SELF-DESTRUCTION:
THE MARQUIS DE SADE'S <u>LES CENT VINGT JOURNÉES DE SODOME</u>
AND THE DESTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN ENGLISH GOTHIC FICTION

by

David Annandale

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the
Department of English

Winnipeg, Manitoba
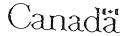(c) David Annandale, 1992

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to study the ways in which
problems of identity (in terms of sexuality and death),
concerns which are central to the Gothic genre, are defined
by the Marquis de Sade's <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>,
and subsequently treated in English Gothic novels of the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sade's work, which
remained unpublished until the twentieth century, cannot be
viewed as a direct source for, or influence on, the English
tradition. However, this extraordinary text, which gives
full blown expression to Gothic anxieties, may be used as a
paradigm or model for the reading of the more circumspect
treatment of these anxieties in a British fiction published
for a general audience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the representation of the destruction of identity as the defining feature of the Gothic genre. This fear forms the core of all the other terrors that the Gothic unleashes on the reader. This thesis argues that the instability of personal identity in the Gothic is expressed largely in terms of sexual and murderous threats directed against the self. Gothic fiction posits an intimate connection, if not an identification, between sex and death, frequently playing one off against the other. A form of written expression whose avowed purpose is to frighten and titillate the reader seizes upon these two pressure points and, by blurring the dividing line between them, heightens the anxiety of the reader.

The Marquis de Sade produced what is probably the clearest and most extreme depiction of this complex of fears, and his work is therefore central in establishing the identification of sex and death in the Gothic. The primary text for this thesis is <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>, a work that pushes the Gothic conventions (as defined in the eighteenth century) to an ultimate extreme, making explicit what other books merely suggest. Its portrayal of sexuality and death will be the yardstick against which the more circumspect works composed and published in England will be

measured. <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> cannot be seen as a direct influence on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English Gothics since it was lost in the storming of the Bastille and did not resurface until the twentieth century. However, this novel's status as an "aural" text (as defined by Howard Felperin), makes it central to the discourse of sex and power in the eighteenth century, and invites us to compare it with other novels.

In this study, my critical approach will be essentially comparative, but with a deconstructive slant, as I will be considering <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> as the unwritten text that the English Gothics both fear and desire to be. I will also be examining recent feminist re-evaluations of the Gothic, since this genre, by virtue of being the product of a patriarchal society, often specifically directs the fear of death and sexuality toward a fear and hatred of the feminine. The fear of losing one's own identity leads to the destruction of another's.

Chapter 1

Sade and the Gothic

Virtually every lengthy study of the Gothic that one comes across wrestles at some point with the problem of defining the genre. Almost inevitable corollaries are the questions of what the genre's effects are, and why we, as readers, willingly subject ourselves to what are, on the face of it, extremely unpleasant sensations. What I propose to do in this thesis is to approach the Gothic with the initial premise that the genre is essentially defined by its effects. Ellen Moers writes that the Gothic has "one definite auctorial intent: to scare. Not, that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror, . . . but to get to the body itself . . . , quickly arousing and allaying the physiological reactions to fear" (Moers, 90). I believe that if we look at the tactics used by Gothic novels to frighten the reader, we will find that they almost invariably play on the complex emotions raised by the fusion of sexuality and death. Gothic fiction realizes that there are intimate ties between Eros and Thanatos, that "a connection has been made between death and sex, the one has become as fascinating and obsessive as the other. These are the signs of a fundamental anxiety that does not yet have a name" (Ariès, 406). This fundamental

anxiety, I hope to show, is in fact the fear of the loss of the self, and one of the most useful guides through this terrain of fears is Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade.

I believe that Sade is not only useful but central to a consideration of the fear of sex and death because his work demonstrates not only his clear grasp of the concept, but it also acts as a paradigmatic representation of this complex of fears. Rosemary Jackson writes that "Sade's writing can be seen as an extreme point, towards which other modern fantasies move and against which they can be located" (Jackson, 76). This is precisely what I intend to examine. Sade will be, in a sense, a yardstick against which to compare two major English Gothic writers from each of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Of Sade's books, the most amenable to the approach outlined by Jackson is, I believe, Les cent vingt journées de Sodome. This work is "thematically . . . the ultimate, and arguably the most honest, Gothic novel. Whereas most Gothic novels preserve some reticence about the fates [with] which the victims . . . were threatened, de Sade's novel not only makes them explicit but celebrates them" (Campbell, 368). As an extreme or ultimate Gothic novel, Les cent vingt journées de Sodome indicates not only how far it is possible for the genre to go, but clearly displays the very elements that the more sedate Gothics gesture towards, yet

do not explicitly articulate, however vital these elements
may be.

Les cent vingt journées de Sodome could thus be
considered as a rather unique case of the deconstructive
notion of the "aural" text. Howard Felperin is applying
this idea to a poem of Robert Frost's when he writes:

> [There] are other poems that this poem
>
> writes and erases in a single moment,
>
> writes and erases in a moment of fear
>
> and desire: fear of being what they
>
> are, and desire to be what they are.
>
> These other, alternative poems exist
>
> within earshot of the written poem,
>
> within its aura so to speak, and are
>
> heard simultaneously within and through
>
> it.   (Felperin, 128)

I believe that this is very much the relationship that
exists between Les cent vingt journées de Sodome and other
Gothic novels. As we shall shortly see, the writing and
publication history of Sade's book render it impossible for
Les cent vingt journées de Sodome to be considered as a
source for other Gothic novels in any normal sense of the
term. And this is precisely what makes the idea outlined by
Felperin so important. In fact, Felperin does not mean to
imply that there might actually exist texts that fulfil the
conditions of fear and desire of other texts. I believe,

however, that the circumstances surrounding the composition and publication of <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> make it a special case.

In one of the wonderful coincidences that pepper literary history, the conditions surrounding the creation of <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> appear to belong to a full-blown Gothic novel themselves. In 1785, Sade wrote as much as he ever completed of <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> in minuscule handwriting on both sides of a scroll 12 centimetres wide by 12.10 metres long. Sade produced such an an unusual manuscript because he was imprisoned in the fortress-prison of the Bastille (a locale that figures prominently in turn-of-the-century French Gothic). Sade scribbling his clandestine manuscript in his cell recalls Charles Robert Maturin's Monçada and Adonijah, similarly confined and transcribing manuscripts of horror in <u>Melmoth the Wanderer</u>. Though his three-year prison sentence had expired in 1781, Sade would not be free until the Revolution released him nine years later. Until that time, Mme de Montreuil (his mother-in-law), operating in the honourable tradition of such Gothic villainesses as Ann Radcliffe's Marchesa di Vivaldi (from <u>The Italian</u>), kept Sade in prison for the honour of the family by means of a *lettre de cachet* from the king. And though Sade was released in 1790, it was not from the Bastille that he was freed, but from the Asylum of Charenton, where he had been transferred after exhorting

the crowds outside the Bastille to riot. His precious
manuscript disappeared after the storming of the prison.
Kept by the Villeneuve-Trans family throughout the
nineteenth century, the book would not be published until
1904, and then only in a hopelessly garbled German
translation. It would receive its first accurate printing
only in 1931 (Le Brun, 13).

Thus, for the period under consideration (1794 to
1897), Les cent vingt journées de Sodome for all practical
purposes did not exist. The text that The Mysteries of
Udolpho, The Monk, Dracula, and Carmilla all fear and desire
to be was, at the time that they were written and first
published, unreachable and irrecoverable. But now it has
been found. Therefore, we have the unique opportunity of
seeing the reification of the text that hovers within the
"aura" of other texts. Les cent vingt journées de Sodome is
as close as it is possible for a text to be to the physical
incarnation of that which is simultaneously written and
erased by other texts. The English Gothics, all intended
for public consumption, are restrained by this very
consideration. Matthew Lewis, for instance, was forced to
bowdlerize later editions of The Monk. Sade, concealing his
manuscript from the eyes of his jailers, is under no such
constraint, and his book shouts what the others barely hint
at.   This is not to accuse the mainstream Gothicists of
cowardice. Most would have been as horrified by Sade's work

as was the society that imprisoned him for those works that he did publish. And the fact that <u>Justine</u> and <u>Juliette</u> helped send Sade to Charenton for the rest of his life more than demonstrates the dangers of writing that, unrestrained, goes too far beyond that which society is willing to tolerate.

Sade himself seems to recognize that there are drives within the genre that it refuses to acknowledge fully. Here, some fifteen years after having written <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>, Sade identifies what he sees as the points where Radcliffe, Lewis and their contemporaries fall short of their potential:

> [I]ci nécessairement de deux choses
> l'une, ou il faut développer le
> sortilège, et dès-lors vous n'intéressez
> plus, ou il ne faut jamais lever le
> rideau, et vous voilà dans la plus
> affreuse invraisemblance. Qu'il
> paraisse dans ce genre un ouvrage assez
> bon, pour atteindre le but sans se
> briser contre l'un ou l'autre de ces
> écueils, loin de lui reprocher ses
> moyens, nous l'offrirons alors comme un
> modèle.   (Sade 1967, 33)[1]

---

[1]"Here, there are perforce two possibilities: either one resorts increasingly to wizardry - in which case the reader's interest soon flags - or one maintains a veil of secrecy,

Whether or not Sade was thinking of his own work as a possible model, _Les cent vingt journées de Sodome_ is just such a model. Several physical (and biological) impossibilities aside, this novel is devoid of wizardry.[2] As for the "rideau" (a slightly more open term than "veil of secrecy," and one by which I would also understand the limits of acceptable representations), Sade does not so much lift it as rend it to shreds. With Sade, there are no taboos (as conventional society understands them) and no limits. In stark contrast to the hesitant flirting with taboos of the public Gothic novels, everything is described.

So the mere explicitness of _Les cent vingt journées de Sodome_ already suggests this book as the model feared and desired by the other Gothics. There are two other factors which I believe support this view: 1) Sade recognizes and points out the ambiguous effect that the fused portrayals of sexuality and death have on the reader; and 2) _Les cent vingt journées de Sodome_ comprehensively catalogues Erotic

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which leads to a frightful lack of verisimilitude. Should this school of fiction produce a work excellent enough to attain its goal without foundering upon one or the other of these two reefs, then we, far from denigrating its methods, will be pleased to offer it as a model."   (Sade 1987, 108-109)

[2]The fantastic is, of course, a rather important, though not absolutely essential, component of the Gothic genre. I would therefore not agree with Sade's disparagement of the marvellous. What is important here is that Sade wrote what was a model for the genre both within the confines of the field as he later understood them, and as far as the fears and desires of the genre are concerned.

and Thanatic fears, enumerating the options open to the Gothic for the portrayal of these fears.

The relationship of fear and desire that exists between the more mainstream Gothics and Sade's book seems to me to be mirrored in the relationship that the Gothic has with its readers. For whatever reasons, we readers, as I mentioned at the outset, deliberately seek out and read Gothic novels (or their twentieth-century descendants, the horror novels) knowing full well that these books intend to frighten us. We *desire* this fear. Now these novels are clearly intended as entertainment. Since entertainment is meant to give pleasure, it is reasonable to deduce that the fear generated by these books ("art-horror" as Noël Carroll calls it) must have some sort of pleasurable component, or we would not seek this sensation.[3] Given that we are, after all, dealing with texts in which portrayals of sexuality, subtle or otherwise, play an important part, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the reader is titillated as well as frightened. Leslie Fiedler argues that this pleasure for the reader is created by a form of substitution:

> The primary meaning of the gothic
> romance, then, lies in its substitution

---

[3]Not all forms of fear contain such an element of pleasure. The fear generated by an imminent final exam, for instance, is a reaction to a situation no more life-threatening than that of reading a book or watching a film. And yet most people do not find this fear desirable, and do not take final exams for the purpose of experiencing the fear the exam causes.

