

Reviews

The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear by Dani Cavallaro (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), ISBN 0-826-45602-2, 230pp., £15.99 pb.

The Gothic Vision is an analysis of a diverse range of Gothic writings. Cavallaro refers to Gothic texts (and related fantastical narratives) as 'narratives of darkness' (vii) which in various ways provide us with an insight into either the workings of the mind or the cultural contexts in which such narratives were generated. I will return to this psycho-cultural argument in a moment, but first I want to outline the structure of the book as it gives a good example of the scope of its inquiry.

The book has five main parts respectively addressing the themes of Darkness, Haunting, Narratives of the Self, Child and Adult, and Monstrosity. These themes are further broken down into three sections so that, for example, the opening part on Darkness, after an introduction, consists of sections on Dark Places, Dark Times, and Dark Psyches. This type of structure helps Cavallaro to explore in some depth a set of related issues, and each main part in its own way leads into the one which follows it. It also enables Cavallaro to return to previously discussed texts and open them up in a slightly different fashion, and the Gothic tradition as mapped here is a very broad one indeed spanning Walpole to the present day fictions of Poppy Z. Brite and Anne Rice, as well as films such as *American Psycho* and *The Blair Witch Project*. It is this attempt to explore such an extensive range of texts which, for me, raised some problems which are in a perhaps oblique way related to the book's uneasy attempt to honour both psychoanalytical readings and more historicist interpretations.

There has been some debate recently about whether Gothic scholars really know their history, or indeed whether we really need to in order to decode the apparent narrative psychosis of much Gothic writing. Cavallaro repeatedly acknowledges the importance of considering Gothic texts within their historical and cultural contexts, and, indeed, has looked at all the right texts that enables her to do so. The analysis of the eighteenth century Gothic, for example, duly acknowledges the importance of Burke and Kant's theories of sublimity and how early Gothic writers responded to them. Cavallaro also emphasises at the outset that 'it is vital to acknowledge that the tropes of mental, bodily and ethical disintegration fostered by the Gothic are inextricably linked to specific ideological, historical and political circumstances' (vii), a claim reiterated throughout. Nevertheless, Cavallaro also emphasises the notion that the Gothic is founded upon fear and this introduces a slightly different argument

concerning how fear appears to be generated by, not simply represented within, Gothic texts. This is because Cavallaro seems to want to isolate fear as an emotion which transcends modes of representation, and accord it a privileged position because it has a positive effect on our emotional well-being and intellectual faculties. Cavallaro claims that:

Fear does not anaesthetize consciousness but actually sharpens it. It makes us aware that reality contains many more layers than common sense would have us recognize, and that some of these layers are enticing, though also menacing, precisely because we do not understand them. In experiencing dread, we are often torn between curiosity and anger: a consuming desire to know what is unsettling us, and a sense of irritation produced by the impossibility of final knowledge. Both emotions alert us to the submerged reality of ancestral appetites. (6–7)

In such claims about ‘ancestral appetites’ we are moving away from any real engagement with historical pressures and cultural contexts. To be fair, Cavallaro does argue that we need to understand how fear is developed in different ways in different contexts, but claims such as the above tend to negate not only ideological concerns but also literary ones. The wider, and unaddressed question, relates to the level at which this fear is manifested. Is it in the reader of such texts or the viewer of such films? If so, then we would need to generalise this but if we did then we would overlook how different readers and viewers engage with such texts at a variety of levels (after all as academics do we really get frightened by reading Gothic novels? Don’t we spend much of our time, dryly, considering certain modes of representation and more of less formalised encodings?). If fear relates to certain characters and how they are represented as responding to anxiety, then don’t we lose a sense of it all being a literary construction? In other words, in what way is fear ‘real’ in a literary context?

Cavallaro, despite the due allowance made for historical and cultural issues appears to be more at home with psychoanalytical interpretations. The very breadth of texts discussed here makes it impossible to construct a truly convincing history of the Gothic, at least not in 230 pages. To give a typical example of how a broad range of texts are brought into alignment, on pages 126–7 the Freudian, argument makes reference to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Lady Oracle*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *The Narrative of Gordon A. Pym*, *The Green Mile*, *The Woman in Black* and *False Memory*. I have to say that this rapid referencing often made the book exhausting to read. That said, the use of certain psychoanalytical theories is, revealingly, often masterful and impressive; the final section on ‘The Subject’ and monstrosity, for example, is an admirably clear exposition of Kristeva.

This is a book which I will recommend to undergraduates as I think that it raises, sometimes accidentally although more often not, some interesting questions about the Gothic and how we read such texts. It is also a very clear, well-written, book and I think that undergraduates will find it a very helpful guide to some of the main issues involved in Gothic scholarship.

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The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories edited by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ISBN 0-192-84085-1, 524pp., £9.00 pb.

First published in 1986, *The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories* has now been reissued. Since the most recent story, T. H. White’s 1981 ‘Soft Voices at Passenham’, was in any case already five years old at the time of the first publication, and since ghost stories are to some

extent an inherently backward-glancing form, it has not really dated, except for the hilarious sentence in the introduction that in the English ghost story those who encounter ghosts are usually 'middle-class persons of independent, if modest, means: academics, writers, retired professionals, all of them people who might be expected to have leisure enough for the story to develop' (xv). I doubt that even in 1986 academics still counted among the leisured classes, but even if they did then, any ghost unwise enough to visit one now would probably find itself hit over the head with a lethal combination of the Roberts Report and a QAA self-evaluation document.

The passage of time has, however, undoubtedly made it easier for us to see that what is going on in this selection is not entirely what the editors think (or profess) is going on. Towards the close of the introduction, they declare that

In the present collection we have tried to hold five broad criteria in mind: each story should reveal to the reader a spectacle of the returning dead, or their agents, and their actions; there must be a dramatic interaction between the living and the dead, more often than not with the intention of frightening or unsettling the reader; the story must exhibit clear literary quality (not as subjectively vague a condition as it might sound); there must be a definable Englishness about the story, by which we generally understand English settings, English characters and institutions, and qualities (both stylistic and thematic) representative of the English ghost-story tradition as a whole; and finally, for not entirely practical reasons, the story must be relatively short. (Introduction, xvi)

Of these criteria, I would say that only the last, that of brevity, has been satisfactorily met, and that the penultimate, the emphasis on Englishness, is a definite red herring. A. E. Coppard's 1933 'Ahoy, Sailor Boy!', with its mulatto hostess and its reference to President Roosevelt, does not strike me as distinctively English; A. N. L. Munby's 1949 'An Encounter in the Mist' is set wholly in Wales, and V. S. Pritchett's 'A Story of Don Juan' (1952) wholly in Seville, with no English characters of any sort; and Somerset Maugham's 1922 'The Taipan' arguably reflects only obliquely on Englishness.

The real figure in the carpet here, it seems to me, is gender. In H. Russell Wakefield's 1929 'Old Man's Beard', Sir Perseus Farrar, 'the greatest authority in Europe on that awful and occult business, the female nervous system' (342), observes of supernatural phenomena in general that 'It is significant that they seem to lose their force with the donning of trousers' (349). It is true that Sir Perseus is referring here to trousers as civilised rather than savage dress – that is, as distinguishing the European male from the 'savage' male – but nevertheless, as his profession indicates, gender is also an important factor in his assessment. (It is notable in this story, for instance, that though it is a man who has committed the crime, it is a woman who is haunted, and whose condition is thoroughly pathologised by those around her.) The differing reactions of the different genders form a prominent part in stories ranging from E. Nesbit's 1893 'Man-Sized in Marble', where the wife dies of terror while the husband is merely frightened, to W. W. Jacobs' 1902 'The Monkey's Paw', where husband and wife react very differently to the death of their only son, to May Sinclair's eerie 1922 'The Victim', where the psychologies of the lead male and female characters are troublingly and rather cynically probed.

What of the editors' other criteria? It certainly is true that there is an actual, definitive ghost in each of the stories, with the possible (or perhaps probable) exception of Henry James' 1896 'The Friends of the Friends', which, in typical James style, commits itself to nothing (and also, incidentally, seems to me by far the single most impressive and accomplished story in the collection). I am sorry to report, however, that I did not find even the most indubitable of the ghosts remotely frightening, or even unsettling. In fact, there is something rather deadening

about the cumulative reading of ghost stories; since I knew that a ghost was bound to appear, I felt positively grateful to those spectres who got on with it and came and did their haunting nice and early. It is perhaps something of a paradox that ghost stories, which seem as if they ought to belong to a classically Gothic genre, are yet rarely Gothic in effect, because they tend to insist so absolutely and so comfortably on a rigorous divide between the material and spiritual worlds rather than any kind of troubling blurring. In this collection, one of the few exceptions to this rule is Mary E. Braddon's 1879 'The Shadow in the Corner', in which we are explicitly and intriguingly told that 'It was not the ghost of the man's body that returned to the spot where he had suffered and perished, but the ghost of his mind – his very self; no meaningless simulacrum of the clothes he wore, and the figure that filled them' (64).

In general, however, these stories exhibit little probing of what a ghost might actually be. Rather they resemble the classic detective novel in their loving, detailed descriptions of 'traditional' English living. This is a phenomenon particularly striking in the story which opens this volume, Sir Walter Scott's 1829 'The Tapestry Chamber', in which the explosive plot material of incest and murder is consigned to less than a sentence, while the narrative lavishes attention on the tensions between the architecture of England's battle-torn past and the urbane Augustan present of the setting. Moreover, the editors declare it to be axiomatic that ghost stories should suggest rather than specify their horrors, so it is thus doubly typical that the same mixture of nostalgia for and horror at the past can also be found in J. S. Le Fanu's excellent 'Squire Toby's Will' (1868), Braddon's 'The Shadow in the Corner', which is set in a house 'substantially built in the days when there was no stint of stone and timber' (51), and Edith Wharton's 1930 'Mr Jones', where the house is as important as any of the characters, in almost something of the spirit of a home improvement TV programme. What seems to be suggested by this collection, then, is that the ghost story is a comfort genre rather than a troubling one.

