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Was there ever a “Female Gothic”?

Ellen Ledoux¹

ABSTRACT This article examines the reception history of women-authored Gothic texts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, arguing that the generic descriptor “Female Gothic” more accurately reflects the ideological goals of second-wave feminist literary criticism than the narratives of early women Gothic writers. While several critics have attempted to destabilize the term Female Gothic, its usage persists as a short-hand form to describe narratives in which distressed female heroines are imprisoned in the domestic sphere and threatened with extortion, rape and forced marriage. This essay asks why criticism clings to an understanding of this genre as one depicting female victimization despite overwhelming textual evidence that represents a much more complicated picture of women’s use and engagement with the Gothic mode. It is argued that the answer to this question rests in looking at how Gothic women’s writing was received in the early nineteenth century and how that reception history shaped the discursive strategies of second-wave feminist literary critics.

¹ Rutgers University-Camden, Camden, New Jersey, USA

In her groundbreaking *Literary Women* (1976), Ellen Moers introduced the term “Female Gothic” to describe how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women novelists employ certain coded expressions to describe anxieties over domestic entrapment and female sexuality. The term touched on something vital to women’s experience, generating robust feminist scholarship exploring the urgency and persistence of these themes in women’s writing and lives. Moers’s work and that of many other-second wave feminists (Margaret Doody, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Leona Sherman, *et al.*) reclaimed a wealth of textual material written by women and created a place for it within the canon. Gothic writing by authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and the Brontës played a central part in that movement. The institutionalization of “Gothic Studies” within academies is due, in large part, to those pioneering second-wave critics (Fitzgerald, 2009: 13–20). So, I entitled this piece, “Was there ever a Female Gothic?” with a sense of hesitation. It seemed ungrateful to question a literary category that made my scholarship and that of many of my peers even possible. Yet, I have wanted to write this article for some time, because categorizing a work as part of the Female Gothic seems to create more problems for analysis than it solves.

Other critics have examined closely the categorical problems inherent to a term that links a stable notion of gender to a notoriously slippery literary mode. This discussion takes a slightly different tack and questions why such a problematic term has had such a sustained and profound impact on feminist literary criticism up to this day. It addresses the reception history of women-authored Gothic texts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, suggesting that the category “Female Gothic” more accurately reflects the ideological goals of second-wave feminist literary criticism than it represents the narratives of early women Gothic writers, such as Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee and Charlotte Dacre. While critics, including Robert Miles, Alison Milbank, Emma Clery, and Diane Hoeveler among many others, have attempted to refine the term Female Gothic, its usage has limited the ways in which scholars approach women’s Gothic writing. Women-authored texts that do not feature “Female Gothic” tropes—a distressed heroine, domestic incarceration, threats of sexual violence, anxiety about monstrous or absent mothers—are often given little critical attention. As I and others have argued elsewhere, however, women’s early Gothic writing—a great deal of which is only accessible to us because of the recovery work of feminist scholars—is much more aesthetically, politically, thematically, and generically diverse than the Female Gothic categorization suggests (Kelly, 2003; Wright, 2003; Potter, 2005; Coykendall, 2005; Ledoux, 2013).

This essay does not wish to disqualify the important work done on the Female Gothic. The themes this work has identified (women’s domestic incarceration, sexual violence, economic disenfranchisement and spectral maternity) are central to the Gothic mode. Rather, this essay attempts to explain *why* the discrepancy between available primary textual material and textual analysis exists and how it came to be. The essay also gestures towards the critical consequences of this discrepancy, highlighting how it limits our understanding of women’s writing. In short, I hope to move the conversation about women’s Gothic writing in new directions by pointing out the ways nineteenth- and twentieth-century political conditions shaped the Female Gothic as a category that does not fully reflect the richness of women’s early Gothic material.

I argue that the origins of this discrepancy can be traced back to how Gothic women’s writing was received in the early nineteenth century and how that reception history shaped the discursive strategies of second-wave feminist literary critics. I use the career of Ann Radcliffe as my central example, because her

writing was central to nineteenth-century critics’ attempts to legitimize the novel and twentieth-century feminists’ attempts to canonize women’s writing. In the late eighteenth century, Radcliffe’s ability to garner an artistic reputation within a commercial genre de-stabilized vulnerable literary hierarchies and accepted notions about professional female authorship. By presenting Radcliffe as an anomaly—a special case—critics such as Walter Scott could acknowledge her artistry without having to re-evaluate the aesthetic contribution made by women authors in the emerging Gothic. These critics also aimed to squelch the groundswell of women’s creativity during this period by branding any woman who wrote Gothic narratives as a “servile imitator” of Radcliffe.

