

Sarah Lansdell's *The Tower; or the Romance of Ruthyne* (1798)

The Tower; or the romance of Ruthyne (1798) is Sarah Lansdell's second and last novel, following the relatively unsuccessful *Manfredi, Baron St. Osmund* (1796). It was printed and sold in a decade that represented a dramatic turnaround for novels in general with the emergence of popular gothic fiction. By locating *The Tower* in the print culture of its time, we can establish an overview of what the literary marketplace would have been like and can explore the socio-economic links between the rise of gothic fiction and the expansion of the book trade. Furthermore, I can speculate how Sarah Lansdell's novel fits into the rapidly commercialising book market of 1798 and, in particular, how it fits in with the print production, distribution and change in reception of gothic literature.

I

Plot Summary and Contemporary Reception of *The Tower*

The novel is centred on the characterisation of two sisters, Matilda and Augusta.¹ Their father, Lord Arthurine, does not give much affection to the girls and becomes estranged from his daughters. After the death of their mother in childbirth, Lord Arthurine remarries and Lady Arthurine contrives to keep the girls in their own apartments, under various pretences which are always made to sound plausible to the Earl. Augusta considers their seclusion a restraint, but Matilda uses it as an opportunity to indulge herself in solitude and study. The girls are sent to live 'in a dreary apartment of Ruthyne Tower,' which forms a part of Lord Arthurine's estate in North Wales (Vol.1, p.5). The sisters spend their time observing the portraits which surround them. Matilda is drawn back to the portrait of a beautiful young woman and feels 'a kind of awful pleasure in sitting opposite the portrait, that often kept her hours in the west parlour; and she would sometimes fancy, that her attachment to the picture must have some particular cause' (Vol.2, p.23). As the sisters get accustomed to solitary life at Ruthyne, strange things begin to happen. Martha, a maid whom the girls become attached to, informs them that one of the rooms in the east wing of the house is haunted

¹ The plot summary of *The Tower; or the romance of Ruthyne Tower* is made after reading the text on ECCO.

and that ‘there are secrets belonging to this wing too terrible to mention’ (Vol.1, p.51). There are locked doors, hidden passages, strange noises and a mysterious poem testifying grief and despair is also found near the portrait. In the end, the supernatural events are explained as effects of Matilda’s paranoia as she discovers that the east wing is actually occupied by Seraphine, whom Mr Aubincourt has been concealing.

Critical reviews of Sarah Lansdell’s *The Tower* amount to only two sources, both of which have little focus on Lansdell. The first is a small section in the *Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800*. In this, Janet Todd maintains that *The Tower* displays ‘a greater imagination’ than the author’s first novel, *Manfredi, the Baron St. Osmund* (1796).² Todd perceives the novel as having ‘a greater psychological insight into the drama of sensibility’ and notes that ‘several subplots are interpolated with some skill.’³ Contrary to this is the review found in *The Feminist Companion*. No assessment is made specifically of *The Tower* but, by implication, the novel was not of a particularly high standard and it puts forward claims that Lansdell ‘promised she would write better than this in time.’⁴ There appear to be no other critical reviews of *The Tower*. In fact, Betty Rizzo states that Sarah Lansdell has ‘been virtually forgotten’ which explains why there is such limited information on her.⁵

Nevertheless, there is an element in the work that could prove to be significant in tracing the developments of the expanding book market in the 1790s. This element concerns repeated claims about the author’s plagiarism of other works. Although the notion of Lansdell’s plagiarism is picked up on by two different sources, there are inconsistencies in their accounts. While *The Feminist Companion* maintains that Lansdell’s novel plagiarises John Palmer’s *The Mystery of the Black Tower* (1796), Angela Wright claims that the novel actually plagiarises Sophia Lee’s *The Recess, or*

² Janet Todd, *Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800*, p.190.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Virginia Blain (editor), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English, Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, p.629.

