

ACCENTS ON SHAKESPEARE

Gothic Shakespeares

Edited by JOHN DRAKAKIS AND DALE TOWNSEND



Gothic Shakespeares

Readings of Shakespeare were both influenced by and influential in the rise of Gothic forms in literature and culture from the late eighteenth century onwards. Shakespeare's plays are full of ghosts, suspense, fear-inducing moments and cultural anxieties which many writers in the Gothic mode have since emulated, adapted and appropriated.

The contributors to this volume consider:

- Shakespeare's relationship with popular Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century
- how, without Shakespeare as a point of reference, the Gothic mode in fiction and drama may not have developed and evolved in quite the way it did
- the ways in which the Gothic engages in a complex dialogue with Shakespeare, often through the use of quotation, citation and analogy
- the extent to which the relationship between Shakespeare and the Gothic requires a radical reappraisal in the light of contemporary literary theory, as well as the popular extensions of the Gothic into many modern modes of representation.

In *Gothic Shakespeares*, Shakespeare is considered alongside major Gothic texts and writers – from Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley, up to and including contemporary Gothic fiction and horror film. This volume offers a highly original and truly provocative account of Gothic reformulations of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's significance to the Gothic.

Contributors include: Elisabeth Bronfen, Steven Craig, Dale Townshend, Susan Chaplin, Angela Wright, Robert Miles, Michael Gamer, Peter Hutchings, Scott Wilson, Fred Botting and Jerrold E. Hogle.

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Gothic Shakespeares

**Edited by
John Drakakis and
Dale Townshend**

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**In memory of Julia Briggs,
1943–2007**

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General editor's preface

In our time, the field of literary studies has rarely been a settled, tranquil place. Indeed, for over two decades, the clash of opposed theories, prejudices and points of view has made it more of a battlefield. Echoing across its most beleaguered terrain, the student's weary complaint 'Why can't I just pick up Shakespeare's plays and read them?' seems to demand a sympathetic response.

Nevertheless, we know that modern spectacles will always impose their own particular characteristics on the vision of those who unthinkingly don them. This must mean, at the very least, that an apparently simple confrontation with, or pious contemplation of, the text of a four-hundred-year-old play can scarcely supply the grounding for an adequate response to its complex demands. For this reason, a transfer of emphasis from 'text' toward 'context' has increasingly been the concern of critics and scholars since the Second World War: a tendency that has perhaps reached its climax in more recent movements such as 'New Historicism', 'Cultural Materialism' or 'Presentism'.

A consideration of the conditions – social, political, or economic – within which the play came to exist, from which it derives, and to which it speaks will certainly make legitimate demands on the attention of any well-prepared student nowadays. Of course, the serious pursuit of those interests will inevitably start to undermine ancient and inherited prejudices, such as the supposed distinction between 'foreground' and 'background' in literary studies. And even the slightest awareness of the pressures of gender or of race, or the most cursory glance at the role played by that strange creature 'Shakespeare' in our cultural politics, will reinforce a similar turn toward questions that sometimes appear scandalously 'non-literary'. It seems clear that very different and unsettling notions of the ways in which literature might be addressed can hardly be avoided. The worrying truth is that nobody can just pick up Shakespeare's plays and read them. Perhaps – even more worryingly – they never could.

The aim of *Accents on Shakespeare* is to encourage students and teachers to explore the implications of this situation by means of an engagement with the major developments in Shakespeare studies over recent years. It will offer a continuing and challenging reflection on those ideas through a series of multi- and single-author books which will also supply the basis for adapting or augmenting them in the light of changing concerns.

Accents on Shakespeare also intends to lead the way as well as follow. In pursuit of this goal, the series will operate on more than one level. In addition to titles aimed at modular undergraduate courses, it will include a number of books embodying polemical, strongly argued cases aimed at expanding the horizons of a specific aspect of the subject and at challenging the preconceptions on which it is based. These volumes will not be learned 'monographs' in any traditional sense. They will, it is hoped, offer a platform for the work of the liveliest younger scholars and teachers at their most outspoken and provocative. Committed and contentious, they will be reporting from the forefront of the current critical activity and will have something new to say. The fact that each book in the series promises a Shakespeare inflected in terms of a specific urgency should ensure that, in the present as in the recent past, the accent will be on change.

