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THE POPULAR FICTION TRADITION AND THE NOVELS
OF MARY STEWART.

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THE POPULAR FICTION TRADITION AND
THE NOVELS OF MARY STEWART

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THE POPULAR FICTION TRADITION AND
THE NOVELS OF MARY STEWART

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ABSTRACT

THE POPULAR FICTION TRADITION AND THE NOVELS OF MARY STEWART

by Monetha Roberta Reaves

Popular culture has, up until recently, been considered the bastard child of art. However, attitudes toward it have changed in recent years because of the changing attitudes of social scientists, anthropologists, and the younger literary critics toward mass media and the mass audience. These changes in attitude towards popular culture have led to the serious study of it in colleges and universities. Teachers have particularly found success in the teaching of popular fiction both as an aid for students with language difficulties and as an aspect of literary study. The latter of these two interests in popular fiction makes serious studies of popular writers a scholarly necessity for the past neglect of this aspect of literature has resulted in a lack of critical information on popular writings.

This study of the works of Mary Stewart is prompted by this growing interest in popular fiction and the present dearth of information about popular writers and their works. Mrs. Stewart seems to be a good choice for this study because the number of books which she has written in the last two

decades provide an adequate body of materials for such a study, because as a writer of Modern Gothic she is using one of the most popular modern fiction formulas, and because she is a fine writer. This study has no set thesis, but is concerned with answering three questions concerning Mrs. Stewart's works based on a thorough examination of her thirteen major novels.

The first question which this study attempts to answer is "how do her works fit into the body of popular fiction?" This question is answered in chapters two through four, by demonstrating that Mrs. Stewart works within the body of popular fiction employing a number of well established conventions. Chapter Two examines her use of the Gothic-Romance tradition, tracing some of the devices which she uses back to the beginnings of the genres. Chapter Three discusses her use of the Historical-Gothic through an examination of her fictional sources for The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills. Chapter Four addresses itself to her use of the detective formulas with specific emphasis on her similarity as a detective writer with Mary Roberts Rhinehart and with her use of mystery, suspense, and thriller techniques.

The second question with which this study deals is "what are the characteristics of Mrs. Stewart's novels which make them peculiarly her own?" Chapter Five attempts to answer

this question through an examination of recurring patterns among her various novels. This chapter is also an attempt to explain and apply a relatively new method of criticism which was originally developed for film but which popular culturists are attempting to apply to popular culture in general: the auteur approach.

The third question with which this study deals, "to what extent can her novels be judged by the criteria used to judge more traditional literature?" is considered in Chapter Six. This chapter is an attempt to show, that although as a popular writer Mrs. Stewart is bound by the traditions and formulas of the popular tradition, she is still able to successfully develop deliberate, identifiable themes in her novels just as serious writers do, and that she is able to use basically the same process of selection and arrangement which is the key to the production of serious, thematic art upon which the traditional literary approach depends.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
II. MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE GOTHIC ROMANCE.	8
III. MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE HISTORICAL GOTHIC	30
IV. MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL	61
V. MARY STEWART AND THE <u>AUTEUR</u> APPROACH.	96
VI. MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH: THEME	127
VII. CONCLUSION.	152
BIBLIOGRAPHY	155
Articles	155
Books.	156

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture has, up until recently, been considered the bastard child of art. Not only was it the illegitimate member of the family but a black sheep as well, which brought contempt to those who were "vulgar" enough to enjoy it. Recently, however, attitudes toward popular culture have been gradually changing. Russel B. Nye identifies what he considers to be five key reasons for this growing "interest in and re-evaluation of the aims, audiences, conventions, and artifacts of popular culture."¹ First, social sciences have found that mass reaction to the mass media is more complex than they had, at first, thought; therefore, they have had to re-evaluate their assumptions about the "naivete" and "maneuverability" of the masses. Second, the cultural anthropological belief that all parts of a culture are worth studying has created a positive attitude towards the study of popular culture. Third, some of the ideas which Marshall McLuhan has set forth in his book Understanding Media have caused some of the younger critics to conclude that perhaps

¹ "Notes for an Introduction to a Discussion of Popular Culture," Journal of Popular Culture, 4 (Spring, 1971), pp. 1032-1034.

ways of looking at art and its effects on man should be re-evaluated. Fourth, this newfound interest, according to Nye, seems to grow out of the fact that we have survived mass culture for two generations without any great catastrophes; and having survived, we have learned to no longer be afraid of it but to "find meaning and value in it." Finally, and this is the reason which Nye sees as being all important, is the relationship which has developed between popular culture and technology, a "merger" as he calls it, in which the popular artist has also become a skilled technician.

This growing interest and re-evaluation, as the above reasons imply, have made popular culture the object of academic scrutiny, a scrutiny which has led, at least in the case of popular fiction, to a study of popular writers and their works merely for the sake of the intrinsic values which such studies contain. Popular literature is new enough to the halls of academe and novel enough when placed side by side with more traditional literary fare, that in recent years, encouraged by growing emphasis on non-traditional studies, more and more two-year and four-year colleges have accepted popular fiction into their English curriculums. Teachers are realizing success from the use of such materials for teaching writing, especially to students with language skills difficulties. Teachers are also finding that students are demonstrating an interest in learning "formally" about an art form which many of them have enjoyed "informally."

This interest in popular fiction as an area for study makes it necessary that there be a body of criticism of it. Consequently, popular culturists are trying to formulate an aesthetic of popular fiction, some criteria by which to evaluate it on its own merits. Meanwhile, those who wish to study and to teach popular fiction seriously are faced with the problem of not having enough critical references; for while science fiction writers have gotten some individual attention, critically, most other popular fiction writers have only been discussed in the few existing general references if at all.

A study of Mary Stewart's novels may at least start "the ball rolling" in the right direction. Mrs. Stewart seems to be a good and appropriate choice for such a study for a number of reasons. First, she is a fine writer who can be judged by both traditional as well as popular standards without taking anything from her work. Second, the Modern Gothic is such a popular genre (approximately 50 novels are published each month) that it seems an area which will eventually attract a lot of study. Furthermore, it has its foundations in two genre which, having been already accepted as areas for study, can supply a ready source of information on the roots of the modern gothic; for the Gothic and the detective story as represented by Edgar Allan Poe have long been accepted literary forms. Third, Mrs. Stewart has written a substantial number of novels, forming a good basis for a

study. She has been a successful writer of popular fiction for over two decades, producing thirteen novels in the past twenty-one years, at least six of which have appeared on the best seller list. Finally, although her novels are filled with vivid descriptions, realistic and memorable characterizations, and a painstaking, historical accuracy, it seems that because she is a "popular" writer rather than a "serious" writer, her novels have gotten no scholarly attention. Now, however, that popular culture is coming into its own as a discipline, popular fiction is being given the legitimacy and respectability which makes serious study of writers like Mrs. Stewart not only possible but necessary.

Mrs. Stewart was born Mary Florence Elinor Rainbow on September 17, 1916, to Frederick Albert (a Church of England clergyman) and Mary Edith (Matthews) Rainbow in Sutherland, Durham, England. She received her early education at the Skellfield school in Yorkshire. She attended the University of Durham where she received her B.A. degree in 1938 along with first class honors, a diploma in theory and practice of teaching in 1939, and an M.A. degree in 1941. From 1940-41 she was the head of English and classics at the Abbey School, in Malvern Wells, England. She was a full-time lecturer at the University of Durham from 1941-1945 and a part-time lecturer from 1945-1955. In 1945 she was married

to Frederick Henry Stewart, a professor of geology, and in 1955 she became a full-time writer. Her works include Madame, Will You Talk?, 1955; Wildfire at Midnight, 1956; Thunder on the Right, 1958; Nine Coaches Waiting, 1959; My Brother Michael, 1960; The Ivy Tree, 1961; The Moon-Spinners, 1963; This Rough Magic, 1964; Airs Above the Ground, 1965; The Gabriel Hounds, 1967; Winds Off the Small Isles (a novelette which was written for Good House-keeping Magazine and which will not be included in this discussion), 1968; The Crystal Cave, 1970; The Hollow Hills, 1973; and Touch Not the Cat, 1977. She received the British Crime Writers Association Award in 1960, for My Brother Michael, and the Mystery Writers of America award in 1964 for This Rough Magic. She has also written several short plays which have been produced on the British Broadcasting Corporation network.

For reasons presented earlier in this chapter, there is no body of critical information on Mrs. Stewart's novels. However, Book Review Digest does offer a comprehensive list of reviews for each of her novels. Among the sources listed there, a number merely give plot summaries of each novel, but the following often go beyond mere summary to provide some critical and evaluative comments: Kirkus, London Times Literary Supplement, New York Times Book Review, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, The Manchester Guardian, and Book Week. Three other helpful sources of information which

pertain directly to Mrs. Stewart's work and which were available for this study are F.W.J. Hemmings' article "Mary Queen of Hearts," which appears in the November 5, 1965, issue of New Statesman, and two articles by Mary Stewart, herself, in the December, 1964, and May, 1970, issues of The Writer. However, this shortage of material did not prove a disadvantage to this study since the primary purpose of this work was to identify the sources of the conventions which Mrs. Stewart used in her novels and since materials on the gothic and detective genre are readily available.

This study of Mrs. Stewart's work is devoted to a thorough examination of her thirteen novels in an attempt to answer three questions. First, how do her works fit into the body of popular fiction? Second, what are the characteristics of Mrs. Stewart's novels which make them peculiarly her own? And, third, to what extent can her novels be judged by the criteria used to judge more traditional literature?

This study does not pretend to have any well defined thesis; however, the prevailing idea of these diverse chapters might be that Mary Stewart is a writer who works with great skill within the limitations of the strict boundaries imposed by popular fiction formulas, so skillfully that her work can be judged by both criteria used for popular fiction and that used for traditional fiction. The study will be divided into six chapters including the introduction and conclusion.

Chapters two through four will be concerned with the answer to the first question posed above. They will attempt to identify the place of Mrs. Stewart's work within the body of popular fiction by demonstrating the fact that in her works she is using a number of well established conventions which can be attributed to at least three popular genre: the Gothic-Romance which will be discussed in Chapter Two; the Historical-Gothic which will be discussed in Chapter Three; and the detective story which will be discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five will be an attempt to answer the second question by examining patterns which recur from novel to novel. Chapter Six, which will be the concluding chapter, will be an attempt to show how Mrs. Stewart's ability to use the formulas of popular fiction to make something uniquely her own also makes her novels suitable to be measured by traditional criteria.

CHAPTER TWO

MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE GOTHIC ROMANCE

One of the traditions out of which Mrs. Stewart is writing is the tradition of the Gothic-Romance. Although only two of her novels fit the Gothic-Romance formula of plot, setting, tone, and character, all of them, to a greater or lesser degree, contain some elements of this formula.

The two novels which fit into the Gothic-Romance formula are Nine Coaches Waiting and The Ivy Tree. Dean R. Knootz, a writer of popular fiction, summarizes this "Jane Eyre" formula in the following way.¹ The heroine is a young girl who is alone in the world, often because she is an orphan. She goes to an old, isolated, mysterious house to assume some position, such as governess to an unwanted child or companion to some elderly invalid woman. She knows none of the people in the house and soon discovers that there is some kind of ominous mystery about the household in

¹ "Gothic-Romance," Writing Popular Fiction. (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest, 1973), pp. 120-121. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

which even the neighbors may be involved. This mystery may center around the death of someone who resided in the house. As she becomes more deeply involved in the mystery, she finds herself a prime target for the murderer or villain turned "would-be-murderer." Knootz also points out that the only variant of this plot that is commonly used is the orphaned heroine who goes to live in a house with her last, living relative. This relative, since he usually turns out to be the villain, must be a distant relative or one who is all but a stranger to the heroine. If the plots of the two novels mentioned above are examined, it is evident that one of them fits the traditional plot formula and the other the variation.

Nine Coaches Waiting is a classic example of a novel which follows the traditional formula. In this novel, Linda Martin, a young woman who has been raised since the age of fourteen in an English orphanage, travels from London to Geneva to become a governess, in the household of Leon and Heloise de Valmy, to their nine-year-old nephew and ward Comte Philippe de Valmy. She senses a strangeness about the situation from her initial interview with Madame de Valmy in London, for the lady insists upon an English governess, a fact which keeps Linda from revealing that she is French by birth and speaks the language fluently. Madame de Valmy's distant and temperamental nature only adds to Linda's feelings of uneasiness. When she gets to the house and meets

Leon de Valmy, the situation seems even stranger, for he is a "fallen archangel," confined to a wheelchair for life by an automobile accident, yet a powerful, strong-willed man of whom even his wife stands in awe. As the story progresses, he proves to be as ruthless as he is handsome and charming. Linda's charge Philippe is an unhappy, neglected, inhibited little boy who has not yet recovered from the accidental deaths of his parents. He receives no affection or attention from his aunt and uncle, who are keeping him while his real guardian is away on business. While Philippe and Linda are walking in the woods one day, someone attempts to shoot the boy who is saved because he falls over a log just as the shot is fired. On another occasion he almost falls from a balcony when he does not notice a broken railing. It does not take Linda long to suspect that Leon and his wife are attempting to murder the heir of the great estate on which they are living and that she, too, is in danger since twice she has been witness to these attempts.

The Ivy Tree has the basic ingredients of the alternative Gothic-Romance formula, but with some interesting twists and qualifications provided by Mrs. Stewart's genius. First, Mary Grey, a parentless girl from America, is paid by Connor Winslow to assume the role of his cousin Annabel. She bears such a striking resemblance to his cousin that he mistakes her for Annabel one day as she sits on a hillside enjoying the country air. Connor hopes in this way to trick

Annabel's grandfather, for whom he runs a large farm. The old man insists on leaving his estate to Annabel although everyone has good reason to think her dead. Connor's plan is to have Mary live in the house, as Annabel, until the old man dies. She is then to turn over her inheritance to Connor and his half sister Lisa (for an adequate compensation, of course). This storyline initially exempts Mary from being a "real" relative, which is one of the major qualifications of the alternative Gothic-Romance formula. Later on in the story, however, it is revealed that Mary really is Annabel and that she is masquerading because she is afraid of her cousin Connor who had tried to murder her before she ran away from home eight years before. Wanting to come back home, she has found that assuming the role of herself is a perfect solution. The heroine, then, really is a relative. Instead of coming into a home where she hardly knows her relatives, which is another qualification of this alternative formula, her alienation comes from other sources. She is coming into a home where she is alienated from her relatives, first because of her masquerade then because of her cousin's murderous hostility and her grandfather's advanced age and infirmity which keeps him from protecting her.

While Annabel is carrying out this charade, she finds that Connor is not just murderous where she is concerned but, in general, a man of unpredictable and murderous temperament when he sees something standing between himself and Whitescar

(the name of the farm). He attempts to murder a young cousin, Julia, who has come for a visit and whom he sees as a potential heir to Whitescar (since Mary-Annable has threatened to discontinue the masquerade and to leave the farm). At the climax of the novel, he attempts again to murder Annabel whose real identity he discovers.

Other characteristics which Knootz identifies as being part of the formula can be seen both in the two Gothic novels summarized above and in other works of Mrs. Stewart's as well. For instance, Knootz (p. 212) and Edith Birkhead both say that a must for the Gothic-Romance is an old house or castle as a setting. Ms. Birkhead says that the traditional Gothic-Romance involves "hairbreadth escapes and wicked intrigue in castles built over beetling precipices."²

In Nine Coaches Waiting the "castle built over a beetling precipice" is replaced by an elegant, eighteenth-century chateau built over a dangerously curving road.

Above these banked and raveled boughs hung a high plateau and there backed by the forest and the steep rise of another hill stood the Chateau Valmy, its windows catching the sunlight . . . here was the four-square classic grace of the eighteenth century, looking, however, wonderfully remote, and floating insubstantially enough up there in the light above the dark sea of trees.³

² The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 223.

³ Mary Stewart, Nine Coaches Waiting (New York: M. S. Mill Company and William Morrow and Company, 1955), p. 193. All further references to this work appear in the text.

As the story progresses we learn that the balcony railings are loose and the silk brocade of the finely styled furnishings is rotten.

In The Ivy Tree the setting is an old farm house in Northumberland which stands among the ruins of an ancient Roman fort and the charred remains of Forrest Hall, once a beautiful mansion. The name of the farm, "Whitescar," resounds with the ominous atmosphere of the setting; and all around it has fallen into decay and disuse.

To the east lay Forrest Hall itself, set in what remained of its once formal gardens and timbered walks, the grounds girdled on two sides by the curving river, and on two by a mile-long wall and a belt of thick trees. Except for a wooded path along the river, the only entrance was through the big pillared gates where the gate house had stood. This, I knew, had long since been allowed to crumble gently into ruin.⁴

In The Gabriel Hounds the setting is an old Turkish palace.

I am sure that the place was not as vast as I imagined it to be, but there were so many twisting stairs, narrow dark corridors, small rooms opening apparently at haphazard one out of the other--many of them in half darkness and all untidy with the clutter and decay of years--that I very soon lost all sense of direction, and simply wandered at random. . . . One ground floor window, I remember, looked north from the end of

⁴ Mary Stewart, The Ivy Tree (New York: M. S. Mill Company and William Morrow and Company, 1960), p. 40. All further references to this work appear in the text.

a black corridor, towards the village; but this window was barred, and beside it were two heavy doors with grilles inset, giving on what I had no difficulty in recognizing as prison cells.⁵

The setting of Touch Not the Cat is an old castle, complete with moat. This Rough Magic takes place in three old Italian villas and the caves beneath two of them; My Brother Michael amid the ruins of Delphi; Airs Above the Ground has as one of its settings an old castle which has been converted into a hotel. Thunder on the Right even has one of its settings in an old abbey, one of the favorite settings of the traditional Gothic writers.

Mary Stewart, like any good Gothic novelist, is fully aware of the effect which vivid description of not only setting but weather and landscape has on the mood of the novel. She says that "most important of all, perhaps, is the power that a vivid setting gives you, the writer, over your reader, the way it lets you catapult him bodily into the action."⁶ This ability is a very important one in the writing of Gothic novels, and Mrs. Stewart makes extensive use of descriptions which not only give physical pictures of places but suggest the emotions which the particular places evoke. This attention to tone and mood is another characteristic of the Gothic novel.

⁵ Mary Stewart, The Gabriel Hounds (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 117. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶ "Setting and Background in the Novel," The Writer, 77 (December 1964), 8.

Knootz says that

Gothic novels are full of rainstorms, snow, thunder, lightening, leaden skies, cold draughts and other gloomy omens which set the mood and act as generators of suspense as much as do the few violent incidents in the course of the story. (p. 121)

This tradition can be traced to Mrs. Ann Radcliff, whose most notable contribution to romance was the atmosphere which she created through her use of landscape and weather.⁷

In Touch Not the Cat, Mrs. Stewart makes use of these same two ingredients to create an atmosphere of foreboding. She combines a description of the weather with a description of the physical surroundings and adds to these one more ingredient, the viewpoint of a frightened heroine whose life is in imminent danger.

The wind was higher than ever, tempestuous. The beech trees beyond the orchard roared and swayed against a fast-moving sky where the clouds, massing and countermassing, piling, and breaking and streaming off in spindrift, left blinks and glimpses of moonlit immensity beyond. The orchard, with its pale tents of blossom, reeled in and out of light and shadow, its torn flowers, snowing⁸ down the gusts of wind. The rain had stopped.

⁷ Ernest A. Baker, "The Gothic Novel," The History of the English Novel (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950), p. 203.

⁸ Mary Stewart, Touch Not the Cat (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1976), p. 216. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Both traditional Gothic critics as well as Neo-Gothic critics agree that tone and mood are most important in the Gothic-Romance; and though they differ slightly on just what that tone and mood should be Mrs. Stewart's novels contain instances which support each of their observations. For instance, G. R. Thompson says that "The Gothic romance seeks to create an atmosphere of dread."⁹ That this is so in the novels of Mary Stewart can be supported by a passage from one of her Gothic novels, Nine Coaches Waiting.

I stooped for a log to throw on the fire when I heard the sound. It whispered across the quiet room, no more loudly than the tick of the little French clock or the settling of the wood ash in the grate.

A very slight sound, but it lifted the hair on my skin as if that, too, felt the cold breath from the open window. It was no more than a voiced sigh, but horrible, it sounded like a word . . . "Madamoselle. . . ."

I was across the schoolroom in one leap. I ran out onto the dark balcony and turned to peer along the leads. To the right and left the windows were shut and dark. From behind me the lighted schoolroom thrust a bright wedge across the balcony, making my shadow, gigantic and grotesque, leap and posture before me over the narrow leads. (p. 288)

This same tone of dread can also be seen in Thunder on the Right which is not a Gothic novel.

⁹ The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism. (n.p.: Washington State University Press, 1974), p. 3.

Jennifer sat down. To her own surprise, the illogical feeling of discomfort persisted. Faced now as she was with one of the inmates of the convent, this woman who stood quietly in tradition medieval garb against the austere simplicity of white wall and unvarnished deal, she should surely have been able to dismiss her earlier tremors as absurd. Why, then, should the appearance of the woman realize rather than quell the senseless unease of the past few minutes?¹⁰

Ernest A. Baker, another traditional critic and a literary historian, agrees essentially with Thompson but adds to this mood of dread a "subjective feeling of suspense."

From beginning to end, however, it is not violent scenes of action, so much as nervous apprehension, vague foreboding, subjective feelings of suspense, in short, the morbid phenomena of sensibility, that tortures the heroine.¹¹

This can be seen in The Gabriel Hounds, where the feelings of the heroine enhance the mood of grotesqueness and suspense.

The light which had flowed so generously out on the flagway of the garden hardly penetrated into the upper corners of the room. It came from an old-fashioned oil lamp standing among the supper dishes, and as I passed it, approaching the bed, my shadow seemed to leap monstrously ahead of me, then teeter up the steps of the dais to add another layer of darkness to the grotesque obscurity in the corner. (p. 70)

¹⁰ Mary Stewart, Thunder on the Right (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1957), p. 26. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹¹ Ernest A. Baker, p. 194.

Joanna Russ, who is a Neo-Gothic critic, uses a stronger term to describe the Gothic mood. She says that "the commonest emotion in these novels is fear."¹² In Mrs. Stewart's works there are many fear evoking situations; for instance, in Touch Not the Cat when Bryony comes to discover herself trapped under the floor of the summer house where she has been left to drown when the moat floods, she fears both for herself and for her lover.

I found I was shaking and sweating, in spite of the cold. I made my mind blank and rested for as many seconds as I dared. At least he was warned. I shut my mind momentarily, straining to shut out the image of the dark cage that trapped me. (p. 280)

Fear, also, plays an important part in The Ivy Tree.

At the final word, with its deliberately lingering emphasis, something must have shown in my face. I saw a flash of satisfaction pass over his. I was scared, and the fact pleased him. (p. 11)

And, in another place in The Ivy Tree, Annabel speaks of experiencing fear for no apparent reason.