> of terror for love as a control theme of
>
> fiction. The titillation of sex denied,
>
> it offers its reader a vicarious
>
> participation in a flirtation with death
>
> - approach and retreat, approach and
>
> retreat, the fatal orgasm eternally
>
> mounting and eternally checked.
>
> (Fiedler, 134)

Fiedler's notion of the pattern of movement of the action in
the Gothic is interesting, but there are several problems
with his position. For one thing, his idea that in the
Gothic "the titillation of sex is denied" is rather curious.
It is difficult, for instance, to take the voyeuristic scene
in <u>The Monk</u>, where Ambrosio spies on the naked Antonia by
means of a magic mirror, and to separate it from all concept
of sexual titillation. I would argue that on the contrary
titillation is this scene's main reason for being. Even
more problematic is the entire notion of substitution.

The problem with Fiedler's substitution is not
necessarily the idea that terror has replaced love, but his
implication that the pleasure the reader receives from the
Gothic is somehow indirect or at one remove. Fiedler
appears to be saying that we seek one form of titillation in
reading, and when it is denied, we look for similar patterns
in what has replaced sex and, in effect, pretend that the
text is doing something that it is not. This seems to me to

be a rather complicated manner of avoiding the possibility

that terror is titillating in and of itself, and does not

need to act as a substitute. The Gothic believes that if we

desire sex and fear death, we also fear sex and desire

death. While Fiedler's argument in a sense provides a

"respectable" rationale for the enjoyment of Gothic fiction,

Sade opts for no such evasions.

Sade knows that his fiction is a double-edged sword,

exploring both our thanato-erotic fears and these same fears

as desires, and he informs the reader of both his knowledge

and intent. Towards the end of the introductory section of

Les cent vingt journées de Sodome, having introduced all of

his characters, Sade discourses on the nature of the book.

He begins by providing a threat and a warning: "C'est

maintenant, ami lecteur, qu'il faut disposer ton coeur et

ton esprit au récit le plus impur qui ait jamais été fait

depuis que le monde existe" (Sade 1991, 78).[4] The tone of

this language is menacing. Sade warns his readers to brace

themselves: an assault is underway. He then goes on to

indicate the nature of the attack: "ces jouissances

[honnêtes ou prescrites par la nature] seront expressément

exclues de ce recueil et . . . lorsque tu les rencontreras

par aventure, ce ne sera jamais qu'autant qu'elles seront

accompagnées de quelque crime ou colorées de quelque

---

[4]"And now friend reader, you must prepare your heart and
your mind for the most impure tale that has ever been told
since our world began" (Sade 1987, 253).

infamie" (79).[5] Sade tells the reader that the attack will

consist of twisted sexuality, and the presence of "crime"

and "infamie" mean that violent death cannot be far behind.

This last is all the more obvious since the perversions or

"passions" to be catalogued are divided into the simple, the

complex, the criminal and the murderous ("meurtrières").

The victims in the novel are furthermore constantly under

the threat of death, and this threat is finally carried out

as the book concludes.

With barely a transition, however, Sade's menaces

become promises: "Sans doute, beaucoup de tous les écarts

que tu vas voir peints te déplairont, on le sait, mais il

s'en trouvera quelques-uns qui t'échaufferont au point de te

coûter du foutre" (79).[6] The reader, then, is expected to

find at least some of the atrocities extremely titillating.

Here Sade distinguishes not between passions, but between

readers. It is not the variable degree of murder and

violence contained in each passion that determines our level

of enjoyment, but rather our own proclivities.

But Sade is not necessarily separating the arousing

---

[5]"[A]ll these modes of taking pleasure [sanctioned by good manners or enjoined by Nature] will be expressly excluded from this anthology, or that whenever peradventure you do indeed encounter them here, they will always be accompanied by some crime or colored by some infamy" (Sade 1987, 254).

[6]"Many of the extravagances you are about to see illustrated will doubtless displease you, yes, I am well aware of it, but there are amongst them a few which will warm you to the point of costing you some fuck" (Sade 1987, 254).

from the frightful. That which inflames us and that which

horrifies us (what we both fear and desire) might be one and

the same. Horror itself can be sexual:

> There is latent eroticism in the
> entire tradition of the "novel of
> terror," which began in late eighteenth-
> century Gothicism and became the modern
> horror film. Freud says "the sexually
> exciting influence of some painful
> affects, such as fear, shuddering, and
> horror, . . . explains why so many seek
> opportunities to experience such
> sensations" in books or the theater.
> The thrill of terror is passive,
> masochistic, and implicitly feminine
> . . . . Men who cultivate the novel or
> film of terror seek sex-crossing
> sensations.   (Paglia, 267)

Clearly, Sade views the eroticism in his novel of terror as

more blatant than latent. As for the nature of this

eroticism, Paglia's assertion that it is "implicitly

feminine" strikes me as dangerously essentialist, while the

"sex-crossing" notion by-passes the entire question of

misogyny which plays an important (though not necessarily

inherent) role in the genre.[7] However, Paglia's notions

are still useful if we consider the condition of being

terrorized and victimized, rather than terror itself, as

being a culturally determined fact of the feminine

condition. In this light, the "sex-crossing" becomes quite

important, and we will return to this idea in the next

chapter.

Sade takes a quite opposite position from Paglia's on

the question of the Gothic's erotic appeal. By using such

expressions as "ami lecteur" (the masculine form) and

"coûter du foutre," Sade explicitly designates his reader as

male. And with a very few exceptions, all of the fantasies

enacted in Les cent vingt journées de Sodome have male

instigators. Not one of the six hundred "passions" is

attributed to a woman. Therefore, the fears and desires

that Sade addresses and manipulates are male fears and

desires. His exploration of sex-crossing should therefore

shed some interesting light on Paglia's comments, and on the

genre in general.

Having promised to arouse as well as shock the reader,

Sade then makes his claim to comprehensiveness: "Si nous

n'avions pas tout dit, tout analysé, comment voudrais-tu que

---

[7]Paglia also states that "the vast audience of the Gothic
novel was and is female" (267). While this might be true of
the Gothic in its most purely conventional sense, with
Radcliffe as the epitome and model of the genre, Paglia
conflates the old-style Gothic with its modern descendants.
And men easily constitute the majority of horror film makers
and watchers.

nous eussions pu deviner ce qui te convient?" (Sade 1991, 79).[8] It is doubtful that a completely exhaustive taxonomy of human perversions is possible, and I will not pretend that Sade's six hundred variations cover every possibility, but it is interesting that early attempts to view Les cent vingt journées de Sodome as something more than the most apocalyptic of all pornographic works focused on its similarities to such non-fictional taxonomies as Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia sexualis. It would appear then that some recognition of Sade's cataloguing achievement is due. It would be wrong, however, to place too much emphasis on this aspect, because we then run the risk of denying Sade his standing as a fiction writer. In any event, the mere fact that Sade explicitly states that he is attempting an exhaustive list is important, particularly as it occurs within the confines of the Gothic genre.

Sade's taxonomy would not be so central to the genre if Les cent vingt journées de Sodome were not a Gothic novel. But with its inaccessible castle, superhuman villains, persecuted and beautiful innocents, and concentric circles of narrative, Sade's novel situates itself quite comfortably

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[8]"[I]f we have not said everything, analyzed everything, tax us not with partiality, for you cannot expect us to have guessed what suits you best" (Sade 1987, 254).

This is a curiously convoluted, and I feel needlessly ambiguous, translation of a straightforward sentence in the original text. A slightly more preferable reading might have been "If we had not said everything, analyzed everything, how could you expect us to have guessed what suits you best?"

within the genre. Sade is especially central to the Gothic
if we consider the emergence of the genre in terms of the
sexual and social upheavals of the Revolutionary period:

> Sadism is not a name finally given to a
> practice as old as Eros; it is a massive
> cultural fact which appeared precisely
> at the end of the eighteenth century,
> and which constitutes one of the
> greatest conversions of Western
> imagination: unreason transformed into
> delirium of the heart, madness of
> desire, the insane dialogue of love and
> death in the limitless presumption of
> appetite . . . It is no accident,
> either, that all the fantastic
> literature of madness and horror, which
> is contemporary with Sade's oeuvre,
> takes place, preferentially, in the
> strongholds of confinement.
>
> (Foucault 1988, 210)

Thus, whether the conventions of setting and plot generate
the Gothic's concerns with sexuality and death, or whether
it is the other way around, the two are virtually
inseparable. Sade, himself imprisoned, is therefore the
Gothic writer who is the most sensitive to the force of
these conventions, and his fiction takes them to the

furthest degree. It would be hard to find, for instance, a Gothic castle more utterly inaccessible than the Castle of Silling. Therefore, it is no accident either that the "fantastic literature of madness and horror" is contemporary with Sade's work because both bodies of work are cut of the same cloth, products of the social conditions of the turn of the century. Sade's book, produced under the greatest pressure, is simply one of the purest of all Gothics.

If we can then view Sade as being in this central position within the Gothic, his catalogue of horrors that is Les cent vingt journées de Sodome becomes all the more important. By attempting to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of horrors from inside a genre, Sade is essentially outlining a list of options available to the Gothic for the manipulation of the fears of sex and death. Though the possibilities are many and varied, I believe that they all share a common basis. I agree with William Patrick Day when he writes: "Essential, then, to its effect is a novel's capacity to reveal the unity of fear and desire, which destroys the self in the Gothic world, as pleasure for the reader" (Day, 63). The fears and desires surrounding death and sexuality are concentrated by the Gothic into the loss of identity and the anxieties and pleasures that it generates. And while the destruction of the self is undoubtedly a fear common to both genders, Sade and the other Gothicists suggest that the male fear specifically

takes on violent forms.

To illustrate this point, I would like to look at Klaus Theweleit's analysis of tales (and reports) which contain scenes of murder strikingly similar to some of those in Sade's work. His comments are relevant as well to the less graphic crimes in the more sedate Gothics:

It's as if two male compulsions were tearing at the women with equal strength. One is trying to push them away, to keep them at arm's length (defense); the other wants to penetrate them, to have them very near. Both compulsions seem to find satisfaction in the act of killing, where the man pushes the woman far away (takes her life), and gets very close to her (penetrates her with a bullet, stab wound, club, etc.). The closeness is made possible by robbing the woman of her identity as an object with concrete dimensions and a unique name. Once she has lost all that and is reduced to a pulp, a shapeless bloody mass, the man can breathe a sigh of relief. (Theweleit, 196)

Murders are such crucial moments, such emotional and physical peaks in the Gothic -- they are, if you will, the

orgasms of the genre -- that it is natural that they should act as a sort of nexus point for the various aspects of the fears of sex and death. In the present case, we have what appears to be a straightforward case of the male fear and hatred for women. However, we should note how the murder fulfils its component of desire by destroying identity. The fear of losing one's own self often translates into a desperate desire to destroy someone else's. Power is a necessary means of reaffirming, or even of defining, one's identity. This would suggest, then, that the misogyny that plays an often crucial role in the Gothic is in some respects a projection of the male fear of identity-loss. Furthermore, the murder has, because of the violent act of penetration, distinctly sexual connotations, and invokes the spectre of necrophilia. Therefore, the "sigh of relief" that accompanies "closeness" to a "shapeless, bloody mass," a sigh that comes at the climax of a sexual act, would seem likely to be also a sigh of sexual satisfaction.

My approach to each of the English novels to be studied will be, then, to examine how each concentrates on specific, major aspects of identity-loss. The facets of these fears and desires that I find most important, and will therefore concentrate on, are power and misogyny. I will be looking at two novels from each of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) we will see the dangers to the self that women

encounter in a patriarchal society. Matthew G. Lewis' The Monk (1795) shows the murderous misogyny that erupts from a disintegrating personality. In the nineteenth century, the powerfully erotic myth of the vampire comes into its own. In looking at Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897), we will see how it expresses many male fears associated with identity. And finally, J. Sheridan LeFanu's Carmilla (1870) shows the devastating effects that these male fears can have on women. Both vampire novels also explore the complex questions of identity which are raised when the corpse is presented as an erotic figure.

First though, I would like to take a closer look at Les cent vingt journées de Sodome. If Sade's text can be seen as the unspoken paradigm for all other Gothics, then we should examine how it portrays the issues surrounding self-destruction, and how it can help define them. We will then be in a position to apply Sade's work usefully to the English Gothic novelists.