Terence Hawkes

Acknowledgements

This collection originated in a series of informal discussions between three of us engaged in teaching on the MLitt in *The Gothic Imagination* and supervising Doctoral students in the Department of English Studies at the University of Stirling. What began as a naïve observation of the high levels of Shakespearean quotation and allusion in Gothic writing gradually expanded into a more sustained investigation of the possibility of a collection of essays on that theme, essays that might address the historical range of the encounter between Shakespearean texts and motifs and the emergence of particular literary and dramatic forms that imitated them, engaged in dialogue with them and re-inscribed them in new cultural contexts, conferring upon them not only the status of a legitimising source, but also a plural identity: ‘Shakespeares’ rather than ‘Shakespeare’.

The natural home for this collection was the *Accents on Shakespeare Series*, and it is to the infectious enthusiasm, the generosity and the intellectual adventurousness of the general editor, Professor Terence Hawkes, that we owe a considerable debt of gratitude. The commitment of our contributors, all of whom have done far more than we originally asked of them, is encouraging testimony to a truly international spirit of collegiality. Polly Dodson and Emma Nugent at Routledge, in their usual cordial and efficient manner, have done more than we could reasonably have expected of them to maintain the overall momentum of the project. We are also extremely grateful to Jerrold E. Hogle for having agreed to write an Afterword for the collection.

Finally, we wish to record with considerable sadness that the late Professor Julia Briggs, whose initial endorsement of the project we were privileged to receive, and who had herself originally agreed to contribute an essay, was forced by ill health to withdraw at a late stage. She was unable to complete her essay, and the world of literary scholarship is much the poorer for her untimely death. Her own range of intellectual interests

far exceeded the scope of this project, but we feel that it would be appropriate in the circumstances to dedicate this collection of essays to her memory.

John Drakakis and Dale Townshend
Stirling

1 Introduction

John Drakakis

We do not hesitate to pronounce this to be one of the most interesting, and most elegantly written, novels which have fallen under our inspection during the present year. Many of the passages would not disgrace Shakspeare; but the anxiety which the author still possesses to imitate the immortal bard, leads him into absurdities, which deteriorate the real merit of the work; these are the frequent introduction of *witches*, *demons*, and *ghosts*, which have so little relation to the chief incidents of the story, that we hope to see their officious interference dispensed with in a future edition, which we doubt not will be demanded.

(Review of W. H. Ireland's *Gondez The Monk* (Blagdon 1805: 423)

Francis William Blagdon's review of W. H. Ireland's Gothic novel *Gondez the Monk* affirms explicitly a connection between 'Shakespeare' and Gothic writing of the early nineteenth century, one in which the authority of the national poet is invoked as a legitimizing strategy to recommend the fiction of a writer who, for some time, passed off forged documents as Shakespearean manuscripts. Within a larger context, Shakespeare's investment in the resources of the supernatural, his predilection for spectres, graveyards, the paraphernalia of death, moving statues, magical transformations and the emphasis upon the 'non-rational' as a category of human experience all render his plays open to the descriptive term 'Gothic'.

In addition to forming part of the pre-history of a movement that only comes into its own at the dawn of the Enlightenment, Shakespearean texts function as a resource for a particular style of writing that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, had become sufficiently established as a literary genre to attract parody. For example, at the beginning of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817/18) the young Catherine Morland's life undergoes a momentous transformation. The narrator tells us that up to the age of fourteen she 'had by nature nothing heroic about her' and that she 'should prefer cricket, base ball, riding on horseback and running about the

country' (Austen 2003: 7). Catherine had no objection to books 'provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them' and 'provided they were all story and no reflection', but this was about to change:

from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.

(Austen 2003: 7)

Poets such as Pope, Gray and Thomson provide her with a vocabulary of censure, but it is from Shakespeare that 'she gained a great store of information', from *Othello* the power of jealousy, from *Measure for Measure* the universality of suffering and from *Twelfth Night* the art of patiently concealing anxiety in the face of frustration.