⁵ Rizzo, Betty, ‘Untitled Review,’ from *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*. Vol 6, No.2, Autumn 1987, p.340.

a Tale of Other Times (1783-85).⁶ It seems appropriate, then, to draw a brief comparison between Lansdell and the works she allegedly plagiarised to either validate or discount these claims.⁷ We need to establish where to draw the line between Lansdell's text resembling Sophia Lee's and actually plagiarising it. Sophia Lee's *The Recess* is a hybrid novel that combines historical fiction and supernatural terror, and it is recognised as an important source of inspiration for subsequent novelists.⁸ *The Recess* tells the tales of Matilda and Ellinor, two fictional daughters of the Duke of Norfolk and the imprisoned Mary Queen of Scots. As a result of the threat that they pose to the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth I, the sisters are raised in an underground dwelling by Mrs Marlowe, a guardian whom they accept as their mother. When the sisters come across portraits of their parents, unknown to them, Mrs Marlowe informs them of their parentage. Both girls in *The Recess* find love, but Ellinor is blackmailed by Queen Elizabeth into marriage with Lord Arlington, in order to save her mother's life. Essex is executed by Queen Elizabeth and Ellinor, like Sarah Lansdell's character Augusta, becomes insane through grief and becomes obsessive over his portrait. Portraits become the key to the mysteries in both novels and a pivotal moment in these texts is the point at which both Lee and Lansdell's heroines discover a room filled with portraits:

An awe that I could not conquer made me unable to form any tale on that subject, and I turned my attention towards the next. It represented a lady in the flower of youth, dressed in mourning, and seeming in every feature to be marked by sorrow; a black veil half shaded a coronet she wept over. If the last picture awakened veneration, this seemed to call forth a thousand melting sensations; the tears rushed involuntarily to our eyes, and, clasping, we wept upon the bosoms of each other.

⁶ Virginia Blain (editor), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English, Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, p.629; Angela Wright, 'To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,' *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

⁷ I would like to point out that a comparison between Sarah Lansdell's *The Tower* and both Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-85) and John Palmer's *The Mystery of the Black Tower* (1796) would have been preferred. Unfortunately I can not access John Palmer's text. As a result, I have chosen not to pursue the claims made about Lansdell plagiarising Palmer. Instead, I will try to establish what similarities there are between Lansdell's novel and Lee's *The Recess* (1783-85) as I have found substantial information about the plot of Lee's text.

⁸ The plot summary of Sophia Lee's *The Recess* is made using Angela Wright's essay, 'To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,' *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

(*The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times*, Vol.1, p.8-9).

The Tower shows a remarkable similarity to *The Recess*, not only in terms of themes and initial plot, but also in the language that Lansdell uses:

Matilda smiled to see Augusta shudder..., but her attention was soon engrossed by the portrait of a beautiful young woman, whose delicate features were half shaded by a black veil, and still more, by a touching melancholy, that rendered her countenance more interesting than the most animated grace could possibly have done. Augusta fancied she saw in it a slight resemblance to Matilda; but both hesitated to call it their mother... These two portraits excited such an interest in the bosoms of Matilda and Augusta, that the rest were passed almost unnoticed; ...

(*The Tower; or romance of Ruthyne*, Vol.1, p.33-34.)

At the end, Lee's two heroines both die of grief; Lansdell's Matilda is rewarded with tranquillity, an inheritance and true love with Mr Aubincourt, while Augusta, goes temporarily mad. However, this is not to deny a striking preoccupation with loss, absence and portraiture in the work of both authors. Angela Wright insists that the model established in *The Recess* provided an important context for subsequent female gothic texts and 'cannot be over-emphasised.'⁹ She continues, claiming that there 'did indeed appear to be a trend in women's Gothic writing of the 1780s and 1790s towards the production of uncanny resemblances of the heroine.'¹⁰ We have to question, then, whether Lansdell is at fault in plagiarising Lee's work or whether she is actually conforming to a 'trend' in 'Female Gothic' fiction of the 1790s.¹¹

II Plagiarism in the gothic genre

There is no simple answer to the question 'what is a gothic novel?' The gothic genre, by definition, necessitates the employment of certain tropes and plot devices. The anonymously-penned 'Terrorist Novel-Writing' of 1798 prescribed a formula that all gothic fiction followed:

Take – An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

As many skeletons, in chests and presses.

