Thomasin(e) Dennis and her anonymous Gothic novel, *Sophia St Clare* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1806)

Biographical Background

The life and unique position of Thomasin Dennis (1770–1809), a young Cornish writer, were first brought to academic notice by Robert Samuel Woof in 1962 in his article, "Coleridge and Thomasina Dennis".[1] Here Woof provided an astute analysis of Thomasin's perceptive observations about Coleridge à propos her social meetings with the poet during his visits to the Wedgwoods of pottery fame, at their home, Stoke House near Cobham in Surrey. Her comments, made in her letters to Davies Giddy, Woof quoted in full. He also found affecting – as indeed they are – her ensuing homesickness and melancholy, and the early death which followed Thomasin's two year employment as governess to the children of Josiah Wedgwood II and his wife Elizabeth.

In striking contrast to Woof's sympathetic portrayal of Thomasin, in 1979 came the following chauvinistic dismissal of her abilities by Frances Doherty:

> "[Davies Giddy] was a polymath with interests in many disciplines, a patron to the Cornish engineers Richard Trevithick and Jonathon Hornblower, the man who "discovered" Humphrey Davy, and he concerned himself with the education of a Cornish Miller's daughter who became governess to the children of Josiah Wedgwood.
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> This girl [sic] Thomasin Dennis (1770–1809) was a somewhat tragic figure, a sensitive neurasthenic who for a short time period (1797–1800) was governess to the elder children of Josiah Wedgwood II, and by no means a notable success. She had literary pretensions, eventually fulfilled by the publication of her bad novel *Sophia St Clare or The Visionary* [sic] in 1806, but frustrated by the publisher's refusal of her verse." [2]

Fortunately Thomasin's abilities have been recorded for posterity in more respectful and enthusiastic nineteenth century tributes. These were paid by Richard Polwhele in his *History of Cornwall, Civil, Military, Religious,* in 1816,[3] and later by Davies Gilbert (formerly Giddy), her close friend and mentor from the mid 1790's until her death from tuberculosis in Cornwall at the age of 39. Many years after her death Gilbert had the following epitaph inscribed on a marble wall memorial installed in the church of St Levan in Cornwall:

Thomasin Dennis,
de Trembath,
ingenio, suavitate, virtute
insignis,
doctrina insignissima.
Nata xxix die Septembris, 1771,
væ!

lenta sed præmatura morte
erepta
obiit xxx die Augusti 1809,
anno ætatis xxxviii.[4]

A further tribute occurred in biographical passages Gilbert included in his *Parochial History of Cornwall* of 1838. Here he was again unstinting in his praise of Thomasin's scholastic abilities[5] However, his claim of "want of incident" in her novel *Sophia St Clare* suggests either a failure of memory after an interval of thirty years, or perhaps a subconscious disinclination to remember its plot. In fact, as the reviewer of *Sophia St Clare for* the *Critical Review* put it, "the story is woven with sufficient intricacy to keep attention on the stretch",[6] and it contains many dramatic incidents. Moreover, as Cornish historian Charlotte Mackenzie has observed in her recent book *Women Writers and Georgian Cornwall*, the vicissitudes and lack of honesty in Giddy's personal relationship with Thomasin find a number of parallels in the novel.[7] Its failure to achieve popularity, despite earning favourable and encouraging reviews in what was generally an inimical climate of reception for novelists in England in the early 1800s, most likely stemmed from the dolorous nature of aspects of its narrative, to which I shall return later in discussing the novel.

Interest in Thomasin Dennis as the first Cornish Gothic novelist has revived following Mackenzie's presentations of new material and the publication of her book, and I am indebted to her for sharing an early draft of her research with me. Drawing on the neglected trove of letters and journals by Davies Giddy. including his correspondence with Thomasin, Mackenzie describes the mutual friends, acquaintances and shared scientific interests he had with the Wedgwoods, and which led to Thomasin's employment at Giddy's instigation in late 1797. Mackenzie further chronicles the routine and known events of Thomasin's life in the Wedgwood's constantly changing household, as well as those during her final years back at home with her family at Trembath in Cornwall where she wrote *Sophia St Clare* for which Giddy arranged publication,

My own interest in Thomasin is two fold. First the circumstances of her scholarly presence for a time in the Wedgwood family with its strong Welsh connection and the influential groups of scientists, intellectuals and writers with whom they associated provide their own fascination. Giddy's obvious protectiveness of and strong classical mentoring influence on Thomasin during this time may also have drawn some attention among members of the Wedgwood circle and beyond, possibly providing inspirational material for the anonymous author of *The Orphans of Llangloed,* with its monitoring, classically inclined "guardian angel," St Arvon. Secondly, the relationship of Thomasin's Gothic novel to other Gothic fiction of the time bears examination: particularly to Ann Radcliffe's romance *The Italian* (1797), which Thomasin is very likely to have read while at the Wedgwoods, and to the anonymous novel, *Lusignan or The Abbaye of La Trappe* (1801), which Thomasin certainly read soon after its publication.

The female members of the Wedgwood family were avid readers of novels and romances, including those of Radcliffe to whom they had a strong social connection dating from the years 1768 – 1780 when Radcliffe's uncle, Thomas Bentley, was Josiah Wedgwood senior's business partner. Radcliffe's maternal aunt, Hannah Oates, was Bentley's first wife, and after she had died in childbirth early in their marriage, Bentley kept up a close relationship with Hannah's family. Her

elder sister Elizabeth Oates, took charge of his household and received his guests following Hannah's death, an arrangement that continued for sixteen years until June 1772 when he remarried. By then Bentley had long since moved to London, having successive residences in Chelsea, Soho and Turnham Green, and managing Wedgwood and Bentley's new showrooms and warehouse in Great Newport Street, as well as the painting and enamelling workshops. During this period his young niece Ann Ward (the future novelist and wife of William Radcliffe) and Josiah Wedgwood's eldest daughter Susannah (Sukey) Wedgwood, (the future wife of Robert Darwin) often stayed with Bentley for long periods. Neither was robust in health and they were almost the same age.[8] It is not known whether they kept up their childhood friendship from this time into their adult lives. However, if they did keep in touch, Radcliffe would no doubt have learnt about the marriage of Sukey's brother, Josiah (Jos) Wedgwood, to the Welsh Elizabeth (Bessie) Allen, and all about the Allens of Cresselly in Pembrokeshire, especially as in August 1792 Sukey herself had introduced the pair at Cresselly.

Five years older than Jos, Bessie, like her friend Sukey, was 28. She was the eldest of Captain John Bartlett Allen's nine daughters and two sons. Bartlett himself, who had fought in the Seven Years' War. and had married heiress Elizabeth Hensleigh of Panteague on his return, was reputedly "dark and domineering" such that his "physical strength and violent temper became legendary".[9] After the death of his wife in 1790, his daughters were left at the mercy of his terrible moods; so they always welcomed company as a successful diversion, a time when their father would not slam his fist on the dining table and demand conversation from them, but instead discuss sport and farming with his visitors, as well as reminisce about the Seven Years' War.

The Wedgwood's Welsh-Allen connection grew still stronger when Jos's brother John married Bessie's sister Jane (Jenny) Allen in 1794. Then, just after Thomasin had started working for the Wedgwoods in April 1798, another sister Catherine (Kitty) Allen escaped Cresselly for London when she married one of John and Jenny Wedgwood's visitors, the Whig political theorist and historian James Mackintosh. Of all her Wedgwood-Allen acquaintances, Thomasin's friendship with Kitty Mackintosh is very likely to have been the closest and most rewarding. Their connection is also of interest because James Mackintosh was himself a voracious reader of novels, often enthusing about the work of female novelists, including Radcliffe,[10] and avowing the primary importance of novels as conveyors of moral sentiment, even going so far as to openly announce himself a "*novellophagist*".[11] While there is no evidence that James Mackintosh himself wrote novels anonymously, it is not improbable. In the years immediately after his marriage to Kitty in 1798, he was extremely short of money, and wrote prolifically for two major journals of the day, *The Monthly Review* and *The British Critic*. For example, for the latter in 1801 he evinced his interest in French literature by reviewing *L'Homme des Champs*, a volume of poetry by M. L'Abbé Delille. However, his son, Robert James Mackintosh, who compiled and edited Sir James' posthumously published *Memoirs* (1835) tended to dismiss as "distracting" his father's "literary pursuits".[12] Worse. Sir James son-in-law, William Erskine, who assisted Robert in compiling the patchwork *Memoirs*, is recorded as deploring Robert's burning of some manuscripts that Sir James had carefully boxed up. He wrote despairingly, "Who can give to others that did not know him an idea of his diversified powers?"[13]

But to return to Thomasin, who was later to be lauded by reviewers for her own novel's moral sentiments: at the time of her employment she was 27. Born in 1770 at Sawah in St Levan, Cornwall, she was the eldest daughter of Alexander and Catherine Dennis who, shortly after her birth, had moved from their farm to another which had a mill at lower Trembath near Penzance. According to Davies Gilbert (formerly Giddy) in his contribution to *The Parochial History of Cornwall*, Alexander Dennis was "one of the superior class of farmers, who occupy their own

estates held at quit-rents for lives".[14] Thomasin had a sister, Elizabeth, an elder brother John, who was apprenticed to two surgeons, and a younger brother Richard, who worked in farming in partnership with his father. She was living with her parents and sister at lower Trembath when she first met the Wedgwoods through the scholarly bachelor Giddy. At that time he was 30, had completed his education at Pembroke College, Oxford, and was keen to apply his advanced mathematical, and scientific skills. However, he was still unsettled on a profession, and living in Tredrea with his father, Rev. Edward Giddy, curate of St Erth, his mother Catherine Giddy, and sister Philippa. Having been elected a member of the Royal Society in late 1791, Giddy was already distinguished for his scientific and mathematical learning, and was part of a circle that included Humphrey Davy and Thomas Beddoes. The latter dedicated some of his work to Giddy, who also introduced Davy both to Beddoes' experimental work and the man himself.. Giddy had held public offices in Cornwall, as Sheriff of Cornwall in 1792-3, and deputy Lieutenant in 1795, and then as magistrate. He was reputedly careless of his attire, devoted to intellectual pursuits, reserved in manner, and politically conservative. His friend/mentor relationship with Thomasin was of about two years standing when he invited her to Tredrea to take tea with the Wedgwoods.

In October of 1797 Jos and Bessy Wedgwood had taken a house at Mount's Bay where their fourth child, Charlotte, was born on November 10th. Later that month they had been joined by Jos's younger sister, Catherine (Kitty) Wedgwood, and Bessie's younger sister, Catherine (Kitty) Allen. Jos's ailing and restlessly itinerant brother Tom had also arrived in Penzance, in the hope that the Cornish air would improve his health. The Wedgwoods dined with Giddy at Tredrea and during further socializing between the two families, Jos asked Giddy's advice about a new governess to replace Everina Wollstonecraft who had not returned to them after she had left in September following the postpartum death of her sister, Mary Wollstonecraft.

On Giddy's recommendation, Thomasin's scholarly qualifications for the position of governess for their young family would have been apparent. She had been fluent in French since late childhood, and had learned Latin while in her teens. In the previous two years, under Giddy's mentorship, she had been learning Greek and reading classical literature. The astronomer the Rev Malachy Hitchins had tutored her in mathematics. She was an autonomous learner, accustomed to reading very widely via access to Giddy's own library, and through him, the Cornwall Library and Literary Society in Truro. She also had access to a local book shop and circulating library. Her friends included Hitchins' daughter Josepha, Giddy's sister Philippa, and Charles Valentine le Grice, an Oxford graduate who had been at school with Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and who had recently settled in Cornwall to tutor the son of a wealthy widow. By this time Thomasin was familiar with the social, scientific and cultural circles in west Cornwall. She was known to have written poetry not yet published, from all accounts had a happy family life, and was confident in making new acquaintances. Giddy no doubt thought that life in the Wedgwood circle would broaden her connections and experience, Although naturally sad to leave her family, especially her sister, with Giddy's encouragement Thomasin accepted the appointment as governess, and three months or so later, travelled with the Wedgwoods when they returned to their home at Stoke d'Abernon.

At the beginning of April 1798 Thomasin happily began her work caring for the intellectual and social development of four year old Sarah Elizabeth, who was nicknamed "B" (for Bessie, after her mother). and her three year old brother Joe. Mary Anne, the Wedgwood's third child, who was only one, and Charlotte the baby were initially probably not much in her ambit of responsibility. In

June Thomasin wrote to Giddy that she was "charmed with [the Wedgwoods'] candour and politeness, and experience[d] from them increasing kindness and confidence"; also that Joe was "particularly fond" of her, that he was learning French words through play, and that his favourite story was "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse" from Aesop's fables.[15] However this buoyancy did not last. By early October 1800, In contrast to earlier accounts of her work, her reading amd engagement with household visitors and events, Thomasin revealed that she was extremely unwell with a fever, respiratory difficulties and melancholia, and had been advised by a doctor to travel for her health, but wanted to return home to Cornwall. Having agreed that she should leave, Jos wrote on the 9th of October to his friend Thomas Poole that it had been amicably agreed Thomasin should go "on account of her spirits being quite unequal to the situation", and asked him if he could recommend someone "possessing a cheerful, sound mind".[16] What had gone wrong? The circumstances that led to Thomasin's desperate desire to leave her position, and the Wedgwoods' recorded perceptions of her as emotionally unstable and not commensurate to her task, require closer scrutiny rather than simply labelling her "a sensitive neurasthenic".

A number of factors appear to have led to this unhappy situation, but the first to consider are the conditions of Thomasin's employment, the nature of the ever-changing Wedgwood household, and what appear to be the family's self-serving expectations of her adaptability and resilience in the face of constant change.

