Irish Gothic:
How the Canon Intersects History

Elena Cotta Ramusino

Abstract
This essay provides a survey of the recent widening of Anglo-Irish Gothic to include works written in the second half of the eighteenth century. It then analyses the development of the genre as a response to the political and social conditions in Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A response to political turmoil and modernisation, the Gothic expresses anxieties and fears related to the political, religious and sexual spheres. The fear of subversion and terror aroused by the French Revolution was amplified by the 1798 Irish rebellion, which inexorably led to the Union. This essay examines how the Anglo-Irish Gothic writing of the period negotiated and managed to govern the most topical coeval issues: the Union, terror and violence, as well as an increasingly felt decay of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.
Keywords: Gothic, Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, legitimacy.

1. Re-drawing the Gothic map

At the beginning of her 2011 article revealingly entitled "Forgotten Fiction: Reconsidering the Gothic Novel in Eighteenth-Century Ireland", Christina Morin claims that

vast swathes of the Irish Gothic landscape remain unexplored, condemning to silent oblivion a significant number of texts that contributed directly to the rise of the Gothic novel in late-eighteenth century Britain [and] attention to the Irish contribution to the form's development is limited. (Morin 2011: 80)

This neglect may seem surprising, considering the success of the Gothic, which was both widely and eagerly read since its rise, and the target of coeval and later critical attention[1]; it is all the more

---

[1] Emma J. Clery clarifies that the phrase "Gothic novel", whose "employment

surprising, given the Gothic's central position in Irish literature. Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is usually taken as marking the birth of the Irish Gothic novel, as if none had been written before, and the nineteenth century as the heyday of Irish Gothic fiction[2]. Actually, as many recent critical studies claim, there were several Gothic contributions before the publication of *Melmoth*, mainly texts which show the blurring of generic boundaries and the overlapping of different genres, a typical feature of eighteenth-century Irish prose, when Gothic, historical and sentimental narratives, romance and realistic fiction hybridised with one another. According to Christina Morin, it was in the 1790s that Gothic and historical fiction began to assume recognisable and distinct generic features. She suggests that the critical invisibility of Irish Gothic fiction might be a consequence of the critical focus on the literary forms – the regional novel, the national tale, and the historical novel – that gained ground with the advent of the Union. Moreover, Morin argues that

we very often forget that [these forms] emerged organically from the Gothic fiction of the late-eighteenth century and, indeed, continued to deploy the themes, images, and tropes made familiar by earlier Gothic works, such as Roche's *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), Anne Fuller's *The Convent; or, the History of Sophia Nelson* (1786), and Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785), among many others. (p. 81)

In her 2006 essay "The Gothic Novel", Siobhán Kilfeather draws up a longer list of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic

---

as a literary term was by analogy with the Gothic Revival in architecture, which […] began in the mid-eighteenth century" (Clery 2002: 21), is "mostly a twentieth-century coinage" (p. 21). It appears as "a generic term […] in two literary overviews in 1899 […]. It was established in Britain by Edith Birkhead in 1921, and in 1932 J. M. S. Tompkins followed suit […]" (p. 37). Jarlath Killeen sees the 1970s as the decade that fostered academic interest in the Gothic. As is well known, the use of "Gothic" as a qualifier in titles or subtitles is very scarce: the first to use it was Horace Walpole in the subtitle of the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, 1765, while Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*, 1778, is the most famous and among the few following texts that displays this adjective in the subtitle.

[2] A fine interpreter of later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestant Gothic is, obviously, Roy F. Foster, who has dedicated seminal studies to the analysis of this topic in W. B. Yeats and Elizabeth Bowen.

novels, which testifies to the existence of the genre in the period[3], while stressing the hybrid nature both of the Gothic and of fiction in general at the time: "[m]any of the novels are only partly Gothic (or mock-Gothic) but that is typical of the genre" (Kilfeather 2006: 81).