When feminist critics in the 1970s sought to create a female canon—to which the Female Gothic was integral—they reproduced nineteenth-century critics’ rhetoric of Radcliffe’s originality and influence. Feminist critics leveraged Radcliffe’s reputation, solidified by Walter Scott’s and others’ endorsement, to legitimate their claims that Gothic romances by women merit serious study. However, by treating Radcliffe’s novels as the first, the best, and sometimes the sole example of the genre, academic criticism did not represent the ideological diversity of women writers, especially those who used their work to reinforce conservative politics, engage with issues outside of gender, or to address the concerns of working-class women. Clara Reeve, for example, made important contributions to the developing Gothic mode. However, since her work is ideologically conservative, establishing what James Watt calls the “loyalist gothic” (Watt, 1999), feminist critics often exclude her novel *The Old English Baron* (1778) and her important literary criticism *The Progress of Romance* (1785) from work on the Female Gothic even though both have been seminal to the development of a women’s literary tradition. On the other side of the spectrum, Sarah Wilkinson’s chapbook “The Count of Montabino” (c. 1810) forms a working-class critique of the bourgeois domestic entrapment theme so central to the Radcliffean narrative (Ledoux, 2013). Although Wilkinson was a prolific author who enjoyed consumer name recognition, her work in “pulp fiction” has been virtually ignored in part because it does not promote women’s writing as high art. In some ways, the term “Female Gothic” has been a victim of its own success. The important work achieved by second-wave feminists to create a more inclusive canon and to “recover” women’s writing, reveals that women authors’ relationship to the burgeoning Gothic mode was richer and more nuanced than previously thought in ways that demand that we widen the lens with which we approach women’s Gothic productions from the eighteenth century to the present.

The Female Gothic: from the second-wave to post-feminism

Ellen Moers’s initial generative suggestion galvanized a whole body of criticism that explores the coded expressions in women-authored Gothic texts, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), a volume of essays edited by Julian Fleenor entitled *The Female Gothic* (1983), Kate Ferguson Ellis’s *The Contested Castle* (1989), Eugenia DeLamotte’s *Perils of the Night* (1990), Diane Long Hoeveler’s *Gothic Feminism* (1998), Helene Meyers’s *Femicidal Fears* (2001), Donna Heiland’s *Gothic and Gender* (2004), Andrew Smith’s and Diana Wallace’s collection *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), and Avril Horner’s and Sue Zlosnik’s recent Edinburgh Companion on *Women and the Gothic* (2016) among other monographs and essays too numerous to name.

Each of these studies qualifies Moers’s initial formulation in meaningful ways and asks some pressing questions about gender in relation to the Gothic mode. One discussion elaborates on

whether the gender of the author correlates with a specific aesthetic. The Female Gothic has been closely associated with the “explained supernatural style” made famous by Radcliffe, in which supernatural events are threatened but later rationalized. This style is in opposition to the “Male Gothic,” made famous by Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis, in which ghosts, devils and other supernatural phenomena demand a willful suspension of disbelief from the reader (Milbank, 1998: 54 and Hogle, 2002: 9–10). Yet important Gothic practitioners, such as Clara Reeve, Charlotte Dacre, and Mary Shelley all write in the so-called “male” style. While it is rare for male authors to write in the “female” style, an author’s gender does not typically align with the “female/male” aesthetic binary (Miles, 2000).

A second discussion explores whether women’s Gothic writing consistently coheres around the principal characters and thematic issues Moers identified. As many scholars have noted, women authors often create Gothic worlds that symbolize patriarchal power in which a virginal heroine attempts to overcome an exaggerated version of the subjugation women face in everyday life. However, a critical mass of women’s Gothic writing exists that addresses very different themes and characters. The works of Clara Reeve and Charlotte Smith, for example, often focus their energies on issues related to the public sphere and center their narratives on a male protagonist (Bowstead, 1986; Fletcher, 1992, and Coykendall, 2005). Narratives that focus on the struggles of a virtuous heroine often portray her as not only suffering, but also exerting agency, displaying physical courage, and gaining empowerment within Gothic spaces (Ledoux, 2011). Further, as Angela Wright argues, “[w]hen one goes beyond the textual examples of Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen during the Romantic period ... the qualities of heroism ... become less clear-cut in terms of uncompromising virtue, beauty, and age” (Wright, 2016: 17). In *Zofloya* (1806), Charlotte Dacre creates a Byronic heroine who sadistically kills a Radcliffean heroine without hesitation or remorse. In short, women do not exclusively write about distressed virtue and the domestic sphere, and even when they do, the female characters represent a diversity of experience.