Chapter 2

<u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>

If the English Gothic novels, in terms of their
treatment of sexuality and death, can be thought of as a
strip-tease, then <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> is an
autopsy. Sade fully expresses what his English
counterparts, consciously writing for publication, can only
hint at. Quite apart from the utterly graphic manner in
which he portrays innumerable sexual and murderous acts,
Sade is notably explicit in dealing with the issues of the
loss of identity and the desire for, and fear of, women.

The very structure of <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>
lends itself particularly well to a full-blown expression of
fearful sexuality. By using as format a framed collection
of tales similar to that used by <u>The Decameron</u> and <u>The
Canterbury Tales</u>, Sade provides himself with a framework
loose enough to permit him to extend his catalogue of
horrors almost indefinitely. In this respect, <u>Les cent
vingt journées de Sodome</u> is quite different from the English
Gothics which, however loose and sprawling their structures
might be, always work towards a definite conclusion. The
lack of such a drive for closure in Sade's work is evident
in the fact that after the one hundred and twenty days have
passed, he sees fit to keep his characters snowbound for

22

another twenty. Thus, even the nominal point of conclusion
for the narrative turns out to be arbitrary and easily
violated.

Sade's choice of structure is also noteworthy for the
fact that it both mimics and subverts the transfer of
sexuality into discourse that, according to Foucault,
greatly accelerated during the eighteenth century:

> There was a steady proliferation of
> discourses concerned with sex . . . : a
> discursive ferment that gathered
> momentum from the eighteenth century
> onward . . . . [There was a]
> multiplication of discourses concerning
> sex in the field of exercise of power
> itself: an institutional incitement to
> speak about it, and to do so more and
> more; a determination on the part of the
> agencies of power to hear it spoken
> about, and to cause it to speak through
> explicit articulation and endlessly
> accumulated detail.
>
> (Foucault 1990, 18)

Sade's book represents the living end of this drive. The
bulk of the novel consists of the endless discourse of the
four story-telling prostitutes, and here Sade creates a
looping movement as the sexual acts of the past are

transformed into the discourse of the prostitutes, which in turn triggers the actions of the libertines (the whole, of course, enclosed within Sade's discourse). One could call this phenomenon the "act-discourse-act loop."

Naturally, Sade goes much further than his society can permit. His discussion of sexuality, filled with nauseating detail and a limitless invention for new depravities, is so extreme that it becomes necessary for the societal powers to silence this discourse.[9] Sade has taken the social directive to its logical end and turned it back on itself. He has effectively engaged in deconstruction. Furthermore, Sade's views coincide with Foucault's as he clearly depicts the social powers' desire for the discourse of sexuality. His four libertines are an aristocrat, a judge, a bishop and a tycoon: a group where most of late-eighteenth-century power gathered. Their instructions are explicit and are precisely those outlined by Foucault:

> Duclos, interrompit ici le
> président, ne vous a-t-on pas prévenue
> qu'il faut à vos récits les détails les
> plus grands et les plus étendus? que
> nous ne pouvons juger ce que la passion
> que vous contez a de relative aux moeurs
> et au caractère de l'homme, qu'autant

---

[9]Sade's elaborate precautions to keep his manuscript hidden testify to the suppression (or, more accurately, destruction) it would no doubt have otherwise encountered.

> que vous ne déguisez aucune
>
> circonstance? que les moindres
>
> circonstances servent d'ailleurs
>
> infiniment à ce que nous attendons de
>
> vos récits pour l'irritation de nos
>
> sens?   (Sade 1991, 96-97)[10]

Sade argues here that not only does power encourage and command the proliferation of sexual discourse, but further that it does so for its own gratification. And so Sade demonstrates the functioning of the "act-discourse-act loop" mentioned earlier.

The presence of Sade's four powerful libertines is important in two other ways. Firstly, these men are representatives of the hierarchical structure contemporary with Sade and of his own society. This is another instance of the freedom that Sade permits himself, in contrast to that of the English Gothic writers. Their evil authority figures are, until quite late in the development of the genre, all kept at a safe distance in past centuries and far countries. Sade's explicit recognition and depiction of politics (sexual and otherwise) as he sees them in his own

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[10]   "Duclos," the Président interrupted at this point, "we have, I believe, advised you that your narrations must be decorated with the most numerous and searching details; the precise way and extent to which we may judge how the passion you describe relates to human manners and man's character is determined by your willingness to disguise no circumstance; and, what is more, the least circumstance is apt to have an immense influence upon the procuring of that kind of sensory irritation we expect from your stories" (Sade 1987, 271).

time and place is what makes him, in Angela Carter's eyes, a "moral pornographer" (Carter, 19).

The other important point to consider concerning the four libertines is related to the preceding, and is the nature of their power. It is here that Sade begins to fuse death with sexuality, for these men hold the power of life and death over their victims. Interestingly, this power seems to be based entirely on their position in the social hierarchy because they are unprotected by any sort of guard, and they are grossly outnumbered by their victims. In theory, there should be nothing to prevent an uprising. But however much they may fear and hate it, the victims of Les cent vingt journées de Sodome never question the power that oppresses them. This power holds out torture and death as a threat should the sexual demands of the libertines be resisted. And in horribly circular fashion, these demands ultimately mean submission to torture and death. Murder is the climactic passion: "il n'y a pas de libertin un peu ancré dans le vice qui ne sache combien le meurtre a d'empire sur les sens et combien il détermine voluptueusement une décharge" (Sade 1991, 32).[11] We can also see murder as the most extreme form of one of the prime aspects of the libertines' power: the control of another's

---

[11]"[T]here is no libertine at least a little steeped in vice who is not aware of the great sway murder exerts over the senses, and how voluptuously it determines a discharge" (Sade 1987, 205).

identity.

The play of identity in Gothic fiction is a complex
one. Gothic novels play not only on the fear of losing
one's identity, but they also explore the desire to lose at
least one form of identity, as well as the need to inflict a
loss of self on others. Sade makes the last case far more
explicit than most other writers, since the depiction of
such an act as pleasurable would be difficult in a socially
accepted book. Nevertheless, as we shall see later, all of
these permutations are still present.

The fear of losing one's identity remains the most
prevalent and the most central of the three forms, and it is
also perhaps the simplest and most basic example of the
overlapping of sexuality and death. Georges Bataille points
out the near equivalence that exists between eroticism and
death:

> The whole business of eroticism is
> to strike to the inmost core of the
> living being, so that the heart stands
> still. The transition from the normal
> state to that of erotic desire
> presupposes a partial dissolution of the
> person as he exists in the realm of
> discontinuity . . . . The whole
> business of eroticism is to destroy the
> self-contained character of the

participators as they are in their

normal lives.   (Bataille, 17)

He later presents us with the key similarity between the two

human experiences: "Pleasure is so close to ruinous waste

that we refer to the moment of climax as a 'little death'"

(Bataille, 170). The idea of dissolution is borne out in

Les cent vingt journées de Sodome as the libertines

experience orgasm as a violent, roaring, out-of-control and

painful event. If we accept Bataille's argument (one that

is far from being unique to him) that there is a strong

correspondence between the loss of self at the moment of

climax and the state of death, then the fear of the loss of

identity is important in that it unites the terrors of

sexuality and death into a single horror. If I am correct

that the Gothic is greatly concerned with the fears and

desires of sex and death, then we would expect to find a

high incidence of identity-loss in the genre. This should

be the case even in the most sedate works because it is

possible to depict identity-loss without a graphic sexual

backdrop. The sexual implications of identity-loss,

however, remain. As we shall see, the fear of the loss of

identity does play an important role in Radcliffe and

others. Sade uses the various desires and fears connected

with identity to great effect, and always within an explicit

sexual context.

Sade begins to confuse the identities of his innocent

characters from the very beginning, as his four libertines
engage in a complex game of intermarriage with their
daughters. All of these women are forbidden from forging
their own social identities, and each finds herself assigned
several unstable identities by her father. The most complex
case is perhaps that of Aline. She is officially the
daughter of the duc de Blangis, and sister to Julie. But
while she is Julie's sister, she is in fact the daughter of
the bishop who, as Blangis' brother, is therefore also her
uncle. Since the bishop acquires primary control over her
in the marriage arrangements, she further becomes his *de
facto* wife. The abuse she receives is therefore apparent
incest from Blangis and real incest from the bishop.

The helplessness and terror of the victims is
emphasized by the absolute power the libertines wield in
determining the form (or lack thereof) of their identities.
These slaves are not permitted the slightest bit of self-
determination. Even their defecation is under strict
control. "The excremental faculty is a manipulative device
and to be baulked of the free control of it is to be
deprived of the first, most elementary, expression of
autonomy" (Carter, 87). The victims are denied any
existence other than as the libertines' property. They are
no more human than any other object owned by these men, who
naturally dispose of their property as they see fit. And of
course, hovering over and enforcing these proceedings is the

omnipresent threat of death, the final and total destruction of self: "vous êtes déjà mortes au monde, et ce n'est plus que pour nos plaisirs que vous respirez" (Sade 1991, 76).[12] It is as if the victims will allow their selves to be twisted and changed in innumerable ways as long as death, which will deprive them of any hope of self-determination, is deferred. But again, the threat becomes reality as the libertines effect the final transformation of their victims' selves by killing them.

Some of the central moments of fluid identity, indeed, of blurred gender, in Les cent vingt journées de Sodome come during the triple marriage ceremonies that begin as the cruelties in the castle of Silling become more and more murderous. For example:

> le duc épouse, comme lui étant fille,
> Hercule en qualité de mari, et comme lui
> étant homme, Zéphire en qualité de femme
> . . . . Ce jeune garçon n'est dépucelé
> que ce jour-là; le duc y prend grand
> plaisir, et y a beaucoup de peine; il le
> met en sang. Hercule le fout toujours

---

[12]"[I]nsofar as the world is concerned, you are already dead, and if yet you breathe, 'tis by our pleasure, and for it only" (Sade 1987, 251).

pendant l'opération.

(Sade 1991, 406)[13]

Here we find virtually all aspects of identity-loss united.
Zéphire is, of course, the victim, finding even his gender
stolen from him. Not only is he ceremoniously declared a
woman, but his bleeding evokes images of female virginity
(as well as reminding us of his encroaching death). In
Blangis, we find both the will to control another's self and
the desire for a shifting identity. In the transformation
he inflicts on Zéphire, we see a demonstration of the fact
that "the pleasure of power is the ability to produce
changes in others" (Gorer, 73). And further, Blangis here
is simultaneously man and woman, husband and wife,
penetrator and receiver. But the key to his desire is that
he always remains in control of the changes that he
undergoes. Blangis' unstable identity is yet another aspect
of his power. This deliberate shift in one's own identity
comes up again and again among the villains of Gothic
fiction, but never again in such an explicitly sexual
context.

Blangis' gender-bending recalls Paglia's notion that
men "who cultivate the novel or film of terror seek sex-

---

[13]"The Duc, acting in the capacity of a woman, is married
to Hercule, who is to be the husband; acting now as a man, the
Duc takes Zéphyr to be his wife. . . . The dear little Zéphyr
surrenders his virginal bum to the Duc, who finds all his
pleasure therein, but much trouble making a successful entry;
Zéphyr is rather badly torn, and bleeds profusely. Hercule
fucks the Duc throughout this operation" (Sade 1987, 622).

crossing sensations." Sade might at first glance seem to be providing an excellent example of just such a man. However, even if we grant that Paglia is correct about the nature of the drive, the element of control undercuts the argument. Both Blangis and the man at a horror film are *willing* themselves into this state. They instigate the sex-crossing and remain in control of it and therefore the sensations are actually counterfeit. Angela Carter points out how spurious the victimization of the male in masochistic pornography really is: "Miss Stern's dominance exists only in the bedroom . . . . She is not cruel for her own sake or for her own gratification. She is most truly subservient when most apparently dominant" (Carter, 21). The contrast between Blangis and Zéphire is the difference between being terrified and being terrorized. One is the sensation deliberately sought in reading a horror novel or watching a horror film. The other is the state of being victimized. Hence perhaps the dark and terrible reputations acquired by the works of Sade and by such films as <u>Necromantik</u>, <u>Cannibal Holocaust</u> and <u>Last House on Dead End Street</u>. These are works that are too disturbing: the sensations escape the audience's control, and the experience is not fun anymore. Blangis may enjoy being whipped, but he never allows himself to be battered bloody, as happens to Zéphire.

