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Clery, E. J. *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 222 pgs. $21.95.

Watt, James. *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 205 pps. $54.95.

E. J. Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction: 1762 - 1800*, a 1995 addition to Cambridge University Press's "Studies in Romanticism" series, is a landmark investigation into the development of the Gothic with persistent reference to the socio-economic conditions which facilitated the emergence of the genre. In particular, Clery attends to the correlation between the rise of consumerism and the production of supernatural fiction in the latter half of the eighteenth century. By focusing on the novel-reading market-place of the Romantic period, Clery effectively is able to delineate the shifting attitudes and forces which allowed the "literature of terror" to arise at the end of the eighteenth century as a "symptom of and reflection on the modern" (10). The result is a nuanced Foucaultian analysis of the Gothic as a discourse which developed in the context of a specific and identifiable historical nexus of forces.

Clery divides her monograph into four major sections: "Techniques of Ghost-Seeing," "The Business of Romance," "The Strange Luxury of Artificial Terror," and "Magico-Political Tales." Each section is in turn subdivided into individual chapters. In Part I, "Techniques of Ghost Seeing," Clery focuses on the manner in which ghosts, beginning in 1762 with the famous case of the Cock Lane ghost in London and then in a series of stage productions, became "fashionable metropolitan diversions" (16). She considers the ways in which spirits, "wrest[ed] from the service of doctrinal proof," became available "to be processed, reproduced, packaged, marketed and distributed by the engines of cultural production" (17). Particularly incisive here is Clery's analysis of the relationship of theatrical innovations like footlights, the darkened theatre, and the introduction of naturalistic acting as embodied by David Garrick to the development and legitimation of an aesthetics of fear (or what Clery refers to as "enthusiastic terror").

In the second section, "The Business of Romance," Clery focuses in depth on the aftermath of the revelation that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was not an historical antiquity (as the preface to the first edition claimed), but rather a contemporary narrative produced by Walpole himself. Clery claims that, "On the basis of the difference between the first two edi-

tions of *Otranto*, a shock metamorphosis, a new stage in the career of the supernatural was publicly initiated" (61). This is a stage in which the subordination of fiction to moral didacticism is refused. As such, Clery claims that Otranto ultimately "serve[d] as an education in a new mode of reading" (71). In this section, Clery also introduces the important subject of the connection between the rise of the novel and the development of lending libraries, a subject to which she will return at greater length in her third section.

Section three, "The Strange Luxury of Artificial Terror," attends to the complex imbrication of gender, economics, aesthetics, and the supernatural. Clery's involved argument here in effect proposes the existence in the 1790s of a balanced opposition between perceptions of supernatural tales as feminine and feminizing items of luxury and, as perceived through the lens of the legitimating discourse of the sublime, as potentially invigorating and salubrious masculine narratives. According to Clery, this dichotomy is most apparent in the work of Ann Radcliffe whose famous device of the explained supernatural, "precisely withdrew with one hand what it offered with the other" (105). Through the use of this device, Radcliffe, Clery contends, was able to satisfy both the taste for "primitive superstition" and for progress (107). Focusing in particular on *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Clery also maintains that the "central Gothic indeterminacy" between illusion and reality became an ideal vehicle for female authors in the 1790s to voice political discontent.

In the fourth and final section, "Magico-Political Tales," Clery turns her attention most specifically to developments in the production and distribution of supernatural tales and to novels more generally. Clery first focuses on the revolutionary marketing innovations of William Lane and his Minerva Press. She claims that, "The birth of Minerva was instrumental in the decisive shift towards popular fiction in its modern form, aimed at a broad readership, commercially streamlined, with the profit motive uppermost" (137). Clery then turns her attention to the various forms in which supernatural tales circulated in the late 1790s, including chapbooks, parodies, ballads, dramatic adaptations, and phantasmagorias, as well as to unscrupulous publishing practices such as piracy and plagiarism and their impact upon the notion of authorship. Clery concludes her discussion by considering the manner in which the disruptive explosion of the Gothic in the 1790s "was almost instantly overtaken by a success which was also the compounding of a new orthodoxy in which calculation figured pre-eminently" (154-155). Claims for the subversiveness of the Gothic after 1800 therefore need to be reconsidered.

