

Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. 336. £ 31. ISBN 9781421407173.

Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 214. £ 55. ISBN 9781107034068.

The introduction to *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction* opens with a few epigraphs about actions of observing pictures that also imply acts of knowledge or reflections on knowledge. In one of them, a character from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* tells another: 'You hardly need an introduction; we have a picture, highly valued by my father, which declares at once your name' (1). The structuring concern of the book lies in these words. Elliott examines the power of pictures, images and (actual or metaphorical) vision in Gothic fiction, though with occasional references to drama, such as Matthew Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, as well as other kinds of fiction. She specifically explores 'how first-wave British Gothic fiction and contemporaneous discourses mythologized the rise of mass picture identification between 1764 and 1835' (1). In doing so, the author addresses questions that are already familiar to scholars of Gothic. The visual in its various manifestations – such as the gendering of the gaze or the picturesque viewpoint – is a recurrent theme in Gothic criticism. Similarly, eighteenth-century and Romantic studies feature a sizeable number of publications exploring ways of seeing in the long eighteenth century. Yet, Elliott's volume considers a more specific and long overlooked phenomenon which she terms 'picture identification' and defines as 'a cultural *use* of portraiture: an intersemiotic practice that most commonly matches an embodied, presented face to a named, represented face to verify social identity' (2).

In order to investigate the pervasiveness and impact of this practice, Elliott draws on an astonishingly vast archive of fictional sources compiled by way of a variety of electronic libraries. On the one hand, this fact reveals how Gothic studies benefit from the new wealth of riches made available by ECCO, Google Books or archive.org. On the other, and more directly, this abundance of sources enables Elliott to demonstrate the proliferation of 'picture identification' from 1764 to 1834, the year of William Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood*, which she describes as 'the last canonical first-wave Gothic novel' (8). Based on these extensive foundations, her chapters variously analyze the theory and politics of picture identification, its matriarchal and patriarchal manifestations, iconolatry and iconoclasm, the contrasts and connections between 'identifying pictures' and 'pictures identifying', iconism (that is 'the capacities of words to raise mental images', 203) as a central feature of Gothic fiction, and the desire for and fear of picture identification. Although its central point is clearly and succinctly made in the introduction, the book is inevitably a long and complex one. Its array of themes and concerns is formidable. Picture identification, Elliott says at the outset, is a way 'to verify social identity' (2) and bears on 'social, political, historical, cultural, ideological, ethical, aesthetic, semiotic, epistemological, narrative, cognitive, and psychological issues' (3). At the same time, the focus of her discussion is often on class, since 'narratives of picture identification' serve to support 'the ascendancy of the ordinary middle classes in competition with the aristocratic, honorific, and wealthy middle classes who had been represented by named portraits for centuries' (3).

Among the highlights in Elliott's volume are her examinations of some of the best-known objects or scenes of vision in the Gothic canon: Alfonso's portrait from Walpole's *Otranto*; Ambrosio's roving, lustful eyes in Lewis's *Monk*; Schedoni's and Ellena's acts of looking and seeing in Radcliffe's *Italian*; and the portrait in Maturin's *Melmoth*. In each of

these cases, Elliott's approach offers fresh insights into a familiar scopic feature or situation. Equally stimulating are her readings of slightly less well-known works (to non-specialists, at least), as in her pages on Charlotte Smith's *Old Manor House* which she reads in terms of 'an intergenerational battle of iconolatry and iconoclasm, pitting live progeny against ancestral portraits to assert the vitality of the rising, eighteenth-century middle classes above the traditions of aristocrats' (147). Elliott's argument occasionally suffers from a penchant for sweeping statements ('Gothic fiction presents a more radical revolution in iconology than Lavater's or those of other bourgeois male writers', 173), but these do not really undermine the value of her book as an important *tour de force* inviting us to re-envisage culture-bound, time-specific and ideologically inflected ways of identifying (with) pictures in first-wave Gothic.