One condition of Thomasin's employment was the expectation that she cooperate and assist in implementing the theories of education of Jos, Bessy and Tom. Like his father before him, Jos was intent on providing his children with a good liberal education,, Josiah Wedgwood senior had personally drawn up an ambitious daily timetable of activities and tuition in various subjects for his three sons and two girls. Jos went further in his prescriptions and supervision in that he kept a journal about the children's progress and problems, and he and Bessie desired that instruction and guidance in general conform to Rousseauian principles of freedom and encouragement, avoiding provocation of shame and imposition of adult authority. Thomasin herself had little admiration for Rousseau's *Émile,* believing his system to be "as "romantic as it is impracticable".[17] Her preference was for the more down to earth guidelines offered by Maria and Richard Edgeworth in their *Practical Education* (1798)*,* and the prospectus for girls in Erasmus Darwin's *A plan for the conduct of female education in boarding schools* (1797). However she agreed to follow the Wedgwood's approach which was also overlaid at times by Tom Wedgwood's pedagogical theories and aims which he had developed from the materialist theories of cognition and human perfectibility of David Hartley, Joseph Priestley and William Godwin, and in which he placed considerable emphasis on the role of emotions. Tom seems to have lived at Stoke for the latter part of 1798 and no doubt conveyed his views to Thomasin.[18] His theory included the idea that strict control of a child's sensory impressions would result in emotions and ideas devoid of pain and distraction. His overarching pedagogical aim was at all times "to direct early childhood experiences 'with the view of creating *agreeable* feeling' in children so that they would mature into healthy well adjusted adults," in contrast to what he perceived to be his own appalling condition.[19] To this end, on occasion he observed and recorded the reactions and problems of his nieces and nephews, prescribing solutions to correct what he viewed as their feelings of pain. Noting B's "occasional dejection of spirits & frequent fits of peevishness" which he attributed "often to want of food" and "often from very slight provocation", he stated that the origin of this "extreme irritability" should be sought in "the method of her education" which had been primarily with her mother, Bessie. Her temper tantrums, he concluded, arose partly from "a weak frame" due to lack of sufficient food,[20] and partly from notions infused in her of private property in relation to toys; this had led to both B's anxiety when her brother played with her toys and her desire for his things. The latter flaw could be remedied by devising some "new and diverting toys" which would require assistance from her

brother, their cooperative play eradicating the notion of "exclusive property".[21] In what appears to have some overlap with Tom's observations, Thomasin, in a letter to Giddy dated August 1798 also remarks on B's "peevish" and "petulant" behaviour, which had increased as they had become more familiar with each other, and which Thomasin intuitively saw as a type of boredom. In her words, B was "tormented by an incessant desire for new pleasures", and in her view, B's mind needed to be fully occupied by more challenging toys which required extended and imaginative play, rather than by changing them frequently to avoid attachment.[22] By November 1799, Thomasin could report to Giddy that over the previous two or three months B's conduct had been "absolutely perfect", that she was "really an outstanding child", and that many of her observations [were] worthy of being recorded".[23] Such improvement suggests that Thomasin must have been succeeding in her role. For all that, Tom's involvement and intrusion in the nursery and learning areas, could well have been a cause of hassle and embarrassment for Thomasin, though comments by Robert Buckley Litchfield suggest it was more so for Bessie,[24] who leaned generally towards permissiveness, and with whom Thomasin also felt strained at times.[25]

Another stipulation of Thomasin's employment was that she spend as much time as possible with the children so that their exposure to the supposed corrupting influence of servants could be minimized. While servants still looked after the children's material needs, Thomasin was expected to have her breakfast and lunch with her charges, and guide all their activities. In general she would take her evening meal with the family and join in conversations at times when they had house guests. However, an exception that proved to be problematic arose on the occasions when Jos's mother, Sarah (Sally) Wedgwood held one of her very long and large dinner parties, and expected Thomasin to stay with all the children. One would have thought that, being young, the children would have been in bed reasonably early anyway, and she would have been free to join the company. It seems likely that Sally Wedgwood did not wish Thomasin to be privy to the conversations of her family and guests. At any rate, Thomasin found the exclusions hurtful, as in December 1800 at Cote House in Westbury near Bristol, the home of Jos's brother John and his sister in law Jenny Wedgwood. In November Bessy and Jos had already been visiting John and Jenny. They had also gone to Bath. In mid December Thomasin wrote that she was "the solitary inhabitant of this great [ie Cote] house" until Jenny returned from Devon, that Humphry Davy had visited and stayed to converse at some length, and that she was looking forward to Christmas when Kitty Mackintosh would be visiting.[26] At the end of December the whole family came together at Cornwallis House in Clifton near Bristol, which Jos's mother had leased, and at which she had organised a "magnificent festival" to celebrate Jos and Bessy's seventh wedding anniversary. However, this, too, was one of the long family parties from which Thomasin was excluded, because she, rather than the servants, was expected to look after the children on such occasions. At such a festive time her home sickness came to the fore, and on December 28 in a letter to Giddy she expressed her hurt at having received no reply to her previous two letters to him, relaying also that she had a cold and that the "children sick and cross tease me as I write".[27] It is not surprising that Thomasin needed a break. Two weeks later, on January 15, 1800, she returned to Cornwall to see her family for the first time in two years, and remained there until March 27 when she returned to the Wedgwood's recently acquired residence at Gunville.

The Wedgwoods do not appear to have been snobs. However, it is very likely that there was a degree of condescension in their relationship with Thomasin. For example in 1823, fourteen years after Thomasin's death, Bessie wrote to her sister Jessie that she had done "a very popular act" by

inviting the governess to the two Tollet girls, a Miss Smith, to come with them on the girls' return visit to Maer to see her two youngest daughters:

> My pity for that unfortunate class would always incline me to do what was in my power to relieve the tediousness of their lives, but in this case Miss Smith is so good that I have quite a reverence for her character, as the girls have represented her to us. She is always extremely happy and cheerful in her situation and she employs her whole spare time in visiting all the poor of the village … .[28]

Jos was equally class conscious. Even before the death of the elder Josiah Wedgwood on New Year's Day 1795, none of his sons had been interested in taking over the pottery business which he had built up, at times in the face of great hardship, to be the source of their considerable wealth. The only one to have remained in the partnership with his father, Jos inherited the business, but he was nevertheless keen to distance himself from the pottery sales outlet in London, as well as the pottery factory and his adjacent childhood home, Etruria Hall. He had made his attitude clear to his father years earlier, when he had briefly looked after the retail outlet in London, telling his father that he "had too long been in the habit of looking upon [himself] as the equal of everybody to bear the haughty manner of those who come into the shop".[29] While still keeping overall control, Jos had withdrawn from the daily management of the business within four months of his father's death, leaving it in the hands of his cousin, Tom Byerley, who also had a share in the business. Three years earlier Jos had already raised his social status by marrying into the landed gentry: Bessie's family, the Allens of Cresselly in Pembrokeshire claimed descent from the Elizabethan Cecils. Also, while he and Bessie had initially lived in the house at Little Etruria which Josiah had had remodelled for them, Jos desired to live the life of a country squire. Accordingly he had bought Stoke d' Abernon, in Coleridge's words, "a noble large house in a rich pleasant country",[30] and moved there with Bessie and the children, while still returning from time to time to Etruria where his mother Sarah and unmarried sisters, Sarah and Kitty, had remained. Everina Wollstonecraft who had been the Wedgwoods' governess for 1797, seems to have found her position congenial enough, irritating her sister Mary with descriptions of the family's happy domesticity. the prodigious appetite for novel reading of the Wedgwood ladies at Etruria, and her requests for more novels, including Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*.[31] However, Everina lived with them for barely eight months. Moreover, the problems that by 1800 were to place stresses on Jos and Bessie's household, in particular the undiagnosed and incapacitating illness of Jos's brother Tom, to whom Jos was intensely attached, had at that point not progressed in severity and been exacerbated by Tom's increasing addiction to opium.[32]

In contrast to that of Everina, Thomasin's employment extended to over two years during which time one of the Wedgwood children, Mary Ann, fell ill and died, another one was born, the family moved house twice – first for eight or nine months to Upcott House in Somerset, and then to Gunville House in Dorset -- Jos and Bessie's relatives and visitors frequently came and went, and they themselves took frequent trips elsewhere. As Thomasin said in one of her early letters to Giddy, "This house is constantly changing Inhabitants, and I think none of them can be happy in the same place a week together".[33]. Although Thomasin at times was made to feel very unhappy by the behaviour towards her of some of the women in the Wedgwood and Allen families,[34] as mentioned earlier, she appears to have formed a stimulating and reciprocal friendship with Kitty Mackintosh, the most intellectual of the Allen sisters. In June 1798 she had read feminist Mary Hays' epistolary novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney,* after Kitty had told her about meeting Hays. In February 1799 when a number of the Allen sisters – Jessie, Fanny and Emma – were staying at Stoke as Bessie and Kitty were both well advanced in their respective pregnancies, Thomasin confided in Giddy about how miserable the conduct of "the Ladies" was making her. She held them responsible for "every mortification, every painful, every melancholy sensation".[35] As if to rectify whatever incidents had

provoked her unhappiness, in March 1799 Thomasin was invited to stay in London for two weeks with Kitty. Together they went three times to the Drury Lane theatre: to see Sarah Siddons in *Isabella, or The Fatal Marriage*, and *Macbeth,* and John Phillip Kemble, Siddons' brother, in *As You Like It.* However, back at Stoke in April – May, when Bessie's fourth child, Henry, had been born, and Kitty Mackintosh had given birth to triplets who had not survived, it is likely that Thomasin was kept at a distance from her friend by Kitty's younger sister, Jessie Allen, who had been staying with the family for months, and was caring for Kitty whose recovery was slow.[36] Jessie was also solicitous of the health and well being of Bessie who, despite caring for a new baby, was always attentive to the needs of other members of her large family.[37] At times of adversity and changes in the Wedgwoods' domestic circumstances, Thomasin found herself alone with virtually full responsibility for the children. Such was the case in June, not long after Henry's christening on May 12, when Jos moved his family to Upcott, ostensibly to be closer to Tom whose health had continued to deteriorate. Thomasin and the children were sent ahead to be joined by Jos and Bessie a week later, after they had been to Cote House to see Jos's elder brother John and his wife Jenny with whom Tom had been staying.

By early 1800, Jos was having to cope with not only Tom's rapidly worsening health and moving his family yet again, but also the financial predicament of his elder brother, John; the commercial bank in which he was a partner, *Alexander Davison & Co*, had failed.[38] The manor house at remote Tarrant Gunville for which he settled purchase in February also needed repairs before the family could move in properly. So when Jos and Bessy went to Cresselly in Pembrokeshire on the death of Bessy's sister Octavia in April 1800, Thomasin was left at Gunville alone for weeks with the children, confined to the ground floor because the roof leaked and the upper windows were boarded up. Although Jos returned in late May for a few days, and in mid June Thomasin was moved to a Christchurch cottage with the children, Jos, Bessy and one of Bessy's younger sisters still did not join them until a week later. When Bessy and her sister left again for Cresselly for Kitty Mackintosh's second confinement, Jos stayed behind to spend time with the constantly itinerant Tom, who had just returned unexpectedly from the West Indies for which he'd left only four months earlier, insisting that the climate there was the only potential cure for his illness. Tom then left Christchurch abruptly for London on the 15th of August, but was riding back to Gunville to be with Jos again on the 27th of August, and he stayed on until the 11th of November by which time Thomasin had left. To what extent Thomasin was affected by Tom's capricious and self-centred behaviour, as well as his extreme physical suffering during this time is unknown, but it was hardly a stable household.

On Bessie's return from Cresselly to Gunville in early September, the family had moved into the manor house properly, but the move does not appear to have gone well for Thomasin. By mid September she was unwell, experiencing what seems to have been a panic or anxiety disorder. In her words she had suffered from "a nervous complaint with slight fever", "a violent oppression on the breast with difficulty breathing", had lost her appetite, and her spirits could be "roused from the deepest melancholy only by hysterics and tears". After the pleasures of walking with the children by the sea and "botanizing" at Christchurch -- where Jos had written to Bessie that Thomasin "did very well in her situation", and that he did not observe "any melancholy about her"[39] -- the reality of living back at inland, remote Tarrant Gunville may have affected her spirits. Although rural, the ambience of the place was not particularly welcoming. As well as attending to repairs at the house, in August Jos was assisting Tom with the purchase and restoration of the neighbouring property, Eastbury Park, with its gloomy old mansion, one room of which was to be set up as a hot room for

Tom, with equipment especially designed and built by James Watt. Jos was also searching for a suitable property nearby for his increasingly demanding mother and his two sisters. While Thomasin had lived at Gunville alone with the children and servants, she had not been happy but had written to Giddy that she staved off depression by discovering pleasant walks, noting with curiosity that a house on the edge of Eastbury Park was inhabited by *émigré* French priests, and indulging her considerable imagination to amuse herself.[40] She may also have learnt something of the recent dark history of Eastbury House which had been partly dismantled, so that both it and the surrounding gardens were now very dilapidated.[41] Back in this place with four children to care for in the midst of the Wedgwood family's distresses, adjustments and tensions, and without a female companion in whom she felt she could confide, both the place and her future may have seemed too bleak, her homesickness may again have come to the fore, and it may all have become too much to bear.

