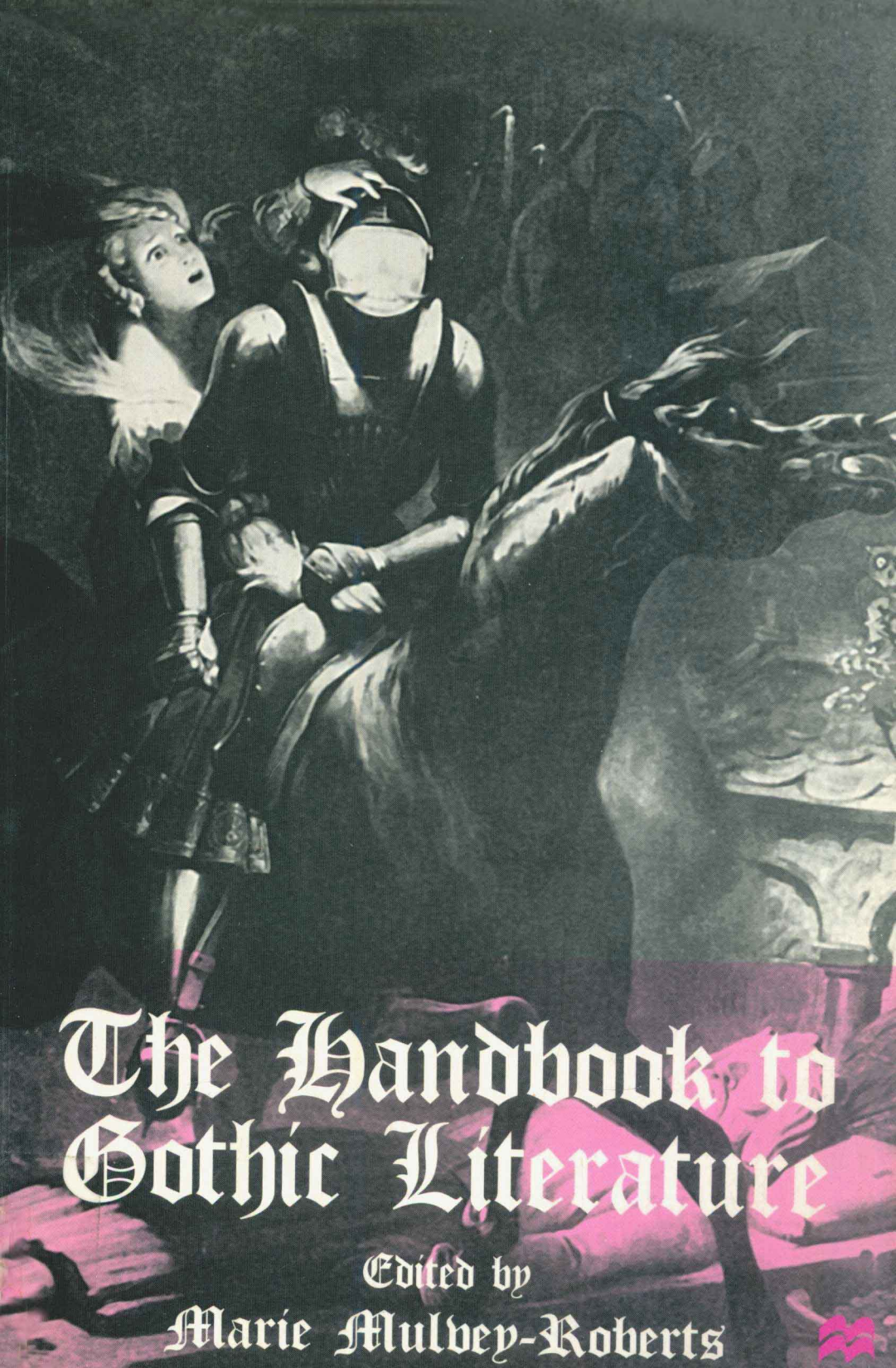

The Handbook to Gothic Literature

Edited by

Marie Mulvey-Roberts

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Senior Lecturer in Literary Studies
University of the West of England, Bristol