Finally, scholars have also considered whether the gender of the reader contributes to a text being labeled as Female Gothic. Satires and critiques from the early nineteenth-century frame the readers as girls and women. Yet as I will discuss, part of the impetus behind those critiques forms around the notion that these narratives are unsuitable for women. Walter Scott and other critics clearly earmark Gothic novels as men’s reading. However, book historian Jacobs’s (2000, 2003) work demonstrates that most texts were produced and consumed by women. Again, the readership does not fall neatly along gendered lines.

The discussion about gender’s relation to the Gothic mode becomes further complicated when one considers genre. As with most Gothic Studies, discussions of the Female Gothic have disproportionately focused on one genre, the novel, and one novelist, Ann Radcliffe. Within the Gothic novel, many scholars’ choice to begin their discussions of the Female Gothic with Radcliffe distorts a more robust genealogy of women’s literary history. For example, Diana Wallace demonstrates the profound influence that Sophia Lee’s brand of historical Gothic in *The Recess* has on Radcliffe and the historical novel generally (Wallace, 2013: 25–66). At the same time, as several critics have noted, the Gothic mode transcends traditional genres and extends well beyond the novel (Williams, 1995 and Gamer, 2000). Women wrote important Gothic poetry (for example, Mary Robinson’s “Haunted Beach”), plays (for example, Joanna Baillie’s *Orra*), and chapbooks too numerous to name. Women’s Gothic novels—including Radcliffe’s—also served as rich fodder for adaptation, some of which is written by men, leading to a whole host of other generic questions (Saglia, 2014).

For all the reasons discussed above, a robust meta-discussion about linking a gendered signifier to an aesthetic mode continues. *Women’s Writing* and *Gothic Studies* devoted entire volumes to the topic in 1994 and 2004, respectively. Others have sought to broaden the term’s reach; Pauline Palmer’s *Lesbian Gothic* (1999) examines closely women’s homoerotic relationships. Emma Clery’s *Women’s Gothic* (2000) discusses women authors who wrote in the “male” and the “female” style. Pickering and Chatto published a 5-volume series *Varieties of Female Gothic* (2002), which represents women’s engagement with genres beyond the novel. *Postfeminist Gothic* (2007), edited by Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz, provides readings—mostly of contemporary film and television—that examine depictions of female characters through a feminist/postfeminist dialectic. *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), edited by Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace, expands upon the 2004 special issue of *Gothic Studies* and updates the discussion of Fleenor’s original. Smith’s and Wallace’s collection indirectly asks a question that is more pointedly posed in the original *Gothic Studies* introductory essay: how does the Female Gothic continue to resonate as a means of critical inquiry despite poststructuralism’s influence, through which essential categories such as “female” have been largely destabilized? (Smith and Wallace, 2004). Avril Horner’s and Sue Zlosnik’s recent Edinburgh Companion on *Women and the Gothic* (2016) offers a “big picture” re-evaluation of women authors and women characters in relation to a wide variety of genres within the Gothic mode. In their introductory essay, Horner and Zlosnik suggest that:

Despite the considerable economic, social, and legal progress (at least in the Western world) made by women, Gothic texts still convey anxiety and anger about the lot of women. Many of the works analysed in this volume reflect back women’s lack of agency; the continued polarization of women through patterns of antithesis such as good/bad, saint/sinner and virgin/whore; a continued use of stereotypes; and the pathologisation of women who fail to conform to traditional expectations ... [T]hey are depressingly constant and suggest that women have been and still feel disadvantaged and disempowered. (Horner and Zlosnik, 2016: 1)

Thus, the rich scholarly tradition focusing on the tropes that Moers initially identifies still resonates today, as Horner’s and Zlosnik’s companion addresses everything from eighteenth-century novels to twenty-first century videogames.