Moreover, there seems little doubt that an aggravating factor in Thomasin's homesickness and anxiety, as well as the Wedgwoods' perceptions of her at this time, was her relationship with Davies Giddy, who had spent considerable time with Thomasin on the occasions when he had visited and stayed with the Wedgwoods. During these times they had read, conversed and gone on walks together as of yore. Indeed, perceptions of their relationship may well have been the source of some of the unspecified "mortifications" to which she alluded in her letters to him. She could have been subjected to light teasing comments, repeated gossip or innuendos, perhaps even from the older children B and Joe, as suggested by her complaint to Giddy about their "cross teasing" her while she wrote her letter to him of December 1799 from Cote House. While Giddy was ostensibly no more than a mentor and friend, the frequency of their letter exchanges would have suggested otherwise to the Wedgwoods, and the pair's manner towards one another on the occasions when Giddy visited them would have been closely observed.

On Thomasin's appointment, Giddy had sent her instructions regarding propriety, character and conduct. His precepts included that

> the passions should be directed by 'the aims of reason'; that 'habitual Cheerfulness', gaiety of mind and playfulness made companions pleasing; and that likeability was also enhanced by assimilating 'in matters of indifference' to 'the manners and even the caprices' with those with whom one associated. He counselled against sharing secrets, both private matters observed in the Wedgwood household, and personal confidences with new acquaintances.[42]

Given their shared reading of Latin and Greek classics, and Giddy's apparent adherence to some form of moral philosophy in contrast to Thomasin's Christian faith,[43] it is telling that she nicknamed Giddy "Cato" after the stoic Roman soldier, senator and historian, Cato, the elder (234–149 BC) who was renowned for his practical wisdom: ("Cato Sapiens"), adherence to simple dress, and strict moral principles ("Cato Censorious").

Giddy also encouraged Thomasin in regard to her writing and was behind the arrangement by his uncle for her to visit his friend John Wolcott (Peter Pindar) in London in August 1798. Wolcott at the height of his fame as a controversial satirical verse writer, was happy to talk to her about her poetry, was impressed by her classical taste and poetic diction, and encouraged her to write for money which she disdained.[44] Whether Thomasin had the time and space to continue writing poetry while at the Wedgwoods is not known, although during Coleridge's second visit to The Wedgwoods in August 1799 at Upcott House, at his request, Thomasin showed him some of her Odes and was pleasantly surprised by his positive comments about their freshness and moral slant. His response to her talent seems to have been sincere. However, in his letter to Jos dated 5 November 1800, Coleridge deferred to Jo's opinion regarding Thomasin with the judgement that

she “lacked a light and Cheerful Heart” which in his view was “indispensible to the moral character of a young person”. He then went on to acknowledge that she had “interested [him] a great deal”, and that her possession of a creative imagination “out of the common way” may have “injured” her.[45]

Thomasin readily took up Giddy’s suggestions about what she should read as well as his advice about her conduct and making contact with other writers. On his recommendation in December 1798 she read Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia,* after which she wrote to him about her favourable impressions of the sections on “Instinct Sleep and Reverie. She then used her own construal about dreams to launch into what she perceived to be a general lack of a satisfactory explanation of imagination as a faculty of the mind:

> I do not know how it is but I have never met with anything satisfactory in the subject of imagination, though it is infinitely the strongest of our faculties, and probably the parent of many of them. Having suffered it to acquire perhaps too much ascendancy over my mind, I will mention a few instances of its power which have always appeared to me unaccountable. Everybody I fancy at some time has been amused by what is termed Castle Building. At such moments a peculiar turn of mind has led me to picture scenes of grief or horror. A thousand times have I wept over the imaginary funerals of my friends, or from misfortunes happening to them. If I looked at the sea, fancy immediately transported me into a desert country where an exile and a fugitive, a wide ocean rolled between me and home. The sight or thought of a precipice was attended either with the idea of falling over it myself, or endeavouring in vain to save another person. Many times in a dark room I have amused myself with trying to fancy a spirit in a person opposite to me, and in two or three instances wrought up my imagination to such a pitch of fear, as by indulging it a minute longer would have had the effect of reality. I have for a long time discontinued the latter, after experiencing every sensation of the sublime that Terror can excite.[46]

Sometime earlier, and again on Giddy’s recommendation, Thomasin had read Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in which the sea, for example, with its immense power, vast expanse and unfathomable depths, is the viewed as the epitome of sublime “objects” in nature, exciting an overwhelming but pleasing astonishment, awe, and fear in the viewer, or, if danger presses too closely, simply terror or fear of the unknown, this mental state being “the ruling principle” of the sublime effect.[47] The Burkean aesthetic had many adherents, and Thomasin’s examples of the objects which triggered her imaginings strongly suggest the influence reading Burke had had on her own cultivation of the sublime effect, which had probably been further reinforced by her reading of Gothic novels at the Wedgwoods. Her outpouring in this letter makes a claim for a gothic sensibility – not far removed from that of Ann Radcliffe’s poetry writing heroine, Emily St Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* whose fancy is often given to terrible and overwrought imaginings, albeit in threatening situations - and it was perhaps an early signal to Giddy of an incipient desire to write a Gothic novel herself. However, Thomasin also had another, more immediate reason for apprising Giddy at this point of “her peculiar turn of mind”: that, somewhat unwisely, she had also revealed her personal predilection to the Wedgwoods, and was now concerned about about their strong reaction. In her own words:

> Conversing on these subjects one evening with some ladies. I chanced to mention my own singular habits, which excited great surprise at the sort of Pleasure my Fancy chose to amuse itself with – Mrs Wedgwood wishes to hear your opinion on a subject which she thinks curious, and what sort of influence indulgence is such reveries is likely to have on the mind – I confess I feel some reluctance to disclose these follies to you, and I expect that Cato will look very sternly.[48]

The idea that indulgence in morbid reverie could lead to a disordered mind was a topic of some serious public interest at this time, having been further fuelled by the popularity during the 1790s of novels of terror which were increasingly under attack. The backlash grew worse with Ann Radcliffe's ongoing reclusiveness and withdrawal from publishing after *The Italian* (Jan. 1797). By 1810 gossip had even begun to circulate that "haunted by the images of fear with which she had thrilled her readers, she had sunk into a state of mental alienation. The most galling rumour was that she had literally died insane."[49] Thomasin's revelations about her own imaginings may well have aroused concern about her mental fitness, and caused the Wedgwoods to both view her differently and observe her more closely, as having or fostering melancholia. The shock of the suicide on 29th December 1799 of Robert Darwin's brother, Erasmus Jr., after a period of melancholic withdrawal, may also have made them more alert to the possibility of this condition. Giddy, too, may have been concerned. Certainly in his reply to Thomasin's letter, he cautioned her against indulging her imagination, upholding reasoning as the most important faculty to cultivate, even as he recognised the interest of other creative individuals he knew in actively fostering experiences of the sublime, such as the journey made from Bristol by his friend Beddoes for the sole purpose of seeing Tintern Abbey by moonlight.[50]

Another aspect of Thomasin and Giddy's relationship that would have been evident to the Wedgwoods was Giddy's protectiveness of Thomasin. Giddy, in reply to Thomasin's assertion of her "mortifications" at the hands of some of the "ladies", conveyed to her his concern about "taking [her] from the bosum of [her] Friends and render[ing] her unhappy".[51] But in his later communication of October 1799 with Jos regarding Thomasin, he glibly analysed her feelings of social embarrassment as a sensitivity to pity or condescension and unwisely dismissed them as an "Hallucination" which had been removed by and since his last visit, and urged Jos to continue to extend "civilities" to Thomasin and include her in their "domestic circle".[52] After the Wedgwood's practice of excluding her from their family dinner parties had continued, in late March 1800, as Thomasin returned to the Wedgwoods, Giddy again wrote to Jos, asking that she "be treated with greater consideration and included 'constantly' in the family's evening parties".[53] Unfortunately this blunt request arrived at a time when, as described earlier, Jos was attempting to cope with three family crises as well as the move to Gunville, and it was probably not well received. His delayed reply to Giddy was that it might be best for his family if Thomasin left. Family accounts have it that in temperament Jos was "silent and grave, but just and kind with no harshness of temper"; nevertheless his gravity left others feeling distanced and in awe of him.[54] This could well explain Thomasin's reticence in speaking to him any more than was necessary, let alone confide in him her feelings and observations. Indeed her reserve with him was something about which he himself commented in his letter to Bessie of July 31, 1800 from the Christchurch cottage:

> Our *tête-à- tête* here is tolerably endurable.. We seldom meet for five minutes except at dinner, and then with eating, drinking, and helping the children, we manage to pass an hour with a few remarks, I believe if we were to live twenty years together we should make no further progress in intimacy. However she does exceedingly well in her situation; she does not come here to amuse me. I do not see any signs of melancholy about her. I fancy my sister's visit has cheered her for a while.[55]

Jos's patient, rational approach also explains his apparent passive acquiescence to Giddy's request that he not act immediately.[56] Given the pressures of his situation at the time, this resolution also no doubt best suited him and the family.

However, Giddy's failure to tell Thomasin about his intervention and its outcome was reprehensible. Jos now knew that Thomasin was very unhappy about an aspect of her employment which she herself felt that she could not raise with him or Bessie, and this may well have put a further strain on the Wedgwoods' relationship with her. Jos and Bessie were also privy to Giddy's

lack of intention to marry while, of necessity, he still lived with his parents, something he had asserted in his earlier letter to Jos. Moreover, they may have long suspected that Thomasin's feelings for Giddy went beyond friendship. Crucially, in June through July, before Thomasin became unwell, she was very likely to have been worried about Giddy, as he had written to her about a downturn regarding his own health and worry about his future.[57] Afflicted with a chest complaint that had not cleared he feared he had tuberculosis and in August was seeking help for his illness in Bristol from the physician Thomas Beddoes, who was specialising in treatment of the common disease. It is unknown whether any of the Wedgwoods spoke to her about Giddy's family situation, his intentions regarding marriage, his health, or her satisfaction with her position with them during the move that September, but the possibility that some pertinent comment was made would add to the number of explanatory triggers for her nervous breakdown.[58]

Having written in October to Giddy that she wanted to return home to Cornwall, she was back there in November and recovered well through that month and December during which time there was a pause in her relationship with him, ostensibly because his mother was ill. When Thomasin had a relapse in January, she wrote to Giddy that her complaint had "returned", and that she felt worse than when she was at Gunville. In response Giddy proposed that they resume their correspondence, a move which Thomasin welcomed because she could communicate with him "with the freedom one uses to a Brother and the confidence of a Father".[59] Thomasin was now 30; in November, she mused to Giddy over the new lack of resilience in her health, linking her lassitude to depression dating from the crisis she had experienced twelve months previously:

> The experience of the last twelve months … I believe that there are few evils which a mind able to command itself, and accustomed to exert its powers, may not support with patience, but ill health when it affects the spirits preys upon the mind as well as the body and reduces both to the same languid state.[60]

During the following three years, Giddy and Thomasin kept in contact by letter and on occasion saw each other, but Giddy also formed close friendships with other women, including the flirtatious wife of Thomas Beddoes, Anna, with whom he had begun to correspond after his consultative visit to the Beddoes in August 1800, and whom Thomasin met at Giddy's home in November 1803.[61] Whatever the depth of Giddy's feelings for Thomasin, his intentions did not include marriage to her, and Thomasin appears to have accepted this by late 1803.[62]

It had long been the wish of Giddy's father that he marry well to support his ambition to become an MP. Spending most of his time in London once he'd actually become the MP for Helston in May 1804, Giddy did not marry until April 1808: to Mary Ann Gilbert, an East Sussex grocer's daughter whom he'd met at St James in 1805. She was educated and artistic, but also an heiress whose surname in consequence he later adopted. Unsurprisingly, capitulation to paternal influence regarding marriage in the face of an abiding companionate love was to become a major theme in the two volume epistolary novel that Thomasin had already begun to write in 1803, finished in 1805, and published anonymously in 1806. Charlotte Mackenzie, with justification, sees "partly a critique of Thomasin's own credulity and delayed realisations" in the depiction of the character of Sophia.[63] However, the novel is concerned more broadly with the promptings of human emotions versus those of reason, and reflects Thomasin's strong interest in what would now be regarded as psychophysiology. In addition to the effect on Sophia of deceit and disappointment in love, it explores the adverse effects on her health, perceptions and emotional well being of sudden shocks and horrific abuses of freedom. Its two volumes are tightly structured, in seventy-five letters and an epilogue by "the editor of these letters".

Sophia St Clare

Setting, pre-texts, parallels, themes and plot

Thomasin's turn from poetry to the novel grew out of her engagement with the genre through her reading once she lived with the Wedgwoods. In July 1798 she had witnessed in their company the pain and extreme anger of Samuel Taylor Coleridge at the adoption of his personal history for the eponymous hero of *Edmund Oliver* (April 1798), a novel written by his close friend Charles Lloyd; so Thomasin no doubt saw the necessity for discretion and distancing in writing a *roman à clef.*[64] These features are achieved in *Sophia St Clare* by its setting on "the Gothic cusp" in Roman Catholic Europe, as in Ann Radcliffe's romances *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* —in this case the seventeenth century in France and Italy. A specific date, 1674, for referencing the events of Thomasin's novel is not revealed until near the end of Volume I when it is offered obliquely in relation to the identity of the beautiful and sympathetically helpful woman into whose palace apartment Sophia had blundered by accident when she had become dangerously separated from her party at Versailles. As Sophia informs Isabella, her constant correspondent and confidante:

> You will think I have been anxious to find out the lady, to whose kindness I was so much indebted at Versailles. It was Madame ****, the favourite of --------, in whose apartment I found protection. This was a strange incident, but what I am going to relate is still more so. At present everybody speaks of her. Within these few days she has quitted the court forever, and entered a convent of Carmelites, where she intends to take the veil.
>
> . Guilty, but less hardened than most that err, she has long been a prey to remorse; pitiable in the opinion of some, because she was attached to the person, not to the rank of ------, and was less his mistress than his friend, Her conduct towards me shows she had begun to practise humility (*Sophia St. Clare,* Vol. I, Letter XXVIII, pp. 166-67).[65]

Undoubtedly Sophia refers here to the widely celebrated religious crisis and conversion of the Versailles courtesan and mistress to Louis XIV, Madame de La Vallière, and her entrance in April 1674 into a Carmelite convent near Paris.

