SGF
STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

BOOK REVIEW

Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion. Edited by Angela Wright and Dale Townshend. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2016. 394 pages, £80.00.)

ISBN: 987-0-74869-674-1

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.18573/sgf.22

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD
Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

Date Accepted: 1 May 2018
ISSN: 2156-2407

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This recent collection of essays, *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, attempts to show the relationship between thematic and linguistic aspects of the Gothic and the Romantic. The collection arises from years of scholars believing these two words are oppositional and often confrontational and demonstrates in what instances these two genres comingle in literature throughout the world. Composed of eighteen essays by scholars at diverse universities and points in their careers, this book examines characteristics of "Romantic Gothic" in a multitude of ways, including theoretically, linguistically, scientifically, and internationally.

In Chapter 1, "Gothic and Romantic: An Historical Overview," editors Angela Wright and Dale Townshend state that the goal of this companion is to show that the "Gothic" and "Romantic" are not "oxymoronic, but complementary, symbiotic and, indeed, inseparable forms" (28). To commence discussion, they investigate two major works: Lyrical Ballads, by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and T*he Orphan of Tintern Abbey*, by Sophia F. Ziegenhirt. Further, the authors spend quite some time on several first-and second-generation Romantics, such as Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and how their "Romantic" poetry contains characteristics of the Gothic, even though they cold-shouldered the genre. Wright and Townshend also present information from several prominent works: Michael Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000), Robert Miles's *Romantic Misfits* (2008), Tom Duggett's 2010 *Gothic Romanticism*, among others. This familiarity with prior works on the topic leads readers to trust that the subsequent essays are reliable and accurate.

"Part One: Gothic Forms and Modes" consists of nine essays, ranging in topics including romance, theater, poetry, ballads, tales, oriental, and parody. Noticeably, many of the essays begin by examining a work by Horace Walpole, since many scholars consider his work to be the foundation of the Gothic. Chapter 2 is a compelling essay by Vincent Quinn on graveyard writing and the Gothic. Quinn is primarily interested in the intersection of the Gothic and eighteenth-century poetry, including poems set in graveyards about nightfall and mental disorder and those that personify extreme emotions (38). Chapter 3 explores the relationship between the Gothic novel and romance form. The author, Deborah Russell, shows how writers – particularly female writers – responded to Horace Walpole's attempt to synthesize these two genres of fiction. Much like the previous essay, Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of Walpole's play, *The Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy*, before moving on to "melodrama with Gothic inflections" (79), German and French drama, and the political implications of stage Gothic plot points. Within the first three essays in Part 1, readers are given a look at the Gothic through three major genres of writing: poetry, fiction, and drama.

Chapters 5 and 6 pair well because they both discuss the Gothic and Romanticism, but focus on first-generation and second-generation Romantics, respectively. The former, written by Joel Faflak, primarily delves into Gothicism in both Helen Maria Williams's works, "Part of an Irregular Fragment, Found in a Dark Passage of the Tower" and *The Bastille*, a Vision, and Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*. His essay is a conversation between these two women's works and other first-generation Romantics, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake. The latter, written by Jerrold E. Hogle, begins by stating the "point of passage between uses of Gothic" by first-and second-generation English Romantics is the "ghost story contest proposed by Lord Byron in June 1816 at the Villa Diodati…where he hosted Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin…and Dr. John Polidori, the keeper of the diary during that whole time" (112). Possibly one of the most prolific meetings

of authors in England during the time, the works produced in this week notably altered the meaning of Gothicism. Although Faflak spends time examining Mary Shelley's parents – William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (notable first-generation Romanticists) – he eventually ties everything back to second-generation writers.

The seventh chapter, "Political Gothic Fiction" by Robert Miles, argues that the Gothic novel is much more political than others but is not the same as the Jacobin/Anti-Jacobin novel. It is quite interesting that this essay comes directly after one comparing the connections and similarities between Mary Shelley and her parents; here, Miles discusses why a Gothic novel, like Shelley's, is not especially similar to her parents' Jacobin writings. Chapter 8 discusses shorter Gothic works, such as ballads and tales. Douglass H. Thomson and Diane Long Hoeveler's piece brings attention to several works that many other Gothic scholars overlook. Chapters 9 and 10 take this companion's showcase of Gothic essays to the next level in their ingenuity. The former, written by Peter J. Kitson, discusses "Oriental Gothic" and the latter, written by Natalie Neill, focuses on "Gothic Parody." Kitson's essay relies on phrases, characters, and stories that many readers will not be familiar with. However, Neill's essay is a bit more lighthearted. She begins with a discussion of satire and parody of Gothic stories and self-parody, then moves to show how Gothic parody is also "literary and ideological criticism," and finishes with Gothic Quixotism to show the "complexity and ambivalence of Gothic as a genre" (190, 201).