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List of Contributors

Lucie Armitt, Lecturer in English at the University of Wales, Bangor

Clive Bloom, Reader in English, Middlesex University, London

Fred Botting, Lecturer in English, Lancaster University

Elisabeth Bronfen, Professor of English, Zurich University

Steven Bruhm, Associate Professor in English, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Charles Butler, Senior Lecturer in Literary Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol

Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, Professor in Comparative Literature, University of Montreal

Steve Clark, Lecturer in English, Osaka University

E. J. Clery, Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University

John Cloy, Librarian, John Davis Williams Library, University of Mississippi

Ian Conrich, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, Nottingham Trent University

Neil Cornwell, Professor of Russian, University of Bristol

Jeffrey N. Cox, Associate Professor in English, Texas A&M University

Eric Hadley Denton, Associate Professor in English, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Madge Dresser, Principal Lecturer in Historical Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol

Sion Eirian, freelance writer, Cardiff

U. A. Fanthorpe, poet, Wootton-under-Edge

Benjamin F. Fisher, Professor of English, University of Mississippi

Michael Franklin, Lecturer in English Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff

Ken Gelder, Associate Professor and Reader in English, University of Melbourne

R. A. Gilbert, writer and bookseller, Bristol

Antonio Ballesteros González, Lecturer in English, University of Castilla, La Mancha, Spain

Iain Hamilton Grant, Lecturer in Cultural Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol

Terry Hale, Director of the British Centre for Literary Translation, University of East Anglia

Jerrold E. Hogle, Associate Professor in English, University of Arizona, Tucson

Avril Horner, Lecturer in English, Salford University

Christoph Houswitschka, Lecturer in English, University of Dresden

William Hughes, Lecturer in English, Bath Spa University College

Elizabeth Imlay, writer and publisher, Speldhurst, Kent

Darryl Jones, Lecturer in English, Trinity College, University of Dublin

Elaine Jordan, Senior Lecturer in English, University of Essex

Richard Kerridge, Senior Lecturer in English, Bath Spa University College

Sally Ledger, Lecturer in English, Birkbeck College, University of London

A. Robert Lee, Professor of English, Nihon University, Japan

T. J. Lustig, Lecturer in American Studies, Keele University

Douglas S. Mack, Senior Lecturer in English, University of Stirling

Cécile Malet-Dagréou, postgraduate student in English, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Philip W. Martin, Head of Humanities, Cheltenham and Gloucester College, Cheltenham

W. J. McCormack, Senior Lecturer in English, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Alison Milbank, writer, Cambridge

Robert Miles, Reader in English, Sheffield Hallam University

Hans-Ulrich Mohr, Technical University of Dresden

Marie Mulvey-Roberts, Senior Lecturer in Literary Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol

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Pascal Nicklas, Lecturer in English, University of Leipzig

Graham Ovenden, artist, Cornwall

David Punter, Professor of English Studies, University of Stirling

Tina Rath, writer and postgraduate student, Royal Holloway, University of London

Faye Ringel, Associate Professor in English, US Coast Guard Academy, New London, USA

Victor Sage, Reader in English and American Studies, University of East Anglia

Neil Sammells, Dean of Humanities, Bath Spa University College

David Seed, Reader in English, Liverpool University

Helen Small, Lecturer in English, Pembroke College, Oxford

John Charles Smith, Fellow, St Catherine's College, Oxford

Allan Lloyd Smith, Lecturer in English and American Studies, University of East Anglia

Helen Stoddart, Lecturer in English, Keele University

Philip Stokes, Lecturer in Photography, Nottingham Trent University

Janet Todd, Professor in English and American Literature, University of East Anglia

Ann B. Tracy, Associate Professor in English, State University of New York at Plattsburgh

Nicola Trott, Lecturer in English, University of Glasgow

Gerry Turcotte, Senior Lecturer in English Studies, Wollongong University, Australia

