiousness I cannot bear. I wish to love you like a younger brother; you treat me with the caprice of a mistress."

But the heart of the scene continues to grow:

Endymion, after gazing on Desmond, as he leaned on the rock, and held up his burning cheek to the sea-breeze, while he felt no breeze could cool the fever that scorched it, approached him, and faintly asked if the singing had displeased him. "No", said the agitated boy, "it pleased me too much ..."
Endymion describes his attraction as

A delight that makes me sick and giddy: the Italians, before an earthquake, have a sensation for which there is no name; such is the sensation I feel in your presence, that I could throw myself into your arms and weep, if you would let me.

Maturin also intensifies the sense of moral taboo:

"Stop, stop", said Desmond, "talk this language no more: if the sight of each other be thus intoxicating, thus ruinous, let us part, and see each other no more."

And:

"Never did I feel before these wild, these maddening sensations ... it is an influence that I must fly from to preserve my reason, my life."

Maturin develops this push and pull of emotions very intensely, with images (such as the blood-red sunset and the earthquake) suggesting both physical passion and danger, even a kind of death-wish. The lovers move into each other's arms with a terrible ambivalence:

"... I cannot love you as a man ... for you, Endymion, I would ... dream life away in voluptuous and frantic melancholy: the feelings that oppress, that soften, that sicken me, even now while I speak to you I cannot describe them; I must not feel them; no, not another moment. Oh! untwine those arms from me; you are making me wild; my blood burns like fire in my veins: do not believe these hot tears that drop on your hands."

But they cannot help confessing their love for each other, and at that moment "a broad sheet of lightning quivered over the sea, and shewed the face of Endymion pale as that of the dead".

The death-wish expressed by Endymion ('to die in your arms') seems to imply an escape to another plane of existence where such love is not prohibited. Maturin ends the scene with the Gothic intensity of a storm while Desmond and Endymion retire to the cave "that seemed to rock to its recesses, as the thunder rolled above, and the waves, tormented ..., dashed themselves against its rocks, and covered the wanderers with their spray."
This scene in which Desmond declares that he loves Endymion "with a love passing that of woman" is extraordinarily detailed and erotic. Why did Maturin make so much of it? Robert Lougy offers this explanation:

Maturin's recurrent treatment of homosexual love can only partially be explained by his fascination with the unknown and taboo realms of human experience; he also uses homosexual love to explore the nature of heterosexual love. It is for him at once a more etherealized and transcendent love and also a love more filled with passion, guilt, and danger. In this respect, homosexual love is a surrogate for heterosexual love in the extreme. Maturin's fear of the body and of sexuality is, as it were, legitimized by locating the fear within a taboo topic. The homosexual love he depicts is a love that is always potential and never fulfilled, one more fraught with peril than the love between man and woman, but also one in which both internal and external pressures provide a check to prevent a complete commitment.

This is an interesting inquiry into a possible subtext, but it does not explain why Maturin chooses here to deal with homosexual love rather than unfulfilled heterosexual love (like that of Eva in Women) or with some other taboo such as adultery (which he dealt with in Bertram, creating a public furore) or incest (a motif of other Gothic writers). It seems more honest to take it as a vivid expression of single-sex attraction, which most people have felt, even if they have not acted upon, at some time in their lives. The fact that Endymion is later revealed as a woman does not cancel out our initial experience of the scene, our original seduction, when we are drawn into the scene by Maturin's passionate writing. Like the ending of many Gothic novels, the later explanation does serve to put the traditional reader at ease, besides protecting the author from public criticism.

This is not to suggest that Maturin is deliberately promoting homosexuality. But rather than talking (as Robert Lougy does) of 'Maturin's fear of the body and of sexuality', I would suggest as a more positive approach, that he was willing to entertain or explore a wide range of human
possibilities in his fiction. As we have seen, he was less bound than
many of his contemporaries by stereotypes of male and female. Audre Lorde,
a writer of our own time, remarked recently in a lecture on 'The Erotic
as Power': "The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a
deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our un-
expressed or unrecognized feeling".70 She goes on to describe this resource
in homosexual terms: "There is, for me, no difference between writing a
good poem and moving into the sunlight against the body of a woman I love".71
While Lorde's attitude is free of guilt, Maturin's interest in the subject
was ambivalent - in keeping with his period and his religious beliefs - and
presumably confined to fiction. Within those limits, however, he explores
it with a great deal of vitality.

