

**CHARLES  
ROBERT  
MATURIN  
HIS LIFE AND WORKS**

BY  
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## Preface.

The completion of this book has been retarded by circumstances unforeseen in the winter of 1914, when I collected most of its materials. I have not, since then, had any opportunity of visiting England, and have thus been unable to augment and verify these materials—which must account for what incompleteness and inaccuracy there may be found in the text as well as in the notes. For the same reason I have been compelled strictly to limit the range of my study, and to desist from all inquiry into Maturin's influence on the romantic movement in France. Neither can my account of his connection with English literature of the latter part of the 19:th century lay any claim to completeness, being confined only to some of the most obvious instances. The fact, however, of this influence's having been greater than is, perhaps, generally known, would seem to justify the publication of a study of Maturin's own works exclusively. These, apart from the intrinsic merit of the best of them, possess, moreover, the interest of being extremely characteristic of, I think, a most fascinating period in the history of literature. It will possibly be remarked that those of them whose literary value is certainly not important, are, in my study, reviewed at rather unnecessary length; but as they have long ago disappeared, not only from the market but also from most libraries, the reader who may take an interest in some of the ideas which they reflect and which are so unfamiliar to our own times, has very few opportunities to become acquainted with the books themselves.

During the course of my work I have received kind assistance from many quarters, which it is my agreeable duty here to acknowledge.

For much valuable advice my gratitude is due to Mr. D. J. O'Donoghue, of University College, Dublin, who was the first to encourage me to set about a study of Maturin, and to Professor Yrjö Hirn, of Helsingfors, who has, with a never-failing interest, followed my work from its beginning. For unpublished biographical material I am under obligation to Mr. John Murray, for having permitted me to make use of Maturin's letters to John Murray, the publisher; and to Miss Ella Hepworth Dixon, who has placed Maturin's correspondence with Sir Charles and Lady Morgan at my disposal. I must also mention that Mr. More Adey has favoured me with the loan of such of Maturin's works as I do not possess, without which kindness the completion of my study would have been utterly impossible. Lastly, it remains to offer my best thanks to Mr. S. Sydney Silverman for help rendered me in point of language, the book being written in what is to me an acquired tongue.

N. I.

Helsingfors, *April 1923.*

# I.

## 1780-1806.

Vastness! and Age! and Memories of Eld!  
Silence! and Desolation! and dim Night!  
I feel ye now—I feel ye in your strength—  
Poe.

In the history of literature change means liberation. The intellectual aspect of a period having worn itself out, the forms which have supported it are felt to be a clog and a burden; and when these forms are dissolved, the channel of thought, from a natural sense of freedom, takes a course diametrically opposite. The transformation seldom takes place abruptly; it may even have been long prepared by pioneers more or less conscious of the advance of a new time with new ideals; but the greatest as well as the most characteristic productions of the victorious movement are not brought forth until the previous order of things has been completely overthrown, and sometimes there is but a short step from the zenith of a literary current to its decadence.

Romanticism in England represented a reaction against that traditional 18:th century, into which Cowper, and Burns, and Ossian had already brought elements new and resuscitating, and whose foundations had at a still earlier date been gently stirred by Thomson, Collins, and Gray. It was a reaction against a time when poetry, although of a polish unequalled afterwards, was confined to subjects upon which the expending of exalted emotions was impossible; when fiction chiefly comprised moralizing descriptions

pertaining to everyday life; and when all sense of outward nature was excluded from both. In the English literature of the beginning of the 19:th century the terms romanticism and naturalism—in curious opposition to the subsequent use of the words—represented collateral currents, springing from the same source, and sometimes the terms were nearly synonymous. In their very essence both of these terms implied a greater amount of freedom. Return to nature was one of the leading catchwords of the time; and the intention of seeing nature not only visually, but also in its most intimate connections with human life, and as intervening in the destinies of man, was to contribute a new depth to thought and feeling, as well as to render the emotions more varied and more intense. The lays of by-gone ages and primitive peoples were studied with admiration and received as wisdom. This interest in nature, independent as it was of any limits of time and space, was followed by the revival of imagination, upon which faculty the romantic movement was largely based. In order to gain a freer scope for imagination romanticism took its literary models and ideas from the dim and mysterious middle ages rather than from the clear and well-regulated classical; in the contrast between the Gothic and the Antique the ‘barbarities’ of the former receded to the background, according as its greater suitability to ‘the views of a genius and to the ends of poetry’<sup>1</sup> became apparent. But in this approach of the mind to nature there was an underlying sense of the incapacity of human conditions to impart happiness, and the flight of imagination to vague and unknown regions was prompted by the feeling that in reality there was no consolation. It was, consequently, not with unalloyed delight that the romantic mind turned to new and untilled fields. It is a characteristic of the movement that it begot a melancholy of its own, a nervous, restless kind of melancholy, connected with temporal rather than eternal

