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Hudson, Kathleen. *Servants and the Gothic, 1764-1831: A Half-Told Tale*. University of Wales Press, 2019. 242 pages.

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<1>Given the ubiquity and significance of servants in British Gothic narratives from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and beyond, it is just short of astonishing that Kathleen Hudson's *Servants and the Gothic, 1764-1831: A Half-Told Tale* is the first monograph of its kind. Even an unexceptional examination of this crucial topic would be useful. Hudson's book, a thoroughgoing, persuasive, and meticulously researched study of the key roles played by servants in Gothic novels, plays, chapbooks and bluebooks published in Britain during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, is invaluable. Over four chapters covering a good deal of cultural and historical ground, Hudson moves the servant from the margin to the center, contending that in an "attempt to formulate and negotiate both personal and sociopolitical identity through verbal and nonverbal performance, no figure redefines the strategies of Gothic narrative quite like the servant character" (2). Often functioning as metonyms for authors, these storytelling characters "operate as both the tools and the wielders of narrative, and [their] liminal narratives enable them to negotiate individual self-fashioning practices and take part in a wider examination of literary boundaries" (17). Through telling and performing Gothic tales, servants not only influence the attitudes and behavior of their social superiors, but also disclose the political and cultural forces that help to shape Gothic fictions in the Neoclassical and Romantic periods.

<2>Chapter One, "Servant Narrative and 'new romance,'" focuses on how servant narrators evolve in the first Gothic texts, thereby contributing to the development of Gothic forms and conventions. Novels and plays considered include Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778), and Robert Jephson's *The Count of Narbonne* (1781). In these texts, servant characters "present stories, observations and evidence to the master-protagonists and the reader and insist on a voice despite personal and social restraints, transcending normalised boundaries to manage the Gothic setting," and their narratives address "repression, historical justice, spirituality, morality and identity" (67). In creating these characters, Walpole, Reeve, and Jephson "[draw] from the theatrical and romantic traditions of the early modern period, contemporary negotiations of rhetoric and realism, and universal cultural assumptions about class discourses" (67). The result is that "liminal narrative becomes a unique form of aesthetic, a Gothic identity" (67). Each of these authors deploys servants somewhat differently; and, indeed, Walpole relies more heavily on the stories of servants in his novel than in his play. Yet, overall, "early Gothic authors developed servant narrative strategies as part of an ongoing engagement with the relatively new novel form," thereby "[redefining] generic boundaries to encompass serious and comic elements and liminal narratives within the distinctly Gothic mode" (59).

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<3>Chapter Two, “Gothic Servants and Sociopolitical Identity,” considers how servant narrators reflect middle-class reactions to the political and social turmoil of the 1790s. Of particular interest is the contemporary decline of feudal attitudes toward domestic service and the emergence of an alternative democratic-capitalist paradigm. Here Hudson concentrates on the works of Ann Radcliffe, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. She argues that Radcliffe’s “construction of domestic spaces” exemplifies her “belief in the possibility of a morally informed sociopolitical structure built upon mutual respect and shared values” characteristic of “the medieval model of feudal loyalty,” and observes that “in a mirror darkly version, this engagement is echoed in Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s later deconstruction of the hierarchical home” (73). In *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Radcliffe politicizes servant narrative by positioning Peter, a morally autonomous, storytelling servant, against La Motte, a deviant and ineffectual aristocratic patriarch. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Annette “rejects hierarchical control” (83) and pursues friendship with her mistress Emily, telling tales that foster an interclass relationship between the two women. Moving to William Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), Hudson explores “the breakdown in the master-servant relationship” (95) in that novel and in George Colman’s dramatic adaptation of it, *The Iron Chest* (1796). She helpfully observes that “the emerging novel form, republican and counter-republican political movements, and the ubiquity of servant voices in literature developed interdependently,” and that “writers such as Godwin effectively used Gothic strategies, and particularly the incorporation of liminal narratives, as a means of appealing emotionally to a wider audience” (86). The chapter concludes with a reading of Wollstonecraft’s *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), in which Hudson demonstrates how, “paralleling Radcliffe’s strategies,” the author employs “homosocial narrative” to “transcend class boundaries and expose invasive social injustices, as well as [to] develop personal identities and political friendships within unstable and oppressive situations” (101).

<4>In Chapter Three, “Gothic Spectacle and the Performing Servant,” Hudson applies theories of performativity, masquerade, and the carnivalesque to Matthew Lewis’s novel *The Monk* (1796) and play *The Castle Spectre* (1797), and to Charlotte Dacre’s novel *Zofloya; or The Moor* (1806). By focusing on “non-verbal performance,” Hudson claims, “Gothic novelists and playwrights […] redirected the political imagination, drawing focus to physical signifiers such as race and grotesquery as a means of articulating parallel Gothic ideologies” (116). Given the salience of imposture in *The Monk*, Hudson’s emphasis on performativity makes perfect sense. As she notes, “the ease with which Lewis’s characters consciously adopt and discard identity suggests carnivalesque acts of narrative masquerade through which the [servant narrator’s] identity becomes an individual and social performance” (117). Hudson’s focus on performance also provides her with a smooth transition from Lewis’s novel to his play, and an opportunity to emphasize how “the early Gothic mode developed overlapping engagements between prose fiction and theatrical works, […] and further complicated the position of the Gothic’s generic boundaries and the self-conscious treatment of performative identity therein” (127-28). This chapter concludes with an analysis of Orientalist performances in *Zofloya*, whose eponymous character “performs servant identity in order to undermine it” (148).

<5>Chapter Four, “Redefining Gothic Servants,” links chapbooks and bluebooks, the Gothic fiction of Walter Scott, James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

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(1824), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Richard Brinksley Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) to demonstrate how these texts redefined both Gothic literature in general and the role of the servant in particular. Hudson contends that in the early nineteenth century "some of the more innovative generic experiments occurred in works that either deviated from or expanded upon previous modular boundaries" (156), including chapbooks and bluebooks that "appear conscious of their roles as extensions of a modular discourse, and incorporate liminal narratives, such as those of servants, accordingly" (164). In novels published after Waterloo and Peterloo, "a political impulse is particularly noticeable, and the servant's role is more explicitly outward facing and social (as opposed to domestic and psychological/spiritual)" (167). "Far from wholly belonging to the earliest iterations of Gothic fiction, servant narratives and narrators heavily impacted developments and departures in later Gothic works" (196); thus, servants illustrate how nineteenth-century Gothic texts evolved in response to charged sociopolitical conditions while retaining essential features of the form.

<6>Hudson's subtitle, *A Half-Told Tale*, indicates that we appreciate only half the story when we focus exclusively on the middle- and upper-class protagonists and antagonists of Gothic fictions and relegate servants to minor, supporting roles. Her book tells a compelling and convincing tale of the significance—indeed, the centrality—of servant narratives in British Gothic literature during its inception and development in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Yet this tale itself remains only partly told. Monographs building on Hudson's might investigate the roles of servants and domestics in British Gothic literature published after 1831, or in the American Gothic. There are certainly plenty of fascinating characters to consider: Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole in *Jane Eyre* (1847); Joseph (and Hareton) in *Wuthering Heights* (1847); Mr. Poole in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca* (1938); Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898); Tobe in "A Rose for Emily" (1930); Mr. and Mrs. Dudley in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and many others. Kathleen Hudson has begun a crucial conversation that should continue well into the future.

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