This point is where my essay intervenes by offering a historical, rather than theoretical answer to the question “was there ever a Female Gothic?” For my purposes, I want to sidestep the significant issues that poststructuralism poses for analysis of the Female Gothic and the notion of women’s writing more generally. I also want to reiterate the importance of working on the themes for which Horner’s and Zlosnik’s companion demonstrates a continued relevance. This essay’s call to rethink how we approach women’s Gothic writing seeks a more expansive, more nuanced understanding that builds upon previous scholarship. However, because my arguments hinge on how nineteenth-century critics—who operated mostly within stable gendered binaries—continue to influence twentieth and twenty-first century criticism, I focus my attention instead on an important concept from feminist thought: strategic essentialism. Gayatri Spivak invokes this term to describe moments in which scholars put aside their critiques of essentialism to inspire political change (Spivak, 2012). In the broadest sense, I am suggesting that, for pragmatic reasons, second-wave feminists were required to define narrowly women’s contribution to Gothic writing. They did not have the luxury,

early on, of questioning what it meant to be female or to choose an obscure author as their champion. Instead, they rigorously and effectively made a case for women's writing by leading with their strongest example, who had long been accepted by a fully enfranchised male critical establishment: Ann Radcliffe.

A special case: Ann Radcliffe's reception history and contemporary feminist criticism

In the nineteenth century, Ann Radcliffe's career (1789–1826) proved a kind of literary flashpoint for cultural anxiety about the status of the Gothic novel and women's increasing literacy and authorship. As others have noted, Radcliffe was not the first woman to write a successful Gothic novel and other established women authors, such as Frances Burney and Joanna Baillie, frequently employed what would later be called "Radcliffian" themes in their work. Yet, her talent for sublime description supported the legitimacy of the burgeoning novel and elicited questions of whether the artistic merit of the Gothic romance should be better acknowledged.

These issues were further complicated by the amount of money publisher George Robinson paid Radcliffe for her later manuscripts, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). As Rictor Norton notes regarding the £500 Radcliffe received for *Udolpho*, "serious money dignified what might otherwise have been dismissed as yet another silly novel ... never before had such an amount been paid to a woman..." (Norton, 1999: 96–97). The payment was extraordinary, considering that the average fee a Minerva Press author received for a 3-volume Gothic novel was between £10–20 (Norton, 1999: 95). Ann's husband, William Radcliffe, earned roughly half of the contract's amount (£274) per year, so her writing positioned her as an earner within the family. From a feminist perspective, these extraordinary gains are undercut when examining the contract for *Udolpho*, which can be found in the Sadleir-Black Collection at the University of Virginia. William Radcliffe's signature appears first, underscoring the historical reality that Ann, as a married woman, held no legal property and could not sign contracts (Stone, 1977 and Okin, 1983–4). Legally, the agreement exists between William and George Robinson. The £500 belonged to William as well. No evidence exists that William abused his access to Ann's money; yet the contract demonstrates that no amount of talent can overcome women's legal and economic disenfranchisement under *coverture* laws.

Even with those constraints, married and single women were encouraged by Radcliffe's success, resulting in an unprecedented number of women-authored manuscripts, varying widely in quality, to flood the literary marketplace and devalue the genre (McIntyre, 1920, Miles, 1995 and Norton, 1999). Most of these manuscripts, by unknown or anonymous authors, simply recycled Gothic devices that proved popular for earlier novelists. Critics responded with alarm about what might happen if every woman fancied herself an author and every young woman began to consume these narratives. Nineteenth-century reviews attempted to resolve these thorny questions by suggesting that Radcliffe formed a class by herself, and criticism consistently presented three interwoven discursive strains about Radcliffe's originality, exceptional talent and ideological propriety to make their case.

Walter Scott was the most important voice cementing Ann Radcliffe's literary reputation. While Anna Barbauld's prefaces to the 50-volume *The British Novelists* (1810) began the process of legitimizing the novel, Scott's *Lives of the Novelists* (1827) solidified its importance as a literary genre and, most important, included Gothic romances as part of that tradition (Robertson, 1994). Scott's literary biography of Radcliffe provides an extended

example of the complex ways in which Radcliffe's gender influences her critical reception, especially regarding issues of canonicity. In the "Mrs Radcliffe" chapter, Scott claims Radcliffe as the founder and best practitioner of the Gothic novel, but in a very back-handed way:

Mrs Radcliffe, as an author, has the most decided claim to take her place among the favoured few, who have been distinguished as the founders of a class, or school. She led the way in a peculiar style of composition, affecting powerfully the mind of the reader, which has since been attempted by many, but in which no one has attained or approached the excellencies of the original inventor, unless, perhaps the author of *The Family of Montorio* (Scott, 1906: 319).