matters, and foreign to its predecessors in the previous century; the difference from these is made apparent upon comparing the melancholy of *Childe Harold* to that of the *Night Thoughts*. If it were possible to imagine the Renaissance with its gaiety turned into *Weltschmerz*, the result would be something like the romanticism of the early 19:th century.

However, freedom held sway, if not in life, still in literature, and the English romanticism owed its masterpieces to originality, as the English classicism did to imitation. Another consequence of this freedom was a greater variety in the romantic literature. *Tintern Abbey* and *The Ancient Mariner* were both written about the same time; both are original and entirely different, and both would have been inconceivable in 1750.

The liberation of the imaginative mind evidently had its perils. Among the romantic writers—even among those of rank—were men to whom freedom implied excess and whose originality was not always strong enough to supply the breakdown of rules and restrictions, and who, accordingly, have not escaped oblivion. One of these is Charles Robert Maturin, the subject of the following pages: a man of unmistakable genius, who was not without influence on some of his happier contemporaries; in whose works the main currents of the time are faithfully and variously reflected, and who occasionally gives forcible proofs of his creativeness in passages that point to the standards of much later periods.

The family of Maturin come from France. The ancestor, Gabriel Maturin, was a Huguenot priest to whom life in that country was made impossible and who, after various adventures, settled in Ireland towards the close of the 17:th century. Concerning this ancestor there was a family tradition, duly recorded in all the

biographies of Charles Robert Maturin, with the statement that it had, from his childhood, made an indelible impression upon him and that he firmly believed it to be true; or with the suggestion that he had invented it himself in some romantic fit or other. The mystery connected with the birth of his ancestor is usually represented as the principal charm Maturin found in the story, yet if related in his own words<sup>[2]</sup> it is patent to all which point of the narrative is most strongly emphasized. Many of the most characteristic passages in Maturin's writings can be explained by the fact that he was fond of imagining his own family to have been a victim of religious persecution. This is how he used to tell the legend:

In the reign of Louis XIV the carriage of a catholic lady of rank was stopped by the driver discovering that a child was lying in the street. The lady brought him home, and, as he was never claimed, considered and treated him as her child: he was richly drest, but no trace was furnished, by himself or otherwise, that could lead to the discovery of his parents or connexions.

As the lady was a devotee, she brought him up a strict catholic, and being puzzled for a name for him, she borrowed one from a religious community, *les Maturins*, of whom there is mention in the Jewish Spy, and who were then of sufficient importance to give their name to a street in Paris, *la Rue des Mathurins*.

In spite of all the good lady's pains, and maugre his *nom de caresse*, my ancestor was perverse enough to turn protestant, and became pastor to a hugonot

congregation in Paris, where he sojourned, and begat two sons.

While he was amusing himself in this manner, the king and *père* La Chaise were amusing themselves with exterminating the protestants; and about the time of the revocation of the edict of Nantz, Maturin was shut up in the bastile, where he was left for twenty six years; I suppose to give him time to reflect on the controverted points, and make up his mind at leisure.

With all these advantages he continued quite untractable: so that the catholics, finding the case desperate, gave him his liberty.

There was no danger, however, of his abusing this indulgence: for, owing to the keeper forgetting accidentally to bring him fuel, during the winters of his confinement, and a few other *agremens* of his situation, the poor man lost the use of his limbs, and was a cripple for life.

He accompanied some of his former flock, who had been grievously scattered, to Ireland, and there unexpectedly found Madame M—— and his two sons, who had made their escape there *via* Holland.

