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Oxford Book of
**GOTHIC
TALES**

Edited by
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THE OXFORD BOOK OF
GOTHIC TALES

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book can claim to be the first attempt to exhibit, along the full extent of its career from the eighteenth century to the present day, a tradition of short fiction specifically designated as 'Gothic'. Although some of the tales reprinted here could also be counted under various other related headings—as ghost stories, as horror stories, as tales of terror, of the macabre, of the supernatural, or the uncanny—the fictional tradition represented in this collection is not adequately described by any of these familiar labels. The category of the Gothic tale overlaps at some points with its neighbouring fictional types, but still retains special features of its own which can and do thrive outside the particular conventions of, say, the ghost story. One of the aims of this introductory account will be to characterize those distinctive properties of the Gothic tale, bringing to a somewhat clearer definition the often nebulous associations that we draw upon when we use such a phrase as 'Gothic horror'.

The term 'Gothic' has become firmly established as the name for one sinister corner of the modern Western imagination, but it seems to work by intuitive suggestion rather than by any agreed precision of reference. There are several difficulties of usage involved in the term itself, of which the most obvious today is the incompatibility between the literary and architectural senses: whereas 'Gothic' in architectural contexts refers to a style of European architecture and ornament that flourished from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century, it is used in its literary and cinematic senses to describe works that appeared in an entirely different medium several hundreds of years later. A term thus applied simultaneously to the products of two such widely differing ages (to say nothing of the cultural gulf between Chartres cathedral and a sensationalist magazine story) would seem to require some qualification attached to it; and, indeed, it is the sensible practice of architectural historians to distinguish from the Gothic of the late Middle Ages the Neo-Gothic or Gothic Revival style of the nineteenth century. In a more logical world, we might have learned to adopt a clearer designation of this kind for the 'Gothic' of modern literature and cinema; but, of course, it is far too late to undo our inherited confusions, and even if we were able to do so, we would only run up against further difficulties rendering 'Neo-Gothic fiction'

or some such nomenclature just as unsatisfactory. But before we can see our way through such further tangles, we will need to look back into the common source of these divergent senses of 'Gothic'.

In its earliest sense, the word is simply the adjective denoting the language and ethnic identity of the Goths: the Germanic peoples, first heard of upon the shores of the Baltic, whose later maraudings and migrations from the third to the fifth century AD took them across southern Europe from the Black Sea to the Iberian peninsula, fatally weakening the Roman empire in the face of further 'barbarian' incursions. Long after they disappeared into the ethnic melting-pots of the northern Mediterranean, their fearful name was taken and used to prop up one side of that set of cultural oppositions by which the Renaissance and its heirs defined and claimed possession of European civilization: Northern versus Southern, Gothic versus Graeco-Roman, Dark Ages versus the Age of Enlightenment, medieval versus modern, barbarity versus civility, superstition versus Reason. As revised by northern Protestant nationalisms, the 'map' of these contraries would be turned about so that the southern Catholic cultures could be represented as the barbarously superstitious antagonist; but the essential shape of the polarity would persist as the founding mythology of modern Europe and its internal tensions. In the drastic simplifications of such a scheme, a telescoping of historical periods that merged the 'Dark Ages' of Rome's decline with the more flourishing condition of the later Middle Ages, lumping together the Ostrogothic warrior of the third century with the learned Parisian monk of the thirteenth, was not considered an anachronism so much as a necessary verdict on centuries of unproductive pre-history. So although the Goths themselves never constructed a single Gothic cathedral, nor composed any Gothic fiction, these later senses of Gothic still have a recognizable meaning by virtue of their polar opposition to the 'Classical' architectural and literary traditions derived from Greece and Rome. Accordingly, by the late eighteenth century 'Gothic' was commonly used to mean 'medieval, therefore barbarous', in a largely unquestioned equation of civilization with classical standards. The early literary sense of Gothic is founded upon this usage, denoting, as in the subtitle of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), a tale concerned with the brutality, cruelty, and superstition of the Middle Ages. The assumed superiority of specifically classical culture then tends to be eroded by the challenge of the Romantic Movement, but there remain other terms of opposition—the modern, the enlightened, the rational—which serve to hold the pejorative sense of Gothic in its place. Unlike

