“Scarers in Print”: Media Literacy and Media Practice from Our Mutual Friend to Friend Me On Facebook

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Abstract

In Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend, Noddy Boffin is surprised at what he finds in books, remarking that he didn’t think “there was half so many Scarers in Print.” This paper explores whether or not there are Scarers in Print. For Boffin, reading is unsettling as it turns books into containers, from which content can be liberated by those in the know. However, content is not contained within the book, but produced through an encounter with it. When readers read, the body of the book disappears in exchange for apparently resurrected content, packaged up and stored by the author. But what happens to the body of the book when it disappears? And under what conditions does it return? Taking in examples from nineteenth-century literature to Facebook, this paper explores this gothic economy of repression and return. Reading and writing are embodied practices: only a literacy that encompasses materiality—which readers do, rather than what they read—can account for the Scarers in Print.

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References


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