The descendants of Gabriel Maturin remained in the service of the church for which he is alleged to have suffered. His son Pierre is mentioned in 1699<sup>[3]</sup> as ‘chapelin du regiment du Marquis de Pizar’ at the French congregation of St. Patrick and St. Mary in Dublin; afterwards he became dean of Killala. One of Pierre Maturin’s sons, Gabriel James, held the deanery of Kildare and, after Swift,



that of St. Patrick's.<sup>[4]</sup> He died in 1746, leaving at least one son—William, the poet's father—who renounced the clerical career and became an official in government service. After entering the Post Office he was appointed Clerc of the Munster Road. The reorganization of the Post Office by the Irish parliament<sup>[5]</sup> apparently made the situation lucrative, for during the two last decades of the century William Maturin was a wealthy and respected man in Dublin, and took active part in the public life of the town. He married Miss Fidelia Watson, who presented him with six children; of these Charles Robert was born in 1780.<sup>[6]</sup> William Maturin was a man of refinement and was interested in literature, so much so, that he is recorded<sup>[7]</sup> to have had some intentions, in early life, of devoting himself to that profession, but for the death of an illustrious personage to whose patronage he had looked forward. The time of literary protection, in the old sense, was, indeed, past and gone, and if his son also had been dependent on it, the name would have been lost to literature. Maturin senior was, however, a man in whose house literary inclinations were cherished and encouraged, and the youthful lyrics which his son poured forth at an early age, are said to have had a wide circulation among friends and relations, sometimes even finding their way into the local papers. In every respect the childhood of Charles Robert seems to have been bright and happy. He was, no doubt, an amiable child, though spoilt on account of his delicate health and looked up to for his cleverness. His favourite pastimes, as those of so many future dramatists, were juvenile theatricals, and in these he was allowed freely to indulge; again and again the drawing-room was turned into a stage, the wardrobes were robbed of what was thought fit, and an occasional piece from Charles Robert's own pen was acted, or else some old play—Lee's *Alexander* for preference, where he always played the principal part with wild impetuosity, to the

delight and wonder of his sisters and an admiring circle of companions.<sup>[8]</sup> The poets to whom his taste first drew him were the dramatists of the Restoration, a period which always interested him keenly. For Lee, Southerne, and Otway his partiality prevailed even in later years, and he never admitted them inferior to any but Shakespeare and the foremost Elizabethans. Once, when praising Otway's *Venice Preserved*, he is said<sup>[9]</sup> to have added:

I speak, perhaps, from an old feeling of attachment, but, nevertheless, from deep conviction. The earliest associations of my mind are with Pierre and Jaffier at the Rialto at midnight: I still fancy I hear the sullen moan of the waters below me, and that I am standing on that lofty bridge beside the glorious conspirators; I could surrender almost any early impressions in preference.

In the field of fiction Maturin's early impressions were equally powerful, but here his taste was fixed and decided by productions of his own time, such as saw the light in his growing years. The Gothic Romance, or school of terror, which is usually considered to have begun with Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in 1764, had in the nineties an extraordinary flight. All the romances of Mrs Radcliffe, Lewis's *Monk* and Godwin's *St. Leon*, with a host of imitations, followed each other in rapid succession and actually became, for a short time, the rage of the public; and among the younger generation who listened to these sombre and mysterious storytellers, one of the most enthusiastic listeners was the Irish boy who was, but too late, to become the greatest of them himself. Of the merits of the novel of terror Maturin afterwards made the following recognition:<sup>[10]</sup>

As a medium of excitement or impression, it (terror) was certainly the most powerful that could be used by one human being on another, from the clown who dresses up a figure to frighten his fellow into idiotism or madness, to the romance-writer who rings bells by viewless hands, encrusts daggers with long-shed blood, conceals treacherous doors behind still more treacherous tapestry, or sends mad nuns or their apparitions to wander about the gardens of their convents.

From this selfsame medium of excitement Maturin's own works never became wholly free; and even when applying criticism to the writers that were the delight of his youth, he cannot but speak of them in a tone of admiration, strongly contrasted with the marked aversion with which he mentions Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett.<sup>[11]</sup>

These, then, were the literary auspices under which Charles Robert Maturin grew up.—After attending the school of one Mr. Kerr, he entered Trinity College, as a Pensioner, in November 1795; some years later he obtained a scholarship, and finally a bachelor's degree. His intentions regarding the profession of an actor were probably definitely abandoned by this time, and theology became the main subject of his studies. According to biographers, Maturin's university career was successful and even brilliant, although a certain indolence and eccentricity was always noticeable in his habits. He acquired distinctions both as a classical scholar and an active member of the theological class, and in the once famous Historical Society he is also said to have distinguished himself by 'rhetorical and poetical productions.'<sup>[12]</sup> The Historical Society, afterwards abolished by the government,