Again, while in *Sophia St Clare* the friendship/love relationship between its central protagonists, Lusignan and Sophia, contains a number of obvious parallels with the relationship of Thomasin and Giddy, the story also has precursors in French narratives about unfortunate lovers whose lives seem ruled by a "strange fatality". The words "fatality" and "fatal" in relation to conduct or events occur in various contexts several times in *Sophia St Clare.* For Sophia it seems that "surely some fatality in [her] life condemns [her] to seek in vain tranquillity, which shall forever elude [her] pursuit" (Vol.I, Letter IX, p. 41). Or as Lusignan expresses it in his letter to Sophia announcing his departure from their relationship:

> Those amiable ties that united us would have formed our happiness, But while I thought only of pleasing you, and meriting your friendship, I was insensibly nourishing a dangerous passion, to which the peculiarity of my position had already opposed a fatal obstacle, The same moment showed me my errour and its consequence, I awoke at once to love and despair, to the consciousness that a secret tie had insensibly united my fate to yours, and that a severe and unalterable destiny would separate us for ever (Vol. II, Letter XLVII, pp. 58-9).

Once more, when he finds that no matter what his "sacrifice," he can no longer please his now sullen wife, he is full of self reproach for being "a philosopher", imagining himself "superior to passion, and to every natural sentiment", and he concludes dolefully:

> A fatality governs our conduct — we think, we act, we seem to possess free will; yet are we the subjects of a strange and uncontrollable destiny? Our thoughts, our actions, and even our passions, are but a part of that eternal progress of things, which hurries us along in its course. … it is the extremes of principle and passion, those moral contradictions which we strive in vain to reconcile, which are in our power, and yet beyond it — it is there the struggle begins. (Vol. II, Letter LIII, p.85-6).

In the use of this trope and the name "Lusignan" for its hero, the novel signals as a pre-text the anonymously written *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe.* In both novels Lusignan is the only son of an aggrandizing and tyrannical French duke who is bent on arranging his son's marriage to the daughter of another duke for reasons of wealth and alliance, Closely based on a short story by Madame de Tencin plus a play by Baculard d' Arnaud,[66] *Lusignan* was published by Lane's Minerva Press in June 1801, listed in its catalogue, and available that year at the circulating library in Thomas Vigur's Penzance bookshop from which Thomasin could borrow.

The opening ten letters of the first volume of *Sophia St Clare* are written by twenty year old Sophia to her married friend Isabella Poitiers from the unspecified French convent in which Sophia has been placed by her "cruel and malignant" step mother following the death of her father. In this section, the influence of *Lusignan, or the Abbaye of La Trappe* is particularly evident in its subject matter: the depiction, in extended passages of critique, of the gloomy atmosphere of the convent and the evils of monasticism and forced monachisation. The supposed positive aspects of conventual retirement, arguments canvassed by at least one character in both novels, are here rehearsed and weighed with the most subjective reflection by Sophia, only to be ultimately dismissed by her own and Sister Agatha's even stronger arguments in favour of individual freedom and one's duty to society.[67]

Sophia St Clare deviates from being a convent to a courtship novel once Sophia is rescued by Lusignan. Paternal opposition then becomes the main obstacle and threat, not only to the lovers' union, but also their ongoing contact as friends. Strong literary precedents are again evident in the depiction of the woman Lusignan's father has chosen, whose real name "Adelaide" (used for no fewer than three characters in *Lusignan*)[68] is not disclosed to Sophia or readers until near the end of the novel when, as Lusignan's vengeful wife, she becomes unhinged and later commits suicide by taking poison. This lack of identity allows the connotations of the disguise in which Lusignan first meets her – that of the beautiful enchantress/sorceress Armida – to continue to operate after Lusignan's momentary enthralment to her at a masquerade. As Lusignan's wife she remains elusive in depiction even as she becomes increasingly sensitive to his lack of any passionate love in his dutiful attempts to please her, and so directs her malevolence in mysterious and evil ways towards his renounced, innocent and true love, Sophia. By her wiles she manages to acquire what Sophia avows in retrospect to have been "a strange influence" over her. Even after her death, her malicious intent seems to live on, Sophia having internalised Adelaide's "visionary" prediction that she, Sophia, is "but short-lived". It is not known whether Thomasin was directly familiar with the sentimental fiction of Baculard d'Arnaud, but his *Les époux malheureux ou histoire de Monsieur et Madame de La Bedoyere* (1764) features a malicious countess who plots against the married couple (because she loves the husband) and who eventually goes mad and commits suicide by taking poison.

Like his namesake, the Marquis, the Count de Lusignan expresses his dislike of his father's preoccupation with rank and aggrandizement:

> There are persons of merit here [in Paris] as in other places but some for whom I have real esteem, I find it difficult to introduce at our house, because their names are not known at court. My father, whose temper you are acquainted with, is even more tenacious of my consequence than his own, and loses no opportunity of hinting to me how much his plans for my future advancement depend on my supporting the dignity of my rank. My Rank! What image is there in that word, that it should deprive me of my ease, my liberty, and self-enjoyment? (*Sophia St Clare,* Vol I, Letter X, pp. 47 – 48)

However, the relationship of the Count with his father is portrayed as much closer than that of the Marquis de Lusignan with his vengeful father, the Duke of Meronville in *Lusignan.*. As Lusignan confides to a friend,

> You know my attachment to him, and the regard with which he has always honoured me. There are few sacrifices I would not make to promote his happiness" (*Sophia St. Clare,* Vol. I, Letter XX, p. 117).

Meronville is heavily influenced by the evil Abbé La Haye who ruins the lives of Lusignan and his beloved Emily. In contrast, the malignant Father Nicholas of *Sophia St Clare* plays only a minor role in the story. At first, as the formidable director of and confessor to the nuns of the convent in which Sophia has been cruelly placed, he is in some respect in league with her evil stepmother. Later, he reappears as confessor to and in the service of the vengeful Countess shortly after her marriage to Lusignan, whose father proves to be more reasonable and honourable than Meronville. He is piqued by Lusignan's lack of enthusiasm for the marriage he has arranged, and then becomes so enraged when Lusignan calls it "a sacrifice" and admits to an affection elsewhere that he sends men to have Sophia officially arrested and detained. Nevertheless, he soon reverses his court order and rash action. In a heated exchange, Lusignan is able to convince him of Sophia's innocence, so that he "offers to make any atonement in his power," which he then follows up with letters of profuse apology both to Sophia and Madame Adhemar, even offering to solicit forgiveness in person, He thus retains Lusignan's regard, and father and son are reconciled.

For both Lusignans, the flashpoint of conflict and antagonism is their fathers' intervention regarding marriage, not just in terms of pressure to marry, but choice of a partner whose rank and wealth will be advantageous. While the Marquis defies Meronville's stern command and intensifies his resolve to consummate in marriage his passionate love for Emily (only to be tricked and abducted), after the attempted arrest of Sophia the Count capitulates to his father's wish that he marry the chosen duke's daughter on the grounds of duty and honour to his family,

But the situation is not simple. Earlier the Count, at least for a very brief time, falls under the spell of the beauty and sophisticated accomplishments of his designated bride, while, simultaneously, he remains buoyed by his close friendship with and benevolence to Sophia. Moreover, he has in fact come to realise that his feelings for her are much more than brotherly—that he is in love with her. To advance the love story and convey this complexity, Thomasin employs the literary device of the masquerade at which, in disguise, characters can act more freely than the dictates of propriety would normally allow. To this end, she draws on the classical story of Armida and Rinaldo from Tasso's epic, *Jerusalem Delivered.*[69]

At his father's wish, Lusignan attends a masque in the guise of the Spaniard Rinaldo, while the beautiful woman whom his father wishes him to marry, but whose identity he does not yet know, appears dressed as the enchantress, Armida, who at the end of the evening reveals that she

does know his identity. Lusignan notes her beauty and aloofness to those who follow her seeking her favour, but he remains as indifferent as he always is with women, other than Sophia. Nevertheless, when Armida contrives to stand next to him at a refreshment sideboard, and declines a proffered glass of water with "so courteous an air", that his vanity is piqued, he banters with her, after which he avoids her, and is about the leave when she approaches him. Touching his arm lightly with her wand, she challenges his gallantry, refuses his claim to be indifferent, challenges him again, and wins his homage:

> "That is not like the politeness of your country", Signior. Yours is a vain sex, but with all your pride, you owe the charms of life only to our favour."
> I snatched her hand:-- "Softly," said she, withdrawing it with an air of reserve, "Armida is not to be so easily won; to gain my favour you must deserve it."
> "Teach me how," said I, "lovely Armida."
> "Your own heart will teach you," she replied.
> "Shall we ever meet again?" (Vol. I, Letter XVII, pp. 103 -4)

This episode and the dialogue are cleverly crafted. The surrender of the usually restrained Lusignan to Armida's allure is a turning point in the novel, setting in motion the train of events that will ruin his and Sophia's happiness. Armida also speaks truly when she tells Lusignan that his heart will teach him. The letter ends with the ironic simplicity of Lusignan's attempt at self reassurance:

> My father is anxious to see me married. But this wild adventure will hardly have so s serious a conclusion. (p.105)

In regard to a parallel with the Thomasin – Giddy relationship, the flirtatious Anna Beddoes, could perhaps be seen as a syren/Armida figure. While obviously not a possible partner in marriage for Giddy, Anna was sexually confident, not averse to attempting to seduce him, and even offered to be his mistress.[70] Thomasin may have known, been told, or had suspicions, even if Giddy himself did not tell her about Anna's behaviour. She was part of his circle. Her father may even have heard gossip about Anna.

In that the Lusignan of *Sophia St Clare* is also more dutifully career oriented than the Marquis de Lusignan of *Lusignan* (who actually abandons his responsibilities on inheriting his dukedom), there is a further parallel with Giddy who went on to become an MP and moved to London. Lusignan engages in various duties for the French Court, and is absent for a time in the role of an ambassador to Venice — without his wife who has refused to accompany him, thus enabling her to take her vengeful actions against Sophia.

The distinction between the companionate love Lusignan shares with Sophia, and what he terms "violent love" — the passionate love he perceives the Duke's daughter to expect of him, and which he rejects — are made clear in a couple of his letters, first to a friend, and later, to his father who questions his lack of passion:

> Most of the married people I have seen, live together without anxiety or passion, and I did not suppose violent love essential to the ease of a wedded life. (*Sophia St Clare,* Vol. I, Letter XXIX, p. 173)

> "Violent love," I said. "had its inconveniences. If there were fewer pleasures in indifference, there was also more ease." (Vol. II, Letter VII, p. 24.)

Not only does such a distinction echo the overarching theme of *Lusignan*; given Giddy's restraint, it is also clearly relevant to Thomasin and Giddy's relationship.

In accord with its title page epigraph, *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe,* draws on de Tencin's *Comminge* story to contrast the joys and lasting nature of friendship to the very fleeting joy of romantic love. As experienced by Emily with her passionate Lusignan, who falls in love with her at first sight and in the end becomes so obsessed with her miniature that he fails to recognise her at La Trappe, the joys of love are momentary indeed. In contrast, the companionate love relationship of Sophia St Clare and Lusignan builds slowly, five years having passed from the time of their first meeting in Italy when Sophia was fifteen. This had occurred in the unhappy circumstance of the mortal wounding of her brother, who had been attacked by three ruffians in the city of Milan where the St Clare family had been living after Monsieur St Clare's exile from France many years before.

Once Sophia has been rescued by Lusignan from the convent where she was being brutally forced to take the veil by Father Nicholas, her relationship with her benefactor blossoms in the safety and congeniality of the chateau in rural Montmorency of his cousin and friend, the caring and motherly Madame Adhemar. From here, often with Lusignan in attendance, Sophia takes a trip to St Denis and has a sojourn in Paris from which she visits Versailles. A friend of her father and now would-be suitor, the brash and chauvinistically witty Baron de Valmont,[71] also emerges in Sophia's letters as a foil at this time. His unwanted advances to her and contemptuous remarks about women increase Sophia's appreciation of Lusignan's tender attentions and benevolent manliness, a generosity of spirit which extends beyond the "remittances" he sends incognito for her livelihood. Her regard for him reaches its pinnacle when she discovers that he has arranged for a widowed peasant woman and her small son whom she has befriended to return to the pleasant cottage from which they had been evicted because they could no longer afford the rent:

> I owe everything to him. But I think I never looked at him with so much pleasure, nor did he ever appear so amiable in my eyes, as since this little incident (Vol, I, Letter XXX, pp. 178-79).

However, while the ongoing joys of friendship and benevolence emerge as a strong theme of the narrative, doubts and anxieties regarding familial duty, loyalty, and social status also enter Sophia and Lusignan's relationship once they individually realise that they are in love. This again appears to parallel Thomasin's friendship with Giddy, In both cases there is an element of patronage in the relationship; they are not social equals. Lusignan supports Sophia in practical ways: by using his rank to rescue her from the convent where she has been placed by her stepmother, by providing a safe haven for her with Madame Adhemar and supporting her financially, and then by again using his position of power to press legal action to secure Sophia's inheritance from the clutches of her avaricious stepmother. Giddy, in the role of mentor and friend, offers Thomasin encouragement, advice, and access to books and networks of scholars and writers, and arranges her safe employment as governess with the Wedgwoods, where he hopes she will have a comfortable and interesting life, further opportunities to read, have time to write poems, and meet members of the Wedgwood's intellectual circle.