* * * * * *

An aesthetic theory of the Horrid and the Terrible
had gradually developed in the course of the
eighteenth century, but why in the most polite and
effeminate of centuries, in the century of bergeries
and fêtes galantes and idyllic conversation pieces,
the century of Watteau and Boucher and Zoffany, should
people have begun to feel the horrible fascination
of dark forests and lugubrious caverns, and cemeteries
and thunderstorms? The answer is: just because
of its feminine character. In no other century was
woman such a dominating figure.

Mario Praz, Introductory Essay,
Three Gothic Novels,

Gothic literature can be seen as an exploration of certain dark, emo-
tional, and private areas of consciousness, previously ignored or repressed.
The imagery used by many Gothic writers tended to associate these areas of
experience with 'feminine' (or 'effeminate') qualities, as Mario Praz
suggests. (Robert Graves's The White Goddess provides examples of this
association from other periods of literature also.72) Granted, it would be
a mistake to limit the discussion of Gothic literature to sexuality or sex roles, but this is certainly a strong theme, as we have seen in Maturin's writing. It is one reason for relating Gothic literature to today's feminist literature, a process of compare-and-contrast that will allow us to see it in a new light.

In a recent study of the fantastic in literature, Dr Jackson writes:

*The fantastic traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'. The movement from the first to the second of these functions, from expression as manifestation to expression as expulsion, is one of the recurrent features of fantastic narrative, as it tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence. Telling implies using the language of the dominant order and so accepting its norms, re-covering its dark areas. Since this excursion into disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy is a telling index of the limits of that order. Its introduction of the 'unreal' is set against the category of the 'real' - a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference.*

We may easily substitute the word 'feminist' for 'fantastic': 'The feminist traces the unsaid and the unseen' - the female side of experience that has been 'silenced' and 'made invisible'. Since 'Telling implies using the language of the dominant order and so accepting its norms', we must, as Adrienne Rich argues, develop new procedures of language to express that which is 'dark' or unconscious. "In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression". Jackson's definition of the fantastic also implies that there is a tension between 'order', 'language' and 'base' on the one hand, and what is to be released on the other hand. Such tension is common to Gothic and certain kinds of feminist literature.

Feminism, like the Gothic, is (directly or by implication) a critique of a particular definition of reality in favour of something more open and expansive. To talk in this way about the Gothic may help us to rediscover its energy of rebellion, which is something that recent criticism of the
Gothic has sought to do. We must be cautious in using the term 'feminine' since this category has changed considerably in the course of history. Still, the basic processes - the assertion of certain 'masculine' qualities as dominant, the attempt to re-assert 'feminine' qualities, and the ambivalent presentation of both in some areas of popular culture - can be observed today, as well as in Maturin's time.

Seen in their historical context, in terms of cultural politics, Maturin's sermons defended 'feminine' forms of spirituality, in a shift of emphases away from the vigorous clarities of mind associated with what we have come to call the Age of Reason. In his Whitsunday Sermon, Maturin stressed the limitations of "truths that ... play around in the head, but never touch the heart". While not denouncing the importance of the intellect, Maturin suggested that it was a useless tool unless it was combined with emotion, spirit and faith, and he believed that women had a special aptitude for these qualities.

It seems no coincidence that one of the dominant motifs of Gothic literature is the female-as-victim, often trapped in a labyrinthine prison. The sophistication of Maturin's writing lies in his development of this motif to suggest that the female (or 'feminine' quality in all of us) can be trapped just as frighteningly in the drawing rooms of high society or in the institutions of church and state as in a literal dungeon. It is from the conflict between these opposites - an authoritarian system and the people or kinds of feeling that it tries to suppress - that much Gothic literature, and much feminist literature, derive their intense energy. Just as Gothic writers turned to a highly stylised genre, a literature not of realism but of super-reality, many feminist writers, such as Doris Lessing, Angela Carter, Ursula le Guin, Carolyn Cherryh, and Suzy Charnas, have been drawn to science-fiction or fantasy. Implied in this move is an awareness that 'realism' is based on a limited conception of 'reality', linked in
many ways with the present state of society. In contrast, a literature which projects its concerns out into a super-real or future existence, can explore a larger conception of human potential, looking at life from new angles, and expressing aspects of human experience that might otherwise be considered too shocking or absurd.