'Romantic', then, 'Gothic' in its literary usage never becomes a positive term of cultural revaluation, but carries with it (even among antiquarian enthusiasts for medieval art, such as Walpole, the Aikins, and their followers) an identification of the medieval with the barbaric. A Gothic novel or tale will almost certainly offend classical tastes and rational principles, but it will not do so by urging any positive view of the Middle Ages. In this important respect literary Gothicism differs crucially from serious medieval revivalism of the kind found in the mature phase of the Gothic Revival in architecture: here, the views of the Catholic convert Augustus Welby Pugin and of John Ruskin effected in the nineteenth century a rehabilitation of the Middle Ages as the great age of Faith and of social responsibility, radically revising the term 'Gothic' to mean 'Christian' in contradistinction to the corruptly pagan tradition of the Renaissance. The term 'Neo-Gothic' used for the Victorian architectural style so endorsed would be entirely unsuitable for the literary Gothickry of Pugin's or Ruskin's contemporaries, because the implied valuations of medieval life are so different in either case. Such a contrast helps to clarify the fact that the most troublesome aspect of the term 'Gothic' is, indeed, that literary Gothic is really anti-Gothic.

The anti-Gothicism of Gothic, by which I mean its ingrained distrust of medieval civilization and its representation of the past primarily in terms of tyranny and superstition, has taken several forms, from the vigilant Protestant xenophobia so strongly evident in the first half-century of Gothic writing, to the rationalist feminism of Angela Carter's fiction. In whatever form, it has persisted as a major element of the tradition, even though its significance has tended to be disguised by the apparent indulgence of archaic superstitions and barbarous energies. At first sight, Gothic fiction may appear, as it did to many anxious readers in the late eighteenth century, as some sort of irresponsible relapse into the old delusions of a benighted age, nostalgically glamorizing the worst features of a past from which we have thankfully escaped. Some attraction to the imagined vitality of past ages is indeed always there in Gothic, but this appeal consists principally in the imaginative freedoms and symbolic possibilities of discarded folk beliefs, not in any faith actually attached to them. When Gothic fiction has employed the ghostly apparitions and omens of archaic lore (and it has not always needed their aid at all), it has at the same time placed them under strong suspicion as part of a cruelly repressive and deluded past. There is often a kind of homeopathic principle at work here, in the way that Gothic writers have borrowed the fables and nightmares of a past age in order to repudiate their

authority: just as the consciously Protestant pioneers of the Gothic novel raise the old ghosts of Catholic Europe only to exorcize them, so in a later age the fiction of Angela Carter has exploited the power of a patriarchal folklore, all the better to expose and dispel its grip upon us. In the early days of Gothic writing, the strong anxiety among both critics and practitioners of Gothic fiction about the risks of dabbling in bygone superstition, and especially about the permissible use of supernatural incidents was animated by a watchful Protestant fear of popery and its imaginative snares. It is no accident at all that Gothic fiction first emerged and established itself within the British and Anglo-Irish middle class, in a society which had through generations of warfare, political scares, and popular martyrology persuaded itself that its hard-won liberties could at any moment be snatched from it by papal tyranny and the ruthless wiles of the Spanish Inquisition. At the foundation of Gothic literature's anti-Gothic sentiment lies this nightmare of being dragged back to the persecutions of the Counter-Reformation; and so the novels and tales of the early Gothic writers are peopled by scheming Franciscan poisoners, depraved abbesses, fearsome Inquisitors, and diabolical murderers from every monastic order, plotting against helpless maidens who have been forced against their wills into the hypocrisies of a conventual regime. Symptomatic of this nightmare world is the familiar contortion by which the Gothic writer has to provide for the hero and heroine of the tale some reassuring Protestant credentials by making them, although Roman Catholic, secretly immune from the impostures of their own faith. The differences often observed between competing schools of early Gothic fiction on the grounds of their deployment of explicable or inexplicable supernatural effects disappear into unanimity on the matter of Catholic superstition, which is relentlessly satirized and condemned.

The distrust which Gothicism shows towards the bugbears of a discarded mythology may be highlighted helpfully by contrast with the principles of the orthodox ghost story. In spite of their consanguinity and their many mutual borrowings, the two traditions can be seen as mutually opposed on this point. There is a very familiar model followed by many ghost stories in English from the early twentieth century: this usually begins with an assembly of gentlemen gathered at a dinner-table or in a London club, debating the existence of spirits. Then a nervous-looking member of the company pipes up with his first-hand account of the inexplicable occurrences at a country house he has rented for a weekend, where the spooky goings-on have reached the point at which the servants have given

notice. At the close of his narrative, the materialist doubters are silenced, and some moralizing is made to the effect that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in the narrow secular philosophies of bolshevists, suffragettes, and the other democratic do-gooders of this rationalist age. My little travesty does no justice to many more sophisticated writers who have worked in this genre, but readers who have browsed at any length in ghostlore will immediately recognize the type and its conventions. The ostensible point of the ghost story (even when the author may privately be an unbeliever) is to convince the sceptical reader of the palpable existence of phantoms. The conservative tendency of such tales lies in their dedication to overcoming modern scepticism on behalf of an older belief which has been foolishly abandoned. Gothic fiction, on the other hand, usually shows no such respect for the wisdom of the past, and indeed tends to portray former ages as prisons of delusion.