William Veeder, Professor of English, University of Chicago

Mary Waldron, Lecturer in Continuing Education, University of Exeter

Alexandra Warwick, Lecturer in English Studies, University of Westminster

Thomas Willard, Associate Professor in English, University of Arizona, Tucson

Carolyn D. Williams, Senior Lecturer in English, University of Reading

Introduction

> 'I will read you their names directly; here they are in my pocket-book: "Castle of Wolfenbach," "Clermont," "Mysterious Warnings," "Necromancer of the Black Forest," "Midnight Bell," "Orphan of the Rhine," and "Horrid Mysteries." Those will last us some time.'
>
> 'Yes; pretty well; but are they all horrid? Are you sure they are all horrid?'
>
> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818)

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* has become the definitive satiric paradigm for the delusions of the Gothic reader engendering the dangers of Gothic reading. When consigned to a list of future reading in the feckless Isabella Thorpe's pocket-book, the fears generated by these *Northanger* novels, rather than being domesticated, are so positioned as to accentuate the prolepsis of redoubtable terrors.

The impulse to catalogue and classify in the spirit of Augustan taxonomy serves us with the illusion of gaining control over the otherwise uncontainable. The murky flux of the formless mass of Gothic space becomes less terrifying when confined to a handbook, particularly one that is arranged in alphabetical order. Like the horror film *The Entity*, which stars a gargantuan shapeless phenomenon that threatens to engulf the entire film set in its ever-expanding protean borders, the Gothic cultural phenomenon continues to break its boundaries. *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* sets out to delineate the contours, points of transgression, cross-over and cross-fertilisation that characterise Gothic literature and its tangential disciplines: architecture, art, film, music and photography.

The hideous progeny of Gothic literature has spawned a textual equivalent of the race of devils that Victor Frankenstein feared 'might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror'.[1] Resistance to such a Gothic invasion has been mounted by a phalanx of critics in a two-pronged attack. Disarming the Gothic text by analysing it, is a variant on Wordsworth's 'We murder to Dissect',[2] which is particularly apposite when *Frankenstein* is being considered. Like Victor, who destroys the female he is creating as a mate for his creature, the literary critic dismembers and fragments the whole into customised parts. From there, follow classification and sub-division of text, author, concept, many of which are re-entered and cross-referenced under different categories such as national or regional divisions. This combination of analysis and classification underscores Gothic literature in its broad

contours as well as in its idiosyncrasies. Such tactics are surety against the danger of us failing to see the Gothic castle for the gargoyles.

This book is more than an inventory of the sinister, the fantastical, and the eerie, it is a passport to what Terry Castle calls the 'hag-ridden realm of [the] unconscious'.[3] Duly labelled and arranged under headings ranging from 'The Sublime' to the 'Rosicrucian', the compendium is divided into entries that are predominantly mainstream and those that are primarily peripheral. The bifurcation of Gothic writing which tends to default along the gendered lines of female 'Terror' and male 'Horror' is included, for example, in the main section. In the second half, entries on dread-related areas such as 'The Uncanny' and 'The Grotesque' are suggestive of how 'Gothic' should not be traduced. At once an umbrella term that has traditionally covered a multitude of the fictional sinned against and sinning, the nuances of what we understand by it as a site of difference within a panoply of family resemblances, is represented in this collection.

What is Gothic literature? Is it a plot, a trope, a topos, a discourse, a mode of representation, conventions of characterisation, or a composite of all these aspects? Associated with the traditional Gothic Novel is an ivy-covered haunted ruin, a swooning heroine replete with sensibility, and a tyrannical villain, bequeathed with a lock, a key and a castle. Constituting and constitutive of anachronism and counterfeit, the Gothic plot, the proverbial textual folly, is a mirror diverting us from the Gorgon's gaze, that is, at least once removed from the source of trauma and taboo. The concoction is a dark yet familiar brew – an uneasy and eerie dialectic between anxiety and desire. A working definition of 'Gothic' and 'Gothic literature', with its polyvalency and slippage of meaning, may be gleaned from the entries aggregated here. *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* is also an index to otherness, for it captures and catalogues a way of looking at the world that is redolent of something other than itself. More perplexing still is the way in which, while trying to lock onto the Gothic co-ordinates, one can end up chasing a zero vanishing point, especially since so much of Gothic writing is preoccupied with gaps. On a pragmatic note, there will inevitably be gaps of omission particularly as Gothic culture continues to evolve. The idea for *The Handbook* was inspired by Frederick S. Frank, whose glossary of Gothic terms in his *The First Gothics* (1987) it is intended to complement. Particularly captivating are his beguiling Freudian categories as in the Beckfordian phallic genre of novels exhibiting 'Toweromania' and 'Turret Gothic', whose gendered counterparts, 'Grotto Gothic' and 'Grottophilia', are set in womb-like, cavernous environments.