If the libertines do experience any actual fear connected with identity, it seems to be expressed by their

consuming misogyny. Paglia asserts that "heterosexuality
for men will always carry the danger of loss of identity"
(Paglia, 258).[14] But the perceived danger does not
suppress the desire, and hence the violence inflicted on the
women of Silling is frequently a direct punishment for
having pleasured the male: "l'évêque dépucelle Colombe en
cul, et la fouette jusqu'au sang après sa décharge, parce
qu'il ne peut souffrir qu'une fille le fasse décharger"
(Sade 1991, 395).[15] Ejaculation is regarded as so precious
by the libertines, that though it is the goal of their
endeavors, the person who "causes" the ejaculation is
nevertheless considered a thief. This is particularly the
case if the person in question is a woman, who by virtue of
being "other" is seen as being more of a thief than a male
partner who is subject to the same possibilities of loss.

The libertines have an absolute horror of the vagina:
"souvenez-vous que cette partie infecte que la nature ne
forma qu'en déraisonnant est toujours celle qui nous répugne

---

[14]Her grounds for this position, that men fear the
chthonian, Great Mother power of women that will reabsorb them
and return them "to childhood dependency" (258), are
interesting but rather difficult to prove. The importance of
the threat, however, lies not in its reality but in its
perception.

[15]"[T]he Bishop depucelates Colombe's bum, and after his
discharge lashes her with a whip, for he cannot bear to have
a girl cause him to discharge" (Sade 1987, 609).

le plus" (Sade 1991, 77).[16] In order to counteract the
dangers to their selves that they see here, the libertines
must unsex and dehumanize the women:

> In their pleasures, all libertines
> have an overwhelming urge to hide the
> Female's sexual organs scrupulously
> . . . . Woman is destroyed: she is
> wrapped up, twisted about, veiled,
> disguised so as to erase every trace of
> her anterior features (figure, breasts,
> sexual organs); a kind of surgical and
> functional doll is produced, a body
> *without a front part* (structural horror
> and flouting), a monstrous bandage, a
> *thing.*   (Barthes, 123)

Thus concealing the woman's sex organs does not make her
less dangerous by transforming her into a being who might
possibly be male. She is denied any being at all: as an
object, she cannot be a threat. It is therefore of
paramount importance that the woman not be seen to be
experiencing pleasure. Sade expresses this fact through the
words of Duclos:

> Il vint me faire . . . la même opération
> . . . [et] ne l'entreprenait plus sans

---

[16]"[R]emember that this loathsome part, which only the
alienation of her wits could have permitted Nature to create,
is always the one we find most repugnant" (Sade 1987, 252).

> me faire expirer de plaisir. Episode,
>
> au reste, qui me parut lui être assez
>
> indifférent, car il ne me parut jamais
>
> ou qu'il s'en informât, ou qu'il s'en
>
> souciât. Qui sait même, tant les hommes
>
> sont extraordinaires, s'il ne lui aurait
>
> peut-être pas déplu.
>
> (Sade 1991, 133)[17]

The libertine ignores (or at least pretends to ignore) the woman's pleasure, attempting to deny its existence. Usually, however, it is safer to eliminate any possibility of pleasure by inflicting pain instead: "[a]s a despot in its dungeon, the Self cannot tolerate pleasure in anyone else. It induces pain in order to assimilate others to its unique existence" (Hassan, 35). And so we come full circle: the torture and murder of women, the ultimate destruction of their identity, becomes a means of shoring up and protecting the libertine's control of his own sense of self.

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[17]He came . . . regularly performing the same operation . . . [and] each time . . . I all but expired with delight -- an aspect of the rite about which he appeared to care very little, for, as best as I could judge, he had no inclination to find out whether or no my work pleased me; that did not seem to matter to him. And indeed, who can tell? Men are extraordinary indeed; had he known of it, my pleasure might even have displeased him. (Sade 1987, 310).

Chapter 3

The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Monk

Of all the writers to be discussed in this thesis, and
indeed, perhaps of all Gothic novelists, Ann Radcliffe would
appear to be the one most utterly opposed to Sade. Her
contemporary Clara Reeve writes that "the great and
important duty of a writer is, to point out the difference
between Virtue and Vice, to shew one rewarded, and the other
punished" (Reeve, 94). Reeve would have approved of the
assiduity with which Radcliffe fulfils this "duty."
Radcliffe echoes Reeve with her own conclusion: "useful may
it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes
pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and
their punishment certain; and that innocence, though
oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience,
finally triumph over misfortune" (Radcliffe, 672). Unlike
Sade, Radcliffe was not imprisoned and did not have her
works suppressed. On the contrary, she was one of the most
popular novelists of her time: "with The Romance of the
Forest and the sensationally successful Mysteries of
Udolpho, Mrs. Radcliffe established for herself a position
which few other novelists, Gothic or otherwise, could
seriously challenge until the appearance of the Waverly
novels" (Garber, vii). And her ultimate challenger, Sir

Walter Scott, informs us that "the fame of her writings was brilliant and universal" (Scott, 211). On the surface at least, Radcliffe's work is in complete contrast to Sade's. Sexuality in Radcliffe's work is covered by veils so thick as to be nearly opaque. Violent death is reserved almost exclusively for the villains. And Radcliffe's innocents are not torn to shreds but ultimately triumph over all adversity. Whatever threats may loom over her heroines, they are never actually harmed.

Radcliffe's very difference from Sade is significant if we recall the notion that <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u> is the text feared and desired, written and unwritten, hovering in the aura of the other Gothics. The more Radcliffe suppresses, the more we are thrown back on Sade to decode her text. Radcliffe's popularity and respectability themselves suggest that her work will of necessity keep much underground. Then there is the terrifying nature of her subject:

> The emotions on which they
> [Romantic writers] dwelt were too
> imperfectly understood or too
> threatening to be systematically
> rationalized, except by someone as
> daring as the Marquis de Sade. They
> explored feelings and compulsions which
> were not merely impolite to mention but

often difficult to label and describe.

<div style="text-align: right">(Robert Kiely cited in Howells, 6)</div>

One could almost say that the clarity and explicitness of the emotions explored by the writer are inversely proportional to the writer's popular acceptance. That Radcliffe and Sade share many of the same concerns, however, is visible in the remarkable parallels that exist between The Mysteries of Udolpho and Les cent vingt journées de Sodome.

Both Radcliffe and Sade portray innocent characters imprisoned by evil, powerful men in inaccessible mountain castles. Significantly, the villains threaten their victims in very similar terms. In The Mysteries of Udolpho, Montoni, having previously warned his wife that "you may understand the danger of offending a man, who has unlimited power over you" (305), thunders against Emily when she refuses to sign her property over to him:

> "Then all my vengeance falls upon you," he exclaimed, with an horrible oath. "And think not it shall be delayed. Neither the estates in Languedoc, or Gascony, shall be yours; you have dared to question my right, -- now dare to question my power. I have a punishment which you think not of; it is terrible!" (Radcliffe, 394)

While in <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>, Blangis, in a
long exhortation, threatens the female prisoners in this
fashion:

> Mille fois plus soumises que ne le
>
> seraient des esclaves, vous ne devez
>
> vous attendre qu'à l'humiliation, et
>
> l'obéissance doit être la seule vertu
>
> dont je vous conseille de faire usage:
>
> c'est la seule qui convienne à l'état où
>
> vous êtes . . . . Non pas que vous ayez
>
> beaucoup à gagner à cette conduite, mais
>
> seulement parce que vous auriez beaucoup
>
> à perdre en ne l'observant pas.
>
> (Sade 1991, 75)[18]

In both cases the oppressor vaunts his absolute power over
the oppressed, and threatens to meet disobedience with
violent punishment. Beyond this point the two novels begin
to part company. Montoni's threats are vague, and Radcliffe
never allows him to either elaborate on them or carry them
out. In Sade's book, by contrast, the reality of the
situation confronting the victims is such that Blangis'
speech turns out to be an unspeakably horrible

---

[18]"A thousand times more subjugated than would be slaves,
you must expect naught but humiliation, and obedience is that
one virtue whose use I recommend to you: it and no other
befits your present state . . . . Not that you have much to
gain by this conduct, but simply because, by not observing it,
you will have a great deal to lose." (Sade 1987, 250)

understatement. Sade has no qualms in describing precisely
the sort of punishment the victims undergo, while
Radcliffe's very reticence easily leads the reader to
suspect the worst.

Emily faces dangers which are not very different from
those which confront the women and children of Silling.
This is suggested by the fact that in Radcliffe the question
of identity-loss is as central as it is in Sade. We see the
will to control, and (to a much lesser degree) the desire
for change in the character of Montoni. We see him, for
instance, attempting to make Emily submit to a definition of
self that he provides, so that she will, following this
definition, do as he desires:

> I say, that you possess an understanding
>
> superior to that of your sex; and that
>
> you have none of those contemptible
>
> foibles, that frequently mark the female
>
> character -- such as avarice and the
>
> love of power.   (Radcliffe, 380)

Montoni defines women (in terms that more accurately
describe himself) in a far from flattering fashion, and in a
matter-of-fact tone that implies given truths. He attempts
to provide Emily with a situation where the acceptance of
his flattery would be tantamount to repudiating her gender
in addition to surrendering her property. If Emily were to
reject his flattery, however, she would then be labelled

avaricious and power-hungry. By the logic established by Montoni, Emily would be avaricious for wishing to keep the property, and she would be power-hungry for wanting to keep it against Montoni's "rightful" claim. The inevitable happens when Emily does stand up to Montoni: "I have been mistaken in my opinion of you," Montoni announces, and refers to "the weakness of your sex . . . , from which, it seems, you are not exempt" (381). Montoni's own shifting identity is far less pronounced and sexual than that of Blangis and friends, but it is still visible in his various disguises. He appears as wealthy aristocrat to trap Madame Cheron and thereby actually become a wealthy aristocrat. He later appears as the leader of marauding soldier-thieves in order to generate the wealth that his first incarnation failed to produce.

Presented as it is primarily from Emily's point of view, however, The Mysteries of Udolpho focuses mainly on the fear of losing one's identity. The dangers that Emily faces are very much a product of a patriarchal society, the same that Sade depicted as completely unleashed through characters representing aristocracy, clergy, courts and business. Radcliffe for the most part avoids explicitly referring to the sexual elements of this fear, focusing instead on apparently social and financial concerns.

The shift from sex to money is not as radical a change as might first appear. This is especially true in

Radcliffe's social context:

> In a society in which a single
> woman's value is intimately tied to both
> sexual purity and endowed property, the
> consequences of sexual and economic
> exploitation are effectively identical:
> either would curtail Emily's chance of
> attaining social identity through the
> only avenue open to her --
> marriage.   (Poovey, 323-324)

One of the primary dangers that Emily faces is the threat of the bad marriage. This sort of marriage threatens her with both sexual and economic exploitation. Radcliffe emphasizes the economic menace, but as the two are so entwined, the sexual one cannot be far behind. These bad marriages, which will bring about a loss of economic self-determination, are themselves essentially the result of mistaken financial identities. Madame Cheron and Montoni each believe the other to be wealthier than themselves. Their horrific marriage, where Montoni subjects his wife to a steadily mounting barrage of mental and physical abuse (which ultimately causes her death), stands as a warning to Emily. She perceives this danger as imminent, because a very similar union with Count Morano is in the offing for her. Again we find economic misidentification: Morano believes Emily to be a rich heiress, and so a union with her will

solve his financial problems, while Montoni hopes to
establish, through Emily, a connection with the wealthy
aristocracy. Each man is misinformed by the other. And for
Emily the situation is in some respects worse than that of
her aunt.