While in Paris, Sophia owns to Isabella that she finds the licentious manners of its inhabitants "disgusting" and has become more conscious of the safety and ease of a rural social environment. She also reveals her dawning awareness of her love for Lusignan when, one night at the theatre towards the end of the third act, he becomes "abstracted" and leaves their box to enter another in which she observes him resuming his gaiety with another woman:

> I thought, by the smiles of one of the ladies, and the attention he paid her, there might, possibly, be another Sophia, who owed her happiness to his benevolence, I know not why, but the idea disturbed me (Volume I, Letter XXIV, p. 145).

At the same time, Lusignan's letters to his confidant also reveal his increasing attachment to and admiration for Sophia as well as his growing unease regarding his dutiful meetings with and attentions to the Duke's daughter. Admitting his involvement with the latter, and praising her beauty and admirable qualities, he acknowledges his indifference to such charms and the conflict into which the values of his rank and upbringing have brought him: that his true desire is not at all "the prospect of a splendid alliance", but merely the company of Sophia. At first he fools himself that he "shall see her the wife of some worthy man and she will not be less [his] friend" (Vol I, Letter XXV, pp.148 – 49), but this resolve is soon seen to be transitory, as ensuing events such as the incident at Versailles, and Lusignan's illness bind them more closely before their inevitable separation occurs.

Baron de Valmont's scathing assessment of Lusignan's character, and his unsolicited and devastating revelation to Sophia that. despite Lusignan's love for her, he is paying devoirs to another woman whom he is likely to marry, form the trigger for the exchanges between Lusignan and Sophia that finally fuel Lusignan's principled resolve "to banish a deceitful passion" and proceed with his marriage to the Duke's daughter. Here he deludes himself with the reasoning that his wife's "affection will engage [his] gratitude, and admiration will supply the place of love"; also that his constant endeavours to make her happy will allow him to forget that he is otherwise (Vol. II, Letter XLVI, pp. 54-5).

In one of her final letters to Isabella soon after her rescue by the Chevalier St Louis from the dungeon in which Lusignan's wife had abandoned her inhumanely chained to a pillar, Sophia writes that "cruel suffering has extinguished love in my bosom". Sophia lacks a robust physical constitution and has become a prey to a "secret melancholy", reliving in imagined scenes and macabre dreams the horrors she has suffered. The horrendous trick and ill treatment inflicted on her by the impassioned Adelaide have ruined her health and consumed her spirits. Unlike Radcliffe's heroines, she does not rally with fortitude following her rescue and the return of her lover, who is filled with remorse and now free and ready to resume their relationship. Instead, Sophia perceives that her life is drawing to a close, and with the eventual restoration of her tranquillity among her friends comes a consistent clarity in her feelings, She conceives the purity of the love she had inwardly cherished for Lusignan to be sullied by its betrayal for material ends, and the consequent claims and hatred of his jealous and grieving wife. His final visit is not a happy reunion. As he embraces her, she shudders, thinking of his wife — "her fatal jealousy and unhappy end", and she feels "as if she had been guilty of a crime". When he seeks her forgiveness for the "the fatal friendship" which he had fostered and which "has destroyed [her]", she attempts to comfort him with a nod to their past circumstances and the avowal that "she had been equally fatal to his peace". Yet her final words to him gently but firmly apprise him of the fact that, as he himself now recognises, he is no longer necessary to her happiness:

> I know that I am dying; but were I to live many years, I would not now be your wife-- it would be criminal to even wish it; everything is changed for us; we are no longer the same we have been to each other. I do not complain of my destiny; life is variable, and unexpected good often succeeds the evil. I count my end fortunate, since I have seen you once more, and die worthy of your esteem. (Vol II, Epilogue, p. 198)

She then exhorts him "to find support in the rectitude of his principles, and to consider her death as an event that is happy for her." (Vol. II, Epilogue, p. 197).

Sophia's sensibility, Lusignan's benevolence

As in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian,* and the anonymous *Lusignan, or, The Abbaye of La Trappe,* Thomasin Dennis peoples *Sophia St Clare* with two sets of contrasting characters: those whose attitudes and practices are of the old Catholic order of feudalism and tyranny such as the Abbess, Father Nicholas, Sophia's mother, Lusignan's father, and his wife, Adelaide, and those like Sophia, Lusignan, Madame Adhemar and Mlle la Harpe, who are endowed anachronistically with eighteenth-century Enlightenment values, manners and tastes, It is the former characters, who provide the Gothic situations in *Sophia St. Clare* by means of their threatening actions and abodes, especially forms of incarceration within a castle or monastic institution. Again like Radcliffe, Thomasin navigates the complexities of female sensibility via the character of her novel's heroine. Given the intimacy of *Sophia St Clare's* first person epistolary narration, Sophia's sensibility — her heightened emotional sensitivity, empathy, and capacity to feel and perceive suffering — is always in evidence as a defining element of her character and the foundation of her moral sense.

At the outset of the novel, as she travels to the convent, Sophia presents herself as very depressed by her situation, and extremely indignant at the unfair treatment she has received from her unfeeling stepmother:

> What degrading views of human nature does her conduct occasion! Is maternal love only a more refined species of selfishness? Why else is a stepmother so often a cruel and malignant being? (Vol.I, Letter I,, p.4)

However, also striking are her philosophical disposition and close perceptiveness regarding her new location and its inhabitants:

> The nun … staid with me while I supped, talking all the time of a life consecrated to religion, and the happiness the sisters enjoy in their convent. I am willing to believe her, for why should she seek to deceive me? Yet there is a fixedness, a vacancy in the countenances of these people. (Vol. I, Letter II, p. 7)

> The appearance of this place is calculated to inspire melancholy, The large and lofty walls frowning, as it were, over the solitude they enclose, the grated windows affording a faint twilight, and the long winding passages, through which the nuns in their white dresses glide like spectres,[72] seem fitter for a cemetery than the habitation of human beings. The garden is laid out in gloomy walks and wildernesses. It has neither shrubs nor flowers, not even the poppy, emblem of forgetfulness but the majestic waving pine, the baleful yew, and the cypress. When I walk beneath their cheerless shade, I am ready to fancy myself a companion for sprites and goblins. Nothing good, methinks, can enter it. Pleasure, in whatever form, seems here a forbidden guest, melancholy and mortification are only admissible. Such is the habitation piety has chosen for an asylum, which rejects the vanities of life, and shuts out the world. O that it could likewise exclude the perturbed uneasy train, affections, desires, regrets! That it could seal up the page of memory, leave the past a blank in existence! My present lot would then seem a natural one, and I should feel no wish beyond the boundaries of these walls. Vain wish! Since our very being is composed of what we have been. I cannot forget past impressions, without forgetting myself, I cannot drink the water of oblivion without ceasing to exist. (Vol. I, Letter III, pp. 9-10)

The style of Sophia's descriptions brings to mind Thomas Wolcot's assessment of Thomasin's poetic diction: "she seems to prefer things to words, substance to shadow, simplicity to affectation, in short a shirt without ruffles to ruffles without a shirt."[73] The effect is a less idealistic and more realistic presentation of character than we find in Radcliffe's romances. Notably, while late in the novel Sophia does turn to reading literature for occupation and consolation, she is not driven by "enthusiasm" for the sublime in nature to bolster her spirits and write lines of poetry like Radcliffe's

Emily St Aubert in *Udolpho*; nor does she find solace in music like Ellena with her lute in *The Italian.*

While owning that she herself possesses an "imagination always too active" and a "taste for solitude", Sophia also correctly surmises that the morose unhappiness and preference for solitude of Sister Agatha is not a natural disposition but "rather the effect of misfortunes operating upon a mind of too much sensibility" (Letter IV, pp. 12-13). Under pressure to take the veil, and between her own periods of despondency, she remains sufficiently driven by indignation at her stepmother's complicity, and what she has already learnt of the convent's horrific dark secrets from Agnes and Agatha, to summon fortitude in challenging the Abbess's clerical authority. She even protests, like a Radcliffean heroine, that she is "ready to suffer any treatment, rather than submit to such tyranny and injustice" (Voll. I, Letter XII, p.71).[74] However, after she has also admonished Father Nicholas, this courage fails her when his eyes "flash fire" and he seizes her hand, leading her through narrow passages to an almost entirely darkened room in which only horrific *momento mori* are discernible, and then subjects her to threats of physical "discipline" and incarceration (pp. 72-6). These threats are more immediate, more dreadful and more concretely depicted that those facing Radcliffe's Ellena di Rosalba at the convent of San Stephano in *The Italian,* and Sophia's capitulation to his demands is unsurprising. Her ensuing hope relies only on the facts that the ceremony of the novitiate is not a final vow —though she doubts that Father Nicholas will wait the regulatory twelve months — and that she still can harbour reveries of a happier future.

Yet having been rescued by Lusignan and on the way to the safety of Madame Aldhemar's country home in Montmorency, Sophia experiences a riot of conflicting emotions. Her "mind, too strongly affected with the change in [her] situation, [is] wrought up to a pitch of painful sensibility," and her imagination runs wild as she relives the miseries she has suffered in the convent and forms "visionary plans of happiness" before "dashing them again with gloomy fancies" (Volume I, Letter XVI, p. 94). Even when a happy future begins to take more definite shape among new friends, Sophia does not escape "a tender sadness" at the loss of her family and friends. During an evening moonlit walk in the park, her reflections that she, too, will pass the boundary of death and see her dear friends again, bring her to tears "not of sorrow, but of a sweet and pleasing melancholy." Lusignan is concerned by Sophia's sudden tears, and their conversation takes a philosophic turn in which Lusignan figures himself as a mentor of more stoic sentiments:

> … It is nor right … to dwell on past misfortunes which are irreparable. You must now look forwards. Life has pleasures in store for you, which will banish the memory of former suffering. You have already been my pupil permit me to be again your instructor in philosophy; that will teach you the vanity of indulging in useless sorrow, and of turning, with regret, to circumstances not in our power."

Sophia's reply in turn instructs Lusignan in a practice of remembrance of the dead which is unassailable without denying her humanity:

> I believe … I shall never be a philosopher. I cannot forget my dear friends, nor do I wish it. There is nothing bitter in the remembrance, but a tender and grateful idea, which I cherish as part of my existence. It seems a debt pf gratitude due to our deceased friends, to think of them sometimes with regret. When the grave has closed on them, we cannot restore them to life, but we may preserve to them that place in our affections, that they most desired while they lived" (Vol I, Letter, XVIII, pp. 109-10).

Affected by her words and tears, Lusignan can only reply,

> How charming is this sensibility … and but for your own sake, who would wish you to lose it for the proudest virtues of a stoic! (ibid)

Lusignan's own sensibility is manifest mainly in his empathy for and benevolence to others who are less fortunate than himself. An early letter by Lusignan to an unnamed friend and confidant suggests that, like Tom and Jos Wedgwood, he is confidently generous in his assistance to the young poverty bound who display artistic genius (Vol. I, Letter XIV, p.88). However, in a later letter, his attitude is much more cynical, again perhaps reflecting the sentiments of some of the Wedgwoods:

> I will make the inquiries that you wish regarding the young peasant at ----- , but, unless in the case of extraordinary genius, a particular turn to these studies is often unfortunate for a young man. Our capital swarms with these pretended geniuses, who serve only to degrade the fine arts, and far from gaining any good to themselves, struggle all their lives with the misery of poverty and dependence. (Vol. I pp. 119-20).[75]

Lusignan is avowedly a philosopher, but his discovery, in his relationship with Sophia, of "a charm in the society of an amiable woman, which we never find in our intercourse with each other," gives him pause to question his profession:

> The pride of philosophy suffers some diminution, when we consider the immense distance between that progress of intellect imagination conceives, and what we are really capable of attaining. The grandeur and sublimity of those laws of the universe, which our reason strives in vain to penetrate, form a striking contrast to human misery and insignificance. Moralists declaim on the vanity of our passions, but I believe we seldom commit so many errours as in the pursuit of truth, or the idea which we are disposed to fancy such. We quit the plain path to bewilder ourselves in the mazes of opinion; we sacrifice health and ease in the pursuit. And in what does it all terminate? In vague belief, uncertainty, chimera (Vol. I, Letter XXVII, pp. 164-65).

Sophia, on the other hand, suffers as well as gains from Lusignan's benevolence and attentions. Her feelings of dependence on and undeclared love for him increase her sense of insecurity, and lead to outright anxiety and illness when she does not see or communicate with him for a period of time. This occurs when an accident in a pleasure boat on the River Seine causes Lusignan's absence from Montmorency. In the interval Sophia is not only unwell for several days, but faints from pleasure when she first sees him on his return. As she confesses to Isabella:

> When I recovered, I felt ashamed at the emotion I had betrayed. Lusignan too appeared agitated; I saw in his eyes tenderness mixed with concern; and when his hand touched mine, I perceived that it trembled. When we were more composed, he inquired anxiously after my health;
>
> "Health," I said, "often varies with our spirits; mine are not always equal, and then I am not so well as at other times" (Vol. I. Letter, XXXV, pp. 195 -96).

When Lusignan inquires if there is anything he can do to make her happier, and avows that he is ready to do whatever is in his power, Sophia replies that she "cannot doubt it", that she has found in him "a father and brother both in one". However, she is unable to finish her articulation of the unhappiness she had experienced "yet a few days since". Catching her meaning, Lusignan dismisses his endangerment on the Seine as "over" and adds that "life will have new charms for [him] if [she] is interested in its preservation". For Sophia, this understatement of her true feelings goes to the nub of the frustratingly unspoken in their relationship and the restrictive norms of her society:

> Interested! Isabella—ah, if I could have told him. But such is the dissimulation imposed upon our sex. My sentiments were to be cold and constrained because I had obligations I could not repay, and because I felt them too sensibly (pp. 196-97).