There was a movement from the brushes at the edge of the clearing; the rustle of dead leaves underfoot, the sound of a heavy body pushing through the thicket of shrubs. There was no reason why I should have been frightened, but I jerked around to face it my heart thudding, and my hand on the stone balustrade grown suddenly rigid. (p. 89)

¹² "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," Journal of Popular Culture, 6 Nos. 3-4 (1972-73), 667.

In Wildfire at Midnight, to give one last example, there is Gianetta, who is terrified when she finds herself confronted by an insane murderer.

I backed against the cliff of the buttress. It was warm and solid, and there were tiny tufts of saxifrage in the clefts under my fingers. Real. Normal. I forced my stiff lips to smile back at Roderick. At all costs, I must try to keep him talking. Keep him in this mad, gentle mood. I must speak smoothly and calmly. If I should panic again, my fear might be the spark that would touch off the crazy train of his murderer's mind.¹³

In fact in Mrs. Stewart's novels the constant presence of or threat of kidnapping, murder, chase, and intrigue keeps the heroine in a state of fear either for herself or for someone for whom she has grown to care.

Despite all of the tension which is built up in the story by the emotion and apprehension which is part of the atmosphere of the plot, Knootz says that the style of the Gothic novel is leisurely (p. 127). This characteristic, too, is true of all of Mrs. Stewart's novels. This may account for the fact that amid murder, smuggling, kidnapping, and cross-country chases, the heroine always finds time for sight-seeing which involves detailed descriptions of the scenery; describing clothing both her own and that of the other women in the story; and giving, in minute details, the menus for each meal. All

¹³ Mary Stewart, Wildfire at Midnight (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1956), pp. 155-156. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

of these delaying tactics help to make the novel move at a slow pace.

Another element which Knootz sees as a key to the Gothic formula is the Gothic heroine (p. 124). This heroine has conventional feminine fears, values and aspirations such as getting married and having children. The Gothic heroine comes straight from the pages of the novel of sensibility, and Mrs. Stewart's heroine, in a number of ways, is a modern, nylon-stockinged version of her. For instance, Joanna Russ points out that Mrs. Stewart's heroine is a sensitive person, taking notice of the things around her, especially the faces of men.¹⁴ This ability to read men's faces and to judge men's characters by them is in the honored tradition of the Gothic belief in the psuedo-science of physiognomy.¹⁵

This tendency can be seen in both of Mrs. Stewart's Gothic novels. For instance, when Mary-Annabel meets Connor on the slope for the first time since her return from America, she senses that he is, by nature, a man given to violence.

He had that whippy look to him that told you he would be an ugly customer in a fight--and with something else about him that made it sufficiently obvious that he would not need much excuse to join any fight that was going. (p. 10)

¹⁴ Joanna Russ, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," Journal of Popular Culture, 6 No. 3-4 (1972-73), p. 680.

¹⁵ John Graham, "Character and Description in the Romantic Novel," Studies in Romanticism, V (1966), 208-218.

In Nine Coaches Waiting, Linda first discovers that there is something not quite right in the de Valmy household when Madame de Valmy greets her husband.

He was smiling now as he greeted his wife and turned to me, and the smile lit his face attractively. There was no earthly reason why I should feel suddenly nervous, or why I should imagine that Heloise de Valm's voice as she introduced us was too taut and high, like an overtight string. I thought, watching her, she's afraid of him. . . . (p. 197)

This tendency to read faces like the other Gothic characteristics discussed here is also seen in those novels which are not pure Gothic. In Madame, Will You Talk?, for instance, Charity makes close scrutiny of the face of the villain Paul Very, as a moment of crisis allows her to look beyond his extraordinary good looks to what lies beneath.

He, at least, had had as much assault and battery as his nerves could take. Gone was the immaculate Frenchman of the Tistet--Vedene, gone the velvet voiced Don Juan of the Mediterranean night; in their place huddled a man with twitching hands and a face shining with sweat. Nothing, not even fear, could strip Paul Very of his extraordinary good looks, but, somehow, they had cheapened in front of my eyes; the man who sat there, staring in fascinated horror at the hurtling road, might have been brought up in any Paris gutter.¹⁶

¹⁶ Mary Stewart, Madame, Will You Talk? (New York: M.S. Mill Company and William Morrow and Company, 1955), p. 149. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

The modern heroine must not only be sensitive, but like her cousin the heroine of the novel of sensibility, she must be a virgin. Joe David Bellamy says that

at the center of the story is the "virgin in flight," the Persecuted Maiden who, under one name or another, has been fleeing violation ever since Pamela took off at a frantic clip through Richardson's novel, and even before.¹⁷

Knootz says that the heroine's virginity is another must for the Gothic novel; in fact, it is taboo in the Gothic-Romance to have a heroine who is not a virgin (p. 128). Following this dictum in all of her novels, Mrs. Stewart uses either a heroine who is a virgin, or one who is estranged or divorced from her husband. In fact in Airs Above the Ground, when Vanessa's husband comes to visit her in her hotel room at night, Mrs. Stewart has her heroine make him lie, fully clothed, on top of the covers to take a nap while Vanessa lies snugly under them. In Touch Not the Cat both hero and heroine are virgins (a condition which the heroine attempts to change before their wedding night, making her position as a true Gothic heroine a dubious one). Closely associated with this virginity is the heroine's traditional feminine image; for although Mary Stewart's heroines show an unusual degree of bravery for Gothic heroines (a point which shall be discussed in a later chapter), they still occasionally faint, cry, fear

¹⁷ Superfiction or The American Story Transformed (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 9.

noises, and are dependent on the hero to give them aid and comfort.

As Knootz points out, the Gothic heroine "cannot remain a static personality from the first to the last page: she must change and mature through the course of the story," (p. 124) and this is exactly what Mrs. Stewart's heroines do. It is Annabel's budding maturity which gives her the courage to come back to the home which she ran away from eight years before. She realizes how she has hurt her grandfather by her disappearance. She left because of fear and now she wants to face her cousin Connor, and she is forced to face her former lover Adam Forrest from whom she has also run away. Linda, who as an orphan alone in the world in Nine Coaches, feels inferior and displaced, finds the strength to assume her responsibility for her young charge Philippe even though it seems that she must save him at the risk of losing a once-in-a-life-time love. Christabel of The Gabriel Hounds finds that at last she is serious enough to marry the man whom her family always knew was right for her. She is also able to admit that for most of her life she has behaved like a spoiled, rich brat. Bryony of Touch Not the Cat returns to England to discover that it is time to put away her girlish dreams of her twin cousins and face the reality of what they really are. She assumes her responsibility as a woman who must protect the family honor and who must face death alone to save the man she loves.

As is evident by the preceding discussion, this maturation process is tied up with the love story which Knootz says always runs parallel to the main plot. He says that the love interest in the Gothic-Romance is always involved in some way with the mystery (p. 121). All of Mrs. Stewart's novels have love stories, and these love stories are in some way directly connected with the main plot of the novels. The heroes are always involved in the intrigue. They may be victims, as are Richard Byron in Madame, and Mark Langley in The Moon-Spinners. They may be related to someone who is involved as Rauol, the son of Leon de Valmy, in Nine Coaches, or Simon in My Brother Michael, or Charles in The Gabriel Hounds. They may even be doing their job like Lewis March in Airs Above the Ground, who is a secret agent investigating murder and smuggling. Sometimes, they may just be involved in an effort to help the heroine.

Joanna Russ sees this male as the "emotional center" of the Gothic novel. She says this is so because "it is the heroine's ambivalence towards the Super Male [as she refers to him] that provides the internal dramatic action of the book."¹⁸ This ambivalence is brought about by a device which Knootz explains is a favorite with the Gothic writer having the heroine initially think that the hero is really the guilty party (p. 120). This happens in Madame when Charity

¹⁸ Joanna Russ, p. 679.

Selborne suspects Richard of being the murderer, in Nine Coaches when Linda suspects Rauol of assisting his parents in the attempted murder of Philippe, in Wildfire when Gianetta suspects her ex-husband of being the mad murderer, and in This Rough Magic when Lucy Waring suspects Max Gale of being the villain.

Lastly, the Stewart hero, like any good Gothic hero, rescues the heroine. This convention can be traced to the chivalric romance out of which Montague Summers says the Gothic-Romance grows.¹⁹ In Nine Coaches it is Rauol who attempts to stand between Linda and the de Valmys even though Linda suspects him of being one of the villains. In The Ivy Tree it is Annabel's lover Adam who comes to comfort and care for her after Connor has attempted to kill her and been accidentally killed by her horse. In The Gabriel Hounds it is Charles who finds Christabel and leads her out of the burning palace. And in Touch Not the Cat it is Rob who finds Bryony trapped in what remains of the summer house after her cousins flood the moat. In My Brother Michael it is Simon who rescues Camilla from Angelos. In Wildfire it is Nicholoas, Gianetta's ex-husband, who rescues her from Roderick Grant, the insane killer. Jennifer in Thunder is rescued by Stephen. Vanessa March in Airs is saved from the

¹⁹ The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel (London: The Fortune Press, n.d.), p. 41.

villain by her husband Lewis, and Nicola in The Moon-Spinners is rescued from a watery grave by Mark.

Besides this rescuing hero, another character which seems to be stock for the Gothic-Romance is a character which Ms. Russ describes as "the other woman."²⁰ She is a direct opposite of the heroine. Kay L. Mussell²¹ says that the other woman is more beautiful than the heroine and more openly sexual, a trait which is directly related to her downfall. Usually, her tendency towards wrong-doing is attributed to some basic weakness in her character. In Nine Coaches the villainess is Heloise de Valmy, who is aiding her husband in his attempt to murder nine-year-old Philippe.

She was sitting with shut eyes. I thought as I looked at her that I had been right. She looks both tired and preoccupied though nothing, it seemed, could impair her rather chilly elegance. She was, I supposed, about fifty-five, and was still a beautiful woman, with the sort of beauty that age seems hardly to touch. Bone-deep, that was the phrase; it was in the shape of her head and temples and the thin-bridged, faintly aquiline nose with its fine nostrils; . . . She looked expensive, and a little fragile, and about as approachable as the moon. (p. 190)

Despite her delicate beauty, however, she proves to be a cold, indifferent guardian for little Philippe.

²⁰ Joanna Russ, p. 670.

²¹ "Beautiful and Damned: The Sexual Woman in Gothic Fiction," Journal of Popular Culture, 9 No. 1-2 (1975), 85-86.

Each evening at half past five, I took him down for half an hour to the small salon where his aunt sat. She would politely put aside her book or writing paper, pick up her exquisite and interminable petite point, and hold conversation with Philippe for the half-hour. I say "hold conversation" advisedly because that phrase does perfectly imply the difficulty and stilted communication that took place. (pp. 212-213)

And she turns out to be a villainess from weakness rather than true evil. Like Lady Macbeth, her guilt causes her to walk in her sleep, ironically enough, in an attempt to keep watch over, in her sleeping hours, the victim of her waking hours.

In The Gabriel Hounds the villainess is Halida, the accomplice of the drug smugglers and the lover of one of them. Not only is she an accomplice but the inadvertent killer of Christabel's great-aunt Harriet. In Touch Not the Cat, while Cathy Underhill is not exactly a "wicked woman," she is a wild, adventurous girl who has been in trouble in the States and is helping Bryony's twin cousins steal valuable articles from the Ashley estate. This "other woman," also, appears as a villainess in My Brother Michael in the person of Danielle, an accomplice to black-marketeering and murder, and in Madame as Mrs. Bristol, kidnapper and murder accomplice. She, also, appears in some novels as a foil rather than a villainess such as Julia, Annabel's cousin, in The Ivy Tree; as Phyllida Forli, Lucy Warning's sister, in This Rough Magic; as Gillian, Jennifer

Silver's missing cousin, in Thunder; and as Marcia Mailing, a flighty actress in Wildfire.

A final important characteristic which Knootz identifies as crucial to the Gothic-Romance is the happy ending (p. 127). Things must always turn out right in the end. The good must be saved and rewarded, and the evil must be punished. The reward, for the heroine, is usually the love of and marriage to the man she loves. Punishment for the villains may be in the form of violent death as in My Brother Michael, in which the villain is killed by the hero; The Ivy Tree in which the villain is kicked to death by a horse; The Gabriel Hounds, in which the villain is shot by a member of an angry mob; Thunder, in which the villainess slips and falls to her death after fatally stabbing the villain; This Rough Magic, in which the villain is blown up on his boat as he attempts to escape; or Madame, in which the villains and villainess are killed in an automobile accident.

I don't remember moving at all, but I must have run towards the road like a mad thing. I only knew that Paul Véry had come round; had somehow got into the Mercedes, and was giving his warning.

I saw the Bentley [which contained the other villains and the villainess] veer into the track on the cliff top, I heard the shriek of her brakes. I saw the Mercedes, roaring like a bomber, leap forward, then lurch on to her burst front tyre, and plunge broadside on across the road.

The Bentley never had a chance.

There was a yell, a dreadful scream, and then the cars met in a sickening crash of rending metal and shrieking tyres. Some hideous freak of chance knocked the Bentley's switch as she struck, so that for one everlasting moment, as the two cars locked in a rearing tower of metal, her headlights

shot skywards like great jets of flame. The cars hung there, black against the black sky, locked on the very brink of that awful cliff, then the beam swung over in a great flashing arc, and the locked cars dropped like a plummet down the shaft of light, straight into the sea. (p. 156)

Punishment may also be in the form of suicide, as in Nine Coaches, in which Leon de Valmy shoots himself, or it may be insanity, as in the case of Madame de Valmy. The villains in Wildfire, Airs, and The Moon-Spinners are apprehended by the police, and in Touch Not the Cat the villains go into a sort of self-imposed exile.

Not only does Mrs. Stewart use the well-known Gothic conventions which have been discussed in this chapter but she also manages to incorporate into her novels other conventions which are part of this old tradition. For instance, in The Gabriel Hounds she makes use of fire to destroy the old Turkish palace. In The Ivy Tree, Thunder, and Touch Not the Cat, she makes use of the hidden manuscript. As was mentioned earlier in Thunder, she makes use of the abbey as one of her principal settings, a favorite setting of the traditional Gothic novelist. In Touch Not the Cat, she makes use of the device of the secret heir, and in all of her novels she makes use of literary quotes as chapter headings, a practice which can be traced back to Mrs. Ann Radcliff.

CHAPTER THREE

MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE HISTORICAL GOTHIC

A second tradition out of which Mrs. Stewart is writing is the tradition of the Historical-Gothic. This genre can be traced back to Sophia Lee's The Recess (1738-85), "a romance of the days of Queen Elizabeth, who herself appears in these pages together with a number of other well-known persons of the reign."¹ Summers says that Miss Lee's book is "the first English romance that blended interesting fiction with historical events and characters, embellishing both by picturesque description." Mrs. Stewart has done the same with The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills, combining familiar legend and British history into a tale in which, as Ann Fuller says of her own Alan Fitz-Osborne, "necessity, stronger than prudence, obliges me to give fiction the pre-eminence."

Since Historical-Gothic has many of the same characteristics as the Gothic-Romance, rather than a discussion of these

¹ Summers, p. 30. Summer's text is followed throughout the paragraph.

two novels in terms of the characteristics of the Historical-Gothic, the discussion will be approached from the point of view of the sources which were used in their creation.

Mary Stewart's The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills are the story of the legendary Merlin. The Crystal Cave, the first of the two novels, deals with Merlin's childhood, first as the neglected and abused bastard grandson of the king of Maridunum, and later as the honored son of Ambrosius the High King of all Britain, and with Merlin's rise to power as the magician and prophet who foretells the victory of Ambrosius and his line; who restores the Giant's Dance, bringing the king stone from Ireland to lie at its center; and who is instrumental in the rendezvous between Uther and Ygraine which results in the conception of Arthur. The Hollow Hills is the story of Merlin's guardianship of the young Arthur and of his quest for Mascen's Sword, with which Arthur will some day rule all of Britain.

Mrs. Stewart says that her novels are by no means to be considered scholarly works. They are purely works of imagination; yet, like all good writers of the Historical-Gothic, she tries to give a semblance of reality and truth to all that happens in the Merlin Legend (though giving "fiction the pre-eminence") by an insightful utilization of both factual and fictional sources. From her factual sources, she recreates the war-torn Britain of the fifth and sixth centuries, using real events, people, customs, and superstitions as the cement which holds her story together and as

vehicles for moving Merlin from one episode to the next. From her fictional sources she draws the figures of Merlin and Arthur and the miraculous events which surround them; and although, like any true writer of Historical-Gothic, she lets fiction take "pre-eminence," Mrs. Stewart treats this fiction as truth, though truth distorted. In one place in The Hollow Hills, Merlin defines legend as

a dreaming distortion of the truth, as if an artist, reassembling a broken mosaic from a few worn and random fragments, rebuilt the picture in his own shimmering new colours, with here and there the pieces of the old true picture showing plain.²

This, to Mrs. Stewart, is what the Merlin Legend is. She says that

where tradition is so persistent--and as immortal and self perpetuating . . . there must be a grain of fact behind even the strangest of the tales. . . . It is exciting to interpret these sometimes weird and often non-sensical legends into a story which has some sort of coherence as human experience and imaginative truth. (p. 44)

What Mrs. Stewart attempts to do, then, is to see through the "shimmering new colour" in order to find and give her readers "the pieces of the old, true picture showing plain." The purpose of this chapter is to examine how she does this.

² Mary Stewart, The Hollow Hills (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publication, Inc., 1974), p. 150. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

The brief description of the contents of the two novels given above will be the only summary information presented since the discussion itself will summarize the main story line of both novels. Although this chapter will deal, primarily, with the fictional sources which make up the main story line, some discussion must be given to the characterization of Merlin at the onset, since it is his character which gives continuity to the story.

Earlier, it was stated that Mrs. Stewart uses her factual sources as background and setting and as a vehicle to carry the fictional action. Her description of how she created Merlin gives some insight into yet another way in which she combines fact and fiction to create "imaginative truth." In creating Merlin, Mrs. Stewart had only a composite made up of song and legend and the account given by Geoffrey of Monmouth who is, at best, a very imaginative historian. Mrs. Stewart says that, using primarily the account given by Geoffrey, she "built an imaginary character who seems . . . to grow out of and epitomise the time of confusion and seeking that we call the Dark Ages" (p. 442). Mrs. Stewart says that she takes her cue, in performing this creative task, from a statement made by Geoffrey Ashe concerning the belief of the time that the familiar world and the "Otherworld" interpenetrated each other.

When Christianity prevailed and Celtic paganism crumbled into mythology. . . . Water and islands

retained their magic, lakesprites flitted to and fro, heroes travelled in strange boats. The haunted hills became fairy-hills, belonging to vivid fairy folk hardly to be paralleled among other nations. Where barrows existed they often fitted this role. Unseen realms intersected the visible, and there were secret means of communication and access. The fairies and the heroes, the ex-gods and the demi-gods hustled the spirits of the dead in kaleidoscopic confusion. . . .

Everything grew ambiguous. Thus, long after the triumph of Christianity, there continued to be fairy-hills; but even those which were not barrows might be regarded as havens for disembodied souls. . . . There were saints of whom miracles were reported; but similar miracles, not long since might have been the business of fully identifiable gods. There were glass castles where a hero might lie an age entranced; there were blissful fairylands to be reached by water or by cave passageways. . . . Journeys and enchantments, combats and imprisonments--theme by theme--the Celtic imagination articulated itself in story. Yet any given episode might be taken as fact or imagination or religious allegory or all three at once.³

Mrs. Stewart says that in her characterization of Merlin, she creates a figure who can move in and out of the two worlds at will. She explains that

as Merlin's legend is linked with the caves of glass, invisible towers, the hollow hills where he now sleeps for all time, so I have seen him as the link between the worlds; the instrument by which, as he says, "all the kings become one King, and all the gods become one God." (The Hollow Hills, p. 143)

The crystal cave, (the myth from which the first novel takes its name) then, is a very important symbol in the

³ Geoffrey Ashe, From Caesar to Arthur (London: Collins, 1960), p. 72.

story; for it is the means by which Merlin moves from one world to the other. It is an enchanted place where Merlin and his god dwell. It is where he is conceived; where he has his first vision; where he returns periodically for succor and for peace from the affairs of men, to communicate with his god; and where, as the narrator of the two novels, he is entombed. The passage quoted below from Edwin Muir's poem "Merlin" alludes to this myth and is Mrs. Stewart's source for it as well as for her rendition of the theme of the coming of Arthur.

O Merlin in your crystal cave
 Deep in the diamond of the day,
 Will there ever be a singer
 Whose music will smooth away
 The furrow drawn by Adam's finger
 Across the meadow and the wave?⁴

The Crystal Cave, in answer to this question posed by the poem, depicts Merlin, who moves between the "Other-world" of the crystal cave and the familiar world of men, as being instrumental in the birth and rearing of Arthur who is to become the savior and uniter of all Britain.

The three names by which Merlin is known in the novels are also reflective of the sources which Mrs. Stewart uses for the construction of the character. His given name,

⁴ Mary Stewart, The Crystal Cave (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publication, Inc., 1971), p. 6. All future references to this work appear in the text.

Myrddin Emrys, is Welsh in origin. Myrddin is the name of the god of high places which dwells on the hill Bryn Myrddin where Merlin makes his home in the crystal cave. Myrddin is also the name of a figure in Welsh folklore who was a mad prophet, living much as Merlin does in the wilderness. Merlin's Roman name, Merlinus, is an historical one, for one or two of the histories make brief mention of this name. It is probably this Romanizing of Merlin's name along with the fact that Geoffrey refers to him as "Merlin Ambrosius" which gave Mrs. Stewart the idea of making Merlin the son of Amobrosius whom Bede describes as a Roman.⁵ This historical figure was uncle to Arthur and at one time High King of Britian. Then, of course, there is the name Merlin, which is most commonly used in the legends and by Geoffrey and which, in the novel, is a kind of nickname.

Of Merlin's childhood and apprenticeship years, Mrs. Stewart says that "My imaginary account of his childhood is coloured by a phrase in Malory, 'the well of Galapas, where he wont to haunt,' and by reference to 'my master Blaise'-- who becomes in my story Balasius" (The Crystal Cave, p. 383). A similar reference to Galapas appears in Geoffrey's work, but the spelling is different (Galabes).⁶ In The Crystal

⁵ Ecclestial History and The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (New York: A.M.S.Press, Inc.), p. 68, n.d.

⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Sebastian Evans (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1928), p. 138. All further reference to this work will appear in the text.

Cave, Galapas becomes a wise man who dwells on Bryn Myddin in the crystal cave. He befriends the lonely child Merlin, teaching him all he knows of medicine, topography, zoology, and the art of using his own wonderful powers. It is with Galapas' guidance that Merlin has his first visions in the cave which he takes as his home after Galapas' death.

