Gothic Crossroads Conference Schedule

with Abstracts and Bios

The Dalton Building, Chester Street, Manchester, M1 5GD, UK

Wednesday 25 June

Morning Programme

10.00 –1.30: Registration

10.30 – 12.30 PGR (Postgraduate) training sessions/welcome event:

10.30 – 11.00: PGR Welcome (Dalton atrium, by registration desk)

11.00-12.30: Workshops for PGRs

11.00-11.40: Seminar Room 6/1.05: Joan Passey, 'Teaching the Gothic'

This workshop would provide opportunities for teachers of Gothic literature to share their experiences and practices of using the Gothic to address the contemporary concerns that haunt our students. Amidst the rise of the far right, ecological devastation, crushing financial pressures, and the increased marginalisation of already marginalised peoples, the study of literature, media, and culture can feel abstracted from the very frightening realities of the 'now' for our frequently overworked and overwhelmed students. This workshop on knowledge exchange and Gothic pedagogies considers how Gothic frameworks and texts can be used to address alienation and anxieties in the classroom, with the eventual aim of producing an edited collection or special issue, as we approach the 20 year anniversary of Anna Powell and Andrew Smith's *Teaching the Gothic* (2006).

Dr Joan Passey is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Bristol specialises in the Gothic from the eighteenth century to the present day, the representations of seas and coasts, and Cornwall in literature and culture. Her monograph, *Cornish Gothic* (UWP, 2023) was shortlisted for the Allan Lloyd Smith Prize and she has published on Ann Radcliffe, Wilkie Collins, Shirley Jackson, and dark tourism. She is a BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker and edits anthologies for the British Library. She is currently

working on a monograph on queer gothic ecologies. Contact details: joan.passey@bristol.ac.uk

11.45 – 12.30: Seminar Room 7/ 1.06: Jen Baker and Bethan Hirst, Marketing Co-Ordinator, Manchester University Press, 'Publishing and Editing the Gothic'

This workshop will focus on advice about how to get published, including writing proposals and making contacts with publishers. There will be discussion of how to get involved with editing projects relating to the Gothic, for example, editing anthologies and special editions of journals.

Jen Baker is an Assistant Professor at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research interests are childhood, death studies, the Gothic, short form and illustration from the late c18th to the present. She is compiler and editor of *Minor Hauntings: Chilling Tales of Spectral Youth* (2021) for the British Library's Tales of the Weird series.

Bethan Hirst is the Marketing Co-Ordinator for Manchester University Press.

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Afternoon Programme

1.30-3.00 Session 1

1a. Gaming and Music Videos: Seminar Room 9/1.08

Bart Mulderij, Choice, Consequence, and Delicious of Self-Destruction

Video games in the Gothic genre can present players with a unique crossroads: the ability to actively shape their character's fate, often by making choices that lead to suffering, corruption, or destruction. Unlike traditional morality systems that reward 'good' choices and punish 'bad' ones, games such as *Sunless Sea* (2015) invite players to embrace darker paths, encouraging them to explore themes of obsession, despair, and self-destruction. These choices do not simply lead to failure, but instead deepen the narrative, aligning the player's experience with Gothic literature's fascination with transgression and the uncanny. This paper examines how Gothic video games function as interactive narratives that challenge conventional gameplay structures by offering choices that do not enforce traditional ethical binaries. Instead, they create liminal spaces where players willingly engage in self-destructive behaviours or morally dubious actions, reinforcing the Gothic genre's preoccupation with psychological descent and existential horror. In Sunless Sea, players can trade their humanity for forbidden knowledge, sacrifice crew members to eldritch forces, or succumb to madness. These decisions that enrich the game's unsettling atmosphere rather than simply serving as

failures. By analysing the intersections between interactivity, agency, and Gothic horror, this paper argues that such games do not merely depict Gothic narratives, but make the players complicit in the horrors they navigate. By focussing on player's ability to pick such 'bad' choices, they push the boundaries of the genre, transforming the act of play into an experience of transgressive storytelling that redefines what it means to cross into darkness.

Bart Mulderij holds two master's degrees from the University of Groningen: English Literature and Culture, and Arts, Media, and Literary Studies. He has co-organized the OSL symposium 'Lifting the Veil: Science, Superstition, and the Supernatural' in 2023 and the 2025 symposium 'Meditations on Malevolence: Exploring Evil in Modern Fiction'. His research focusses on late 19th- and early 20thcentury Weird and Gothic fiction, with a particular interest in monsters and the unique sense of horror these stories evoke. He is also interested in the afterlives of these texts and their modern adaptation in various forms of media such as video games.

Joshua Tuttle, 'Gothifying the Castle: Ravenloft and Tabletop Gaming's Gothic Crossover'

Tabletop roleplaying games first explicitly took up the Gothic tradition in 1983, with the publication of *Ravenloft*, an adventure module for the Advanced *Dungeons & Dragons* game. During the years that followed, TSR expanded the original module into an entire line of Gothic roleplaying products. This presentation demonstrates that the early evolution of this product line shows a remarkable similarity to the nineteenth century evolution of the Gothic concept from a trope-bound genre into an authentic and flexible mode.

Dungeons & Dragons had its *Castle of Otranto* moment with 1983's *IL6: Ravenloft*, and its Strawberry Hill in 1990's *Ravenloft: Realm of Terror* boxed set, which, like "recipe Gothic" parodies re-deployed sincerely, included instructions to "re-skin" fantasy situations and creatures with Gothic trappings (but otherwise not changing them much). Rather than D&D in a Gothic mode, this approach more closely resembled a Gothic façade atop a barely compatible underlying structure of generic and gameplay expectations; *Dungeons & Dragons* then still carried Middle Earth meets "druids with phaser guns" connotations.

Over time, however, *Ravenloft* products diverged sharply from this origin, and the Gothic concept it trafficked in moved away from "re-skin it as Gothic" and toward "rewrite it with Gothic gameplay expectations." Later products for Gothic game masters even included comparative renderings of how a scenario might be conveyed and played out in a Gothic manner, emphasizing what had to be different from a traditional fantasy encounter to achieve the desired atmosphere and imagined affective response.

Joshua B. Tuttle is Assistant Professor of English at Concordia University Chicago, where he teaches courses in British literature. His articles and book reviews have

appeared in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* and *Gothic Studies*. His scholarly monograph on the historiography of the Gothic should be in print in 2026.

https://www.cuchicago.edu/faculty/college-of-theology-arts--humanities/division-humanities/joshua-tuttle/

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Helena Bacon. 'Me and the Devil Views: Music Videos and the Crossroads Myth'

Legend has it that, before he was famous, Robert Johnson took his guitar to a crossroads in Mississippi one night. There he met the Devil, who took his guitar, tuned it and returned it, giving Johnson mastery over the instrument and the talent to play the blues he later become known for. The cost to Johnson was, of course, his soul.