After Sophia makes to Lusignan the obvious but restrained reply that of course she would think his death "the greatest misfortune", that "it has pleased Heaven that [she] should owe everything to

[him],” Lusignan comes close to confessing that he is in love with her, but chooses to couch his avowal in terms of acquiring sensibility and the soft affections:

> When I saw you, and thought of you as bereft of that natural protection which ought to cherish a young and lovely woman, this, with your merit, our peculiar situation, your confidence in my moral character, have excited in my breast a tenderness for you which I never felt for any other woman. Till I knew you, I supposed I had scarcely any affections; I had seen few objects capable of interesting a sensible heart; sympathy, tenderness between persons of a different sex, were to me little more than words. But for you I should never have known these charming sensibilities, (Vol. I, Letter XXXV, pp. 187-98).

Volume II opens with Isabella’s letter of reply to Sophia regarding all of this, a wisely reasoned warning that it is obvious that Lusignan loves her, but that “his person and talents render him but too dangerous an object for the intimacy of a young woman”:

> I have long been uneasy to see you exposed to the daily assiduities of a man, who seems to live only to do you favours, without professing himself your lover. So cautious in his language, while he insidiously steals into your affections, and who, in deserting you, will hardly leave you at liberty to reproach him. The character of his father, excuse me if I say it, is too well known, to allow for a moment the expectation that an alliance which promises not wealth or powerful connections, will ever be sought by the Count de Lusignan. What then will become of a passion which honour and prudence forbid him to gratify! A time must come when he will seek to forget you. … The moment of separation may be cruel to both, but you will not be equal sufferers (Vol. II, Letter XXXVI, pp. 2-3).

The letter ends with exhortations to consider the Baron de Valmont as an alternative suitor, and to withdraw herself for a time from “this amiable protector, this dangerous friend,” by leaving Montmorency and staying with her and M. Poitiers in Italy.

Sophia does not take up Isabella’s offer, and her anxiety takes a more extreme turn when she learns that Lusignan has a cold: she experiences irrational fears that he will die. These become overwhelming after she has had a macabre dream in which she sees him, pale and deeply sad, standing in front of an empty tomb before taking her hand, pressing it to his violently beating heart, and then to his deathly cold forehead. As she regards him in anguish, he presses his cheek to hers, and sinks into the tomb which instantly closes, Although greatly abbreviated and without accompanying sound effects, Sophia’s account of this dream and her declamatory panic that follows are D’Arnaudian in style and are possibly influenced by melodramatic episodes in the final volume of *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe.* While the fact that Lusignan is subsequently pronounced “out of danger” offers some basis for Sophia’s fears, it does not exempt her response from being considered disproportionate. Moreover, she wonders at her own lack of resilience after his recovery:

> My joy should be equal to what my grief has been. Why does it not rush in full upon me, and overpower this frame with its excess? But it is not so with me. I feel like one escaped from the brink of a precipice, in whom the idea of danger still mingles with the sense of safety. I have seen the face of misery too near, to be able to welcome the return of joy (Vol. II, Letter XXXIX, p. 13).

Sophia’s health continues to suffer, and her pleasure on seeing Lusignan again is “mixed with melancholy,” a melancholy that does not leave her after he has arranged for her fortune to be restored to her so that she is financially independent. Furthermore, his confession that he has “sunk the friend in the lover … too much” and a self serving statement that “if it were a fault to love [her], it is a fault with which [she] at least ought not to reproach [him]” raise in her only a hint of resentment, even though it validates only too well Isabella’s warning.

In common with Sophia, Lusignan's mental conflict and sufferings take a toll on his health. His illness occurs when he realises that he is in love with Sophia and is under increased pressure from his father to marry. Even after his physical recovery and his reconciliation with his father, he continues at variance with himself, feeling "equally false to honour and to love." Fretting about what Sophia will think of him when he chooses "a more splendid connection," he avowedly spends "hours in reverie," imagining that he presses Sophia to his bosom, only to see her suddenly "dead in his arms," Accompanying the Duke to his ancient country seat inhabited only by two or three retired officers — a place in the middle of a gloomy wood, "a most desolate place" with "the air of a prison" — Lusignan yet imagines it a place where he and Sophia could live and love in obscurity, lost to the world, his hopes, his honours "resigned for her." But then, dismissing this confession of his feelings as "the language of romance," he assures his addressee that he shall act agreeably to reason:"

> From my early youth I proposed to myself an object, and I will pursue it steadily through life.
>
> After all, my friend, it is not happiness we seek, nor is it life itself what we most value. Talk of our sacrifices—our honours and fortunes are what we most unwillingly resign. The reason is, because we live less to our sentiments than to those of others; in their eyes only we see ourselves great or elevated, on our own we shrink and appear diminutive (Vol. II, XLIII, p. 43).[76]

Lusignan's unhappiness does not diminish, and on one occasion he even risks a visit to view, from a distance, the home inherited from her father where Sophia is living. Nevertheless he maintains his health until he returns from Venice to learn of his wife's imprisonment of Sophia and subsequent suicide, the story of which becomes known and is spread about by the embittered Valmont. These events leave him much changed in appearance; but a shadow of his former self: "pale, melancholy, oppressed with anguish and bitter recollections" (Vol. II, Epilogue, p. 196).

Sophia's acceptance of retirement as an acceptably productive or creative aspect of female sensibility is foreshadowed, and occurs in her account of her visit with Madame Aldhemar and Baron de Valmont to meet Mlle la Harpe, This episode may register Thomasin's knowledge of Mary Hays personal life and takeaways from her reading of Hay's controversial novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), in the Preface of which Hayes had advocated for greater realism in presentation of character in novels, and written that "the errors of [her] heroine were the offspring of sensibility." Like Hays, Clara la Harpe has experienced a tragic loss in the death of her beloved very shortly before their marriage, and to live with her grief has long adhered to a life of country retirement, reading and study.[77] Madame Aldhemar considers Clara to be "a lady of a romantic turn", and satisfies Sophia's "great curiosity to see her", introducing Sophia as follows:

> My dear Clara … I have brought this young lady to visit you. I promised to show her a person of congenial taste; she, like yourself, is a lover of solitude, and, if her looks do not deceive us, she possesses fancy and sensibility. (Vol. I, Letter XXII, p. 125.

Sophia is impressed not only by the beautiful gardens that Clara has created in her solitude, but also the evidence of her studies of plants, minerals, fossils and butterflies, and her library, consisting mainly of poetry, romances, some mystic works and unusually constructed cages of singing.birds.[78] When the amused Valmort teases Clara about her "very pretty amusements" and "elegant solitude", suggesting that a better outlet for her beauty and accomplishments would be making some worthy man and herself happy, Clara's reply is that "a woman of delicacy and sentiment can love but once, it is shocking to marry where she does not love, or to love more than one".The outing concludes with a visit to Clara's artificially created grotto, with its little stream, female figure and urn, on which are inscribed extremely morose sayings composed by Clara herself. These draw Valmont's strongest criticism of her adherence to perpetual sadness:

> "But what is the use of all this sadness?" said the Baron, "let us sit in the sunshine, and enjoy the feast, it is time enough to weep at the funeral when it comes." — "But the difference is not great," said Mademoiselle la Harpe, "if I find pleasure in melancholy.(p. 128)."

Sophia's response is more measured and empathetic. Although she finds Clara's retirement "charming" and remains very interested in her "singular turn," she considers her "an object of pity," commenting to Isabella that "life should not be trifled away, not passed like a dream" (p. 129).

This principle is connected to Sophia's internalised Christian faith, which is most in evidence after she has been rescued by Chevalier St Louis from the dungeon in which she had been fettered by the Countess, and, still in a disordered state, placed in a carriage to leave the castle:

> All this appeared like an illusion. I felt no emotion in leaving a place so full of terrours for me, nor any desire to know whither I was going; my eyes distinguished no objects; I experienced only a wild confused sensation, like the images in a dream or delerium. I do not know how long I continued in this state; the windows being let down, the fresh air was of benefit to me; my recollection returned, and I looked up to Heaven with gratitude for my preservation.
>
> > "Father!" I cried, "unseen, yet felt by me! The cruelty of my fellow creatures shall not abate my hope in thee, in thy goodness and pity! In a dungeon, in solitude, amidst the most terrible evils, I found thy presence a support. I thank thee for the past, and feel confidence for that which is still to come!"
>
> After this short prayer I found my spirits revive (Vol. II, Letter LXIX, p. 165).

The supporting divine presence to which Sophia alludes in her prayer is the comforting dream she had experienced while semi-conscious in the dungeon, this being of "a bright form, like [her] guardian angel," interposing to prevent the Countess from forcing her into a grave, This vision had been followed by a voice telling her "to leave that dismal place" and finding herself at the entrance of a green valley, Elysian in its natural beauties and calm. There she had beheld her mother, "beautiful as [she] remembered her on earth, but with an inexpressible sweetness and benignity in her countenance." She had smiled and they had advanced to meet, but the scene had vanished as they embraced, and Sophia had awoken to the sound of footsteps and the arrival of the rescuing Chevalier. This dream is far from being incoherent, and Sophia obviously believes it to be a divine intervention. At various points in her letters she has alluded to religion as solace, most notably, when it was her lot to retire in the sadness of loss to her father's home in S____,[79]. There her solitude is punctuated by benevolent acts towards her tenants, and seeking comfort in religion as she attends confession at the Carmelite convent below her home.

On her return to her childhood home, Sophia, like Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert, is moved by the sight of the treed estate in which she, her family and friends had shared happy times:

> A winding path brought me to the orchard, I went into it for a few moments. The little stream of water at its foot murmured as it was wont to do in happier days; the rustic seat, under the shady chestnuts, remained in place; and the wood-pigeons that used to inhabit this retired spot were there still. A thousand tender recollections rushed upon my mind at sight of these well-known objects, I lost myself in gazing upon them; and fancy restored to me, for a few moments, the pleasures and friends of my youth, These dear friends no longer exist; but their image is indelibly engraven on these scenes in which they still live to me, and return, as it were, from the grave to sooth me with their imaginary presence (Vol II, Letter XLIX, p. 66).

However, the landscape itself here is not "spectralised" or "haunted" in the manner of Radcliffe when, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* she writes of Emily and Valancourt;s return to Emily's childhood home, La Vallée, that "the pleasant shades welcomed them with a thousand tender and affecting remembrances".[80] Rather than breaking down the distinction between mind and matter, subject and object in this way, Thomasin's focus remains on Sophia's interiority, and the projections of her "fancy" or imagination. Moreover, unlike Radcliffe's Emily and Ellena, Sophia does not find comfort for her fears and anxieties or fortitude in the sublimities and beauties of the landscape itself, of which there are very few descriptions in *Sophia St Clare.* Sophia's sensitivities evoke moral and spiritual rather than aesthetic responses.

Further allusions in the novel which function to flesh out Sophia's sensibility and character, are also indicative of Thomasin's classical reading and interest in literary debate. For example, she has Sophia find that the numerous abbés she sees in Paris, whom she had previously thought were "men of letters", are "but mere pedants, who frequent the society of ladies only to make a parade of their learning":

> I can hardly forbear laughing when one of them appeals to me on some disputed point, as to whether de la Motte or Dacier knew most of Homer" (Vol. I, p. 132) [81]

Other references, such as the daunting line from Dante, "*Lasciate speranza, voi qui y entrate",*[82] quoted by the nun, Agatha, in her elaboration of why Sophia should not take the veil (Vol. I, p. 28), Sophia's comparison of the grandeur of the colourfully crowded rooms at Versaiiles to "the magic castle in Ariosto, where friends and lovers met without knowing each other" (p. 134), and her reading in captivity of the tragic love story of Inês de Castro in *Lusiad* of Camöens (Vol. II. p. 120), again bespeak Thomasin's immersion in classical literature. She had evidently also read James Ridley's *The Tales of the Genii* (1764) (Vol. I, p. 151), while references to French literature include Sophia's viewing of Corneille's *Polyeucte* (Vol. I, p. 135) seeing which causes her to enter "with all [her] heart into the distresses of Pauline", and Molière's *Le Médicin malgré* (Vol. I, p. 144) the wit of which she does not enjoy.

Reception

Uncharacteristically for the times, as a Gothic novel *Sophia St Clare* drew considerable praise from its reviewers. The politically conservative *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* for December 1806 led the way with a four page review, beginning in its usual pompous, patriarchal vein:

> How far the merit of *Sophia St Clare* may tend to reclaim the honours of her degraded sisterhood, must now be the subject of consideration.[83]

Also in the manner of the day, the reviewers quoted lengthy passages: in this case from Letters LXIII – LXVII in Volume II, that they considered representative of "incidents and situations which are … new and striking" in the Gothic style, and "written with a masterly hand." (These take place after Sophia, at the command of Lusignan's wife, has been abducted from her father's home by some men led by a Chevalier St Louis, and held hostage in a nearby solitary castle under the watch of an unfeeling servant called Beatrix. Attentive readers will suspect correctly that this is the same solitary, prison-like castle visited by Lusignan with his father, ironically the one in which, in romantic reverie, he had imagined as a lovers' refuge from the world. Here Sophia has received visits from a supposed friar, Father Benedict, who has pressured her to take the veil before

eventually dropping his disguise, and confessing to a plot by the Countess to have her incarcerated within a strict Carmelite convent. Promoting himself anew as “a man of some consideration,” he has offered her love and safety if she will become his wife. Sophia is saved from his increasingly repugnant advances by the Chevalier St Louis who appears to carry authority in the castle. After her previous sufferings and disappointments, this further shock to her spirits brings on “a slow fever” and she is subsequently treated with “more indulgence” -- again due to the interventions of the now empathetic Chevalier St Louis who ameliorates the prescriptive surveillance imposed on her.)

