
Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*. NY: Modern Language Association, 2003. 310p.

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As Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller's collection of essays makes clear, the genre of Gothic literature has become an increasingly important subject for examination within the larger field of English and American literary studies. Especially as colleges and universities continue to pursue more interdisciplinary and multicultural courses of study, the Gothic offers a wide range of opportunities for instructors of literature to develop innovative classes for their students, whether majors or non-majors, undergraduate or graduate students. To that end, Hoeveler and Heller's collection of essays on teaching Gothic fiction provides an invaluable resource for teachers of the subject.

This compilation is divided into two main parts: "Materials" and "Approaches." The first part is certainly useful, as it provides a general sense of the historical and critical background for the genre as well as introduction to the different critical approaches most often utilized in the classroom. This section is based largely on the responses of "nearly one hundred" individuals to a survey sent "to MLA members and others who teach the Gothic" (xiii). Consequently, Heller lists those works most frequently used by the respondents, organizing her discussion into numerous categories, but often simply listing large numbers of books without evaluative statements of relative merit. Nevertheless, several concise evaluations do appear. In the discussion of critical approaches, for example, Heller does include more specific guidance regarding the most useful secondary sources associated with different critical perspectives.

The second part, consisting of essays by twenty-nine different instructors, is itself divided into four sections: "Teaching the Backgrounds," "Teaching the British Gothic Tradition," "Teaching the American Gothic Tradition," and "Specific Classroom Contexts." These essays offer discussions of teaching methodologies that occupy spaces along a wide continuum of concerns and complexity, from close thematic investigations to explorations of more abstract theoretical concepts, and thus are suited for different levels of students. The balance of pedagogy and theory also shifts from essay to essay. For example, in the first essay in this section, Judith Wilt's "And Still Insists He Sees the Ghosts': Defining the Gothic" (39-45), Wilt explains how her course has evolved through two undergraduate versions and one graduate version. She explains not only the texts she has used and replaced, but

also the rationale behind her decisions—not only what has worked or hasn't worked, but why she believes it has or hasn't. She also shares three "shaping ideas" about the Gothic, ideas that have consistently generated useful classroom discussion (41).

In sharp contrast to Wilt's essay is the one that follows it, Marshall Brown's "Philosophy and the Gothic Novel" (46-57). Brown takes as his subject an interesting phenomenon: the tendency for students (and critics) virtually to ignore the "long passages of description, background, drifting, and waiting that lack the intensity supposedly characteristic of the genre" (46). Brown proposes that such passages have considerable importance when considered within the context of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophy, and thus proceeds to examine connections between such writers as Charlotte Dacre, Ann Radcliffe, and Edgar Allan Poe, and different philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

To be sure, both approaches have considerable merit. It is certainly useful, when devising or revising a course syllabus, to consider the experiences of our colleagues in the field. It is also helpful to consider different critical approaches and interpretations of the texts we are teaching, especially when such interpretation is couched, as Brown's indeed is, in terms of the transmission of these theories to our students. While Brown's discussion is certainly insightful, however, a more effective presentation, at least in terms of the overall purposes of the collection, is found in Anne Williams' "The Horrors of Misogyny: Feminist Psychoanalysis in the Gothic Classroom" (73-82). In describing a very ambitious plan to train her undergraduate students to develop psychoanalytic readings of the Gothic based on the theories of Julia Kristeva, Williams offers a very methodical explanation of the sequence of assigned readings and classroom pedagogy, complete with two appendices. The first supplies a table of binary pairs, derived from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and delineating the concepts of the line of good and the line of evil. The second presents study questions used in the class discussions of "Bluebeard," Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard," Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (81-82). Ultimately, the great majority of the essays included in this volume are firmly grounded in pedagogy, though a number of them incorporate some theoretical framework—usually a historical or psychoanalytic one—that informs the instructor's classroom approach to the texts under investigation. Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault come up most frequently, though references are made to theorists from Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Marx, to Lacan, Bakhtin, and Derrida.

The most impressive component to this collection is its extensiveness. Not only is there a large variety of primary texts represented in these essays—of course, Walpole, Radcliffe, Poe, and Shelley receive ample attention, but so too do such writers as James Hogg, Iris Murdoch, Gloria Naylor, and even Stephen King and Anne Rice—but the works are investigated from numerous points of view. Issues of colonialism, gender, sexuality, and class all receive proper treatment, allowing instructors to consider a wealth of possibilities for their classrooms. Indeed, whether an instructor is approaching the teaching of a Gothic literature course for the first time or wishes to reformulate a course that has been taught for years, this collection of essays will prove to be an essential tool. ✨