Radcliffe permits Madame Cheron the luxury of
misrepresenting herself previous to her marriage. She is
consciously shifting her social identity. Emily's case is
quite different. She is desperate to hold on to her
identity, but it is seized and misrepresented by Montoni.
Having tricked her into signing her name to an acceptance of
Morano's proposal, Montoni accuses her of capriciousness
when she denies any knowledge of such an acceptance:

> "I perceive, sir, that you are
>
> under a very great error, and that I
>
> have been equally mistaken."
>
> "No more duplicity, I entreat; be
>
> open and candid, if it is possible."
>
> (Radcliffe, 199)

Montoni twists Emily's honesty around and declares it
duplicity. If she remains honest, Emily will be perceived
as a liar; to be seen as honest, she must lie, and surrender
control of her identity to Morano. In either case, we have
a classic example of the heroine "being falsely charged with
feelings and intentions she does not have. This is part of
a larger motif of the misknowing of the heroine: the false

categorizing and misnaming of her essential innocence"
(DeLamotte, 173). To "misknow" the heroine in this way,
deliberately or not, is to twist and possibly destroy her
social identity. But this also cuts much more deeply, as it
denies her the right to establish her identity herself,
rather than having it defined by other people. These people
view Emily as being first and foremost their property. (One
thinks of the ribbons used in <u>Les cent vingt journées de
Sodome</u> to mark which harem member's virginity belongs to
which libertine.) The shape that this property takes in
society more generally is hence a secondary identity.

The link between the sexual and the economic fears of
identity-loss is perhaps clearest in the matter of Emily's
bedroom in Udolpho. Radcliffe is extremely reluctant to
spell out the erotic nature of the fears she is dealing
with, but her reticence leads her awry here, and the sexual
implications of the scene are inescapable. The other door
to Emily's bedroom, the one that leads to secret passageways
descending into the bowels of the castle, can be locked only
from the other side. This ominous lock emphasizes Montoni's
perception of Emily as his property. He can seal her
inside, as if caging an animal, and he can permit access to
her at any time. The sexual implications of a man
controlling entry to a woman's bedchamber need hardly be
pointed out. The lock on the door is just as much a mark of
sexual property as are Sade's ribbons. Emily's sexual self

is open to violation at any time.

The implicit threat of the lock becomes reality when Count Morano bursts through in the middle of the night. Previously, Morano has been a menace in economic terms, as he misunderstands Emily's financial situation which he wants to exploit to his profit. He has also threatened Emily's identity by being an obstacle to her union with Valancourt, and Emily's preference for Valancourt is one of her few methods, however slight, of self-determination. But now the economic threat is also clearly sexual. Radcliffe's fear of this aspect is obvious in her hilarious contrivance of having Emily miraculously fall asleep with all of her clothes on for this one occasion. Clearly, Radcliffe protests a little too much. Emily, Radcliffe writes, "sprung from the bed, in the dress, which surely a kind of prophetic apprehension had prevented her, on this night, from throwing aside" (261). By being hyperconscious of her heroine's sexually vulnerable position, and by taking ludicrous measures to protect her from an event that the logic of the narrative has rendered inevitable, Radcliffe is forced to make Morano's sexual menace explicit. The economic threat to identity is, here in the most intimate of surroundings, stripped of its trappings and revealed as sexual.

Radcliffe has barely permitted the sexual threat to Emily to become apparent when she introduces death as well.

Morano's appearance is followed in short order by a duel in which Montoni seems to wound him mortally. Death, it would seem, is a threat to the self that inevitably accompanies the one of sexual passion.

In the case of the woman known as both Sister Agnes and Laurentini di Udolpho, Radcliffe appears to go so far as to suggest that sexual beings are murderous, and so again rejoins Sade. Laurentini's sexuality destroys both her economic and personal identity:

> The crime of sister Agnes . . . was giving in to passion, agreeing to become the mistress of the Marquis de Villeroi. In Radcliffe's world, the devastation Agnes describes inevitably follows such liberation of female feeling, for, as Patricia Meyer Spacks has noted, "to submit to passion means to abandon the controls by which women even more than men -- given their social conditions -- must live." Abandoning the "controls," those moral feelings internalized as "principles," catapults a woman into the anarchy of sexual desire and tears from her the last remnants of her social power, even her identity.
>
> (Poovey, 321-322)

From mistress of Udolpho, Laurentini becomes mistress of the
Marquis, shorn of country, home and fortune. She even loses
her name, as she becomes the mad nun Agnes. Radcliffe
leaves us in no doubt that she sees Laurentini's passion as
the root of her suffering: "It was the first misfortune of
her life, and that which led to all her succeeding misery,
that the friends, who ought to have restrained her strong
passions, . . . , nurtured them by early indulgence"
(Radcliffe, 655). And as her identity is eradicated,
Laurentini masterminds the murder -- the annihilation of
self -- of her rival, the Marchioness. In the murder we can
see an impulse similar to that of Sade's libertines, who
incessantly slaughter in order to preserve their own
identities. Laurentini hopes that the Marchioness' death
will clear the way for her to become the Marquis' wife, and
thus recreate an identity for herself, complete with
property and high social standing. Of course, in
Radcliffe's retributive world, she succeeds only in ensuring
her own complete loss. Agnes/Laurentini's insanity
demonstrates the fact that she now lacks any kind of stable
sense of self.

The link between sexuality and crime and murder also
helps explain Emily's terror when her own origins come into
question. The possibility that she might in fact be the
Marchioness' daughter (an illegitimate one at that, since we
are told of an "attachment" the Marchioness had previous to

her marriage) holds multiple threats for Emily. In the
first place it assaults one of the foundation stones of her
identity, as the daughter of two saintly, almost completely
asexual persons. Secondly it disrupts what little she could
assume with regard to her social identity: if she is the
daughter of the Marchioness, does she now pass into the
Villeroi family? Thirdly (and most terrifyingly) the
possibility of her father's promiscuity is now raised.
Within the logic of the text, this would make the man who
has been Emily's role model throughout her trials capable of
the worst of crimes, and she would then be forced to
confront her own sexuality. In Radcliffe's world, a
doubtful image implies a doubtful character. And a sexual
identity composed of active sexuality is no identity at all:
it is death.

                    *   *   *

     Though it is in many ways far more bleak than The
Mysteries of Udolpho, Matthew G. Lewis' The Monk
significantly tempers Radcliffe's message. Lewis has
characters who are sexually active beyond the boundaries
established by their society, and who are also sympathetic:
Agnes and Raymond. And though they suffer horribly (Agnes
especially) as a result of their actions, Lewis puts the
blame on the impermissive society rather than on the couple.

"The story describes the way institutional power, exercised equally through physical and ideological constraints, can work against basic human needs and desires -- presented directly in the story in sexual terms -- creating oppressive and violent situations" (Watkins, 121). Furthermore, all suffering (spectacular and gruesome though it may be) aside, Agnes and Raymond ultimately reunite, marry, and live in as much happiness as Lewis permits them. Where Lewis seems to find danger, death and disintegrating identities is in unrestrained sexuality. Though death permeates all visions of sex in the novel, it is only in this last case that it appears to be an inherent component. In the case of Agnes and Raymond, for instance, death is present due to the misguided rules and fears of society.

Lewis' contrast between healthy and unhealthy sexuality is visible because his representations are much more explicit than Radcliffe's. Lewis does not dispense with the economic aspect of his characters' fears concerning identity-loss (we see these terrors most notably in the financially insecure Elvira) but he shifts the focus away from this one remove and back to clearly sexual threats. He thus moves closer to Sade, and predictably, Lewis' reputation among his contemporaries does not have the éclat of Radcliffe's.

This is not to say that The Monk was unpopular; quite the opposite is true, and after all, even Sade's Justine had

six printings. But The Monk also became progressively more

and more bowdlerized (in direct contrast to Justine).

Lewis' reputation improved as his book toned down, while

Sade was forced to deny authorship of Justine but still

wound up imprisoned. In its original form, however, The

Monk was the subject of considerable controversy, drawing

upon itself the moral indignation of such influential

critics as Coleridge:

> The poisonous nature of The Monk is "a
> fault for which no literary excellence
> can atone." It is a romance "which if a
> parent saw in the hands of a son or
> daughter, he might reasonably turn
> pale." Ambrosio's temptations are
> described with libidinous minuteness and
> the work leaves "the most painful
> impression . . . of great acquirements
> and splendid genius employed to furnish
> a *mormo* for children, a poison for
> youth, and a provocative for the
> debauchee." . . . . Moreover, the
> author is a man of rank and fortune:
> "Yes! the author of the Monk signs
> himself a *Legislator!* -- We stare and
> tremble."   (Peck, 25)

We see of course one of the most time-honoured of all

accusations levelled at books: that the immorality depicted
will lead to immorality in fact. As Clara Reeve expounds,
"the viciousness of [a bad character] cleaves to the mind of
the young reader, and . . . if it happens to be more
inclined to evil . . . vicious images will strengthen that
propensity" (Reeve, 88-89). Coleridge is all the more
horrified because Lewis is an MP. As such, the argument
would go, he should not only know better, but should
demonstrate some sense of his responsibilities. Lewis, like
Sade, though not quite in the same degree, violates the
rules regulating sexual discourse. He does not merely talk
about sex: he revels in it, and thus his work becomes
dangerous.

Lewis' novel is still a popular one, though, and he
does not go quite as far as Sade. He pulls back from his
more far-reaching social implications, and we must return to
Sade to find them. Lewis ultimately supports societal
authority:

> The fear and horror in the story arise
> from the unquestioned assumption that
> without tradition -- specifically,
> without the traditional definitions of
> religion, family, law, aristocracy --
> human society will collapse into a
> Hobbesian state of nature and all human
> value will be destroyed . . . . The

> Monk . . . titillates readers by showing
>
> them a world run wild; it describes
>
> human passions unleashed, that is, what
>
> these passions might be like removed
>
> from the constraints of culture.
>
> (Watkins, 122-123)

Sade, on the other hand, sees society as simply providing a structure where those in power, those who represent religion, family, law and aristocracy, are free to unleash their passions on the less fortunate. Anarchy is the only way out of Sade's inferno.

The Monk is also dangerous because its look at identity-loss is far more brutal and unblinking than Udolpho's. Radcliffe threatens her protagonists' identities, be it with a loss of social or economic position or with death, but by the end, order is restored, innocence is saved, and identities are secure. Only the evil characters suffer real loss, and we are distanced from their sufferings. The narrative is never presented from Madame Cheron's point of view, for instance. We always witness her suffering through the mediating eyes of Emily. We are even more distanced from Montoni's ultimate fate, because it takes place off-stage, and we learn of it only through a cursory report from the omniscient narrator. Lewis, on the other hand, does not hesitate to destroy innocent characters, and the narrator remains close to Ambrosio

throughout his disintegration.

Ambrosio's plight is all the more tragic in that he
never has what Lewis would have us believe is his true
identity:

> Had his Youth been passed in the world,
>
> He would have shown himself possessed of
>
> many brilliant and manly qualities . . .
>
> Unfortunately . . . His Instructors
>
> carefully repressed those virtues, whose
>
> grandeur and disinterestedness were ill-
>
> suited to the Cloister . . . . While
>
> the Monks were busied in rooting out his
>
> virtues, and narrowing his sentiments,
>
> they allowed every vice which had fallen
>
> to his share, to arrive at full
>
> perfection.   (Lewis, 236-237)

Thus Ambrosio has his true self destroyed while still
developing. The only identity he has is the social one
imposed on him by the Church. It is only a short step from
this warping of Ambrosio's self to the unleashing of his
destructive sexuality. In fact, Lewis makes the sexual
aspect of Ambrosio's constructed identity quite clear early
on. The first time that we see Ambrosio alone, the Church
and eroticism are fused as he prostrates himself before a
portrait of the Madonna: "Were I permitted to twine round
my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the

treasures of that snowy bosom!" (Lewis, 41).

Fittingly, the figure who opens the floodgates of Ambrosio's sexuality, and thereby sets the events in motion that will destroy more selves, more lives, than just Ambrosio's, itself possesses an extremely fluid identity. What first appears to be the male novice Rosario seemingly reveals itself as the love-struck innocent Matilda, who then turns out to be a witch and adopts more and more masculine (in Ambrosio's eyes) characteristics of domination and power, and at the last turns out to be a demon. A sexually aggressive, unstable self (the two are virtually synonymous) is materialized evil.