An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut...

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken

At any of the watering places before going to bed.¹²

Entitled, 'Terrorist System of Novel-Writing,' the article appeared in the August edition of the *Monthly Magazine* (1797) and was useful in indicating a typology of discourse that became the basis for generating dozens of novels.¹³ To be identified as a gothic writer, an author would have to incorporate a number of these features into their literary work. In doing so, these writers all heavily influence and plagiarise one another [in a sense] by disseminating the same themes and motifs in their novels.

Both E.J. Clery and David Punter situate the 'rise' of the Gothic in the late-eighteenth-century in relation to the rise of middle-class consumerist society.¹⁴ Presumably, the increasing popularity and growing demand of gothic literature in the 1790s was a direct result of the developments in reading practice.¹⁵ Certainly there was an expansion of the reading public and E.J. Clery points out that new methods for distributing and marketing books were devised.¹⁶ These 'methods' most probably took the form of circulating libraries to help broaden readership and improve sales. It is most likely that as the reading public increased, so did the demand for the popular novel, and, more specifically, the gothic novel after the circulation of Ann Radcliffe's novels. Presumably, when excessive demand for gothic literature threatened to surpass the bookseller's supply, consumer-conscious booksellers began to recognise the marketability of this type of fiction and encouraged its

¹² E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.147.

¹³ Angela Wright, 'To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,' *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

¹⁴ E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p. 5; Angela Wright, 'To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,' *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

¹⁵ E.J Clery, Lecture 8. It has also been suggested that the unprecedented rise of the Gothic novel could be in conjunction with the political and social chaos that stemmed from the French Revolution and the war of 1793. Furthermore, the publication rate of terror novels in the 1790s indicates a cause-and-effect relationship between the rapid industrial progress which took place in England from the 1760s onwards. (Angela Koch, 'Gothic Bluebooks in the Princely Library of Corvey and Beyond').

¹⁶ E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.5.

mass production as another ‘method.’ Dale Spender explains that ‘a common invention of the time was the practice of relating a sober tale which was already known and of embellishing it in the process.’¹⁷ It seems that previous novels were “turned and retrimmed” to constitute new novels and, consequently, it came to matter less in the 1790s ‘whether the text in question was authentic, or simply ‘in the style of.’¹⁸ By altering certain aspects of one novel, another could be produced and printed quickly to meet the demands of the reading public. We can speculate, then, whether Sarah Lansdell’s bookseller, [Hookham & Carpenter], encouraged her to recapitulate the work of a more successful gothic writer because they were convinced that *The Tower’s* ‘Gothic formula’ would appeal to popular culture and acquire a mass readership. Booksellers certainly seem to have viewed gothic literature as a successful commodity and the mass production of “trimmed” novels became an economic strategy used to enhance profits.¹⁹ For Robert Darnton, the reader ‘influences the author both before and after the act of composition.’²⁰ It certainly seems that the reader’s growing demand for literary material has an enormous impact on the author because it is the consumer’s very demand that initiates the process of ‘borrowing’ in the first place as booksellers try to meet new standards of supply. This helps to explain why there are so many ‘mirrored tropes’ and novels that appear to be ‘pale imitations of the earlier and more original examples of the genre by Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe.’²¹

So, why did Sarah Lansdell become involved in the act of “trimming” previous works? Can we speculate that she conformed to the ‘trend’ that Angela Wright refers to because she *needed* financial support? After all, other writers from the late-eighteenth century have openly admitted to

¹⁷ Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel, 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*, p.17.

¹⁸ E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.139; p.90. From this point on, I will refer to the act of “trimming” as a means of referring to evidence of plagiarism.