The Faustian bargain this American folktale echoes has been told and retold in various forms, often connected still though, to musical artists. In 2015, when the music video format was taking on new modes and meaning thanks to the development of YouTube, RnB singer/songwriter the Weeknd released his second studio album *Beauty Behind the Madness*. Three of the singles from the album, 'Can't Feel My Face', 'Tell Your Friends' and 'The Hills' each had music videos directed by Grant Singer that, when viewed together, depict a Johnsonian narrative, with the Weeknd selling his soul to a very thin, pale, red-headed Devil (played by L.A. punk and glam rock idol Rick Wilder) for wealth, status and pleasure, a new version of the crossroads myth. The videos themselves blend glossy but dark aesthetics with religious iconography and modern urban decadence and the tour attached to this album, *The Madness Fall Tour*, also took its title from an epithet The Weeknd uses for himself – the King of the Fall, further consolidating connections between his media persona and both the fall of Lucifer and of Man.

Burns and Hawkins (2019) state that '[a]s multimodal forms, music videos reside at the crossroads of musical genres and styles, visual genres and styles, lyrical narratives and messages, artistic subjectivities and cultural representations, new media technologies, as well as participatory culture and social media'. This paper will explore music videos as a 'crossroads', a fluid medium that, as Vernallis (2013) suggests, means that 'media relations become malleable and volatile in a "mixing-board" aesthetic' that has been informed by music video. If '[m]usic video's major contribution to today's audiovisual turn stems from the fact that ways of placing music and image together are *learned*: they form genealogies', then The Weeknd's use of the Johnson myth, and the 'genealogy' this triptych of videos creates, gesture towards the music video as a site of both historical and contemporary gothic tales, symbols and sounds.

Helena Bacon is a lecturer and course lead in Film at the University of Suffolk and taught at the University of East Anglia, Anglia Ruskin University, the University of Nottingham and the University of Essex before that. She has published articles in multiple journals including *Green Letters*, *Horror Studies* and *Gothic Studies* and is co-editing new special editions of both the *European Journal of American Culture* and

Comparative American Studies. Her monograph, *Nuclear Gothic: Textual and Cultural Fusions*, is due out in 2026.

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1b. Gothic TV: Seminar Room 8/1.07

Shannon Scott, **"Visions for Restorative Justice in *True Detective: Night Country*"**

My essay explores how Issa López utilizes shared visions and spectral visitations in *Night Country* as systems of communication, or ways to traverse crossroads among spheres, between Detectives Liz Danvers and Evangeline Navarro. While nightmares, dreams, and hallucinations have long been a staple of Gothic narratives, often used as a destabilizing force, in *Night Country*, visions function as stabilizers and become a form of connection and message transmission between detectives as they work to solve the murder of Annie K., an Iñupiat midwife protesting the environmental pollution from Silver Sky Mining. The detectives' visions must be shared to untangle the mystery and find restorative justice that ultimately resides outside the law in which the detectives work.

Because the visions are shared between Danvers and Navarro, they cannot be easily explained or dismissed. Often stemming from past trauma, the visions/visitations produce tangible objects: glass, hubcaps, oranges, crosses, and polar bears. They reveal clues about Annie K's murder, as well as the death of William Wheeler, both cases overlapping as Danvers and Navarro track down leads. This fluidity of vision complicates the traditional notion that visions are ephemeral and individualistic events; it similarly complicates the idea that detective fiction is based on a stylistic realism that excludes the supernatural. In *Night Country*, visions are not figments of one imagination but a collective experience as well as a method of crossing boundaries that lead to restorative justice.

Shannon Scott is an adjunct Professor of English and film in the Twin Cities. She has contributed essays to collections published by Manchester UP, Routledge, Palgrave, and Bloomsbury. In addition, Shannon has published short fiction in *Nightmare Magazine*, *Nightscript*, *The Other Stories,* and *Water~Stone*. She is co-editor of *Terrifying Transformations: An Anthology of Victorian Werewolf Fiction, 1838-1896* and has created two lecture series on the horror genre for Audible.

Beccy Kennedy-Schtyk, ' **Folk Terror: (Re)viewing and (Re)rendering *Survivors* (1975-77) at the intersection of televisual genres.**

The 1970s three-serial television drama *Survivors,* about 1% of humanity existing in the wake of a pandemic, has been described by critics over the years as: (post)apocalyptic, sci-fi, or cosy catastrophe. It hasn't been defined as Folk Horror, or Folk Gothic, though it contains elements of these at points within the narrative. I argue that it is a significant example of 1970s British television in its rendition of a post-pandemic world, intersecting several Gothic and Horror genres without subscribing to any resolutely. To

this end, it enables a nuanced positionality in relation to horrific or terrifying stories, whilst inadvertently challenging the retroactively applied label of 'British Folk Horror'.

I entertain the term 'Folk Terror' as a more oblique, alternative label, which accounts for *Survivors*' absence of the kinds of materialising supernatural forces, monsters or graphic revulsion expected within the genres of Sci-Fi, Gothic Folk, Horror or Gothic Horror respectively. Actually, *Survivors* introduces then actively shuts down supernatural subplots. Nevertheless, by addressing how *Survivors* employs certain tactics of terror, the Gothic and the eerie, alongside occasional suggestions of the folkloric or the spiritual as narrative digressions, the drama may be revisited and appreciated by more varied audiences.

The (re)viewing of the analogue series within a digital context fifty years on, moreover, re-renders the series visually and hauntologically, as the videotape has decayed, causing ghostly green hue in the sky of outdoor shots. Lastly, I suggest that non-spiritual formations of folklore within the plot - in relation to withstanding the land - become central to the protagonists' (and the serial's) survival.

Dr Beccy Kennedy-Schtyk is a Senior Lecturer in Art History and Curating and programme leader for Art Theory and Practice degrees at MMU. She is part of The Stones Project collective @scholarsofthestones involving curating, writing and making in relation to the visual cultures of ritual stone structures. B.Kennedy-Schtyk@mmu.ac.uk

Brontë Schiltz, "I see what you see": *Red Rose* and television at the digital crossroads

In the opening scene of *Red Rose*, a 2022 miniseries by Paul and Michael Clarkson in which a group of teenagers are tortured via an apparently cursed app, a girl is tormented by her expensive home's malfunctioning smart technology. The thermostat plunges below freezing, the lights turn on and off, and she hears her mother's voice from an empty room. But the most disturbing moment comes when her television turns on, displaying an image of her. The screens that she watches have been watching her back.

Through the language of poltergeist phenomena, the Clarksons probe the quandaries arising from our current technological crossroads in which television merges with the internet, and we are presented with more choice of what to watch at the cost of a rapid erosion of privacy.

Red Rose reveals the horror lurking beneath the illusion of autonomy in online television's personalisation functions: that producers remain in control while increasingly mining every aspect of our lives for profit. The Gothic here functions as a disruptive force, illuminating that the paths ostensibly offered to us lead in the same

direction – the reinforcement of power – and suggesting alternative routes for the future of television, and what is at stake if we fail to take them.

In his seminal work on monster theory, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that monsters buried at crossroads 'will haunt that place that leads to many other places, that point of indecision'. *Red Rose* asks what this means when that entrapment is turned on us.