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Fatal Women of Romanticism by Adriana Craciun (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ISBN 0-521-816688-8, xviii + 318pp., £45 hb.

The publication of Adriana Craciun's *Fatal Women* is a welcome event for all those working on British women writers of the early Gothic era. In clearly focused and densely researched chapters on Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, Mary Lamb, Charlotte Dacre, Anne Bannerman, and Letitia Landon, Craciun develops her thesis about the cultural and literary ambience in which these women were working: 'women's violence in the contexts of larger political, ideological, and even medical debates specific to the Romantic period, to demonstrate that women's inherent nonviolence was often a necessary feature in arguments for "natural," corporeal sexual difference, and that this two-sex system was by no means universally and unquestioningly accepted as unchanging by either women or men' (10). Working almost as a 'third wave' feminist literary critic, Craciun corrects the older generation of feminist literary critics who have analyzed the period through either a gender-complementary model (*mea culpa!*) or through a reading of femme fatales as misogynist male fantasies (*mea culpa* again). Given that Craciun's ambitions are large in this book, she admirably fulfills them. This book is an impressive achievement, a study that provides solid and mature scholarship on these authors, their *milieux*, their major works, as well as the conflicted ideologies of the female body and mind that pervaded the period.

To begin: Craciun seeks to correct the tendency of feminist literary critics to avoid trying to explain, let alone understand, the depiction of women's violence in female-authored texts. Not a pretty subject to be sure, but what is one to do with the murders and worse that occur in women's poems, novels, and dramas? And what can one possibly say when female characters kill each other? Traditionally, one has been forced to fall back on a few standard explanations: women internalizing the violence perpetuated on them by men or women lashing out at their oppressed posture by seizing on the opportunity to prey on another, even weaker, woman. Craciun takes on this unpleasant – Gothic – subject and brings to bear largely Foucauldian theoretical and critical tools: 'women's writing thus needs to be seen within this larger field of power, in which resistance is not constituted by "the simple absence or inversion of normative structures," but as a "heterogeneity – the overlapping of competing versions of reality with the same moment of time"' (Biddy Martin quoted in Craciun, 7). Although she is adamantly opposed to using psychoanalytic theory (as essentialist and universalizing), Craciun's critical methodologies are interesting and illuminating, particularly when she reads Landon's works in the context of medical theories of miasma and death in the air around graveyards.

As there is much valuable material in this book I will proceed chapter by chapter in my commentary. In Chapter One, 'The Subject of Violence: Mary Lamb, femme fatale', Craciun examines the matricide Mary Lamb and how her killing of her mother can be understood in relation to her later writings (largely for children). This for me was the weakest chapter in the book, and, indeed, almost absurd. In brief, Craciun's argument is that Mary Lamb 'had suffered years of neglect by her mother' (21) and so she killed her. She was then psychically free, able to write, somehow having transformed a knife into a pen:

Her crime was liberatory in two senses – it freed her from the excessive burden of caring for her sick mother (who appears to have been both cruel and neglectful), and marked the beginning of her career as writer, since as far as we know she did not write before the murder. Her dual positions as author of the deed of murder, and author of texts, are thus inextricably bound. (38)

This statement was by far the most insensitive in the book, for it attempts to rationalize the murder of one's mother as just another writerly strategy. More tellingly, it attempts to celebrate women's violence and that I found disturbing. Also, when the charitable attitude to Lamb's matricide is to understand it as a manifestation of mental illness, Craciun demurs, perhaps because of her suspicions about psychoanalysis. She goes so far as to say:

I am not arguing that Lamb's violence was an indication of her 'free will,' her intentional and transgressive agency as an 'autonomous' subject. But neither can I accept modern diagnoses that emphasize her lack of responsibility (the most popular being bipolar or manic depressive disorder), for they represent our current medical and often anesthetizing approach to such disturbing behavior, and in my opinion cannot be offered (as they now are) as helpful explanations; like the explanations of possession, or unreason, or of moral failure, they reveal little about Mary Lamb, and much about the current dominant construction of 'mental illness' and its ideological interests. (35)

There is no need to belabour this point, but perhaps the choice of Mary Lamb as a 'femme fatale' would have been more successful if she had killed someone other than her mother. And to see the murder of anyone (let alone one's mother) as an act that helps one find one's vocation in life is a logic that I do not understand:

Lamb specifically admonishes herself for being overcome by a 'forcible impulse' and expressing anger in a specific way – *while writing*. Her pen runs away with her in 1796, leaving Lamb at once the victim of a demonic power (either of 'mental illness,' or of language), and a dangerously

aggressive writer *and* murderer, who recognizes the dangerous affinity between pen and knife. We cannot separate the writer of children's verse from the murderer, precisely because Mary Lamb tried to do just that for fifty years, and . . . found that she could not. (36; italics Craciun)

If women need to kill their mothers to write children's verse, then I would not be the only one, I think, to find no cause for celebration in either the act or the verse.

Chapter Two, 'Violence against difference: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, and women's strength', was a solid examination of the various discourses about women and gender that emerged from the French Revolution. Most tellingly, Craciun places Wollstonecraft alongside Sade, examining her 'Sadean speculations', as well as 'feminism's antihumanist inheritance', – unpopular topics indeed (75). But, as I said earlier, this is a bold book that takes risks. At times, as in the Lamb chapter, the risks are not worth the effort, but with Wollstonecraft, Craciun is on solid ground. In Chapter Three, "'The aristocracy of genius': Mary Robinson and Marie Antoinette", she continues to pursue a contrary route, again with interesting results. This chapter attempts to explain why Robinson, a decidedly middle-class woman with upwardly mobile class aspirations, would choose to champion Marie Antoinette as a wrongfully martyred queen and mother. Craciun examines a number of poems, and mentions the major novels (more detailed discussion of these novels would have been helpful). She moves to claim that Robinson attempted to establish a 'feminist meritocracy' (91), that would challenge the monarchy by critiquing 'class and sex privilege' (97). This 'Republic of Letters' that she envisioned would place its trust in the growing print culture's 'liberating and democratizing potential' (97), and yet somehow still hold on to Marie Antoinette as its female figurehead: 'Robinson's lament of Marie Antoinette is a lament of the larger exclusion of women from public discourse, and of women poets from due public acclaim' (105).

Chapter Four, 'Unnatural, unsexes, undead: Charlotte Dacre's Gothic Bodies', has been published earlier in her introduction to the Broadview edition of Dacre's *Zofloya*, as well as in Craciun's *ERR* article, but it is useful to have all this material together. Dacre is an important female Gothic writer, and we have here not simply a discussion of *Zofloya*, her best known novel, but also her *The Passions*, a novel that deserves to be taught in women's novel courses (alongside *Sense and Sensibility?*). Again, I do not agree with Craciun's attempt to rehabilitate Dacre or to celebrate the violence in her texts, but I appreciate and admire her scholarship and research on Dacre's life. And there is much to explain in Dacre, not the least is her use of a black slave as the body that the devil assumes on earth and her depiction of a murder of one (small) woman by another (much larger one). In order to explain these violently racist and sexist actions Craciun uses medical discourse, this time Bienville's *Nymphomania*, in order to claim that 'Dacre's literary reworking of such misogynist medical discourse offers an instructive example of how women's imaginative representations of bodies can transcend the passionlessness or reticence often ascribed to them by modern critics' (121). I would need to see very clear evidence that Dacre ever read Bienville, but be that as it may, Craciun does mount the best (and most elaborate) defence she can for Dacre's over-the-top works: 'Dacre, unlike Bienville, is precisely the sort of novelist she warns us against, her narratives of sexually transgressive women who destroy properly asexual women and are themselves punished are, in fact, sophisticated accounts of the discursive construction of *both* natural and unnatural women and their sexuality' (135, italics Craciun). Again, this is a matter of taste ultimately. As someone who has read Dacre, I do not find 'sophistication' in her works, nor can I be persuaded that I am missing a subtle critique of a medical tract. I find the chapter interesting and am particularly intrigued by placing it alongside *Zaflora, or the Generous Negro Girl* (1804), but Dacre cannot be rehabilitated

for me, nor can the murder of Lila by Victoria be explained away by claiming, as Craciun does, that 'the true subversive potential of Dacre's heroines lies in their mutual annihilation' (153). Lila did not kill Victoria; it was the other way around. Nor did these murders occur simultaneously (as you will recall, Victoria is hurled into the pit of hell by her black lover when he reveals himself as Satan). Again, in her bid to rationalize women's violent acts Craciun has put herself in yet another morally awkward position.

In Chapter Five, "In seraph strains, un pitying, to destroy": Anne Bannerman's femme fatales', Craciun hits her stride, and this chapter is one of the two strongest, largely because she is not trying to rationalize some outrageous act of mayhem. True, Bannerman's prophetesses have a tendency to kidnap men, while her mermaids and dark ladies are constantly returning from the dead to seek some sort of justice or vengeance, but there is little overt violence and hence no critical acrobatics needed. The strengths of this chapter are exactly the strengths that Craciun brings to a project. The research is original, meticulous, on-site, and thoroughly incorporated into her readings of the poems.