As an anatomy of the Gothic world and an unholy Bible of the world's leading Gothicists, this *Handbook* purports to be introductory, referential

and innovatory. Popular representations of the Gothic subsist with high cultural forms. Marginalised Gothicisms, such as 'Welsh Gothic', are represented alongside canonical Gothic writers like Ann Radcliffe (if such appended designations are not respectively tautological or oxymoronic). The Gothic writer, to misappropriate Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*, belongs to 'the Republick of dark Authors' who span the dark side of the solar ray of the Rational Enlightenment to the present day. Landmark writers that form the main contours of the Gothic landscape make up most entries. An appended list of further reading, which gives priority to 'Female Gothic' as a distinct category, includes brief bibliographies for six of the most popular writers: Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker and Angela Carter.

Gothic life, like that of a giant poisonous plant with far-reaching tendrils, has found its sustenance by feeding off the credulities of its readers. This hot-house hybrid is constantly mutating, making new growths out of old as in its propensity for parody and pastiche. What remains consistent, according to Angela Carter, is the retention of 'a singular moral function – that of provoking unease'.[4] This inflection of Gothic as un-ease or dis-ease invites comparisons with the pathological. Having taken up residence in its host, the Gothic replicates itself throughout our culture like a virus. While resistant to the antidote of realism, it persistently conjugates with the dark side of contemporaneity, at the same time, making a textual negotiation with history. Apart from time there is place. The diaspora of Gothic writing has led to the emergence of distinct traditions in Australia and Canada and beyond. Regrettably space does not allow all the countries who have either imported or incubated Gothic cultural representations to be included here. Pragmatism dictated by undergraduate reading lists has, inevitably, restricted the entries to English-speaking countries and selected European black spots of the sinister, the uncanny and the terrible, like France, Germany and Russia.

It is to those who have created this Gothic topography, that I am most grateful. Many contributors are leading Gothicists, who have pushed back the frontiers of our understanding of the mechanisms of fear and the perverse attraction to the creeping horrors of the imagination. William Hughes has been particularly helpful as a source of reassurance and unfailingly sound advice while Macmillan's Charmian Hearne has been a most patient and understanding editor. Her fund of wisdom, insight and faith in the project, have shed much-needed light, particularly when I have felt emeshed in pockets of Gothic darkness. Neil Cornwell, Norah Crook, Marion Glastonbury, Naomi Lester, Valery Rose and my family deserve special mention for their support. Finally, I would like to thank my students for their Gothic enthusiasms and trust

that this book will match up to their Gothic requirements. Though it may not contain definitive answers to such questions as 'Is Gothic literature a sub-genre of Romanticism or the other way round?', as an adjunct to Angela Carter's observation that 'we live in Gothic times',[5] the *Handbook* goes a long way in showing us where we came from and where we are going.

Bristol MARIE MULVEY-ROBERTS

Notes

1. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 140.
2. William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798; London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 186.
3. Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 5.
4. Angela Carter, Afterword to *Fireworks*, in *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage Random House, 1996), p. 459.
5. Ibid., p. 460.