A comparison between Gothic and feminist writing also reveals some common themes and images. For example, one of the strongest themes in recent feminist literature is revenge, particularly that of the victim against the victimiser. Maturin anticipated this motif by structuring some of his plots around the justified revenge of a woman character. For example, Lady Montclare (in The Milesian Chief) takes revenge against Lord Montclare after he has imprisoned her for failing to produce a male heir; Zaira's mother (in Women) takes revenge on her husband by attempting to convert her offspring to Catholicism; and Marie de Mortemar (in The Albigenses) avenges not only women but the heretic faith against the Catholics. In his sermons Maturin remarked:

Women avenge themselves on man - if we make them slaves, we are slaves ourselves - we may bind them with chains, but the 'iron enters into our own souls' - if we bruise their heads, they bruise us, and mortally too.

By giving Marie the power to act out her revenge, Maturin answers her complaint to the Lord of Courtenaye in Book I: "Alas! That vengeance should rest in men's hands, and only in women's hearts".

Feminist literature has placed revenge firmly in the hands of women. Where D.W. Griffith summed up the stereotyped woman's role in his image of 'the hand that rocks the cradle' in his film Intolerance, Rita Mae Brown has transformed the image by giving one of her books the ominous title, The Hand that Cradles the Rock. This subversion of imagery implies the subversion of an entire culture, in terms of its gender role stereotypes.
Closer to Maturin's territory, Sandi Hall begins her feminist science-fiction work, *The Godmothers*, in the midst of heavy religious repression, describing the unfair trial of a young woman accused of being a witch. Before her execution, her mother asks her to pledge revenge on behalf of her victimised sisters:

"And one other thing there is to remember, Cassie", said Selina, her voice deepening, "When you get to the other side, beseech a day of reckoning, for yourself and all the others." 81

Feminist writers using the thriller as well as the science-fiction genre have relished the thought of revenge against the university system, that modern 'church' with its own hierarchy of priests. Blood flows in the hallowed halls in Suzy Charnas' *The Vampire Tapestry*, 82 and in Valerie Miner's, *Murder in the English Department*, 83 in which a woman student murders a sexist professor when he tries to rape her. Dr Jackson has remarked:

It is surely no coincidence that so many writers and theorists of fantasy as a countercultural form are women - Julia Kristeva, Irène Bessière, Hélène Cixous, Angela Carter. Non-realist narrative forms are increasingly important in feminist writing: no breakthrough of cultural structure seems possible until linear narrative (realism, illusionism, transparent representation) is broken or dissolved. 84

Derived from a shared political context, their work may have some effect upon that political context: "In the end this may lead to real social transformation." 85 Adrienne Rich expresses a similar notion in her essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision': "Revision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival". 86

Gothic imagery of darkness, of that which is mysterious and concealed, has many equivalents in feminist literature. Virginia Woolf, writing of her mother, speaks of 'the dark core'. 87 Adrienne Rich observes:
The void ... is a part of every woman ... We begin out of the Void, out of darkness and emptiness. It is part of the cycle understood by the old pagan religions, that materialism denies. Out of death, rebirth; out of nothing, something ... The Void is the creatrix, the matrix.

In Chapter One I quoted some remarks which suggested that the essence of Gothic was the human being's attempt to regain consciousness of the "dark realm inside himself". Jean-Paul linked this to the creative act of writing in which poetry is "a song risen from the abyss" and the poet "tries deliberately and in complete lucidity to induce the mysterious voices to rise". Many similar images could be collected from both Gothic and feminist texts. This is not to forget that Gothic novels, even sophisticated examples such as those of Maturin, were still limited in many respects by what we would today call sexist stereotyping.
NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE


12. Ibid, p.27.


15. Ibid, p.188.


32. Ibid, I, p.84.
35. Ibid, II, p.195 (see also IV, p.192).
36. Ibid, IV, p.197.
37. Ibid, IV, p.199.
40. Ibid, pp.184-5.
41. See Idman, op.cit., p.10.
44. C.R. Maturin, 1819 Sermons, op.cit., p.188.
47. Ibid, I, pp.87-117.
52. Ibid, I, p.218.
53. Ibid, I, p.221.
64. Ibid, I, p.169.
68. Ibid, I, p.172.
71. Ibid, p.7.