Much has been made of the fact that Matilda's seduction of Ambrosio begins while she is still in the male guise of Rosario. Nina daVinci Nichols, for instance, writes that "Lewis' expense of style on Rosario's unveiling and then on the following seduction scene adds the titillations of transvestism to these other indications of personal bias" (Nichols, 204). The possibilities of homoeroticism here, though present, are not, I believe, quite so important except insofar as they point to a connection between Lewis' Ambrosio and Sade's libertines. To speak of Sade's monsters as hetero-, homo-, or bisexual is, I believe, to misinterpret and limit their sexuality. These men are purely and simply sexual, and the gender of their partner or partners is largely immaterial. As we have already seen,

other people do not have any real existence in the eyes of a
libertine. They are merely objects to assist in his self-
gratification. Les cent vingt journées de Sodome drives
this fact home as a very large proportion of the "passions"
that it portrays are voyeuristic and masturbatory
(particulary the more violent ones). The case of Ambrosio,
I would argue, is very similar. Though he may briefly
believe that he has higher feelings for Antonia, his passion
is so completely self-centred that again the gender or
nature of the object of his desire does not matter as much
as the fact that there is an object. In Ambrosio's
treatment of his love-interests, we can see the same
desperate need for control that animates Sade's libertines.

Ambrosio's need for control is so urgent precisely
because he feels his own sense of self eroding and slipping
from his grasp. The identity that the convent constructed
for him, however artificial and violently imposed, was still
the means by which he knew himself. By breaking his vows,
Ambrosio shatters that self, even though he may successfully
perpetuate the illusion of its existence. But conscious of
the death of his old self-image, Ambrosio is forced to deal
with his internal fragmentation:

> All of Ambrosio's actions and
> appetites reveal his desire to resolve
> his relationship to his feminine
> identity. The combination of longing

and disgust and violence he displays

toward Matilda and Antonia reflects his

feelings toward his warped and distorted

feminine half. His desire to dominate

and control his doubled identity as

ascetic and sensualist is part of his

desire to dominate his feminine nature.

(Day, 123-124)

Sade's libertines explicitly adopt the roles of women, as we
have seen, as a method of emphasizing what they believe is
their complete mastery over their identities. The
environment and circumstances of these moments are tightly
regulated, so that the experience never escapes the
libertine's control. As long as they decide when and how
they "become" women, the libertines avoid unexpected
encounters with unwanted instabilities of identity.
Ambrosio makes no such conscious attempt. He is thus
resentful when he finds himself forced into the subordinate
role of the women of his society by the increasingly
dominant and powerful Matilda, who once she has lost her
attractiveness (as far as Ambrosio is concerned) might just
as easily be male.

Ambrosio feels that his control over his self is so
tenuous, so threatened, that he cannot indulge in the same
role-playing as Sade's supermen. Ambrosio's brutality
towards women is thus a direct consequence of his own terror

at his disintegrating identity:

> To assert his identity through
> sensual satisfaction and affirm his
> status as superman, Ambrosio must pursue
> women on purely masculine terms. He can
> enjoy Antonia only by force or through
> the power of magic; if he established an
> affectional relationship to her, he
> would regard her as something more than
> a tool of gratification, which would
> limit his power over her, and he would
> thus fall short of his ideal.
>
> (Day, 123)

Of course, even when he does achieve his ends with the
female characters, Ambrosio fails to live up to his ideal.
Immediately after his first relations with Matilda, and his
rape of Antonia, he turns on the women with disgust.
"Dangerous Woman!" he shouts at Matilda. "Into what an
abyss of misery you have plunged me!" (223). And after his
rape of Antonia, "She, who so lately had been the object of
his adoration, now raised no other sentiment in his heart
than aversion and rage" (384). This is the same revulsion
we saw in Sade's libertines. No matter how helpless the
victim, she is still regarded as a thief and a menace. This
is because no matter how controlled the circumstance that
lead up to it are, orgasm is always a loss of control, a

loss of identity. It is vital for Ambrosio to project the blame for this loss away from himself. He must establish the woman as cause for his weakness, and not himself.

Ambrosio's desperation leads to more and more extreme measures of controlling women, inevitably leading to death. Death is implicitly or explicitly present in almost all of Ambrosio's sexual encounters, creating distinct overtones of necrophilia. Matilda overcomes Ambrosio by threatening to stab herself in the breast. Ambrosio's lust is inflamed by the sight of her breast, but the fact of the dagger, the menace or promise of the extinction of the breast must play a part in his desire. We can see this borne out in the fact that Ambrosio first has sex with Matilda believing that she has only three days to live. His interest in her vanishes with the possibility of her death.

Similarly, in the case of Antonia, her apparent death is a necessary prerequisite to Ambrosio's gratification. By stealing her identity, he shores up his own and removes her ability to threaten. Thus, in his initial attempt, he puts Antonia in a death-like slumber, at which point "He considered her to be absolutely in his power, and his eyes flamed with lust and impatience" (300). This attempted rape ends with the murder of Elvira. Unlike Sade, Lewis does not venture quite so far as to describe murder as a source of sexual gratification in itself (since it is the ultimate form of identity control). However, he does link the two

acts even closer together with Ambrosio's second attack on Antonia.

Once again, Antonia must "die" before Ambrosio can have access to her. This time -- when he is successful -- her "death" is more severe: as far as the rest of the world is concerned, she really is dead, and so her social identity (what little there was of it) is utterly annihilated. And this time, the necrophilic overtones are even more obvious:

> By the side of three putrid half-
>
> corrupted bodies lay the sleeping Beauty
>
> . . . . And as wrapped in her shroud
>
> She reclined upon her funeral Bier, She
>
> seemed to smile at the Images of Death
>
> around her. While He gazed upon their
>
> rotting bones and disgusting figures,
>
> who perhaps were once as sweet and
>
> lovely, Ambrosio thought upon Elvira, by
>
> him reduced to the same state. As the
>
> memory of that horrid act glanced upon
>
> his mind, it was clouded with a gloomy
>
> horror. Yet it served but to strengthen
>
> his resolution to destroy Antonia's
>
> honour.
>
> . . . . Scarcely could he command
>
> his passions sufficiently, to restrain
>
> himself from enjoying her while yet

insensible.   (Lewis, 379)

Murder and horror are now arousing for Ambrosio, as he completes his descent. Not only is it not surprising, it is in fact completely expected, that he find an insensible Antonia almost irresistible, because in that state she does not have the slightest bit of identity that might threaten his. After the rape, his worst fears are confirmed by the guilt she makes him feel. He desperately tries to reassert his power over her identity by imprisoning her, but is finally forced, as much by the logic of his fears as by desperate circumstances, to kill her.[19] And so Lewis draws Ambrosio's sexual crimes and murders as close together as he might dare. In Ambrosio's first attempt on Antonia, just as the rape was deferred, so the murder was displaced. Now the rape is accomplished, and so is the murder.

Lewis still stops short of violating the taboo on outright necrophilia. The murder still takes place after the sexual act and is not, as with Sade, identically equal to it. The literature of the vampire, however, brings us even closer to the public recognition of this fusion.

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[19]"Each man should kill the thing he loves," words spoken by Peter Lorre in Karl Freund's Mad Love (1935), is the credo that echoes and re-echoes throughout Gothic fiction.

Chapter 4

Dracula and Carmilla

The vampire is perhaps the most enduring and popular
figure to emerge from Gothic fiction.[20] The character is
fascinating because on the one hand it is one of the most
explicit representations of fatal sexuality in literature
before the breakdown of taboos in the 20th Century (which
also permitted the re-emergence of Sade), while on the other
hand it embodies fears and desires in such a way as to
distance them safely from the reader. Since the vampire --
an external, evil, will-sapping supernatural force -- is the
aggressor, neither its victims nor the reader need feel
guilty in the erotic encounters that take place. The
vampire presents many of the sexual threats related to loss
of identity that we have seen before. It does, after all,
kill its victims, and it transforms its victims into sexual
beings that, by virtue of being sexual, are no longer
considered to be the selves they once were. But the vampire
is also a living corpse, and this brings necrophilia to the
foreground.

The necrophilic elements of the vampire emphasize the
creature's contradictory nature because, in opposition to

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[20]As of 1980, 133 films had been made concerning Dracula
alone (Twitchell, 312).

the obvious menace of violation by a corpse, necrophilia may
itself be an extreme reaction to the fear of identity-loss:

> The causes of necrophilia are
>
> essentially those of other sexual
>
> deviations. The sexual pattern operates
>
> as an ego-defense mechanism. Strong
>
> feelings of inadequacy make it difficult
>
> and sometimes impossible for the
>
> individual to carry out satisfactory
>
> sexual relations with other adults. The
>
> necrophiliac obtains a feeling of
>
> competency and power when he is having
>
> relationships with a corpse.
>
> (Thorpe et al, cited in Bayer-Berenbaum, 41)

This is of course the point at which The Monk stops short.
Ambrosio feels the attraction of taking Antonia while she is
comatose, because then, utterly lacking identity herself,
she can hardly pose any threat to his. Nevertheless, he
still waits until she awakes. But in the case of outright
necrophilia, there is no possibility of the passive partner
ever waking up, and his/her (usually her) identity is gone
forever. The aggressor's identity cannot be threatened, and
is affirmed if he/she (usually he) caused the death in the
first place. The climactic act of murder establishes a
claim of absolute control over the victim.

The vampire complicates matters because, while it is

certainly a corpse, it is not passive. Not only is it animated, but it is in fact the aggressor. This must be in some part due to social conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is during this period that the corpse first comes into its own as a sexual object. At this time fantasies arise which "assume that the cadaver has a kind of existence of its own that arouses desire and excites the senses" (Ariès, 381). One need hardly point out that this sort of passion could not be explicitly admitted to in socially acceptable fiction: "it was the mores of Stoker's day which dictated that the Count's evil should come from outside, because much of the evil embodied in the Count is a perverse sexual evil" (King, 73). I believe that it is no coincidence that the vampire makes its first literary appearance during this period: the Oxford English Dictionary indicates 1734 as the first printed occurence of the word. The vampire is, I would argue, a way of expressing these desires in an acceptable form. Not only is the vampire a corpse with a most definite existence, but by virtue of being the active partner (who in fact first subdues the passive one), it takes the blame for unacceptable desires upon itself. Thus Stoker's Jonathan Harker can enjoy the female vampire's attack with a clear conscience: "it's all right, *because he is not responsible.* In matters of sex, a highly moralistic society can find a psychological escape valve in the concept of outside evil"

(King, 74). Sade, of course, is not tailoring his writing
to make it acceptable to society. Imprisoned, he has been
removed from society, and so does not need to make use of
Stoker's safety valve. He presents necrophilia without any
projection or substitution: "le duc de Florville . . . veut
qu'on place sur un lit de satin noir un beau cadavre de
fille venant d'être assassinée; il le manie dans tous les
sens et l'encule" (Sade 1991, 393).[21] The evil in Sade
does not come from outside. It is not the product of an
inhuman, supernatural force. All of his monsters in Les
cent vingt journées de Sodome are human beings. The evil
comes from within.

Bram Stoker's Dracula is the most famous vampire tale
of all, and established the standard vampire image of the
Eastern European aristocrat. The murderous play of sexual
identity in the book is so complex that it would require a
book in itself to examine thoroughly, and so I will confine
myself here to an examination of the role of power in this
context.

The fears of the characters with regard to identity-
loss have a somewhat different focus than in The Mysteries
of Udolpho and The Monk. All of the characters are well-
off, and what few financial worries the Harkers initially

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[21]"The same Duc de Florville . . . wishes to have the
corpse of a beautiful and recently murdered girl placed upon
a bed covered with black satin; he fondles the body, explores
its every nook and cranny, and embuggers it." (Sade 1987,
606)

have disappear after the death of Peter Hawkins. Thus,
their economic and social identities, so much the objects of
concern in the novels of Radcliffe and Lewis, are almost
unassailable here. Interestingly, the one character who
does fret about his social identity is Dracula himself, and
this would appear to be the one area where he fears, rather
than desires, a fluid self:

> Here I am noble, I am boyar; the common
> people know me, and I am master. But a
> stranger in a strange land, he is no
> one; men know him not -- and to know not
> is to care not for. I am content if I
> am like the rest, so that no man stops
> if he sees me, or pause in his speaking
> if he hear my words, "Ha, ha! a
> stranger!" I have been so long master
> that I would be master still -- or at
> least that none other should be master
> of me.   (Stoker, 30)

Dracula is willing to accept anonymity as the price of
carrying out his move to the fresh pastures of London,
though to be no longer recognized as a lord does seem to
rankle. However, the possibility that he be misidentified,
that he be seen as a stranger and inferior, is intolerable.
He would much rather have no social identity at all than to
have one which he hates, one constructed by other people and

not himself. This would strike at what is the main focus in this book of the erotics of identity: power.