¹⁹ The role of the publisher and the bookseller was interchangeable in the context of the late-eighteenth-century according to Robert Darnton. (Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, p.11). When I refer to one, it is important to remember that the other can also assume this role. Moreover, as contemporary readers, can we assimilate the Gothic phenomenon with the craze of J.K. Rowling’s infamous *Harry Potter* series by suggesting that new novels recounting magical tales of wizardry have probably been introduced on to book shelves and marketed because of J.K. Rowling’s success?

²⁰ Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, p.11.

²¹ Angela Wright, ‘To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,’ *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

being a heteronomous author. For instance, Charlotte Smith's husband was sent to prison for debt in 1783 and from that point on, she used her writing as a vehicle for supporting her husband and family.²² The process of "trimming" also meant that authors of 'lesser novels' are given the opportunity to get their work published which implies that aesthetic quality can be overruled by popular demand. This raises questions concerning Lansdell's mediocrity. Did Lansdell resort to plagiarism for fear that her novel would not be published if she used her own ideas and that plagiarising more successful works would, in turn, grant her a similar kind of success? Dale Spender locates *The Tower* within a list compiled of one hundred good female novelists, insisting that 'it is not because they were all no good that these hundred novelists and their six hundred novels have been consigned to oblivion.'²³ In fact, Spender concludes that 'the only conclusion which can be drawn is that their worth is being determined by their sex.'²⁴ Yet, as I mentioned earlier, there is evidence to suggest that Lansdell's work was not of a particularly high quality. In the Preface to *The Tower*, Lansdell apologises for her inexperience as a writer and blames her 'female inability' for the novel's insufficiencies.²⁵ It may be important to remember that although Lansdell's admission of mediocrity may be genuine, she could actually be adhering to a convention of prefaces. It could also be a marketing strategy, deployed in the hope that readers may be impressed by the writing despite her 'confined education and retired situation in life.'²⁶ But, if we do accept that *The Tower* was not a work of high quality, why was it sold by Hookham & Carpenter, the second leading novel publisher in the 1790s?²⁷ Presumably, a successful business would not have wanted to risk their reputation or take financial risks. Or, can we suppose that the success of the business means that Hookham & Carpenter may have been able to afford to take on relatively unknown authors and might have been prepared to take the financial risk by selling *The Tower*. After all, Hookham & Carpenter owned a

²² http://romantic_poetry.agnesscott.edu/British%20Romanticism.htm

²³ Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel, 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*, p.138.

²⁴ *Ibid.* This can take us in another direction as discussing gender issues would be a good way to expand the argument.

²⁵ ECCO.

²⁶ Sarah Lansdell, *The Tower; or the romance of Ruthyne*, (Preface). ECCO.

²⁷ James Raven, *The English Novel 1770-1799 (Volume 1). A Bibliographical Survey in the British Isles*. p.73.

circulating library in Westminster and most probably included Lansdell's work in the hope that it would reach a wider readership and encourage sales.²⁸

From here, we move directly on to the issue of property rights. Plagiarism was perfectly legal in the late-eighteenth century.²⁹ This could be for a number of reasons. Quite simply, the authors of the original work may not have been able to afford judicial costs against their imitator. On the other hand, legal charges may not have been pursued because plagiarising, or "trimming," the work of others was a widely accepted and approved practice; a practice that was disguised as a sales strategy because, as E.J. Clery points out, 'remainder sheets could be reissued under a new and more sensational title.'³⁰ This gives booksellers a financial advantage as they made a saving on high copyright fees and full payment to the authors because, in the end, the new books were disguised as changed products.³¹

Though this may have been advantageous to the printer and bookseller, there were various objections, one of which was voiced by Clara Reeve who opposed the process because it undermined the economic and social position of the author.³² This practice of trimming a text and reconstructing it as another author's traces a move in the literary marketplace that, according to Jacqueline Rhodes, is a shift that demanded texts as a kind of consumerist product rather than a process as texts and ideas were bought, sold, hoarded or exchanged.³³ Writers and booksellers, then, were trying to provide a profitable balance between the paradoxical necessity of old material and new material.

In effect, there is also an ideological contest between originality and imitation of the gothic

²⁸ Ibid, p.85.