The excerpts begin with the description of an incident which occurs one day while she is reading in a “small closet furnished with books and paintings,”has “sunk into melancholy,” and finds she has a visitor:

> Looking up I saw a lady who had entered, and stood earnestly gazing at me. She saluted me with politeness, but her manner betrayed confusion and embarrassment. I left the closet; but the lady followed me to my apartment, and entered into conversation. I found my situation was known to her; and she acknowledged having sought an opportunity of speaking to me. Observing my guest more attentively, I thought her extremely beautiful. She was pale and rather thin, but her eyes sparkled with uncommon lustre, and seemed by her penetrating glances to read into my soul. An air of melancholy dignity was spread over her whole person; and her voice sweet, yet mournful, touched the heart insensibly.
>
> The stranger, on her part, seemed not less earnestly to observe me; a faint flush crossed her cheek, and an emotion, she seemed struggling to subdue, appeared in her countenance as she gazed on me.

The quoted passages go on to reveal Sophia’s reservations about the stranger’s visits, the intermittent “wildness” she observes at times in her appearance, the revelation of her name but not her status. and the interventions and cautions regarding her visits made by the Chevalier, Yet Sophia’s empathy, desire to escape, and the allure of Adelaide’s proposition to that end fuel her melancholic credulity, only for her to discover that she has been duped by none other than Lusignan’s wife. For the *Anti-Jacobin* reviewers this “catastrophe” is a patently obvious outcome, but necessary to the moral of the story,

They also make the claim that some of the minor characters such as Father Nicholas, whose “eyes flashed fire” are “but faint reflections” of those found in Radcliffe’s *Italian.* However, they justly assert that the characters of Sophia and Lusignan are “ably supported” and find that of Adelaide equally original and consistent. The *style and language* (their italics) they also consider “infinitely superior, not only to those of common novels, but of many which are read as the first productions of the day.” Their highest praise, however, is for the novel’s sentiments, not one of which can they fault, and of which they again quote several examples, commenting that they are “the sentiments of a highly cultivated mind, expressed with force and elegance.”[84]

Almost as an afterthought, they comment that they “suspect” the author “from her frequent allusions to dreams,” to be “a little superstitious on this subject.” In fact, Thomasin was very interested in the subjective connection between waking life and dreams, as evidenced by her letter to Giddy after reading Darwin’s *Zoonomia.* There she opines that “it appears to me that the incoherence of dreams is well accounted for by the absence of volition, external stimuli … I am inclined to believe that Dreams are a species of Temporary Insanity as far as that may from proceed sensation & imagination alone independent of disorder in the system.”[85]Certainly the terrible dreams of the Countess de Lusignan following her crime are not independent of her disordered mind, but are symbolic of her evil intentions, guilt and fears of Dantean punishments beyond the

grave. They include instances of the terrors Thomasin had cited as her sublime imaginings in her letter to Giddy in response to reading Zoonomia — images such as falling from a precipice or being lost at sea in a fierce storm. Thomasin also has the Countess relate these dreams and wild imaginings in highly emotional and declamatory outpourings, a D'Arnaudisn style in evidence in the final chapters of *Lusignan or The Abbaye if La Trappe.* Both the anonymous author of that novel and Thomasin appear to have been influenced by D'Arnaud's use of the *sombre* or sublime gloom and images of terror to prompt moral and spiritual reflection.[86]

The *Anti-Jacobin* review ends with "words of praise for this "novitiate in literature" whom they believe to be "a young lady" and the anticipation of her "future excellence," a view shared by the critic for *Flowers of Literature.* [87] However, one wonders if the latter critic had actually read the novel as he claims that it "contains much interesting matter blended with many attempts at Radcliffian imagery, and a few grammatical errors."

More faithful to the general nature of *Sophia St Clare* is the categorical statement made by the reviewer for the *Critical Review* for April 1907:

> This novel is not of the common mass. The story is woven with sufficient intricacy to keep attention on the stretch; but they, who take it up merely for amusement, will be disappointed; its merit is of a higher tone: it abounds with sentiments, which exhibit much feeling and reflection.[88]

However, this reviewer then discourses on the plenitude of machinery for Gothic invention offered by historic monastic settings: "where monks and nuns dwell, every avenue is the vista of some new adventure," such that "in the regions of fiction, we do not wish that monasteries should ever be dissolved." There is no need for invocations of the supernatural. "All things are strange, yet there is no enchantment; all things are strange, yet there is no improbability." He concludes by leaving the misleading impression that *Sophia St Clare* is primarily a convent novel. Sophia's "excellent" "observations on the seclusion of a convent," he writes, are "a fair specimen of this anonymous writer's cast of thought and style of expression:"

> My imagination, always too active, had formed conceptions of the state of society here, very different from the reality. Little as I know of life, I did not suppose that any would willingly quit the world, till it had frowned upon them; nor, with my taste for solitude, could I suppose that an entire devotedness to it would be sought by any but the children of calamity. I expected therefore to find traces of energetic suffering strengthened into fortitude, of grief subdued by time, of despair softened into resignation, or brightened into hope by the benign power of religion. I looked for sensibilities that had changed their object, passions purified rather than extinguished, and a fervour of piety worthy the mind that had quitted the world to converse with its creator. But for these I looked in vain. The character of the nuns is for the most part of the common cast, which is easily assimilated, and the sameness of their life has nearly worn out the few distinguishing features. Many of these were devoted at so early an age as to have little idea of any other state. The voluntary seclusion of the rest seems to have been followed by distaste, and a vain longing after the world, which they had too hastily quitted. Time has calmed their regrets, and reconciled them to their situation, or taught them to endure it without repining. Where hope cannot enter, disappointment is unknown, and many of the pains of life are excluded with its pleasures. A calm reigns in the cloister, but it is the calm of indifference, or of stupidity. Here are no temptations to vice, but the virtues are not more real, or more perfect. Superstition supplies the place of piety, and apathy of philosophy (Vol I, Letter IV, pp. 13-15).

The last review, from the *Monthly Review* for August 1807 is too brief to do justice to large sections of the novel, but is more balanced, as well as cognisant of its likely reception by the general reading public:

> In this work the bad effects of monastic institutions on the happiness of their inmates are feelingly described, and the fatal consequence of groundless jealousy are forcibly represented, The construction of the tale is simple, but it is ably narrated; the language is natural and easy, and the sentiments are laudable:—had the

> story been less dolorous, particularly in the termination, the effect of the whole would have been more pleasing.[89]

Indeed, as I suggested earlier, its dolorous nature is the most plausible reason for *Sophia St Clare*'s lack of lasting appeal and virtual loss to posterity. The gloom and terror of its convent and incarceration scenes are well managed, and would not have been new to readers of Gothic fiction. However the final, established melancholy of its heroine, the D'Arnaudian dolour of its dispiriting ending and extended accounts of macabre dreams and reveries, which it shares in its final episodes with *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe,* are another matter. The wildly uncontrolled emotional outpourings of the Countess, in particular, might work in the performance of a play, but in epistolary form they detract from what is otherwise a short but ably written and interesting Gothic novel — one that still merits consideration, particularly by those interested in developments in Gothic fiction in Britain in the decade after Radcliffe.

NOTES

1 R. S. Woof, “Coleridge and Thomasina Dennis”, University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 1, October, 1962, pp. 37 – 54.

2 F. Doherty, in "Some first-hand impressions of Coleridge in the correspondence of Thomasin Dennis and Davies Giddy” Neophilologus, April 1979, Volume 63, 2, pp 300–308, p.301. Thomasin’s novel did not have this (or any) subtitle.

3 Polwhele’s *History* was first published between 1803 and 1808 with T. Cadell and Davis, the volume, “Language, Literature and Literary Characters” appearing in 1806. A second edition appeared in 1816: *History of Cornwall, Civil, Military, Religious,* (London: Law & Whittaker, 1816). See Vol. V, p. 203, footnote: “Miss Thomasin Dennis, a young lady in the neighbourhood of Penzance, daughter of Mr Alexander Dennis, a substantial and intelligent farmer, displayed very early a strong inclination to poetry – The best English authors were become familiar to her; and in a short time those of France were equally at her command: when wishing to help a brother in his labours at a grammar school, and accidentally meeting with some little assistance, she acquired Latin, then Italian and finally Greek so perfectly as to read the Tragedians without the aid of translation.” Polwhele, nowadays notorious for his condemnations of contemporary women writers and novelists in his politically charged satirical poem of 1798, “The Unsex’d Females”, makes no mention of Thomasin’s novel *Sophia St Clare.*

4 Thomasin Dennis was born in 1770, not 1771 as recorded by Davies Gilbert on the memorial in the Church of St Levan.

5 Davies Gilbert, *The Parochial History of Cornwall, Volume 3 (of 4)* Contributor: Mr Hals, Mr Tonkin, Project Gutenberg, release date October 23, 2019 [Ebook #60557] *https://www.gutenberg.org › files* 8.44pm, 14/11/19:

“Her superior genius displayed itself at a very early age, in reciting poetry from our best authors, and then in producing imitations of her own. “She lisped in numbers from her mother’s arms.” French was acquired with equal accuracy and facility; and then, observing that her eldest brother appeared to make an inadequate progress in Latin, occasioned by the entire want of attention on the part of the schoolmaster at Penzance, this young lady under eighteen studied a classic language for the mere purpose of helping forward her brother.

The celebrity which Miss Dennis had now acquired, brought her acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Hitchins, the learned vicar of St. Hilary, with the Editor of this work, and with several others, more or less scholars, from all of whom she received the praises due to her superior talents, and such instruction or assistance as they could afford, by lending books, or by indicating the most approved methods of proceeding; and with such slender help her progress was so great and almost unexampled, that not only were all the Roman authors soon read, but the Greek writers followed in a rapid succession, till Æschylus and Pindar became her familiar acquaintance. ….

Miss Dennis proved herself adequate to the composition of any work in prose, by publishing in 1806, at Mr. Johnson’s in St. Paul’s Churchyard, “Sophia St. Clare,” in name indeed a novel, but far superior in style of writing and in correctness of sentiment, to the fictions of the day. From the want of incident, however, similar to those which are characterized in the drama by producing stage effect, the work failed of becoming popular.”

6 *Critical Review,* 3rd ser, 10 (April 1807), pp. 402-03.

7 Charlotte Mackenzie, *Women Writers and Georgian Cornwall*, (Cornwall History, 2020), pp. 105–156: p, 128.

8 See Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1999) pp. 26-31 for details regarding these sojourns by both the girls with Bentley, and the Wedgwood connection.

9 Elisabeth Ingliss-Jones, “A Pembrokeshire County Family in the Eighteenth Century, Part I, National Library of Wales Journal, 1971, Winter. Volume XVII/2. Copied on to the pages of GENUKI with the kind permission of the National Library of Wales. https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/PEM/Jeffreyston/Allen

10 Henrietta Emma Litchfield, editor, *Emma Darwin, Wife of Charles Datwin, A Century of Family Letters*, Vol I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 143.

11 Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment Genres if Historical Wring in Britain 1740–1820,* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 123-24, 197-199.

12 James Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh, edited by his son, Robert James Mackintosh Volume 1 of 2,* 2nd edition (London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street), 1836, p.168

13 Patrick O'Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh The Whig Cicero* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p. 208.

14 Davies Gilbert, *The Parochial History of Cornwall* (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1836), section of St Levan. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/60557/60557-h/60557-h.h

15 Mackenzie, op.cit., pp. 116 -17

16 Ibid., p. 124.

17 Ibid., p. 117. According to Janet Todd, in her *Mary Wollstonecraft a Revolutionary Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 413, "Thomasin Dennis agreed in general with the system, while tartly remarking that the idea of inducing learning with rewards directly opposed the advice of Epictetus."

18 Richard Buckley Litchfield, *Tom Wedgwood, the First Photographer: An Account of His Life, His Discovery and His Friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Including the Letters of Coleridge to the Wedgwoods, and an Examination of Accounts of Earlier Photographic … ,* (London: Duckworth , 1903.), p. 65.

19 Lisa Ann Robertson, "Hints and speculation on Education": Tom Wedgwood's Materialist Pedagogy, *Romantic Circles,* Pedagogies Edition: "Romantic Education: Romantic Pedagogies and New Approaches to Teaching Romanticism," May 2016, p. 27. https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/romantic_education/robertson,

20 Nowadays scientists generally believe that 20 to 60 per cent of human temperament is genetically determined, but Tom believed a child's embodied mind to be like a Lockean *tabula rasa.* He appears not to have taken into account a child's hereditary and genetic characteristics, for example, B suffered from scoliosis of the spine, a deformity which she carried into adulthood, and resigned her to remaining a spinster.

21 Robertson, op. cit., p. 39.

22 Mackenzie op. cit., p.117

23 Ibid., pp. 117-18.

24 Richard Buckley Litchfield, op. cit., p. 165.

25 Mackenzie, op. cit., p.145.

26 Ibid., p. 121. Thomasin Dennis to Davis Giddy, dated 4 September – 4 October 1798.

27 Ibid, p. 142.

28 H. E. Litchfield, ed., *Emma Darwin, Wife of Charles Darwin A Century of Family Letters* Vol I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), p. 191.

