

**Christina Morin, *Charles Robert Maturin and the Haunting of Irish Romantic Fiction*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011. Pp. 210. £72. ISBN 9780719085321.**

Christina Morin's monograph on Charles Maturin frames itself as 'a project of ghost-hunting and ghost-conjuring' (4). Maturin is an acknowledged presence in the Irish and Gothic canon, but that presence is curiously spectral; Morin highlights the relative lack of critical and cultural attention that the author has received. The ultimate aim of her ghost-conjuring is, of course, revival – and it seems that this may be Maturin's time. Together with Jim Kelly's recent *Charles Maturin: Authorship, Authenticity and the Nation* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), Morin's book opens up welcome new avenues of research into an important writer.

The sense that Maturin has occupied a somewhat marginal cultural space, despite his influence, reflects the elusiveness and challenge of his work. Even the famous *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) offers a disorienting reading experience; its complex structure makes it akin to a 'maze of mirrors' (143). In fact, Maturin never had an easy relationship with his readership; Morin's exploration of the complexity of his attitudes to 'a reading public he both despised and relied upon' is a fascinating thread running throughout this volume (145). Maturin emerges as a peculiarly anxious figure: the novels are underpinned by disquiet about politics and religion, but there is also a recurrent unease about Maturin's own status, his relationship with his literary models, and his audience's tastes, for example.

Such concerns are particularly in evidence when it comes to the Gothic, as Maturin repeatedly seeks both to evoke the popular Gothic mode and to distance himself from it. And, as her title suggests, the genre is central to Morin's reading. *Charles Robert Maturin and the haunting of Irish Romantic fiction* builds on Derrida's ideas about ghosts in *Spectres of Marx* to argue that Maturin's work – and by extension Irish national fiction – is 'haunted' by Ireland's turbulent past and by 'past literary forms' (4). Examining the fiction chronologically, Morin explores how the Gothic interacts with the national tale and the historical novel, drawing attention to the way in which such interaction breaks down and complicates boundaries between genres, between reality and fiction, and between present and past.

That central awareness of the porosity of generic borders and of the potential generated by generic hybridity makes for some insightful analysis. Morin argues, for example, that the disruptiveness of the Gothic problematises the project of unity and reconciliation that ostensibly underpins the national tale. Similarly, 'merging [...] the Gothic and historical modes' (157) means that the historical novel's sense of factuality can be combined with the Gothic's insistence on the inevitable repetition of trauma to offer a bleak perspective on contemporary politics. 'Gothic negativity' (15), in other words, inflects the conventions of the other genres to signal Maturin's political pessimism. Morin's focus is resolutely on the fiction's Irish contexts; she makes productive use of paratexts, for instance, to bolster her sense that Maturin insists on the connections between Irish history and the events of his Gothic-marked fiction.

However, Morin's argument about the artificiality of generic boundaries could have gone further. She usefully complicates a chronology of genre in which the Gothic novel gives way to the national tale which in turn shades into the historical novel, by making a persuasive case about how these forms overlap in Maturin's work. However, she fails to point out that in fact the Gothic and historical novel were always inextricably intertwined, paying little attention to the pre-1790s origins of the Gothic. Morin's account makes no reference to Thomas Leland, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, or Anne Fuller, for example – British and Irish writers whose hybrid works are early examples of both the Gothic *and* historical novels. There is a similar reliance on a slightly suspect chronological convention in Morin's claim

that the Gothic novel was ‘seemingly dead’ when Maturin was writing *Melmoth* (131); this offers a rhetorically effective conceit whereby the novel is haunted by the Gothic, but seems somewhat in tension with Maturin’s own attempts to distance himself from the ongoing influence of the ‘Radcliffe-Romance’ (134).

Nonetheless, the monograph’s strengths far outweigh such issues. Morin is, for example, consistently interesting on gender issues, whether she is discussing Maturin’s desire to masculinise the novel form, the way references to incest connect to the contemporary imaging of Anglo-Irish Union, or the relationship between gender dynamics and national commentary in *The Milesian Chief* (1812). This latter chapter is, indeed, one of the highlights of the monograph.

Overall, Morin’s work offers an impassioned sense of the importance of Maturin’s haunting presence in our literary history. Her conclusion offers a survey of Maturin’s influence on writers from Baudelaire to John Banville, and a call for the source of that influence to be better understood. This volume is an important contribution to that project.

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