Richard Haslam, on the other hand, expresses a different view on the issue and downplays the presence of Gothic fiction in the period, putting forward the idea of a Gothic "mode" rather than a Gothic tradition. In his opinion, the Gothic mode is characterised by "a distinct but discontinuous disposition, a gradually evolving yet often intermittent suite of themes, motifs, devices, forms and styles, selected in specific periods, locations, and rhetorical situations, by a succession of different writers." (Haslam 2007: 4) Haslam rejects the recent enlargement of the Gothic canon to include the late eighteenth century suggesting instead that "rather than invoking an inchoate Irish Gothic 'tradition', we can more usefully analyse in *specific* works the Gothic mode's intensity and frequency and its imbrication with other supernaturalist and non-supernaturalist literary modes" (Haslam 2018: 40).

Jarlath Killeen, for his part, pushes back the onset of Gothic, locating its origin "in the use of horror and terror in historical texts from the mid-seventeenth century" (Killeen 2014: 49), claiming that its tropes and themes "can be followed at least back to Sir John Temple's response to the 1641 rebellion"[4] (p. 49). As a matter of fact, this pamphlet was repeatedly reprinted, particularly at times when Protestants feared a new outburst of violence. "Conjugal Fidelity", a novelette by Elizabeth Griffith published in 1780, is indeed set in that period of sectarian violence: "[a]t the time of the late Civil

---

[3] "Irish Gothic novels which appeared in this heyday of the genre include Thomas Leland's *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762); Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* (1771) and *Conjugal Fidelity: Or Female Fortitude. A Genuine Story* (1779); Anne Fuller's *Alan Fitz-Osborne* (1787); James White's *Earl of Strongbow* (1789); Stephen Cullen's *The Haunted Priory* (1794); Anne Burke's *The Sorrows of Edith* (1796); Elizabeth Ryves's *The Hermit of Snowden* (1797);[Mrs] F. C. Patrick's *More Ghosts!* (1798); Anna Millikin's *Plantagenet; or, Secrets of the House of Anjou* (1802); Catharine Selden's *Villa Nova* (1804); Marianne Kenley's *The Cottage of the Appenines or the Castle of Novina* (1804); Luke Aylmer Conolly's *The Friar's Tale; or, Memoirs of the Chevalier Orsino* (1805); W. H. Maxwell's *O'Hara* (1825); George Croly's *Salethiel, or The Wandering Jew* (1828)" (Kilfeather 2006: 80-81).

[4] Killeen refers to the pamphlet by Sir John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion*, 1646.

Wars, about the year 1640"⁵ (Griffith 1780: 182). In this text a Catholic priest is the embodiment of evil and brings about the ruin of the two protagonists: "[a] sight like this would have affected any heart that was not rendered callous by bigotry. To see even an enemy fallen from a happy state, and patiently submitting to misfortune, would soften even the most obdurate mind, that was not tainted with the Catholic zeal for vengeance upon heretics" (p. 188).

Killeen distinguishes between proper Irish Gothic fiction and proto-Gothic horror, claiming that the former "did not appear until the end of the 1750s and the early 1760s, by which time the Irish Catholic middle class had partially established itself" (Killeen 2014: 49). Despite Haslam's reservations, both Rolf and Magda Loeber, as well as Morin and Killeen, categorise as Gothic two Irish novels published in Dublin slightly earlier than *The Castle of Otranto*: *The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley* and *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury*, in 1760 and 1762, respectively. The former is an anonymous epistolary novel whose author is "a young lady", while the latter was written by the historian Thomas Leland and presents Gothic features, among which is the character of an evil monk. Roughly ten years later, in 1771, Elizabeth Griffith published the epistolary novel *The History of Lady Barton*.

