

Angela Wright and Dale Townshend, eds., *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. Pp. 394. £80. ISBN 9780748696741.

There are numerous scholarly companions that chart the Gothic novel's rise to popularity and infamy in the late-eighteenth century. Their broader aim is, often, to read this ascent alongside the many and varied Victorian, modern and contemporary manifestations of the Gothic. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend's new collection *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2016) enters the vast critical field of Gothic studies, then, as the only major scholarly companion whose sole focus is to illuminate the Gothic Romance's often troubled relationship with literary Romanticism. As the editors admit in their introduction, given Romanticism's initial construction of itself as a more refined aesthetic than its excessive Gothic counterpart – through, for instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's numerous, often derogatory reviews of Gothic novels – the invocation of a 'Romantic Gothic' may seem 'oxymoronic' or even 'confrontational' (1). Yet, as much critical work since David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980) attests, the resonances and relationships between the Gothic and Romanticism are nuanced and complex. Romantic poets held an appreciation for the prose of the most renowned Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe; while, it was the retreat of a number of second generation Romantics to the Villa Diodati in 1816 – the year without a summer – that birthed John Polidori's modern, Byronic vampire and the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818; 1831).

Reiterating, supplementing and even re-framing existing critical work in the field, the nineteen chapters that make up this comprehensive volume suggest, as we may intuitively expect, that there is much more to the story of Romantic Gothic. Ambitious in its scope and continually sharp and perceptive in the critical insights its well-respected contributors provide, Wright and Townshend's collection should appeal to a broad readership of scholars, postgraduates and advanced undergraduate students alike. *Romantic Gothic* is, therefore, an essential addition to any university library's holdings. Forming a relatively new but increasingly important part of Gothic criticism, there are only a small number of studies in Edinburgh's Gothic *Companions* series, and *Romantic Gothic* is hopefully an indication of the methodology that will underpin the Press's future endeavours in the field. While fresh readings abound in this collection, many of the contributors here expertly recap critical consensus, where it exists, for the reader who is less familiar with the historical, intertextual, theological and cultural climates that shaped the emergence of the Gothic.

Given such broad contexts, there is little space in this review to do justice to all of the valuable critical work that *Romantic Gothic* provides. The chapters that I focus on below may appeal, in particular, to a scholarly readership that wishes to draw from the collection in their teaching. The *Companion* is neatly divided into three sections and should prove easy to navigate for its broad target readership. The first part – 'Gothic Modes and Forms' – is the lengthiest and most comprehensive of the three. From the early chapters, Deborah Russell's reading of the Gothic Romance and Robert Miles' summation of 'Political Gothic Fiction' are both reassuringly comprehensive and manage to shed fresh light on well-covered topics. Douglass H. Thomson and Diane Long Hoeveler's joint essay on Gothic ballads and chapbooks is, too, admirably detailed and provides an almost exhaustive survey of shorter Gothic forms. Their description of Gothic chapbooks as replete with 'libertines, rakes, seducers, predators, gamblers and adulterers' (155) will have students racing to the archives to discover more. Indeed, a range of influential forms and contexts – those normally reserved for detailed discussion in monographs on the Gothic Romance – are afforded significant and sustained critical attention. By drawing from Sue Zlosnik and Avril Horner's established work on comic Gothic, Natalie Neill's excellent essay on 'Gothic Parody', for instance,

charts a quintessential parodic strand to Gothic fiction, which, most notably, includes John Aikin's 'Sir Bertrand, A Fragment' (1773), Matthew Lewis' playful invocation of 'The Bleeding Nun' in his *The Monk* (1796), and the establishment of the Gothic Quixote of the period.

Moving away from its more self-referential narrative forms, the second half of the volume seeks to disentangle the many transnational, cultural, scientific and theological influences that shaped the Gothic. Contributing to this critical aim, *Romantic Gothic*'s middle section – entitled 'National and International Borders' – contains a fascinating essay by Mark Bennett that highlights those 'Gothic presences' in Grand and Picturesque tourism narratives that proved 'of great importance to the broader development of the Gothic imagination ... in Romantic print culture' (231). In the book's third part – 'Reading the Romantic Gothic' – Andrew Smith's overview of 'Gothic Science' is an essential survey for students; while in the companion's closing essay on 'Gothic Theology' Alison Milbank argues that the Gothic novel's various handlings of Catholicism attempt to move beyond 'the problematics of eighteenth-century rational Dissent' (362). Appealing to scholars and students alike, the collection as a whole, then, proves an invaluable companion for those studying the myriad forms and intersections of the Gothic and Romanticism.

Matt Foley
University of Stirling