Blaise, Merlin's second mentor, appears in the Merlin by Robert de Boron. In the Boron version of the legend, Blaise is a "learned clerk" associated with Merlin's youth.⁷ In the novel he becomes Merlin's teacher after Merlin runs away from the home of his grandfather, unwittingly finding his way to the court of his father Ambrosius. From Belasius he learns mathematics which will later help him to restore the Giants' Dance; and he learns to use whatever power is at hand, for Belasius is the chief Druid, and he makes Merlin welcome at the Druid's forbidden ceremonies.

Mrs. Stewart says that it is unlikely that Merlin existed in the form that we know him. He seems to be a composite of several people: a prince, a magician, an engineer, and a prophet. Yet, says Mrs. Stewart, "here again one feels that for such a legend to persist through the centuries, some man of power must have existed, with gifts that seemed miraculous to his time" (The Hollow Hills, p. 442). Accepting

⁷ Roger Sherman Loomis, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 319.

this image of Merlin as truth, though truth distorted, she not only accounts for all these various roles but gives him another, that of physician. His being a prophet and a magician she accounts for by giving him a highly developed sixth sense. His powers are those of telegnosis, telepathy, telesthesia, and precognition. He is a medium, for it is through him that the god speaks, and although he can call down fire, a fact which seems miraculous, this power too is only a special extrasensory power. His being an engineer and a physician she accounts for by giving him unusually high intelligence and powers of perception and observation. There is also the fact that in the fifth century there was little accumulated knowledge of the arts of engineering and medicine; and since he started his training as a young boy, Merlin's mastering both becomes credible. His being a prince she accounts for very simply by making him the son of Ambrosius.

Ironically, the legend which will be the first one discussed in this portion of the chapter is the one with which Merlin's life ends. The legend goes, according to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem Merlin and Vivien, that Vivien, who was a friend of Arthur's enemy Mark of Cornwall, "insinuated herself into Arthur's court and disrupted its harmony with rumors and gossip."⁸ She tricked Merlin into telling her his most powerful spell which she used against him: "And

⁸ Geoffrey Ashe, The Quest for Arthur's Britain (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), p. 39. Both quotes are from this source.

in the hollow oak he lay as dead / And lost to life and use
and name and fame."

Vivian or Niniance, as she is sometimes known, seduces Merlin, who has maintained his virginity all of his life. With the loss of his virginity comes the loss of his power. Merlin, on the brink of manhood, chooses his mystical powers over sexual love, and for many years he carefully guards his chastity, knowing full well as he does so that his downfall will be caused by his involvement with a woman. His doom is foreshadowed many times throughout both novels; but it is Ygraine, the mistress and future Queen of the High King Uther, and the mother of Arthur, who puts the curse on him.

But if you have brought bloodshed to Cornwall through me, or death to my husband, then I shall spend the rest of my life praying to any gods there are that you, too, Merlin, shall die betrayed by a woman. (The Crystal Cave, pp. 348-349)

Now having fallen victim to this feminine betrayal, he sits in his crystal cave, an old, powerless man, writing his memoir.

Part one of his memoir, The Crystal Cave, deals with three of the remaining myths to be discussed: Merlin and Vortigern's Tower, Merlin and the Giants' Dance, and Arthur's Conception. In her use of all these myths, Mrs. Stewart follows the same basic pattern, although parts of the pattern may vary in order from story to story. There is a

foreshadowing, usually in the form of a vision. There is the event itself, utilizing the myth as metaphorical truth. Then there is the presentation of the myth in its original form, attributed to the people who have heard of the event and distorted the truth of it. As in the work of Geoffrey, the mythological events are held together by threads of historical fact concerning the war-torn country of Britain.

According to Geoffrey, Vortigern, usurper of the throne of Britain, wishes to build a tower at Segontium, but the stones laid each day fall by the next morning.

And when word was brought hereof unto Vortigern, he again held counsel with his wizards to tell him the reason thereof. So they told him that he must go search for a lad that had never a father, and when he had found him should slay him and sprinkle his blood over the mortar and the stones, for this, they said, would be good for making the foundation of the tower hold firm. (pp. 112-113)

Vortigern sends for Merlin and his mother because he has heard that Merlin's father is the devil, and he wants Merlin's mother to confirm this.⁹ When she is questioned, she does so and

⁹ According to the Vulgate Merlin, "The devil, infuriated by the descent of Christ into hell and his deliverance of the righteous Jews, plotted to bring about the ruin of mankind by means of a prophet, half human, half devil." One of the devils is given the task of seducing a rich man's daughter. However, she tells her confessor, who blesses her; and afterwards she lives a holy life. When the child is born he has a hairy body and preternatural knowledge but not his father's will to do evil (Arthurian Literature, p. 319).

In the novel, Merlin's mother wishes to retire to a convent, and does so after the death of her father.

Vortigern sends her back to the convent of St. Peter's, where she lives, and prepares to slay Merlin. However, Merlin tells the King that he knows what is wrong with the tower and that the king's wizards are only lying fools. He says that there is a pool beneath the tower and that it should be drained, for in this pool, in hollow stones, lay two sleeping dragons. The King, impressed by Merlin, does as he says; and as soon as this is done, the dragons emerge and begin to fight. "But presently the white dragon did prevail and drive the red dragon unto the verge of the lake" (p. 117). The red dragon recovers, however, falling on the white dragon. When the King asks what the fight means, Merlin begins to prophesy. The prophecy is a long, complicated and highly metaphorical account of the next several hundred-years' history of Britain; however, the immediate meaning of the fight is that the King will be defeated and should flee to his own country.

The story which Mrs. Stewart tells is basically the same as Geoffrey's, yet she gives some explanation and insight which makes plausible an otherwise fantastic fairytale. In her version Merlin knows of the existence of the pool of water because he has had a vision in which he sees the cave where it is and because he actually goes inside the cave when he accompanies his grandfather's troops on a trip to Vortigern's camp. This is the foreshadowing for his confrontation with Vortigern. Several years later when he has been firmly

established as the son of Ambrosius, younger brother of the rightful British King Constan who was slain by Vortigern, he is sent back to Maridunum on a reconnaissance mission. He remembers the cave and that he had overheard Vortigern and his grandfather discussing the building of the fort years ago when as a boy, he had accompanied his grandfather and his grandfather's troops. In the novel the legend that Merlin's father is the devil is a common one in Merlin's home country because Merlin is a dark child in a family of fair-skinned people, because Merlin's mother refuses to tell anyone the identity of his father, and because Merlin's powers are common knowledge. Vortigern, being very superstitious and being acquainted with the legend, believes it and sends men in search of him. When Merlin's mother is asked about Merlin's father's identity, she retells this commonly accepted legend in an attempt to protect both Merlin and his father Ambrosius; for she does not know why Vortigern wants Merlin, only that Vortigern is an enemy of Ambrosius. When Merlin discovers the real reason that the King has sent for him, he saves himself with the knowledge that the water-filled cave is undermining the foundation of the fort and, playing on Vortigern's superstitious nature, leads him by "magic" to it: "This is the magic, King Vortigern, that lies beneath your tower. This is why your walls cracked as fast as they could build them. Which of your soothsayers could have shown you what I show you now" (The Crystal Cave, p. 237).

After he is possessed by the god and makes the prophecy, Merlin again plays on Vortigern's superstition to get him to return to his own country where he will be more vulnerable to Ambrosius, who later follows him and burns his castle with him and his Queen in it.

The matter of the dragon Mrs. Stewart treats as metaphor; for when the pool is drained, there are no dragons. Again, however, Merlin's god intervenes. As the King waits for Merlin to explain why there are no dragons, the staff which has been flying the standard of the White Dragon of Vortigern snaps and the standard falls into the last of the water from the pool which a workman has poured out at the foot of the platform on which the King is seated.

As we watched, it sagged slowly into a pool, and then water washed over it. Some last faint ray from the sunset blooded the water. Someone said fearfully, "An omen," and another voice, loudly, "Great Thor, the Dragon is down!". . . . I jumped off the platform in front of them all and threw up my arms.

"Can any doubt the god has spoken? Look up from the ground, and see where he speaks again!"

Across the dark east, burning white hot with a tail like a young comet, went a shooting star, the star men call the firedrake or dragon of fire.

"There it runs!" I shouted. "There it runs! The Red Dragon of the West!" . . . "You have seen the Red Dragon come tonight, and the White Dragon lie beneath him. . . . Take warning." "Strike your tents now and go to your own country and watch your borders lest the Dragon follow you and burn you out!" (The Crystal Cave, p. 249)

Vortigern, believing totally in Merlin's power, flees to his own country to be killed by Ambrosius. With Vortigern's

death, Ambrosius becomes High King in the novel just as he does in Geoffrey's account; and the legend of the dragons in the pool is spread by the people who have heard of Merlin's prophecy.

The next story, the bringing of the stones from the Giants' Dance, is also told by Geoffrey (pp. 133-141). After Ambrosius kills Vortigern, he then defeats the army of Hengrist, Vortigern's German ally. Eldor, Duke of Gloucester, and his men kill Hengrist in revenge for the cold-blooded murder of Eldor's men at a peaceful council. Ambrosius then begins to rebuild the country. He decides that it is only fitting to erect some monument to those who died at Kaer-carador. Sending for Merlin, on the advice of his councilors, he is told to send to Ireland for the Giants' Dance, a hugh stonehenge. He sends Merlin and his own younger brother Uther along with an army to obtain the Dance. Gillomar, the young king of Ireland, in protecting the Dance, attacks Uther in unwise haste and is defeated. Merlin brings the stones of the great Dance down easily, and he and Uther sail with them to Britain where Merlin sets them up again. In the meantime, Pascentius, Vortigern's son, comes from Germany and attacks Ambrosius and is defeated. He then flees to Ireland to enlist the aid of Gilloman. Uther meets them at Wales to do battle because Ambrosius is ill at Winchester. Eopa, a Saxon who

has made a pact with Pascentius to kill the King, disguises himself as a monk and poisons the King.

Whilst the things were being enacted at Winchester, there appeared a star of marvellous bigness and brightness, stretching forth one ray whereon was a ball of fire spreading forth in the likeness of a dragon, and from the mouth of the dragon issued forth two rays, whereof the one was of such length as that it did seem to reach beyond the regions of Gaul, and the other, verging towards the Irish sea, did end in seven lesser rays. (p. 143)

Merlin tells Uther that the star means that Ambrosius is dead, that Uther will be King, and that his heir shall "be of surpassing mighty dominion, whose power shall extend over all the realms that lie beneath the ray" (p. 144). When Merlin and Uther reach Britain with the Dance, Ambrosius is buried at its center.

Though Mrs. Stewart uses most of the essential details of this story, she does make several changes so that, in some instances, it serves as a vehicle for the characterization of Ambrosius as the good, wise King. First, the Duke of Gloucester does not kill Hengrist, although it is he who drags Hengrist from his horse. Hengrist is executed after the battle, and his body is burned along with those of his men, after the custom of his country. That he should go to his gods properly and honorably is insisted on by Ambrosius even before the protests of the Christian bishop. Second, it is not Eldor who tells the story of Hengrist's treachery against the nobles but Ambrosius, saying that he would like

for the monument, which is to be built to his victory, to be a memorial to Eldor's countrymen as well as to the others who have died in battle. Third, Merlin does not bring the whole Dance from Ireland, only the King Stone; for there is already a Dance in Amesbury where the monument is to be. He lays the King Stone at its center after restoring its fallen pieces. Fourth, the selection of the Dance as a monument is Ambrosius' idea rather than Merlin's; for he feels that none of the other cities will feel slighted if the monument is built at his home, where the Dance is located. It is also his idea that he be buried at the center of the Dance. Fifth, although the star does appear at the moment of Ambrosius' death, it is not the spectacle described by Geoffrey. Again, Mrs. Stewart used Geoffrey's description as a metaphor: "The king-star rose again that night, looking, men said, like a fiery dragon, and trailing a cloud of lesser stars like smoke" (The Crystal Cave, p. 316).

Unlike the first story taken from Geoffrey, with the exception of the description of the star, this one seems credible. Geoffrey even says that Merlin's raising of the Stone was done by skill (p. 141). The legend, which Mrs. Stewart attributes to the people concerning the Giants' Dance, comes from an earlier comment made by Geoffrey that the people believed that the stones were brought from Africa by giants. However, the same pattern is established here as for the treatment of the first story. There is a foreshadowing;

Merlin expresses an interest in the giant stones which dot the landscape of Lesser Britain while he is still an apprentice engineer. One day Merlin meets a blind singer whose songs give him the knowledge to raise the stones, practical knowledge forgotten so long ago that only the stones and the legend that they were set down by giants now exist. Because the stones are associated with legends, naturally Merlin's restoring of the Dance becomes ripe ground for more legend. As the men rebuild the Dance, they sing. Of this Merlin comments that years afterwards he heard the legend that he moved the stones by magic and with music.

I suppose you might say that both are true [the fact that he moved the stones by magic and music.] I have thought since that this must have been how the story started that Phoebus Appollo built with music the walls of Troy. But the magic and the music that moved the Giant's Dance, I shared with the blind singer of Kerrec. (p. 312)

Another legend which appears in the story concerning the Dance is that Merlin floated them down the river to Britain. This, of course, grew out of the fact that they were shipped to Britain with Merlin standing guard over them all the way.

The third myth which Mrs. Stewart uses in her storyline comes from two sources, Geoffrey's history and Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur.¹⁰ According to Geoffrey's

¹⁰ Le Morte D'Arthur (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1961), pp. 1-5.

version (pp. 147-150), at the Easter festival, Uther is crowned; and he calls together all of his lords for a celebration. Gorlois of Cornwall comes and brings his wife with whom Uther falls immediately in love, paying her many attentions. Gorlois considers the King's conduct an affront to both himself and his wife and leaves the court without permission. When Gorlois refuses to return and apologize for this insult to the King, Uther gathers an army and goes after him. Gorlois, in an effort to protect himself and his wife, puts her in his castle at Tintagel and goes, himself, to fortify at his castle at Dimilioc. The King takes his men to Dimilioc and cuts off all access to Gorlois. Still love sick for the Duke's wife, Igerne, the King asks his "familiar" Ulfin what he must do and is told to send for Merlin, who can help him obtain his "heart's desire." Merlin transforms Uther into the image of Gorlois by means of a potion.¹¹ Himself, he changes into Bricel and Ulfin into Jordan, familiars of Gorlois. That night the King lies with Igerne, the lady being none the wiser that it is not her husband, and Arthur is conceived. Gorlois, finding that the King is not with his men, attacks Uther's army and is killed. When Uther returns to his encampment and finds that Gorlois is dead,

¹¹ Geoffrey's use of the word "medicament" meaning "a medicine" and the word "transformed" suggests that Merlin changed Uther into the likeness of Gorlois by the use of a potion. "He Uther did entrust himself unto the arts and medicaments of Merlin, and was transformed into the semblance of Gorlois" (p. 149).

he is very sorry. After Gorlois' burial and a proper period of mourning, Uther marries Igerne.

Malory's version of the story differs in a number of ways from that of Geoffrey, a few of which are important to Mrs. Stewart's rendition. First, in Malory's version, Merlin makes Uther promise to beget a son by Igraine (Malory's spelling of the name) and to give him the boy to raise. Second, Ulfen finds Merlin and tells him what the King wishes of him instead of the King telling him, himself. Third Merlin warns Uther not to talk much, but to say that he is ill and go right to bed to keep from being found out. This suggests that Uther's semblance of Gorlois is merely a clever disguise rather than a magical change. Fourth, Merlin gives Arthur to Sir Ector of Galava to raise. Fifth, the child is wrapped in cloth of gold when he is given to Merlin.

Mrs. Stewart makes several changes in the original sources for the sake of her story line and characterization. Merlin does not, for instance, make Uther promise to give him the child to raise. The fact that he will be entrusted with this task comes to him in a vision while he is helping to stand guard over Uther and Ygraine (Mrs. Stewart's spelling of the name) at Tintagel. Another way in which she changes her version is that the real Brithal and Jordan are killed by Merlin and his servant Cadal when they come to the castle to tell Ygraine of her husband's death. This detail appears in neither of the sources. Mrs. Stewart also dismisses

the idea that Ygraine does not know that her lover is Uther, for this would not be likely. In fact, in the novel, Ygraine is a co-conspirator; for she, too, sends for Merlin, feigning illness, and tells him of her love for Uther. It is she who gets Gorlois to leave court, at Merlin's prompting, without permission, telling him that she is pregnant. The King's anger at this affront and his taking of the troops to Cornwall is merely part of the plot.

There are a number of foreshadowings which lead up to this plot with Uther and Ygraine. There is Merlin's prophecy before Vortigern in which he proclaims the coming of Artorie, the Bear ("Artorie" or "Arthur" is the Roman word for bear). There is the ironic remark made by Ambrosius that Merlin and Uther together will make a good king. There is also a foreshadowing that Gorlois will be killed; for as he stands before Merlin, sent by his wife who is pretending to be ill, the fire turns his garments red.

Of course there are legends which follow the night of Arthur's conception. These appear in The Hollow Hills. Edewyr, young Arthur's friend, says that he has heard that on that night a dragon lay coiled on the castle tower and that Merlin rode away on it afterwards. This may be attributed to the fact that the dragon star shone again on that night as on the night of Ambrosius' death. The other legend is one started by Merlin, himself, and follows Geoffrey's version in the matter of the King being changed by magic into

the likeness of Gorlois and both Geoffrey's and Malory's version in the matter of Ygraine's innocence of the plot. He says that he has created this tale because "the common folk will find the tale of magic and a blameless Duchess, better to believe--and, God knows, easier than the truth" (p. 24). When he hears the tale two days later some new material has been added. Supposedly, Jordan and Brithael, who have come to tell Ygraine of her husband's death, find "Gorlois sitting large as life beside her at breakfast." Of course, it is supposed to be Uther whom they see still under Merlin's enchantment.

The fourth story, Merlin's guardianship of Arthur, takes up the largest portion of The Hollow Hills. The novel is a continuation and expansion of the legend of Arthur's conception as told by Geoffrey and Malory. The seed for Merlin's guardianship of Arthur, as Mrs. Stewart handles it, is based on Geoffrey's comment, "And when he [Uther] understood how everything had fallen out, albeit that he was sore grieved at the death of Gorlois, yet could he not but be glad that Igerne was released from the bonds of matrimony" (p. 150). In the novel Uther, filled with the guilt of these conflicting feelings along with the fact that three other good men have also died that night because of him, puts all the blame on Merlin and declares that he will not claim Arthur nor rear him. His plan is to send the boy to King Budec, his kinsmen, to raise. However, Budec dies before the

child is born, and Merlin is given charge of him. The child is christened "Arthur" at the Queen's request. This detail also appears in Malory's version (p. 6). Arthur is raised for the first four years of his life by Moravik, Merlin's old nurse (this is an addition made by Mrs. Stewart) and afterwards by Ector, who rears him as his own son.

Several myths grow up around Merlin's evasive actions in trying to keep the whereabouts of the child secret. One is that Merlin keeps the child with him, having put a spell on him which makes him invisible. The other is that he has carried him to Hy Brasil, the Island of Glass, "the Isle of Maidens, where kings are carried at their endings."¹² This place has many names: Avalon, "the isle of apples;" Caer Wydys or Fortress of Glass; Cnis Cutrin or Glass Island. It is connected, historically, with Glastonbury, where Arthur is supposed to be buried, and mythologically, to the island where he was carried to be nursed back to health after his last battle, and is believed to have been part of a very old Welsh myth even during Arthur's day.

The fifth story, the quest for Macsen's Sword, is one which Mrs. Stewart invented herself; yet it has its basis in both truth and myth. Historically, Maximus was the King whose reign marked the end of Roman Britain and united the country. He also brought Christianity to Britain. A

¹² Arthurian Literature, pp. 66-67. This source is followed throughout the paragraph.

Spaniard by birth, he gained popularity in Britain where he rose to command an expedition against the Picts. He settled in Britain and was proclaimed Emperor in 383.¹³ Yet, for all this, the real Maximus or Macsen, was not a heroic figure; for he became obsessed with the idea of conquest, taking all Britain's best fighting men on a campaign to Italy where he was killed along with many of them. This left Britain a defenseless country at the mercy of any who wanted to invade it.

Geoffrey Ashe comments that the legendary Maximus is an attempt to "legitimise the venture, and wipe out the taint of usurpation." He continues his description of the legendary Maximus:

The Maximus of British legend, transmitted mainly through Wales and Cornwall . . . is the hero of an expedition that makes Britain count for something in the eyes of the world. . . . He is a valued ancestor; his supposed presence at the head of a pedigree constitutes a title to power. . . . Despite the genealogies which include his name, they do not make him a Britain or even a half-Britain. They make him British by marriage. . . . Their Maximus is an emperor before ever he sails to Britain. The subsequent war is not a conquest but a reconquest, in which his loyal islanders help him to recover his own. (pp. 42-43)

This, then, is the Maximus of Mrs. Stewart's story, the Macsen Wledig of the prose Welsh romance The Dream of Macsen Wledig taken from the collection The Mabinogion (p. 41).

¹³ From Caesar to Arthur, pp. 42-43. This source is followed throughout the account of Macsen's life.

The beautiful, jewel encrusted sword, an invention of Mrs. Stewart's, was made by Weland Smith (another legendary figure). The story goes that the sword was made for the protection of Britain and that when Macsen took it out of Britain, he was defeated. However, those of his men who survived brought it back again and hid it.¹⁴ Merlin has seen the sword a number of times in visions and once in a mural, but one night he has a dream in which the specter of Macsen commands him to find the lost sword.

He held the sword out to me, flat across the skeleton hands. A voice . . . said "Take it."

He said . . . "You need not fear me. Nor should you fear the sword. . . . You are my seed. Take it Merlinus Ambrosius. You will find no rest until you do."

As the sword left his grip, it fell, through his hands and through mine, and between us to the ground. . . . I heard him say, "Find it. There is no one else who can find it." (The Hollow Hills, pp. 226-227)

Merlin finds the sword in Segontium beneath Macsen's Tower under the altar in the temple of Mithras, the Roman god of soldiers.

It is interesting how Mrs. Stewart uses the idea of the sword in the stone myth in her novel. In the myth as told

¹⁴ Mrs. Stewart got the idea for this detail from an entry in Bede's Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dated 418 A.D. "This year the Romans collected all the treasures that were in Britain, and some they hid in the earth, so that no one has since been able to find them; and some they carried with them into Gaul" (p. 308).

by Malory, after the death of Uther, at the bidding of Merlin, all the lords come, at Christmas, to a great church in London to pray to Jesus to show them, miraculously, how their next king will be chosen. At this time a huge stone appears with a sword in it and the legend "whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England."¹⁵ Of course, Arthur is the only one who can achieve this feat. But in Mrs. Stewart's novel, it is Merlin who achieves the miraculous feat of strength; guided by his god, he pulls down the altar in the temple.