Her final chapter, "Life has one vast stern likeness in its gloom": Letitia Landon's philosophy of decomposition', is another very strong chapter and again it seems not to have been published previously. By closely examining the medical discourses that arose out of the outbreak of Asiatic cholera in 1831–2, Craciun is able to place Landon's works in a very relevant historical, medical, cultural, and moral ambience. Quoting from newspaper articles and medical works of the day, she establishes the climate of fear that permeated this culture, explaining at the same time the anti-materiality and anti-naturalism that run throughout Landon's poetry and novels. Her placement of Landon as a corrective to Wordsworth is particularly useful and her discussion of Landon's novel *Ethel Churchill* is valuable and interesting on a number of points. For Gothicists, one comment is particularly telling: 'a poetics of decomposition and decay, distinct from that of ruins and fragmentation' has yet to be written (248).

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The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells by Linda Dryden (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), ISBN 1-403-90510-X, 220pp., £45.00 hb.

Gothic fiction's relationship with literary modernism and cultural modernity has been the subject of some excellent recent scholarship, not least a number of articles in *Gothic Studies* or Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace's *Gothic Modernisms* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Investigations of this new territory have not only laid bare the extent to which Gothic has been influential beyond its accepted stronghold on the *fin de siècle* but have also led to a reinvigoration of the debate over definition and categorisation. Consequently, contemporary scholarship in this area has had two related aims: first, to reveal the pervasiveness of the Gothic in modern literature and culture and thereafter to recalibrate what we presently consider Gothic to be. Linda Dryden's *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* appears at face value to fall clearly within this remit yet it requires only a cursory perusal of her chosen topics to realise that the book is of an altogether different type: the introductory synthesis of central Gothic tropes and texts.

To this end Dryden ably illustrates the critical consensus on Gothic fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Organised into six chapters, three on the Gothification of culture and society and one each on the work of Stevenson, Wilde and Wells, the

book pivots on the notion of the double as both a fictional device and a social construction. Dryden's own conclusion articulates this position well:

The modern Gothic and the literature of duality in Stevenson, Wilde and Wells are more than fictional fantasies. At the *fin de siècle* Gothic representations of duality and horror are expressions of metropolitan anxieties springing from the lived experiences of the late-Victorian public. (188)

Dryden's arrival at such a conclusion comes first from a broad-based analysis of *fin de siècle* degeneracy, Gothic literary history, and the City of London, and then from detailed close readings of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Wells' scientific romances.

These choices of text and context should make it clear that this is no venture into new arenas. Yet it is initially a surprise to find that *Modern Gothic* takes such an introductory approach. The book's cover, the foreword, and at times Dryden's introductory remarks, all signal a work of innovative scholarship rather than a survey aimed at those in the preliminary stages of research into the Gothic. This is an intriguing paradox, and one that leads to several questions related to the publication of academic monographs.

The dust jacket argues that Dryden's work 'offers refreshing new analyses,' a view reiterated by Dryden in the concluding pages of her introduction where it is argued that the book provides 'new perspectives from which to view some of the popular literature of Stevenson, Wilde and Wells' (18). To this end, Dryden also offers a contrast between *Modern Gothic* and previous scholarship:

The Gothic novels and stories of Stevenson and Wilde and the scientific Gothic novels of Wells have often been discussed together in previous critiques: what distinguishes *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* from other discussions is the way in which these works are linked through their common cultural history. (18)

This is all perfectly reasonable; it would be absurd to suggest that introductory works cannot also be innovative in their critical analyses. However, this is not one of these works. Rather it is a series of chapters that surveys a period of literary history already extensively investigated by other scholars and, more importantly, that makes extensive use of their critical readings in forming the basis and direction of its cultural and textual analysis. In sum, this work is less the 'cultural archaeology' (18) that Dryden maintains is the foundation of her new historicist approach and more an attempt – and a good one – at critical archaeology.

Nevertheless, it is not simply that the introductory comments are not explicit enough in defining the aims and methodology of the book as a whole. There is, I would argue, a larger issue at stake in maintaining that the study of canonical Gothic fictions within commonplace paradigms of late nineteenth century cultural criticism is either unique or groundbreaking. Inherently *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* is conservative in its treatment of modern Gothic, neither introducing us to neglected works of Gothic fiction nor exploring new contexts within which it was produced and consumed. Yet the various introductory commentaries attempt to persuade us that this originality is indeed present. Dryden seems to have been as much the victim of this persuasion as her readers. In several of the chapters, and most explicitly in the extended discussion of Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, there are interesting diversions into areas of Gothic criticism that would benefit from further analysis. One such example is Dryden's comparison of Stevenson's work with that of Arthur Machen. Machen has been one of those neglected Gothic writers whose work requires scholarly focus, especially as novels such as *The Great God Pan* and short stories like 'The Three Imposters' are beginning to gain critical currency in Gothic studies broadly. However,

the readings of Machen offered here act as little more than addenda to the canonical fiction in view. The inclusion of Machen in the first instance and the continual return to his work as a touchstone for many of the other fictions suggests that Dryden's interest in him is more than as a useful counterfoil to Stevenson, Wilde or Wells. Why, then, not devote a greater portion of the book to an account of Machen's place as a Gothic writer within the Gothicized cultural milieu of the *fin de siècle*?

Of course it might well be that Machen's work would sit uncomfortably in an introductory work on late Victorian Gothic fiction. However, as the book is at pains to disguise that introductory status this seems somewhat unlikely. It is more likely that Machen suffers from a reproachable lack of name recognition. With far less market value than Stevenson, Wilde and Wells, Machen is the long shot in a publication strategy that often backs the favourite. It seems fair, then, to believe that the conservatism of *Modern Gothic* may well reflect present publishing practice as greatly as it does the interests of the author. This is a pity in the present instance as it appears that the last few years have witnessed an increase in Gothic scholarship and a concomitant rise in undergraduate and postgraduate courses dedicated to its study. Indeed, Palgrave Macmillan have obviously recognised this already, as their recent doublings of Gothic with other literary topics (*Gothic Modernisms*, *Empire and the Gothic*) bear witness. It is disappointing, then, that they failed to reflect on this in commissioning Dryden's work and missed an opportunity to promote greater innovation in Gothic studies.

These important issues aside, *Modern Gothic* still stands as a competently researched and dynamically written introduction to Gothic fiction at the close of the nineteenth century. New researchers in this area of literary production will find a great deal of benefit in Dryden's stylish and commendably lucid discussions of the key debates at the *fin de siècle*. The breadth of coverage is indicative of the tremendous amount of material that Dryden has amassed and synthesised into succinct and direct sections. This is nowhere as apparent as in the chapter dealing with London as a city of 'doubles' both real and imagined. In the space of some twenty pages Dryden discusses Jack the Ripper, non-fictional accounts of social deprivation, actual social conditions, the role of the flâneur, the importance of the crowd, the place of women in urban environments, London's geography (spatial and cultural), and the city as imaginative construct. Even if the broad brush of this approach tends to deny finer detail at times there remains a remarkable amount of useful information that both highlights the diversity of Gothic studies and suggests the many different avenues open for further study.

This scholarly generosity also marks out the chapters specifically dedicated to the fictions of Stevenson, Wilde and Wells. Of these the weakest is the chapter on Wells which tries, very simply, to do too much and ultimately stands as a rather piecemeal account of Wells' Gothic influences. The focus on a single text in each of the other chapters is a wiser choice and these chapters benefit from a mooring of the varied contexts within one fiction. In her analysis of *Jekyll and Hyde* Dryden steers clear of the modernism of Stevenson's novella (already admirably defined by critics such as Alan Sandison) and instead focuses her attention on an eclectic range of metropolitan-related subtexts from the homosociality of Jekyll's world to Stevenson's treatment of streetlights. These subjects have been discussed before, again by Alan Sandison (homosociality) and also by Linda Neath (lighting), but Dryden combines them neatly in a larger framework of urban Gothic. The same attention to the urban is apparent in the reading of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where a clever, if brief, analysis of Gray's murder of Basil Hallward looks less at the Gothic frisson of the event itself and more at Wilde's description of the sounds of the London streets.

Critically robust when involved in textual analysis, *Modern Gothic* is weaker on issues of genre and definition. While the preliminary discussions usefully introduce several different

critical opinions on the nature of Gothic, the book as a whole relies too heavily on Julian Wolfreys' controversial definitions. This would be less problematic were they placed within a discursive interrogation of the defining features of Gothic rather than implicitly accepted as the critical mainstream. Wolfreys' view of Gothic as 'everywhere . . . but never in the same form' (110) is a far cry, say, from Kelly Hurley's and Robert Mighall's interpretation of Gothic as a genre that moves through a variety of incarnations, yet Dryden puts these together as though they articulate a consensus. Indeed, Wolfreys' views make a mockery of genre boundaries and definitions altogether, but they do make it easier to attribute Gothic characteristics without the critical sharpness from which genre studies benefit. Dryden is guilty of blunting her definition of Gothic on Wolfrey's opaque scholarship: Wilde is seen to be Gothic because he, unlike Stevenson, is comic rather than serious. The paucity of this analysis can be contrasted with a much more detailed acknowledgement of Wells' Gothic inheritance in the following chapter, a reading that draws on the work of Fred Botting and which benefits from his refined and detailed praxis.

That *Modern Gothic* is an introductory survey of prevailing critical opinion should be even clearer in registering that the analysis is stronger when the critical foundations are well built and weaker when they are shoddy. Yet for all this, Linda Dryden has constructed a useable, accessible and spirited critique that will be of immense value to those wishing for an introduction to late Victorian Gothic. If only it had said so.

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The Medusa Reader, edited by Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), ISBN 0-415-90098-0, xviii + 310pp., £16.99 pb.

In this much needed anthology, Marjorie Garber and Nancy Vickers artfully confront the icon of dangerous looking. The extracts are arranged chronologically from ancient legends told by Homer and Hesiod *et al* to relatively recent discourses of feminist empowerment, as in Emily Erwin Culpepper's essay entitled 'Ancient Gorgons: A Face for Contemporary Women's Rage' (1986). Feminists have found, within the stories of the Medusa, narratives of rape and ravishment, retribution and revenge along with mirrors of themselves. As May Sarton writes in her poem 'The Muse as Medusa' (1971): 'I turn your face around! It is my face. / That frozen rage is what I must explore' (108).

