

## ABSTRACT

### LIVE TO SPEAK: POWER, LANGUAGE, AND GENDER IN THREE GOTHIC NOVELS

In this paper, I propose that examining three key Gothic novels (Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) through their use of communication reveals an important argument for a movement towards social and gender equality. By applying James Gee's concept of Discourse Communities and Mikhail Bakhtin's "heteroglossia," we can reveal the progression of this argument through these three texts. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole challenges the perception of what is correct in terms of language use by comparing the Discourses of masters and servants. He then complicates this dynamic by juxtaposing the communicative acts of male and female servants to argue for greater gender equality. Clara Reeve continues challenging social roles by giving her hero access to myriad Discourse Communities, all of which prove essential to his quest to reveal his birthright. Finally, Ann Radcliffe presents the reader with both traditional and progressive servants in order to argue for changes in how servants are treated and perceived. She also creates a successful lady/servant dynamic that challenges all previous conceptions of class and gender roles. Combined, these three authors make radical claims for greater social equality.

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