Contents

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Gothic Specialisms

Gothic Writers and Key Terms

Ainsworth, William Harrison (1805–82)

Ainsworth made his first venture into sensational fiction with 'The Test of Affection' (*European Magazine*, 1822), a tale that relies heavily on artificial **'SUPERNATURAL'** devices in the **ANN RADCLIFFE** mode for its effect. It was followed by 'The Spectre Bride' (*Arliss's Pocket Magazine*, 1822) and his early Gothic tales were collected in his first book, the anonymous *December Tales* (1823). All of this youthful work – which displays more enthusiasm than polish – was produced while Ainsworth was living in Manchester, where he had been born in 1805.

After he moved to London in 1824 to complete his legal training, Ainsworth took up a career in periodical publishing, although his finest work as an editor – with *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Ainsworth's Magazine*, and *The New Monthly Magazine* – belongs to the 1840s, by which time he had established himself as a successful popular novelist. Between 1834 and his death in 1882 he published thirty-nine novels, but while his earlier works were immensely successful he outlived his popularity and the later titles were failures.

Rookwood, his first independent novel, published anonymously in 1834, was, in his own words, 'a story in the bygone style of Mrs. Radcliffe'. It contains the standard stock-in-trade of such stories: gloomy settings, dismal vaults, and skeleton hands, with a decaying manor house and an English highwayman in place of the Radcliffean castle and Italian brigand – all of them used to great effect. His second novel of highwaymen, *Jack Sheppard* (1839), was more realist than Romantic in nature and was condemned for its idealisation of crime. With *The Miser's Daughter* (1842), in which the influence of Mrs Radcliffe can clearly be seen, he returned to the Gothic fold.

In 1848 Ainsworth published his most enduring novel, and the only one which is overtly supernatural in content, but *The Lancashire Witches* is in no sense a true Gothic novel. It *does* contain **WITCHES** and demons but its success comes by way of the author's portrayal of regional character and local topography. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s Ainsworth maintained a steady output of sound, stirring historical novels, but while supernatural episodes occasionally crept in, the Romantic elements faded away and with them his claim to be a writer of the Gothic.

R. A. GILBERT

American Gothic

American fiction began in the Gothic mode, because the first substantial American efforts in fiction coincided with the great period of British and European gothic. The examples of the British novelist William Godwin and the German romancers played an important part in inspiring **CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN**'s early novels and the Germans similarly provided material for **WASHINGTON IRVING**'s Gothic satires. A little later **EDGAR ALLAN POE** worked in the vein of the sensationalist *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, producing tales that did not achieve the popularity he expected, largely because the literary marketplace had already moved on by the 1830s and 1840s. **NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE** fully realised the possibilities of resonance between the Gothic tradition and the American past, and **HERMAN MELVILLE** used the mode to articulate his more coded understanding of the darker underside of the new nation's optimistic surfaces. That darker note concerned in part the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination, which was to inform many subsequent fictions of **SOUTHERN GOTHIC** and is still a principal energiser of the mode, as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Another thread may be identified as the psychological possibilities of Gothicism, again a major element in Brockden Brown's novels, developed through Poe's and Hawthorne's tales and powerfully at work in **HENRY JAMES**'s ghost stories and even his major fictions. The advantage – and perhaps indeed inevitability – of the Gothic form in articulating the concerns of the unvoiced 'other' has meant that the position of the female in a predominantly masculinist culture provided another important strand in American Gothicism, instanced best by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Recently, while the Southern Gothic tradition has modulated from Faulkner, Truman Capote and Flannery O'Connor into an exploration of the history of the racially 'othered', there can also be identified a strain of **URBAN GOTHICISM**, in the work of James Purdy, for example, or some of John Hawkes's writing, and what might be called techno-Gothic, as in Thomas Pynchon's *V* or *Gravity's Rainbow*, and finally, cyber-Gothic, in William Gibson's novels and stories. To summarise, then, although American Gothicists participated in a wider literary tradition, the circumstances of their own history and the stresses of their particular cultural and political institutions meant that a series of significant inflections determined a Gothicism that differs considerably from British or European versions.

Philip Freneau (1752–1832) struck the Gothic note early in his graveyard poem *The House of Night* (1799):

> Let others draw from smiling skies their theme,
> And tell of climes that boast unfading light,

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