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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

Property and Power in English Gothic Literature. By Ruth Bienstock Anolik. (Jefferson, NC: Mc Farland, 2016. 233 pages, \$35.00). ISBN 978-0-7864-9850-5
by Nellene Benhardus

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/sgf.36>



Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

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ISSN: 2156-2407



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***Property and Power in English Gothic Literature.* By Ruth Bienstock Anolik. (Jefferson, NC: Mc Farland, 2016. 233 pages, \$35.00). ISBN 978-0-7864-9850-5**

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Nellene Benhardus

University of Iowa

Ruth Bienstock Anolik's *Property and Power in English Gothic Literature* undertakes a large task when it seeks to unify various characteristics of Gothic fiction under a single concept, but it does so with a good deal of finesse. In four parts and sixteen chapters, the work builds its claim that Gothic novels join together under a common interest in issues of property and possession. Anolik situates this claim in the context of eighteenth-century attitudes toward primogeniture, commodity culture, and ownership, and she skillfully connects these attitudes toward Gothic tropes, such as contested inheritances, fragmented texts, haunted spaces, absent mothers, and demonic husbands. All of this builds off of a strong Foucauldian foundation, which reads eighteenth-century instances of confinement and regulation as means of retaining power. For the sake of her own study, Anolik reframes the idea of "power" into her own terms of commodity and ownership. Then, in the three major parts of her work, she skillfully moves from a discussion of the Gothic's interest in physical property to an expanded discussion of the abstract concepts of ownership of the self/individual and of the text.

In Part I, "Castle and Moat: Property Possession in the English Gothic," Anolik ties the Gothic interest in property and possession to the changing landscape of eighteenth-century economics and law. "The advent of mercantilism and commerce," she says, may have created the need for "laws . . . to define and protect the terms of possession," yet she demonstrates that it is the role of "the English literary imagination" to "fill the void left by the limits of the legal imagination" (14). Through recurring themes of properties that resist their present owners as well as of properties that resist enclosure altogether, the Gothic novel suggests that the very concept of property is something both slippery and problematic. Anolik manages a careful balance between conservative readings that see the Gothic ending—the restoration of order—as supportive of the established order

and those readings that appreciate the disruption of the Gothic novel's plot. She suggests that Gothic texts maintain their tension between these two extremes by abruptly ending the narrative at the moment of restoration, leaving open the question of how long that order might be maintained. Key texts in this section include *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and *Wuthering Heights*.

In Part II, "Ghosts: Possession of Person in the English Gothic," Anolik turns from possession of physical property to possession of the self. Her interest here lies primarily with the figure of the woman and the racial other. The woman is a dual figure, both the means by which men can, though coverture, attain additional property and the means by which the patriarchal system—by way of childbirth—can be maintained. If the woman traditionally represents a self who is threatened because ownership of her is desirable, the racial other, especially in the figure of the wandering Jew (as developed later in the book) or the revolting slave, represents a threatening self that resists enclosure and ownership. Like the physical building that resists enclosure, unmarried women, wandering Jews, and revolting slaves in Gothic texts give voice to anxieties that the current landowning male order could be overthrown. Also important in this section is a consideration of how various forms of possession reflect social and legal modes of ownership in the eighteenth century. Key texts in this section include *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Monk*, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and *Zofloya*; or, *the Moor*.

In what I consider the book's final major section, "Fragmented Stories; Appropriated Voices: Possession of the Narrative in the English Gothic," Anolik turns to the issues of reliable narrators, fragmented texts, and ownership over the written word. She suggests a parallel between the rise of copyright laws and discussions of authorship rights throughout the eighteenth century and the forgeries, stolen diaries, and fragmented narratives in Gothic literature. Overall, what Anolik

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suggests is “a recurring tendency to destabilize both the writer’s narrative authority and the reader’s hermeneutic and critical control of the text” (125). Key texts in this section include *The Woman in White*, *Trilby*, and other previously mentioned novels.

Though the book has a fourth and concluding section, it is in these first three sections that I find *Property and Power*’s greatest strengths. Anolik works from a strong methodology that combines Foucauldian, Marxist, and psychoanalytic theory with historical documents and original close readings of Gothic novels. While I appreciate her ability to both rely on and build off of Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish*, I especially appreciate her use of Lacan and Kristeva as she reads the role of motherhood in Gothic novels. Via Alison Milbank, Anolik acknowledges the way that abjection is manifest in the Gothic novel’s frequent requirement that a mother be absent in order for an individual character to develop selfhood. And yet in texts like Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, Anolik sees a disruption of this paradigm. A mother’s care for her child in fact imprisons her within a marriage while enabling her child’s needs to be met. For example, Julia’s reunion with her mother creates a story in which “the mother and daughter are allies . . . against the law of the father” (110). In her reading of the novel, “it is not the story of the daughter fleeing the engulfing mother, but the story of the mother subject to the social confinement of childbearing, dictated by the patriarchy The mother manages to escape a prison that is a literalization of the confined situation of the mother in the eighteenth century” (110). Similarly, it is through reunion with his mother that Anolik reads Ferdinand’s fulfillment. Through a Lacanian lens, she suggests that Ferdinand’s silence upon meeting his mother signals “his maternal need fulfilled, he is plunged back to the pre-linguistic state that precedes the separation between mother and son that is enforced by the law of the father” (113).

The final section of the book, “Beyond the End: Dispossessing Closure,” has both its strengths and its weaknesses. In the final two chapters, Anolik turns to two departures from the limits of “English Gothic,” considering a modern day neo-Gothic novel in one chapter and the American Gothic in another. The strengths of these chapters are the connections they make. Anolik supports the importance of possession as a unifying Gothic concern when she can trace it through a twentieth century neo-Victorian text (Sarah Water’s *Affinity*) that includes, in Anolik’s terms, dispossessed property, the dispossessed self, and narrative dispossession. Anolik also insightfully claims that the American Gothic grew immediately out of English Gothic concerns of selfhood and property. The American Gothic responds to the idea of America, itself a newly owned property with newly forming selfhood, yet born out of acts of dispossession. The only weakness in this final section is its brevity. Anolik’s readings of

neo-Victorian literature and American literature strengthen her overall claim about property and possession in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature, and the latter would benefit from the former’s expansion.

Overall, though, Anolik’s *Property and Power* is an enjoyable text that knits together a wide network of texts and theories under the compelling mantle of property and possession. This book, while a strong contribution to Gothic studies in its own right, may prove especially useful in teaching the Gothic as both a unified genre and as a complex field.