Throughout Stoker's novel, the most common fear is not the loss of financial position or social status, or even the fear of death (in its usual and mundane sense). The great terror seems to be the threat of becoming Other. The victim's body remains superficially intact, but the personality has changed utterly. Hence Mina's horror after her encounter with Dracula: he has changed her, and she knows it, and she bears the physical evidence of her transformed self in the scar left by the host on her forehead. And of course, the transformation into Other always occurs at someone else's behest.

Though Mina reacts with fear and loathing to her transformation, her friends also react with utter horror. It is important to note that the horror of an identity shift is primarily experienced by the victim's friends. Mina is only horrified because she is aware of what is happening to her. Lucy was oblivious. The social context is vital in establishing that something horrible is taking place. Among the key sequences that show that the horror is defined primarily by the attitudes of the victim's friends is the staking of Lucy:

> There, in the coffin lay no longer
> the foul Thing that we had so dreaded
> and grown to hate that the work of her

destruction was yielded as a privilege

to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy

as we had seen her in her life, with her

face of unequalled sweetness and purity.

True that there were there . . . the

traces of care and pain and waste; but

these were all dear to us, for they

marked her truth to what we knew.

(Stoker, 222-223)

Lucy's change is seen as an abomination that is fortunately destroyed. The most disturbing element of her transformation for her friends does not appear to be the fact that she preys on children, since the tale of the "Bloofer Lady" was of no interest to them until they connected it with Lucy. The most disturbing part of the change is that she has become something that they do not recognize, that they do not know.

It is also significant that throughout the novel, the person undergoing the change is always female, while the horrified witnesses are male. When Lucy becomes a vampire she not only becomes a being that they do not know, but she escapes the identity that has been constructed for her. Here we can see all the games of power coming into play. The supposedly sympathetic male characters are just as involved in the determination of others' (women's) identities as is Dracula. We can see this clearly in Van

Helsing's first encounter with Mina, where she is somewhat
taken aback by his rapturous praise:

> "But, doctor, you praise me too
>
> much, and -- and you do not know me."
>
> "Not know you -- I, who am old, and
>
> who have studied all my life men and
>
> women; I, who have made my specialty the
>
> brain and all that belongs to him and
>
> all that follow from him!"
>
> (Stoker, 190)

Van Helsing is "intent on mythologizing Mina" (Griffin,
145), and will brook no opposition. Given his knowledge and
education, it appears self-evident to him that he is in a
position not only to know someone, but to know that person
better than they know themselves. We should also note Van
Helsing's use of the masculine pronoun "him" rather than
"it." He thus transforms the mind, to which so much
"belongs" and from which so many things "follow," into a
kind of patriarchal god.[22]

If Van Helsing and the other men engage in defining
other people's identities, the primary focus of their
activity is the control of the women's sexual selves.
Independent sexuality on the part of the women, indeed, any

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[22]Similarly, Van Helsing refers to the Bible as "him."
Christopher Craft comments that "Van Helsing's mangled English
. . . permits Stoker the unidiomatic pronominalization of the
genderless text" (Craft, 226-227).

form of sexuality at all, is feared and forbidden. Before her transformation, Lucy fulfils the required role of the virginal bride-to-be. There is, however, a hint that she is not as asexual as society demands: "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (Stoker, 68). As Judith Weissman points out, "the intended meaning is that she would like to be kind to these three fine men who love her; the implicit meaning is that she feels able to handle three men sexually" (Weissman, 74). Lucy is conscious of the fact that she has transgressed her assigned role, and suppresses the revelation of desire immediately. Nevertheless, this hint suggests that the sexual being Lucy becomes as a vampire (consistently referred to by John Seward as "voluptuous" [217, 218, 220]) may simply be an unleashing of her repressed self, rather than the alien "Thing" that the men believe. Thus, for Lucy's lovers it is still less threatening to maintain that her body is possessed by an outside evil than to face the possibility that that which they do not know is merely a facet of Lucy's self that has been present all along.

We have seen earlier that in Les cent vingt journées de Sodome, Sade's libertines control all aspects of their victims' sexuality. It is instructive to note the libertines' reaction when their prisoners do express their own sexual identity: "On découvre ce jour-là qu'Augustine

et Zelmire se branlent ensemble; elles sont toutes deux

rigoureusement punies" (Sade 1991, 374).[23] One might have

expected such activity to meet with the libertines'

approval, but this is sexual activity that occurs outside

their control, and must therefore be suppressed. Nothing

must be permitted which might threaten their omnipotence,

and by extension their selves.

Bearing Sade's model in mind, we see that a very

similar situation exists in Dracula. The female vampires

are seen as evil by the male characters. The descriptions

of these women go to such lengths to emphasize their

overwhelmingly sexual nature that this in itself appears to

be an evil warranting violent destruction, and the vampires'

status as blood-suckers is, if not incidental, part and

parcel of this sexuality. The punishment meted out to this

sexuality is worthy of Sade:

>The Thing in the coffin writhed;
>
>and a hideous, blood-curdling screech
>
>came from the opened red lips. The body
>
>shook and quivered and twisted in wild
>
>contortions; the sharp white teeth
>
>champed together till the lips were cut,
>
>and the mouth was smeared by a crimson
>
>foam. But Arthur never faltered. He

---

[23]"Upon this day Augustine and Zelmire are found frigging
together; they are both rigorously punished" (Sade 1987, 582).

> looked like a figure of Thor as his
>
> untrembling arm rose and fell, driving
>
> deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing
>
> stake, whilst the blood from the pierced
>
> heart welled and spurted up around it.
>
> (Stoker, 222)

The welter of gore and physical agony in this passage invests the notion of a "mercy-bearing stake," already a brutal oxymoron, with the most grotesque irony. The being in the coffin has transgressed its bounds, and is therefore not a woman but a Thing. Any amount of pain it suffers is no more than its due. Their power and their selves challenged, the men re-assert their authority. Arthur is compared to that most macho of deities, Thor. And authority is asserted in a spectacularly violent and phallic manner. The fear of feminine sexuality is visible in the very power of these killings: "to make your own hole is an ultimate arrogance, an assertion of penetrative prowess that nonetheless acknowledges, in the flight of its evasion, the threatening power imagined to inhabit woman's available openings" (Craft, 235).

Dracula, too, makes his own openings, though it is interesting that he, the representative of evil in the novel, inflicts violence that is far less brutally physical on his victims (and he is thus also quite different from the mutilating ghoul that the vampire was in folklore). In

fact, the descriptions of vampiric attacks in <u>Dracula</u>
clearly carry a strong element of erotic pleasure: when
Harker is attacked by the female vampires he tells us that
"I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited --
waited with beating heart" (Stoker, 47).

Dracula also resembles Sade's libertines in a number of
ways, quite apart from the sexual nature of his violence.
Like the libertines, he is a member of his society's ruling
class, and is therefore above the laws by virtue of making
them.[24] Like them, he even extends his control over
reproduction. Sade's libertines have an absolute horror of
childbirth. When Constance becomes pregnant, "[l]a haine de
Curval croissait en même temps que son pauvre ventre" (Sade
1991, 197-198).[25] She is permitted to carry her pregnancy
to term only so that her death might be the more atrocious.
Curval's hatred is easy to understand, because here he is
confronted with the threat of an uncontrolled life that
nevertheless partakes of him. His identity has been
fragmented, and further, his "little death" has been the
occasion of a new life. This is intolerable. Thus it is
both logical and inevitable that the libertines ultimately

[24]Social critique in Stoker's novel is, however, muted,
since Dracula's victims and opponents are also from the upper
classes. The book's staunchly upper-bourgeois position is
perhaps best encapsulated by Mina's rapturous exclamations
about "the wonderful power of money!" (Stoker, 360).

[25]"Curval's hatred was growing just as certainly as was
her poor belly" (Sade 1987, 382).

kill their own daughters. The only exception is Julie. She
is spared because she becomes the same sort of monster as
her father and his friends. Their successful moulding of
her into one of their own determines her survival,
overcoming the fact of her birth. Similarly, Dracula's
attacks ultimately ensure that his victims can never
reproduce conventionally, but in this process he also
creates more of his own kind. Dracula and the libertines
thus reproduce without the participation of women.
Furthermore, as William Patrick Day points out, Dracula is
both lover of the vampire women and (by virtue of creation)
their father (144). He thus assumes an almost identical
role with the female vampires as the libertines do with
Julie. And just as the libertines have defined Julie's
identity, so Dracula defines those of his victims. He may
have removed them from one constricting society, but only to
place them in another. The society of vampires is just as
limited in its means of expression as is human society, and
Dracula is his culture's ruling patriarch.

Dracula also resembles the libertines in that his
sexuality must finally express itself through his partner's
death. This is in contrast to his living male opponents,
who see death as a release from the living death of
sexuality. As with Sade's supermen, the climax of Dracula's
attack is murder. He is only satisfied once he has killed
his victim. Furthermore, the physical form that his

sexuality takes (blood-sucking) is very similar to a large number of the "passions" depicted in <u>Les cent vingt journées de Sodome</u>.

Though the actual sucking of blood is almost conspicuous by its absence in Sade's book, the consumption by the libertines of other people's bodily fluids appears on virtually every page.[26] Vampirism, furthermore, "signifies a reversion to the most primitive aspects of sadism" (Jones, 111), and so Dracula's primary activity is clearly Sadeian in nature. Vampirism reaffirms the aggressor's identity at the expense of the victim's, a fact that is not only visible in Dracula's rejuvenation and Lucy's decline, but also, as Renfield points out, in the literal stealing of identity:

> "He [Dracula] didn't even smell the
> same as he went by me . . . . I thought
> that, somehow, Mrs. Harker had come into
> the room."
>
> . . . . "When Mrs. Harker came in
> to see me this afternoon she wasn't the
> same: It was like tea after the teapot
> has been watered." (Stoker, 286)

Dracula has physically stolen a portion of what constitutes Mina, and she is correspondingly lessened. The sexual nature of this attack is emphasized by the oft-quoted

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[26]Father Henri's passion (Sade 1991, 102), which consists in sucking out nasal mucus, makes one thankful that vampires' tastes are as mundane as they are.

depiction of Mina's second encounter with Dracula. This
scene, where she is forced to drink blood from his chest,
is, as so many critics have pointed out, evocative of both
enforced fellatio and nursing. Mina also confesses that,
when the vampire drank from her neck, "strangely enough, I
did not want to hinder him" (Stoker, 293). The identity-
destroying attack of the vampire is pleasurable, but to
admit to this, to submit to the demands of unrestrained
sexuality, is unacceptable and punishable by death, and so
the human participant in vampirism must somehow be
exculpated. Dracula and his kind conveniently place their
partners into hypnotic trances. The victim is thus entirely
passive, and can enjoy the experience without guilt. And so
in a sense we have a symbiotic relationship: the
vampire/libertine requires an unwilling and passive-to-dead
partner in order to preserve his/her identity, while social
constraints force the partner into a passive victim role if
he/she is to enjoy any form of sexual expression at all, and
even this mode ultimately results in death. Even though
admittedly a socially blameless end, this is still a dire
fate.

*   *   *

Necrophilia also plays a role in J. Sheridan LeFanu's
Carmilla, as it would in any vampire tale. And again, we

find that it is the corpse that is the active partner, and
the living human is the passive one. But the passivity of
the victim also serves as a quite different form of defense
mechanism in this tale. Here Laura (the narrator) finds her
identity assailed on so many sides that passive
incomprehension is her only recourse. More accurately, she
is offered a choice of dooms and wrong (or apparently wrong)
identities, and prefers to have no self at all rather than a
dangerous one. She is unable to confront the possibility of
her own homosexuality.