That the Medusa is wooed by the poets is not surprising, considering that she gave birth to Pegasus, the poet's muse. Among the Medusa poems included here are Percy Bysshe Shelley's tribute to Leonardo da Vinci's Medusa in Florence, which he caresses as 'Tempetuous loveliness of terror' (76) and Sylvia Plath's spiky 'Medusa' (1962), which begins: 'Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs. . . / You house your unnerving head – God-ball / Lens of mercies' (102).

The inter-disciplinarity of this collection reflects the different faces of the Medusa. Lizbeth Goodman's 'Who's looking at Who(m): Re-viewing Medusa' (1996), situates the Medusa within performance art as a metaphor for the transformative power of women by drawing on Dorothea Smart's one-woman show 'Medusa'. Smart interprets the Medusa's snaky locks as a black woman's 'nappy' hair, which serves as a metonym for the lesbian, 'outsider' or black woman, who have been threatening to certain white men. More intrepid males (since no woman has been petrified by the gorgon) include artists and fashion designers from Giorgio Vasari to Gianni Versace. In the latter's 'The Versace Moment' (1996), the Medusa is shown

as a haute-couture designer logo, in stark contrast to Jo Springer's homely instructions on embroidering your own Medusa to make an 'attractive pillow' (122) design. Less *heimlich* is Freud's famous essay 'The Gorgon's Head' (1940), written in 1922, and published after his death. Here, Freud argues that the male subject, on seeing the Medusa, experiences her petrifying agency, as the stiffening (*Starrwerden*) of horror at the sight of the female genitalia that results in an erect penis, which reassuringly counters the incumbent fears of castration. The snakes around the head have also been interpreted as a plethora of penises, giving rise to the notion of the phallic mother. According to Freud, this is the petrified male child's defensive fantasy against the fear of being castrated.

The Medusa as destroying mother is in evidence throughout, as in Sarah Kofman's feminist reading of Freud's Medusa, where she adds that the sight of female genitals both 'awaken and appease' (167) the male castration anxiety. Another contributor, Erich Neumann, draws on the Jungian view of the terrible mother by associating the archetypal Gorgon with the 'castrating' womb. For Philip Wylie, in an extract from his *Generation of Vipers* (1942), the real horror is 'momism', the cult of the American mother, who is part Medusa in disguise even though as he points out: 'no Gorgons are ever clearly seen, let alone slain, in our society. Mom dishes out her sweetness to all fugitives, and it turns them not to stone, but to slime . . . I give you mom. I give you the destroying mother' (91).

An extract from the work of C. D. Daly would have provided a useful addition to the material on Freud. Daley explains the horror associated with the Gorgon's head with reference to the *vagina dentata*. He also challenges Freud's view of the father as the source of the castration complex by arguing that it is the mother and her power which need to be controlled through menstrual and incest taboos. This could have been related to the early cult of menstruation associated with Athena who, along with Medusa, had been originally part of a three-fold female deity. Even though there is a strong recent feminist presence in the volume, not sufficient emphasis is given to the earlier female-centred myth of the Medusa and the gestalt shift, which led to her being gorgonised by Athena, who became integrated within patriarchal mythology. The crawling horror head may also be seen as emblematic of the shaming of menstruation, while Medusa's beheading acts as a displacement for male fears of castration. The triumphant Perseus figure, who has remained intact, holds up the bleeding head in a triumphant stance of male virility. This posturing prefigures Macduff raising aloft the head of Macbeth, which is central to Garber's memorable reading of Shakespeare's eponymous hero as a male Medusa, where she engages with the Medusa's 'gender undecidability' (249).

As the editors rightly point out: 'the twin strands of feminism and misogyny . . . have attached themselves to retellings of the Medusa myth throughout the ages' (1). This is nowhere more evident than in representations of the Medusa as *femme fatale*. The most well-known examples have been omitted from the *Reader*. For instance, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Lucy Westenra's vampire self is seen at its most terrible in terms that are gorgonesque. Another vampire hybrid appears in the writhing horrors of C. L. Moore's science-fiction story 'Shambleau' (1933). Such mixed-blood gorgons may offend purists, as might Tanith Lee's demystification of the Medusa in her short story 'The Gorgon' (1985), whose hero, armed only with the legend, suffers her scopophilic revenge as castration of the pen rather than of the penis. A more traditional literary treatment can be found in Clark Ashton Smith's quaint story of the same title published in 1932 and set in London.

The Medusa appears to have been disembodied from the roots of horror within Female Gothic and this *Reader* could have helped towards her incorporation by including extracts from such primary sources and a discussion of her contribution to Gothic film. Cinematic

history was made, for example, when the heroine of *The Gorgon* became Hammer Horror's first female monster (1964, dir. Terence Fisher), where she is renamed Megaera after one of the Furies. This low-budget movie starred Barbara Shelley, whose snaky head was made up of a halo of embarrassingly wagging wires. Ray Harryhausen improved significantly on these special effects in his animated Medusa in *The Clash of the Titans* (1981, dir. Desmond Davis). Apart from omitting to look at popularist Gothic cinema, Garber and Vickers register the Medusa's presence in popular culture by including an illustration of an advertisement of 1999's hottest "scream machine" a roller coaster named "Medusa" (xvii) as well as a photograph of Annie Lennox, whose album shares the same name.

Garber and Vickers have provided a wealth of psycho-analytic sources, which situate the gorgon in familiar Gothic territory, whose centre piece is Freud's '*Das Medusenhau*'. An extract from an essay on Freud's Viennese office 'Bergasse 19: Inside Freud's Office' by Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, annoyingly fails to mention that he had several Gorgoneions there on display. These are protective amulets based on the apotropaic function of the severed head, which Athene placed on the omphalos of her shield to ward off her enemies. Might this be a sub-consciously deliberate gap as the extract is concerned with the architectonics in relation to the positioning of mirrors? They argue: 'If, as Freud insists in "Medusa's Head", the terror of castration is always linked to the sight of something, then it is the sight of *seeing oneself seeing* that possesses lethal consequences for the figure in the mirror' (270). This self-reflectiveness is mirrored by *The Medusa Reader* itself, which is a collection less of 'numinous heads' (96) than of their mirrorings, since the face of the Gorgon will always remain beyond representation. As 'the Infernal Feminine' (96), the Medusa articulates the semantics of forbidden looking because to look is to die, unless mediated through the reflective shield of art. Her square mouth, painted on Caravaggio's shield (which has been used as the illustration on the book jacket) is the void. The holy dread issuing from that mouth is a metaphor for that which cannot be spoken. This excellent illustrated anthology is probably the nearest we will ever get to it.

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Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror by Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), ISBN 0-859-89696-X, xii + 276pp., £47.50 hb, £15.99 pb.

When, in 1963, a small theatre at the end of a cul-de-sac in an unfashionable district of Paris closed its doors for the last time there were few who genuinely mourned its passing. Though the very term Grand Guignol had become synonymous with a kind of play dispensing psychological suspense, brutality and extreme violence, the theatre in the impasse Chaptal was already an anachronism. In the last decade of its life, seeking no doubt to reconcile the interests of its own dwindling band of regulars (known affectionately as the *grand-guignoleurs*), the tourist trade, and a post-war Parisian audience with a very different range of cultural expectations, the programme became an uncomfortable mixture of revivals of the classics from the theatre's own heydays, sub-pornographic shockers and stage adaptations of American-style thrillers.

As is often the case with cultural institutions of this kind, it is only with hindsight that we realise their true extent and stature, the highly problematic nature of their achievement, and

the degree of ambiguity entailed in our own response to that body of work. The Théâtre du Grand Guignol was founded in 1897 by Oscar Méténier, a playwright who had cut his teeth in the experimental theatre on the fringes of Naturalism, and was taken over two years later by Max Maurey who then remained in control until the eve of WWI. Since it was Maurey who, in the words of Hand and Wilson, ‘rebranded the Grand-Guignol as the “Theatre of Horror”’, there is no little interest in observing how the genre developed during this crucial early period. Indeed, one myth that the ten plays assembled here (one from the Méténier years, seven from the Maurey years, and two from the interwar years) debunk is that the Grand Guignol was exclusively a theatre of gore. What we find instead is a theatre of meticulous, obsessive even, emotional intensity and bizarre, often disturbing, eroticism interspersed with crude sexual comedy. In Méténier’s *Lui!* (1897; tr. here as *Jack*), for example, nothing much happens except that a drunken man visits a prostitute, falls asleep, and is arrested. The tension arises exclusively from the fact that the audience realises long before the actress does that the man who has come to see her recently murdered another prostitute. Naturally, the claustrophobic atmosphere of the theatre in the rue Chaptal would assist in the staging of productions of this kind; but it should be remembered that one false note would be capable of destroying the whole effect.

Even in classics of the Maurey years, such as André de Lorde and Eugène Morel’s *La Dernière Torture* (1904; *The Ultimate Torture*) and Paul Autier and Paul Cloquemin’s *Gardiens de phare* (1905; tr. *The Lighthouse Keeper*), both of which do culminate in a murder, it is the sense of expectation, *that something dreadful is just about to happen*, which renders the action meaningful. But then Maurey very quickly proved himself an expert at manufacturing fear and anxiety. There cannot be many theatres in the early twentieth century which found it necessary to employ a full-time in-house physician in the likely expectation that what was occurring on stage any given evening was so gruesome and macabre that it would cause fainting fits and attacks of vomiting among members of the audience. If such a theatre did so, one might imagine that they would have kept quiet about it. Maurey, on the other hand, flaunted the matter in the theatre’s house magazine. But, of course, as Hand and Wilson reveal, this was all a deliberate ploy to unsettle the audience, part of the theatrical experience. Paramount, they reveal in a telling footnote, played a similar trick on the audience at the premiere of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in 1960.