This survey of the difficulties involved in the term 'Gothic' in literature has so far considered the two problems of its anachronistic origins and its possible confusion with more positive medievalist senses to which it is in fact hostile. There remains a further warning to be made against any inflexible identification of Gothic with specifically medieval settings. As this tradition of fiction has evolved, it has adapted the archaic atmosphere of early Gothic fiction, with its usual time of action in the late Middle Ages or the early modern period, to later periods, even in some cases to the writer's own time. It has done this by abstracting certain leading features of these original Gothic settings, retaining especially the enclosed spaces of the old building, with further associations of the past's destructive cruelty. The modern time of writing which is set against the Gothic past eventually comes round to being the past of succeeding generations of readers and writers; and so by the 1930s we find F. M. Mayor and Isak Dinesen both setting their stories in the early nineteenth century, now become a 'Gothic' period itself, its customs cruelly repressive in twentieth-century eyes. In principle and in practice it is perfectly possible to have a Gothic story set in the author's own time, provided that the tale focuses upon a relatively enclosed space in which some antiquated barbaric code still prevails. For instance, Conan Doyle's story 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' is set at a time within the living memory of all its first readers, but within an ancestral mansion locked into an archaic form of domestic tyranny. Dislodged from the specific association with the Middle Ages which gave it its name, the Gothic has become in such

ways a mobile form, and so has generated significant traditions where there are no medieval castles at all, in the Americas.

Before attempting any summary definition of the Gothic tale as I have understood it in making the selections for this book, it will be worth reviewing briefly the emergence of Gothic fiction in its widest sense; because the Gothic tale, unlike the relatively free-standing genre of the ghost story, initially derives from and is thereafter partly entangled with the tradition of the longer Gothic novel or romance. Some of the most important practitioners of Gothic and semi-Gothic fiction, notably Ann Radcliffe and the Brontë sisters, never published short stories, and some others have kept their Gothic work and their shorter fiction separate. As a result, our usual understanding and recognition of Gothic effects in shorter tales depends partly upon conventions originating and continuing outside the short-story tradition itself, which is to some extent a supplementary and junior line: an additional wing belatedly built on to the larger ruined house of Gothic fiction, although still well worth exploring for its own sake.

The tradition began with the attention attracted by Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in the 1760s. This short novel, set in the thirteenth century, concerns the efforts of Manfred, a tyrannical Italian prince, to produce an heir to the title and estate which his grandfather has usurped. Following the strange death of his son, he decides to continue the family line by taking his son's fiancée Isabella in marriage. Aided by the gallant peasant boy Theodore (who later turns out to be the rightful heir of Otranto), Isabella resists, and the enraged Manfred pursues her through the castle until he mistakenly stabs his own daughter Matilda to death. Theodore is restored to the title by the intervention of the gigantic ghost of his ancestor Prince Alfonso the Good, whose statue had earlier crushed Manfred's son. Walpole was inspired to produce this novel by his antiquarian explorations among old ballads and romances, and he offered his work to the public (at first under the guise of a translation from the Italian) as a modest experiment in resurrecting the imaginative liberties of medieval romance, against the realistic constraints of a contemporary fictional code which frowned upon his supernatural marvels. Judged by the standards of Walpole's successors it is a rather clumsy production, but it did establish for them a fruitful combination of themes, motifs, and settings: the merciless determination of the feudal tyrant to continue his family line, the threat of dynastic extinction, the confinement and persecution of a vulnerable heroine in a sinister labyrinthine building. These were to become the standard materials of Gothic as the tradition took shape.