"Part Two: National and International Borders" contains four essays. They explore the Gothic as it travels around Europe, the United States, and other areas of the world. Chapter 11, "Gothic Borders: Scotland, Ireland, and Wales," shows how Gothic in the countries surrounding England was different than Gothic to which readers are accustomed to. Meiko O'Halloran notes that authors from these three countries "frequently drew on other moments of national conflict, problematic union and loss which were closer to home. Thus, their treatment of Gothic often engages with the long-term consequences of the Acts of Union," which bind the four countries (208). His essay is one of the most impressive in that it gives the readers access to long-forgotten authors from these countries. The following chapter, "Gothic Travels" by Mark Bennett, connects Gothic writing with travel-writing, placing the Gothic both culturally and physically on the map by focusing heavily on Ann Radcliffe, a prominent female Gothic author.

Chapter 13, "The Romanic and the Gothic in Europe: The Elementary Spirits in France and Germany as a Vehicle for the Transmission and Development of the *Fantastique*, 1772-1835" by Victor Sage, after a bit of historical information, ties E.T. A Hoffmann's more Gothic text, *Der golden Topf: Ein Mërchen aus der Neue Zeit*, and other stories and letters authored by him, with the French Romantics involvement in the "transmission of Hoffmann's *Fantastique* to France in the late 1820s" (260). Chapter 14 is unlike all the essays because Carol Margaret Davison takes readers across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States in her "American Gothic Passages." Early in her essay, she states, "given his innovative domestication and development of the form, Charles Brockden Brown is the era's greatest Gothic pioneer," which is also believed by many scholars (271). Brown's works show the themes and conventions of the Gothic, and he even published a more feminist Gothic, *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness*, in 1799. It seems fitting that the first American novel published in England was Gothic, since England is seen as a revolutionary force in the genre.

"Part Three: Reading Romantic Gothic" begins with "Gothic and the Language of Terror," by Jane Hodson, in which she shows that how interjections and silences are used in the Gothic, and states that these are "suggestive of some ways in which the language acts as an instrument of terror...but they do not represent an exhaustive list of Gothic tropes in English" (293). Her essay combines sources of literature, linguistics, and rhetoric, giving her a vastly different discussion point than the others in this companion. The next chapter, "Gothic Science," explores the intersection between the two, most notably shown in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and her father William Godwin's *Things as They Are*; or, *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Andrew Smith discusses alchemy, electricity, magnetism, and medicine throughout the piece, showing how Gothic writers use science as "a trope for rationality, moderation and creativity" (319).

Patrick R. O'Malley's "Gender and Sexuality in Gothic Romanticism" argues that the "fascination with the eroticised aesthetics of power as they are enacted in the enforcement and the dismemberment of gendered hierarchies and ideologies that the Gothic both produces and problematises its relationship to Romanticism" (325). Here, he shows that the two are not as separate as referring to them as "genres" portrays. They are actually quite entangled within the same texts, working together to create the text. Chapter 18, "Gothic Forms of Time: Architecture, Romanticism, and Medievalism" by Tom Duggett, is different from the other essays in this companion because it identifies instances of architecture in Gothic texts and Gothic architecture throughout England and how Shakespeare and his theatrical works were infused with Romance. The final chapter, entitled "Gothic Theology" looks at the ways Gothic and Romantic writers handled religion in their works, including Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, Charles Brockden Brown's W*ieland; or The Transformation*, and James Hogg's T*he Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner.* After an in-depth discussion of these works, Alison Milbank then moves to a discussion of the theological trope often found in

the Gothic and Romantic literature, the natural sublime, before concluding that both genres "share a commonality of theological project, in which they seek to find a way to connect self and world, to give a voice to nature" (374).

Overall, *Romantic Gothic* is an extremely comprehensive view of the topic. Essays are fairly spaced out in terms of topics, examples, and approaches to viewing the Gothic and Romanticism. Although many of the essays discuss the same works, they all do so in different ways, giving vastly different perspectives and voices to this diverse subject.