Maurey fashioned and organised the Théâtre du Grand Guignol in many other ways too. Plays would be extensively rewritten during rehearsal, the technical support staff were of the highest calibre (not just with regard to the visual elements but, equally important, with regard to the aural), and the programme was carefully thought through. A typical evening’s fare might consist of four or more items, including a rather risqué comedy (an example is included in the present collection). Equally noteworthy is Maurey’s reluctance to make use of intervals which, he felt, served to dispel the atmosphere. Finally, in André de Lorde, one of the theatre’s most productive playwrights, Maurey found a talent equal to his own. True, there were many gory moments (not least in Pierre Chaine and André de Lorde’s 1922 adaptation of Octave Mirbeau’s 1899 *Le Jardin des supplices* – also included here), but even these scenes are the culmination, not the *raison d’être*, of the theatrical experience.

The rediscovery of the genre really began with François Rivière and Gabrielle Wittkop when they published a lavishly illustrated history of the Théâtre du Grand Guignol in 1979. Prior to this, the only sources of information in French (let alone English) were buried in obscure theatre journals from the early years of the twentieth century, a nigh well unobtainable study by Antona Camillo-Traversi published in 1933, and in long out-of-print memoirs of French theatrical life. Even the playtexts themselves could only be consulted in

the dignified silence of the great research libraries (a far from ideal setting for evaluating such strident manifestations of popular culture) or had to be painstakingly winkled out of the catalogues of antiquarian booksellers.

The problem with illustrated works, however, is that the impact of the visual images can overrule the more nuanced accompanying prose account. And so it proved with Rivière and Wittkop. Undated photographs taken from early stage productions in which women are shown in the act of being strangled or having their eyes gouged out jostle with pictures from obviously later (but equally undated) productions representing the inmates of mental asylums and crude attempts at open brain surgery being practiced on live subjects. On this evidence, the Grand Guignol tradition appeared to have few, if any, redeeming features. Agnès Pierron's *Le Grand Guignol: Le théâtre des peurs de la belle époque* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), containing not only some fifty-five complete playtexts but also a very substantial critical apparatus (including a detailed historical overview, a listing of all productions, a filmography, and a substantial appendix which reprints a wide selection of contemporary articles, accounts and reviews), provided a timely corrective to any simplistic view of the genre. Weighing in at well over fourteen hundred pages, this is a work that no-one working in the field can afford to ignore.

Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson not only manage to accommodate Pierron's opus, however, they also manage in a number of telling ways to make the subject their own. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Hand and Wilson's main interest in Grand Guignol is not so much that of the theatre historian chronicling a curious but dead tradition (which is essentially Pierron's perspective) as that of present-day theatre practitioners seeking to understand how these pieces might be made to work for fresh audiences. Secondly, even though they may be first and foremost engaged with the issue of performability, they also prove themselves to be highly astute when it comes to examining these works in the light of contemporary (especially post-Freudian) critical theory. In other words, performance practice is continually interrogated by critical and historical insight.

Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror consists of two parts: a substantial, closely researched overview of the Grand Guignol tradition followed by modern translations of ten classic (i.e., pre-1930) examples of the genre. The latter, of course, are all to be found in Pierron (who is duly acknowledged), but it is useful both for teaching and research purposes (not to mention the possibility of staging) to be able to move conveniently from commentary to text in an English version. The translations, incidentally, do not seek to provide any period feel but follow present-day idiomatic usage, a strategy which is particularly suited to stage translations. Having recently taught a module on Grand Guignol with third year drama students, it is also worth noting that this book captured their imaginations in a way that few other set texts seem to manage. Indeed, it effectively supersedes Mel Gordon's *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (1988; rev. ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), another book with an abundant iconography, which has until now been the primary text on the subject in English.

More generally, though, the subject deserves to be better known in Gothic Studies than it is. Grand Guignol draws on energies and themes which, taken as a whole, are very different to those which inform, say, Hammer Films. It does not belong to a tradition of vampires, monsters and ghouls from the grave, but of vengeance, bizarre twists of fate, and man's inhumanity to man (or, more usually, woman). Given the importance of the French film industry in the early twentieth century (Pierron lists more than two dozen film versions prior to 1945), it may be that the genre has left more of a mark on British and American culture than we may imagine. Certainly, considerable traces are to be found in the popular

fiction of the Edwardian period in Britain; while, in North America, many of the stories contained in publications such as *Weird Tales* in the 1940s seem to derive directly from the tradition of Grand Guignol.

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Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, edited by Natalie M. Houston (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2003), ISBN 1551113570, 510pp., £6.00 pb.

There is a good range of supplementary materials provided in this Broadview edition of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's most famous work, which it is good to see so seriously treated. I wonder, however, if the seriousness has been a little overdone, for the charms of this most racy and sensational of novels are dealt with here in the most matter-of-fact of tones. From the ordinary-looking black and white photograph of Julia Margaret Cameron's which adorns the cover, rather than the usual flamboyant pre-Raphaelite painting, everything about this volume seems designed to dampen down the sparkiness and subversions of Braddon's text.

The introduction, which is long on information but short on analysis, begins with a precisely detailed account of the print culture of the period, particularly the role of the circulating library. Of course this is an important issue for Braddon's novel, and Houston gives a very welcome and succinct explanation of its textual history and of the textual variants, together with a very useful table of what appeared when which allows for easy reconstruction of the different experiences of its first sets of readers. However, the wildly controversial TV adaptation of the novel by Donald Hounam, along with the radio version by Bryony Lavery, are relegated to one sentence which observes merely that they 'brought Braddon's story to new audiences, although altered in significant ways' – surely a serious understatement, since the Hounam in particular effectively amounted to more of a new interpretation of the novel than any kind of adaptation of it. Similarly, there is more about the legal and copyright issues raised by early dramatic adaptations of the novel than about what was actually in them, although extracts are supplied amongst the supplementary material at the end, which also includes interesting reproductions of contemporary illustrations, satires, reviews, and the description of Sigismund Smith from *The Doctor's Wife*, which is Braddon's own satirical portrait of the successful sensation novelist. These things make this edition well worth having, as do the notes, which are few – this is not a text which needs very many – but judicious. There should, however, have been room for a more substantial bibliography (and perhaps for annotation of it), and it is a pity to find no mention of Chris Willis' excellent Braddon website (<http://www.chriswillis.feeserve.co.uk/braddon.html>). In short, this is a useful edition whose arrival is to be welcomed, but it offers a strangely flat presentation of so lively a novel.

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Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*, edited by Jacqueline M. Labbe (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002), ISBN 1-551-11213-2, 587pp., £8.99 pb.

Jacqueline Labbe's meticulously researched and informed edition of Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* is a comprehensive introduction to Romantic feminism. Smith is

difficult to categorise; a novelist, a poet and social commentator and like many of her female contemporaries she wrote in most of the popular genres; she articulated her own poetic response to the French Revolution in *The Emigrants*, interweaving the plight of the exiled soldier with her own experiences as a woman in exile; in *Emmeline* she refined an understanding of the strategies of sensibility in her creation of the 'feminine' woman and the sentimental feminised man; the characters of Mrs Rayland and Orlando in *The Old Manor House* embody radical, new codes of conduct, which serve to expose the constructed nature of the prevalent culture.

Labbe's edition includes a selection of primary contextual sources including key reviews of notices of Smith's work from *The Analytical Review*, *The Critical Review*, and *The Mirror Review*, all of which accurately reflect both negative and positive responses to the novel. Extensive articles centred on the issue of genre by Anna Leatitia Barbauld, John Moore, and Walter Scott and historical documents, are presented in full, focusing on both the laws of property and the effects of war. This is also illustrated by the poetic responses of Smith and Wordsworth to the casualties of war, and Smith is identified as a sympathiser to the cause for freedom, liberty and reason. Labbe's keen observations, detailed endnotes and exhaustive appendices vastly enhance the reader's knowledge of Smith and her importance to her contemporaries within her social milieu. Labbe's informative and thorough introduction situates Smith as one of 'the most significant novelists and poets of the Romantic period' (29), a literary modernist of her time who redraws and reconstructs literary conventions exposing the framework of human behaviour. The thematic content of the novel is usefully divided into sections, providing an astute analysis of the text. Smith's literary and personal lives are laid out thoroughly, grounded in a rigorous and methodical investigation of the primary sources.

Labbe specifically links the narrative of *The Old Manor House* to 'property: who owns it, who claims it, who deserves it' (16), citing the laws of inheritance and the ambiguities of the legal system which shaped Smith's thinking. Smith's personal life helped to foster an empathy with the politically oppressed. Her husband's financial troubles, which resulted in Smith spending several months with him in King's Bench, where he was imprisoned for debt, were the key motives for her writing to support herself and her nine children. Smith's husband's financial exclusion from his father's will also committed Smith to a legal battle with a system that she recognised as only facilitating the inheritance of property from one male heir to the next, and disinheriting the female because of her sex. The inequality, injustice and alienation of Smith's experience as legally dependant on her husband inform her experience as a woman writer and influence the plot of *The Old Manor House*. The political force of the novel is invested, as Labbe reveals, in the indomitable character of the unmarried Mrs Rayland (although an honourable 'Mrs', given her status as a property owner) and her determination to control the legacy of her estate. Unfortunately, her attachment to the archaic and feudal laws of land ownership reveal her to be as tyrannical and despotic as any traditional male Gothic villain. Smith interweaves two romances: Mrs Rayland's obsessive feelings for Orlando and Orlando's excessive love for Monimia. In situating these romances as dependant upon issues of patrimony, Smith reaffirms Gothic sensibilities through the laboured desires and, as Labbe points out, notions of Romance are subverted to initiate social discourse.