Brontë Schiltz is a PhD candidate researching the Televisual Gothic at Manchester Metropolitan University's Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies. Her work has appeared in *SFRA Review, The Sibyl, Fantastika Journal, Aeternum Journal, SIC Journal, Revenant Journal, Horrified Magazine*, and others. She is the members coordinator of the International Gothic Association.

1c. Gothic Histories/Herstories: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Ellesse Patterson, Cradles and Graves: Reading Gothic Women as Thresholds of Death in the Works of Matthew Gregory Lewis

In *Foucault's Futures* (2017), Penelope Deutscher observed: 'If women will come to be considered as agents exercising reproductive choice, they also come to be reproductive thresholds of the health of nations, populations, peoples, and futures in a number of ways associated with norms for responsible conduct' (Deutscher 2017, 81). Although the works of Matthew Gregory Lewis significantly predate this notion of women as reproductive thresholds, his depiction of childbirth and motherhood through Agnes in *The Monk* (1796) and Izra in *The Isle of Devils* (1827) illustrates the deathly consequences of irresponsible reproductive conduct. Examining the circumstances of these births, this paper engages with the Gothic mother's role as a threshold between life and death.

During childbirth, Agnes and Izra's maternal bodies are transformed into Gothic crossroads where life and death intersect. Reproduction is transformed into a deathly act through the subsequent aftermath of these births. To this end, the illegitimate children produced by these women become symbols of death and decay, heralding the destruction of the microcosmic society which they were born into as a seemingly inevitable consequence of their transgressive existence. Applying Michel Foucault's biopolitical theory of 'the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' to these texts, this paper further engages with notions of reproductive danger by analysing how the unusual conception of these children (for Agnes, during an affair before she takes holy vows: for Izra, through rape by a racially-coded demon on an island) shapes their deadly natures (Foucault 1976, 140).

Ellesse Patterson is an AHRC funded PhD researcher at the University of Sheffield. Her thesis examines monstrous reproduction in the long nineteenth-century Gothic with a

particular focus on the intersection of life and death that occurs within narratives of reproductive horror. elpatterson1@sheffield.ac.uk

Stephanie Oliver, Romantic Women's Poetry at the Crossroads

British women's writing of the period 1780–1830 is frequently situated at a point of intersection between the two literary modes that have been retrospectively labelled as 'Gothic' and 'Romantic'. Approaching this point of intersection through the metaphor of the crossroad, this paper builds upon scholarly accounts of the Gothic / Romantic relationship in order to address some of the other points of convergence and divergence to which Romantic women's poetry attests, including masculine and feminine aesthetic realms, high and low culture, poetry and romance and the perceived gendered differences between literary forms. Focusing in particular upon Helen Maria Williams' 'The Bastille: A Vision' (1790) the paper will introduce the imagery used within the poem to illuminate the crossing of modes from Romantic to Gothic. In observing aspects of 'traditional' Gothic tropes and metaphors, I will argue that women poets are able to manipulate them to serve a functional purpose within their poetry, often to voice a critical perspective on society. In this instance, I focus on setting, considering the specific, detailed depiction of The Bastille – itself an important metaphorical crossroad for the potential outcomes of revolution - questioning why this famous landmark offers such rich opportunity for Gothic language.

Stephanie Oliver is in her first year of her part time PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University after completing her MA at MMU. Her academic interests are Romanticism and the Gothic, particularly the hybridity between the two modes.

Liz Oakley-Brown, 'Tudor Gothic'

Critical discussions of the literary gothic before Horace Walpole subtitled the second edition of his novel *The Castle of Otranto* 'a gothic story' (1765) is now an established topic within the capacious field of Gothic studies. In the words of Dale Townshend:

> contemporary scholars have traced back the origins of the Gothic to…chronologically remote sources and periods, some seeing in the plays of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, John Ford, Thomas Middleton, John Webster and other early modern dramatists clear evidence of a 'premodern', 'early modern' or 'Renaissance Gothic' literary tradition, with others identifying adumbrations of the Gothic even as far back as the writings of the fourteenth-century scholastic philosopher, theologian and biblical exegete John Wyclif and in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563). ('The Literary Gothic Before Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto'*: 2020, 70)

Here, Townshend's authoritative overview provides a snapshot of premodern literary gothic thus far. Inaugurated by a 2022 marketing campaign for the jewellery company Tatty Devine which included the Tudor Rose as part of its 'English Gothic' collection, my

talk argues for a specific epoch before the letter: Tudor Gothic. Rather than viewing Tudor Gothic as an anachronistic label, and taking Sophia Lee's novel *The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times* (1784) as a case study, my talk ultimately argues that the Tudor Gothic's temporal crossroads inform, fashion and trouble the cultural politics of English literary gothic in terms of race, gender and embodiment.

Liz Oakley-Brown is Professor in English Literature at Lancaster University. Her research interests include Premodern Gothic, Surface Studies, and the cultural politics of Tudor translation. Her most recent publication is the monograph *Shakespeare on the Ecological Surface* (2024), and her forthcoming publications include a short book on *Tudor Gothic* and a co-edited volume on *Translating Shakespeare: Access and Mediation*.

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1d. Transformation and Monstrosity: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Jacqueline Victorian Woreniec, Celestial In-Between: Angelic and Demonic Intersections in *I, Lucifer* (2002)

Glen Duncan's novel *I, Lucifer* (2002) reimagines the celestial as a site of existential, moral, and metaphysical negotiation. The novel follows Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, who is granted the opportunity for redemption by inhabiting the body of a suicide victim human writer, Declan Gunn. This fusion of the celestial and the human transforms Gunn's body into a liminal space—a crossroads where angelic and diabolic forces intersect, and where the boundaries between salvation and damnation, divine will and human agency, are continuously blurred. Through Lucifer's first-person narrative, which fractures linear time and weaves together historical, biblical, and personal recollections, *I, Lucifer* destabilises conventional dichotomies of good and evil, natural and supernatural. The novel positions the human body as an uncanny threshold, complicating notions of identity, possession, and transformation. By situating the celestial struggle within the corporeal, Duncan's novel not only humanises the experience of supernatural convergence but also interrogates the Gothic's enduring preoccupation with ambiguity, transgression, and liminality.

This paper explores *I, Lucifer* as a text that embodies the gothic crossroads—both thematically and structurally—by revealing the human form as a site of cosmic intersection. In doing so, it invites a reconsideration of the body as a space of transit, negotiation, and metamorphosis, where the boundaries between the angelic and the demonic, the sacred and the profane, collapse into a hauntingly unstable continuum.

Jacqueline Victoria Woroniec, MA, is PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of University of Szczecin, Poland, researching the Satanic Figure in contemporary

popular culture. Her eld of academic interest comprises queer studies as well as all things morbid: horror, the Gothic, and the occult.
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Eric Alejandro Lopez Vasquez, Freaks, mental illness and monsters, the crafting of monstrous otherness in *El Señor Presidente*, by Miguel Angel Asturias.