Taking their cue from Walpole, several other antiquarian hobbyists took to composing pseudo-medieval works: in verse, the craze called forth the poetical forgeries of the tragic prodigy Thomas Chatterton, while in prose it generated the transient genre of the Gothic 'fragment'—an incomplete narrative presented as if the result of an antiquarian discovery among partially destroyed manuscripts. The Gothic fragment, which is the forerunner of the Gothic tale proper, ingeniously exploits the aesthetic principle behind the appeal of ruined buildings, by suggesting a lost whole which the reader's imagination is then invited to reconstruct. This device of the tantalizingly incomplete text—a crumbling parchment or fatally interrupted narrative—was to be incorporated into the far more substantial works of the greatest early Gothic novelist, Ann Radcliffe. Her full-length novels *The Romance of the Forest* (1792), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797) all combine more successfully the elements earlier assembled by Walpole. Again the endangered heroine is brought under the malevolent power of a sinister aristocrat in the gloomy chambers of an old castle or abbey, although the time of the action is brought forward into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She developed the leisurely construction of suspense and brooding atmosphere, apparently abandoning her heroes and heroines to the most frightful of fates for several chapters before returning to permit their escape through some damp subterranean passage. Such prolonged teasing of the reader's anxieties was possible only in the three-volume novel, and it was in this form that Gothic fiction dominated the circulating libraries for the next fifteen or twenty years, before Walter Scott's new mode of historical fiction displaced it. There were, however, shorter and less expensive forms of Gothic reading-matter: several magazines in this period offered serialized Gothic romances and, more rarely, the occasional self-contained tale; while at the lower end of the market there were the popular chapbooks known from their covers as 'bluebooks' and sometimes nicknamed 'shilling shockers'. The first decade of the nineteenth century witnessed a brisk trade in these sixpenny, thirty-six page pamphlets with their condensed reworkings and outright plagiarisms of Gothic novels. Lifting as much as they could from the novels of Radcliffe and her imitators, the bluebook hack-writers compressed their tales into a breakneck narration that frequently degenerated into a plot-summary interspersed with choice incidents of violent outrage, in the more frantic sensationalist style of M. G. Lewis's novel *The Monk* (1796). The hectic confusion of this manner can be seen here in 'The Vindictive Monk', and a more assured exercise in abridged

Radcliffean imitation in 'The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin'.

Although many literary historians are satisfied to regard Gothic as a closed episode after the appearance of C. R. Maturin's rambling novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820, the tradition in fact survives through the nineteenth century and beyond, following two intertwined courses of evolution. On the one hand, it infiltrates and contributes powerfully to the mainstream of the Victorian novel, distinctly colouring the atmosphere of major works by Charlotte Brontë and by Charles Dickens, whose characters Bertha Mason and Miss Havisham are unmistakably and unforgettably Gothic figures; and it resurfaces in the 1860s within the modern settings of 'sensation novels' by Sheridan Le Fanu, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Wilkie Collins, appearing once again towards the close of the century in more overtly Gothic works by Stevenson, Wilde, and Bram Stoker. On the other hand, it adapts itself to the emergent form of the magazine tale as the modern genre that we recognize as 'the short story' takes shape. This second development is in some ways the more remarkable, requiring as it did a thoroughgoing reformulation of Gothic conventions away from the protracted suspense of Ann Radcliffe's work and from the disorderly multiplication of incidents found in Lewis, Maturin, and others, towards a far more tightly concentrated effect, of a kind that the fragment-writers and the bluebook summarizers had failed to refine. Although the somewhat expansive stories of Sheridan Le Fanu have an honourable place in this process, the writer who almost single-handedly carried through the necessary transformation was Edgar Allan Poe. If there is one work that announces the true arrival of the Gothic tale, its convincing emergence from cruder beginnings, it is his story 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. Poe's deliberate dedication to economy and consistency of effect in his writings produced in this tale a remarkably crystallized pattern for the future evolution of Gothic fiction. His new formula involved not only the stripping down of a cumbersome conventional machinery to its essential elements but an accompanying clarification and highlighting of a theme long familiar to Gothic writing and to the surrounding culture of Romantic sensationalism, although hitherto left hovering in the shadows: that of the decline and extinction of the old family line. Perfectly harmonizing the terminal involution of the Usher family with the final crumbling of its mansion—of 'house' as dynasty with house as habitation—Poe ensured that whereas before him the keynote of Gothic fiction had been cruelty, after him it would be decadence.