had been founded the year previous to Maturin's entrance at College, and was a fruit of the vivid intellectual activity ruling in every department during the short period of Irish independence. The time in which Maturin lived, it is important to note, was the most remarkable in the political history of Ireland. In 1782 Grattan had had the satisfaction of hailing Ireland as a nation; the parliament in College Green began its work of reforms with a joyous sense of reconciliation with England, and a general hope that it would last for ever. Dublin became, for a time, one of the liveliest capitals in Europe, and the meeting-place of the greatest wits and most eloquent men of the kingdom. The generation, however, which was born with the Irish parliament, had not reached their manhood ere calamities loomed ahead again. They saw the rebellion of '98 with all its horrors; they also lived to see the Union and felt the oppressive calm that followed in its wake, interrupted only by the unfortunate insurrection of Emmet in 1803. The works of Maturin demonstrate sufficiently that he was an ardent Irish nationalist who resented the Union; but he was, by temperament, nothing of a politician, and none of the family seem to have been involved in any political intrigues. There was, however, another side of nationalism—closely connected with the romantic movement in all countries—which he eagerly embraced. It expressed itself in an interest in the folklore, antiquities and early history of Ireland, preferably seen in a slightly romantic colour. The *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* of Joseph Cooper Walker, which was long considered a standard work in its subject, appeared in 1786, giving rise to other investigations of the same kind. Among Irish novelists Maturin and Lady Morgan were those in whose (earlier) writings this sense of a glorious past first found expression, besides which their works also, for the first time in fiction, aimed at a conscious and artistic description of genuine

Irish scenery. Maturin's sense of nature was ever on the alert, and the beautiful Wicklow mountains were to him, as to so many other Irish writers of later times, a constant source of poetic inspiration.

As for life and circumstances in general, towards the end of the 18th century, they were indeed 'wild, wonderful, and savage,' to use a critic's words of Maturin's *Women* in its quality of an Irish story. Reality abounded in startling and extraordinary incidents, not seldom outdoing even the confessedly fertile imagination of the poets of Erin. The picture which Miss Edgeworth drew, in her immortal *Castle Rackrent* (1800) of a typical Irish estate, other writers confirmed to be eminently faithful; life in the country, all around, was feudal, wild and reckless; elopements occurred frequently, and duels were daily bread among the gentry. The disposition of the lower classes was likewise all for the adventurous, so much so that the autobiography of a famous highwayman became one of the most popular schoolbooks, effects of which reading by no means failed to make an appearance.<sup>[13]</sup> In the capital the social contrasts presented themselves at their sharpest. Beside the refined, gay and brilliant Dublin there was another, where the sullen murmur of discontent was never hushed, and which was constantly hovering on the brink of rebellion. 'There existed,' says Carleton,<sup>[14]</sup> 'in Dublin two distinct worlds, each as ignorant of the other—at least, in a particular point of view, and during certain portions of the day—as if they did not inhabit the same country.' Fierce street-frays occasionally raged for whole days in public thoroughfares, and the students of Trinity College were said to be particularly prone to take part in these and other such-like amusements.—

What other records there are left of the youthful years of Maturin are centred in the story of a courtship which ended in marriage at

an early age. The object of his attachment was Miss Henrietta Kingsbury, like himself of an old and respected Protestant family. According to a tradition it was Miss Kingsbury's grandfather to whom Swift is supposed to have uttered his last words before the light of his powerful mind was darkened for ever. A brother of hers was archdeacon of Killala. Now biographers<sup>[15]</sup> generally maintain that Maturin married while still going through his college course, and decided in favour of the clerical profession *after* his marriage, in hopes of being promoted through the interest of his wife's relations; but this, at least partly, seems to be wrong. Maturin was not exactly a child at the time of his marriage—he was 23 years old—; he had most probably finished his college course and had certainly taken holy orders, being already in enjoyment of the title Reverend, as may be seen from his marriage license at the Public Record Office in Dublin<sup>[16]</sup>.

The union proved happy. Though the maintenance of a growing family early compelled Maturin to strenuous work, his literary occupations being thus influenced by pecuniary considerations, it at the same time gave him full compensation for his labours. His wife was a woman of beauty and talents—she was one of the best singers in Dublin, a pupil of Madame Catalani—and the conjugal harmony is said never to have been broken. In many of his works Maturin speaks of a happy home with nothing short of devotion, and in one of his sermons he calls domestic felicity 'the best, the only that deserves the name, the sole flower that has been borne unwithered from paradise.' Yet it was, no doubt, well for the domestic felicity that Mrs Maturin *was* a woman of elegance and possessed talents admired in society; for her husband was not always content with a quiet home-life but would, from time to time, emerge from it to be a lion of reception-rooms and to play the part