The thorough research conducted by Rolf and Magda Loeber on the "Irish novelettes [in the period from 1750 to 1829] as a hitherto unrecognised transitional phase between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish Gothic novels" (Rolf and Magda Loeber 2003: 18), provides an extremely precious bibliography of early Irish Gothic fiction. Their study enables them to point out that

[t]he publication of Gothic fiction by Irish authors accelerated between 1786 and 1805 when thirteen such works were published, mostly in London, but a few in the Irish provinces, including Limerick, Cork, and Belfast […]. During this period, the key Irish authors of Gothic fiction were mainly women, and include Anne Fuller, Regina Maria Roche, Anne Burke, Mrs F. C. Patrick, Anna Millikin, Catharine Selden, Marianne Kenley, and Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan). Among the small number of male authors in this sub-genre were James White, Stephen Cullen, and Revd Luke

---

⁵ Violence is testified by textual evidence: "[t]he troubles that then raged through all parts of Ireland" (Griffith 1780: 184); "Two years and more had elapsed […] but Ireland was still rent with intestine commotions" (p. 186).

Aylmer Conolly. Most of these authors – whether male or female – appear to have published only a single Gothic work. One of the exceptions was Regina Maria Roche, who published numerous Gothic novels, including *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), *Clermont* (1798), *Nocturnal Visit* (1800), and *The Houses of Osma and Almeria; or, Convent of St Ildefonso* (1810). (*Clermont* was one of the seven "horrid" titles mentioned by Jane Austen in her *Northanger Abbey* (1818).)
Very few novel-length Gothic works were produced by Irish authors between 1800 and 1820, but several publishers in London and Dublin introduced Gothic novelettes. Many of these Gothic novelettes published during this period were potboilers of original works. (Rolf and Magda Loeber 2003: 28)

These numbers actually raise doubts about the assumption that Gothic, even intended as Gothic mode, "lay relatively dormant in the 1770s and 1780s" (Morin 2018: 30). Moreover, such a variety of critical stances on the subject further complicates the critics' recurrent admission that the Gothic is difficult terrain. The relevant presence of Gothic elements which appear in varying degrees in Anglo-Irish fiction in the late eighteenth century – from simple elements to "dominant"[6] generic features – also point to the foundational nature of the Gothic in the development of Anglo-Irish literature.

2. Following the Gothic

As a genre, the Gothic says more than it seems: it brings to the fore political, religious, social and sexual anxieties; it also enables the irruption of the past into the present by means of revenants that will not be put to sleep. Marine Galiné elegantly describes it as "a polymorphous prism through which one can apprehend anxieties, tensions and violence" (Galiné 2018). From a psychoanalytic perspective, it has also been defined as the return of the repressed, of what cannot be dealt with openly. Certainly, it is a response to

---

[6] This adjective is used here according to Roman Jakobson's definition of the term. In the words of the formalist theorist, "[t]he dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure. […] We may seek a dominant not only in the poetic work of an individual artist and not only in the poetic canon, the set of norms of a given poetic school, but also in the art of a given epoch, viewed as a particular whole" (Jakobson 1997: 6).

modernisation, "a mode of registering loss and of suggesting that new forms of subjectivity are necessary to deal with the new forms of knowledge and power that are conquering past systems and beliefs" (Kilfeather 2006: 83). For this reason, Kilfeather sees Gothic fiction as "the appropriate self-image of enlightenment" (Kilfeather 1994: 36). At the same time, the Gothic also investigates the mechanism of power and the corruption related to (or necessarily inherent in) it. According to W. J. McCormack, "[t]he gothic novel endlessly exposed the violence and corruption that lay behind authority, ancient authority for the most part; in this sense it was a subversive force in the eighteenth century and the period following the French Revolution" (McCormack 1991: 831). As a matter of fact, Walpole uses the past in *Otranto* in order to criticise the present political situation; exploring "questions of rightful inheritance and proper rule. […] *Otranto* is often understood to imagine the (supernatural) overthrow of tyranny and the restoration of legitimate governance at a time when Walpole himself was seriously disaffected with British politics" (Morin 2018: 38), which he saw as moving towards absolutism. Walpole's work expresses a disquieting closeness between the past and the present, "a threatening proximity between pre-modern and modern, calling upon contemporary understandings of the Gothic past to construct Enlightenment Britain as prey to superstitions and fears putatively consigned to history" (p. 38). The Gothic does not subscribe to the Enlightenment faith in progress: rather, its deployment of superstition challenges the Enlightenment's faith in reason.