I came to myself coughing, with the air round me swirling thick with dust and the sound of a crash still echoing round and round the vaulted chamber. . . . At my feet lay the altar, hurled over on its back into the curve of the apse. (The Hollow Hills, p. 260)

As Merlin holds the sword in his hands, the words which he hears are a paraphrase of Malory's; "Whoso takes this sword from under this stone is rightwise King born of all Britain" (p. 261). The implication is that Merlin is the rightful king; and so he is, being Ambrosius' son but his god has other plans for him. He attempts to put the sword back where he has found it, but the lid of the box in which he found the sword along with some other treasures¹⁶ falls

¹⁵ Le Morte D 'Arthur, pp. 6-10.

¹⁶ Also within the box was a jeweled krater, the grail of the Perceval legend. Later in the novel, Merlin comments that he will let the whereabouts of the grail stay a secret, for it will some day be the object of another quest.

with a crash, bringing down "a cascade of stone and plaster." The "hole and all had vanished from view under the rubble." Merlin takes the sword with him and puts it in a place where Arthur will find it later.

Mrs. Stewart uses the sword in the stone concept in still another way, as a foreshadowing of Arthur's eventual finding of the real sword and as a way of showing that Arthur, intuitively, knows that the sword is for him. Merlin finds the image of the sword carved in the altar of the Green Chapel¹⁷ in the Wild Forest above Galava where he goes to be near the child, Arthur. When Arthur comes to visit Merlin one day he sees the carving.

Before I could say a word, he [Arthur] had darted forward and reached for the hilt. I saw his hand meet the stone and the shock of it go through his flesh. He stood like that for seconds, as if tranced, then dropped the hand to his side and stepped back, still facing the altar.

He spoke without looking at me. "That was the queerest thing. I thought it was real." I thought, "There is the most beautiful and deadly sword in the world, and it is for me." (The Hollow Hills, p. 292)

She makes use of the concept again when Arthur finds the real sword. Merlin has hidden it in a castle-like cave on Caer Bannog, a small island in the middle of the lake near the chapel, on an altar-like rock formation. There

¹⁷ The Green Chapel plays an important role in the legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

the sword lay for fourteen years waiting for the young Arthur to claim it.

There beyond the shining pool, the sword lay on its table. From the rock above a trickle of water had run and dripped, the lime on it hardening through the years until the oiled leather of the wrapping, though proof enough to keep the metal bright, had hardened under the dripping till it felt like stone. (p. 326)

After he has found the sword, Arthur tells Merlin, "I pulled at it, and it came clear of the stone" (p. 327).

Mrs. Stewart says that she uses the quest pattern, which has become so much a part of the Arthurian legend, in structuring Arthur's discovery of the sword. She describes the pattern in this way.

There is usually an unknown youth, the bel inconnu, who is brought up in the wilds, ignorant of his name or parentage. He leaves his home and rides out in search of his identity. He comes across a Waste Land, ruled by a maimed (impotent) king; there is a castle, usually on an island, on which the youth comes by chance. He reaches it in a boat belonging to a royal fisherman, the Fisher King of the Grail legends. The Fisher King is sometimes identified with the impotent king of the Waste Land. The castle on the island is owned by a king of the Otherworld, and there the youth finds the object of his quest, sometimes a cup or a lance, sometimes a sword, broken or whole. At the quest's end he wakes by the side of the water with his horse tethered near him, and the island once again invisible. On his return from the Otherworld, fertility and peace are restored to the Waste Land. Some tales figure a white stag collared with gold, who leads the youth to his destination. (p. 444)

Arthur's quest is a miniature of the usual quest story, but Mrs. Stewart ingeniously incorporates most of the

ingredients of the pattern into it, again using legend as metaphor. One day a white stag, a trail of yellow (gold) loosestrife hanging around its neck like a collar, runs into the forest past Merlin (the royal fisherman) who is fishing in the lake. He is followed by Arthur's white hound Cabal and then by Arthur, himself, mounted on his white horse Canrith.¹⁸ The stag plunges into the lake, headed for the island on which the sword is hidden, followed by the hound. Merlin, realizing that this is the time when Arthur should find the sword, encourages him to follow them in Merlin's boat. Arthur does so willingly, not wanting to lose the dog which is a gift from his friend Bedwyr. The dog and stag lead him into the cave under the castle-like rock formation,¹⁹ and there he finds the sword. He rows back to shore with Cabal where Merlin is holding his horse for him. It is not long after this adventure that Arthur becomes king of Britain, uniting the war-torn country ("restoring fertility and peace to the Waste Land").

The invention of the sword quest has caused Mrs. Stewart to completely change the accounts given by Geoffrey and Malory of how Arthur becomes king. In both source versions,

¹⁸ White is Arthur's color.

¹⁹ In the story it was the belief of the people of Galava that this island was the home of the king of the otherworld.

he does not come into the picture until after Uther's victorious battle with Octa and Eosa, Hengrist's kinsmen. Following the battle, into which the ill King is carried on a litter, he dies after proclaiming Arthur his heir. In Malory's version, Ector tells Arthur the truth of his identity after the King's death; and Arthur assumes the throne only after proving to the nobles, who do not think that a fifteen-year-old boy should be king, that his is a God-given right by pulling the sword from the stone many times. In Mrs. Stewart's version, Merlin and Arthur are summoned to court before the battle by the seriously ill King who fears that his death is near. Arthur rides into battle at the side of his father's litter and wins the victory with his father's sword which is passed to him after he loses his own defending the King. Uther's death comes the next night at a victory feast at which he proclaims Arthur his son and heir. He dies of shock after finding that someone has treacherously broken his sword (Mrs. Stewart's way of making way for its replacement with Macsen's sword). Merlin is the one who must tell Arthur of his identity, although the ailing King is allowed to think that he tells his son this news. Merlin must disregard Uther's wish in this matter because Arthur is seduced by his villainous sister Morgause on the night of the battle.²⁰ Recognizing him

²⁰ As a result of Arthur's incest, Mordred, Arthur's arch enemy who is the eventual cause of his downfall, is born.

earlier she hopes to put him in disfavor with the King by this insidious act. As in Malory's version, some of the nobles oppose Arthur's claim to the throne, but eventually everyone is reconciled; and they all go to the Green Chapel where Arthur lifts the real sword from the stone altar in the presence of his subjects.

This chapter has dealt only with the more obvious of the mythological sources used by the author. One can hardly turn a page of the novels without realizing how very rich they are as documents of the lore not only of Merlin and Arthur but of the times in general. Some of the footnote citations will indicate how Mrs. Stewart has woven into her story a number of legends which space will not allow me to cover in this chapter. Her extensive use of these materials shows a great respect for the people and legends of her homeland, as do her comments in the "Authur's Notes" which were quoted earlier in this paper. She also conveys this respect through the character of Merlin, who does honor to all the gods, knowing that all gods are really but one, and who humors the superstitions of the people; for he knows, as he comments in The Hollow Hills, that behind all legend there is a plain truth showing through if one will only take the time, as Mrs. Stewart does in this Historical-Gothic, to find it.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL

To this point this study has identified two popular traditions from which Mrs. Stewart is working: the Gothic-Romance and the Historical-Gothic. This study has also revealed that only four of her novels can be identified as belonging to a particular fictional type: Nine Coaches and The Ivy Tree which are Gothic-Romances and The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills which are Historical-Gothic. Her other novels, though the study has indicated that they have some Gothic elements, do not follow any literary formula to the letter; and she hesitates to classify them:

I'm always asked to classify, but all the available definitions have specific meanings that somehow don't fill the bill. I find myself calling my books "thrillers" for want of a better word, but it isn't one I like. The same with "mysteries." People expect a detective story or a whodunit, and my books certainly aren't that. They're not really mysteries because the mystery element isn't nearly as important as other aspects.¹

¹ James M. Ethridge and Barbara Kopala, ed., A Biographical Guide to Current Authors and Their Works (Detroit: Gale Research Company, The Book Tower, 1967), p. 910.

Despite this hesitancy on Mrs. Stewart's part and despite the fact that none of her heroines are detectives, the third tradition out of which she is writing is the tradition of the detective novel.

Dean R. Knootz (p. 88) and Carolyn Wells, two writers and critics of the detective novel, agree that it is not necessary for a detective to appear in a novel for it to be a detective novel. Ms. Wells says the only criteria which is really important is that detective work be done by one of the characters:

There must be a crime or apparent crime or attempted crime. But whether the problem is one of murder, robbery or kidnapping--whether it be solved by evidence, deduction or a cryptogram, it is detected not guessed, and this is the main element in our classification.²

Mrs. Stewart's novels, then, meet the criteria for the detective novel, a fact which is made obvious by an examination of their contents. Such an examination will reveal that Mrs. Stewart's novels have many of the characteristics peculiar to the Mary Roberts Rhinehart type of detective novel, as well as those of detective novels falling into the suspense, mystery, and thriller classes.

² The Technique of the Mystery Story (Springfield Mass.: The Writer's Library, Folcraft Library Edition, 1973), p. 44.

Russel Nye says that the novels of Mary Roberts Rhinehart, written during the early 1900's, created a new dimension in the detective novel, "deriving as much if not more from the domestic novel and the old-fashion Gothic story as from Holmes or Poe."³ Since Mrs. Stewart's novels seem to be written, more or less, in this tradition, this may account for the fact that a Gothic strain can be seen running through all of her novels whether they can be classified as Gothic or not. Of the characteristics which Mrs. Rhinehart contributed to the development of the detective novel, the following can be seen in the novels of Mrs. Stewart. First, the novels are "novels of detection" rather than detective novels in the usual sense of the term. Second, there is the combining of the detective plot with a love plot. Next, there is the initial crime which is used merely as a "prelude" to one or more later crimes. Then, there is the use of the "had-I-but-known type of foreshadowing." Fifth, there is the use of an interesting, individualized female narrator "whose personal involvement with the other characters . . . [is] easily transferred to the reader" (p. 247). Sixth is the creation of a society which is "comfortable and orderly, being temporarily disturbed by a crime but perfectly capable of rearranging itself after the guilty . . . [are] apprehended" (p. 247).

³ The Unembarrassed Muse (New York: The Dial Press, 1973), p. 247. Nye is followed throughout in this discussion, and any further reference to Nye will pertain to this work and will appear in the text.

Mrs. Rhinehart, like Mrs. Stewart, objected to having her novels classified because she said that they did not fit into any particular mode. She insisted that her novels were not detective novels but novels of "detection." She said "the organized police play [only] a very small part in any of my books, and indeed I know little about them" (p. 247). This is true of Mrs. Stewart's works. "The organized police plays [but] a small part in any of them." Like the novels of Mrs. Rhinehart, the novels of Mrs. Stewart involve detection by one of the main characters.

The second characteristic which Mrs. Stewart's works share with those of Mrs. Rhinehart is the combining of a love story with the main plot of the novel. The love story has already been discussed in connection with the Gothic tradition. Its presence in the detective novels of Mrs. Stewart seems to serve as evidence that she is using the devices which Mrs. Rhinehart used in her novels of "detection." Even though this aspect has been discussed in Chapter Two it might be added that the love plot is tied up with the detective plot just as it is with the Gothic plot. The love interest has a key role in the working out of the plot because the lover either is directly involved in the mystery or crime (innocently, of course) or he assists the heroine in solving the mystery.

In the Gothic novel, usually, if there is a crime of some sort, especially murder, there is only a single one.

The mood of suspense, mystery, and danger is usually created by an atmosphere of impending violence rather than a number of real violent incidents. This is not always true of the detective novel in general nor of several of Mrs. Stewart's novels which fall into this classification. Just as in Mrs. Rhinehart's novels, the initial crime in some of Mrs. Stewart's novels is merely "a prelude" to other crimes. This characteristic occurs in all of Mrs. Stewart's novels except those which have been identified in Chapter Two as following the Gothic plot structure and those discussed in Chapter Three. With these exceptions, all of her novels begin with an initial crime which takes place before the story opens and leads inevitably to the attempted murder of the heroine whose involvement in the mystery brings her too close to the identity of the villain.

Wildfire at Midnight is the only one of these books which deviates slightly from the pattern described above. In this novel the heroine does not become involved in the mystery of her own accord. The story involves the ritualistic murders of three people and the attempted murder of a fourth. These murders are committed by an insane killer who believes that he is paying homage to the great mountains which surround the Isle of Skye where the story takes place. The first murder, that of a young girl, takes place before the story begins. As the story progresses, we learn that the killer sees this murder as an annual virginal sacrifice to

the great mountains. The other murders which he commits are intended to punish those who commit sacrilege against the mountains. Although Gianetta becomes a would-be victim, her attempted murder has nothing to do with the motive for the other three. Gianetta, who is on her way to the Isle of Skye for a vacation, learns of the strange murder of the young girl, the killer's first victim. However, her involvement in the crime comes about simply because she has the misfortune to be staying at the same hotel as the killer and because, although she doesn't realize it until much later, she knows who the killer is. Not realizing that she knows the identity of the real murderer, she begins to suspect her ex-husband, who, as prearranged by her match-making parents, is also staying at the same hotel. This makes her doubly unlikely to want to aid in the solution of the crimes because she is still in love with him and feels a need to protect him. If the crimes are to be solved she is perfectly happy to let the police perform that duty. The attempt, then, which is made on the life of the heroine is merely a matter of bad luck. She becomes a near-victim simply because she talks to a guilty man whom she does not suspect of being anything but a charming gentleman with whom she has been vaguely acquainted in London. During their conversation he, unthinkingly, identifies a piece of jewelry which only the killer has seen in the possession of his first victim. This, then, is a detective story, told from the point of view

of one of the victims, and the detective work which is done is merely glimpsed by her and the reader.

In Madame, Will You Talk?, the heroine says that she becomes a minor player in a play which, for the most part,

has been played already; there had been love and lust and revenge and fear and murder--all the blood-tragedy bric-a-brac except the Ghost--and now the killer, with blood enough on his hands, was waiting in the wings for the lights to go up again, on the last kill that would bring the final curtain down. (p. 9)

In this story most of the crimes take place before the story begins; in fact, the initial crime takes place during World War II when a German officer kills a Jewish painter, and Richard Byron, the hero of the story, is a witness to it. After the war the officer becomes afraid that Byron will be able to identify him and he hires a beautiful woman and her husband, who is an antique dealer, to kill Byron. The woman, who is French, marries Byron and goes to live with him in England despite the fact that she is already married. She and her real husband kill Byron's best friend who has come to spend a holiday with her and Byron and try to make it look like Byron killed him in a fit of jealous anger. The scheme does not work, for Richard is acquitted. Then they damage the brakes on his car; and although he is injured in the accident which results, he recovers. However, Richard's wife tells his twelve-year-old son that he is dead and takes the boy on a holiday before carrying him to

Marseilles. The plan is to get Richard to follow them and then to kill him. This is where Charity enters the picture and the story begins.

As the story opens David is being held captive by his stepmother although he does not realize it. The heroine befriends this troubled child, who is being used for bait to draw his father out into the open where he can be killed. This draws her into the center of the criminal action and makes her yet another victim who must be disposed of. The balance of the book is concerned with finding out why Richard's ex-wife and her real husband are trying to kill him (facts which are not revealed until near the end of the book) and with bringing the culprits to justice.

In Thunder on the Right, the initial crime is smuggling undesirables into Spain. It is this crime which leads to the mystery of Jennifer's missing cousin Gillain. Her apparent death proves false. Unlike the woman who, posing as Gillain, has died at the convent following a car accident and who is very fond of gentians because of their beautiful blue color, Gillain is color blind. This woman who has come, injured, to the convent posing as Gillain is really a criminal who has come to the border to be carried into Spain. Jennifer travels to the convent at the invitation of her cousin who has told her to meet her there. At the convent, prompted by this strange account of her cousin's actions and

of her death, Jennifer uncovers the two villains of the story. One of them is Dona Francisca who, for years, has had a fanatical desire to be part of the order which resides in the convent and who uses the money which she gets from her illegal activities to buy lavish furnishings for the chapel and silk habits for herself. The other is Pierre Bussac, who lives in the mountains near the convent. He was in the business of smuggling aliens long before Dona Francisca, who forces him to make her his partner, joined him. It is Pierre who discovers the amnesic Gillain wandering in the mountains, falls in love with her, and tells her that she is his wife who has had an accident and lost her memory. Jennifer puts her own life in danger when she discovers the whereabouts of Gillain and tries to rescue her.

In My Brother Michael, the crimes which have taken place before the beginning of the actual story are the stealing of goods and gold from the American army by Angelos, a member of the Greek underground, and the subsequent murder of Michael, Simon's brother, by the same man. It is a letter written by Michael alluding to a discovery which he has made and the rumor that Michael has been killed by Angelos which brings Simon to investigate the situation. The discovery of the murderer and blackmarketeer leads to the death of a young artist Nigel, who has inadvertently stumbled upon the goods as well as Michael's real secret, a priceless statue of the god Apollo standing in a hidden grotto. Angelos also kills

the girl Danielle, who has been his accomplice and mistress. And he attempts to kill both Simon and the heroine Camilla, who are in pursuit of him.

In The Moon-Spinners this pattern can be seen again. This time the crime which takes place before the beginning of the story is the murder of a "fence" Alexandros by his ex-partner Stratoes. Stratoes flees to his home country of Crete, taking with him the booty from a major jewel robbery. After the robbery he argues with Alexandros and leaves him for dead, stabbed in an alley. Alexandros recovers and follows Stratoes to Crete where a successful attempt on Alexandros' life is witnessed by Mark Langley and his younger brother Collin, who are discovered by Stratoes and his accomplices. They shoot Mark, leaving him for dead, and hold Collin captive in an old mill. Nicola Ferris inadvertently becomes involved when she takes a hike through the Crete countryside and accidentally comes upon the hut where the wounded Mark and his friend and guide Lambis are hiding. Nicola helps Mark rescue his brother Collin, uncovers the fact that Stratos is hiding the stolen diamonds in his fish traps, and almost gets herself drowned by Stratoes while she is trying to escape the island.

In This Rough Magic, Godfrey Manning, who is smuggling forged currency from Corfu to Albania, attempts to kill Spiro, the servant of his neighbors Julian and Max Gale, who

has come very close to discovering his illegal activities on the island. Lucy Waring first becomes involved in this situation because, animal lover that she is, she sets out to investigate who is shooting at a dolphin which is swimming in the same cove she is. After the boy, Spiro, who is discovered alive, but with a broken leg, tells what really happened, Lucy aids in trapping Manning. He tries to murder her when he finds her stowed-away on board his yacht where she is searching for some clue to his illegal activities.

In Airs Above the Ground, the situation of the plot is different from that of the other stories. This is the only one of the books in which a law enforcement agent is a main character. Lewis March, the husband of the heroine Vanessa, is a secret agent on a case. Vanessa becomes involved in her husband's "007" activities when one of his fellow agents is killed, and he is sent to find out why and to continue the man's mission. Vanessa, who thinks that her husband is working in Sweden, gets caught up in his mission when a friend tells her that she has seen Lewis on an Austrian news-reel. Vanessa confirms this story and takes off for Austria where she finds her husband masquerading as Lee Elliot and traveling and working with the circus. It seems that there have been two murders, that of a circus employee as well as that of the agent. The agent was on the trail of some drug smugglers. Vanessa becomes the near victim of Sandor Balog, one of the criminals, who is a performer in the circus, when

she is asked to take a stolen Lipizzan and his saddle back to the famous Spanish Riding School. It seems that the saddle contains the drugs and that that is the reason why the two men were killed and the reason that Vanessa is nearly killed on the roof of an old castle which has been converted into a hotel.

The crimes which take place in The Gabriel Hounds are murder and drug smuggling. The heroine Christabel becomes involved when she becomes suspicious after her ailing, eccentric aunt refuses to see her favorite nephew. Christabel, who is on vacation, goes to visit her aunt, whom she hasn't seen since she was a child. The aunt lives quite outlandishly in a Turkish palace, dressing like a man and riding wildly through the countryside on a horse. When Christabel reaches her aunt's home, she is almost turned away by an inarticulate servant. This makes her more determined than ever to get into the palace. Finally, after the servant finds that she will not go away, he sends for a mysterious young man who proves to be her aunt's companion. This young man tells her that she may stay the night and that later on in the evening, for a brief period of time, she may see her aunt, who is ill. The interview with the aunt turns out to be a strange experience; and when Aunt Harriet refuses to see Charles, who has always been her favorite, Christabel wonders what is wrong and decides to find out just what is happening in the household. A flooded river which lies between the palace and the

town gives her just the excuse she needs for staying longer. She soon finds that her aunt is really not her aunt but a man and a drug smuggler and that her aunt's servants are in league with him. She also finds out that the girl servant has accidentally killed her aunt with medicine which she gave her to punish her for being difficult. Christabel's uncovering of their smuggling activities and of her aunt's murder makes it necessary for them to get rid of her. At the climax of the story, the palace catches fire and Christabel is rescued by her cousin and lover, Charles, from the dungeon in which she is being held captive.

In Touch Not the Cat, it is the accidental hit-and-run killing of Bryony's father that leads to the opening of the mystery and nearly to Bryony's death. John Ashley's strange deathbed statement carries Bryony back to England not only to clear up the estate of her dead father but to look into the mystery of the paper in "William's brook" and to decipher the meaning of her father's strange dying exclamation, "The cat, it's the cat on the pavement. The map. The letter. In the brook" (p. 24). Bryony's determination to find out exactly what it is that her father is trying to warn her against, even with his dying breath, leads to the discovery of a before unrealized heir to Ashley Court and to Bryony's near-drowning under the floor of a summer house at the center of the mysterious maze which her great-great-grandfather had built.

Besides the initial crime acting merely as the first movement in a chain reaction, another characteristic which Nye attributes to Mrs. Rhinehart's novels and which can be found in Mrs. Stewart's as well is the foreshadowing or the "had I but known" passage near the beginning of the novel. Charity Selborne in Madame expresses it in the following way:

THE WHOLE affair began so very quietly. When I wrote, that summer, and asked my friend Louise if she would come with me on a car trip to Provence, I had no idea that I might be issuing an invitation to danger. . . .

How was I to know, that lovely quiet afternoon, that most of the actors in the tragedy were at that moment assembled in this neat, unpretentious little Provencal hotel? All but one, that is, and he, with murder in his mind, was not so very far away, moving, under that blazing southern Sun, in the dark circle of his own personal hell. A circle that narrowed gradually, upon the Hotel Tistet-Vedene, Avignon. (p. 9)

In The Moon-Spinners the "had I but known" passage is handled in this way:

IT WAS THE EGRET, flying out of the lemon grove, that started it. I won't pretend I saw it straight away as the conventional herald of adventure, the white stag of the fairytale, which, bounding from the enchanted thicket, entices the prince away from his followers, and loses him in the forest where danger threatens with the dusk. But, when the big white bird flew suddenly up among the glossy leaves and the lemon flowers, and wheeled into the mountains, I followed it.⁴

⁴ The Moon-Spinners (New York: M. S. Mill Co. and William Morrow and Company, 1962), p. 3.