Labbe presents a useful summary of Smith's use of Gothic imagery, linking it to the values and codes of property but because of this emphasis and concern within her study it is necessarily less interested in its relationship with the female Gothic tradition. There is an overwhelming presence of stock Gothic motifs within the text: the imprisonment of

Monimia in the tower; the threat of the supernatural; a labyrinth of rooms beneath the Old Manor House, and the inclusion of the sublime and picturesque. Labbe states that 'Smith uses Gothic imagery as simply another code for property' (25) but does not pursue the way in which the text cultivates the Gothic, as Clery states, as an 'enabling' condition for women (Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*, [2000], 4) or explore how the assimilation of the marvellous, can be used as a vehicle to critique a society obsessed with money and feudal codes. The influence of the female Gothic dramatists of the time, such as Hannah Moore and Hannah Cowley, cannot be ignored in such a melodramatic text loaded with Gothic rhetoric; as Cox states the 'heartland of the Gothic drama is during the period we call Romantic' (Cox, *Gothic Studies*, 3/2 [2001] 110). Labbe also does not refer to Smith's navigation of the Gothic through the sublime and supernatural as a form that will be reflected in so many subsequent works, where the virtuous young heroine negotiates the dangers of a patriarchal world. For Labbe, property becomes an overriding concern of this text. While one may not always agree with her attempt to find one unifying theme to unlock the text, Labbe's work is informed by an adroit and scrupulous reading of Smith's narrative augmented by a range of articles and books on genre and romance.

The introduction to this edition also details the political background to *The Old Manor House*, in particular the influence of the American Revolution, and it is noted that Smith's writing was informed by her intense personal experiences during this conflict. Labbe's work accurately identifies the prominence within Smith's novel of the negotiation of the cultural and political upheavals of war. Her arguments are strongly substantiated and demonstrate the importance of how Smith goes beyond the eighteenth-century critique of the picturesque to develop a politicised landscape. Labbe specifies ways in which Smith appropriates the American landscape to question England's perception of the rebels. In this landscape of human suffering Smith negotiates the tension between foreign and domestic concerns through the concept of exile and the figure of the dispossessed.

Labbe's edition recovers the politics and social commentary within *The Old Manor House*, and ensures that this text is not seen as a merely ossified romance of the 1790s. Instead, Labbe liberates the modernity of the text, its reflexive, playful use of genre and ability to critique its social milieu. The impressive, meticulous research establishes a terrain from which other readers may pursue the work of Charlotte Smith and other women writers of the period.

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A Companion to the Gothic, edited by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), ISBN 0-631-23199-4, xix + 323pp., £19.99 pb.

As David Punter acknowledges in his introduction to the essay collection *A Companion to the Gothic*, there is no critical consensus as to 'what constitutes Gothic writing' (viii). Gothic is an historically delimited genre – or perhaps it is a genre that recurs throughout later modernity, reshaping itself to accommodate Enlightenment, Romantic, decadent, and post-modernist sensibilities. Gothic is a set of narrative conventions, of thematic preoccupations, of rhetorical strategies – though it is also known for the regularity with which it violates its own conventions. Or perhaps we recognize Gothic by the characteristic mood and atmosphere it generates, or by the devices it employs for disrupting normative realities, for the production of the uncanny.

The Gothic is rather like Mr Motley in China Miéville's recent masterwork of Gothic Science Fiction, *Perdido Street Station*. Mr Motley is an animate Arcimboldo painting, a disgusting amalgam of bits and pieces of incompatible species:

Scraps of skin and fur and feathers swung as he moved; tiny limbs clutched; eyes rolled from obscure niches; antlers and protrusions of bone jutted precariously; feelers twitched and mouths glistened . . . Scales gleamed. Fins quivered. Wings fluttered brokenly. Insect claws folded and unfolded. (42)

The artist commissioned to do Mr Motley's sculpture is transfixed with horror, but she cannot take her eyes off of him. The Gothic, too, is a composite, often a rather disgusting one, and yet this may be why we like it so much.

The twenty-four essays in this collection circle around this heteromorphic monster known as the Gothic and attempt to take its likeness, or at least to illuminate one aspect – one tentacle, one hoof, one claw of the monster. Not surprisingly, critical and theoretical approaches to the genre are as various as the Gothic texts themselves; as Scott Brewster notes in his piece on 'Gothic and Madness of Interpretation,' the genre is characterized by its 'inexhaustible capacity to generate readings' (281). Without foreclosing interpretative possibilities, then, *A Companion to the Gothic* offers a range of strategies for understanding the genre, and is an excellent resource for students, teachers, and scholars of the Gothic.

Some of the essays attend to national traditions of Gothicism. Allan Lloyd-Smith explores four 'indigenous features' distinguishing the American Gothic from its fellows: representations of 'the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race and political utopianism' (109). Glennis Byron examines certain anxieties – about Empire, class and gender, late-Victorian science – that shape the British Gothic of the 1890s. In 'The Political Culture of Gothic Drama,' David Worrall shows how Romantic-era Gothic was 'informed by the politics of an increasingly plebeian theatre' at the turn of the eighteenth century (94). Neil Cornwell discusses 'the early evolution of a Gothic style' in French, German, and Russian literatures, and the 'cross-fertilisation' between these Continental Gothic traditions and the British and American ones (29). In examining the origins of the word 'Gothic,' Robin Sowerby traces the European Enlightenment's not-quite-accurate association of the Goths with barbarity and monstrosity, in 'antithesis to the Roman or the classical' (16). Ian Duncan's essay on Walter Scott and James Hogg describes a Scottish Gothic tradition that 'represents . . . the uncanny recursion of an ancestral identity alienated from modern life,' an identity the Scottish Gothic attempts, but fails, to reassimilate in order to help form 'an organic national culture' (70–1). Duncan seems to confirm Fred Botting's argument in 'Heterotopia, History, Culture,' that Gothic authors appropriate and revise history so as to serve the ideological needs of the present, yet the mirror that Gothic holds up to its contemporaneous reality serves to distort and unsettle, rather than consolidate, cultural norms.

Other essays attend to genres adjacent to or overlapping the Gothic novel, or sub-genres within the Gothic. Clive Bloom discusses the conventions of Horror fiction, and Julia Briggs those of the ghost story. Lucie Armitt examines contemporary novels 'that amalgamate magic realism and the Gothic in a way that politicises the unconscious through trans-generational haunting' (306–7). Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik explore another hybrid genre, the comic Gothic, wherein 'the diabolic energy of the Other is frequently translated into laughter and sexuality,' and the 'uncanny and the supernatural are used . . . not to frighten and appal, but to amuse, to stimulate and to intrigue' (243). David Punter's 'On Poetry and the Uncanny,' concerned with the 'haunting' of the reader by the text (203), brings theories of the uncanny to bear on issues of poetic form and voice. Heidi Kaye

focuses an unwieldy topic by limiting her discussion of 'Gothic Film' to film adaptations of *Frankenstein*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, and *Dracula*; further essays on film would have been welcome. Taking on the literary vampire industry, William Hughes argues that much *Dracula* criticism has committed us to a critical orthodoxy whereby we equate the vampire 'with the liberation of repressed sexualities', and this does justice neither to the complexities of Bram Stoker's novel, nor to twentieth-century representations of the vampire, particularly by gay and lesbian authors who explore vampirism as a 'parallel lifestyle' rather than a state of unmitigated otherness (151, 149). Gina Wisker is in agreement on this last point, though her celebration of contemporary women's vampire fiction is accomplished at the expense of nineteenth-century vampire novels, dismissed as uniformly reactionary.

Among author-specific studies, Nora Crook provides not only interesting readings of Mary Shelley's novels, but also a very useful overview of Shelley criticism. Robert Miles is particularly good at explicating the theoretical underpinnings of the various critical approaches to Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, and combining biographical analysis and queer theory to complicate the critical orthodoxy by which Lewis and Radcliffe are juxtaposed as practitioners of 'male' and 'female' Gothic respectively. Victor Sage discusses C. R. Maturin and J. S. Le Fanu within the context of Irish Protestantism: their 'Huguenot refugee heritage . . . gives these writers, perched with varying degrees of discomfort inside a dominant class, a particular sensitivity to the darker implications of a fractured society' (81).

Kate Ferguson Ellis provides a careful history of feminist approaches to the Gothic in 'The Gothic Heroine and Her Critics', and Michelle A. Massé, an extremely lucid overview of psychoanalytic criticism of the genre. Psychoanalysis, however, is an object of animus in Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall's 'Gothic Criticism', which also lines up poststructuralist, feminist, and neo-Marxist Gothic criticism to be executed by firing squad. The 'collapse of history into universal psychology' notwithstanding (Baldick and Mighall, 218), the collection features two especially good essays employing psychoanalytic models, Steven Bruhm's Lacanian-based queer reading of Steven King's *The Shining* and Jerrold E. Hogle's 'The Gothic Ghost of the Counterfeit and the Progress of Abjection'. Working from Baudrillard as well as Kristeva, Hogle explores the abjection of the liminal: of historical moments wherein signification and identity are fluid and contested, and 'ideologies and their symbols pull in different directions at once' (296). Bruhm outlines 'a series of queer strategies' in King, including 'the exploration and explosion of heteronormative male subjectivity' (270), and a salutary unfixing of that subjectivity into something 'permeable, penetrable . . . and receptive' (279).