By late 1817, drawing attention to Shakespearean quotations – an offshoot of the editions of Rowe (1709) and Pope (1725) – had grown into a more extended practice of anthologization. Margreta de Grazia observes that the first of these anthologies, William Dodd's *The Beauties of Shakespear* (1752), contained quotations and 'evaluations based upon Johnson's authority', but that by 1818 the contextual apparatus had been removed (de Grazia 1991: 202–3). It is to this process of anthologizing that Austen's narrator refers, although this is the last we hear in the novel of Shakespearean quotation; rather, the narrative is confined to citations of plot, Gothic architecture, spectres, the discovery of ancient manuscripts and the behaviour of her 'literary' heroine, all of which were characteristic of the novels of Ann Radcliffe. Indeed, the irony of *Northanger Abbey* appears to extend to a self-denying ordinance that refuses to include epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter, a feature prevalent in much early Gothic writing, and does not have Catherine cite one Shakespearean quotation beyond the period of her 'training'. Rather, Austen focuses her satire primarily upon Ann Radcliffe and the 'un-English' behaviour of her fictional characters. For example, following one particular flight of fancy involving the nature of the relationship between Henry Tilney's father and his dead mother, a reverie that might easily have featured in Gothic fiction per se, Catherine is taken to task:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland,

and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were then represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security of the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend.

(Austen 2003: 147)

The anxiety generated by a threat to 'national' identity goes well beyond the concern with Radcliffe's writing, and, as we shall see, extends to embrace the debate about the 'national' poet, Shakespeare. But we should pause here to consider for a moment the strands that comprise this type of novelistic discourse. As an *explicit* critique of Radcliffe's style, this is not the clearest example of Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1981: 301), although its parodic invocation of an 'other' discourse as well as the invocations throughout of particular 'Gothic' features of the narrative qualify it as 'a double-voiced discourse' that is 'always internally dialogized' (Bakhtin 1981: 324; Novy 1998: 2). There are, of course, throughout early Gothic fiction examples of precisely the kind of free indirect discourse in which one kind of language is 'internally dialogized' as part of a narrative. Indeed, Jane Austen was herself the butt of occasional irony as Gothic writing itself wrote back. In Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Chapter 35 begins with an epigraph from Dryden's *King Arthur* (1691), followed by a coarse parody of the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813):

It is a singular, but well attested fact, that women who are compelled to undergo all the inconveniences and uneasiness of clandestine pregnancy, often fare better than those whose situation is watched over by tender and anxious relatives; and that concealed or illegitimate births are actually attended with less danger and suffering than those which have all the aid that skill and affection can give.

(Maturin 2000: 576)

Maturin's novel, coming at the end of the initial flourishing of Gothic writing, discloses, through its complex invaginated narratives, the fundamental literariness of the genre. But, like its predecessors, it contains both explicit quotation from Shakespeare, as well as 'internally dialogized'

narrative that requires the reader to keep in mind the two elements of a complex dialectic that is anchored in the text, but that expands its horizons.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a text generally thought to have initiated the genre, was published shortly before Samuel Johnson's edition of Shakespeare, and in his preface to the second edition of 1765, Walpole cites the authority of Shakespeare for the mixture of comedy and tragedy that his narrative contains:

The very impatience which a reader feels, while delayed by the coarse pleasantries of vulgar actors from arriving at the knowledge of the important catastrophe he expects, perhaps heightens, certainly proves that he has been artfully interested in, the depending event. But I had higher authority than my own opinion for his conduct. That great master of nature, Shakespeare, was the model I copied.

(Walpole 1968: 44)

This is another perspective upon the 'mixed' characters that Jane Austen defended as being peculiarly 'English'. *The Castle of Otranto* is a version of *Hamlet*, and the secret passageways, ghosts and general atmosphere of foreboding have informed performances of the play up to and including Laurence Olivier's 1947 film. But Walpole is concerned to defend the 'English' practice of mixing genres against the neo-classical strictures of French writers such as Voltaire whom he describes as 'a genius – but not of Shakespeare's magnitude' (Walpole 1968: 45). In his account of the process of eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare Michael Dobson observes that

Shakespeare's enhanced status provided new incentives for modifying his texts, however discreetly such rewriting had to be performed: the more securely Shakespeare was enshrined as a figure of national authority, the greater were the potential legitimating rewards of appropriating that authority by adaptation.

(Dobson 1994: 186)