In the opening line, Scott clearly establishes Radcliffe as an innovator and a leader. Nathan Drake had gone even further, calling Radcliffe "the Shakespeare of Romance Writers" (qtd. in McIntyre, 1920: 46). Other critics who made similar statements include David Rivers in *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors in Great Britain* (1798), and unsigned reviews in the *Monthly Magazine* from 1819 and the *British Review* from 1820. As Robert Miles suggests, "The literary establishment of the day placed her [Radcliffe] in the front rank of contemporary English Fiction" (Miles, 1995: 7). Despite being in good company, Scott undercuts those claims, suggesting that this innovation is only for a "peculiar style." By the end of the passage, doubt exists whether Radcliffe truly is the best writer of this group because of the strange series of dependent clauses linked with "which ... but ... perhaps ... unless" that end the second sentence. Scott seems to say that no one is as good as Radcliffe, except maybe the author of *The Family of Montorio*. One wonders why Scott refers to Charles Maturin as the author of *Montorio*, rather than by name. It could just be a stylistic flourish or a way of highlighting that novel, yet something more calculated seems to be going on here, which only becomes clear within the context of other reviews. Scott names a title rather than an author, because, by doing so, he can avoid any suggestion that a woman directly dominates over her male colleagues in this literary field.

George Moir's *Treatise on Poetry and Modern Romance* (1839) bestows praise even more begrudgingly on Radcliffe, while employing a similarly oblique strategy in ranking her among her male counterparts.

[T]his species of romance writing was probably carried to its perfection by Mrs Radcliffe ... who ... has never been excelled [W]e think justice has seldom been done to the real genius which she threw into the style of fiction she chose to adopt, whatever may be its precise order of precedence in the calendar of fiction [S]he herself with two exceptions only ... remains the solitary writer of genius by whom it has been adorned. The truth is, that the sarcasms which have been directed against the puerile horrors of Mrs Radcliffe ought justly to have been confined to the extravagances of her successors, who imitated her manner without either her imagination or her judgment" (Moir, 1995: 97).

By asserting that Radcliffe "threw" her "genius" into "the style of fiction she chose to adopt," Moir suggests that Radcliffe's success has been serendipitous, that she has more raw talent than cultivated good taste. When creating a hierarchy, Moir suggests that "she herself" is the Gothic's "solitary writer of genius" (my emphasis) but then contradicts himself by offering two exceptions, which the passage's larger context clearly indicates as

Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin. Again, Moir's choice to phrase his distinction of Radcliffe as "solitary" with "two exceptions" rather than "one of three great writers," suggests that he categorizes Lewis and Maturin differently from her other "successors" whom he derides.

When one starts to investigate who these "successors" are, both Moir's and Scott's phrasing starts to make more sense. Historical evidence reveals that anonymous women comprised the majority of Gothic authors (Jacobs, 2000). Moir, however, does not link Radcliffe with these women when he uses the gender-neutral term "successors," suggesting a desire to distance Radcliffe from her female peers. For Scott, who is trying to canonize the novel, the association of Radcliffe with these anonymous women would undermine his argument. One of the chief reasons critics dismissed romance was the perception that it was primarily written and read by women and therefore associated with the down-market trade (Jacobs, 2003). Scott champions the Gothic novel's aesthetic importance through Radcliffe's example, so he needs to distance her from these "down-market" associations.

Not only does Scott obliquely separate Radcliffe from her male peers, but he also creates a sacred barrier between Radcliffe and other women writing in the same genre. Speculating on why Radcliffe retired after *The Italian* (1797), he says: "Mrs Radcliffe ... may have been disgusted at seeing the mode of composition, which she had brought into fashion, profaned by the host of servile imitators who could only copy and render more prominent her defects, without aspiring to her merits" (Scott, 1906: 203). By using words like "profaned" and "disgusted," Scott shows his disapproval for this mostly female group. Yet, by using the gender-neutral epithet "servile imitators" he avoids explicitly gendering these authors and thereby tarnishing Radcliffe by the association of sex. In *The Gothic Flame* (1957), Varma (1966: 86) reveals the long-lasting impact of Scott's assessment when he (most likely unintentionally) ventriloquizes *Lives* during his own evaluation of Radcliffe: "Probably she was disgusted to see her mode of composition profaned by a host of servile imitators, who, unable to achieve her merits, rendered her defects more obvious". Other early twentieth-century studies of the Gothic, such as Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* (1921) and Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927) focus mostly on male authors and make exceptions only for Reeve and Radcliffe. Scott creates a critical precedent, where exceptions to a male-dominated canon can be made for extraordinary women authors, which goes unchallenged until the recovery project of second-wave feminism.

