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**Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic.** Eugenia C. DeLamotte. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 352 pages, $34.50.

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Before the 1960s, most studies of the Gothic merely made lists of conventions and then illustrated them by drawing on the novels of Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, and Clara Reeve. In contrast, more recent studies have looked behind the secret doors of the Gothic stage, attempting to shed light on the psychological meaning of such conventions as the dark interiors of castles and convents, and the ghost-haunted, misty vistas that surround them. In this vein, G.R. Thompson has defined a Gothic monomyth as part of dark Romanticism; Judith Wilt has traced a continuous Gothic tradition within England, while Elizabeth MacAndrew has traced one from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth; and increasingly critics such as Gilbert and Gubar, Norman Holland, and Ellen Moers have explored the Gothic in terms of women's psychology and social status.

Like this last group of scholars, Eugenia C. DeLamotte argues in *Perils of the Night* "against a tendency . . . to masculinize the Gothic canon," choosing instead to describe why "the Gothic has been so preeminently a woman's genre." To explain this important perception, DeLamotte organizes her answer by two definitive ideas about the genre: its anxieties "about the boundaries of the self" and its "obsession with the interrelated social and psychological constraints on women's freedom." Overall, DeLamotte's argument in this interesting, thorough discussion proves both persuasive and novel: her scope is vast, her scholarship is deep, and most important her close readings of the Gothic texts themselves are consistently illuminating.

The heart of the book lies in DeLamotte's alert readings of Gothic novels. The opening section, which comprises four chapters, is entitled "Boundaries of the Self as the Gothic Theme." Although meant to prepare for the feminist slant of the second part—"Boundaries of the Self in Women's Gothic"—her best chapter in the book's first half focuses on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* from the perspectives of the male characters and the Gothic tradition's use of sublime transcendence. First, as a prologue to discussing Bronte's novel, DeLamotte lucidly connects the traditions of the Gothic and the sublime. For one thing, she exemplifies how "the theme of the boundaries of the self is an interface between the two varieties of Romanticism"—the dark, negative, gothic mode on one hand; and the light, positive, idealistically sublime mode on the other.

Next, using *Wuthering Heights* for concrete support, DeLamotte generalizes that characters in Gothic novels aspire toward sublime transcendence, but at the same time face the possibilities of transcendence "with ambivalence and fear." To illustrate, DeLamotte points to how Bronte confuses the boundaries between Lockwood, Heathcliff, and their settings. When Lockwood, the narrator from London, spends the night at Wuthering Heights in the room of Cathy, Heathcliff's dead beloved, the men's boundaries blur: first

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Lockwood dreams of the long-dead woman's ghost and then Heathcliff responds to her elusive ghost that has appeared in *Lockwood's* nightmare. To interpret this blurring, DeLamotte says, "Lockwood's perils of the night are the object of Heathcliff's soul's desire [to reunite with Cathy's ghost]. Yet in the confusion of identity between the two men, their fear and desire are revealed as two aspects of the same dilemma." This astute psychological interpretation of the characters' inner and outer selves typifies DeLamotte's reading of *Wuthering Heights* in terms of transcendence and boundaries.

If DeLamotte generally succeeds in clarifying how novels such as *Wuthering Heights* and Melville's *Pierre* reveal the Gothicists' ambivalence toward transcendence, in part 2 of her study she explores the feminist problem that receives her greatest interest and inspires her most inventive criticism—how the self and its boundaries relate to modes of transcendence available to women. By asking "why so many women writers from the 1780s to 1820 and after found their voice by speaking the Gothic nightmare," DeLamotte discovers that the heroine's desire for sublime transcendence always becomes an impulse toward marriage. But according to DeLamotte, Charlotte Bronte alone among women Gothicists avoids blindness to their chief insight: "that the happy bounded world of home, the heroine's compensation for the loss of full selfhood [which the concluding marriages always required], is the same prison from which she sought escape."

Consequently, DeLamotte devotes two long chapters in part 2 to *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, thereby demonstrating Charlotte Bronte's subtle "transformation of the genre." For example, to summarize DeLamotte's argument, in *Jane Eyre* Bronte narrates Jane's boredom both at school and at Rochester's estate as imprisonment and describes her possible marriage to St. John as "murder" since it promised a communion of unequals; but then, according to DeLamotte, Bronte subverts the conventional ending through Jane's fulfillment with Rochester at Ferndean: though still linking woman's transcendence with a relationship to a man, Bronte nevertheless makes "the difference between domesticity as Gothic nightmare and domesticity as perfect bliss turn on the self-knowledge and mutual knowledge the male-female relationship" can sometimes accommodate.

*Villette*, however, serves DeLamotte's purpose even better, mainly because it subverts the Gothic tradition more dramatically than *Jane Eyre* does. *Villette*, often dismissed as Charlotte's least successful novel, has previously been ignored as a Gothic novel. But DeLamotte expertly proves that Gothic conventions work here simultaneously in both psychological and social contexts. For instance, the convent (from which Lucy Snowe must initially escape to get into the town of Villette) represents Lucy's inner psychic space as well as the alien society outside her. A chief character like Ginevra, who is relentlessly self-absorbed, serves both an antagonistic role in the social sphere and an allegorical role in Lucy's psychomachia, for she counters Lucy's self-abnegation. Ginevra also doubles Lucy's low economic value.

Besides her rich, densely supported readings of Gothic novels, DeLamotte's book also is impressive for its scope and scholarship. To be sure, her scope is enlightening simply because she includes evidence from many novels not only rarely read these days but almost never mentioned: Sophia Lee's *The Recess*; Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*; and Regina Maria Roche's *Children of the Abbey*, to name just a few. DeLamotte also stretches her ideas across a broad frame by convincingly incorporating "highbrow" works less obviously linked to the Gothic tradition—Melville's *Pierre*, Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, and *Villette*. Similarly expansive is her scholarly depth. Throughout her text and notes she responsibly refers to items from her 18-page bibliography: standard critical works on the Gothic; feminist essays, such as those by Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir; and psychological theory and interpretation by Freud, Northrup Frye, and Joseph Campbell.

However useful her wide reading may be to scholars, most readers will not escape from *Perils of the Night* without encountering some difficulties. One limitation is that the book

divides into halves not always coherently related. True, crossreferences to novels already discussed abound in the second section, but more backward glances to the earlier approach and theory as well would have made the argument easier to follow. In fact, given the book's subtitle—"A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic"—I wonder whether DeLamotte really needs the first part here at all, though it too is intriguing, if indeed irrelevant to "women's Gothic." Nevertheless, *Perils of the Night* is a rewarding book that casts new light on the social and psychological functions of the popular Gothic.