In this paper, I will examine *El Señor Presidente*, where the author creates a set of monsters inspired by the freak show, yet imbued with Gothic elements of body horror. I argue that Asturias blends modern and pre-civilised worlds to craft a socio-political realm that is Gothic in its decay, imbued with a sadistic yet orderly, hierarchical, and bureaucratic universe. He revisits the Gothic to critique the obscure side of modern societies in Latin America during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

I conduct a textual analysis of Asturias's depiction of monsters, contrasting them with disabilities, physical deformities, and mental illness in what I argue is a freak-show-like revisitation. I also explore medical practices of the time that further dehumanise people considered abnormal, and political actions that cause extreme suffering, dragging individuals into mental illness through psychological shocks. I aim to demonstrate how monstrosity results from the application of mathematics and scientific progress to build a standardised conception of the human that is dehumanising, segregative, and even lethal for those who do not fit within it due to different carnal inscriptions.

My argument seeks to unpack how freaks and other monsters are used as political distractions, drawing attention away from real abnormalities such as rampant and normalised structural violence, deep inequality, and the permanent erosion of human rights. The monster category shifts constantly by crafting new categories of abnormality, a cornerstone in the building of modern democracy.

Eric Alejandro Lopez Vazquez is a PhD Student at the University of Liverpool. My research focuses on Gothic representations of evil in Latin American novels. I hold a master in cultural studies. I am part-time lecturer of Spanish at Cronton Six Form College and Spanish advisor at the University of Liverpool. In the past I have presented academic papers in University of Salamanca, Spain and University of Science and Arts of Chiapas, Mexico. Email: e.lopez-vazquez@liverpool.ac.uk

Teresa Sorolla and Victor Minguez, 'Poor Bella. *Poor Things* (2023) as Postmodern Gothic Film'

Poor Things, the adaptation of the namesake novel by Alasdair Grey (1992) directed by Yorgos Lanthimos (2023), adapts a kaleidoscope of gothic, Victorian and fin-de-siècle imagery in the filmmaker's style (hyperbolic, deformed, macabre and sprinkled with

scatology), in which literary, visual and cinematographic intertexts abound. Already in the first scene, in which we witness the suicide of a woman throwing herself into the polluted waters of the Thames from Tower Bridge, the mise-en-scène reproduces using tangible references the link that Victorian culture establishes between water, the female corpse and the fallen woman. Lanthimos conceives a postmodern film based on a postmodern novel. Through the treatment of the spaces - foggy streets, anatomical theatres, brothels, the Victorian mansion or its laboratory in the attic - , the configuration of the characters - the freak, the mad doctor, the libertine, the abusive husband, the new woman - , the themes and plot - anxieties related to the body, female emancipation, the emergence of long-intuited, painful secrets - the film reconfigures recognisable referents to revisit Gothic and Female Gothic as genres, modes or aesthetics from a contemporary perspective. The purpose of this paper is to carry out an aesthetic and narrative analysis of *Poor Things* that allows us to observe the functioning of its wide range of intertexts, focusing on Gothic and Victorian ones, in order to understand how this particular film works as a postmodern, gothic text.

Teresa Sorolla holds an International PhD. She is associate professor at the Universitat Jaume I. She has completed a visiting research period at the Film Studies Research Unit (Oxford Brookes University). Her research interests are the endurance of the Victorian visual culture in cinema and nonlinear narratives on cinema.

Víctor Mínguez is full professor in Art History at the Universitat Jaume I. He has directed a range of R+D projects and research excellence networks. The editorial project Triunfos Barrocos has been honoured with national awards. His research interests are the Inconography of Power, Imperial Art and History of cinema.

Adriana Raducanu, **Between the Waters and the Walls: Gothic Becoming in *Once a Monster***

Robert Dinsdale's *Once a Monster* reimagines the Minotaur myth within the shifting geography of Victorian London, constructing a Gothic narrative of transition, instability, and uncertain identities. In this paper, I examine how rivers and labyrinths function as Gothic crossroads—liminal spaces where past and present, myth and reality, monstrosity and humanity intersect. I explore how the Thames, much like the Minotaur's labyrinth, becomes a paradoxical crossing point: both a refuge and a trap, a source of sustenance and a force of destruction. Its currents mirror the instability of identity and survival, particularly for the mudlarks, orphaned children who scavenge along the river's edge. Among them, Nell assumes a protective role toward Minos, an enigmatic figure whose existence unsettles rigid boundaries of monstrosity and innocence. As she navigates uncertain paths of care and survival, her choices define her role within this liminal landscape. Her guardianship, shaped by necessity rather than convention, echoes the novel's broader engagement with perilous crossings—both physical and psychological—where the boundaries of the self are in flux. Building on this, I argue that *Once a Monster* expands the Gothic crossroads beyond a space of mere transition,

instead presenting it as a site where identity is actively unmade and remade. Through its portrayal of fragile relationships, moral ambiguity, and shifting selves, the novel suggests that crossing is not just a moment of instability, but a continuous state of existence.

Adriana Raducanu is Professor in the English Language and Literature Department of Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey. She holds a BA in English and Spanish Language and Literature from the University of Bucharest, an MA in English Literature from Yeditepe University, Istanbul and a PhD in English Literature from the University of the West, Timișoara, Romania.

She has published extensively on contemporary Gothic novels, Jungian criticism, Shakespeare studies, post-colonial, gender studies, and comparative mythology. She is the Head of the English Language and Literature Department and coordinator of the PhD program in English Literature at Yeditepe University, Istanbul. She is the author of *Speaking the Language of the Night: Aspects of the Gothic in Selected Contemporary Novels* (Peter Lang, 2014).

Late Afternoon Programme 3.30-5.00

Session 2

2a. Visual Storytelling: Seminar Room 9/1.08

Kateřina Valentová, Silent Crossroads: Thomas Ott and the Unspoken Horror of Wordless Gothic Comics

This paper explores crossroads as an intersection between media and storytelling, positioning wordless comics as a unique and underexplored “crossroad” in Gothic and horror studies. Rather than fitting into the genre chronologically, these comics draw aesthetic and psychological parallels, particularly through their treatment of the unspeakable: taboos, repression, and the unknown, all central to Gothic horror.

I examine the Swiss artist Thomas Ott, whose wordless horror narratives create a void where terror operates in the unspoken. Deeply influenced by German Expressionism, Ott’s stories explore psychological horror, obsessions, fear and madness, unfolding like nightmares or subconscious visions. His narratives reject conventional logic, instead relying on grotesque situations, unexpected twists, and relentless fatalism, where characters are swept away by inexplicable, uncontrollable forces.

Rather than explicit horror, Ott instills fear through suggestion and omission, reinforcing existential dread and alienation. His anonymous and alienated characters, trapped in cycles of despair, descend into madness or confront the irrational, never

escaping a sense of helplessness. The oppressive, sinister atmosphere reflects their fractured psyches, mirroring the psychological distortion of Expressionist cinema.