In Nine Coaches Waiting the foreshadowing is in the form of a quote which comes rushing to the memory of the heroine to signal her that there is danger ahead:

Suddenly, unbidden, verses were spinning in my brain. Nine Coaches Waiting--hurry, hurry, hurry-- But here, surely, the quotation was desperately inappropriate? What was it, anyhow? I racked my brain, remembering. . . . Something about the pleasures of the palace, secured ease and state . . . banquets abroad by torchlight! music! sports! nine coaches waiting--hurry, hurry, hurry . . . some tempter's list of pleasures, it had been designed to lure a lonely young female to a luxurious doom; yes, that was it, Vendice enticing the pure and idiotic Castiza to the Duke's bed. . . . (Ay, to the devil). . . . I grinned to myself as I placed it. Inappropriate certainly. (pp. 184-185)

But, of course, the quote turns out to be quite appropriate indeed.

The reason that both Mrs. Rhinehart and Mrs. Stewart could use the "had I but known" technique leads to the next characteristic which Mrs. Stewart shares in common with Mrs. Rhinehart. That is the use of the female narrator. All but one of Mrs. Stewart's novels, Thunder on the Right, is written in first-person point of view. Nye says in the case of Mrs. Rhinehart that this point of view establishes a closer relationship between the reader and the characters in the novels. Mrs. Stewart uses this point of view for much the same reasons:

The gain in vividness, personal involvement and identification is immense. I have always been interested in pinpointing sensation down into words,

and first-person writing allows close exploration of physical reactions to the stimuli of fear, joy, pain, and so on.⁵

Still another characteristic which they share is the creation of a world temporarily set wrong by crime but which can quickly recover. F. W. J. Hemming says most of Mrs. Stewart's novels have an atmosphere with "the sunny serenity, the sense of 'it'll all come right in the end.'"⁶ After the criminals are apprehended the conclusions of Mrs. Stewart's novels do give the impression that now the world will go on as it was meant to and that the momentary episode of crime has been a temporary intrusion into an otherwise orderly existence.

At the end of Wildfire, after Gianetta has just barely escaped being sacrificed to the great mountains, life goes on as neatly as ever with the reconciliation of husband and wife--after the capture of the maniac, of course:

I stirred in his arms and drew a little breath of pure happiness.

"What d' you bet," I said, "that when we arrive at Tench Abbas, Mother'll meet us just as if nothing had ever happened and serenely show us both into the spare room?"

⁵ "Teller of Tales," The Writer, 83, No. 5 (May, 1970), 11. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

⁶ "Mary Queen of Hearts," New Statesman (November 5, 1965), 698. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

"Then we'd better be married again before we get there," said Nicholas, "or I won't answer for the consequences." And so we were. (p. 175)

At the end of Madame, after a frightening chase through the French night and the near murder of Richard, Charity and the child David, the lovers stroll down the street making plans for their wedding. Then the heroine concludes the telling of the story: "and, ten days later . . . my husband and I set our faces to the South, and the Isles of Gold" (p. 176). All of Mrs. Stewart's novels have a happy ending in the tradition of the Gothic, but this happy ending reassures all that the world is back to normal and that all will go well now in an untroubled world, where crime and evil are exceptions rather than the rule.

Besides having characteristics of Mrs. Rhinehart's novels, Mrs. Stewart's novels also have characteristics of the detective novel in general. According to Knootz the detective novel can be broken into two classes, the suspense novel and the mystery novel. Mrs. Stewart's works bear characteristics of both.

The mystery novel puts a great deal of emphasis on finding out who the villain is. Knootz says that emphasis is essential:

First of all in the mystery the villain is always unknown until the end: a major purpose of the narrative is to deduce, by degrees, the identity

of the murderer or thief. The unveiling of the villain is the whole dramatic focus, forms the entire climax, and comes near the very end of the novel. (p. 73)

With the exceptions of The Ivy Tree and My Brother Michael, none of Mrs. Stewart's villains are known from the beginning of the story.

In Madame, Wildfire, and This Rough Magic, the detective technique of not revealing the villain until late in the story is combined with the Gothic technique of mistaking the real hero for the villain. In Madame, Charity Selborne does not realize until she is speeding down the road with Paul Very, whom she has enlisted to help her rescue Richard and his son, that Paul is the real villain. She has not realized this, though there are a number of things which should have made her suspicious of him, including the fact that she had overheard a meeting between Very and his wife. She does not realize earlier that he is the villain because it has taken a good part of the novel for her to realize that Richard is not a killer, but a victim of his ex-wife and her real husband. In This Rough Magic, Linda suspects Julian Gale's son initially of being the villain, for she is sure that it is he who shot at the dolphin and later left it for dead in the cove. It is her suspicion of Max which closes her eyes to the identity of the real villain Geoffrey Manning. In Wildfire, Gianetta is so busy shielding her ex-husband whom she suspects of being the murderer that she literally runs into the arms of the real killer before she realizes who he is.

Besides these two characteristics, Knootz lists nine other requirements for the mystery (pp. 104-114) which Mrs. Stewart's novels either collectively or individually exhibit. These requirements, which he poses in the form of questions for the mystery writer, will be presented here with brief examples from those works which contain the specific characteristics.

The first question from the list is "does your hero appear in chapter one?" In the case of Mrs. Stewart's novels the answer is "yes, in everyone." The first-person point of view makes this inevitable. The heroine not only tells the story in most cases, but she begins the novel by telling something about herself and the circumstances which surround the events which take place in the book. Even the one novel in which Mrs. Stewart uses the omniscient point of view begins by introducing the heroine.

The second question which Knootz has on his checklist of musts for the mystery is "does your hero have a sound motive for becoming involved in the investigation of a case," and does the villain have a clearcut motive for committing the crime? Mrs. Stewart always makes clear the motive of her characters. In the case of the heroine, her motive is almost always one of two reasons. First, she is helping some person who is in need of help. Often this person is a child; sometimes it may be an elderly person or someone who is hurt. Second, the heroine may be involved because the person in

trouble is a relative. In the case of the villain, the motive is the desire for money and power. This is true of Leon de Valmy, who wishes to kill Philippe to get possession of the child's estate. This is also true to the Ashley twins who have accidentally killed Bryony's father and who deliberately attempt to murder her to get control of the Ashley Court estate before anyone discovers that Rob, the caretaker, is a legitimate relative with a claim on the inheritance.

The third question which Knootz poses about the mystery is "is your fictional crime violent enough?" Madame, Wildfire, Airs, My Brother Michael, and This Rough Magic all contain violent murders. In Madame, Richard's friend Tony is strangled to death as he sleeps in his bed. In Wildfire the young girl and one of the hotel guests are stabbed to death in a sacrificial rite. In Airs, a horse trainer at a small circus and a secret agent with whom he is talking are burned to death in the trailer of the trainer. In My Brother Michael, Angelos the villain commits three violent murders; first, he stabs Michael to death, then he tortures and kills the young painter Nigel, and then he stabs Danielle to death. In This Rough Magic, Manning attempts to kill Spiro by throwing the boy overboard a boat.

The fourth question which Knootz poses is "is the method of murder or the way the body is found unique and attention getting?" The answer to this question can be found in

excerpts from two of Mrs. Stewart's novels. First, from Wildfire, there is Gianetta's account of her finding of Roderick Beagle's body:

I dropped the basket with a crash, and ran like a mad thing towards the smoking pyre. I don't know what I hoped to do. I was acting purely by instinct. I hurled myself forward, shouting as I ran, and I had the heavy torch gripped in my hand like a hammer.

There was an answering shout from the hill behind--close behind--but I hardly heeded it. I ran on, desperately, silent now but for my sobbing, tearing breath. The fire was taking hold. The smoke belched sideways in the wind, and whirled over me in a choking cloud. . . .

I saw the smoke fanning out under something that was laid across the top of the pile. I saw the glass of a wrist watch gleam red in the flame. I saw a boot dangling, the nails in the sole shining like points of fire. . . .

Then a shadow loomed behind me out of the smoke. A man's strong hand seized me and dragged me back. I whirled and struck out with the torch. He swore, and then had me in a crippling grip. I struggled wildly, and I think I screamed. His grip crushed me. Then he tripped, and I was flung down into the wet heather, with my attacker's heavy body bearing me down. . . .

His voice was without expression. He said ". . . . It's Beagle. And someone has cut his throat." (pp. 98-95)

Then from My Brother Michael there is Camill's account of her discovery of the body of the young painter Nigel:

In the paralyzed moment before I dropped the torch from a numbed hand, and let the merciful darkness loose again, I saw what had happened to Nigel. You can see an awful lot in a split second's acute terror and shock; the picture your brain registers then is complete, the stuff of a million lingering nightmares still to come. Nothing is missed; every bestial detail is there for the mind to come back to, turn over, re-picture without ceasing.

He had been tied. The rope had gone now--no doubt the murderer had need of it--but the boy's wrists were scored raw where he had struggled. He had been tied and tortured. In that one glance I had seen the shabby green shirt ripped down off one thin shoulder, and, on the upper arm, shocking against the peeling skin, a series of marks whose sickening regularity could mean only one thing. He had been burned four or five times, deliberately. . . . Let it remain that Nigel had died, in pain. His eyes were open. I remember how they gleamed in the light of the torch. And his teeth clenched, grinning, on some fragment that might have been skin . . . Dimitrio's bitten thumb.⁷

Another excerpt from My Brother Michael may answer the question even more strikingly as Camilla describes how Angelos murders Danielle while making love to her:

I heard him kick a stone out of the way as he pulled her down onto the dusty floor of the cave near the rubble pile . . . near Nigel's body. . . .

I only heard one sound from her, and it was a little half-sigh, half-whimper of pleasure. I'll swear it was of pleasure. . . .

I don't know how long it was before I realized that the cave was quiet, except for the heavy breathing.

Then I heard him getting to his feet. His breath was deep and even. He didn't say anything, and I didn't hear him move away. There was no sound from Danielle.

I opened my eyes again, and the dimming torchlight met them. He was standing beside the pile of rubble, smiling down at Danielle. She lay there, still looking up at him. I could see the glint of her eyes. The sweat on his face made the wide fleshy cheeks gleam like soapstone. He stood quite still, smiling down at the girl who lay at his feet staring back at him, her bright skirt all tossed-looking in the dust.

⁷ My Brother Michael, (New York: M. S. Mill Company and William Morrow and Company, 1959), p. 212. All further references to this work appear in the text.

I thought, with crazy inconsequence, how uncomfortable she looks. Then, suddenly, she looked dead.

Presently Angelos stopped, took her body by the shoulders and dragged it across the cave to pitch it down in the rubble beside Nigel.

And that is how Danielle Lascauz was murdered within twenty yards of me, and I never lifted a finger to help her. (pp. 227-228)

Question five is "do you introduce at least one potential suspect by the end of chapter two?" In This Rough Magic, Mrs. Stewart not only introduces a suspect by the end of chapter two, but she has the heroine confront him with an accusation:

I got enough breath to speak, and wasted neither time nor words. "Why were you shooting at that dolphin?"

He looked as blank as if I had suddenly slapped his face. "Why was I what?"

"That was you just now, wasn't it, shooting at the dolphin down in the bay?"⁸

And she has the suspect point a finger at the real villain, though not for the crimes which happen in the story:

"If you want help in your protection campaign I suggest you go to the Villa Rotha straight away. Manning's been photographing that beast for weeks. It was he who tamed it in the first place, he and the Greek boy who works for him." (p. 27)

In Wildfire, Gianetta's ex-husband, whom, at first, she sees as a prime suspect, enters the hotel just as the first chapter ends. In Madame, although he is not present physically until

⁸ This Rough Magic, (New York: M. S. Mill Co. and William Morrow and Company, 1964), p. 25. All further references to this work appear in the text.

much later in the story, Richard Byron enters the story as a suspect when one of the other guests at the hotel tells Charity the story of the scandal connected with the Byron family and of why Mrs. Byron has changed her name and that of her stepson.

Since question six and seven are so closely related, they can be discussed together. Question six is "have you provided legitimate clues to the killer's identity?" Question seven is

does your hero's sudden realization of the killer's identity evolve from a juxtaposition of events that he has been unable to interpret, thus far, because of some preconception or character flaw of his own? (pp. 111-112)

The answers to these two questions can be found in Madame. Charity has not been able to see Paul Very as the villain because, even after she no longer suspects Richard of being the murderer, she suspects Marsden, who turns out to be a policeman. When she is alone with the killer and realizes who he is, she also realizes that she should have known all along. As she rides with him through the French night an inscription on his lighter and a phrase spoken softly in French triggers her memory:

The lighter went out. Above me in the darkness, his voice said, ever so slightly mocking: "Don't worry about it anymore, ma belle. It'll be all right. I'll see to that. And you trust me, don't you?"

That phrase, softly spoken in French in the darkness . . . the voice of the Rocher des Doms [where earlier in the story she had overheard a conversation between Very and his wife although she had not seen his face]; the voice I had heard less than an hour ago in Kramer's office [where she had heard the plot to kill Richard and the boy, with him as the murderer]. . . . And, like another echo behind it, too late, whispered the ghost-voice of Louise [Charity's friend and companion on this holiday trip] Paul Very . . . something to do with antiques. . . . (p. 141)

In Wildfire, too, the heroine has literally run for aid into the arms of the villain before she realizes who he is. And, again, it is her mistaking an innocent man which draws all of the suspicion from the real villain:

"Ho!" I cried, stooping after it. "It's Heather's brooch!"

"Heather's brooch?" His tone was casual, so casual that I looked at him in some surprise.

"Yes. I found it yesterday under that dreadful ledge. I thought it was Roberta's, but Dougal said--"

Once again my voice dwindled and died in my throat. I stood up, the brooch in my hand, and looked up into his eyes.

I said: "The first night I was here, you told me about Heather's murder. You told me about the little pile of jewelry that was found on the ledge. A bracelet, you said, and a brooch, and--oh, other things. But the brooch wasn't on the ledge when she was found. And since she had only been given it that day, for her birthday, you couldn't have known about it, unless you saw her wearing it yourself. Unless you, yourself, put it onto that little pile on the ledge beside the bonfire." (p. 154)

The eighth question "does the revelation of the villain's identity come close to the end of the book?" has already been answered in the section of this paper which discusses the

characteristics Mrs. Stewart's novels share with Mrs. Rhinehart's. The ninth question "is the relation of the killer's identity delivered in an action scene, as opposed to a dry, verbalized accounting made by the hero to other people in the story?" turns the discussion again to the above excerpts from Wildfire and Madame. Other examples which can be pointed to in answer to this last question are My Brother Michael and The Gabriel Hounds. In My Brother Michael, although Simon knows that it is Angelos who killed Michael, he thinks Angelos to be dead and the present villain to be Angelos' cousin Dimitrios. He does not know that Angelos is still alive and that Dimitrios is merely his accomplice until well near the end of the story. Camilla discovers that Angelos is alive right at the time when the whole situation is coming to a head: Nigel's body, the contraband and gold, and Michael's treasure have been discovered by Camilla. Simon has gone off looking for Dimitrios and Nigel, whom he does not know is dead, and Camilla is left alone to witness Daneille's death. In The Gabriel Hounds, Christabel discovers who the villain is when she is kidnapped by a strange man who has offered to give her a ride to the city to have her passport corrected. The fact that this man is the head of a small ring of drug smugglers made up of her aunt's companion and maid, that it is this man who imitated her aunt the first night when Christabel visited her, and that the servant girl, Halida, had accidentally killed her aunt

by giving her croton oil is revealed near the end of the novel while the three are holding Christabel captive in her aunt's palace, waiting for their stash of drugs to be picked up.

These elements of the mystery story are often used in Mrs. Stewart's work in some combination with elements of the suspense story. Knootz sees the suspense novel and the mystery as belonging to two different types (p. 71). For instance, while the identity of the villain in the mystery is not known until near the end of the novel, in the suspense novel, the identity of the villain is usually known from the very beginning and emphasis is placed on catching him. This technique can be seen working in some of Mrs. Stewart's novels, namely The Ivy Tree, Thunder, and Touch Not the Cat. However, there are characteristics of the suspense novel which are compatible with those of the mystery novel and which Mrs. Stewart makes use of in combination with them.

Knootz says that three narrative techniques are very important to the development of the suspense novel. They are the chase, the race against time, and anticipation of a violent event (p. 94). Mrs. Stewart makes use of all of these devices in her books.

Knootz says that the chase is usually between the hero (or in this case heroine) and the villain:

The antagonists will pursue the hero for only one reason: he has something which they want. This

"something" may be vital information, or a commodity of more immediate value such as jewels or money, or it may be knowledge which would incriminate them if he were to release it to the proper authorities. If the last is the case, their only reason for giving chase is to catch and kill him. Even though the hero's death is not implicit in the first two circumstances, the threat of death is desirable, for it will strengthen his motivation for flight and put an edge to the tension that will make the reader more concerned for his welfare than he otherwise might be. (p. 94)

The chase takes place in all of Mrs. Stewart's books. In Airs, the villain is chasing the heroine because she has a saddle in her care which contains some drugs that he and his bosses have been transporting. In Wildfire the villain is chasing the heroine to kill her because she is the only one who can prove that he is the murderer. In fact in each novel in which there is a chase, with the exception of Nine Coaches and Madame, the villain is chasing the heroine with the intention of killing her. In Nine Coaches, Rauol, whom Linda suspects of being one of the villains but who in reality is the hero, is chasing her to let her know that she and the boy are in danger from his father and stepmother and not from himself. Just as in Nine Coaches, in Madame, it is the hero who chases the heroine who mistakenly suspects him of being the villain. He is chasing her because he thinks she is a villainess who has helped abduct his son and he wants to know the whereabouts of the child. In Touch Not the Cat, the chase is turned about. It is the heroine who chases the villain and this chase, unlike the others, takes place early in the novel.

Knootz continues his discussion of the chase with this explanation:

Each step of the chase should build suspense by making the hero's hopes for escape grow dimmer. Every time a new ploy fails to lose the chasers, the hero's options should be narrowed until, at last, it seems that each thing he tries is his only hope, each momentary reprieve from death looking more like his last gasp than the reprieve before it. This narrowing of options can be created in two ways in the chase story. First of all, the distance between the hero and villain should constantly narrow. . . . Second, options may be narrowed if the villains drive him out of places where he moves with relative alacrity into landscapes he is unfamiliar with where he becomes further alienated from hope. (p. 96)

The chase in Airs is a good example of one in which the heroine's options keep getting more and more limited and in which the distance between the heroine and the villain keeps getting narrower and narrower:

He had seen me. I saw the gun flash threateningly into his hand; but I knew that, here of all places, he wouldn't dare to shoot. In any case I couldn't go back; there was nowhere to go back to; he could reach the turret up which we had come before I could. And I could get down to the courtyard, down my stairway. He couldn't. His was broken, the turret itself just a jut of crumbling fangs. To get to me he would have to go all the way back. I ran forward.

I had run twenty yards, not looking at him, my whole being intent simply on the head of that stone staircase, when I suddenly saw what he was doing. . . . He went up that broken turret like a leaping cat and then was on top of the arch and running-not walking, running across it towards me.⁹

⁹ Airs Above the Ground (New York: M. S. Mill Co. and William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 163.

The second of the suspense devices, the race against time, appears in Madame, Airs, Thunder, and The Ivy Tree. In Madame, Charity races through the night in an attempt to prevent the murder of Richard and his son by Kramer's henchmen. In Airs Vanessa races down the mountain to stop the train which will soon be bearing down on Timothy, her teenage ward who has caught his foot in a railway cross tie. In Thunder, Jennifer and Bussac, who is in love with Gillain, search through the night for Dona Francisco in an attempt to keep her from killing Gillain. In The Ivy Tree, Annabel hurries for help when the old ivy tree is hit by lightning and falls, pinning Donald, Julia's fiance, and Adam, Annabel's lover, in the basement of the ruins of the old gatehouse.

A long discussion of the third of these elements, "anticipation of a violent event," is not necessary because its significance, as Knootz explains, "should be implicit in the first two techniques" (p. 98). Knootz explains:

the man being chased is trying to avoid his own death or trying to keep information from the antagonists which would allow them to wreck havoc on other people. The race against time is entered for the express purpose of preventing some deadly disastrous event. (p. 163)

The fourth and last type of "novel of detection" from which Mrs. Stewart seems to draw is the thriller. In fact, both she and her critics often refer to her works as "thrillers."

The thriller element which she uses is the hero. The following description of the thriller hero, provided by George Stade, will demonstrate just how much like this character her heroines are, even though they, also, bear a number of the characteristics of the Gothic heroine as well:

The hero must in keeping with a world entirely sinister is not that distillate of brain and eccentricity in the tale of ratiocination, not the walking truncheon of the American private-eye novel, not the blighted absurdist of the European big caper type, not the obsessed quester of adventure yarns, not the intrepid loner of westerns, not the mad doctor of one kind of science fiction or the master of technological white magic in another, not even a secret agent, unless he is on vacation or retired or recuperating, but an ordinary citizen. . . . He should not even believe that the world he will be sucked into exists. . . . Overly conventional in thoughts, attitudes, values, allegiance, sexual interest; of average intelligence and moderate education . . . he is without the resources of . . . special knowledge and abilities . . . so that the reader can more easily share his experience.¹⁰

Like this hero, the heroine of Mrs. Stewart's books are ordinary people. They work at such occupations as sales lady, fashion model, embassy clerk and housewife. Their thoughts, values, and attitudes, like those of the hero described above, are conventional and, by today's sexually liberal standard, very old fashioned. They have no special skills to help them out of the dangerous situations in which

¹⁰ George Stade, "Thrillers," Columbia Forum, XIII (1970), Number 1, 36. All further reference to this work will be made in the text.

they become involved. In fact, according to an earlier quote, Mrs. Stewart says that she has made

a deliberate attempt . . . to discard certain conventions which seemed . . . to remove the novel of action so far from real life that it becomes a charade or a puzzle in which no reader could involve himself sufficiently to care. (Teller of Tales, p. 12)

One of the ways in which she achieves this is through her heroine:

I tried to take conventionally bizarre situations (the car chase, the closed-room murder, the wicked uncle tale) and send real people into them, normal everyday people with normal everyday reactions to violence and fear; people not "heroic" in the conventional sense, but averagely intelligent men and women who could be shocked or outraged into defending if necessary with great bravery, what they held to be right. . . . I was tired of "tough" books where her qualities of mind and heart (if any) are treated as irrelevant. I tried unobtrusively where I could to show admiration for liberal ideas, common sense, and civilized good manners that are the armor of the naked nerve. (Teller of Tales, p. 12)

What Mrs. Stewart's heroines have going for them is love, respect, and sympathy for their fellow human beings who have been placed by fortune or design in some dangerous situation. None of the heroines, though they all tell stories of intrigue and danger, ever give the impression that this is a natural part of their existence. It all is a nightmare which they are happy to be out of, a world not their own, a world in which they are aliens. They are simply ladies on holiday, for the most part, just wanting sun, peace, and some interesting sights to see.