Similarly, Leland's 1762 *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* comments "upon present politics by way of an implicit process of comparison and contrast with the Gothic past" (p. 39). Differently from *Otranto*, *Longsword* does not deploy supernatural or marvellous elements: although retaining "remnants of the supernaturalism for which the second edition of *Otranto* was later harshly condemned" (p. 35), Leland seems not to undermine "Enlightenment ideals of historical progression […], [but rather to offer] 'the advantages of history'" (p. 34). Leland's novel is seen by James Watt as a foundational text in the establishment of "the Loyalist Gothic romance" (Watt 1999: 47), which can be identified

by the way that – with the aid of selective historical reference – they located their action in a predominantly English medieval setting, and depicted

the conflict between patriotism and a variant of misguided ambition in a period of chivalric manners, all the time underlining the lessons that such a conflict presented for readers in the 1790s. (p. 58)

Both *Otranto* and *Longsword* "explore the mythology of English national identity" (Morin 2018: 41), but, as a narrative intended to "provide a reassuring moral and patriotic fable during a period of national crisis" (p.49), *Longsword* is, according to Watt, a conservative, not a subversive one.

The Gothic probes its fears and anxieties by projecting them onto different settings, thus deflecting criticism from contemporaneity. Typically, it projects them elsewhere: on other countries, which are the seat of injustice, violence, terror, and corruption. It also casts them back in time: the Middle Ages are a favourite period in English Gothic, but not always so in Irish Gothic, especially in the nineteenth century. The closeness or contiguity between English and Irish Gothic stops at the end of the eighteenth century, the watershed being represented by the Irish Rebellion in 1798:

[b]efore 1798, the Irish Gothic was close to the English Gothic in terms of its dual interests in early British and Irish history (see Leland, Fuller and White) and in ghosts and sensational terrors (Griffith, Cullen, Roche and Patrick). […] After 1798, the terrors of the Gothic became much more explicitly related to those of contemporary life in Ireland, and the realism became much more horrific and dangerous than previous fantasy literature had suggested. (Kilfeather 2006: 81)

Indeed, as W. J. McCormack claims, "Irish Gothic fiction is remarkably explicit in the way it demonstrates its attachment to history and to politics" (McCormack 1991: 833). Charles Robert Maturin's *The Milesian Chief*, 1812, while fictitiously referring to an imaginary rebellion at the beginning of the nineteenth century, actually discusses the 1798 rising. As the author writes in the "Dedication" to the novel:

I have chosen my own country for the scene, because I believe it the only country on earth, where, from the strange existing opposition of religion, politics, and manners, the extremes of refinement and barbarism are united, and the most wild and incredible situations of romantic story are hourly passing before modern eyes. (Maturin 1812: V)

Several scholars claim that the representation of Ireland as a wild place was relevant to English culture and politics: Kilfeather suggests a continuity unravelling from Elizabethan times of such a representation:

If one pushes further back into the history of the gothic, into the influence of Burke's *Philosophic Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), and into early gothic scenes in the novels of Frances Sheridan and Elizabeth Griffith, one may trace a continuity between the uses of 'wild' Ireland in the poetry and romance of Spenser and Milton, the mystification of Celtic landscapes by mid-eighteenth-century poets such as Gray and Macpherson, as well as in travel narratives, and the exploitation of the Celtic 'fringes' as the earliest setting for gothic passages in fiction. Such examination reveals Ireland to be one of the original sites of the gothic, and may help to explain the status of Ireland as a gothic scene in nineteenth-century fiction. (Kilfeather, 1994: 37)