There is no space here to prolong the story of Gothic fiction beyond these founding and defining stages, except to notice that among Poe's achievements was the successful translation of Gothic into American literature, if not exactly on to American soil. The full 'grounding' of Gothic in particular territories and their special customs would later be accomplished by writers of the 'local color' movement, notably George Washington Cable. This transatlantic appropriation, though, guaranteed for the Gothic tale an extended life in the flourishing short-story tradition of the United States, as the many American tales in this collection should illustrate. By the middle of the twentieth century there even came to be talk of a 'Southern Gothic' movement in the most fertile region of the States—a group usually understood to include, among others, William Faulkner and Eudora Welty (with some writers like Flannery O'Connor whose work inclines more to the 'grotesque' than to Gothic proper). So pronounced did this tendency become, in both North and South, that Leslie Fiedler in his provocative critical study *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) was tempted to conclude that the central tradition of fiction in the United States had been predominantly Gothic from first to last. And although Fiedler was speaking of the literature of white America, his view would seem to have been confirmed subsequently by the appearance of the most outstanding Gothic work of recent years, the novel *Beloved* (1987) by the African-American writer Toni Morrison.

Drawing together some of the characteristics of Gothic fiction already suggested in this brief account of its evolution, I can now summarize what I have understood, in selecting the contents of this collection, a Gothic tale to be. For the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration. This is, of course, too abstract a formula to capture the real accumulation of physical and historical associations by which we actually recognize the conventions of Gothic; so it may be translated into more concrete terms by noting that typically a Gothic tale will invoke the tyranny of the past (a family curse, the survival of archaic forms of despotism and of superstition) with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the present (the liberty of the heroine or hero) within the dead-end of physical incarceration (the dungeon, the locked room, or simply the confinements of a family house closing in upon itself). Even more concisely, although at the risk of losing an important series of connected meanings, we could just say

that Gothic fiction is characteristically obsessed with old buildings as sites of human decay. The Gothic castle or house is not just an old and sinister building; it is a house of degeneration, even of decomposition, its living-space darkening and contracting into the dying-space of the mortuary and the tomb. Although Gothic fiction can work with other kinds of enclosed space, if these are sufficiently isolated and introverted—convents, prisons, schools, madhouses, even small villages—it is still the dark mansion that occupies its central ground. Doubling as both fictional setting and as dominant symbol, the house reverberates for us with associations which are simultaneously psychological and historical. As a kind of folk-psychology set in stone, the Gothic house is readily legible to our post-Freudian culture, so we can recognize in its structure the crypts and cellars of repressed desire, the attics and belfries of neurosis, just as we accept Poe's invitation to read the haunted palace of the poem in his tale as the allegory of a madman's head. Less often remarked; however, despite all the signs thrown out by Gothic fiction—from the status of its characters to the very decor of its settings—is the mansion's historical resonance. Some further commentary may help to bring out this rather neglected dimension of the Gothic.

It is customary to account for the appeal of Gothic fiction by reference to a set of universal and timeless dreads usually referred to as 'our deepest fears'. And some such common repertoire of shared anxieties, including the fear of death, of decay, and of confinement, is almost certainly involved in both the creation of Gothic works and the reader's response to them. The difficulty with this generalizing claim, though, is that Gothic writing summons up these fears only within its own peculiar framework of conventions, whose special features cannot be explained directly by any nameless dread that Gothic has in common with very different fictional forms like the folk-tale, the ancient myth, or most modern horror stories. Unlike the fear of death, Gothic fiction is neither immemorial nor global, but belongs specifically to the modern age of Europe and the Americas since the end of the eighteenth century; and it is marked by this limited location and history in ways that help differentiate it further from the generality of fearful narratives. Prominent among its special features is a preoccupation with the inherited powers and corruptions of feudal aristocracy, and with similar lineages and agencies of archaic authority, which can include the pseudo-aristocracies of the American South and the monastic hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church. So while it would be possible to concoct a passable horror story about the misdeeds of, say, a dangerously sadistic bank manager or dentist,

one would not be writing a Gothic tale unless one linked the subject-matter in some way to the antiquated tyrannies and dynastic corruptions of an aristocratic power or at least of a proud old provincial family. Moulding our common existential dread into the more particular shapes of Gothic fiction, then, is a set of 'historical fears' focusing upon the memory of an age-old regime of oppression and persecution which threatens still to fix its dead hand upon us. As the brief account of early Gothic fiction given above should already have suggested, these fears first took the form of nervous Protestant fascination with Catholic aristocrats and monks; but as this sectarian alarm subsided, the Gothic tradition continued to feed upon the sinister allure of noble dynasties or lesser family autocracies. It is a middle-class tradition, and its anxiety may be characterized briefly as a fear of historical reversion; that is, of the nagging possibility that the despotisms buried by the modern age may prove to be yet undead.