He goes on to argue that in the case of two adaptations in particular, *Florizel and Perdita* (*The Winter's Tale*) and *Catherine and Petruchio* (*The Taming of The Shrew*), Shakespeare became 'an exemplar of middle-class domestic virtue' but also 'the foe of mid-century Britain's favourite personifications of aristocratic vice, the French – however vigorously nationalist writers were now prepared to execrate the practice of adaptation altogether' (Dobson 1994: 198). Dobson's general thesis draws the practice of performance into its aegis, and he notes throughout his argument the

relationship between the adaptation of Shakespearean texts for actual performances, and the public perception of the literary and cultural value of particular texts (Dobson 1994: 201). Clearly, the Gothic annexation of what from a modern standpoint might be regarded as idiosyncratically selected examples of the Shakespeare *oeuvre* needs to be viewed in the larger political context of the challenge to national identity, as well as to the incidence of performance and the burgeoning domestic industry of editing the texts and the debate that this process stimulated. We are still a long distance from T.S. Eliot's reconstruction of an Elizabethan past whose organic culture could be set against the alienating and fragmenting processes of modernity. But there is more to the engagement of the 'Gothic' with Shakespeare – and with Milton, that other towering 'literary' influence on Gothic writing – than simply a question of legitimizing a particular form of what was, at the time, 'popular' literary production.

The Gothic and 'the Gothic'

The 'political' interest in Shakespeare during the eighteenth century is multifaceted and is an important part of an even larger interest in what we might call the historical Gothic at the end of the century. In the first of his 1818 lectures on European literature Coleridge encouraged 'contemplation of the works of antique art' because 'it excites a feeling of elevated beauty, and exalted notions of the human self', stimulated by the nature of Gothic architecture:

the Gothic architecture impresses the beholder with a sense of self-annihilation; he becomes, as it were, a part of the work contemplated. An endless complexity and variety are united into one whole, the plan of which is not distinct from the execution. A Gothic cathedral is the petrification of our religion.¹

(Coleridge 1987: 60)

But he also went on to claim a direct historical connection between the pre-Christian beliefs of 'the northern nations' and Christianity itself. According to Coleridge these nations 'received it [Christianity] gladly, and it took root as in a native soil. The deference to woman, characteristic of the Gothic races, combined itself with devotion to the idea of the Virgin Mother, and gave rise to many beautiful associations' (Coleridge 1987: 79). This attempt to establish a continuity with the past, displaced into its material religious remains and aligned with a Romantic sense of the sublime, finds its way into the preoccupation with buildings and landscape

in novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Coleridge seems to have had a tolerably 'objective' view of the Gothic past of the kind that might, in part, satisfy a modern historian,² although one of the number of differential equations to which it draws attention is that between the level-headedness of what Chris Baldick has described as 'Northern Protestant nationalisms' and 'the southern Catholic cultures [that] could be represented as the barbarously superstitious antagonist' (Baldick 1993: xii). But this is not quite borne out in a poem such as 'The Pains of Sleep' (1803), where the urge to pray 'aloud' is prompted by the speaker's

Upstarting from the fiendish crowd
 Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
 A lurid light, a trampling throng,
 Sense of intolerable wrong,
 And whom I scorned, those only strong!
 Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
 Still baffled, and yet burning still!
 Desire with loathing strangely mixed
 On wild or hateful objects fixed.

(Coleridge 1951: ll.14–24)

Such images, whether produced under the effects of opium or not, recall the garish fantasies of Thomas Nashe's *The Terrors of the Night or a Discourse of Apparitions* (1594), and are much closer to the ethos of 'Gothic' fiction than to a more accurately historical sense of the Gothic. They are not too far removed from the violent ethos of the only Shakespeare play to deal explicitly with 'Goths', *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1594), a play for which Coleridge had little affection. Indeed, he castigated its 'rhymeless metre' (Coleridge 1962, I: 131) and thought 'it was obviously intended to excite vulgar audiences by its scenes of blood and horror – to our ears shocking and disgusting' (Coleridge 1962, II: 27).

Clearly, Coleridge's own sense of the Gothic as a historical moment and the precursor of a specifically Christian ethos conflicts with those disturbing anxieties that refuse to submit to rational explanation, but that are, at the same time, paradoxically, the justification for religion. Baldick attempts to unravel this complex psychological paradox by drawing attention to the double sense in which we interpret the epithet 'Gothic'. It is, as Coleridge adumbrates, a means of describing a particular style 'of European architecture and ornament that flourished from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century'; but it is also, in a literary and cinematic sense, a term that describes 'works that appeared in an entirely different medium several