Ott's distinctive style is defined by his mastery of the scratchboard technique, a form of engraving where black ink is scraped away to create stark, high-contrast imagery. This interplay of light and shadow enhances the Gothic aesthetic, symbolizing the tension between reason and irrationality. Ott's work, operating at the intersection of silent media and horror, exemplifies the power of the unspoken in visual storytelling.

Kateřina Valentová holds a PhD in the Territory, Heritage and Culture program of the University de Lleida, Spain (2018). Her doctoral thesis focuses on the value of nonverbal elements in naturalist texts of Spanish and French tradition. She works as assistant lecturer at the University of Lleida, in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures where she teaches Comparative Literature, Autobiography, and Creative Writing. She is an active member of the European Network of Ageing Studies (ENAS) and her research focuses on comics studies, and life writing. Currently she participates in a research project on ageing at the University of Lleida.

Barbara Braid, **Writer biofiction as gothic remix in the graphic novel *Le dernier jour de Howard Phillips Lovecraft* (2023)**

Writer biofiction is a fictional reimagining of a famous author that blends biographical elements with recognizable scenes and motifs from the writer's body of work. In this genre, protagonists may encounter their iconic literary creations or navigate the narrative structures and genres that characterize their oeuvre. A notable example of such a text is the graphic novel *Le dernier jour de Howard Phillips Lovecraft [The Last Day of H. P. Lovecraft]* (2023), written by French author Romuald Giulivo and illustrated by Polish artist Jakub Rebelka. This metafictional and counterfactual work depicts H. P. Lovecraft's last day as he receives a visit from Randolph Carter, his fictional character and alter ego, who encourages him to write himself out of imminent death. What ensues are drug-induced visions and letters in which Lovecraft reflects on the most significant relationships of his life while foreshadowing his own fame and literary afterlife—all rendered in Rebelka's eerie graphic style, which creates a visual dialogue with Lovecraft's weird fiction.

In this paper, I propose to examine this biofiction as a form of remix: a temporal remix of Lovecraft's life and literary afterlife (encompassing his past and posthumous future), as well as a remix of references. This includes not only biographemes from Lovecraft's life and work but also intertextual play with gothic texts and conventions, evident in both the graphic novel's narrative and its visual allusions and interplay. By doing so, this biofiction positions Lovecraft as a literary biomyth that inspires and is inspired by literary gothic traditions.

Keywords: writer biofiction, remix, biographemes, graphic novel, H. P. Lovecraft

Dr Barbara Braid is Assistant Professor at Institute of Literature and New Media, University of Szczecin, Poland. Her academic interests include neo-Victorianism, adaptation studies, biofiction and gothic studies. She is currently working on several articles and book chapters on biofiction, including a paper on Edgar Allan Poe as a character in comic books. barbara.braid@usz.edu.pl

Jen Baker, "distorted, absurd, and impossible monsters": Intersections of Textual and Visual Terror in the Gothic Short Form

This paper will examine the various intersections created by the production and reading of illustrated editions of gothic short form texts in periodicals and bound collections of the long nineteenth century, as well as their reimaginings in later editions. Examples may include William Blake and Diana Beauclark's illustrations to 1796 versions of *Leonora*; Maurice Greiffenhagen's illustration for W.W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw" (1902); Harry Clarke's illustrations to Poe's tales of mystery and imagination. Through those examples I explore the multi-modal relationship between the visual and textual medium, and their publication context, in which the intention and choices of the author, illustrator / engraver, editor/publisher meet to convey moments or encounters of "unspeakable" and "indescribable" terror and horror – an epistemological gap between what is rendered textually and what is imagined. The reader then joins them at the site of this gap – the crossroads where each contributor's part intersects – to experience that disjuncture between what we are told and what we see. While to some extent this is evident in all dialogic moments between image and text, the gothic mode and its forms of production in the long c19th in particular are, I suggest, integral to the playful, distorted, powerful expression of unknowability that challenged hierarchies of knowledge and empiricism of the period. As such, this paper is also concerned with both the disciplinary crossroads of illustration studies and studies of the gothic, as well as the aesthetic and material crossroads of the works themselves.

Jen Baker is an Assistant Professor at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research interests are childhood, death studies, the Gothic, short form and illustration from the late c18th to the present. She is compiler and editor of *Minor Hauntings: Chilling Tales of Spectral Youth* (2021) for the British Library's Tales of the Weird series.

2b. Gothic TV: *Severance*: Seminar Room 8/1.07

Elleanna Jenkins, The Grim Barbarity of Optics and Design: The Tyranny of Organisational Space in *Severance* (2022-)

This paper will explore the Gothicisation of organisational space and how this is represented in the offices of the American television series *Severance* (2022-). I engage with theorisations of Gothic space, following Anthony Vidler's argument that 'there is no such thing as uncanny architecture, but simply architecture that, from time to time and for different purposes, is invested with uncanny qualities.'1 This paper aims to

discuss why the office has become key Gothic space within the twenty-first century, and subsequently why shows like *Severance* have received a burst of popularity.

Firstly, *Severance* presents space as a weapon that can be wielded against the worker, as surveillance and control is imbued into the space of the severed floor. I use the classical image of the labyrinth to suggest that *Severance* utilises confusion and pointlessness to encourage subservience, as the space takes on a dark and agential role within the office. Secondly, I argue that the uncanny nature of the office is due to the instability of the work/life balance that *Severance* explores. I define the workplace as an inherently uncanny space due to its incessant lapses of the heimlich into the unheimlich, and vice-versa. This paper utilises a new and underrepresented text to explore the exciting intersection of Organisational Studies and Gothic criticism, grounded within the context of the state of work/life balances in an increasingly 'hybrid' world.

My name is Elleanna Jenkins, and I am a PhD student at Lancaster University in the English department. My research explores the representation of work and workspaces in contemporary American fiction, particularly focusing on how and why these are Gothicised.

Paddy Lonergan, 'The "Innie" goes to Heaven (Whilst the "Outie" Burns): Work, Consumerism and Salvation in Apple TV's *Severance*'

Severance is a psychological thriller, currently comprising two seasons, having premiered on Apple TV+ in 2022. The show is premised on a group of (four) employees working on highly classified projects at a biotechnology corporation called Lumon Industries. Such is the critical nature of their work, they are required to undergo a medical procedure called "severance", where a device is implanted in their bodies, causing them to lose all memories of their lives on the outside, while at Lumon. In essence, employees inhabit two distinct identities, and 'crossover' upon entering/exiting the lift.

This presentation uses *Severance* as a context within which to explore Gothic Marxism, capitalism and the enduring legacy and ideological influence of the Protestant Work Ethic. The presentation specifically identifies Season 2, Ep. 6 as a focal point for this discussion, where Burt (Christopher Walken) believes he would not gain entry to heaven when he dies, due to his behaviour as a youth. Fields (John Noble), his partner, sought advice from their pastor who noted that; "the church's stance is that Innies are, you know, complete individuals, with souls that can be judged separately from their Outies".