Representing Radcliffe as a special case, however, does little to ward off the second main cause of reviewers' anxiety: the voracious, imaginative female reader. Most readers are familiar with Jane Austen's loving parody of this reader, Catherine Morland from *Northanger Abbey* (1818), whose mind is so full of Gothic novels that she mistakes a washing-bill for evidence of murder. Yet, this parody of female literacy emerges on the stage earlier in the eighteenth century, as the novel gains in popularity; consider Polly in George Colman's *Polly Honeycombe* (1760) and Lydia Languish in Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). A more serious debate rages in non-fiction prose about the effect of novel reading on young women, and this debate becomes more urgent once the Gothic novel comes into fashion. In an anonymous column called "Terrorist Novel Writing" published in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* the author suggests that Gothic novels do little to instruct and to prepare women for domestic life. The writer asks, "Can a young lady be taught nothing more necessary in life, than to sleep in a dungeon with venomous reptiles, walk through a ward with assassins, and carry bloody daggers in their [sic] pockets, instead of pin-cushions and needle-books?" (Anon., 1797). The author concludes that these narratives "carr[y] the young reader's imagination into such a

confusion of terrors, as must be hurtful" (Anon., 1797). In short, young female readers dissipate their time in a fantasy world of masculine adventure, rather than learning the skills necessary to run a household and to perform femininity.

Thomas James Mathias, whose observations about Radcliffe Scott quotes in *Lives*, takes this concern to another level, suggesting that Gothic novels might encourage young women to embrace French republican values. Mathias's *Pursuits of Literature* (1800) appears at a moment of intense scepticism about social change in the wake of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, in which cultural productions are deeply scrutinized for "revolutionary" sentiments. In this climate, Mathias suggests that, in addition to having talent and originality, Radcliffe can be trusted to maintain a certain moral and political conservatism:

Mrs Charlotte Smith, Mrs Inchbald, Mrs Mary Robinson, Mrs &c., &c. though all of them are ingenious ladies, yet they are too frequently whining or frisking in novels, till our girls' heads turn wild with impossible adventures, and now and then are tainted with democracy.—Not so the mighty magician of THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO, bred and nourished by the Florentine Muses ... a poetess who Ariosto would with rapture have acknowledged (Mathias, 1800, n.p.).

Like Moir and Scott, Mathias separates Radcliffe from her peers; he begins with a laundry list of women universally dismissed based on their interchangeability as one anonymous "Mrs &c." His treatment of Radcliffe is different; he does not name her as "Mrs Radcliffe" (somebody's wife) but as "the mighty magician of" a specific important work. As with Scott's mention of *Montorio*, one might assume that this choice is just a rhetorical flourish. (All these reviews are so flowery that they are difficult to cite in short segments.) Yet, he suggests through his syntax that Radcliffe's politics constitute part of her critical appeal. After stating that Mrs &c. turns "our girls' heads" with thoughts of "impossible adventures" and "taints" them with "democracy," he then says "not so the mighty magician [Radcliffe]." Here, one expects him to finish his sentence—to say exactly how Radcliffe affects her female readers. He denies this expectation and instead launches into aesthetic praise. This topic shift suggests that Mathias's approbation of Radcliffe's politics and his positive critical assessment of *Udolpho* are interdependent. Further, he conflates Mrs &c. and her heroines who "whine and frisk" in novels, making no distinction between author and character. It is no coincidence then that in *Pursuits* Mathias singles out authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith, whose heroines do not observe the strictest decorum, as having tarnished reputations that make them unfit authors for young female minds.