Laura, as William Veeder demonstrates, systematically
represses her own presence in her narrative: she never
tells us her last name; she does not reveal her first name
until forty pages into the story; and in her passionate
encounters with Carmilla, guilt "prompts Laura to withdraw
'I' from sentences and to substitute convenient
abstractions" (Veeder, 199, 201). Since her adventure with
Carmilla, Laura can no longer return to her originally
established identity -- her state of innocence -- which,
characterized as it was by her total isolation from the rest
of society, can hardly be considered as much of an identity
in the first place. Nonetheless, she cannot bring herself
to admit what Carmilla offers. Her initial recourse is
essentially to play dumb to Carmilla's unambiguous advances:

It was like the ardour of a lover; it

embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet

overpowering; and with gloating eyes she

drew me to her, and her hot lips

travelled along my cheek in kisses; and

she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You

are mine, you shall be mine, and you and

I are one for ever." Then she has

thrown herself back in her chair, with

her small hands over her eyes, leaving

me trembling.

"Are we related," I used to ask;

"what can you mean by all this? I

remind you perhaps of some one whom you

love; but you must not, I hate it; I

don't know you -- I don't know myself

when you look so and talk so."

(LeFanu, 292)

Even from her vantage point of writing long after these

events, Laura cannot encounter them face-on. She retreats

behind the ingenuous comfort of similes: Carmilla's ardour

is "like" that of a lover. For the reader, this is a

tautological comparison, given the sensuous physicality of

Carmilla's actions, and the directness of her words. Her

speech could hardly be "like" anything other than what it

is: a declaration of love. Laura's own emotions are less

clear-cut, and with good reason, since she does not know

them or will not admit them to herself. She consistently

describes her sensations in paradoxical terms: Carmilla's advances are "hateful and yet overpowering," and earlier Laura herself is "conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence," a circumstance which she acknowledges "is paradox [sic]" (292). Having been alerted by the improbable use of simile, we should be just as suspicious of the paradoxes. Laura's most honest statement is "I don't know myself." Carmilla's love-making sets off sensations in Laura that she does not properly understand. And while she realizes that her previously constructed self, asexual and properly positioned in the patriarchy, is false, she is terrified of the alternative.

Though Laura very shortly realizes that Carmilla's advances are precisely what they appear to be, she attempts desperate rationalizations: "What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress?" (LeFanu, 293). Laura herself instantly dismisses this idea as nonsense, "highly interesting as it was to [her] vanity." Thus, all of Laura's protestations are qualified, even though she is terrified of admitting to her sexuality.

Laura is terrified for reasons quite other than Mina and her friends. Granted that Carmilla is, after all, a vampire, and does finally threaten Laura's life, and so the fatality of sexuality still looms, it is important to note

that Carmilla's attacks are qualitatively very different

from Dracula's. Carmilla's sexual advances and her actual

bloodsucking occur separately. However much the attack

registers in Laura's consciousness, it still occurs while

she is asleep, while the advances take place when she is

fully conscious and Carmilla makes do without hypnosis.

LeFanu's vampires are quite different from Stoker's, in that

the gradual destruction of a victim only occurs when the

vampire has become fascinated with this person: "In these

cases [the vampire] seems to yearn for something like

sympathy and consent. In ordinary ones it goes direct to

its object, overpowers with violence, and strangles and

exhausts often at a single feast" (LeFanu, 337). Carmilla

needs Laura's consent, and thus deprives her of the excuse

which shielded Mina, Jonathan and Lucy from condemnation.

It is this consent which terrifies Laura, because then she

would be acknowledging a transgression that her society will

not tolerate: "If Carmilla is monstrous, then, so too is

Laura. But here what is horrible is not substance, but

forms imposed on female sexuality and pleasure by masculine

society" (Day, 89). The men in the story punish Carmilla by

staking her and cutting her head off,[27] and Laura may well

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[27] It should be noted that here, as in <u>Dracula</u>, only the
female vampires are so graphically executed. Staking the
woman through the heart, is of course, and extremely phallic
method of execution. As for the decapitation, "[i]f man
operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is
culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said
that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration

apply the lesson to herself. To deviate from accepted sexual identity will entail as punishment the deprivation of all identity.

Seward, Van Helsing and company react with horror to the sexualized women they perceive in the vampires. As this sexuality and vampirism are indistinguishable, the punishment the men mete out certainly has as much to do with the sexual aggressiveness of the women as it does with their blood-sucking propensities. Carmilla is a sexually expressive woman as well, but she generates even greater anxiety through her lesbianism. Christopher Craft outlines the intense male fear of female homosexuality:

> Late Victorian accounts of lesbianism
> . . . superscribed conventional gender
> norms upon sexual relationships to which
> these norms were anatomically
> irrelevant. Again the heterosexual norm
> proved paradigmatic. The female
> "husband" in such a relationship was
> understood to be dominant, appetitive,
> masculine, and "congenitally inverted";
> the female "wife" was understood to be
> quiescent, passive, only "latently"
> homosexual, and . . . unmotivated by

anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head" (Cixous, 481).

> genital desire. Extreme deployment of
> the heterosexual paradigm approached the
> ridiculous [such as enlarged clitorises
> as penises]. This rather pathetic hunt
> for the penis-in-absentia denotes a
> double anxiety: first, that the penis
> shall not be erased, and if it is
> erased, that it shall be reinscribed in
> a perverse simulacrum; and second, that
> all desire repeat, under the duress of
> deformity, the heterosexual norm that
> the metaphor of inversion always
> assumes.   (Craft, 228)

There are two points to be made here. Firstly, Carmilla's
and Laura's relationship might at first seem to conform to
the required husband-wife heterosexual paradigm, given
Laura's passive response to Carmilla's direct advances.
However, as we have seen, Laura's passivity is not so much a
product of quiescence and latent homosexuality as it is a
fear of acknowledging her desires and their terrible social
consequences. Laura herself realizes that Carmilla's
"masculinity" is mere rationalization on her part. After
she wonders briefly if Carmilla might not be a boy in
disguise, she concedes that "her ways were girlish; and
there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible
with a masculine system in a state of health" (LeFanu, 293).

Secondly, the male anxiety concerning the erasure of the
penis is directly connected to the fears of identity-loss.

As I hope I have shown, the male characters in Gothic
fiction define themselves largely through the power that
they wield over others, and especially over women. This
being the case, a lesbian relationship, which by its very
nature excludes men and thus removes the women from at least
one aspect of the masculine power structure, is particularly
threatening. Deprived of an actual role in these
relationships, it would appear that the male attempts to
compensate by forcing the lesbian couple into the
heterosexual model so that one of the partners is a *de facto*
male (hence the search for the enlarged clitoris as penis
substitute). If the man cannot be there himself, then at
least his presence is still felt. If the heterosexual model
is maintained, then belief in a form of control is still
possible, even if this is control at one remove. The great
fear is that complete erasure of the male role will occur.
An identity largely predicated on power naturally begins to
disintegrate when that power collapses.

Sade appears to be conscious of the power of lesbianism
and its threat to male hegemony. All of his superwomen
prefer other women as bed partners. Champville, for
instance, is explicitly defined by her homosexuality: in
her character summary, Sade writes: "elle est tribade, et

tout l'annonce dans elle" (Sade 1991, 82).[28] And though

she is the only woman so exclusively defined, we discover

that even Duclos, who enjoys a vigorous relationship with

Blangis, leans toward her own gender:

> J'ai aimé les femmes, messieurs, je ne
>
> m'en cache point. Pas cependant au
>
> degré de ma chère compagne, Mme
>
> Champville, . . . mais je les ai
>
> toujours préférées aux hommes dans mes
>
> plaisirs, et ceux qu'elles me
>
> procuraient ont toujours eu sur mes sens
>
> un empire plus puissant que les voluptés
>
> masculines.   (Sade 1991, 205)[29]

Duclos' declaration is the polar opposite of Laura's

hesitancy and denial: "je ne m'en cache point" indicates

that she conceals her preferences from no one, including

herself. Though her frankness and explicitness would

obviously not have been advantageous to her in a mainstream

social context, by placing her in such a powerful position

(and having her survive), Sade acknowledges the strong

subversive effect of her sexual orientation.

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[28]"She is a tribade, and everything about her proclaims
it" (Sade 1987, 257).

[29]"I love women, Messieurs, I don't deny it. Not however
to the uncommon degree my good colleague, Madame Champville,
loves them . . .; I have simply always preferred them to men
in my pleasures, and those they have procured me have always
exerted a more powerful sway over my senses than masculine
delights" (Sade 1987, 389).

We must not forget, however, that Sade's superwomen are
massively evil in their own right, and the same applies to
Carmilla. She is a vampire, and she is sucking the life
from Laura. The superwomen and Carmilla may well be
threatening the patriarchy, but they have still been warped
by it. Duclos callously sells her lover to a murderer, and
Carmilla confesses her fatal intentions to Laura: "In the
rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life,
and you shall die -- die, sweetly die -- into mine" (LeFanu,
291). However seductive Carmilla's advances are, she is
clearly destroying Laura's identity. Veeder correctly
points out that Carmilla is trying to lead Laura into an
"identity-destroying emersion" into her own self (208).
Laura is finally faced with an impossible choice, where she
must either deny her true identity (and through suppression
destroy it) or accept it, and still be destroyed.

This, then, may well be the ultimate pessimism which
lies at the heart of Gothic fiction. What blazes forth in
the apocalyptically nihilistic pages of Sade, "a man who
believed that, if man exists, we do not need to invent the
devil" (Carter, 103), still pulses in the restrained Gothics
intended for public consumption. What these works reveal is
a society where sexuality has been so twisted and deformed
that it inevitably leads to the annihilation of self,
ultimately ending in death. There is no way out. Those in
power define themselves and their sexuality by this power,

which in turn is defined by the destruction of others. Those who successfully threaten this power do so at the cost of committing the very same crimes. The endings of the Gothics will therefore forever be problematic. Sade's novel, which ultimately becomes a series of arithmetical operations, can hardly be said to end at all. The English Gothics conclude with the old order triumphant and restored. But this is the order, as Sade explicitly shows, that is responsible for the horrors in the first place, and so nothing is truly resolved. The characters remain trapped in a system of murderous, abyssal sexuality, locked in and whirling about in the dance of self-destruction.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that one of the prime concerns
of Gothic fiction is the fear of the destruction of
identity, and that this fear is expressed by representations
of sexuality and death, in which the two are seen as
inextricably entwined. If we look at any Gothic novel from
the period under discussion, I believe that we will find the
same concerns, however disguised or restrained the depiction
of these fears might be. It would be difficult to imagine a
writer more assiduously correct than Ann Radcliffe, yet, in
spite of the circumspection of her work, we still find the
same terrors of identity powering her narrative. Indeed,
Radcliffe's very circumspection works against her because of
these fears: when she emphasizes that her heroine is
dressed, the thought of the heroine undressed is immediately
invoked. The terrible dangers to Emily's identity are
present in their conspicuous absence.

This characteristic concern of the Gothic can be
extremely useful for studying the genre as it changes
through the centuries. Traditional conventions and
trappings may disappear, but this preoccupation, I believe,
remains constant. Thus, in the revisionist Gothic novels of
Anne Rice, for instance, we find the vampires on endless
quests to discover and preserve the nature of their selves.

Although, as I have stated, <u>Les cent vingt journées de</u>

Sodome does not act as a direct source for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothics, the situation has changed. Sade's work is now generally available. Les cent vingt journées de Sodome is no longer merely an "aural" text: it can now be a direct influence on contemporary writers. Certainly the authors of works that fall within such movements in the horror genre as "splatterpunk" owe much to Sade. Taboos have now collapsed to the point that new works are no longer restrained by the public considerations that held Lewis and others back. There are writers today who begin to approach, and in some cases rival, Sade in ferocity and unflinching, graphic detail. This is a very rich field, and there remains much to explore.

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