This scene, and the overarching concept of *Severance* allows us to further disentangle and delineate the 'horror' and 'monstrous' aspects of Capitalism (Marx 1867; Featherstone 2013), as well as the dual identities of the everyday consumer/worker, and how they navigate these pathways through ritualistic and existential forms of behaviour and expression (Campbell 1987; Elliott 1997), in a bid to inevitably stave off

debilitating death anxiety, and achieve a sense of meaning, purpose and salvation in the present.

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Dr Paddy Lonergan, Manchester Metropolitan University (The Fashion Institute)
Contact: P.Lonergan@mmu.ac.uk

I am a multi-disciplinary researcher, mainly interested in the relationship between popular culture, brands/consumerism and religion as cultural institutions that shape the ideas, thoughts and behaviours of a population. I am currently completing my first monograph entitled; *Brands, Hallelujah! People, Ideas and Dates that Changed the World*.

2c. Folklore and Thresholds: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Mo Moshaty, **'The Crossroads as a Liminal Horror Space: Death, Bargains, and the Gothic Uncanny'**

The crossroads has long been a site of supernatural transactions, hauntings, and existential terror, where the boundaries between life and death, fate and freewill are perilously thin. This paper explores how horror and Gothic narratives engage with the crossroads as a liminal space of transition, punishment, and transformation.

Beginning with folklore, this paper examines the crossroads as a site of execution, spirit summoning and devil dealing, reflecting anxieties around choice, consequences and the unknown. Moving into horror literature and cinema, it analyses key motifs such as Faustian bargains and supernatural transactions (*The Devil and Daniel Webster, Angel Heart, Supernatural*), crossroads burials, and the unrested dead (*The Others, Pet Sematary*), and the horror of choice and consequence (*The Witch, The Night House)*. Finally, it considers the crossroads through intersectional and cultural perspectives, including Black diasporic narratives of hoodoo, rooted devil packs, (Eve's Bayou, Us) and Indigenous and queer representations of the crossroads as a space of identity

negotiation and transformation (I Saw the TV Glow). Exploring the horror of the crossroads reveals deep seated anxieties about fate, free will, and the consequences of transgression. As a site of supernatural bargains, moral reckoning, and transformation, it reflects cultural fears of power, punishment, and the unknown, making it a vital lens for understanding Gothic horrors enduring grip on us.

Mo Moshaty is a horror writer, producer, and lecturer specializing in Gothic horror, women's trauma in cinema, and marginalized voices in the genre. Editor-in-Chief of *NightTide* Magazine and founder of Mourning Manor Media, she explores liminality, folklore, and the uncanny through film, literature, and academic discourse.

Charlie Jorge, 'Satanic Thresholds: Gothic Ruins and the Act of Union in Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*'

Attending to their metaphorical meaning, ruins represent abandonment and the cessation of vitality, serving as a tangible embodiment of decline and obsolescence (Cirlot 2020, 569). As such, it is not surprising that they often portray Gothic crossroads and gateways to decay, since they situate readers "at the limits of normal worlds and mores" (Botting 1996, 13). In this way, the Gothic conjures up a sense of mystery and fear surrounding these thresholds, using them to materialise the anxiety stemming from the social and political order present and, thus, to make readers conscious of the dire path ahead.

Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) takes readers on a journey through sinister settings, from shadowy monasteries to the foreboding halls of the Inquisition. The narratives weaves through eerie forests and desolate mountain landscapes, culminating in the ruins of a monastery shrouded in rumours of dark rituals and demonic pacts. This paper will show how Maturin uses imagery of decay and ruin as metaphor for the precarious social and political climate in Ireland following the Act of Union. Maturin's depiction of crumbling structures with otherworldly associations and corrupt institutions serves as a powerful allegory for the uncertain future the Irish nation faced, as if their fate had been sealed through a pact with the Devil.

Keywords: Charles Robert Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer, Act of Union, Irish Gothic, ruins, nineteenth century literature

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Dr Charlie Jorge is from the University of the Balearic Islands, Palma de Mallorca, and specialises in Archetypal and Irish Studies, specifically the works of Charles Maturin. He has recently published some articles on the archetypes of the Terrible Mother in the Irish

Gothic. He runs the project "The Uncanny in Language, Literature and Culture", leading to the publication of two edited volumes. **Email:** charlie.jorge@uib.eu

Kevin Corstorphine, 'The Room Was, Yet Was Not Mine': Cults and Otherworldly Summoning in Gothic Fiction'

When one of the protagonists of the 2024 videogame *Alan Wake 2* declares that 'there's a world behind ours', the game joins a long tradition of Gothic fiction that deals in the notion of a dark parallel universe that we might slip into during specific moments where the veil becomes thin. This clearly has long folkloric origins (e.g. the Celtic Otherworld), and is a staple of the Weird (e.g. in Arthur Machen, William Hope Hodgson, and H.P. Lovecraft). It is also far from unique in combining this Otherworld with the theme of a group of cultists who open the door between worlds. This paper draws on larger research into the Gothic cultist in the popular imagination by going back to nineteenth-century American examples such as the Dutch settlers/fairies of Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' (1819), the witches of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835), and the decadent arabesque figures of Fitz-James O'Brien's 'The Lost Room' (1858), arguing that there is a continuity with the modern Satanic (or otherwise malign) cultist in fiction such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), and its omnipresence in contemporary videogames and TTRPGs. In all examples the cultist figure works as a mediator that enables a terrifying slippage between worlds. In bringing together these threads of origin, this paper will provide an analysis of the literal crossroads between worlds in these texts as well as the thematic and aesthetic blending that gives us the familiar genre trope of cult activity and otherworldly crossings.

Dr Kevin Corstorphine is Lecturer in English at the University of Hull and Programme Director in American Studies. He is editor (with Laura Kremmel) of the *Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature* (2018) and his most recently publications include an article on Ambrose Bierce and Charles Chesnutt in *Studies in American Fiction* and a chapter on 'Indian burial grounds' in *Graveyard Gothic* (2024). He is currently under contract with Bloomsbury for a monograph on Gothic Cultists in American Fiction.

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2d. American Gothic, Psychoanalysis and Paranoia: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Meghan Kelley, 'The Skull of Freud: Gothic and the Ancient Burial Ground of Boundary Violations in Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice

The psychiatrist and researcher Glen Gabbard has states that boundary violations—that is, inappropriate behaviour on the part of the analyst within treatment relationships—most often occur at moments of crisis, when an analyst is at a 'crossroads' in their own life or is faced with a patient in the midst of an emergency, or both. It is at such crucial moments, Gabbard argues, that the analyst makes a choice

that propels the dyad down a path that can have disastrous psychological, interpersonal, and professional consequences. The transgenerational transmission of boundary crossing, meanwhile, has been part of the psychoanalytic profession from the very beginning, buried under gossip and rumour, enacted more than openly discussed. As I seek to argue in this paper, these and other instances of boundary violation within the psychoanalytic relation are imbued with a decidedly Gothic potential. Using Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983) as a framework, this paper will examine the Gothic tropes of the generational curse and the ancient burial ground as they relate to boundary violations in psychoanalysis, from Freud's earliest writings to today.

