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Section: Book Reviews  
Date of Publication: November 2013  
Issue: Volume 1, Number 2

Information: *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption* by Tyler R. Tichelaar. ISBN-10: 1615991387. The price is $33.40 in hardcover. The Amazon page is:


Keywords: gothic, wanderer, French Revolution, vampires, weird fiction, horror

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Julianne White received her Ph.D. in English literature from the University of New Mexico in 2002. She wrote her dissertation on the poetry of the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, and her three areas of specialty were Rhetoric-Composition and Victorian and Modern British Literatures. She is now a Writing Programs Instructor at Arizona State University in the English Department, where she teaches composition, business writing, and sophomore level English survey classes.

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If you think “gothic” only refers to vampires, then Tyler Tichelaar’s book, *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption. Gothic Literature from 1794 – Present*, is here to set you straight. He actually does not even get to vampires, and *Dracula* in particular, until the next-to-last chapter.

Before he can deal with the Transylvanian Count, he sets the stage with a comprehensive discussion of the roots of the Wanderer figure, and in particular the Gothic Wanderer, in the French Revolution. He points out the existence of several variations on the Gothic Wanderer—mainly, the Wandering Jew figure and the Rosicrucian Gothic Wanderer—the role of gambling as a type of transgression oddly specific to the Gothic Wanderer, other “Subversive Wanderers” such as the Existential Gothic Wanderer; follows the development of the Gothic Wanderer from, as the title says, “Transgression to Redemption,” progresses on to the Wanderer at Rest (the Dracula/vampire figure’s chapter), and, finally, ends with the Wanderer transformed into the Superhero figure of today.

The first chapter, on the roots of the Gothic Wanderer figure located in the anxieties produced by the French Revolution, is extensive and establishes Tichelaar’s scholarship as rhetorically sound, if not as thoroughly comprehensive as some purists might demand. He first takes pains to make a distinction between the traditional “wanderer” figure from the “Gothic Wanderer,” which he establishes as a category of its own, one that has been overlooked by traditional Wanderer scholarship. In observing that the Gothic Wanderer is a “commentary on 19th century political and social concerns” who “suffers guilt” and is “eternally damned for transgressing authority,” but who is a figure that eventually evolves from “a symbol of transgression” to one of redemption” (1), Tichelaar clearly sets up the progression also of his analysis, while also firmly grounding that analysis in the watershed moment of European history, the French Revolution.

He maintains that because the monarchical systems of government in Europe (and Britain in particular) had been “the central focus of government, people feared that its destruction would result in the dissolution of all units of society, including the family” (2). This should sound very familiar to us in the 20th and 21st centuries, as this has been the usual cry of most conservatives in the face of any social change. British Gothic novels, as a result, “created plots that centered on family secrets and inheritances” in the attempt to “re-invent the family in a new form, so it could survive the post-revolutionary age” (2-3). Anyone familiar with any Dickens novel should see this immediately as a truth universally acknowledged in British novels of the late 19th century. The Gothic Wanderer figure questioned whether family could survive, if re-created, and emphasized the religious implication of rebellion. In fact, Tichelaar goes so far as to assert that the Gothic equaled Rebellion, against king/monarch, against the social status quo, especially in regard to the family, and against God and religion. This can readily be seen easily in Stoker’s *Dracula*, made up, as it is, of an unconventional family unit and undead creatures that stand as a repudiation of Christian notions of the afterlife.

Tichelaar also includes in his discussion an interesting element: the Conspiracy Theories of the time, manifested in secret societies like the Freemasons, the Illuminati, and Rosicrucians, who were believed to be the mysterious forces behind the unparalleled events of the French Revolution, but who, after a time, had
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lost that control; in other words, there were strong beliefs that the French Revolution
had been set in motion by these secretive forces, but the event and its subsequent
consequences had spun out of control, leading to social chaos and anarchy. As a
result, then, characters who played the role of conspirators in these novels were often
condemned, and suffered terrible consequences for their transgressions—a fate that
could not be assured to them in “real life,” since even their actions, much less their
very existence, could never have been confirmed.

Tichelaar, for the most part, has written an interesting literary encapsulation
that reflects the huge historical forces at work in the 19th century. My only issues with
his book are really just quibbles. For one thing, he begins his discussion, quite
appropriately, with the French Revolution. Then, in Chapter 2, he must move
backwards in history to pick up Milton’s Paradise Lost as an important precursor. It
seems to me that perhaps the order of these chapters could have been reversed. But
again, I stress that this is a mere quibble.

The second quibble is more important, I think: Tichelaar sometimes uses
sexist language to describe the differences between the two main types of Gothic
Wanderer plots and narrators. He says that these novels can be divided along gender
lines: that “comic” novels, which he names “feminine,” maintain the status quo and
usually end in marriage, while the “tragic,” or “masculine” novels “take seriously the
illicit and irrational by refusing to create happy endings” (10). He claims that novels
either written by female authors or featuring a female main character end with a
“return home with the wisdom to establish domestic paradise,” while those written by
males or featuring male main characters “only result in displacement and
condemnation” (11). While the facts of these cases may indeed represent such a
divide, is it really necessary to perpetuate such gender-specific stereotypes in order to
make the observation?

But as I said earlier, these are quibbles. The most interesting contributions to
Wanderer studies that Tichelaar offers are: the inclusion of the Gothic Wanderer as a
separate literary figure worthy of its own area of study; the element of conspiracy
theories, the highlighting of gambling as a particularly “Gothic” transgression, and the
evolution of the Gothic Wanderer figure into the Superhero, a figure who is cast out
from society, but who serves, unselfishly, the society that so unceremoniously rejects
him.

Probably the best thing that Tichelaar gives us is an understanding of the
Gothic that goes beyond Dracula and vampires. According to Tichelaar, the Count is
actually in good company.