

Gavin Hopps, ed., *Byron's Ghosts: The Spectral, the Spiritual and the Supernatural*. Liverpool English Texts and Studies, 62. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013. Pp. 224. £70. ISBN 9781846319709.

Grim reader! did you ever see a ghost?
No; but you have heard—I understand—be dumb! (DJ XV, 95)

Given that Byron's most famous ghost is unveiled as the all-too fleshly Duchess Fitz-Fulke, previous commentators might be forgiven for overlooking the poet's concern with the spectral. *Byron's Ghosts* seeks to challenge this 'programmatic incuriosity about the immaterial' (10) in a wide-ranging examination of the role of the spectral, spiritual, and supernatural in Byron's poetry. The subject of this long-awaited collection is a rich one, and has haunted a handful of other recent publications, perhaps the best known being Susan Wolfson's excellent essay on 'Byron's Ghosting Authority' (*ELH* 76, 2009). Gavin Hopps's edited collection offers ten further perspectives on the topic of Byron's ghosts. He opens with a pithy yet studiously theorized explanation as to why there has been a postmodern revival in an interest in ghosts, and, pertinently, 'why this surprising renewal of interest is of significance for Romantic studies in general, and readers of Byron in particular' (1). In so doing, Hopps situates this edited collection in what he terms a 're-enchantment' (5) of the world currently experienced by a postmodern readership, arguing persuasively that, contrary to prevailing assumption, 'it is *scepticism* that dilates the parameters of the possible and underwrites the contemporary hospitality towards the spectral' (8).

The contributors offer a compelling selection of work that moves well beyond the numerous ghostly apparitions in Byron's verse, or the poet's love of a good ghost story – be that in the Black Friar episode of *Don Juan*, or on a dismal evening in Villa Diodati. From theology (Mary Hurst) to flirtation (Corin Throsby), from rhetoric (Dale Townshend) to sublimity (Philip Shaw), from the Gothic novel (Alison Milbank) to biography (Peter Allender), the contents page alone evidences the diverse critical possibilities of reading Byron through a spectral lens. Great care has been taken by the editor in drawing together such a range of perspectives. I hope to do justice to such diversity by considering the two contributions which bookend the chapter content of the volume more carefully – Bernard Beatty's cartography of the spectral in Byron's work, and Corin Throsby's chapter on the spectral nature of flirtation.

In 'Determining Unknown Modes of Being', Beatty offers the reader 'a basic map or chart' (30) of the ghosts and spirits we encounter in Byron's corpus. He indicates an undeniable spectral presence in Byron's poems: '50 per cent of them contain some kind of significant mention of ghosts or spirits' and of the eight dramas, '50 per cent depend upon spirits as major characters' (33). With characteristic attentiveness Beatty examines the play between 'unknown modes of being' (Wordsworth, *The Prelude* I, 419-20): from *The Siege of Corinth*, whose heroine, Francesca, materializes as 'Byron's most realised ghost' (34), to the Black Friar Cantos of *Don Juan* which counterpose ghosts of fiction and ghosts of fact (45). The essay offers a particularly compelling assessment of the largely neglected *Siege of Corinth*. Beatty deftly traces the poem's shifting gaze from the dogs feasting upon human remains in the shadow of Corinth's walls, to Alp reclining at the base of a ruined pillar, to the spectral visitation of Francesca – Byron taking us from the physical verisimilitude of death and ruination to the appearance of a ghostly apparition. Beatty thereby exposes Byron's peculiar brand of dualism, where, rather than adhering to a more conventional antithesis of matter and spirit, the poet is also seen to be 'intrigued by the idea that an absolute concentration on materiality flips into something else' (37).

Throsby's contribution extends the traditional definition of the ghostly to read a kind of spectrality in Byron's public and poetic practice of flirtation. The early citation of Adam Phillips's definition of flirtation as a 'calculated production of uncertainty' (202) underpins readings of poems such as *The Giaour*, which in its calculatedly uncertain form is argued by Throsby to be Byron's most flirtatious piece. Two features of flirting are attended to with especial care – veils and intertextuality. Byron's references to the former, which offer 'half-concealment and partial-revelation' (204), are read alongside the poet's use of narrative absence, which flirtatiously hints, veil-like, at the 'spectral presence' of the poet (206). Throsby also discerns such poetic hauntings in Byron's intertextual self-reference, specifically in the Harem Cantos of *Don Juan*, where Katinka fears 'the worst dreams that can be, / Of Guevres, Giaours, and Ginns, and Ghouls in hosts' (*DJ* VI, 48). A consummate flirt, this partial conjuring of his own spectre leaves the reader in a state of perpetual expectation – and 'wanting more' (212).

As a final note, whilst the value of the collection for students and scholars of Byron is without doubt, it is a slim collection for the price, being over 100 pages shorter than, for instance, another very good collection by Liverpool University Press: *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron* (2008). As such, I suspect the volume's final resting place will be the library shelf, rather than the private collection.

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