Exploring similar ground, Luke Gibbons sees the "subjugation of the Celtic periphery – Gaelic Ireland and the Scottish Highlands" (Gibbons 2004: 11) – along with its Jacobitism and Catholicism, as essential to "the formation of 'Britishness' in the eighteenth century" (p.11). Darryl Jones also works on this idea, as he considers the shaping of a modern English identity and the emergence of the Gothic novel occurring at the same time as "the construction of the Celt as a kind of counter-Enlightenment figure, and of Celtic lands as zones of the weird […]. As English identity was configured as normative, those areas which surrounded it – the 'Celtic fringe' – were simply constructed as abnormal." (Killeen 2006: 18) Correspondingly, in *The Milesian Chief*, the native Irish former owner of the castle and estate bought by Lord Monclare's family – in his opinion "rather the usurper than the purchaser of his property" (Maturin 1812: 48) –, is referred to by Lord Montclare as "the old savage" (Maturin 1812: 49). Getting in touch with Ireland proves threatening: to Armida, Lord Monclare's daughter,

accustomed only to the sunny regions of Italy, or the cultivated fields of England, the effect of such a scene [the gloomy landscape near the castle] was like that of a new world. She shuddered at the idea of becoming the inhabitant of such a country; and she thought she felt already the wild transforming effect of its scenery. (Maturin 1812 vol.I:55)

3. The issue of legitimacy

Legitimacy haunts Irish Gothic fiction, which pivots on wills, inheritance, ownership and dispossession. Indeed, as Ian C. Ross argues, "the legality of the Revolution of 1688-89 would trouble many Protestants for many years afterwards, leaving the permanence, as well as the legitimacy, of the Williamite land settlement and the restoration of a Protestant establishment in doubt" (Ross 2011: 14), "the primal scene"[7] (Killeen 2006: 17) taking place at the time of Cromwell, "when Irish Catholics were banished to 'hell or Connaught'" (p. 17). In Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont*, 1798, therefore written before the Rebellion and set in France, the marginal character of the exiled Lord Dunlere provides a view on Irish historical events: "Lord Dunlere […] was one of the most faithful and zealous supporters of James the Second, and in consequence of his attachment to that unhappy Prince, became an exile from his native country, Ireland, and lost a considerable property in it" (Roche 1798, vol.III: 201). Lord Dunlere speaks of his lost mansion in Ireland and consequently of his lost social position in elegiac terms: "noble was the house of Dunlere: and should any chance ever lead you to the isle in which it stands, you will find I have not been a vain boaster in calling it so. True, its honours are departed, its possessions are divided; but though its glory has set, it has set like yon bright orb, leaving a long tract of radiance behind it" (Roche 1798, vol. IV: 131).

Gibbons emphasises that

Burke's […] *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was to launch a powerful counter-offensive against the conventional Gothic, shifting the locus of terror from the ancient to the modern, from Jacobite to Jacobin. Though directed primarily at events in France, this had far-reaching implications for the Catholic cause in Ireland, to which Burke had devoted much of his career: if the Catholic population here was also on the receiving end, the monster could only be the Protestant Ascendancy that arrogated all power to itself, depriving the mass of the Irish population of their most basic liberties. (Gibbons 2004: 14)

---

[7] Interestingly, psychoanalytic terminology keeps recurring when discussing the Gothic as a helpful tool to describe forces at work in the genre which are difficult to describe otherwise.

In a letter to his son Richard, Edmund Burke writes that in Ireland the ultimate legitimacy concerns "those terrible confiscatory and exterminatory periods" whose result was that "the lands of their country were put up to a mean auction […] in London" (Gibbons 2004: 58). The stress on remembering and the celebration of the actions that brought about the confiscations – the perpetuation, in other words, of a divisive past – could only make things worse. So, instead of

letting 'time draw his oblivious veil over the unpleasant modes by which lordships and demesnes have been acquired', the ideologues of Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland succumb to the very form of superstition they excoriate, and engage in triumphalist commemorations that all but release the ghosts of the past from their unquiet graves (pp. 57-58).