²⁹ Today, we would probably be inclined to disapprove of a new writer who 'borrows' their ideas because, at present, to be 'unoriginal' borders on committing a crime and can ruin the credibility and reputation of an author. Just recently, the case against Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* was brought about by claims that he had lifted certain ideas from *The Holy Blood, The Holy Grail* (Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln). The case was highly publicised and it is interesting that it shows such a dramatic turnaround in copyright law. What does this say about twenty-first-century culture? Does it indicate that we have greater financial motivation? More importantly, what does it say about late-eighteenth-century culture when it is evident that the same regulations were not in place and continued not to be so until British copyright changed substantially in 1842 [when the term of copyright was extended to forty-two years or the life of the author plus seven years – whichever was longer]? (Mark Rose, 'Literary Property Determined,' p.237).

³⁰ E. J.Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.139.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jacqueline Rhodes, 'Copyright, Authorship and the Professional Writer: The Case of William Wordsworth.'

novelist which moves us away from thinking about the rapid growth of consumerism and leads us directly on to the issue of authorship. Mark Rose points out that ‘at one level, the literary-property question was a contest about how far the ideology of possessive individualism should be extended into the realm of cultural production.’³⁴ So, as a result of the ‘consumer revolution’ in the 1790s, questions are raised about the real conditions of ownership.³⁵ The late-eighteenth century, was a turning point in the general consensus of what it meant to write or to be an author.³⁶ It entailed seeing the writer as a source, as an originator, one ‘who no longer *produced* texts as a cog in a publication machine, but instead *created* them as an author.’³⁷ As authors came to be seen as creators rather than producers of texts, Martha Woodmansee argues that ‘inspiration came to be regarded as emanating not from outside or above, but from within the writer himself.’³⁸ Inspiration came to be explicated in terms of the conceptualisation of ‘Original Genius’:

An *Original* may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up by those *Mechanics, Art, and Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own. (Gothic Documents [3.7a]).³⁹

This new conception of ‘genius’ reveals an ambivalence in the class of the author and emphasises inspiration and creativity as the distinct product and property of the writer, thus the ultimate mark of authorship. But, can we ever be entirely certain where inspiration or originality really comes from? After all, Roland Barthes insists that there ‘are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*.’⁴⁰ Can we conspire that plagiarism is an ‘awakening’ of the aspect of the ‘already?’

³⁴ Mark Rose, ‘Literary Property Determined,’ p.231.

³⁵ E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.5.

³⁶ Jacqueline Rhodes, ‘Copyright, Authorship and the Professional Writer: The Case of William Wordsworth.’

³⁷ *Ibid.*

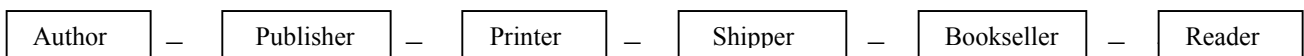
³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Edward Young, *Gothic Documents, (3.7a)*, E.J. Clery.

⁴⁰ E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.142.

Indeed, Dale Spender insists that it would be ‘a mistake to think that writers were any less because their stories were not ‘original’.’⁴¹ Spender uses Shakespeare as an example, claiming that ‘he is not often rated as less than a genius on the grounds that his stories were not of his own making.’⁴² But, I am not entirely convinced. The theory of the sublime ‘had it that nowhere was the...power of imaginative creation more clearly seen than in writing which provokes pity and terror.’⁴³ It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that gothic fiction is connected to the discourse of the sublime when it seems that writers of the 1790s were duplicating each other’s work. What happens to sublime authorship when gothic motifs become commonplace? How can gothic literature be conceived as ‘imaginative creation’ if writer after writer adopts identical tropes in their work? How can the claim to inspiration and, in particular, to originality, be upheld when there is constant evidence of repetition? And what happens to ‘original genius’ when authors are prepared to circulate extracts from previous works as a commercialised sales strategy? In the end, what becomes of the status of the gothic novelist? As E.J. Clery asks, do authors become ‘creative artists’ or ‘pre-programmed automatons’ in the commercialised gothic book trade?⁴⁴