In this context it may be worth speculating that the figure of the vampire (which has hardly any prominence in early Gothic writing) probably carries a greater importance in twentieth-century mythology than it ever did for Transylvanian villagers in centuries past, and that this is because it encapsulates for a more democratic age a fantasy model of decadent aristocratic cruelty which we need to sacrifice over and over again. Those millions of us who descend, however remotely, from peasant stock rather than from the blood of princes must, it seems, derive some necessary reassurance from these fictional rites of exorcism. The mainstream non-vampiric traditions of Gothic fiction give us something similar, to the extent that they re-enact and implicitly celebrate the extinction of their fearsome dynastic houses. Just why we should feel any need to reassure ourselves may seem to be the real mystery here: after all, the Bastille fell long ago, and, as Jane Austen reminded the readers of Gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey*, it is not so easy these days to be kidnapped and assassinated by an Italian count. One kind of answer to this riddle may be indicated by considering the noticeable prominence of women in the Gothic tradition, as popular and influential authors, as central fictional characters, and as devoted readers. Gothic fiction has long been presided over by Ann Radcliffe and her female successors, commonly employing the Radcliffean model of the heroine enclosed in the master's house: a formula persistently re-worked in the popular variety of women's fiction still known as the 'Gothic romance', whose descent can be traced back through Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. It is more than likely that this enduring adoption of Gothic fiction by women has to do with the

relative failure of modern societies to ensure for women the kind of economic, legal, and personal security that are enjoyed as the post-absolutist rights of man. And if the liberties of women are felt to be more precarious in these public senses, their traditional sphere of the domestic interior will often come to appear less as a refuge than as the most imprisoning space of all, where there may survive the most archaic of tyrannies. As Charlotte Perkins Stetson's tale 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' reminds us, in its combination of personal testimony and feminist fable, the imprisoning house of Gothic fiction has from the very beginning been that of patriarchy, in both its earlier and its expanded feminist senses. Developing the principle more widely, we can conclude that while the existential fears of Gothic may concern our inability to escape our decaying bodies, its historical fears derive from our inability finally to convince ourselves that we have really escaped from the tyrannies of the past. The price of liberty, as the old saying tells us, is eternal vigilance; and in Gothic fiction we find this vigilance running beyond the sober assessment of dangers into a lurid form of fatalism for which paranoia is often not too strong a term. Gothic fiction is a way of exercising such anxieties, but also of allaying them by imagining the worst before it can happen, and giving it at least a safely recognizable form.

In my choice of tales for this collection, I have set out to present not only the best and the most strikingly characteristic of shorter Gothic works but at the same time some sort of evolutionary sequence through which the reader can trace developments across more than two hundred years of this tradition. The tales are accordingly arranged in their chronological order. Readers who are likely to be impatient with the historical curiosities to be found in the opening section, and who wish to spend time only on works of some literary accomplishment may prefer to skip straight to the second section, or even to Poe's 'Fall of the House of Usher', although they will be missing some rather startling entertainment.

This selection has been guided by the conception of Gothic fiction sketched out in the last few pages, and represents an attempt, perverse as it may be, to put together for the first time a relatively pure line of shorter Gothic writing. I am aware, however, that a broader definition of Gothic is possible, and have at some points slackened the line to accommodate this view. An example is the inclusion of Isak Dinesen's story 'The Monkey'. This does not quite meet my own entry requirements, but since Dinesen herself, by including it in her *Seven Gothic Tales*, classified it for us as Gothic (in her sense, as melancholy, fantastical, and Romantic in setting), I am happy to give

it the benefit of the doubt, especially as it is so fascinating and so well written. I had also decided to exclude parodies, partly because so many Gothic tales are already half-way to sending themselves up; but in the time-honoured fashion of anthologists I have in the end broken my own rule in favour of Bret Harte's irresistible 'Selina Sedilia'. Although this collection has an international scope, with two stories from France and three from Latin America, it is dominated by writing from Britain, Ireland, and the United States; I would have preferred it otherwise, but it does seem that Gothic travels only with great difficulty across cultural borders. Within the constraints of the chronological arrangement, I hope to have found some acceptable balance between shorter and longer tales, between the subtle and the sensational, and between little-known pieces and old favourites. Some of the tales found in the first portion of the book reappear here for the first time since their original publication. Others in the later sections, such as Conan Doyle's 'Adventure of the Speckled Band' or Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily', will have been seen before by many readers in different contexts, but may now appear to take on a changed complexion alongside their new neighbours in the many-windowed house of Gothic fiction.