

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Gothic  
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## MARY ROBINSON AND THE GOTHIC

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## Mary Robinson and the Gothic

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**Abstract:** Celebrated as an actress on the London stage (1776–80) and notorious as the mistress of the Prince of Wales (1779–80), Mary Darby Robinson had to write to support herself from the mid-1780s until her death in 1800. She mastered a wide range of styles, published prolifically, and became the poetry editor of the *Morning Post*. As her writing developed across the 1790s, she increasingly used the motifs of Gothic fiction and drama descended from Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). These came to pervade her late novels and poems so much that she even wrote her autobiography as a Gothic romance. She also deployed them to critique the ideologies of male dominance and the forms of writing in which they appeared. This progression culminated in her final collection of verses, *Lyrical Tales* (1800), where she Gothically exposes the conflicted underpinnings in the now-famous *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

**Keywords:** Mary Darby Robinson, the Gothic, the Rights of Women, French Revolutionary writings, the “English Sappho”

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*For  
Aedan  
and the entire Hogle-Brown-Boeckman clan*

Contents

A Note on Texts	vii
1 A Gothic Life	1
2 The Ungrounded Grounds of the Walpolean Gothic	9
3 The Argument	17
4 The Gothic Image of the Defining Other	20
5 The Gothic Mind	31
6 The Gothic Performance of Gender	43
7 The Gothic in <i>Lyrical Tales</i>	55
8 Coda	63
Bibliography	65

## A Note on Texts

All citations from her writings here come from *The Works of Mary Robinson* in eight volumes (abbreviated *WMR*), edited, with introductions and notes (to which I am often indebted), by William D. Brewer (general editor), Daniel Robinson, Dawn M. Vernoy-Epp, Sharon M. Setzer, Orianne Smith, Julie A. Shaffer, and Hester Davenport (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009–10). All her texts – and some introductions and notes in these volumes – are cited by *WMR* volume and page number, and her poems are cited by line numbers as well, with her Gothic play (and all plays) cited by act, scene, and line numbers. All other citations refer to entries in the Bibliography at the end of this Element. The works there are cited in my text by last name and page number, with a year of publication being added only in those cases where I refer to multiple texts by the same author. For a reliable full chronology of Robinson's life, see *WMR* 1: xxxiii–xxxviii.

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