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, fears of violence and of a reversal of order which had been aroused by the American War of Independence were unleashed by the French Revolution, whose effects were deeply feared in Britain. Therefore, a reconciled Ireland was perceived as crucial against a backdrop of wider unrest, while the awareness of brooding violence in the country was high. In a context of widespread turmoil and agrarian agitation brought about by secret societies, Protestant organisations also contributed to fuelling violence; these groups were "[e]xplicitly sectarian in composition, [and] approached social and economic matters on the assumption of a supremacy as much mythological as historical." (McCormack 1994: 67) Therefore, although "[b]y the 1790s the rights of Catholics to hold land had been modified, […] the apprehension of Protestants that their monopoly was thereby threatened increased in proportion to the European crisis rather than the local one" (p. 67). As Seamus Deane claims, "the long discourse of Protestant Gothic […] was, like Catholic nationalism, always seeking for a rhetoric that would […] provide an analysis of the political question of the land and its ownership" (Deane 1997: 85). Legitimacy and usurpation of the land, the hot issues of early nineteenth-century Ireland, are at the core of *The Milesian Chief*.

4. The Union

The fears of subversion and terror aroused by the French Revolution were amplified by the 1798 Irish rebellion, which inexorably led to

the Union. Although the uprising lasted only a few months – mainly between May and September, and it was definitely over everywhere by October –, it caused the death of thirty thousand people, ninety per cent of whom were on the rebel side[8]. Its repression was ferocious, but the rebellion narratives which were published in its immediate aftermath, written by loyalists, focussed on the barbarity and brutality of the Irish rebels. These accounts sold well, and although, as Susan Egenolf writes, "[m]ore than twenty rebellion narratives or accounts were published in the years immediately following the rebellion […] and went quickly through several editions, […] Rebellion narratives were published throughout the nineteenth century" (Egenolf 2005: 863). Their stress on gory details provided ready-made Gothic material.

The Union was presented as a metaphorical marriage in which England would protect a feminised and needy Ireland. It was not destined to be a happy one, though, but rather experienced as imposed, and therefore it increasingly came to be perceived as a Gothic marriage, in which Ireland assumed the characteristic features of the imperilled heroines of the genre, thus providing further material for Gothic fiction.

The Union also marked the end of the domain of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and the start of its decline. Notwithstanding William Butler Yeats's contention that the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy had its golden age in the eighteenth century, its flourishing was rather short, spanning the few years from 1782, when the Irish Constitution was ratified and an Independent Parliament in Ireland was established, and 1800, when the Acts of Union were passed. As W. J. McCormack has pointed out, the collocation – Protestant Ascendancy, afterwards simply Ascendancy in this sense – came into use only at the beginning of 1792[9], and it was first "used as the equivalent to Protestant interest (or the ascendancy of

---

[8] See Egenolf 2005.

[9] W. J. McCormack has devoted careful attention to this issue, and according to him, "[t]he phrase 'protestant ascendancy' does not seem to be traceable before February 1782 when it was uttered in the Irish House of Commons by Sir Boyle Roche. Moreover, as a deliberate formulation, it dates from 1792. In the course of that year Roche's words were ritualised in Dublin Corporation's anti-catholic resolutions in defiance of London's wish to modify the penal code" (McCormack 1989: 162).

Protestantism) and not to any specific social 'class' or party. There was still no sense of the phrase meaning the Protestant gentry, or indeed the Protestant aristocracy" (McCormack 1994: 70). W. J. McCormack further clarifies that "[t]he term certainly was not used […] to name any existing, or former, social group. And as for the now familiar association of the protestant ascendancy with landed estate, the context of protestant ascendancy ideology in the 1790s was urban and mercantile, even commercial" (McCormack 1989: 162).