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Fictions of Unease: The Gothic from Otranto to The X-Files, edited by Andrew Smith, Diane Mason and William Hughes (Bath: Sulis Press, 2002), ISBN 0-952-68568-X, £14.99 pb, ISBN 0-952-6856-1, £40.00 hb, 219pp.

As it says on the tin, this collection covers the ground from the early Gothic of Walpole to the diffuse postmodern Gothicisms of the Black Lace series, contemporary feminist Gothic, and the doubtless quite unreasonable suspicions of the American government in *The X-Files*. Along the way – and this is both the charm and the vexation of edited collections deriving from conferences – come a series of illuminating glimpses into wildly different

academic terrain. These papers stem from the Third International Gothic Association Conference, held at Strawberry Hill under the useful flag of convenience *Legacies of Walpole*.

Several contributors examine precisely what those legacies might be, Tim Burke showing how Ann Yearsley slyly critiques her patron in 'On reading *The Castle of Otranto* December 1784', Lauren Fitzgerald considering the issues of a Walpolean inheritance, or its denial, for Ann Radcliffe: her 'killing him off, just as the Gothic fathers of her own property plots are killed off, to secure the heroine's rights.' Benjamin F. Fisher resituates William Beckford's legacies, finding a large number of previously unremarked references to *Vathek* through the nineteenth century, which seem a curious mixture of surprise and embarrassment, with admiration and deprecation in equal measure. Maggie Kilgour traces a Miltonic legacy (from *Comus*) in an 1820 vampire play, an eccentric adaptation of the latter part of Polidori's tale (set in Scotland and called *The Vampire; or, the Bride of the Isles*, by J. R. Planche), and sees another possible legacy in this towards Bram Stoker's novel, reminding us that 'national cultures are always tartans invented out of random bits and pieces, like the melodramatic *Vampire*, and Stoker's heterogeneous *Dracula*.' As Kilgour warns, 'the danger of being a Gothickist is that one comes to believe that all stories are incestuously connected.' Of course it is – of course they are.

The legacies of Walpole begin to peter out around this point in the collection, being superseded by more distinguished legacies from Milton, or, in Victor Sage's essay on Le Fanu, Homeric and Joycean connections circulating around nationalism, Druidicism, and the Cyclops; the 'revenge of the dark other'. The dark other of Collins' *The Moonstone* is the group of Indians in search of the stone, but also as Ardel Thomas shows, appears in the curious figure of Ezra Jennings, the doctor's assistant whose 'queerness' as an outsider enables him to solve the mystery: 'Instead of rendering Jennings monstrous, his trebly "Othered" positionality opens up a space for detection not available to standard British procedure as symbolised by the failure of Sergeant Cuff. It is a pity, though, that Thomas' interest in 'characters on the periphery that constantly de-centre any colonial narratives striving to map racial hierarchies' does not include a view on that other peripheral but revelatory character and *her* de-centred place, Rosanna Spearman, and the Shivering Sand.

Judith Halberstam pursues the curious case of *The Beetle* (1897), by Richard Marsh, as another account of the incoming colonial threat (the East here being Egypt, the creature seeming male, but also proving to be a disgusting and *female* beetle) which turns out to be an expression of anxiety about female masculinity at the turn of the century: 'the Beetle, indeed, is everything that English women must not be . . .' Halberstam cheerily concludes that, 'In order to avoid repeating the mistakes of demonisation and prejudice that have plagued the twentieth century, I suggest that we find ways to embrace the Gothic nation, hybridity, impurity, gender mixing and all.' Perhaps. But I'm still not sure about that Beetle. Pursuing the theme of the dark Other into more stylish vampire looks – the aquiline nose, the fixed and cruel-looking mouth, the sharp white teeth of the Count – William Hughes contends that the atavism signified in these features may produce fascination and admiration as well as fear. Bram Stoker evidently had a weakness for a 'high aquiline nose and black eyes of eagle sharpness' (*The Mystery of the Sea*, 1902), and admired Sir Richard Burton's canine teeth which (like Tennyson's!) he thought showed fighting spirit. At once atavistic savage and chivalric modern knight, Don Bernadino combines high and low qualities, which is arguably unsurprising in *fin de siècle* naturalist writing, as found in, for example, Jack London's *Sea-Wolf*.

George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil' remains one of the oddest and most powerful ghost stories, if that is the right term for this psychological chiller, and Diane Mason builds on Jane

Wood's identification of medical discourse in the story to suggest that Latimer's peculiarities fit pretty closely with contemporary doctors' ideas about masturbation. Andrew Smith's reading of *Sons and Lovers* develops the theme of degeneration that each of these essays suggests, seeing Lily Western as named in reference to Lucy Westenra, noting her financial vampirism upon William Morel, and London as being seen as a site of such degeneracy. Paul himself shows a kind of vampirism in his own sexual relations, having a disturbing obsession with Miriam's and then Clara's throat: 'He sunk his mouth on her throat, where he felt her heavy pulse beat under his lips.' It is easy to get carried away; the problem remains the relationship between Lawrence's hypothesised pure primitivism and popular ideas of degeneracy. Smith concludes that 'Gender appears to explain this apparent inconsistency, which directs us to the way that Lawrence's nebulous philosophy of primitivism is ghosted by political considerations'. Elaine Hartnell explores more ramifications of post-war gender issues in *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) and *Madame Holle* (1934), looking at how these Gothic configurations negotiate the situation of post-war women, deemed to be uncontrolled, dispossessed and vulnerable, and 'inconveniently independent.' The traumas of the second Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca* are examined in terms of masquerade by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, who focus on the Gothic use of the moving portrait and the dream of the mirror in the narrator's progressive empowerment beyond the Rebecca double: 'Consciously, the narrator believes she has discovered the "truth" about Rebecca; her unconscious, however, offers up Rebecca as her mirror image.'

Gender remains the predominant focus for Laura J. Kranzler's account of the Black Lace imprint, books designed to sexually arouse the reader and suggesting a 'female sublime' instead of the *masculine* experience of Burke's concept. The Black Lace heroine is 'continually at the centre of all male desire in these texts', which makes it rather disappointing when Kranzler retreats to politically safer ground: 'I read the fantasies of female submission as a sign of women's frustration at being marginalised and cast in peripheral positions of power in a patriarchal society'; a formulation that seems a good deal more tired than the energetic books it describes. Anne Williams looks into similar territory in 'Feminism in Contemporary Gothic', revisiting her earlier ideas on 'male' and female 'Gothic' to explain that 'to "write in Gothic" from either the male or female position, is to deploy the transgressive irrationality usually coded "female" in the West. Thus to "write in Gothic" is to question, if not entirely to disrupt, our culture's construction of gender, which may lead to larger disruptions.' The problem with Williams's analysis, to my mind, is that first the reader has to accept her taxonomies (for example that 'women writers of Gothic rationalise the supernatural') and then to accept her judgement, based on three recent novels, that these patterns have begun to fade; and to endorse new models, such as the appearance of 'the disposable male' and 'the consort'. It is claiming too much to call these 'changes in literary conventions'.

In '*The X-Files* as Contemporary Gothic', Heidi Kaye focuses on the 'dark present' rather than the dark past or the dark future: *The X-Files* is a postmodern, schizophrenic Gothic, splitting its narrators, postponing and bifurcating its story-lines, 'meaning is unstable, constantly slipping away'. Behind the apparently supernatural is the 'real' of government and corporatism, and the bogeys of the British, American, and Japanese, perhaps in league with the aliens. 'The Truth is Out There' competes with 'Trust No One' as the series' contradictory messages. To call it a 'post-modern millennial phenomenon', however, is to reach for the sort of comforting larger understanding it is itself at such pains to subvert.

The editors of *Fictions of Unease: The Gothic from Otranto to The X-Files* claim that this collection 'represents an effective map of Gothic criticism' as it exists at the close of one century and the beginning of another. If that is so, where then are we? There is a continuing

interest in mapping the reactions to early canonical Gothic, such as Walpole's, and scholarship in drawing into the light such references as may have been overlooked, as in the case of Beckford. There is an interest in popular materials of the past, such as vampire plays, or of the present, such as the Black Lace series, or *The X-Files*. Nationality, degeneracy, race, gender all reliably come into focus in looking at later nineteenth-century work; gender and female positioning dominate the accounts of Gothic writing in the twentieth century. Post-modern culture is understood to be a scene of neo-Gothic catastrophism. That may not be all that is going on currently in Gothic criticism – but it is a pretty good survey.

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The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination by Eric G. Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), ISBN 0-312-29299-6, 278pp., £30 hb.

Like crystalline forms, this book is weird and wondrous. Dr Wilson has met and exceeded his stated goal to write a

threefold book: a spiritual history of Western representations of frozen shapes from ancient times to the early nineteenth century; an anatomy of these representations of ice; and an apology for a Romantic mode of seeing that ecologically inflects the spiritual history and anatomy of ice. (2–3)

The book, however, is more than this. To borrow some of Wilson's favored words – along with his preferred syntax, the list of seemingly opposed terms – it is at once a synthesis of critical and visionary faculties, a presentation of knowledge and an invitation to gnosis, a perspective on the past and a portal to the numinous, simultaneously transparent and opaque, organized and turbid, stable and lubricious, and often the uncanny, abysmal other when it most seems the familiar, orderly one.