Writing in the wake of this critique, it is advantageous for Scott to characterize the Gothic novel's audience as male. This tactic not only evaporates concerns about tainting impressionable female minds, it also elevates the novel's status. The Gothic novel, he argues, is an everyman's genre. After "outing" himself as a fan of romance, he suggests:

[I]f there were to be selected one particular structure of fiction, which possesses charms for the learned and unlearned, the grave and gay, the gentleman and the clown, it would be perhaps that of those very romances which the severity of their criticism seeks to deprecate. There are many men too mercurial to be delighted with Richardson's beautiful, but protracted display of the passions: and there are some too dull to comprehend the

wit of Le Sage, or too saturnine to relish the nature and spirit of Fielding: and yet these very individuals will with difficulty be divorced from *The Romance of the Forest* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. (216)

When discussing the romance reader's demographics, Scott again elides historical reality. He imagines only a male audience—"clown", "gentleman"—and suggests that what they scoff at in public, these men enjoy in private. Scott describes reading romance as an act of heterosexual seduction, where the feminized novel retains "charms" from which the reader is not easily "divorced". Promoting romance reading as a virile act subverts the dominant stereotype of the romance reader as a flighty maiden. Scott's grouping of Radcliffe with a list of "best in class" authors—Richardson, Le Sage and Fielding—suggests her parity with them in the Gothic realm, making her suitable reading for men.

In the 1970s, when second-wave feminists sought to create a woman-authored canon, they were in a position similar to Scott's when he wrote *Lives*. Radcliffe's prominence in the nineteenth century could help support their claim that women's writing deserves serious study, but they displayed discomfort with Radcliffe's sentimentality and slavish attention to propriety. Ellen Moers comments that despite the perilous situation faced by a Radcliffe heroine "her sensibility and her decorum never falter" (Moers, 1976: 138). Describing how Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* always manages to have musical instruments, arts supplies, and proper clothes despite multiple forced moves, Moers laments, "This kind of novel writing deserves being laughed at. The author plays with her heroine, dresses and undresses her, transports and arranges her, much as a girl plays with her doll" (Moers, 1976: 138). As late as 1995, Terry Castle suggests, "Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is primarily remembered today for its most striking formal device—the much-maligned explained supernatural It has always been easy, of course, to patronize Ann Radcliffe" (Castle, 1995: 120). To be fair, these comments exist within a much larger context. Moers devotes great attention to demonstrating how Radcliffe's heroines represent a more robust vision of virtuous womanhood than the female characters who appear in novels such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Castle establishes this "easy" patronage to convey how other critics have misread *Udolpho*'s aesthetic. Yet both critics' rhetorical strategies serve to anticipate and to deflect the criticisms of those who would oppose women's inclusion in the canon. Radcliffe's ladylike writing—what attracted nineteenth-century critics like Thomas James Mathias and helped solidify her reputation—is the very thing that made her writing seem quaint in the late twentieth-century.

To overcome both this ambivalence and the detractors of women's writing, second-wave feminists invoke authoritative, mostly male voices from the nineteenth century to advocate for the canonical inclusion of women-authored novels. Sir Walter Scott, whose ideological goals are somewhat allied with their own, makes for an ideal endorser of Radcliffe, and by extension, the new category of the "Female Gothic." This deployment of Scott stretches back to the 1920s. Clara McIntyre justifies her book-length study of Radcliffe by arguing: "one of whom Scott could speak in such [laudatory] terms ... certainly has some claim to consideration" (McIntyre, 1920: 4–5). In *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers cites Scott's and Hazlitt's praise to demonstrate Radcliffe's talent and to argue for the importance of the Gothic romance in general; she then echoes Scott, calling Radcliffe the Gothic's "greatest practitioner" (Moers, 1976: 126). Margaret Doody, arguing that female authors should be read on their own terms, nevertheless attempts to augment Radcliffe's prestige by reminding the reader that: "Without Mrs Radcliffe's novels, Scott could not have written as he did" (Doody, 1977: 572). Three years later, Leona Sherman also leverages Scott's praise to justify a Radcliffe

project and takes Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1797 *Critical Review* piece on *The Italian* out of context to show another great male author's approval (Sherman, 1980: 11). (Coleridge's main point in the review is that Radcliffe's novels had been devolving since 1791's *The Romance of the Forest*.)