However, the impending fate of the Protestant landed gentry, whose members were more and more unable to efficiently run their affairs and their estates, and what was perceived as the inevitability of their fall, increased after the Union, and the fears it generated projected Gothic phantoms onto the Irish landscape.

A deeply-needed reassuring image of the Irish, "who had recently appeared in much more horrific narratives" (Egenolf 2005: 846), was offered by *Castle Rackrent*, 1800. A portrait of the increasingly competitive forces in Irish society, it focuses on the failings and guilt of the Anglo-Irish ruling class and delineates its replacement at the hands of a rising Catholic professional class. This novel stands outside the Gothic tradition, but it is worth mentioning here, as it explores issues that have been identified as archetypal of Anglo-Irish Gothic, such as its obsession with class decay and unease about the legitimacy of their position, the accompanying sense of guilt, (fear of) dispossession, and claustrophobic confinement, thus showing the contiguity and closeness of themes and tropes in the fiction of this period, and the centrality of these issues, both to the Gothic and to the rising Irish national tale, but also to subsequent Irish fiction.

It is therefore not surprising that Anglo-Irish Gothic devotes its attention more to coeval competing political forces and to the excesses of Irish history rather than to the medieval period. It is also not surprising that the nineteenth century witnesses the flourishing of the genre, both in novels and in tales. As a matter of fact, "a survey of the periodical literature of the 1830s and 1840s suggests that tales of the fantastic and supernatural dominated Irish taste. In periodicals, Gothic texts are fragmented by serialisation and illustration, and there is contamination with contiguous political discourses" (Kilfeather 2006: 87).

5. Conclusion

This essay has illustrated the chronological extension of Irish Gothic production to include late eighteenth-century novels and novelettes, an enlargement put forward by recent critical studies, of which a survey is given here. As these pages have shown, the subject is controversial, as not all critics agree on this extension, considering the Gothic in the period rather discontinuous, and therefore difficult to categorise as a tradition. A further reflection would suggest that the difference between these critical positions is mainly terminological, as it concerns the degree of Gothic content – its themes and tropes – in the fiction examined in order to determine whether Gothic is dominant, in Jakobson's terms, in these narratives. It is important to bear in mind, though, that the critics who have put forward the extension of the canon to include the late eighteenth century have clarified that a contiguity, mixing and blurring of different genres is typical of Irish fiction of the period, which starts to acquire more definite generic contours with the new century. This naturally means the co-existence of elements which have later developed into different genres.

Moreover, this essay has outlined the peculiar relationship between Gothicism and history in Ireland and pointed out how the issues of legitimacy and usurpation, ownership of the land and dispossession are at the core of Irish Gothic writing. It has also discussed the watershed represented by the 1798 Rebellion and the following Acts of Union. While the latter constrained Ireland to an imposed relationship which imaginatively echoed threatening Gothic marriages, the former supplied suitable Gothic material and sanctioned the difference between the English and Irish versions of the genre, as contemporary historical and political issues became the stuff of Irish Gothic fiction.

References

CLERY, EMMA J., 2002, "The genesis of 'Gothic' fiction", in J.E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, C.U.P., Cambridge, pp. 21-39.

DEANE, SEAMUS, 1997, *Strange Country – Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*, O.U.P., Oxford.

EGENOLF, SUSAN B., 2005, "Maria Edgeworth in Blackface: *Castle Rackrent* and the Irish Rebellion of 1798", *ELH* 72 (4), pp.845-869.

GALINÉ, MARINE, 2018, "The 1798 Rebellion: Gender Tensions and Femininity in the Irish Gothic", *RISE* 2 (2), pp. 105-118.

GIBBONS, LUKE, 2004, *Gaelic Gothic – Race, Colonization, and Irish Culture,* Arlen House, Galway.