'Frozen phenomena in the West have been persistently figured in three forms: crystals, glaciers, and the poles' (3), Wilson writes, and the book's three long chapters ('Crystals', 'Glaciers', 'The Poles') accordingly follow this progression from microcosm to mesocosm to macrocosm. In Wilson's 'history of Western representations', there have been two ways of seeing these 'frozen shapes': the exoteric and the esoteric. The former 'is interested in external surfaces, understandable visibilities, and social orders', and those who see in this way often view 'ice as a deathly coldness to be transcended, raw material to be converted into commodity, or static matter to be reduced to law' (3). 'The esoteric perspective', on the other hand, 'considers internal depths, invisible mysteries, and individual experiences. This mode of vision – instanced by hermetic dreamers, alchemical adepts, and Romantic visionaries – frequently sees icescapes as revelations of an abysmal origin, marriages of opposites' (3). I imagine that many readers will approach the book, as I did, with a kind of tepid indifference towards ice (at best, in a glass; at worst, in the driveway). That would put us in the neutral wing of the exoteric party, decidedly not the party to be in:

Until the Romantic age, most Western representations of these types of ice were exoteric and thus largely neutral or negative. With few notable exceptions, writers from Herodotus to Pope tended either to ignore the special qualities of ice or, worse, to demean frozen shapes to signs for aloofness, numbness, stasis, transience, monstrosity, or death. However, at the turn of the nineteenth century, scientists . . . were beginning to understand that ice is not evil matter to be transcended or bland material to be commodified but is instead a vehicle and revelation of vital energy. (4)

Coleridge, P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley, Byron, Thoreau, Emerson, and Poe

are among the first poets, essayists, and novelists to embrace ice as a positive . . . fact and symbol . . . [T]hese Romantic figures thus not only point to a neglected hermeneutic context for reading their works; they also redeem ice from its exoteric past and establish it as a site for esoteric redemption. (5)

Before turning to Emerson and Thoreau, Chapter 1 describes the history of scrying, the ‘method of divination . . . that requires the seer . . . to stare into a pellucid or reflective object . . . until he observes the future’ (10). Focusing on the mode of scrying called “‘crystallogmancy” – divining the stars in earthly prisms’ (10), Wilson discusses Medieval and Renaissance accounts and theories of crystals (Roger Bacon, Cornelius Agrippa, Nostradamus, Paracelsus, John Dee). For the scryer, the crystal possesses three virtues: ‘it distorts normal, everyday perception’ and hence ‘refreshes one’s relationship to the universe’; it ‘visualizes unseen agencies’ and thus ‘comprises a threshold between visible and invisible, matter and spirit’; and, ‘because it blends reflections of interior desires and refractions of external objects, the crystal merges subject and object, self and other’ (15). The crystal becomes ‘a mode of vision as much as a stone’ (15) for both the alchemical adept and the enlightened student of optics and matter (Boyle, Newton, Swedenborg, Goethe, Schelling, Davy, and others). This engaging account of early modern magic and enlightenment science introduces intense readings of Emerson’s *Nature* and Thoreau’s *Walden*. In different ways, both represent a ‘crystallographic epistemology’ (45) by which the mind of the writer takes on the dialectical virtues of the crystalline forms upon and into which he, as scryer, gazes. As the writer’s mind itself turns crystalline, so does his writing, which becomes ‘an oscillation between stable argument and agitated lyricism, steady flow and quick crystallization’ (61). The great subject of Wilson’s book is the ‘synthesis of and division between opposites’ (58) in material forms as well as human minds and their expressions, and thus ‘Thoreau’s extravagantly simple cosmos plays between chance and law, spontaneity and structure, identity and difference, perpetual motion and unmoving calm, meaning and meaninglessness’ (58). Suggesting a Blakean ‘poetics of self-organization,’ the crystal

is Thoreau’s cosmos (as it is Emerson’s, and Goethe’s, and Schelling’s): an organic system in which distinct beings organize an indifferent energy of life . . . Everything – as form and energy, pattern and turbulence – is a crystal in various states of solidity. All things – differences of indifference, vortices of the void – are eddies in different states of liquidity’. (61)

Throughout, Wilson presents his wide-ranging and energetic research in a gripping, narrative fashion. Before turning to P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Byron, Chapter 2 describes overlapping histories of early alpine exploration, negative (‘black,’ ‘egocentric’) and positive (‘white,’ ‘cosmological’) magic in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and geological science in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. If crystals subvert dualistic modes of vision at the microcosmic level, by the early nineteenth century glaciers as mesocosm ‘are daemonic revelations as much as universal laws, magicians of the word as much as geomorphic agents’ (74). Embodying the creative and destructive forces that reside within occult powers and earthly processes, glaciers appealed to the young P. B. Shelley, steeped as he was (like Victor Frankenstein) in both ancient alchemy (Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Agrippa, and further back to Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus) and modern science (Erasmus Darwin, James Parkinson, and Davy): ‘Hungry for a science of ghosts as well as a spiritual empiricism, Shelley embraces this double nature of glaciers’ (74). A discussion of *Prometheus Unbound* precedes the centrepiece of the book, Wilson’s reading of ‘Mont Blanc,’ Shelley has fashioned in his verse a glacier’ (128), Wilson writes, taking the alpine poet who stands at

the base of Mont Blanc, gazing up the Mer de Glace toward the unseen peak, as a mind negotiating and restoring the balance between 'seemingly different powers' (117) – necessity and mind, fate and freedom, the 'universe of things' and the speaker's own 'separate phantasy,' annihilation and creation, cosmic power and poetry. The image for the rhythmic processes of nature that synthesize these apparent opposites is the 'oscillating' (124) glacier, but the glacier itself has a source, an 'undifferentiated' (124) and invisible but necessary power at the peak of the alp. The glacier thus organizes and makes manifest this power, and as the speaker witnesses this process of 'differentiating and identifying . . . he speculates on how his mind arranges the forces of the heights – on how his mind is *glacial*' (124). Unlike this poet, Victor Frankenstein and Manfred fail to embrace ice, to view as complementary the apparent dualities of creation and destruction, mind and matter, life and death, from the selfless perspectives manifested in 'Mont Blanc' and Prometheus as well as in the esoteric tradition of cosmological magic and in Thoreau scrying in the surface/depths of Walden Pond: '*Frankenstein* and *Manfred* explore Alpine magi unable to reconcile necessity and creativity. Victor and Manfred long to achieve the vision of Shelley's glacial poet, yet their ego-centric desires thwart their abilities to flow with and thus trope the mysterious cause' (128). Providing wonderful interpretations for the teacher and student alike, Wilson reads these two texts as rewritings of 'Mont Blanc'. The chapter ends, fittingly and poetically, 'pinnacled dim in the intense inane': instead of '[r]ejecting the ice', could the narcissistic dualists Victor and Manfred 'only see the glacier as a living mind of which their own thoughts form an integral part', Wilson concludes, they would 'find in the revolving crystals a thousand flames, or a portal to the staff of life itself, the central pole, the *axis mundi*, the omphalos, the caduceus – the esoteric Antarctic' (138).

'If the crystal is the microcosm revealing in its lattices the oceans of life and if the glacier is the mesocosm throbbing between earth and sky, then the poles are the macrocosm, undifferentiated life thriving beyond its heterogeneous forms' (143), and Chapter 3 finds in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* two interrelated inflections of such polar powers. Wilson follows the pattern established in the preceding chapters, here providing a fascinating account of polar exploration. As either '[t]he dark other, the alien planet – the antihuman, the monstrous' (145) or 'paradises beyond the clotted ignorance of the familiar world' (146), the poles 'endured as a blank screen on which Western fears and desires were cast' (154). In this chapter Wilson's distinctive applications of occult vocabulary intensify following his discussions of the 'primary symbols' of the South Pole, '*axis mundi*, omphalos, caduceus' (165); of the three stages of 'alchemical work' (166); and of Blake's *Book of Urizen*. The reading of Coleridge's *Rime* proposes that the Mariner, unlike either Victor Frankenstein or Manfred, undergoes a process of transformation from exoteric to esoteric in his relationship to ice. Viewing the albatross through a Urizenic logic of 'either/or' (138), the Mariner interprets it solely as 'a synecdoche of the disorienting power of the icescape' and thus shoots this 'microcosm of chaos' which 'threatens all the Mariner holds sacred' (171). Having descended into a state analogous to Blake's Ulro, 'frozen indifference' (173), he then undergoes an experience of awakening and redemption by which, through suffering, he comes to understand 'that *all* creatures suffer' and thereby 'envisions a world hurting beyond his ego' (175). His transformed and transformative responses to the moon, the water, and the snakes suggest that he has converted 'from the single vision – phenomena as either one thing or the other – to a double science: events are polarized. His hierarchies are upset by polarities he formerly repressed' (176). Forced to retell his tale of suffering and vision, the Mariner ends as 'a tortured prophet of the polar gnosis' (190). Poe's Pym, however, fails to transform:

If the Mariner is a self-conscious alchemical adept gleaning golden wisdom from his dark sufferings, then Pym is an alchemical element passively undergoing dissolution and resolution, *solve et coagula*. Pym thus places the reader in the role of the alchemist, who must actively infer meanings from the alembic he observes. (193–4)

By the end of the chapter, Pym as alchemical element has entered upon an endless process of chemical revolution through the three stages and back to the *prima materia*, leaving evolution itself to the reader:

though Pym . . . must endlessly *revolve*, the reader, like the alchemical adept, can *evolve* . . . To follow Pym in his round is to engage mindfully in a hermeneutic circle, to come again and again to the same paradoxical revelations yet with a different knowing. Revolving thus, one never understands once and for all the mystery of the abyss and its polarized patterns. Yet, one nonetheless sounds life and its doublings with increasingly graceful dives. (214–15)

In quoting so extensively from *The Spiritual History of Ice* I hope to have given a sense of the unusual energy and empathy with which Wilson writes. Like the ‘significations of ice’ that inspire him, his writing is ‘paradoxical, revelatory, perhaps unexpected’ (2). Many of the arguments and interpretations set forth about particular texts will seem familiar, yet articulated in the contexts and language provided by Wilson’s research and modes of expression, they consistently illuminate and challenge. But I will return to this admirable and valuable book for other reasons: more than a book to have read, it is a book to read.

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