29 Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgwood. *The Wedgwood Circle 1730-1897 Four Generations of Family and Their Friends* (London: Cassell Ltd., 1980), p. 96.

30 Coleridge's letter to Thomas Poole, June 1798, in Richard Buckley Litchfield, op. cit., p. 65.

31 Janet Todd, op. cit., p. 415.

32 For descriptions of Tom's continual search for treatment and remission from his physical condition which was accompanied by incapacitating debility and depression, see Richard Buckley Litchfield, op. cit. Tom had suffered what seem to have been migraine like headaches from the time he was 12, and the family doctor Erasmus Darwin had tried various treatments including opium. His son, Dr Robert Darwin (married to Sukey Wedgwood) and Thomas Beddoes also prescribed opium in the form of a mixture of laudanum and alcohol for their patients, who at times included Tom. Tom's consumption of opium was not helped by his friendship with Coleridge whom he'd first met in 1797, and who also became addicted to it. Litchfield states that by 1792, when Tom was 21, "the ill health from which he had more or less suffered from childhood had become so constant as to make him unfit for any serious or continuous work …" (p. 21). Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgwood, op. cit., p. 101, also allude to Tom's "nervous collapse" at this time when he suffered from "exhaustion, trouble with his eyesight and headaches so severe he would sometimes throw himself to the ground screaming". At one point, Tom himself listed his physical ailments as "Headache/Rheumatic pains in the legs/Insomnia/Debility" which he attributed to "Irresolution &

consequent Anxiety" (quoted from V&A/Wedgwood Collection E40-28515/14 by Lisa Ann Robertson, op. cit., p. 9 https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/romantic_education/robertson,

33 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 113. The letter is dated 23 June 1798.

34 Ibid., p. 124.

35 Ibid., p. 140.

36 O'Leary, op.cit., p. 52.

37 H. E. Litchfield, *Emma Darwin,* op. cit., p. 15. On her return to Cresselly, Jessie wote to Bessy (10 June 1799) as follows: "One thing that I do entreat, is that you take the greatest possible care of your dear self. Get rid if you can of some of the superabundant affection and feeling you have for your own family. At present I am sure that you have too much either for your own health or happiness."

38 Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgwood. *The Wedgwood Circle 1730-1897,* op. cit., pp. 116 -17. John developed a nervous condition in response to this downturn in his fortunes and the harsh advice by his brother-in-law, Robert Darwin, regarding it.

39 Ibid., p. 22.

40 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 122.

41 William Doggett, the steward of Eastbury's owner Lord Temple (who lived in Italy) had dismantled and sold off the materials from the mansion illegally in 1795 in the belief that his master would never return to England, and his theft would go undetected. When the Earl did return and Doggett was found out, the latter entered Eastbury House and shot himself. According to the locals, his ghost, which would perpetually appear at the gates to the Park, would enter the house and reenact the suicide.
https://www.opcdorset.org/TarrantFiles/T.Gunville/TarrantGunville%20History.htm

42 Mackenzie, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

43 Giddy did not share Thomasin's Christian faith and was despairing in June – July 1800 when both his career appeared to be stagnating and his health failing. See Mackenzie, op.cit., pp. 143: "Thomasin urged Giddy, who was probably a Deist, to become a Christian 'Even if it were a dream'", and p. 144: "[Giddy] seemed anxious about the future, burdened and dispirited, noting sardonically in reply to her nostrums about sunshine and faith ,

> Life is found scarcely supportable without the aid of Hope; apply therefore to some Fortuneteller, and obtain from him in exchange for a large fee some brilliant promise … Who would not prefer such a state to this, to dry investigation of truth, or the possession of knowledge?"

44 Mackenzie op. cit., p. 137.

According to Thomas Girtin in his *Doctor with Two Aunts A Biography of Peter Pindar* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 182, Wolcot was always willing to help and foster aspiring genius", and he had already been apprised of Thomsin's talent as a poet by Si Christopher Dawkins in the winter of 1797-8, when Dawkins had shown him Thomasin's long poem, "Ode to Philosophy", now extant.

45 The section of Coleridge's letter regarding Jos's "late governess" is quoted in Mackenzie, ibid., p. 125. Coleridge was necessarily deferential to Jos his patron: in January 1798 Jos and Tom Wedgwood had begun jointly giving him an annuity for life of £150 so that he would not take up a position as a Presbyterian minister and could devote his time to his writing and study. For all his moralising about Thomasin's melancholy, Coleridge was himself no stranger to flights of distressing fancy and periods of depression. See Richard Buckley Litchfield, op. cit., p. 66-67, for Thomas Poole's comments about Coleridge's "tumultuous feelings" and "untired imagination" at this time.

46 Mackenzie op.cit., p.138

47 Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 1757. Penguin Classics. 1998, p.86:

"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say,

whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime, that is it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."

48 Ibid., pp. 138-39.

49 Norton. op cit., p. 211.

50 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 139 – 40.

51 Ibid., p. 140. (Letter exchange of 14 February 1799 and 28 February 1799.)

52 Ibid., p. 141 (Giddy's letter to Josiah Wedgwood 5th of October 1799)

53 Ibid., p. 142 (Giddy's letter to Josiah Wedgwood of 25th March 1800)

54 H. E. Litchfield, op. cit., p. 10 -11.

55 Ibid., p. 22. This section of the letter is preceded by an ellipsis, suggesting that some text about Thomasin has been edited out.

56 Mackenzie op. cit., pp. 142-43. (Letter of Davies Giddy to Josiah Wedgwood 15th May 1800)

57 In *Sophia St Clare,* Vol II, Letter XXXVII, pp. 8-9, and Letter XXXVIII, pp. 10-12, Sophia becomes extremely anxious and fearful foe an extended period when she learns that Lusignan has a cold.

58 If so, as Mackenzie points out, (ibid., p. 144) there is a possible parallel in *Sophia St. Clare*, when the Baron de Valmont. a member of Madame Adhemar's circle and frequent visitor to her rural chateau, informs Sophia that Lusignan will set aside his own feelings for Sophia and marry an aristocratic woman.

59 Ibid., p. 146.Thomasin's letter to Giddy of 9th October 1800.

60 Ibid., p. 147. Thomasin's letter to Giddy of 4th November 1801.

61 Ibid., p.148

62 Ibid., p. 150.

63 Ibid., p.151.

64 See Thomasin's letter to Giddy of June 23, 1798, quoted in Woof op, cit., p. 38.
Richard C. Allen, 'Charles Lloyd, Coleridge, and "Edmund Oliver," *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol. 35, No 2, (pp. 245-294), p. 245:

> To Coleridge it was obvious that he was the model for Edmund Oliver's flight from Oxford and enlistment in the dragoons, romantic obsession with the anti-heroine Gertrude Sinclair, and confessions of sexual excess, drunkenness and opium eating … .

65 *Sophia St Clare. A Novel. In Two Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, 1806), *Gale Nineteenth Century Collections Online, European Lirerature 1790 = 1840: The Corvey Collection.* All references appear in the text.

66 Claudine Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin, *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* (La Haye: J. Neulme, 1733); François-Thomas-Marie de Baculard D'Arnaud, *Les Amans malheureux, ou Le Comte de Comminge* (La Haye, L'Esclapart, 1764).

67 Thomasin Dennis herself appears to have had a strong Christian faith, registered in devotional passages in *Sophia St Clare.* She also espoused the anti-Catholicism of her father, Alexander Dennis, who was not impressed by Napoleon's repatriation of French émigré priests to re-establish the Catholic church In France under the *Concordat* of 1801. See Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 127.

68 In *Lusignan or The Abbaye of La Trappe* "Adelaide" is the name given to Emily's mother Madame Clarival, to Lusignan's mother, the Duchess of Meronville, and also the long lost mother of Caroline de Montfort. It was

Madame de Tencin's choice of name for her heroine in *Mémoires du comte de Comminge.* In *Sophia St Clare* one of the correspondents of the Countess is a "Madame Clairval", obviously a variant on "Clarival."

69 Quotations from *Jerusalem Delivered* are used as chapter epigraphs on three occasions in *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe.* Although Radcliffe refers occasionally to Tasso as author, *Jerusalem Delivered* is not actually quoted or used in a substantial way in any of her novels.

In Tasso 's story, Armida is the daughter of Hidraotes, king of Damscus. She offers her services to the defenders of Jerusalem when it is besieged by the Christian crusaders under Godfrey de Bouillon. She goes into the Christian camp to lure away many of the principal knights, who are enthralled by her beauty. When she come across the handsome and honourable Rinaldo of Este, she intends to kill him but falls in love with him instead, and takes him to her enchanted island where he is held in thrall to her charms and forgets about the crusade. He is rescued by two knights who are his loyal companions. Their device of holding up before him a mirror of diamond forces him to see himself in an effeminately amorous and indolent state, and to return to being a warrior. Heart broken, Armida raises an army to kill him and defeat the Christians, but her army is defeated and Armida attempts to commit suicide, which Rinaldo just in time prevents.

70 Mackenzie, op.cit., pp. 147-8.

71 Valmont's worldly wit and humour could in part be based on the satiric humour of Thomasin's friend, Charles Valentine le Grice, who had left a romantic attachment abruptly in London in 1796 to take up a secure position in Cornwall as tutor to the son of the wealthy widow, Mary Nicholls, whom he married in 1799. The Christian name of le Grice's mother was "Sophia".

72 *the nuns in their white dresses glide like spectres* is used for a Gothic effect, hinting at the supernatural and superstition commonly associated with Roman Catholicism, rather than as a clue to the specific Order of the convent. Descriptions of French convents in English Gothic fiction of this time were rarely accurate. Nuns of the Carthusian Order wore a white habit, but theit Rule of austerity and silence makes is very unlikely that the convent in which Sophia has been placed is Carthusian.

73 Girtin, op. cit., p. 182.

74 Compare, for example, Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Penguin Classics. Vol. III, Chpt..V, p. 360), when she tells Montoni, who holds her captive in the castle of Udolpho, and is pressing her to sign over her estates to him, "the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause … I can endure with fortitude, when it is in the resistance of oppression". Also Ellena di Rosalba in *The Italian (*London: Penguin Classics, Vol. I, Chpt. VIII, p, 99) who, after being kidnapped on the orders of her suitor's mother, the Marchesa, and placed in the convent of San Stephano, tells the Abbess: "I am prepared to meet whatever suffering you shall inflict upon me; but be assured, that my own voice shall never sanction the evils to which I may be subjected, and the immortal love of justice, which fills all my heart, will sustain my courage no less powerfully than the sense of what is due to my own character".

75 Lusignan cites the example of a former secretary to his father, Velasquez, who conceiving that he had genius and aspired to be a to be a writer for the theatre, had received generous patronage, but had turned out to be a ne'er do well. This can perhaps be read as a sly dig at Coleridge's dependence on the Wedgwoods' patronage. From early in 1798 he had received a stipend of £150 annually from Jos and Tom for his livelihood and studies. On his return from studies in Germany, Thomasin, who had previously been critical of affectations in his five act play *Osorio,* read his translation of Schiller's play *Wallenstein* and thought it "dull", Neither play was performed or successful commercially. Coleridge's subsequent prevarications and absence of output also led to the disillusionment of Jos and other members of his family.

76 This passage is of interest not only because Lusignan's life long ambition appears to parallel the long standing ambition pursued by Davies Giddy. It is also the only passage in the novel to which the author adds an editorial footnote, viz

> This sentiment is false, and directly the reverse of the maxim, "Respect thyself." But it is the general principle of conduct with men of the world.

77 Hayes went into retirement for decade after the death from a fever of her fiancé John Eccles in August 1780. https://chawtonhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Mary-Hays.pdf

78 It is not evident what significance these cages hold, for Clara, but they may be symbolic of the view of Mary Hay's Emma Courtney that women are confined by society to "a magic circle" from which they are unable to break free.

79 Possibly Saulny in the Moselle region of France, as Sophia mentions vineyards and woods, and Lusignan, in Vol II, Letter LIII, p. 81, speaks of the Sophia's house as being not far from Vaux.

80 For my discussion of Emily St Aubert's aesthetic sensibility in this respect see *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* op. cit., pp. xvii – xviii.

81 In 1714 la Motte had significantly abridged and altered Homer's *Iliad* to suit himself and published it as a translation along with a *Discours* on Homer's lack of taste. With this Mme Dacier took issue, and defended Homer's text. In the controversy that ensued, la Motte provided flimsy riposte, but was supported by an abbé, Jean Terrasson, who argued that 18th century poets were infinitely superior to the ancients because of the development of the human mind that had occurred in the interim.

82 It., "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here".

83 *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine,* Dec. 1806, pp. 389 – 392, p. 390.

84 Ibid., p. 392.

85 Quoted in Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 138, from Thomasin's letter to Giddy of 26 December, 1798.

86 D'Arnaud's theory behind his *drame sombre i*s explicated in the *discours préliminaire* to his play *Les Amans malheureux, ou Le Comte de Comminge*, which is set in a vast *soutterain* or underground vault at La Trappe. While D'Arnaud's play was popular in France particularly in the early 1790s, it was little known across the channel in England, unlike Madame de Tencin's *Comminge* novella, parts of which were expropriated by Ann Radcliffe for the story of the nun Cornelia in *A Sicilian Romance.*

87 *The Anti-Jaconin Review,* op.cit.., pp. 392-93; *Flowers of Literature, for 1806; or, Characteristic Sketches of Human Nature, and Modern Manners* (an anthology) ed. Francis William Blagdon, (London: B. Crosby and Co., 1807), p. 513.

88 *Critical Review,* 3rd ser. 10 (Apr. 1807), pp. 402-03, p. 402.

89 *Monthly Review,* 2nd ser, 53 (Aug. 1807), p. 3.