hundred years later' (Baldick 1995: xi). What Baldick calls the 'anti-Gothicism of Gothic' (Baldick 1995: xiii) is enlisted as part of a larger argument in support of its radical political potential, its invocation of 'the fables and nightmares of a past age in order to repudiate their authority', exorcizing on the one hand 'the ghosts of Catholic Europe' and more recently, in the fiction of writers such as Angela Carter, an exploitation of 'the power of a patriarchal folklore, all the better to expose and dispel its grip upon us' (Baldick 1993: xiii-iv). At its simplest, Baldick argues that 'Gothic fiction is characteristically obsessed with old buildings as sites of human decay', but this historical obsession with the material evanescence of human life is also connected with a series of timeless and universal anxieties (Baldick 1993: xx). It is this intersection between the historical and the a-historical that allows us to locate the emphasis placed upon Shakespeare in Gothic fiction: the resurrection of a past and the re-fashioning of its elements to represent a complex series of preoccupations and attitudes in the eighteenth-century present. What is true of the use of Shakespeare applies equally to the amalgamation of 'ancient' and 'modern' that Horace Walpole identified in the preface to the second edition of *Otranto* as the hallmark of *The Castle of Otranto*: 'the attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern' (Walpole 1968: 43). Here the 'modern' addition to 'ancient' romance consisted in the damning up of 'imagination and improbability' by the imitation of 'nature' that involves 'a strict adherence to common life' (Walpole 1968: 43). At the other end of this burgeoning of 'Gothic' fiction, Coleridge's scathing, and perhaps partisan, dismissal of Charles Maturin's play *Bertram* in 1816 concentrated on unmotivated 'effects' in his observation that the tempest in the play was 'a mere supernatural effect, without even a hint of any supernatural agency; a prodigy without any circumstance mentioned that is prodigious; and a miracle introduced without a ground, and ending without a result' (Coleridge 1951: 401). Coleridge is even more vitriolic in his judgement of the ending of the play in which the distraught figure of Imogene laments the loss of her child. Her lines 'The forest field hath snatched him – / He rides the night-mare thro' the wizard woods' are dismissed as 'a senseless plagiarism from the counterfeited madness of Edgar in *Lear* ... and the no less senseless adoption of Dryden's forest-fiend and the wizard-stream by which Milton, in his *Lycidas* so finely characterises the spreading Deva, fabulous Amnis' (Coleridge 1951: 418).

Even though, as E. J. Clery has rightly pointed out, the term 'Gothic' used to describe a genre of fiction was not initially deployed by its early exponents (Clery 2002: 21), the term had already begun to creep into the vocabulary of those, like Coleridge, whose engagement with, and veneration of, the past was exploited, to very different effect, by writers such as

Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, Maturin and Mary Shelley. Shakespeare became a model for two reasons: first because he was an indigenous poet of 'Nature', a claim that had been substantially initiated by Dryden, and one that had persisted throughout the Augustan period, notwithstanding the textual improvements effected by editors; second, the 'common repertoire of shared anxieties' that Chris Baldick has catalogued were there in abundance in plays like *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, although other plays such as the *Henry VI* plays, *King John*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* also provided sources of quotation. But Coleridge's allegation of 'plagiarism' levelled against Maturin raises a series of questions about the use of Shakespearean (and in this case, Milton and Dryden) 'quotation'.

Shakespearean intertexts

In a recent book, the late A.D. Nuttall cites the passage in *Hamlet* that describes the death of Ophelia. He suggests that this description may have had its origins in the real-life drowning of Katherine Hamlett in 1579 (Nuttall 2007: 5–6). He draws attention to the eighteenth-century practice of anthologizing 'beauties from Shakespeare' and suggests, provocatively, that Shakespeare himself 'sometimes seems to write "anthology pieces" as if he had such future treatment in mind' (Nuttall 2007: 7). This is, of course, another version of the claim made for the 'universality' of Shakespeare, and aligns Nuttall with his own Romantic forebears, but it is what Nuttall goes on to say that is of crucial interest. He refers in passing to John Everett Millais's nineteenth-century painting of the scene of Ophelia's drowning, and he concludes that 'It might seem then that the original, low-life incident has been wholly erased by this exercise in "heightening"' that began with Shakespeare's description. Transposed into a Coleridgean language, the passage describing Ophelia's death is the product of the poet's 'secondary imagination' that 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create', in short to vitalize (Coleridge 1951: 263) what may have been an actual historical event. Subsequent quotation, however, provides a language for the filtering and the internalization of experience through a Shakespearean vocabulary that only attracts the allegation of plagiarism once texts become the intellectual property of authors. In this respect Shakespeare becomes one of the main mediating forces through which the 'Gothic' experience passes, and that process of mediation varies in its level of sophistication from writer to writer. In the case of Maturin's novel, or even Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, relatively sparse quotation from Shakespeare is subsumed into an operatic finale that