These feminist critics appear to also have been deeply influenced by Scott's contention that Radcliffe is the Gothic novel's main innovator. Yet earlier writers, such as Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee, deeply influenced Radcliffe's content; while others, such as Hester Piozzi and Charlotte Smith, anticipated the style for which Radcliffe became famous. Clara McIntyre, for example, gives detailed examples of descriptions Radcliffe appropriated from Hester Piozzi; she also provides evidence that Smith's translation, *The Romance of Real Life* (1787), inspired Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1792) (McIntyre, 1920: 57, 59). She persists, however, in suggesting that Smith "deliberately imitated" Radcliffe in later works, even though Smith had already used scenic description and Gothic settings in *Emmeline* (1788). In fact, a side-by-side comparison suggests that Radcliffe borrows from Smith's Mowbray Castle to create the castle at Udolpho. Ultimately, it is less important who influenced whom, as the influence was most likely reciprocal. What is important, however, is how critics have interpreted this influence. For example, Margaret Doody argues that "it was not until after the advent of Mrs Radcliffe's works that Charlotte Smith discovered how to make the elements of Gothic romance work in harmony with her radical themes Charlotte Smith took ... what she needed from Mrs Radcliffe ..." (Doody, 1977: 562). While Doody correctly points out Radcliffe's influence on Smith, it is perhaps more accurate to acknowledge that Mrs Radcliffe also took what she needed from Smith (and Lee, Reeve, and Piozzi).

Feminist critics' early invocation of Scott's, Hazlitt's, and Coleridge's praise to legitimize Radcliffe was an important expedient in establishing a female canon; however, these invocations had a secondary effect of influencing later critics to overlook the formal and political contributions Radcliffe's contemporaries made to the genre (Summers, 1964). In 1990 Eugenia DeLamotte argues: "Radcliffe must be regarded as the center of the Gothic tradition, if only for the central place she held in the minds of critics and writers Even if Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, and Charlotte Smith assembled the materials of Gothicism, no one so much as Ann Radcliffe issued the 'invitation to form' itself" (DeLamotte, 1990: 11). DeLamotte recognizes others' influence on Radcliffe, but very aptly notes that her prominence is due to "the central place she held in minds of critics." In 2001 Helene Meyers reveals the lasting impact of these ideas when she argues, "feminist work on such touchstone Gothic texts as *Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Maria*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Rebecca* clarifies that, from its inception, the Gothic romance has meditated upon the potential for female victimization" (Meyers, 2001: 26). In one of the most recent monographs to theorize a female tradition, *The New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress*, Patricia Murphy depends upon Moers's and DeLamotte's analysis to claim that "Certainly the list [of Gothic dangers] could be extended, as Radcliffean narratives and their imitators suggest an array of terrifying features lying in wait within the home" (Murphy, 2016: 18). Here one can see Scott's assessment of Radcliffe from the early nineteenth century continuing to reverberate throughout the twenty-first.

2014 marked the 250th anniversary of Ann Radcliffe's birth, and scholars celebrated this occasion with several academic events designed to re-evaluate Radcliffe's impact. These included a special issue on Radcliffe in *Women's Writing* and a "Study Day" at Chawton House Library. An essay collection published in January 2014 by Oxford and edited by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright—*Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism, and the Gothic*—celebrated

its launch in June 2014 at the “Radcliffe at 250” conference hosted by the University of Sheffield. Two other female authors, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen, will have such centennial celebrations in 2017 and 2018. The others focus on male Romantic poets. There was one for the “Geneva Summer” (Lord Byron, both Shelleys) in 2016. There will be several for Keats, another for both Percy and Mary Shelley, and a few for individual publication events: Byron’s *Manfred* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves*. These events, with their impressive roster of speakers, promise renewed scholarly commitment to these authors. Yet, when one looks at the big picture implications of this line-up, we see that very little has changed with regard to the women authors that receive sustained study. While Radcliffe should be celebrated, this essay works to explain why she enjoys that pride of place when she was influenced by and drew from so many of her contemporaries, including Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, and Charlotte Smith. Perhaps the antidote to this phenomenon lies in going back to the original criticism. In 1792, the *Critical Review* reviewed the anonymously published *Romance of the Forest*. The review praises Radcliffe’s third novel for its likeness to Clara Reeve’s *Old English Baron*: “The greater part of the work resembles, in manner, the *Old English Baron* ... everything is consistent, and within the verge of rational belief: the attention is uninterruptedly fixed, till the veil is designedly withdrawn” (458). *Baron*’s emphasis on maintaining a relative sense of realism and an atmosphere of moral instruction are key elements in the formation of Radcliffe’s style, which will later be termed the “Female Gothic.” Considering just this one instance of an overlooked route of influence suggests, as I hope this entire essay does, that the development of a women’s Gothic tradition was a much lengthier and more organic process than how Scott and his contemporaries and later second-wave feminist critics described.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this paper as no datasets were analysed or generated.

Additional information

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