of a dandy and a *grand seigneur*. His was a complicated nature, and there was—though certainly much exaggerated by tradition—another side of his character, vain, pleasure-loving and extravagant, which broke out, as will be seen, with singular force after his only great success in life.—As for Maturin’s choice of profession, it must be considered a failure. Not that he lacked qualifications for his calling: he was naturally religious, and distinguished himself as a very eloquent preacher, nor was he ever accused of neglect in the discharge of his duties; but the ‘worldly’ side of his character was too strong not to bring about conflicts. The union of clergyman and author was, after the classical examples of Swift and Sterne, probably not in itself an abomination in the eyes of the British public. Yet the apparent incompatibility of the two in Maturin’s case was continually emphasized by hostile critics, and his eccentric habits, his connection with the theatre and his excessive fondness for dancing was more than the average mind could ever understand in one of his profession; to judge from certain utterances<sup>[17]</sup> Maturin was, at least in the most rigorous-minded circles, actually considered more or less insane.—

What induced Maturin to choose a profession in the earliest years of the century was, besides his intention of marrying, the declining state of his father’s affairs. About the time of the Union the work of the postal establishment appears to have fallen into a decay, which sadly affected the Clerks of the Roads, who were paid in proportion to the frequency and quantity of their sendings. As early as 1802 Mr. William Maturin is found writing<sup>[18]</sup> to the secretary of the Irish Post Office to complain of the distressing diminution of his income. After drawing a comparison with the extent of his sendings in previous years, he continues:

Under these embarrassing Circumstances, already deprived of the principal part of my subsistence, and with the melancholy prospect of the rapid failure of the residue, I earnestly supplicate you, Sir, to lay this application before the Post Masters General, whose humanity I trust will not permit an old and faithful servant, to be reduced, without any fault on his part, from a state of humble competence, to wear out the short remains of his Life in penury and distress.

Yet this must be the case, if Government do not graciously interpose, by granting not only some Compensation for past losses, but some provision against those exigencies which are encreasing every hour, and threaten the total extinction of the emoluments of a Clerc of the Road-Emoluments, which after a service of 40 years, are almost all the provision left us.

This application was forwarded with the secretary's recommendations, but whether it had any effect is uncertain. At all events it is clear that the family was not quite abruptly plunged from affluence into poverty at the final dismissal of Maturin senior from his situation—of which more later on—and that his son had long before been obliged to work hard both as a curate and an author. His first appointment was the curacy of Loughrea, to which he attended some time between 1804 and 1806.<sup>[19]</sup> The sojourn of Maturin in Loughrea was, upon the whole, felt as a kind of exile; wretched place as a small Irish country-town at that time must have appeared to all, it was intolerable to a man of literary interests and social habits. His dreariness was, however, pleasantly interrupted by his sojourn as a guest at Cloghan Castle, the seat of



the family of O'Moore, who were supposed to be the lineal descendants of the old kings of Leix. In a note to *Melmoth the Wanderer* Maturin says that he was an inmate of the castle for many months, and to his friends he used to speak with delight of 'that ancient structure, and the Irish hospitality he there enjoyed and witnessed.'<sup>[20]</sup> For Maturin's literary conceptions this visit was of importance. He saw now, for the first and only time in his life, a glimpse of the wild nature of Western Ireland; he actually inhabited, himself, one of those old castles the occurrence of which in the romantic productions of the period was a *conditio sine qua non*; and he came into contact with genuine types of Irish peasantry, such as he was afterwards to describe with an impartiality and a graphic realism unequalled in earlier Irish fiction.

Through some exertion on the part of his relations, Maturin was before long removed to the curacy of St. Peter's in Dublin, where he remained to the hour of his death. The parish was one of the most extensive in the town, and was said to contain 'most of the wealth, rank, and talent of the metropolis.'<sup>[21]</sup> The salary of the curate, however, did not amount to more than 80-90 pounds per annum, and Maturin was, consequently, forced to eke out this slender income by other means. Alaric Watts says in his article that Maturin resided in his father's house until the final economic ruin of that gentleman; according to other writers he established himself, immediately on his return to Dublin, in York Street,<sup>[22]</sup> where he set up a kind of boarding school and prepared young men for College. The task was rather congenial to him; he was always fond of the company of very young people, and at his well-known house, alternately the scene of luxury and poverty, he was wont to arrange private theatricals and other amusements with his pupils. York

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