Clery's study is impressive in both its breadth and detail. Its footnotes and bibliography are extensive. The text is essential reading for those interested in the Gothic, the development of supernatural literature, and the development of British Romanticism and the novel more generally.

James Watt's mission in his 1999 *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* is a straight-forward one: to throw a wrench into the works. Watt's thesis is that the Gothic as a genre is far more heterogeneous and generally more conservative than twentieth-century literary criticism has allowed. Watt observes in his introduction that, "any categorization of the Gothic as a continuous tradition, with a generic significance, is unable to do justice to the diversity of the romances which are now accommodated under the 'Gothic' label, and liable to overlook the often antagonistic relations that existed between different works or writers" (1). By offering detailed case-studies of specific works and authors in the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century attitudes toward publishing, literacy, and literature, Watt aims—and succeeds—at enabling the contemporary reader to appreciate the Gothic romance as a complex and contested social space (6).

Watt begins, as it appears all studies of the Gothic must, by focusing on the first self proclaimed "Gothic" story, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Watt argues in Chapter One that "the elevation of Walpole's work to the status of an origin has served to grant an illusory stability to a body of fiction which is distinctly heterogeneous" (1). *Otranto* is clearly a foundational text; however, Watt attends to Walpole's authorial motivations and what Watt isolates as *Otranto*'s emphasis on farce in order to differentiate it from the body of Gothic romances which follow it. According to Watt, *The Castle of Otranto* and its recourse to the past must be discussed in terms of Walpole's attempts to construct an "aristocratic" identity for himself and the text must be appreciated as a work "calculated both to amuse a leisured audience and mystify those uninitiated readers without the necessary powers of discrimination to appreciate the nature of the work's invention" (7). In contrast to contemporary critics who have read *Otranto* as "an allegory of class relations," Watt concludes that late eighteenth-century writers and critics "almost unanimously acknowledged *Otranto*'s status as a frivolous diversion" (7), an observation which problematizes the work's status as the origin of "terror-fiction."

It is in his second chapter that Watt really breaks new ground with the elaboration of his conception of the "Loyalist Gothic romance." In contrast to the "excess and extravagance" of *Otranto* (38), Watt argues that the majority of works which followed after *Otranto* and called themselves "Gothic" in the 1790s and early 1800s were in fact extremely conservative texts promulgating unambiguous moral and patriotic agendas. Watt claims that, during this period which encompassed both the loss of the American colonies and the protracted conflict with France, "the drive to refashion the self-image of Britain led to the 'historical' category of the Gothic being purged of its associations with either democracy or frivolity and defined increasingly in terms of a proud military heritage" (44). Watt identifies the Loyalist Gothic romance as a distinct sub-genre of the Gothic defined by cer-

tain recurring characteristics: an English medieval setting with action taking place in or around a real castle, references to real historical figures, the conflict between patriotism and misguided ambition, and the subordinated presentation of supernatural agency invoked for the purposes of "purging rogue family members and restoring legitimate rulers and/or property claims" (59). In contrast to Walpole's "jeu d'espirit" (38), the conservative Loyalist Gothic, exemplified by Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* and Richard Warner's *Netley Abbey: A Gothic Story*, focused on "staging the providentially inspired process by which legitimate hierarchies are re-established" (8).

The ubiquity and popularity of such conservative Gothic romances in the 1790s and early 1800s raises the question of how the Gothic romance acquired its transgressive reputation. Watt attends to this question is his third chapter which focuses on the "enfant terrible" (99) Matthew Lewis and his scandalous *The Monk.* Watt observes in reference to *The Monk* that, beyond its sensational content, its extraordinary popularity "served to amplify long-standing anxieties about the spread of literacy and the growth of an undisciplined reading public" (71). However, Watt's fascinating conclusion is that, like Walpole's Otranto, *The Monk* was atypical of works in the period of its production. According to Watt, Lewis crafted his work against the prevailing romance paradigms of the time. He "eschewed the emphasis on legitimacy and property favoured by the Loyalist Gothic, and amplified the suggestion of impropriety that was only implicit in the work of a writer such as Ann Radcliffe" (8). Few fictions, according to Watt, defined themselves so vigorously against "the canons or morality and propriety or concluded on the same dystopian note" as did Lewis's work and, in light of the anomalous nature of *The Monk,* the "subversive aura" of the Gothic romance as a whole needs to be reassessed.