These ladies have another similarity to the thriller hero. A further quote from Stade will serve to show just how similar they are to him:

Our hero does not think of himself as rushing towards this world. He is not an adventurer. He is an ordinary man travelling for business or for health. His passport is in order. . . . A slight misunderstanding, a comic and trivial case of mistaken identity, an absurd coincidence, a snatch of conversation overheard, the most trifling accidents and he is tripped into the ambiguous, the questionable, the menacing, the sinister, into a realm wherein no one and nothing can be relied upon, least of all to be one thing or the other for once and for all. (p. 37)

That the heroines do not see themselves as "rushing towards this world" is supported by Mrs. Stewart's use of the "had-I-but-known" technique which was discussed earlier. They, like the hero of the thriller, become entrapped, often because of what seems like some trivial matter. Charity Selborne in Madame becomes involved in murder, kidnapping, and attempted murder just because a dog chases a cat onto the balcony of her hotel room. Lucy Waring of This Rough Magic becomes involved in smuggling and attempted murder, including her own, because she tries to aid a dolphin who is being shot at. In Thunder, Jennifer Silver is almost killed because she accepts an invitation to visit with a cousin. In The Gabriel Hounds, Christabel is only curious to see an eccentric aunt whom she has not seen since she was a child. Annabel of The Ivy Tree only wants to return home.

Camilla in My Brother Michael thinks it may be amusing and adventurous to drive to Delphi, to see who this Simon is, after she has been mistaken for his girl and left with the care of his car. Gianetta just wants some peace and quiet when she goes to Skye in Wildfire and Nicola simply decides to take an innocent walk in the hills of Crete in The Moon-Spinners, only to find Mark Langley, wounded and in need of help. And, finally, Vanessa March in Airs is pulled into a mystery when a gossip friend comes to tea.

Another similarity which the Stewart heroine shares with the thriller hero can be found in another comment which Stade makes about this character:

Canny authors often introduce a hero who has just undergone a crisis, physical or spiritual, brought on by divorce, the death of a wife or son, or a respectable illness. (p. 36)

In several of her novels, Mrs. Stewart's heroines have just undergone some kind of traumatic experience. For instance, in Madame, Charity is still recovering from the death of her husband. In This Rough Magic, Lucy has just finished a run in a play which folded. And in Nine Coaches, Linda is an orphan on her own for the first time when she takes the job as governess at the de Valmy's.

All of the characteristics which have been discussed above usually are thought of separately as composing the formula for the classic types of detective novels. However,

Mrs. Stewart has combined the types discussed here with those of the Gothic and come up with something which is uniquely her own. It is this ability to use these elements together with skill which makes Mrs. Stewart one of the best popular writers. Just what results from this marriage of diverse elements is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARY STEWART AND THE AUTEUR APPROACH

The answer to the first of the questions with which this study has been concerned, namely, "How do Mrs. Stewart's works fit into the body of popular fiction?" has led to an examination of three classical popular types: the Gothic-Romance, the Historical Gothic and the detective story. The answer to the second question with which this study is concerned, "What are the characteristics of Mrs. Stewart's works which make them peculiarly her own?" leads to the examination and application of a relatively new form of criticism: the auteur approach.

David Madden explains that this approach, which was first used to criticize films, "is a mode of analysis based on the individual stylistic characteristics and thematic interests of the director as they show up in his collective works."¹ John Cawelti describes the auteur approach this way:

According to most proponents of the theory, the auteur is not one of those few film directors who

¹ "The Necessity for An Aesthetics of Popular Culture," Journal of Popular Culture, 7, Nos. 1-2 (1973), 6.

insists upon absolute originality, who create their own material, write their own scripts and thus create total works of art without any compromise for the sake of commercial success or mass audience taste. On the other hand, the auteur is not a mere technician who simply transmits to film the script which an omnipotent producer hands him. Instead, the auteur is an individual creator who works within a framework of existing materials, conventional structures and commercial imperatives, but who nevertheless has the imagination, the integrity, and the skill to express his own artistic personality in the way he sets forth the conventional material he works with. In other words, the successful auteur lies somewhere along the continuum between original creation and performance. He is not an original artist because he is an interpreter of material or of conventional structure largely created by others, but he is more than a performer because he recreates these conventions to the point that they manifest at least in part the patterns of his own style and vision.²

According to Cawelti and Madden, who shares with Cawelti the belief that auteur criticism is an answer to fairly evaluating popular fiction, the film autuer and the popular writer have a number of things in common. These two critics agree that both the writer of popular fiction and the director must function within rather rigid limits. The director must work within the confines of a script which has been written by someone else, the writer within the bonds of the conventions and formulas which have been established by popular writers of the past and perpetuated by his own peers and the tastes of the reading public. Second, both the film director and the popular writer occupy similar

² "Notes Toward and Aesthetic of Popular Culture," Journal Popular Culture, 5, Nos. 1-2 (1971), 265. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

positions in creating their art. Madden says that like the imagination of the director, the imagination of the popular writer

does not process in terms of a conception and thus transform his raw material, . . . rather, with basic fictional techniques he expertly manipulates and controls all the elements for calculated effects. So we speak of inventive powers, his structuring mind--a mind aware of itself and of the reader's mind--rather than the shaping imagination.³

To this can be added Cawelti's comment that the auteur of the world of popular fiction must turn

conventional and generally known and appreciated artistic formula into a medium of personal expression while at the same time giving us a version of the formula which is satisfying because it fulfills our basic expectations. (p. 266)

Madden and Cawelti agree that the film auteur and the popular writer are similar because both their arts lie somewhere between creation and performance. Cawelti thinks that it is in this quality that the popular writer has most in common with the director. It is because of these similarities that Madden seriously proposes the use of this approach for criticizing popular art; for as Cawelti points out, the concept of auteur has made available to us, "although it is just beginning to develop an articulated method," a way to "define and analyze the personal within the conventional,"

³ "Necessity," p. 12.

(p. 266) a task which he sees as paramount to the evaluation of popular fiction. Cawelti says that "there are always a few writers who without losing sight of the conventional structures of the story type they work within still manage to create a distinctive personal art. These are the auteur of popular literature" (p. 267).

Such a writer is Mrs. Stewart. F. W. J. Hemmings says her use of a personal formula which has made her work uniquely her own has become a hallmark among her reading public:

She must know by now that she owes her huge following to the attractiveness of her basic ingredients: a mass readership must be given what it has come to expect, though of course there must be judicious variations in blending to prevent custom staling. (p. 698)

Yet, although Mrs. Stewart has managed to create her own formula, she has managed also to work this formula out within the bounds of the romantic suspense novel. She does this by weaving the conventions discussed in chapters two and four into a formula which preserves their original form while, at the same time, allowing her to do things with them which grow out of her own creativity. In other words the conventions and traditions become her building materials. What she does is put her personal touches on certain aspects of the story formulas, working, as she has said earlier, to bring the conventions to life. For instance, she balances the melodramatic characteristics of the heroine of the Gothic

novel against the more realistic characteristics of the thriller hero; and she takes setting which is important for creating mood and tone in the Gothic novel and brings it to life through vivid descriptions so that it functions almost as a character in the novel. She may give an already established convention a personal touch by making it a recurring aspect of most or all of her novels, for instance the use of a child in trouble as a major character or the chase scene which climaxes all of her books.

Mrs. Stewart's complete formula is made up of a number of characteristics which appear with appropriate modifications in eight of her novels: This Rough Magic, Madame, My Brother Michael, The Moon-Spinners, The Gabriel Hounds, Thunder, Airs, and Wildfire. Even those novels which do not contain the complete formula contain most aspects of it. One reviewer sums up her formula in this way: "a young Englishwoman, escaping herself in travel, becomes involved in a succession of tense experiences, skirting death, and playing with dangerous characters who stop at nothing."⁴ Hemmings, however, has delineated it in more detail. He sees the formula as containing four basic characteristics. First, there is always a similarity in the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the heroine at the location of the action. Second, there is always a heroine who is

⁴ Rev. of My Brother Michael by Mary Stewart, Kirkus, 28 (Feb. 1, 1960), 107.

self-reliant, young, and brave. She is independent, attractive, and neither extremely rich nor poor. Third, a child often plays a key role in the story. Finally, the novel generally concludes with a chase sequence (pp. 698-699). To this list might be added three more recurring patterns. First, added to Hemmings' description of the heroine might be the fact that her life situation is altered by the action of the story. Some kind of growth or awareness of discovery of an important truth results from a romantic interest. Next, Mrs. Stewart uses setting in a way that makes it a key part of the development of the story. And third, her villains are usually men of physical beauty and intelligence. These then are the major characteristics which make her novels uniquely her own: a certain repetition of basic plot structure and certain character types.

Hemmings says that the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the location of the main action of the story is always the same:

Arrival and settling in at a foreign hotel--the bath after the journey, the first meal, the discreet inspection of the other guests--is a characteristic gambit, occasionally delayed (as in My Brother Michael, and Airs Above the Ground and particularly in The Moon-Spinners) but never declined. This is followed by some earnest and intensely enjoyable sight-seeing, sea-bathing, or halting exchanges with the always charming natives. The heady euphoria of a much needed holiday creates the initial mood. (p. 698)

According to the above quote, there are six basic ingredients in Mrs. Stewart's presentation of the story setting: the arrival and settling-in, the bath, the meal, getting acquainted with the surroundings, seeing the local sights of interest, and experiencing the joy of finally being on that much-needed vacation.

Sometimes these events take place at the beginning of the novel, functioning as the initiating circumstances. This Rough Magic begins with the heroine, Lucy Waring, having her first meal in Corfu where she has come to visit her pregnant sister Phyllida Forli. Having just finished an unsuccessful run in a play, she is relishing the beginning of her holiday. To her Corfu is "paradise after London, I feel different already. When I think where I was this time yesterday . . . and when I think about the rain . . . "; (pp. 11-12) and then she reflects as she tells her story:

I shuddered, and drank my coffee, leaning back in my chair to gaze out across pine tops furry with gold towards the sparkling sea, and surrendering myself to the dreamlike feeling that marks the start of a holiday in a place like this when one is tired and has been transported overnight from the April chill of England to the sunlight of a magic island in the Ionian Sea. (p. 12)

It is during this period of sheer enjoyment and relief that Lucy learns about the neighbors who are to play principal roles in the intrigue which is to follow. There is Julian Gale, famous Shakespearean actor (now retired), who believes

the theory that Corfu is the historical site of the events dramatized in Shakespeare's Tempest. There is Gale's son Max with whom Lucy is to fall in love and whom Lucy suspects, initially, of being the villain. There is Geoffrey Manning, who is the real villain, a smuggler of counterfeit currency and an attempted murderer. And there is Miranda, the maid, and her brother Spiro, whom Manning almost kills. After breakfast Lucy goes down to the beach to bathe in the sea, and it is during this "sea-bathing" that Lucy rescues a dolphin that is being shot at. It is this rescue which pulls Lucy slowly but steadily into the center of the action.

Like This Rough Magic, Madame, Will You Talk? also begins with the heroine expressing the idea that her trip is to be a long-needed vacation. Charity Selborne describes the arrival of herself and her best friend Louise at Provence.

And when we arrived one afternoon, after a hot but leisurely journey, at the enchanting little walled city of Avignon, we felt in that mood of pleasant weariness mingled with anticipation which marks, I believe, the beginning of every normal holiday.
(p. 9)

Then, comes the inevitable "settling-in:"

When Louise had gone to her own room, I washed, changed into a white frock with wide belt, and did my face slowly. (p. 12)

After Charity has dressed and is seated beside the window making sight-seeing plans for the next day,

Fate, in the shape of Nidhug took a hand.
 My cue had come. I had to enter the stage.
 The first hint I had of it was the violent shaking of the shadows on the balcony. The Chinese design wavered, broke, and dissolved into the image of a ragged witch's besom, as the tree Yggdrasil vibrated and lurched sharply under a weight it was never meant to bear. Then the ginger cat shot onto my balcony, turned completely round on a space the size of a sixpence, sent down on her assailant the look to end all looks, sat calmly down to wash. From below a rush and a volley of barking explained every thing.
 (pp. 12-13)

Enter Rommel, the "large, nondescript dog," and his master David Byron, alias David Shelley. It is Charity's intuitive knowledge that this child is in some kind of trouble and her attempt to protect and save him which draws her into the midst of a murder, a "frame-up," a kidnapping, and three attempted murders with herself as one of the victims. It is also at this time that she gets her first look at David's beautiful but wicked stepmother and that she realizes that all is not well between the boy and this lady:

The exquisite film-starry creature, and the dilapidated dog . . . Christian Dior and Gilbert White . . . and she was French and the boy's accent was definitely Stratford-atte-Bow . . . and he was rude to her and charmingly polite to strangers.
 (p. 16)

And, a little later, as we are introduced to the other guests, we meet the other principles in the story, all except David's father:

I looked about me, resigned to the fact that almost everybody in the hotel would probably be English too, but the collection so far seemed varied enough. . . .

The two men at the next table to me were Germans. [They were the men who wanted Richard Byron dead]. One was thin and clever-looking and the other was the fat-necked German of the cartoons. . . . Then there was the handsome Frenchman [This was the villain Paul Very] . . . and another man [Marsden the policeman] sitting alone near the trellis, reading a book and sipping a bright green drink with caution and distrust. (p. 17)

It is while Charity is sight-seeing with David that she meets the last major character of this intrigue, David's father, Richard.

Like This Rough Magic, Thunder begins with the heroine's first meal of her vacation:

The dining-room windows give onto this little gorge, so that anyone sitting at the table may look straight down on the damp slabs of the bridge that leads to the skirts of the Pic du Pimene.

At one of these windows, on a blazing fifth of July, sat Miss Jennifer Silver, aged twenty-two, eating an excellent lunch. This was her first visit to France, and she was savoring that heady sense of rediscovery which that country wakes perpetually in lovers. (p. 7)

After an appropriate bit of "back-flashing" Jennifer, perusing the other guests, does rediscover her lover from whom she has been separated for two years sitting at a nearby table. He has come back into her life just in time to help rescue her cousin Gillain. It is during this initial meeting that the circumstances under which Jennifer is in

France are revealed, and during a later conversation, still very early in the book, that Jennifer first expresses some anxiety over her cousin who has written asking her to visit and then fallen silent.

Sometimes the events surrounding the introduction of the location are delayed a while, as an earlier quote from Hemmings puts it, "to prevent custom staling" by "judicious variation." This happens, as Hemmings points out, in The Gabriel Hounds, My Brother Michael, The Moon-Spinners, and Airs. In each of these novels, the delay makes way for initiating incidents which precipitate these events.

In Wildfire, Gianetta Brooks is ordered by her employer Hugo Montefio, the famous designer, "to go away for a fortnight," because "London had been packed to suffocation for weeks with the Coronation crowds" (p. 12) and things were piling up on her. She quickly accepts her mother's suggestion to visit the Camas Fhionnarich Hotel "at the back of beyond" in the Isle of Skye:

So it came about that, in the late afternoon of Saturday, May 30th, 1953, I found myself setting out on the last stage of my journey to Cama Fhionnaridh in the Isle of Skye. Mother, I found, had been right enough about the back of beyond. The last stage had to be undertaken by boat. . . . And presently a boatman, . . . , dumped me into his boat, and set out with me, my cases, and one other passanger [the murderer], across the shining sea loch towards the distant bay of Camasunary. Nothing could have been more peaceful. (p. 14)

It is during the boat trip that Gianetta learns of the strange ritualistic murder which has occurred on the great mountains. It is after she reaches the hotel that she discovers that she has walked right into the center of the crime. At the hotel the other guests, including the killer and the hero, who is Gianetta's ex-husband, are presented to the reader.

In The Gabriel Hounds the events which lead up to the introduction of the location of the major action of the novel take place when Christabel has a chance meeting with her cousin Charles in Damasucs. It is he who gives her the idea of visiting their eccentric aunt. In My Brother Michael the events happen because a man mistakes Camille for "Simon's girl" and leaves a rental car with her, enabling her to travel to Delphi to do some sight-seeing and to add some adventure to an otherwise dull life. In The Moon-Spinners the events are delayed when Nicola Ferris's trip to Agios Georgios is side-tracked by her hike into the countryside, a hike which brings her upon Mark Langley, wounded and needing help. Although in this instance Nicola had planned to go to Ariso anyway, it is her meeting with Mark which shapes the events of her trip. In Airs, Vanessa March has no intention of going on a holiday, but lights out after she sees her husband in an Austrian newsreel embracing a beautiful blond when he is supposed to be in Sweden.

In addition to the repetition of the pattern which introduces the location of the action, a pattern which is reminiscent of the pattern of circumstances surrounding Stade's thriller hero, another characteristic of Mrs. Stewart's novels is the chase which has previously been identified as a borrowing from the suspense novel. In Madame, it is the murderer speeding after the heroine in a fast car. In Nine Coaches, it is Linda Martin fleeing, though needlessly, from Rauol with Philippe. In Thunder on the Right it is Jennifer Silver desperately attempting to overtake the villainess to prevent her from killing Gillain. In Touch Not the Cat it is also the heroine who chases the villain. Wildfire finds its heroine desperately trying to get away from a mad killer. He is convinced that she should be sacrificed to the ancient mountains in the Isle of Skye so that she cannot point an accusing finger at him, their high priest. Chases take place through fields (The Ivy Tree), across the roof of an ancient castle (Airs), through the secret passageways of an ancient Turkish palace (The Gabriel Hounds), and even through the forests of 4th century England (The Hollow Hills).

Another characteristic of Mrs. Stewart's novels is that the setting plays a key role in most of her stories. This characteristic can be traced back to the Gothic influence upon Mrs. Stewart's novels as is evidenced by the discussion in Chapter Two. However, she goes further with

her use of setting than is indicative of the Gothic genre, as a whole. Mrs. Stewart's use of setting is something which she has made distinctly her own. According to her, often the setting is used "not just as background color [or to set mood] but dynamically, almost as a 'first person' of the book."⁵ This may be attributed to two interrelated factors. First, the manner in which she puts her stories together may account for the key role which the setting plays. Second, the relationship between story and setting may account for this key role.

The fact that the setting plays a key role in Mrs. Stewart's stories may be attributed to the way in which she puts a story together. She believes that "place makes plot." Speaking of the writing of her first published novel, Madame, Mrs. Stewart says,

I found in the writing of the book, that the tough, strange romantic setting exactly suited to the kind of thing I wanted to write; that it did, in fact, dictate its own kind of plot; and that to allow it to permeate every corner of the story could do nothing but enrich that story. (p. 7)

Mrs. Stewart goes on to explain that this became a repetitive pattern in her method of writing:

This was obviously the kind of thing that suited me, so book by book, from this kind of start, I

⁵ "Setting and Background in the Novel," p. 7. This source is followed throughout this discussion and all further references will appear in the text.

formed my own personal work map. A place which had powerful impact on my senses and imagination would suggest a story line and an atmosphere into which I could put my characters, and let their reactions to the setting work themselves out into a plot. (p. 7)

Setting, to Mrs. Stewart, goes deeper than just the physical aspects of a locale. It is a blending of place with legend and history. Each place in which she sets a story is to her a completely delineated entity, defined and characterized by its legends and its history which is in some way woven into the storyline itself:

I am country bred [she says], with a deep interest in natural history, over which is grafted my profession of English Literature and a passion for ancient history and folklore. So I find that my type of imagination quickens most readily in beautiful places where legend and history add an extra light of excitement to the kind of life that is lived there today. (p. 8)

Setting is most important to Mrs. Stewart because, to her, setting suggests story. This explains why the circumstances of the plots of her novels are usually directly related to the setting. In fact plot is directly related to setting in all of her novels except Madame, Thunder, Nine Coaches, and The Ivy Tree. In Wildfire, the insane murderer is motivated to kill his first female victim as a sacrifice to the great Gaelic mountains which he has come to worship and to regard as gods in his psychotic haze. These mountains which play such an important part in the plot permeate the

story from the beginning of Gianetta's arrival at Skye because Mrs. Stewart brings them to life with her vivid description. Note how the following passage suggests the magical quality of the personifying legend which for centuries the Gaelic people have attached to these magnificent mountains, the legend which becomes religion to the deranged Roderick Grant, as it had to the people of long ago, a religion which demands sacrifices for the appeasement of the giants:

The fishing village of Elgol, backed by its own heather hills, was within one tip of the crescent; from the other soared sheer from the sea a jagged wall of mountains, purple against the sunset sky. The Cuillin, the giants of the Isles of Mist.

And, locked in the great arms of the mountains, the water lay quiet as a burnished shield, reflecting in deeper blue and deeper gold the pagentry of hill and sky. One thin gleaming line, bright as a rapier, quivered between the world of reality and the water-world below. Our boat edged its way with drowsily purring engine, along the near shore of the loch. Water lipped softly under the bows and whispered along her sides. The tide was at half ebb, its gentle washes dwindling, one after one, among the sea tangle at its edge. The seaweeds, black and rose-red and olive-green, rocked as the salt swell took them, and the smell of the sea drifted up, sharp and exciting. The shore slid past; scree and heather, overhung with summer clouds of birch, flowed by us, and our wake arrowed the silk-smooth water into ripples of copper and indigo. (p. 14)

In My Brother Michael, Michael's secret is tied up with the ancient city of Delphi and the famous statue, the "Charioteer," which was discovered there. Simon Lester has come to Delphi to find out what the secret is that his brother

had written of shortly before his death. Simon discovers that his brother has been murdered and that the murderer is in some way tied up with blackmarket contraband. But it is not this contraband nor the gold hidden with it that is Michael's secret. It is something much more precious. It is something the existence of which is bound up with the ancient history of the city of the oracle, something hidden from harm for centuries in an antechamber of the cave where the stolen contraband is hidden:

It wasn't a way out. It was a small enclosure, like a light-well. Centuries ago this had been a circular cave into which the gallery had run, but the roof had fallen in and let in the sun and the seeds of grass and wild vines and the spring had fed them, so that now, in the heart of the mountain was this little well of vivid light roofed with the moving green of some delicate tree.

The music had stopped. The only sound was the drip of the spring and the rustle of leaves.

