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THE GOTHIC NOVEL IN IRELAND C. 1760 – 1829 (2018) BY CHRISTINA MORIN

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Morin, Christina. *The Gothic Novel in Ireland c. 1760 – 1829*. Manchester University Press, 2018. 228pp.

Christina Morin's *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* (2018) charts new territory in the field of Gothic and literary studies by actively challenging the myopic view of what we call Gothic and Irish literature. *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* combines well-honed close readings of Irish texts spanning from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries with distanced reading practices which favour literary empiricism to carve out a space for reinvention of both 'Irish Gothic' and the 'Gothic Novel.'¹ Morin provides readers not only with a compelling reorganisation of the field, but also a reclamation of an often-maligned literary practice of distanced reading. *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* is a much needed, well-researched, and highly important piece of new criticism that scholars should celebrate for its clarity and its impact on literary history.

Morin's text is comprised of four central chapters, each focused on a specific argument concerning the qualities we use to describe both 'Gothic' and the 'Irish Gothic.' These temporal, generic, geographic, and material descriptors are ultimately far from what contemporary readers and authors of eighteenth and nineteenth-century fiction understood and thus limit our current understanding of what can be called 'Irish' and 'Gothic.' Chapter One focuses on the "competing connotations of the term gothic" in popular culture which "very few" writers adopted when promoting or describing their work (27). Using Thomas Leland's understudied *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762) as a starting point, Morin traces how both the historical novels and the history of 'Gothic', as we defined it off Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), were not unified in their understanding of the Gothic past and what it could and could not represent. In Chapter Two Morin then interrogates how writers within the period described their own work in terms of genre from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Morin links the works of Irish Romanticism, which critics often associate as being "dominated by regional, national, and historical literary forms that rose to prominence" in 1801, to the long history of the Gothic (15). Ultimately, Morin contends that these nineteenth-century genres "virtually co-existed" with the Gothic (16). In Chapter Three, Morin turns to examine the geographies of the "Gothic" and "Irish Gothic" to challenge "our assumption that contemporary English gothic literature almost universally deploys Catholic Continental locals" (115). Using texts from Fuller, Milliken, and Selden as evidence, Morin underscores that Irish writers frequently rejected such continental settings "traditionally associated with gothic fiction" to describe English settings "as equally dangerous as foreign climes" (118). Doing so resituates the

Irish landscape away from just representing barbarity or Celtic otherness. The final chapter focuses on the Minerva Press and Regina Maria Roche's literary reach and modes of production to showcase how readers and authors built ideological and literary networks to best understand their place and participation in a global marketplace forming around them (158-159). Ultimately, this final chapter argues that Irish print culture remained more than an afterthought in the minds of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century readers; instead, such fiction formed the backbone of these readers' understanding of the literary world.

Both Morin's clarity and her thoughtful organisation allow readers to trace the complicated print history of Ireland without feeling stressed by the magnitude of the project. The chapters blend with each one building to the more abstract Moretti-inspired work that concludes the text. Instead of jumping into the maps, figures, and data points, Morin remains disciplined and firmly rooted in carrying her readers into deeper theory and distanced reading practice. *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* does not evangelize only literary data to readers. Instead, Morin conducts her close readings of works like Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Leland's *Longsword* into a crescendo of literary history and print culture-detective-work in its broader analysis of the Minerva Press and its publications. The scope of Morin's work alone is astonishing for any scholar of literary history, as is her ability to guide readers along this sixty-nine-year history coherently.

I truly appreciate the focused interrogation of the more traditional elements of what we may typically expect from Gothic novels in Morin's work. Such an organisation allows Morin to not only challenge the Gothic label, but also advocate for the inclusion of a more expansive definition of both 'Gothic' and the 'Irish Gothic.' Her chapters push back against the traditional tendency to place what we study in tidy and separate generic boxes. Yet, to only view Morin's argument in this way is missing the anticolonial work she attempts in each chapter. By first deconstructing the temporal, generic, geographic, and material qualities of supposed Gothic texts, Morin can more easily focus on the exclusion of texts outside of the traditional English Gothic realm. While this book is focused on making the case for the inclusion of Irish texts, one could easily see how this model could be applied to other texts from within and outside of the English empire. The circulation of print in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was a transnational phenomenon that often muddied the national and geographic boundaries we use to make sense of the historical periods of our choosing today.

While I found the work in the first two chapters engaging and immaculately researched, I really believe that the final two chapters of *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* showcase the impact of Morin's methodology. In both "Gothic Geographies" and "Gothic Materialities," Morin revives the often-maligned practice of distant reading coined by Franco Moretti.² Moretti often eschewed the individual examination of certain authors and texts. Instead, Moretti challenges us to aggregate large swathes of literary data, crunch numbers, and make figures, graphs, and maps that help bring more empiricism to our conclusions. Most exciting about Morin's brand of distant reading is her ability to temper Moretti's quantification to suit her argument for the "dismantling of the restrictive, largely artificial, formal, and generic categorisations" in our understanding of what counts for both

Irish and Gothic literature (11). Her figures, graphs, and maps showcase the sheer number of literary texts lost to history by our narrow conceptions of the field. By using Moretti's distant reading in this way, *The Gothic Novel in Ireland* literally shows us the sheer volume of texts and authors we've overlooked, with her appendix forming a "working bibliography" of Irish Gothic fiction for further research (201).

The only figure I found a bit wanting was the heatmap of reprinting and circulation of Regina Maria Roche's texts (166). This figure highlights the reach of Roche's work internationally, showcasing density in larger geographic regions. While intriguing, the visualisation left me wanting more of a deep dive into some of these hotspots to really understand the networks represented in the map. For instance, we see that Roche's work was reprinted up and down the Northeast Coast of the United States, but we do not get a sense of where those happened specifically. My grumbling here is slight to be sure. The fact that I want to explore these networks more completely is precisely the challenge Morin asks of us.

The Gothic Novel in Ireland is a powerful display of the reparative work contemporary critics must do to further our understanding of the literary periods we study. As such, I would recommend Morin's work to any scholar who has an interest in the Gothic or literary history. For graduate students and early career scholars, I find that Morin's text is an exemplary display of critical focus and organisation. What is most admirable in Morin's work is the set of doors she leaves open for future exploration. Morin concludes her text with lengthy bibliography of primary and secondary texts and, more importantly a working appendix of Irish fiction spanning from 1760-1829. Certainly, there is more buried in the annals of eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth century literature that this book does not cover. However, this volume clearly demonstrates not only that this material exists but also how it can be approached and so should be considered wildly successful.

NOTES

1. Morin insists that these terms should be offset in inverted commas. The inverted comma places, she argues, a frame around these terms which draws our attention to the history of these terms as modern critical inventions.
2. I should note that Franco Moretti's alleged sexual abuse of a student at UC Berkely also paints my reaction to his work.

BIONOTE

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