Furthermore, does plagiarism interfere with Robert Darnton’s conception of the ‘life cycle’ of printed books?⁴⁵ He describes the circuit as:



But, as I have explained, the individualised notion of ‘the author’ is complex and perhaps this needs to be reflected in a greater capacity in Darnton’s communications circuit. I previously stated that [for Darnton] the author is ultimately influenced by the reader and, in the 1790s, the author was

⁴¹ Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel, 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*, p.18

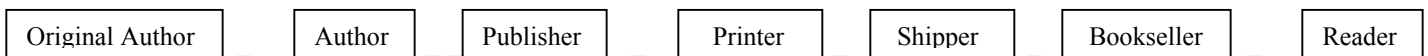
⁴² Ibid. From this point, we can take the argument in a different direction. It would be interesting to extend the debate further by considering whether adaptations can be perceived as a form of plagiarism. After all, they are in no way original texts as they depend entirely on reusing ideas from an original source.

⁴³ E. J.Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.139.

⁴⁴ From here, we could take the issue of authorship and plagiarism down another line of enquiry by questioning where inspiration comes from in the first place. E.J Clery suggests that originality does not necessarily have to come from within the writer himself, but can develop from other external factors. (E. J.Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.66).

⁴⁵ Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, p.11.

predominantly influenced by the reader's demand for greater production of gothic fictions. But, in cases where plagiarism and "trimming" the work of others is evident, the reader is not necessarily the only influencing factor on the author. Darnton says that 'authors are readers themselves' and their reading would presumably affect their own writing.⁴⁶ Plagiarising the works of others means that the original author loses their moment of individualism. In light of this, perhaps there needs to be a space for the 'Original Author' which would grant them authenticity. After all, if an author like Lansdell, takes their inspiration and ideas from the likes of Sophia Lee and John Palmer, is it not logical to include them as the original authors in the 'communication circuit?' The life cycle, then, could be as follows:



The cycle above would only apply to texts that were involved in the act of plagiarism.

III The end of the Gothic

As E.J. Clery points out, the intertextuality of gothic fiction makes dividing one text from another difficult as each is 'revealed...to be a fabric of other texts.'⁴⁷ Although the same effects may stimulate pleasure for the reader in the short-term, when material is used and reused again, reading can eventually become monotonous. In short, one gothic novel symptomatically begins to read like another. Is the Gothic's own familiarity what causes its fatality? E.J Clery recognises that, in the end, these fictions became 'parodies of themselves' as they all incorporate the same, satirical 'Gothic formula' that I explained earlier.⁴⁸ So, how long could the cycle of gothic reproduction continue to be popular and successful? As John Brewer insists, the periodical press was a crucial vehicle at this point in time.⁴⁹ But, while periodicals 'made possible a career' in writing, we can speculate that periodicals also had a hand in the increasing denigration of Gothic as a genre, as the inevitable

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ E. J.Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, p.142.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.146.

⁴⁹ John Brewer, 'Authors, Publishers and Literary Culture,' p.244.

‘fatality’ of the genre seems to have made gothic literature an easy target for satire.⁵⁰ What begins to take shape at the end of the 1790s, then, is a sociological opposition between high art and popular culture as the turn of the eighteenth century sees a change in reception of the popular gothic novel. Up until this time, imitation and quantity had presided over invention and quality because of the demand-led industry. But, as the repetitious mechanisms of the Gothic phenomenon come to light, quantity finally transmutes into quality and contemporary readers began to recognise the habitual use of the ‘Gothic formula.’