But I had not thought to spare for Pan and his music. Apollo himself was here. He was standing not ten feet from me as I came out of the tunnel. He was naked, and in his hand was a bow. He stood looking over my head as he had stood for two thousand years. (p. 200)

Michael had discovered "the Lord of the Car." As Camilla and Simon stand gazing at the majestic statue, it not only dawns on her that this is really Michael's secret but that there is something even more wondrous about this find:

It's not only the eyes, I said, but the whole impression of strength going along with grace . . . a sort of liquid quality. . . . Simon, why

shouldn't he be not only by the same hand, but part of the same group? It's only so much guesswork, isn't it, that the Charioteer was part of a victory statue for some potentate or other? Heavens above, if there were six thousand statues there, you'd think there might have been a chariot statue of Apollo somewhere in Apollo's own sanctuary? And why shouldn't the Charioteer be the driver, and this--the god himself. (pp. 204-205)

Austria, the setting for Airs, is important to the plot of that story because it is the home of the famous Lipizzan stallions of the Spanish Riding School. One of these Lipizzans plays a key role in the unraveling of a mysterious double murder. The island of Corfu, which is the setting for William Shakespeare's Tempest, is the setting for This Rough Magic. Mrs. Stewart weaves aspects of this play throughout the novel. There is Julian Gale, the retired Shakespearean actor who propounds the theory that Corfu was the setting for the Tempest, there are the servants Miranda and Spiro, named for characters from the play, and there is the finding of Mannings' illegal cargo which Miranda and Spiro think is treasure left from the shipwreck in the Tempest. The Roman Britain countryside still dotted here and there with the ruins of ancient Roman forts is the setting for Touch Not the Cat. This setting is important because it is the discovery of the floor of an old Roman palace under the floor of the summer house on the family estate which solves the mystery of Bryony's father's enigmatic deathbed statement. In The Gabriel Hounds, the

setting is important because the particular part of Turkey in which the story is set is notorious for drug smuggling, an activity around which the mystery of the novel revolves. This setting is also important to the story because it lays the foundation for the parallel which Mrs. Stewart draws between Christabel's eccentric aunt and Lady Hester Stanhope, an equally eccentric though authentic person who lived in that part of the world. In The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills, setting is important because it is against the background of the war-torn and religiously ambiguous England of the 4th century that the legendary Arthur came to power. The setting is also important because the superstition of 4th century Britain explains how a man like the Merlin, whom Mrs. Stewart creates with an extraordinary degree of extra-sensory powers and intelligence, could have become the wizard of the famous legends.

Besides the structural patterns which recur throughout Mrs. Stewart's works, there are also certain recurring character types. Among them are the child-victim, the beautiful villain, and the brave heroine.

In a number of Mrs. Stewart's books there is the presence of a boy victim. Such characters appear in seven of her novels: Madame, Nine Coaches, This Rough Magic, Airs, The Moon-Spinners, The Crystal Cave, and The Hollow Hills. In Madame, it is twelve-year-old David Byron who is being

held captive by his stepmother and her real husband as lure for his father whom they wish to kill. In Nine Coaches the victim is nine-year-old Philippe Conte de Valmy who is in danger of being killed by his villainous uncle and aunt. In This Rough Magic, it is Spiro, a seventeen-year-old servant, who is almost killed by Geoffrey Manning, currency forger and smuggler. The boy victim in Airs is not a would-be murder victim but a victim of parental neglect. Unwanted by his mother or his father who are divorced and wish to live their own lives unencumbered, Timothy Lacy becomes the temporary ward of Vanessa March who is traveling through Austria looking for her missing husband. In The Moon-Spinners, it is a fifteen-year-old named Collin Langley (the brother of Mark who Nicola Ferris finds wounded in the woods), kidnap victim of the men who have attempted to kill his brother. In The Crystal Cave the victim is Merlin endangered by his mother's ruthless brother and guarded by a faithful servant; and in The Hollow Hills, it is Arthur, soon to be King of all Britain, envied and hated by many ambitious men, who is guarded by the young man Merlin.

Usually, it is this child who keeps the heroine (or in the case of Merlin, hero) in dangerous circumstances she would otherwise leave. Willa Davis Roberts says that a good writer will give her heroine a credible reason for staying in a dangerous situation.⁶ This she sees as what separates

⁶ "Creating Heroines for the Gothic Novel," in Writing Suspense and Mystery Fiction, ed. A. S. Bursack (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1977), p. 144.

the good Gothic suspense novel from the type which can be bought by the hundreds on any newstand. She says that these reasons usually fall into three categories: the physical surroundings which preclude escape, a barren isolated locale, or concern for a loved person or pet.⁷ It is the presence of the boy-victim which often puts Mrs. Stewart's heroines, loosely, into the last of these categories. For instance, in Nine Coaches and in Madame, it is the desire to aid a helpless child of whom she has grown fond which keeps the heroine in jeopardy; for in either situation, the heroine could leave at any time she chooses.

In addition to the boy victim, the beautiful villain or "ruined archangel" is another recurring character type in Mrs. Stewart's novels. The expression the "ruined archangel" comes from the description of Leon de Valmy who seems to be the most memorable of these villains. Linda Martin in Nine Coaches gives this description of him:

It was a tribute to Leon de Valmy's rather overwhelming personality that my first impression had nothing to do with his crippled state; it was merely that this was the handsomest man I had ever seen. My experience, admittedly, had not been large, but in any company he would have been conspicuous. The years had only added to his extraordinary good looks, giving him the slightly haggard distinction of lined cheeks and white hair that contrasted strikingly with dark eyes and black, strongly-marked brows. The beautifully-shaped mouth had that thin, almost cruel set to it that is

⁷ "Creating Heroines," pp. 182-183.

sometimes placed there by pain. His hands looked soft, as if they were not used enough, and he was too pale. But for all that, this was no invalid; this was the master of the house, and the half of his body that was still alive was just twice as much so as anybody else's. . . .

I thought, watching her [Madame de Valmy], she's afraid of him. . . . Then I told myself sharply not to be a fool. . . .

Just because the man looked like Milton's ruined archangel and chose to appear in the hall like the Demon King through a trap door, it didn't necessarily mean that I had to smell sulphur. (pp. 196-197)

Valmy is disarmingly charming, and he desires money and power to the extent that he would ruthlessly murder a nine-year-old boy. These men are unusually handsome, intelligent, charming, power-hungry, and ruthless. This character appears in seven of Mrs. Stewart's books: Nine Coaches, Madame, Wildfire, This Rough Magic, The Ivy Tree, The Crystal Cave and Touch Not the Cat.

In Madame there is the Frenchman Paul V^éry who is "handsome enough to sucide oneself for." In The Ivy Tree there is Connor Winslow:

He was tall and slenderly built, with that whippy look to him. . . . He had the almost excessive good looks of a certain type of Irishman, black hair, eyes of startling blue, and charm in the long, mobile mouth. His skin was fair, but had acquired that hard tan which is the result of weathering rather than of sunburn, and which would, in another twenty years, carve his face into a handsome mask of oak. (p. 10)

In Touch Not the Cat, there is the mirror image handsomeness and charm of Emory and James. The charm of the madman in Wildfire is so successful that Gianetta falls into his trap before she ever realizes that he is the crazed killer. All these men, except for Roderick, are motivated by a hunger for power and money, and their villainy is directly related to this desire. As Valmy wants his ward's inheritance, so Connor wants his uncles's legacy; and the twins want the wealth to be gleaned from the sale of the Ashley estate. The evil and ruthlessness of these very attractive men is shown through the fact that they will do anything to achieve their ends: attempting to kill young boys as do Paul Very in Madame, de Valmy in Nine Coaches, Manning in This Rough Magic, or Merlin's uncle in The Crystal Cave; or attempting to kill close relatives as Conner in The Ivy Tree or the twins in Touch Not the Cat.

In addition to the handsome villain, the third character type which appears in most of Mrs. Stewart's works is her heroine. Hemmings identifies her as peculiar to Mrs. Stewart; for, although she shares a number of characteristics with the Gothic-Romance. Joanna Russ says the traditional Gothic heroine is usually thought of as being passive:

most striking about these novels is the combination of intrigue, crime and danger with the Heroine's complete passivity. Unconscious foci of intrigue, passion, and crime, these young women . . . wander through all sorts of threatening forces of which

they are intuitively, but never intellectually, aware. Most of all, they are of extraordinary interest to everyone--even though they are ill-educated, ordinary, characterless and usually very hazily delineated, being (as one might suspect) a stand-in for the reader.⁸

The passivity and ineptness which Ms. Russ sees as characteristics of the Gothic heroine does seem to be exhibited by two of Mrs. Stewart's heroines: Gianetta Brook of Wildfire and Camilla Haven of My Brother Michael. However, in these instances, there are extenuating circumstances which make such passivity and apparent ineptness credible and excusable. In Wildfire, for instance, the heroine arrives after the initial murder has taken place and becomes a "victim after the fact" so to speak. She is involved with the murder plot simply because she is a guest at the inn. Her involvement is really no more important than that of the other guests, initially; what makes her stand out is the fact that she is the one telling the story and that the murderer has let something slip to her, something to which she pays no attention. The events concerning the murder plot have, in a real sense, very little to do with the heroine except that it is the precipitating factor in reuniting Gianetta with her ex-husband. However, even this "passive" heroine can go into action when someone is in trouble:

⁸ "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband," p. 678.

I am not brave. I was horribly frightened, with a chill and nauseating terror. But I don't think anybody normal would unhesitatingly run away if they heard a friend being attacked nearby. (p. 144).

In My Brother Michael, the passivity of the heroine can be attributed to the fact that the story is really Simon's story and that the heroine, in many instances, is meant to be little more than a device through which the story is told. She is admittedly weak and unheroic; but she, too, in the end, exhibits the bravery under stress which is so characteristic of the Stewart women.

The Stewart heroines have a number of characteristics in common. They are young. All of them range in age between 22 and 28; none are thirty. They are virgins or divorcees like Gianetta or married and estranged from their husbands like Vanessa. Yet, says Hemmings, "these girls are not innocents or prudes," (p. 698) and Bryony of Touch Not the Cat is not only willing but anxious to lose her virginity to her lover before their wedding night. It is only his "virtuous" insistence in "marriage or nothing" that saves her from breaking one of the biggest taboos of the Gothic heroine. The Stewart heroines are attractive to men. Unlike the ordinary, characterless females described by Ms. Russ, Mrs. Stewart's heroines are pretty, sometimes beautiful, intelligent, and spirited. Since they are usually the narrators of the stories their attractiveness is usually implied through incidental information so that they

will not appear to be egotistical. For example in Wildfire, we know that Gianetta is a raving beauty because she is the image of her great, great grandmother whose beauty was legendary. The heroines are neither terribly rich nor poor as a rule. They may work in the theater like Lucy Waring of This Rough Magic or in an embassy like Nicola Ferris of The Moon-Spinners or as a model like Gianetta Brook. Sometimes, however, they do prove to be "well off" as Christabel in The Gabriel Hounds and Charity in Madame. And sometimes they are poor but of good family like Bryony Ashley in Touch Not the Cat, Linda Martin in Nine Coaches, or Annabel Winslow in The Ivy Tree.

One of the most important characteristics of the Stewart woman is her independence. This independence is suggested by the fact that, as the novel opens, she is a girl on her own, alone in the world. Like the true Gothic heroine, she may be an orphan or just away from her family. However, instead of this aloneness indicating her vulnerability as it usually indicated the vulnerability of the Gothic heroine, it is used as a device to demonstrate her resourcefulness and her ability to cope, and cope she does as is demonstrated by Vanessa March, the heroine of Airs, who becomes the reconnaissance agent for her spy-husband, or Charity in Madame who drives a car like an international race car driver and is able to get the upper hand with and intimidate the villain Paul Very:

I laughed. I was as cool as lake-water, and, for the moment, no more ruffled. The feel of that lovely car under my hands, in all her power and splendor, was to me like the feel of a sword in the hand of a man who has been fighting disarmed. The Mercedes was my weapon now, and by God! I would use her. I knew just how frightened Paul Very was: I had watched it all, the gradual stretching of his nerves . . . the savage excitement of his murderous assignment, the acute pleasure of baiting me, the speed, the anticipation of the final thrill . . . and then, this. The man's nerves were rasped naked. (p. 147)

Closely related to her ability to cope is her bravery. This bravery is one characterized by a sensitivity to and a sympathy for the well-being and safety of others. She always seems to sense more than those around her when trouble is in the making, and she always feels obliged to get involved in what is going on no matter how dangerous it is or how disinterested a by-stander she should be. If there is someone in trouble, especially someone who because of age or circumstances is unable to help him or herself, the Stewart heroine must come to the rescue. It is this "empathy" with the sufferings of others which causes her to get into trouble. Sometimes the person who is the object of this sympathy is, as was said earlier, a child or an aged woman. Sometimes the person is a relative such as Gillain in Thunder or the husband in Airs. Sometimes the person who needs help is a total stranger like Michael's brother or the wounded Mark Langley in The Moon-Spinners. The one in trouble might even be a dolphin like the one in This Rough Magic.

Most of the time the heroine, like the hero of the thriller, has no plan for getting herself or anyone else out of trouble. Hemmings says that it is a matter of "playing it by ear":

The books are thrillers in which the heroine necessarily plays an essential part in foiling the villains; but she is no professional and she goes about the job with entirely credible timidity and occasional ineptitude. (p. 698)

Still another characteristic of the heroine is that the situation in which she becomes involved always makes a dramatic and significant change in her life. This change is directly related to two characteristics which have already been discussed in Chapter Two. That is that the Gothic heroine must mature instead of staying a static character. The other characteristic is discussed in Chapter Four. That is that the protagonist of the thriller usually goes into the action of the story recently having had some traumatic event in his life. Mrs. Stewart combines these two characteristics in her protagonists. The heroine may be recently widowed; or she may be just tired; or she may feel that she has failed; or she may lack self-confidence. Whatever her problem is, it is solved, and she gains insight into herself by the end of the story.

Though the suspense theme appears to be the most important theme in Mrs. Stewart's novels, in a sense it acts on one level as a vehicle to carry the personal story of the

heroine. At the beginning of each novel, the heroine almost always has some kind of personal problem or dilemma which she is attempting to face. The solution to her problem, as is appropriate in a romantic novel, is meeting and falling in love with the right man. It is through the events which surround this process of falling in love that the heroine works out her problems.

In some instances the love story involves a reunion with a former lover. In Thunder, Jennifer Silver who has been separated from the man she loves by an ambitious, overly-protective mother, is reunited with him again when she takes a trip to France to visit her cousin whom she has not seen in several years. In Wildfire Gianetta Brook, a successful model who has been haunted by the failure of her marriage, takes a trip to Skye to relax from the tension of her demanding life and is reunited with her ex-husband. During the course of the story she learns that the failure of their marriage was, in part, due to her lack of maturity and her feelings of insecurity. She also discovers that she never stopped loving her husband. In The Ivy Tree, Annabel Winslow's homecoming brings her face to face with Adam Forrest, now a widower. Eight years before she had left home, partially to escape an impossible love affair with this man who was then married to a hysterical, neurotic wife. And Christabel's trip to Damascus unites her again with her cousin Charles whom everyone in the family

hopes she will marry. In the novels which have the reunion pattern, the hero's role is usually to aid the heroine in getting some third person out of trouble or in getting herself out of trouble into which she has gotten helping some third person.

Although the reunion of lovers is a pattern which appears in a number of Mrs. Stewart's novels, just as often the lovers may be people meeting for the first time. In Madame, Charity Selborne is a young widow. It is during her holiday that she meets the child David and his father Richard who is to become her second husband. In Nine Coaches Linda Martin, an orphan since the age of fourteen, returns to her homeland of France to become governess to Philippe de Valmy. She is a displaced person without home or family. Her falling in love with Rauol solves both her personal problems. Camilla Haven in My Brother Michael, who finds her life dull and who has very little confidence in her ability to stand fast when it counts, finds both love and self-confidence in her meeting with Simon. In Touch Not the Cat Bryony Ashley, who for years has been communicating telepathically with an unrevealed lover, finds out who her lover is when she returns to England to settle her dead father's estate. When this pattern appears in the novel, it may be the hero rather than the heroine who is involved in the intrigue. When this occurs the heroine becomes involved in an attempt to help the hero.

All of these heroines find a solution to their personal problems tied up somehow with a solution to some mystery. It is this mystery which brings the lovers together; and it is the lovers who, together, solve or at least help to solve the mystery.

What this chapter has attempted to do is to specify those things which make Mrs. Stewart's novels strictly her own. In a real sense, it stands as the antithesis to chapters two and four which discuss the position of her novels among popular fiction by measuring how well she adhered to the popular formulas and conventions. Yet, in a way, this chapter would have no validity without the validity of chapters two and four; for in the world of the popular fiction writer individuality means very little unless that individuality can be served within the limits of the popular formula. Herein lies the paradox of popular fiction. It is no good unless it conforms to established modes and conventions; yet, by the same token, it is no good unless the writer, at the same time, can put his personal hallmark on each and everything he does. And Mrs. Stewart has done this.

CHAPTER SIX

MARY STEWART AND THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH: THEME

Charlotte Armstrong says that often a popular writer

has a theme or pattern in his books, and he should be aware of this, though . . . not in a hampering way. He should be aware of it so as to exploit it well, and so as not to repeat it without realizing it.¹

Mrs. Stewart's novels have both pattern and theme. Her use of pattern was examined in Chapter Five; the purpose of Chapter Six is to examine her use of theme. Although an examination of literature from the point of view of theme is a traditional approach, which is usually used to judge elite literature, Mary Stewart's novels can be judged by the traditional approach. The popular conventions which she makes use of embody certain themes, and she uses these conventions in ways which emphasize and develop these themes in her works much as an elite writer uses life experiences in ways which emphasize and develop themes in his works.

¹ "Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction," in Writing Suspense and Mystery Fiction, p. 144.

In order that the thesis of this chapter be clear, it may be well to start with three explanations: first, how the term "traditional criticism" is being used here; second, how traditional literature differs from popular fiction; and third, the cultural implications of formulas in literature.

First, by "traditional criticism" is meant, for the purpose of this chapter, the approach used to judge what is generally called "serious" or "artistic" literature. Such criticism is based on the general assumption that a writer writes because he has something to say about life, some philosophy or idea which he wishes to set forth through the use of certain techniques, devices, and literary elements. He makes use of these in some way to contribute to the development of that philosophy or idea. In other words, traditional criticism is based on the assumption that a literary work develops some theme, that a writer makes certain observations about the nature of existence, and that he imitates the actions of life, selecting and arranging them in a way to make his point. His tools are character, setting, plot, action, motivation, and dialogue.

It is true that the popular writer works with the same tools; however, his aim is different from that of the serious writer, in fact his whole position as an artist is different. Russel Nye, in the introduction to his The Unembarrassed

Muse, identifies a number of differences between the popular writer and the serious writer:

Elite art is produced . . . within a consciously aesthetic context and by an accepted set of rules, its attainment (or failure) judged by reference to a normative body of recognized classics. The subjective element--that is, the presence of the creator or performer--is vital to its effectiveness. Elite art is exclusive, particular, individualistic; its aim is the discovery of new ways of recording and interpreting experience. Technical and thematic complexity is of much greater value in elite art than in . . . popular art; in fact, technique may become a vehicle for thematic expression, or may simply become an end in itself.

Popular art, aimed at the majority, is neither specialized, technical, nor professional knowledge. It is relatively free of corrective influences derived from minority sources; its standards of comprehension and achievement are received from consensus: it must be commonly approved, pervasive in the population, "popular" in the sense that the majority of people like and endorse it and will not accept marked deviations from its standards and conventions. More individualized than folk art, but less so than elite art, popular art tends to be more dependent than either on the skill of the performer. (pp. 3-4)

He also says that the popular writer must confirm the experiences of the majority, reaffirming values and attitudes already familiar and accepted by his audience rather than discovering new ways of looking at life as the serious or elite writer does. The art of the popular writer must be adapted to mass production and diffusion in order to reach the widest possible readership. This, as Nye points out, is "one of the stipulations of his craft" (p. 4). The elite writer and the popular writer also differ in the types of

audiences which they attract. Nye says that the audience of the popular artist is "huge, heterogenous, bewilderingly diverse in its combination of life styles, manners, interests, tastes, and economics and educational levels" (p. 5) while the audience of the elite artist "possesses commonly held aesthetic and intellectual standards and has its own specialized idiom of appreciation and criticism" (p. 5). He also points out that while this elite audience has certain specific criteria for judging art, the popular audience is not sure why they like popular literature. Because of this ambiguous basis for a popular aesthetic, Nye says that the popular artist has a unique relationship with his audience. For while the elite audience judges the elite artist by how well he is able to interpret his experience and how well he can use his art for this interpretation:

The popular artist, . . . , works under no such set of rules, with a much less predictable audience, and for much less predictable rewards. . . . Between editors, publishers, . . . public relations men, wholesalers, exhibitors, merchants, and others who can and often do influence his product;. . . . The popular artist is subject primarily to the law of supply and demand; his aim is to win the largest possible audience in the marketplace. (p. 5)

It is easy to see, given these criteria, that the popular writer's existence depends much more on his ability to give the audience what it wants than on his ability to create something of his own. Therefore, the popular writer finds

himself confined by the conventions and devices which the reader anticipates will be in his work. The popular writer's aim then is to tell a story in a certain recognizable way while still maintaining enough originality not to tell the same version that has been told before. Whatever creativity the popular writer achieves must be realized in how he interprets a familiar formula.

Being so inhibited puts restrictions on the extent to which the popular writer can make use of theme, for one of the marks of popular fiction is an absence of long reflective passages. This does not mean, however, that a popular story has no point or that it can develop no theme effectively. What it does mean is that it must do so within the action of the story. For it is impossible to achieve a sense of unity in any kind of writing if there is not some point to be made, some center around which the story revolves. A popular story, just as a serious one, generally has some kind of theme. The difference is that the serious story serves and is inherent in the theme while in the popular story the theme serves and is inherent in the story.

The formulas of which popular fiction is composed have inherent themes. According to John Cawelti, "formula" is a "conventional system for structuring cultural products." In fiction these "cultural products" manifest themselves in the form of values, interests, and beliefs of the culture in which they develop. These values, interests, and beliefs

are reflected in the specificity of the plots, characters, and setting which are cultivated in the popular fiction of a culture, so Cawelti thinks.² These recurring literary patterns are a synthesis of the cultural symbols, themes, and myths of a particular culture and their repeated occurrence in fiction is a ritualistic reaffirming of these ideas. They either reflect the way in which the particular culture perceives existence or how they wish existence to be. Given this theory of formula, all a writer needs to do in order to develop a theme is to put the ingredients of the formulas together in such a way as to emphasize the themes which are already there.

Nye says that "sometimes, with skill and talent alone, a popular artist may transmute mediocre materials into something much better than it is, something even good" (p. 7). If the writer of popular fiction can do this--make the conventions in which he is writing serve his purpose, his theme, as it were, he is an auteur. What the auteur of popular fiction does is see the potential in the formulas, what they say through their structures about man's ideas, beliefs, dreams, existence, and use these. In doing this the popular writer produces fiction that can be judged by traditional criticism as it is defined in this chapter, for

² "The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Fiction," Journal of Popular Culture, 3, No. 3 (Winter, 1969) 386.

he is using the basic technique which the traditional approach assumes a writer will use: selection and arrangement.

