

critics and fans of Gothic fiction alike.

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**Beville, Maria. *Gothic-postmodernism: voicing the terrors of postmodernity*. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2009.**

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*Gothic-postmodernism* is Maria Beville's proposal of a new literary genre, a hybrid combination of Gothic and Postmodernism. As she writes "the aim of this study is to recognize Gothic-postmodernism as a distinct literary movement and genre in its own right" (61). She reasons the creation of such term since she understands the existence of a "gap in literary criticism" (7), which ignores the presence of the Gothic in Postmodernism. Some critics, such as Fred Botting, argue that since the Gothic has lost its power in the postmodern period, new lighter versions have arisen as the "candygothic." For Beville, these milder versions are not Gothic

at all. By counterarguing such discourses and defending that the Gothic has not lost its intensity, she recognizes the rise of a new kind of Gothic, which holds an "even darker vision of contemporary existence" (99), what she calls the Gothic-postmodernism.

The Gothic-postmodernism is not simply the blending of a genre and a period's artistic inclination; she defends the existence of a common feature between the Gothic and the Postmodernism: the sublime effects of terror. This sublime aspect comes from "the unrepresentable aspects of reality and subjectivity" (15). In the first part of the book, Beville discusses the theoretical aspects of the term. For the author, terror is an over-used and over-interpreted term in the Gothic, and it has lost the strength of its effects to contemporary audiences (8). Thus, her recuperation of the Gothic in the postmodern period is also a recuperation of the sublime feeling of terror. Moreover, as the Gothic is a literature of terror so is the Gothic-postmodernism. Her explanation is that the terror felt in the French Revolution, when the Gothic genre was born, is quite similar to the terror transmitted by contemporary terrorism and media.

In this sense, postmodern terror is rejuvenated by global terrorism. Beville points the 9/11 as the climax of a rising terror; in her words: “the 9/11 attacks resulted in a globally-perceived experience of the uncanny” (33). This argument may collide with other postmodern theorists, such as Robert Eaglestone, who defend that this postmodern fear goes back to the holocaust; or even that indeed Postmodernism began after the horrors of the holocaust. Beville also considers other acts of terrorism as the ones promoted by the IRA, the PLO and the terrorism in South America and Sri Lanka, but her track on the history of terrorism does not go further than the nuclear war in the 1950s. Still, the notion that postmodern contemporary society lives in an era of fear, which raises terror, and that Gothic-postmodernism is an expression of such period is relevant; as she affirms: “Gothic-postmodernism as our contemporary literature of terror, is a profound generic expression of our postmodern condition” (34).

Beville does not limit the Gothic-postmodernism to fiction, she also evinces gothic traits in the most influential postmodern theories. Jean Baudrillard’s “spirit of terror” and “cities of death,” Jacques

Derrida’s “hauntology,” Jean Francois Lyotard’s postmodern sublime, unrepresentable and negative pleasure, Slavoj Žižek’s “the Thing” are some of the most significant ideas that she includes in the discussion associating the Gothic with postmodern theory. In doing so, she reinforces her argument that the Gothic and Postmodernism can be related, and in addition, she sheds light on the convoluted side of some of these theories, which might be used not only by those interested in the Gothic-postmodernism, but those who are enthralled in Postmodernism in general.

A relevant distinction is that the terror in Gothic-postmodernism is not the same as in the Gothic. The power of the terror in the former is subtle. According to Beville, “the power of terror then, is in suggestion. It functions as part of the gothic enterprise to stimulate the reader’s imagination in the recreation of a terror that is unspeakable and sublime” (89). Different from horror, which appeals to an explicit grotesque, terror allows room for fascination and imagination. This aspect is best explained in the second part of the book, the analytical part, in which she analyzes the construction of the Gothic-postmodernism in

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaghterhouse 5* (1969) and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow: or the nature of the offence* (1991) as examples of gothic-postmodern novels. In this second half of the book, she keeps a dialogical analysis with the previous theoretical part through the very end in a true attempt to set a relation between theory and practice, which might be interpreted as a repetitive construction, but which is reasoned by an effort to confirm her point. Her cyclical writing is a confirmation of the notion she is attempting to prove: the rise of a new hybrid genre born in the combination of the Gothic and Postmodernism.

Beville traces the history of the Gothic genre, as her analysis is not limited to the gothic-postmodern novels. In this sense, Gothic-postmodernism becomes part of a chain of mutations in the evolution of gothic literature. To confirm this argument, she also discusses Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a novel from the *fin de siècle*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Samuel Beckett's dramatic texts as modern references. The Gothic-postmodernism in this sense is an intensification of the modern Gothic.

The fantastic also has a role in Gothic-postmodernism. As she explains, some of the novels analyzed were even classified within this context of "literary fantastic" or magical realism. The issue is how the fantastic works in a postmodern context of disbelief in reality. To answer this issue, Beville recurs to Todorov, who argues that the relation with the fantastic has changed. His explanation is that before this era of disillusionments, the conflict in a novel's plot started with a normal context and then reached a supernatural climax; while, in the postmodern context, the plots start with the supernatural and later reach an acceptance of this fantastic. Beville's example is Kafka's literature, in which no presumption of truth even exists. Todorov's argument goes even further to state that the only fantastic object remaining is man: an ordinary individual inserted in an extraordinary context.

The result of the combination between Gothic and Postmodernism is a self-conscious narrative and an intermingling between supernatural and metafictional elements. The distinctions between real and the fictional are blurred with the metafictional aspect of the novel, which also contributes to the uncanny and subtle feeling raised

by this new genre. Furthermore, the suspense and mystery become key issues in this narrative, since they corroborate the notion of the unknown which ghostly haunts us. The opposition between good and evil is still a recurrent theme, but as evil is generally represented in the figure of the *doppelgänger* (one that has a double life or looks like another person, commonly associated with a hidden evil), monsters and ghosts become embodiments of us. Due to this narcissistic fear found in ourselves, the self is the unimaginable, the unthinkable. Following Jacques Lacan's poststructuralism, the self is precisely where it is not thinking, hiding inside ourselves. Technology also plays a consistent role in this uncanny experience, as it helps to emphasize the issue of duplicity and reproduction; it provides an effect that is similar to the one provided by mirrors. As a consequence, this new genre is more psychoanalytical and decadent than the *fin de siècle* or modern Gothics. Gothic and postmodern influences also appear in the construction of the narrative, in which the abundance of references reflects the fragmented being and transfers to the reader the uncanny feeling of lack of control. Besides, the metafictionality of

the novels indicates a narcissistic attention, which is similar to the turn of attention to the self. Lastly, Beville's review on the effects of the terror is not only a search for a new genre in Postmodernism, but it is also a way to refresh the Gothic.

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