Meghan Kelley LCSW-R is a licensed clinical social worker and certified psychoanalyst. She maintained a private practice in New York, USA for 20 years before moving to London in 2019. Meghan will begin a PhD in Creative Writing and English Literature at Manchester Metropolitan University in October 2025, examining the Relational psychoanalytic treatment of trauma through the lens of the Gothic.

Sophie Bellenberg, 'Georgia O'Keeffe and Frontier Gothic'

Georgia O'Keeffe's crossing from New York to New Mexico inspired a change in the subject of her paintings, the subjects of these paintings are gothic and can be related to the canon of the 'Frontier Gothic.' O'Keeffe is one of America's most established and well recognised Modern painters, she is yet to be described as a gothic painter. Her movement south and her subsequent paintings of skulls can be linked to America's 'Frontier Gothic.' The frontier gothic shows the anxieties and paranoias of a certain group of people through their inseparable links to the land in which they inhabit, it also relates to the terrors hidden in a seemingly open landscape. O'Keeffe's skull paintings visualise the complicated relationship that new settlers, and previous inhabitants have with the landscape, using iconic gothic symbols. O'Keeffe strayed from the path, which was paved for her by her contemporaries. Stieglitz built her a platform to work and present in New York, yet she travelled to New Mexico. In doing so she found herself as an artist through painting Gothic motifs. This is a new analysis of O'Keeffe's works and broadens the scope of the American gothic, showing that by straying from the path, O'Keeffe went on to produce some of her most well-recognised works which are coded by the Gothic.

Sophie Bellenberg afz15mcu@uea.ac.uk

I am a fourth-year, part-time post graduate researcher at the University of East Anglia in the American Studies department. I am currently writing my thesis on 1930s America, showing how the Gothic makes up the matrix of American culture, and can be found in unlikely places.

Simon Schothans, 'What makes a "Bad Trip": The Philosophical Horrors of Psychedelic Space'

We currently find ourselves in what Ben Sessa has coined a psychedelic renaissance, referring to a resurgence of interest and access to researching psychedelics. While promising in its positive contributions to medicine and psychology, this resurgence has largely neglected a potent phenomenon that should not be ignored: the so-called 'bad-trip'. Finding itself at the crossroads of psychedelic studies, psychophilosophy, and Gothic studies, this presentation concerns itself with the inner workings of 'bad trips'.

Using Lacanian psychoanalysis, phenomenology, present-day psychology, and the spatial theories of Lefèbvre, Tuan, and Foucault, it explores how the spatial construction of a 'psychedelic space' contributes to the (potentially traumatic) experience of horror during a 'bad trip', and what causes this same space to be largely harmless during successful, 'good trips'. To elucidate these concepts and assertions, the presentation provides an analysis of Aleister Crowley's 'The Drug' (1910) and H. P. Lovecraft's 'Hypnos' (1924) to show how novel observations and developments are already reflected in Gothic short stories of the 1920's. Overall, it is argued that an improperly induced ego-dissolution causes a continuous state of abjection that exposes the subject to the horrors of psychedelic space so long as the ego-dissolution remains incomplete, or the effects of the psychedelic substance last.

Simon Schothans is a Dutch author and gothicist whose research primarily focuses on intersections between Gothic literature and psychophilosophical approaches to fear. He received a Master's degree in English Literary Studies from the University of Groningen, and is currently a Research Master's student of Literary Studies at Radboud University.

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Break 5.15 – 6.30

Plenary 1: LT.1 (G37)

Maisha Wester, "Coded Black: Gaming the Gothic for Social Justice"

History haunts, especially those who refuse to contend with it. Now, more than ever, we have to strategize new ways to reach wider audiences within and outside of the academy. The walking simulation game *Coded Black* does just that. A social justice game aimed at countering anti-Blackness in the US and UK, Coded Black uses Gothic visual tropes and musical composition to remind players that recent history in the US and UK for people of colour has been the stuff of Real Horror. This talk will discuss the theory, sources, and strategies used to create the game, as well as the challenges that arose throughout. It will also discuss the companion website which also deploys Gothic

tropes to subtly haunt users. Links to play the game via Steam will be available before the conference.

Dr Maisha Wester is a British Academy Global Professor at the University of Sheffield in the School of English. She is also an associate professor of American Studies, and African Diaspora Studies. Her research focuses on racial depictions in Gothic literature and Horror Film, and on the ways Horror tropes are used in social and political discussions to dehumanize people of color. Her current project explores the long, contradictory and horrifying history of anti-Blackness.

She is the author of *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (Palgrave, 2012) as well as numerous essays and articles including "The Gothic Origins of Anti-Blackness: Genre Tropes in Nineteenth-Century Moral Panics and (Abject) Folk Devils" published in the journal *Gothic Studies*; “Learning How to Read: Lovecraft Country’s Literary and Historical Interventions” published in *Post45;* and “The Gothic in and as Race Theory” in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*. She has also written and directed a short film titled *Hegira*. She has recently published *African American Gothic in the Era of Black Lives Matter* (Cambridge Elements, 2025)

Thursday 26 June

Morning Programme 9.15-10.45

Session 3

3a. Fashion, Art and the Posthuman: Seminar Room 9/ 1.08

Ruth Hibbard, Mourning fashion at a crossroads

In the Victorian period, the crossroads of Oxford Street and Regent Street was dominated by Mourning Warehouses – department stores selling clothing and accessories to wear during the transitional period after the death of a loved one.

The Victorian era was also at a crossroads of the experience of mourning – looking back to the pomp of great royal and national funerals, such as that of Wellington, but also stepping towards a more modern society where lengthy and showy mourning were less acceptable. At the centre of the crossroads between these times are mourning warehouses, which opened in many towns and cities to provide the appropriate material culture in which to publicly express grief.

In the Victorian age the mourning process was increasing formalised and became more prominently followed by the middle classes. The death of Prince Albert in 1861 contributed to the cult of mourning that lasted for much of the remaining century. Mourning became big business. The paraphernalia of mourning increased and became

more widely available as the commercialisation visible in all areas of Victorian society affected the business of death.

Buying new clothing and jewellery for each stage of mourning was a central part of the liminal experience between the death of a loved one and finally fully rejoining society. For decades mourning warehouses monopolised the mourning clothing market until social changes, and WWI, meant that people changed direction and moved away from very visible mourning fashions and the warehouses that supplied them.

Ruth Hibbard is a Curator at the V&A Museum in the Art, Architecture, Photography and Design Department with an interest in the Gothic. She has contributed to various publications, including the chapter on 'Black' for the V&A Book of Colour. She has presented YouTube videos on Dracula, Ghosts and Witches on the museum's channel.