We can quite confidently speculate that the change in reception of gothic texts and consequent decline of the genre was firmly taking shape when *The Tower* emerged into the literary market in 1798. Though *The Tower* has not been found to be specifically satirised in periodicals or reviews, this does not mean that the novel was not targeted by the reading public as yet another example of the ‘Gothic formula.’ Indeed, Angela Wright claims that Lansdell’s text ‘was undoubtedly one of the later examples of veiled plagiarism which were satirised in the periodical press.’⁵¹ Both the periodical press and the reading public were almost certainly aware of the prevalent literary tropes that constituted the Female Gothic and would have been conscious of the article ‘Terrorist Novel-Writing,’ written in 1797. Was Lansdell unfortunate, then, that *The Tower* was printed and sold at a time when satirical criticism of gothic writing [from the periodical press] was intending to diminish the popularity of the genre by ridicule and was having an effect on the reading public? This, combined with the negative contemporary reception pointed out earlier, provides adequate reasoning as to why *The Tower* is not recorded as being enormously popular.

Markman Ellis points out that ‘the gothic is not simply a narrative of terror or a set of properties, but is also a tone or mood that is, in its own way, quite experimental.’⁵² It seems that the gothic

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Angela Wright, ‘To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,’ *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic 1700-1800*.

⁵² Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p.8.

phenomenon initiated a new kind of experimentation, one that was involved in a dramatic turnaround for novels in general. Although *The Tower* may not have been regarded as having much importance [in terms of popularity and sales], we should not overlook the text's significance in indicating the literary practices of its time. It operates within and is a reflection on the changing social patterns of readership and the effects of economic factors concerning the growing demands of consumerism in the late-eighteenth-century. To accuse an author [of the Gothic novel] of plagiarism, then, is to completely misunderstand the conventions of the time. Instead, it is more practical to suggest that *The Tower* was an example of a commercial enterprise and that Sarah Lansdell revealed a measure of opportunism. It is just unfortunate for her that this did not pay off, quite literally. Samuel Beckett once asked, "what does it matter who is speaking?"⁵³ In this indifference, appears one of the fundamental principles of *écriture*. This is the notion of the 'author.' We can now concede that it does matter who is speaking. Who really speaks in the end? Is it the author with 'original genius?' Or is it the author who imitates? With what authenticity does the imitator speak?. With what originality is this spoken? Rather than asking about the extent to which it matters who speaks, he rephrases this to 'what difference does it make who is speaking?' To this, and in light of the various developments of the book trade, I would answer that in the late-eighteenth century, it seems to matter far less *who* is speaking. The denigration of the Gothic genre means it matters more *what* is being said [or written in this context].

⁵³ Michael Foucault, 'What is an Author?,' p.225.

Bibliography

Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1600-1800, (ed.by) Janet Todd.
Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987.

The Feminist Companion to Literature in English, Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present eds.
Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy. Batsford, 1990.

Brewer, John, 'Authors, Publishers and Literary Culture' in *The Book History Reader*, (ed.by) David
Finkelstein and Alastair McCleery. Routledge, 2002.

Clery, E. J., *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Ellis, Markman, from *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2003.

Foucault, Michael, 'What is an Author?' in *The Book History Reader*, (ed.by) David Finkelstein and Alastair
McCleery. Routledge, 2002.

Koch, Angela, 'Gothic Bluebooks in the Princely Library of Corvey and Beyond.' Issue 09, December 2002.
Cardiff Corvey.

Raven, James, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the
British Isles*. Volume 1: 1770-1799. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Rizzo, Betty, 'Untitled Review,' from *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol 6, No.2, Autumn 1987,
p.340. JSTOR.

Rhodes, Jacqueline, 'Copyright, Authorship and the Professional Writer: The Case of William Wordsworth.'
Articles, Issue 8, June 2002. http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc08_n01.html

Rose, Mark, 'Literary Property Determined' in *The Book History Reader*, (ed.by) David Finkelstein and
Alastair McCleery. Routledge, 2002.

Spender, Dale, *Mothers of the Novel, 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*.
Pandora Press, 1986.

Wright Angela, 'To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection,' *Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic
1700-1800*. www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/information.

ECCO. (Eighteenth Century Collections Online).

Email conversation with Angela Wright.

Other Sources Not Consulted

Botting, Fred, *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Miles, Robert, 'Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic', in *Gothic* ed. Fred Botting (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer,
2001), 47-70.

Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day (1980)*.
London and New York: Longman, 1996).