Mrs. Stewart is a writer who carefully selects and arranges the conventions which she uses to develop certain themes, yet she is able to remain loyal to her commitment as a popular writer:

I am first and foremost a teller of tales, but I am also a serious-minded woman who accepts the responsibilities of her job, and that job, if I am to be true to what is in me, is to say with every voice at my command: "We must love and imitate the beautiful and the good." (Teller of Tales, p. 46)

She is true to her role as a popular fiction writer because she does not violate the traditions and conventions of her trade by abandoning them, but she is true to herself as an artist because she makes these conventions and traditions support her beliefs and transmit what she thinks should be man's purpose in existing. She sets forth this general theme through the use of a number of specific themes which are related in some way to man's attempt to "love and imitate the beautiful and the good."

She identifies six basic themes which appear in most of her novels (Teller of Tales, pp. 11-12). One of her themes concerns searching out the beautiful and good. She states it as "a search for values in a shifting and corrupt world" (Teller of Tales, p. 11). Another has to do with the

reason people should love and imitate the beautiful and the good. This one she sees embodied in the idea that "good does beget good" (Teller of Tales, p. 11). A third theme which she identifies in her work is the choice between love and duty. Through this theme she sets forth the idea that one who does seek to love and imitate the good will choose duty over any personal interest. The fourth theme is that one need not be a failure simply because he has failed. All one must do is to look to that which is true in oneself and keep faith with it. A fifth theme involves "a hatred of violence and a fear of the growing tendency to regard it as a solution to any problem" (Teller of Tales, p. 12). For hatred and violence are the destroyer of that which is beautiful and good. Another theme is that we are all members one of another.

As can be seen from these themes, Mrs. Stewart believes in the nobility of the common man; and she says that in her novels she has tried to express this by a judicious selection and arrangement of the conventions of popular formulas which she is using. She says that she has made

a deliberate attempt . . . to discard certain conventions . . . and to . . . take conventionally bizarre situations . . . and send real people into them, normal everyday people . . . who could be shocked or outraged into defending, if necessary with great physical bravery, what they held to be right. (Teller of Tales, p. 12)

She identifies a different book for each theme; yet each theme runs through most of her works. These recurring themes are set forth through her use of various popular conventions which have been discussed earlier in this study, including her own personal formula. These themes are not only developed through the use of these elements, but appear to be direct outgrowths of them as they function in their capacity as cultural transmitters of ideas, interests, and values. Mrs. Stewart conducts her search for values by examining the questions "what is virtuous?" and "how does one go about restoring order to a world which has become devoid of virtue?" She answers these questions through the use of several techniques, some of which can be identified as belonging to the tradition of the detective story and some of which can be attributed to the tradition of the Gothic-Romance.

Mrs. Stewart says that the theme of "a search for values in a shifting and corrupt world" is one which she presents in her first published work Madame; however, this theme is one which runs through all of Mrs. Stewart's books. Several aspects of the detective formula are used in the development of this theme. The general structure and nature of the detective story act as vehicles for carrying the theme. More specifically, Mrs. Stewart's use of characteristics of the thriller hero, the delayed identification of the villain, the chase, and the race against time all contribute to the

development of this theme. From the Gothic-Romance she also makes use of the general structure and nature of the formula as well as specific aspects such as characteristics of the heroine, the "other" woman, and the mistaken villain and hero.

The very nature of the detective novel makes it an ideal vehicle for carrying this theme. The violence, the crime, and the resulting searching out and punishing of the guilty party are all affirmations of man's belief in an identifiable difference between that which is beautiful and good and that which is evil. They are also affirmations of his belief that when evil invades the world man must restore "right order" by separating the bad in the world from the good. This is what Charity attempts as she struggles to discover what the truth is about Richard Byron, whether he is a murderer who is capable of harming his own child or whether he is just a decent man who is desperately trying to rescue his child from a dangerous situation and clear his own name. The very structure of the detective novel emphasizes the differences between right and wrong. The crime and the criminal plunge the world of the detective novel into chaos. The "wrong" caused by the crime causes suffering, death, fear, and confusion. The detective attempts to set the world right again by ridding it of the danger caused by the criminal.

The characteristics of the thriller hero which Mrs. Stewart has made use of in drawing her heroine also demonstrate this theme. Usually, the thriller hero (or heroine in this case) is an ordinary person used to living in an orderly, everyday world, a world where crime and violence are alien. (This fact is reflected in the types of occupations which the Stewart heroines have). For this reason the world of crime into which she is thrust is a doubly disorienting place where she cannot identify the peaceful orderliness of her former existence. This idea is implied through the use of the "had-I-but-known" technique which Mrs. Stewart seems to have borrowed from Mrs. Rhinehart. This technique indicates that the situation which the heroine experiences comes as a total surprise to her. This disorientation is intensified by the fact that the heroine is usually recovering from some traumatic experience such as Charity in Madame, or Lucy in This Rough Magic, or Bryony in Touch Not the Cat, or she may be going into a stressful situation such as Linda in Nine Coaches Waiting or Annabel in The Ivy Tree. The heroine is usually in a situation where her life is in a state of disruption because of death, failure, or some sense of inadequacy. Furthermore, the fact that this character is drawn into the action because of some emotional attachment makes it impossible for her to just walk away from this world. Mrs. Stewart often makes use of the boy victim to explain the heroine's involvement.

In order for the heroine to return to her own orderly existence, it is necessary for her to help set the world right again for someone she cares for as well as for herself. This activity of setting the world right reaffirms and reestablishes the old values.

The delayed identification of the villain and the entrapment of the known villain are also devices which Mrs. Stewart uses to elaborate this theme. The delayed identification of the villain is used to show just how confused the heroine is. She often mistakes the villain for the "good guy," or she both mistakes him for the hero and runs to him for help. This makes more dramatic the search for values by showing that sometimes it is not easy to discover what is true or beautiful or good. Having the heroine search for the villain, or at least assist in the search, personifies at least one aspect of this search; for if one can find the bad then one has some basis for identifying the good. If the bad can be caught, whether that means finding out "who done it" or discovering some way to entrap a known but cunning villain, the old order of things can be set right.

The chase and the race against time also can be used to demonstrate the theme of a search for values. As has been stated earlier, the chase may have either the heroine pursuing the villain as in Touch Not the Cat or the villain pursuing the heroine as in Thunder, Wildfire, Airs, My Brother

Michael, and The Gabriel Hounds. The important thing in this situation is who wins ultimately. If the one being pursued is the heroine, she usually escapes either with the help of the hero or by herself. If it is the villain being pursued, he is either caught or he leaves a clue behind during the chase which helps to catch him later. The race against time, just as the chase, has to do with overcoming evil, outrunning something dreadful which is about to overtake some aspect of "goodness" if it is not stopped. In Mrs. Stewart's novels, this race may not always have to do with stopping the villain from committing another crime, as it does in Madame; but it does always have to do with diverting another disaster, reassuring the reader that "good will out" in the end. If the bad thing which is about to happen is not part of the crime, it can be seen as part of the general pessimistic atmosphere of the surroundings; and if this disaster can be stopped then some hope can be offered for restoring the good.

The Gothic-Romance too lends itself well to this theme. The search for values implies the existence of good and evil and a need and desire to differentiate between the two. The structural formula for the Gothic novel involves the confrontation of good and evil. There is always a villain who has committed some crime or ignominious act, and there is always a heroine who uncovers this crime or act and plays a key role in rectifying the situation caused by it. This heroine is significant not only because of her role in the Gothic

but because of her origin which helps to shape her role; for she is derived from the heroine of the sentimental novel whose chief characteristics are virtue and goodness. So in the Gothic novel there is the figure of the villain who has always stood for evil personified in all cultures and there is the heroine who because of her origin stands for goodness. She is a threat to the villain, and he attempts to eliminate her. The tension between these two characters demonstrates one step in a search for values: uncovering and identifying that which is evil.

This idea of good and evil is further emphasized by the use of the "other woman," who either appears as a foil for the heroine or as a villain. Ms. Mussel explains that the development of this character is a direct outgrowth of an attempt on the part of society to keep its traditional moral values:

. . . it might seem somewhat anachronistic to discuss women's gothic novels were it not for the fact that these books, sold on paperback counters beside The Sensuous Woman (. . . Man . . . Couple, etc.), Playboy, and Stage, support in fictional form some of the very ideas about sexuality that gives rise to current alarms, about corrupted morals in America. Because these novels, while toying with forbidden acts and illicit sexuality, represent and reinforce a world in which traditional values about men, women, sexuality, and marriage still hold true, they provide for the reader a way of escaping from the problems of coping with a society that seems to undercut those values.³

³ "The Beautiful and the Damned," p. 4. This discussion follows this source throughout, and further references appear in the text.

This literary reaction, according to Ms. Mussel, has resulted in two related aspects of the Modern Gothic: "the portrayal of female characters who fail to control their sexuality, and the assurance for the reader that such lack of control leads to defeat"(p. 84). To show the importance of this pattern to the reader, Ms. Mussel points out that

In the gothic novels of four of the most consistently popular authors of the past decades (Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt, Dorothy Eden, and Phyllis Whitney), such contrasting figures appear in more than half of the books, indicating the importance of such patterns in the novels themselves as well as the significance of those assumptions in the reader's mind. (p. 85)

As the previous discussion of this character shows us, she is contrasted with the heroine. Her weakness as a human being which may either draw her into a life of crime or simply make her less desirable than the heroine is intended to emphasize the heroine's virtues and to reaffirm the fact that that which is morally good is also that which is truly beautiful. The role of this device is to identify an evil which must be recognized if in the search for values one is to find the good.

The heroine's search for values is dramatized by using the device of letting her mistake the hero for the villain and the villain for the hero. This device which, as has been noted earlier, Mrs. Stewart combines with the detective device of delaying the identity of the villain, implies a

groping on the part of the heroine, a need and a desire to identify that which is good and a difficulty in doing so. The heroine is usually allowed to become momentarily lost to emphasize the confusion brought on by living in an atmosphere permeated by evil. Through the use of an attractive villain overshadowing the good, the idea is presented that one can be sidetracked in a search for values by that which appears to be desirable. Villains like the twins in Touch Not the Cat, one of whom Bryony mistakenly assumes to be her mysterious lover, and Paul Very in Madame, to whom Charity turns for help in rescuing David and Richard, represent such attractive evils. The maturation of the heroine, which is one of the requirements for the Gothic formula, is directly related to her growing ability to distinguish the good from the evil through the lessons she learns as a result of her mistakes.

Two more patterns which can be identified as contributing to this theme are the atmosphere which is usually identified with the Gothic and the bravery of the heroine which is attributed to the Stewart formula. Just as atmosphere and setting play an important role in establishing the mood for the Gothic novel, so it is important to Mrs. Stewart's novels in developing this theme. Usually, her heroines are placed in situations which create a certain amount of alienation from that which is familiar.

A strange country and strange surroundings (Madame, Airs, Thunder, or the Gabriel Hounds) or a country which is part of one's past (Nine Coaches Waiting) or a house haunted with memories, long left behind but now returned to (The Ivy Tree)--all of these add to the sense of alienation from everyday existence. The violent or menacing actions and atmosphere of the novels intensify the heroines' search for something of value which they can identify with and cling to. The bravery and daring of Mrs. Stewart's heroines who are ready to risk their lives to save someone or to help solve a crime become a direct testimony to their search for values.

The theme of "good begetting good" is one which Mrs. Stewart also identifies as being part of Madame. This minor theme can be seen working through the action in the story and is closely related to the theme of a search for values in that doing that which is good is one way of being assured that one will reap the "good." Like the first theme discussed, this theme also appears in all of her novels. From the Gothic tradition Mrs. Stewart uses the virtuous heroine to illustrate this theme, for she is always rewarded in the end by winning the love and/or name of her beloved. This theme is also illustrated by the use of the villain who is always punished because as good begets good and virtue is

rewarded so evil begets evil and the bad must be punished. This theme is also supported by the fate of the "other woman" when she functions as the accomplice of the villain. Consequently, this theme can be seen working through one of the requirements of the Gothic novel--that is that it must always have a happy ending; and this happy ending means that the good are rewarded and the guilty punished. In the detective novel this theme is developed antithetically through its structure, for the whole object of the detective novel is the finding and apprehending of someone who has done wrong.

A third theme which Mrs. Stewart identifies as belonging to her novels is the theme of the choice between love and duty. Her use of this theme is a clear demonstration of how she makes formula work for her, selecting that which will serve to develop her themes and discarding that which is of no use to her purpose. She sees her use of this theme as a protest against formula patterns which are bad for the image of the heroine and unrealistic. She explains that she attempts to write about "real," everyday people who under the correct circumstances and given the sense of decency, which she sees all "right" men as possessing, show unusual bravery. She points out that such an attempt has resulted in "the heroines of Wildfire and Nine Coaches [who], faced with a choice between love and duty, . . . [reject] the traditional choice of romantic fiction, and--as so many women do--choose duty" (p. 12). What she has done then is

to use this theme to give depth and character to the traditional Gothic heroine, a depth and character not supplied by the formula. Both Wildfire and Nine Coaches demonstrate this theme through the use of the love relationship which is the device of the Gothic novel. In Wildfire Gianetta suspects her ex-husband, to whom she still feels a wife's loyalty, of being the mad murderer. She finally decides that she must tell the police what she suspects despite this personal feeling. In Nine Coaches Linda must decide between protecting Philippe and accepting the love of Rauol whom she suspects is one of those who is attempting to kill Philippe. She, of course, decides that she must protect the small, helpless boy at all cost.

Though this theme is treated specifically in these two novels in terms of the love theme, variations on it can be found in most of the other novels; for the heroine or hero in one way or another must make a choice between a higher good and a self-serving motive. In Madame, for instance, the heroine must choose whether to go on her way, enjoying her vacation and sight-seeing, or to help a child-victim and his father. In Thunder, the heroine must choose between being safe or exposing herself to hurt and even death to rescue her cousin. In My Brother Michael, the heroine assists a man whom she has never meet before to find and bring to justice the murderer of his brother simply because she senses that he needs someone on his side. Nicola Ferris

in The Moon-Spinners insists on aiding the wounded Mark Langley instead of forgetting about him and enjoying her Crete vacation. Lucy Waring of This Rough Magic sees helping to apprehend Manning as part of her role as a member of the human family. In The Gabriel Hounds, Christabel is willing to expose herself to danger in order to protect her great-aunt. In Touch Not the Cat, although her own life has been placed in danger by her twin cousins who are trying to kill her, Bryony attempts to protect her lover by not revealing to him what danger she is in. And The Crystal Cave and The Hollow Hills are about Merlin who sacrifices his personal life in order to prepare himself to groom the Savior-King whom Great Britain has so long needed and later to tutor and protect that king as he grows into a man. In each of these novels the theme is carried by the heroine (or in the latter case the hero) who is virtuous and brave, or by the use of the boy-victim, or by the device of the happy ending, for part of what makes for a happy ending in Mrs. Stewart's novels is the triumph of good, in a general sense, as well as a personal sense.

Another theme which Mrs. Stewart uses is one which is closely related to the theme of love versus duty. That theme is that we are all involved in each other's lives. Concern for a higher good can be seen as part of this theme. For it is concern for another or for the group which makes the heroine answer the call of duty. This theme is developed

in My Brother Michael. In this novel the hero presents this idea as a paraphrase of the famous quote from John Donne: "we are both involved locked in the great chain of being. We need never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for us all" (p. 135). This theme is not just a part of My Brother Michael but is expressed by Lucy Waring in This Rough Magic:

It seems to me you can be awfully happy in this life if you stand aside and mind your own business, and let other people do as they like about damaging themselves and each other. You can go on kidding yourself that you're impartial and tolerant and all that, then all of a sudden you realize that you're dead, and you've never been alive at all. Being alive hurts. (p. 108)

Like the theme of duty versus personal loyalty, this theme is demonstrated through Mrs. Stewart's use of the brave, selfless heroine who is willing to put aside her own safety in order to help someone else. In the other works this theme can be seen through the use of the boy-victim. The heroine always feels compelled to protect this child even though he may be a total stranger. This feeling is also expressed through the knight-like attitude of the heroine who sees it as her mission in life to rescue those in danger whether man, woman or child.

Another theme which Mrs. Stewart identifies as one which she develops in her novels is the idea that one need not be a failure simply because he has failed. One has only, says

Mrs. Stewart, to keep faith with himself to start life anew and start it better. This theme she identifies as belonging to This Rough Magic and The Ivy Tree. In both of these novels, she makes use of the Gothic and thriller characteristics of her heroine and also the idea implied by the endings of the Gothic and detective novels to carry this theme.

In both This Rough Magic and The Ivy Tree the heroines are among those characters who have failed. Lucy Waring has failed to become the stage star which she has dreamed of becoming, and as the story begins, she is enjoying an escape from this theatrical failure. Annabel has been a failure too. She has run away from home eight years from the time that the story opens to get away from a dangerous cousin who wishes to marry her for her estate and from a hopeless love affair. Mrs. Stewart's heroines are troubled people as the stories begin just as the hero of the thriller is troubled, and like him they are attempting to overcome some failure or personal tragedy. From the Gothic heroine Mrs. Stewart borrows the dictum that the heroine must mature as the story progresses. The discovery that failure does not ruin a life is one lesson which these heroines learn, a lesson which makes them deal with life in a much more mature way, by picking up the pieces, so to speak, and starting to build again.

The ending of the Gothic and the detective novels also suggests this theme of another chance. The Gothic story must

end happily. Such an ending for people who have failed naturally suggests a second try. The detective novel, too, suggests an ending where all is set right again. Rebuilding is one way to set things right. So Lucy does not become the star that she dreams of becoming, but she does find someone to love and start a new life with. Annabel is allowed to return home where she can live unmolested, after Conner is dead, and where she can pick up the pieces and marry Adam, now a widower.

This theme, too, can be seen in other novels of Mrs. Stewart's. For instance, Gianetta in Wildfire feels that she has failed at her marriage; yet, in the end, she gets a second chance, and the end of the story suggests that this time she will succeed. She and her ex-husband are reunited, and she also gains insight into why their marriage failed. In Madame, Richard Byron is a failure in a sense. His poor judgment has gotten him tied up with an unscrupulous woman and her murderous husband, but with the help of Charity and because he is a good man, he is given a chance for a happy life with a good woman. Camilla of My Brother Michael feels that her whole life is a failure. It is dull and uneventful. "Nothing ever happens to me," she says and proceeds to have the kind of adventure which few people ever experience, an adventure in which she learns that everyone is all right as long as he is himself and that under pressure she too (like all of the other Stewart heroines) is as brave as any other

decent person. This theme is related to the Gothic idea of good being rewarded and evil being punished, for keeping faith with oneself is good and in Mrs. Stewart's novels this goodness is rewarded with a second chance.

A last theme which Mrs. Stewart identifies as part of her work is a hatred of violence. Like the theme of duty versus love, this theme came about as a result of Mrs. Stewart's protest against some conventions of the popular novel and it provides further evidence of her careful process of selection and arrangement in developing her themes. She explains,

a theme that I tried to develop up to and into My Brother Michael, [was] a hatred of violence and a fear of the growing tendency to regard it as a solution to any problem. Because of this, it seemed to me (even in the early 1950's) time to discard the type of detective novel where pain and murder are taken for granted and used as a parlor game. In my first novels, too, I discarded and laughed at certain conventions of plot, including the romantic hero, unthinkingly at home with violence, who was still mainstreaming when I started writing; and his equally romantic alternative the social misfit who was just coming into fashion. (p. 12)

This theme is carried through the use of the Gothic and the detective structures, both of which confirm the fact that violence is part of the evil in the world. This theme is also reinforced in her novels by a hero whom she deliberately makes a non-violent being. All of her heroes, with the exception of Vanessa's husband in Airs, are ordinary men with

ordinary jobs. The Stewart hero is not a detective or a soldier of fortune or a secret agent (except Vanessa's husband). Violence is as alien to him as it is to the heroine. This is not to say that he cannot fight if he must; it is to say that if at all possible he avoids brute confrontations.

Some critics say that a good popular writer can take the conventions and devices beyond mere surface use. In deliberately developing theme in her novels this is just what Mrs. Stewart has done. It seems clear from her remarks which have been quoted in this chapter that she feels free to use what seems to suit her purpose and to discard or rearrange that which does not. Her use of the materials and techniques of popular fiction seems comparable to the elite writer's use of the experience of life. She seems to see the potential for saying something important about life by a judicious use of traditional popular formulas and conventions, just as the elite writer sees the potential for saying something important about life from a judicious use of the experiences of life. Mrs. Stewart selects and arranges the conventions, devices, and techniques which develop her themes, and the result is a body of fiction which can be identified both as a part of the body of popular fiction and as a fiction which is distinctly one writer's creation designed to comment on what that writer thinks is important in life.

CONCLUSION

John Cawelti has said that all literature is composed of two aspects, convention and inventions. Popular fiction generally has more convention because its purpose is to belong to a specific popular category, a category recognizable to its readers by certain recurring patterns. But good popular fiction must have a sufficient amount of invention too. It is this invention working within the confines of the convention which sells books.

It has been the purpose of this study to examine both these aspects of Mrs. Stewart's novels in order to answer three questions concerning them. The first question to be answered here, "how do her works fit into the body of popular fiction," concerns the convention aspect of her work. The answer is that Mrs. Stewart's works exhibit characteristics of three popular forms, popular forms which through traditions have some status as serious literature: the Gothic, the Historical-Gothic, and the detective novel. The characteristics which Mrs. Stewart's novels exhibit for the most part are characteristics which can be traced back to the earliest beginnings of the Gothic as well as the classic detective story. The second question "what are the characteristics of Mrs. Stewart's novels which make them

peculiarly her own" deals with the second aspect, invention. An examination of Mrs. Stewart's works as a body of literature reveals that she employs her own personal formula, one which can be identified in variation in all of her novels. This formula is composed of traditional characteristics which have either been modified or repeated in some specific combination from one novel to the next. Also on the side of invention was the question "to what extent can her novels be judged by the criteria used to judge more traditional literature." This question is not answered as an apology for writing about popular literature or for using techniques which are being developed for the study of popular fiction. This question was considered in this study because traditional criticism, if used in the proper way, is still a viable way of examining popular fiction. The purpose of this last chapter was twofold. It was to show that a skillful writer like Mrs. Stewart can make the formulas work for her; can see potential in them, a potential which exists (if we are to believe Cawelti's theory) because society perpetuates its beliefs, values, and interests through repetitive fictional patterns. If this is true these patterns already contain themes, and a traditional critical approach need only be based on how these patterns demonstrate these themes. The other purpose for including this discussion is to show that like an elite writer a good popular writer uses

much the same process for creating a work, the process of selecting and arranging that which he sees into that which he wishes to say about life. In Mrs. Stewart's case what she sees working in some of the patterns and conventions of popular fiction is a confirmation that man should strive to be good and noble, and what she knows and attempts to show through her use of theme is that this is so.

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