Watt's study can be said to manifest a sort of pendular motion between discussions of transgression and conservatism, anomaly and standard. Chapter One on Walpole establishes *The Castle of Otranto* as distinctive; Chapter Two on the Loyalist Gothic romance focuses on the conservative Gothics that developed in the wake of *Otranto*; Chapter Three attends to the anachronistic subversiveness of *The Monk*; and Chapter Four, as might be expected, swings back again to a focus on what Watt will characterize as Ann Radcliffe's conservative appeal. Watt notes that recent critical work on Radcliffe has tended to emphasize the latter's feminist potential and he counters that the desire to read Radcliffe as a "proto-feminist writer of 'female Gothic'" (107) should be tempered by the observation that her work was extremely congenial to conservative critics of the 1790s and early 1800s, as well as by the fact that "many other Gothic novels and romances by contemporary women were far more searching in their social criticism" (107).

As in previous chapters, the strength of Watt's discussion is his attention to historical context. By considering Radcliffe's place in the overall field of

literary production, Watt is able to demonstrate how Radcliffe clearly took account of the criticism leveled at contemporaries such as Lewis and "sought to reinstate some of the more innocent proprieties of the romance genre" (9). Watt argues, for instance, that Radcliffe's *The Italian* was "clearly offered by Radcliffe as a rejoinder to Lewis" (117) and elucidates the ways in which Radcliffe sought to distinguish herself from Lewis and other writers of German-influenced "escapist fiction." Most palatable to conservative literary critics of the 1790s and early 1800s was the distinctively Radcliffean characteristic of the explained supernatural. Watt writes that, "Conservative critics, in particular, praised this technique, drawing attention to the parallel between credulity or superstition and revolutionary idealism, and implicitly equating rationalizing explanation with a recovery of the rule of law" (116). Watt concludes that Radcliffe's apparent detachment from political controversy and the use of the device of the explained supernatural participated in the sanctioning of her work as "a legitimate form of diversion or recreation at a time of obvious national crisis" (128).

The final chapter of *Contesting the Gothic* on Walter Scott and the *Waverly* novels has less to do with actually contesting the generic homogeneity or stability of the Gothic genre than with chronically the vicissitudes of literary popularity. As Watt details, the same aspects of Radcliffe's narratives which made them so popular to readers in the 1790s and early 1800s-particularly their perceived distance from contemporary politics—made them seem "naive and ignorant" to readers of Scott's immensely popular *Waverley* novels in the 1820s and 1830s. As opposed to escapes from reality, Watt explains that Scott was celebrated for "breaking the spell of romance and ushering his readers instead into the communal space of history and public life" (153). However, the apparent critical consensus that Scott's work successfully synthesized romance and history was short-lived. Watt details that, "the professionalization of history-writing in the period increasingly led critics to question Scott's expansionist treatment of 'historical' raw materials" (154). Scott came to be seen as a writer of popular romance catering to an "undifferentiated and uncritical mass audience" and the second half of the nineteenth century saw his works categorized as books for children—just as Gothic works began to be celebrated again in terms similar to those used by conservative critics of the 1790s.

While the final chapter on Scott seems less immediately relevant to *Contesting the Gothic*'s central thesis concerning the hybridity of the Gothic genre and the false sense of unity twentieth century literary criticism has imposed upon a diversity of texts, Watt achieves his stated intention of worrying generic categorization and makes clear that larger claims which have been made about the Gothic genre "fail to do justice either to the variety of works which are now labelled as 'Gothic' or to the diverse ways in which these works have functioned for their readers" (159). In particular, Watt's

elaboration of the conservative Gothic is compelling and his coinage of the category of the "Loyalist Gothic romance" is sure to enter into academic literary parlance. As with Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, *Contesting the Gothic* is impressively researched, well-documented, and convincing in its claims. It is recommended primarily for those with an interest in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European Gothic romance.