

***Castle of Wolfenbach*(1793) by Eliza Parsons**

Parsons was comparatively old when she began publishing.  She was driven to write to support her family after her husband died prematurely when his business failed.  She churned out novels and plays in great quantity, including the important early Gothic *Castle of Wolfenbach*.  In *Wolfenbach*, young Matilda Weimar’s lecherous uncle tries to rape her, so she flees and takes up residence in a haunted castle.  The castle turns out not to be haunted, after all: the supposed ghost is the Countess of Wolfenbach, shut up for eighteen years by her murderous husband.  As the novel unfolds, both women must avoid their cruel persecutors, and Matilda must uncover her own true parentage so she can marry her lover.

***Clermont* (1798) by Regina Maria Roche**

Roche was an Irish novelist who was often compared-not usually favourably-with Radcliffe.  In *Clermont*, Madeline Clermont lives with her reclusive and mysterious father until she goes to live for a time with his old friend, the Countess de Merville.  But her happiness quickly turns to terror when ruffians attack the gentle Countess, and Madeline is assaulted in a gloomy crypt. And to make matters worse, a sinister stranger appears, threatening to reveal the bloody truth of Clermont’s past unless Madeline marries him. Can she avoid the snares of her wily pursuers, solve the mystery of her father’s past, and win the love of her dear De Sevignie?

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***The Mysterious Warning* (1796) by Eliza Parsons**

The good old Count Renaud is dead, and his will makes the degenerate Rhodophil his heir, disinheriting his other son Ferdinand, who has married against his father’s wishes. Rhodophil promises to share his new riches with his younger brother and his wife Claudina, but Ferdinand hears a mysterious voice from beyond the grave, warning him to flee his brother and his wife to save himself from sin and death!

Ferdinand obeys the supernatural warning and sets out to find fortune and adventure. In the course of his quest he will encounter a recluse in a ruined castle with a horrible secret, find himself captured and imprisoned by the Turkish army, and encounter one of Gothic literature’s most depraved female characters, the monstrous Fatima.

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***The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest*(1794) by “Peter Teuthold”**

*The Necromancer* is a translation of various German stories, spliced together, and consists of a series of interconnected tales, all centering on the enigmatic figure of Volkert the Necromancer. Filled with murder, ghosts, and dark magic, and featuring a delirious and dizzying plot that almost defies comprehension, *The Necromancer* is one of the strangest horror novels ever written. “For magniloquent descriptions of ‘horrid’ episodes, for sheer stylistic fervour in the handling of the supernatural, the work can rank high among its contemporaries.” Michael Sadlier

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***The Midnight Bell*(1798) by Francis Lathom**

Young Alphonsus Cohenburg enters his mother’s bedroom and finds her covered in blood. She tells him his uncle has murdered his father, and orders him to flee Cohenburg castle forever to save his own life! A disconsolate exile, Alphonsus wanders the earth seeking the means of survival, first as a soldier, then a miner, and finally as sacristan of a church, where he meets the beautiful Lauretta. They wed and establish a home together, and everything seems to promise them a happy future. But their domestic tranquillity is shattered, when a band of ruffians kidnaps the unfortunate Lauretta! Alphonsus must solve the mystery of Lauretta’s disappearance and the riddle of his mother’s strange conduct. And when he hears that ghosts inhabit Cohenburg castle, tolling the great bell each night at midnight, the mystery only deepens….

One of the most prolific authors of the time, and arguably the first queer novelist, Lathom is a fascinating figure who has been unfortunately neglected.

***Horrid Mysteries*(1796) by Karl Grosse**

Perhaps the best description of this novel is that of Professor Fred Frank, who wrote, “Certainly no novel to survive from the Gothic period is stranger, darker, or more precipitously irrational than *Horrid Mysteries.*  Its convolutions of plot are matched by a grim potency of style as found in the memorable descriptions of Elmira’s enforced containment in a coffin during one of her three deaths.”  As Sadleir wrote, it is “a strange, wild work, dealing unashamedly in the supernatural, written with a lurid if inconsequent power…certainly it is the most defiantly fantastic of any novel of the period.”

***The Orphan of the Rhine*(1798) by Eleanor Sleath**

Sleath is perhaps the most mysterious of the Northanger novelists.  Virtually nothing is known of her, except that she published five novels, all of them rather long, in addition to a children’s book called *Glenowen; or, The Fairy Palace* (1814), which has been called the first sustained fantasy story for children in English.

In *Orphan of the Rhine*, the young orphans Laurette and Enrico set out for the Castle of Elfinbach to solve the mystery of their parentage.  Heavily influenced by Radcliffe, and consisting of a number of inset narratives, *Orphan*was summed up by Sadleir as “a strangely attractive absurdity, which excites a sort of sugary fascination over the reader.”

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