



Victoria Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction, 1860-1930: Our Own Ghostliness*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 203 pp. Hb £59.99.

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In *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction, 1860-1930: Our Own Ghostliness*, Victoria Margree examines women's ghost fiction as indicative of the problems inherent in traditional accounts of the literary transition from Victorianism to Modernism. Discussion of literary innovation and influence is set alongside consideration of the fluctuating position of women between the emergence of first-wave feminism and the post-suffrage period. Aligning herself with existing scholarship in her examination of ghost stories as means of offering social or cultural critique, Margree adds a specific gender focus that directs her readers' attention to the "epistemic injustice[s]" (14) that silence or exclude women on account of their sex, and highlights the difficulty inherent for women writers attempting to make female experience comprehensible when the institutions in control of meaning-making are dominated by men. Whilst the monograph accepts women's voices as often being marginal to the dominant culture, it warns against the expectation that women writers will always use their voices to promote the subversion of accepted norms. Significantly, Margree focuses on authors and texts that are not often considered, examining overlooked stories as indicators of women's progressive and traditional impulses. Acknowledging the contradictions and aporias embedded within the texts, Margree demonstrates the often polysemic and equivocal nature of women's ghost stories and invites us to recognise their complexity and their range.

Margree's exploration of Victorian supernatural fiction begins with a focus on "(Other)Worldly Goods", and offers an examination of economic themes in the ghost writing of Margaret Oliphant and Charlotte Riddell. Drawing on Mary Poovey's 2008 work on the interrelationships between imaginative fiction and forms of financial writing, Margree argues that Oliphant and Riddell use the short story as a platform through which readers can be educated about financial ethics. Whilst acknowledging the transgressive nature of women's financial writing, this analysis highlights the restrictive perspective of Oliphant's and Riddell's own experiences as British, female, middle-class writers. Class, gender, race and economics are shown to intersect: women's financial writing might be a subversive act but the subversion is diluted by the values inherent in the middle-class, white experience. The chapter's close reading is contextualised against an awareness of financial precarity, an increasing middle-class awareness of poverty and women's particular economic vulnerability during the 1880s. Focusing on the economic impact felt by women, Margree's reading of Oliphant's "The Portrait" (1885) and Riddell's "Old Mrs Jones" (1882) presents spectres as supernatural reminders of the means by which middle-class wealth is obtained. Each apparition is shown as enabling the return of a female representative of the repressed class through which financial assets were acquired: the English working poor in "The Portrait" and the foreign Other in "Old Mrs Jones".

Turning away from the ghost as a means of economic education, Chapter Three considers the ghost story as a vehicle for social critique, focusing on representations of female death as a means of interrogating patriarchal structures. Margree reads a selection of short fiction by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Edith Nesbit against Elisabeth Bronfen's positioning of the female corpse as a site for the projection of fantasies about immortality, arguing that Braddon and Nesbit disrupt the typical application of the trope. Drawing on a range of tales, but focusing in particular on Braddon's "The Cold Embrace" (1860) and "The Shadow in the Corner" (1879), and Nesbit's "The House of Silence" (1906), Margree demonstrates the fiction's refusal to present the female corpse as a distanced object for male contemplation. Instead, as Margree demonstrates, each tale presents the deceased woman's body as confronting the male observer, with Braddon challenging him to recognise his role in the gendered social systems that contribute to female death, and Nesbit demanding that he confront his own mortality.

As the monograph's focus shifts to look at women's ghost writing in the early twentieth century, Margree reads "The House of Silence" with reference to *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Presenting Nesbit as a proto-modernist writer, the chapter argues that the story demonstrates qualities associated with aestheticism, using them to construct a text that denounces the male-dominated decadent movement and its representations of women. The following chapter continues this exploration of fiction from the opening decades of the twentieth century, exploring Alice Perrin's Anglo-Indian tales as fictional representations of the tension between imperial duty and individual desire. Considering tales from Perrin's earliest collections, *East of Suez* (1901) and *Red Records* (1906), the fourth chapter positions the supernatural as a means of presenting the difficulty in acknowledging the truths of women's marital experiences. Exploring the intersection between

colonial discourse and Victorian gender politics, Margree argues that Perrin's representations of the Anglo-Indian wife offer a positive model of the Mensahib as central to the imperial mission, whilst simultaneously depicting the difficulties faced by Anglo-Indian women trapped in loveless, or even abusive, marriages.

The final section of the text considers ghost fiction produced by women writers during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Margree explores the supernatural fiction of May Sinclair, Eleanor Scott and Violet Hunt against the backdrop of nineteenth-century spiritualism and the Victorian ghost story, and in relation to the onset of war, the development of psychoanalytical theory, and the emergence of literary modernism. The readings offered in this chapter are of particular interest in their interrogation of existing critical perceptions of literary historiography, innovation and imitation, influence, and the hierarchies accorded to genre and gender.

British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction will be of particular interest to readers of the *Victorian Popular Fictions Journal* in its contemplation of gendered judgments about literary status and its rejection of a historical canon that has pronounced men's ghost stories to be literary fiction whilst marginalising women's supernatural writing as popular fiction produced only for commercial gain. Margree contributes not only to discussions of ghost literature and women's writing, but also to a body of scholarship concerned with interrogating the border between "popular" and "serious" fiction.