

Elizabeth Murray
S681
Final Project
12/3/2013

Gothic Novels: Book History

I have been interested in Gothic novels for a long time. However, I have not explored the genre through the lens of book history or the book cycle. I was reading the novels, but I did not know much about the authors, publishers, readers, or physical artifacts. Therefore, I wanted to explore this topic to begin making connections between the texts and all of the other aspects of the book cycle. The research questions I am addressing in the project are: What is the book cycle of the Gothic novel, and how is the genre's popularity related to the authors, publishers, readers, and artifacts?

The methodology I used for my project was primary source analysis and scholarly research. I wanted to rely heavily on primary sources to try to uncover the experiences of authors and readers. So, I looked for letters and journal entries which could reveal more about these two groups. I also wanted to find many examples of first editions or early editions of these texts. Next, I needed some historical background from scholarly sources, and I examined historical sources for that background. For instance, I was unable to uncover primary materials about the Minerva Press, so I turned to a scholarly secondary source instead.

When I first began researching this topic, I quickly discovered that there were not many resources which addressed multiple aspects of the Gothic book cycle. I wanted to create a resource which would allow interested individuals to learn some basic details about several key players in the book cycle. My inspiration for this approach was Robert Darnton's "What is the History of Books?" In the article, Darnton demonstrates his approach to book history by examining a single text Voltaire's *Questions sur l'Encyclopedie* from a variety of viewpoints to uncover how the book cycle worked for this publication. I wanted to mirror this approach for an exploration of the book cycle of a genre. While others may provide more depth or detail about specific parts of the Gothic book cycle, I believe that there is a need for research which brings together multiple aspects of the Gothic book cycle.

The process for completing this project involved several steps. First, I decided on my subject and research questions. Then I began researching the Gothic book cycle. In particular, I spent a lot of time using RED (the Reading Experience Database) to locate the opinions of readers about the Gothic genre and about specific authors and texts. I also explored some scholarly databases which included contemporary reviews of novels because I wanted to compare the thoughts of reviewers and ordinary readers. After I gathered all of my sources, I then began looking for the physical artifacts which I wanted to both discuss and include in my website as examples. I was able to find many examples of early Gothic book editions at archive.org. With all of these materials, I was able to begin analyzing and interpreting the research and primary sources, and I started to organize all of the information on the website.

While completing this process, the two biggest challenges I faced were finding information about publishers and locating examples of Gothic bluebooks. Originally, I had hoped to explore several publishers of Gothic novels; however, it was difficult to uncover information about some of the publishers who were connected to well-known works by Radcliffe and Lewis. Instead, I had to focus on the Minerva Press which has at least received some

scholarly attention. Locating examples of bluebooks was probably a challenge due to the fragility of the materials. Bluebooks were not made to last. Instead, they were made out of the cheapest materials available. Thus, it is not surprising that there were more examples of Gothic books than bluebooks.

Finally, I think that the two strengths of my approach were breadth and the use of primary sources. I was able to achieve some breadth by giving a brief overview of several aspects of the Gothic book cycle. However, the weakness of this approach was a lack of depth. If I had just focused on one aspect, publishers or readers for instance, I could have gone into much greater detail. Next, I think the primary sources I was able to uncover through RED, Archive.org, and other websites were fascinating. They helped me to see what physical objects the readers would have had in their hands and what readers' responses were to these Gothic texts. The one weakness of this reliance on primary research is that it limited the evidence I could find. While there are a lot of primary sources available online, many Gothic texts only exist in one or two copies which are not digitized. Additionally, while RED includes many excellent examples of readers' experiences, it is still rather limited. So, I had to rely on the materials that were readily available to me.

Works Cited

Darnton, Robert. "What is the History of Books." *Daedalus* 111 (Summer 1982): 65-83. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.