75. C.R. Maturin, 1819 Sermons, op.cit., 'Whitsunday Sermon', p.112.


77. See, for example, Maturin's 'Sermon on the Necessity of Female Education', 1819 Sermons, op.cit.

78. C.R. Maturin, 'Sermon on the Necessity of Female Education', 1819 Sermons, op.cit., p.182.


84. R. Jackson, op.cit., p.186.

85. Ibid, p.10.

86. Adrienne Rich, op.cit., p.35.


"All Biography, I believe, should begin with a moral sentence. I am afraid the moral sentence will come in of itself at the conclusion of mine; besides to confess a truth ... I know not a single moral maxim of which my life would be an exemplification, except by the rule of contraries; so, as the clown says in Barbarossa, 'For want of Prologue, I will tell you my story.'"

We have considered Maturin’s theme of the pressures and distortions created by rigid social categories. As an author of romances, Maturin could explore an extraordinary range of behaviour - the mass psychology of orthodoxy, and all the possible forms of heresy and individual alienation. There was, as we have seen, a school of critical opinion that wanted the romance to be kept within strict limits, but Maturin - who recognised that sort of orthodoxy for what it was - went on to produce a very wide-ranging body of work. It is not easy to sum up such a diverse range of fiction, as we can see from Maturin’s own difficulties in bringing some of his novels to a 'conclusion' or to 'a moral sentence', but we can note the diversity itself as a key characteristic. It reflects Maturin’s curiosity to explore, to follow possibilities to their limits. The world of human behaviour is so labyrinthine that even at the limits, at the extremes, there is uncertainty. To quote Armida Montclare in The Milesian Chief:

... the purer human felicity appears the more exquisite its precariousness, the greater its danger: is it a proof of the vengeance or the mercy of heaven that our happiness should be thus woven with misery, that the alternate shades can scarce be distinguished? I know not whether I most love or fear; yet sometimes so mingled are my emotions, that the fear is delightful, and the love a torment.
This is one of Maturin's 'rules of contraries' that 'alternate shades can scarce be distinguished'. Love is mixed with fear, extreme piety with wild superstition, male with female, and so on. He is enormously curious about this complex landscape of light and shade, and so it is not surprising that he should return so often to the Gothic genre with its heightened sense of warring opposites, its strange reversals, its mood of tension and imbalance. With "all his faults", Maturin was (as Edith Birkhead has proclaimed) "the greatest as well as the last of the Goths".  

And what of the man himself and his life - what "maxim" do they exemplify? They create a similar impression of unusual complexity. "I am quite sure", remarked his contemporary biographer, "that many of his opinions will appear strangely contradictory of the character of mind to be inferred from his works". Maturin once speculated that his greatest talent as writer lay in "darkening the gloomy, and deepening the sad", and it is this kind of push to extremes (particularly extremes of darkness) that he is usually remembered for. Yet it is striking to discover how cool and moderate were his own working habits as a writer:

I compose on a long walk; but then the day must be neither too hot nor too cold: it must be reduced to that medium from which you feel no inconvenience one way or the other ... then ... my mind becomes lighted by sunshine, and I arrange my plan perfectly to my own satisfaction.

From 'sunshine' - from a clean, well-lighted place - the man with a clear faith can look out over the fallen world, the landscape of human possibility, and explore its darkest nooks and crannies with curiosity and confidence. Not that Maturin's temperament was always "lighted by sunshine". He was spirited and flamboyant in company, and his delight in dancing shows him to have been a physical person; but he was also drawn to periods of isolation and melancholy. He suffered for much of his life from poverty, managing his small income with care; yet in the one period of his life
when he had money - following the brilliant success of Bertram - he lived a hectic social life that soon exhausted his funds and gave him a reputation for extravagance.7

He performed his role as clergyman very conscientiously, but his complex personality was never confined to it - an attitude to a social role that is in keeping with his novels. A friend described his personal appearance in this way:

Never shall I forget Maturin's strange appearance amongst these romantic dells. He was dressed in a crazy and affectedly shabby suit of black, that had waxed into a "brilliant polish" by over zeal in the service of its master; he wore no cravat, for the heat obliged him to throw it off, and his delicate neck rising gracefully from his thrice-crested collar gave him an appearance of great singularity. His raven hair, which he generally wore long, fell down luxuriantly without a breath to agitate it; and his head was crowned with a hat which I could sketch with a pencil, but not with a pen. His gait and manner were in perfect keeping; but his peculiarities excited no surprise in me, for I was accustomed to them. 8

Anthony Clyne, writing a hundred years after his death, noted the "effeminate" (or what today we might call the 'camp') aspects of his personal appearance and style:

His handsome face (of which the well-known drawing by Brocas is doubtless a fair likeness); and his graceful person, his delicate, femininely tender idealism, probably reconciled the ladies of the fashionable parish of St Peter's, Dublin, if not the men, to such eccentricities as his sticking a wafer on his forehead to indicate that he was in the throes of inspiration and not to be disturbed, or his swathing of one leg and foot in bandages that by contrast the exquisite contours of the other might evoke the admiration of passers-by. 9

To encompass Maturin's personality we need to bring together the popular preacher, the devout Christian, the party-goer, the Gothic novelist, and all his many other activities. The complexity does not, however, suggest a kind of schizophrenia, but a kind of freedom. Contemporary critics had difficulty in reconciling these aspects because of their more rigid
sense of social categories and narrower conception of what literature should accommodate. The same habits of mind can be seen in criticisms of Gothic literature that stress its lack of unity, or consistency, that seem unaware that there are other values also to be considered. These issues have both a personal and literary dimension— for the concern with 'order' (for example) can become an excessive demand in both areas, reducing human possibility to a particular mould.

In keeping with Maturin's diversity, his work has been admired by a great variety of writers. Balzac considered Maturin's work "not less powerful than that of Goethe" and placed him among "the greatest geniuses of Europe". Victor Hugo heads several chapters of his *Han d'Islande* (1823) with passages quoted from Maturin's *Bertram*. Gustave Planche compared Maturin's work favourably with that of Schiller, and predicted a place for Melmoth and *Bertram* alongside Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Manfred*. Maturin's writing inspired a scene in Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*. Madame Tastu based a poem on a passage of *The Albigenses*, and, as we have already seen, the women characters in Maturin's writings made a profound impression on Christina Rossetti. Perhaps the crowning glory for Maturin's work was for reference to it to appear in Pushkin's great poem *Eugene Onegin*.


There are too many examples to explore in detail, but we may mention the important influence of Melmoth on Oscar Wilde, who took up the name, 'Sebastian Melmoth' in rebellion against the authorities after being imprisoned for homosexuality. Balzac was so interested in Maturin's work that
he published *Melmoth Reconcilié à l'Église* in 1835, and later incorporated it into his *Comédie Humaine* while Baudelaire set out to translate *Melmoth* into French.

Although many great writers have acknowledged Maturin's work there has often been a counter-theme running through their praise, which may be summarised in Amédée Pichot's statement: "Si Maturin n'eût été le plus extravagant d'auteurs, il serait le plus grand génie de la littérature anglaise". Gustave Planche has countered this neatly with his remark: "La Norvège serait aussi chaude que la Congo, si elle n'était située un peu plus au Nord".

The present thesis has set out to map Maturin's literary geography (or at least a few corners of that vast territory) without any impatient attempt to push it north. Maturin's extravagance is his genius. In the same way that certain kinds of mountain landscape held little aesthetic appeal until Romantic artists taught people to look at them with a new perspective, so the strange forms of Maturin's landscape (physical, psychological, and stylistic) needed to be viewed with a responsive eye. Paradoxically, it was a type of literature associated with fantasy that was illuminating reality in this new way. Reason, which had set out originally to discover reality and to expose social corruption, had declined into another orthodoxy, become another straitjacket. These are not merely historical issues, because today we are still learning to map the new territory to which Maturin and other adventurous writers and artists of his time were intuitively drawn.
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13. Ibid, p.49.
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(ii) Drama:


(iii) Sermons:


(iv) Reviews:


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(v) Correspondence:

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[Arranged in alphabetical order according to periodical names, and chronological order under periodical title.]

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