Angela Wright's *Britain, France and the Gothic* also aims to transform our ways of seeing and reading Gothic by viewing it 'through the lens of evolving relations between Britain and France' (18). Repositioning Gothic fiction within a network of trans-Channel cultural exchanges, Wright takes up the 'deep challenge of reciprocity' inscribed in it (149). As she authoritatively remarks, 'while Gothic novelists in Britain were acutely aware of their country's troubled relationship with its French neighbour, they all nonetheless dared to look across the Channel for inspiration, be it through the realms of translation, adaptation or unacknowledged plagiarism' (10). In particular, Wright singles out the Seven Years' War as the context for the 'complex, ambivalent origins of the Gothic romance in 1764' (3), and accordingly urges us to reconsider Gothic as bound up with precise forms of international conflict and exchange.

In her fine introduction, the author reconstructs the variegated and contradictory panorama of Anglo-French literary and cultural relations in the second half of the eighteenth century. She emphasizes undercurrents of mutual attraction and competition and, especially, Shakespeare's function as a gauge of the complex traffic of 'self-criticism, discussion, admiration and emulation' between the two countries (10). In her first chapter she examines Walpole's *Otranto* in light of his familiarity with French epistolary travel writing and his comments on French language and literature in the novel's Prefaces. The second chapter looks at the politics of Sophia Lee's, Clara Reeve's and Charlotte Smith's translations from the French and how this practice bore on their Gothic output. Keeping her focus on translation, in chapter 3 Wright considers the literary and political hysteria of the 1790s and how Gothic became synonymous with 'literature of terror' as the label was 'purged of its patriotic associations and abjected onto Britain's enemy, France' (13). Chapter 4 is an examination of Radcliffe's engagements with, and retreats from, French culture and philosophy; and chapter 5 deals with 'French convents and British liberty' through a fascinating examination of Lewis's uses of the topos of claustration.

Wright's elegantly written volume offers original perspectives and insights at every turn. In her discussion of Lewis's avowal of his plagiarisms in the 'Advertisement' to *The Monk*, she skilfully directs us to recognize and evaluate the presence of the 'sources' Lewis did not acknowledge, all of them French (124). Similarly, she encourages us to read Radcliffe in light of her 'enduring fascination' with France and its culture (14). Investigating the novelist's engagement with French educational philosophy (Rousseau, of course, but also the influential Madame de Genlis), Wright charts its progressive submergence within Radcliffe's works because of increasing Anglo-French 'military and literary hostilities' in the 1790s (105). The critic expands on and corrects existing scholarship to demonstrate that Radcliffe's novels are 'equally as embedded within philosophical educational arguments emerging from France as they are in the English literary heritage that she flagged up with so much care through her choice of epigraphs' (104). Moreover, in view of this ambivalence, France does not disappear from the novelist's output even after the traumatic turning point of the

Revolutionary decade. In her analysis of *Gaston de Blondville* Wright aptly suggests that the French cultural context may account for the novelist's only unexplained ghost, which thus becomes visible as 'a troubling reminder of the crisis of imagination in England's governance'(118). Casting new light on an author who is all too often associated with conservative Anglocentrism, the chapter on the 'great enchantress' exemplifies this critic's deft unravelling of coded intercultural connections. As she emerges from Wright's inspirational treatment, Radcliffe is an intercultural author caught in the act of conversing with a wider and more problematic range of interlocutors than we are generally accustomed to.

Consistently and convincingly argued throughout, *Britain, France and the Gothic* avoids the pitfalls of unspecified 'influences' and general similarities. Instead, it maps channels of contact, borrowing, adaptation, rewriting and translation in order to demonstrate how Gothic fully participated in the many networks of Franco-British cultural exchange between the Seven Years' War and the post-Napoleonic era. A crucial contribution to studies of Gothic and the cross-cultural dimensions of British Romanticism, Wright's book is set to change how we study and discuss these literary manifestations beyond purely national boundaries.

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