GRIFFITH, ELIZABETH, 1780, "Conjugal Fidelity: or, Female Fortitude", in Dr. Goldsmith and Mrs. Griffith, *Novellettes, Selected for the Young Ladies and Gentlemen*, Fielding and Walker, London, pp. 179-191.

HANSEN, JIM, 2009, *Terror and Irish Modernism - The Gothic Tradition from Burke to Beckett*, SUNY Press, State University of New York Press, Albany.

HASLAM, RICHARD, 2007, "Irish Gothic: A Rhetorical Hermeneutics Approach" *Irish Gothic Journal* 2, pp. 3-26.

HASLAM, RICHARD, 2018, "Negotiating the Poetics of Irish Gothic Fiction Via Casuistry", in I. Natali and A. Volpone (eds.), *"The common darkness where the dreams abide:" Perspectives on Irish Gothic and Beyond*, aguaplano, Perugia, pp. 29-53.

JAKOBSON, ROMAN, 1997, "The Dominant", in K. M. Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, Palgrave, London, pp. 6-10.

KILFEATHER, SIOBHÁN, 1994, "Origins of the Irish Female Gothic" *Bullán - An Irish Studies Journal* 1 (2), pp. 35-45.

KILFEATHER, SIOBHÁN, 2006, "The Gothic Novel", in J. W. Foster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, C.U.P., Cambridge, pp. 78 -96.

KILLEEN, JARLATH, 2006, "Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction", *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 1, pp. 12-26.

KILLEEN, JARLATH, 2014, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction - History, Origins, Theories*, Edinburgh U.P., Edinburgh.

KREILKAMP, VERA, 2006 "The Novel of the Big House", in J. W. Foster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, C.U.P., Cambridge, pp. 60-77.

LOEBER, ROLF and STOUTHAMER-LOEBER, MAGDA, 2003, "The Publication of Irish Novels and Novelettes - A Footnote on Irish Gothic Fiction", in *Cardiff Corvey – Reading The Romantic Text* 10, pp. 17-44.

LUBBERS, KLAUS, 1992, "Continuity and Change in Irish Fiction: The case of the Big-House Novel", in Otto Rauchbauer (ed.), *Ancestral Voices – The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*, The Lilliput Press, Dublin, pp. 17-29.

LUBBERS, KLAUS, 1992, "Continuity and Change in Irish Fiction: The case of the Big-House Novel", in O. Rauchbauer (ed.), *Ancestral Voices – The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*, The Lilliput Press, Dublin, pp. 17-29.

MATURIN, CHARLES ROBERT, 1812, *The Milesian Chief – A Romance*, printed for Henry Colburn, London.

MCCORMACK, W. J., 1989, "Eighteenth-Century Ascendancy: Yeats and the Historians", *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dáchultúr*4, pp. 159-181.

MCCORMACK, W. J., 1991, "Irish gothic and after (1820–1945)", in S. Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 2, Field Day, Derry, pp. 831–845.

MCCORMACK, W. J., 1994, *From Burke to Beckett – Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History*, Cork U.P., Cork.

MORIN, CHRISTINA, 2011, "Forgotten Fiction: Reconsidering the Gothic Novel in Eighteenth-Century Ireland", *Irish University Review - Special Issue: Irish Fiction, 1660-1830* 41 (11), pp. 80-94.

MORIN, CHRISTINA, 2018, *The gothic novel in Ireland, c. 1760–1829*, Manchester U. P., Manchester.

ROCHE, REGINA MARIA, 1798, *Clermont – A Tale*, Minerva Press, London.

ROSS, IAN CAMPBELL, 2011, "Mapping Ireland in Early Fiction", *Irish University Review - Special Issue: Irish Fiction, 1660-1830* 41 (11), pp. 1-20.

WATT, JAMES, 1999, *Contesting the gothic: fiction, genre and cultural conflict, 1764–1832*, C.U.P., Cambridge.