Samuel Egea-Castañeda, **Gothic Crossroads on the Catwalk: Posthuman Encounters in Alexander McQueen's *It's a Jungle Out There***

Inspired by Thomson's Gazelle—one of nature's most vulnerable prey—, Alexander McQueen's *It's a Jungle Out There* (A/W 1997) revisited the designer's longstanding penchant for pairing women and animals. Despite the collection's prey motif, the models exuded a fierce defiance enhanced via hairstyling, animalistic maquillage and sartorial design, which included, *inter alia*, taxidermized crocodile heads nestled against collars and enormous impala horns sprouted from a jacket's shoulders. In McQueen's vision, the catwalk operates as a Gothic crossroads—a liminal space where multiple thresholds collapse: predator and prey, human propriety and bodily horror, glamour and disgust, fiction and reality. The collection becomes a site of transformation where bodies, neither fully human nor entirely other, reflect anxieties about cross-species entanglements.

Drawing on posthumanist epistemology (Braidotti 2013, 2022) and fashion's "posthuman turn" (Smelik 2020, 2022; Vänskä 2022), this paper examines McQueen's *It's a Jungle Out There* as a manifestation of Gothic body horror, where the designer's alternative conceptualizations of the body—evoking tropes of corporeal instability and monstruous excess—transformed the catwalk show into an uncanny threshold, detached from reality yet deeply reflective of cultural fears. By fusing body horror with fashion spectacle, McQueen challenged anthropocentrism and the commodification of bodies, evoking a posthuman convergence that disrupts the boundaries between the human and the non-human. Ultimately, *It's a Jungle Out There* exemplifies fashion's potential to stage Gothic narratives of posthuman mutability, confronting audiences with the dissolution of bodily borders in an industry traditionally fixated on idealized human forms.

Samuel Egea-Castañeda is a predoctoral fellow at University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. He is currently working on his doctoral thesis, where he explores alternative

conceptualizations of the human body in contemporary fashion. His research interests include posthumanism, fashion studies and the potential intersections of these disciplines with the Gothic, the grotesque and body horror. **Contact**: samuel.egea.castaneda@usc.es

Lucy Winnington, 'Embodied Anxieties: Bioart and the Gothic'

The intersection of contemporary art and the biological sciences is a site of ambiguity and transgression, where established boundaries between the living and the non-living, the natural and the artificial, the human and the other, are actively destabilised. This is most apparent in bioart, an emergent genre that integrates bioengineering and synthetic biology into artistic practice, using living tissue, cellular structures, and genetic modification as its very media. In this way, bioart does not only reference scientific processes; it enacts them. Transforming laboratory-based biotechnologies into aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical provocations, bioart exposes the tensions at the heart of bioengineering debates: its simultaneous promise of progress and its undercurrent of existential unease at such capabilities existing unchecked.

The gothic has long been concerned with the moral dilemmas of scientific advancements, depicting bodies in crisis, identity in flux, and the monstrous consequences of transgressing biological limits. Bioart operates within this same trajectory, except in place of fiction, it is real. The use of living materials collapses the distance between representation and reality, making bioart a direct confrontation with the ethical dilemmas of technologies of the anthropocene by transforming these transgressions into tangible, affective encounters.

Exploring the fine line between critique and hypocrisy, the human relationship with new forms of life, and the differing cultural expectations and allowances of artists and scientists, this paper, based on my doctoral research, examines how bioart offers a new dimension to the Gothic's role in contemporary discourse through its entanglement with abjection, uncanniness, and the posthuman.

Dr Lucy Winnington is an Art Historian, completing her PhD in Art History at the University of Auckland in 2022, with research exploring the effects of materiality in living bioengineered art. Her wider research focuses on the dynamic interplay between art and science and its theoretical interactions.

3c. Eco-Gothic: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Joan Passey, Queer Ecologies of the Nineteenth-Century Gothic Coast

Queer ecologies emerges in the 1990s, building from ecofeminism in identifying productive overlaps between ecocriticism and queer theory. In this paper I argue for a generative 'crossroads' between ecocriticism, queer theory, and the gothic, whereby the frameworks developed over four centuries of gothic literary criticism and theory can provide valuable contributions to emergent queer ecologies. I situate this crossroads at

the coastline, a liminal, threshold space, ideally positioned for interrogating the relationship between the unnatural/natual/supernatural embodied by queer gothic ecologies. In this paper I position the coastal vampire as queer body and ecocolonial metaphor, drawing from *The Black Vampyre (1819), The Blood of the Vampire (1897)* and *Dracula* (1897).

Dr Joan Passey is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Bristol specialises in the Gothic from the eighteenth century to the present day, the representations of seas and coasts, and Cornwall in literature and culture. Her monograph, *Cornish Gothic* (UWP, 2023) was shortlisted for the Allan Lloyd Smith Prize and she has published on Ann Radcliffe, Wilkie Collins, Shirley Jackson, and dark tourism. She is a BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker and edits anthologies for the British Library. She is currently working on a monograph on queer gothic ecologies. Contact details: joan.passey@bristol.ac.uk

Jemma Stewart, 'Strange Bedfellows? The Victorian language of flowers and the Female Gothic'

The language of flowers was a popular nineteenth-century literary genre in the tradition of the gift books and annuals, which contributed to the wide dissemination of floral symbolism in the cultural imagination. The genre's purpose, beyond the commercial impetus of book aesthetics, was to ascribe human feelings to flowers in a floral vocabulary that lovers might use to cultivate a romance. However, initially marketed at the genteel lady, male editors of the language of flowers books in Britain led female readers down the garden path, prescribing patriarchal notions of femininity and imposing appropriate behaviours for women. The Gothic, in contrast, with its transgressive characters and shocking plot developments, could often stand in opposition to accepted cultural mores and standards. Incorporating the language of flowers or floriography into the Gothic may appear a jarring interpolation, given the stark contrasts between the sentimental, romantic and chaste (language of flowers) and the subversive, frightening and uncanny (the Gothic). This discussion of confluence and mutual influence may then seem an exercise in incongruity. However, the methods used by women writers of the Gothic ensured an effective manipulation of floriography as part of their rebellious plots and provocations. Floriography in the Female Gothic is engaged in a process of remixing, crossing and reflowering to critique many of the values perpetuated by the mainstream language of flowers. This presentation seeks to demonstrate that the strange crossover of the Female Gothic and the language of flowers allowed women writers to protest against the incarceration of floral femininity.

I am a PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London, supervised by Dr Ana Parejo Vadillo, and I am now in the final stages of my PhD. My thesis explores the language of flowers, or floriography, and nineteenth century Gothic fictions by women writers.

Jenny Wan Ying Chak, 'Where Harmony Haunts: Gothic Resonances in the Ecology of Premodern Chinese Gardens'

Recent scholarship on gardens has compellingly highlighted their inherent Gothicness. William Hughes, for instance, powerfully asserts that the garden "is something of a paradox, embodying, perversely, central Gothic imperatives within its façade of floristic orderliness and meticulously managed landscapes" (15). In this framework, gardens emerge as complex, crucial sites for interrogating darker anthropocentric impulses—such as the urge to control, reshape, and possess nature—while simultaneously revealing, through New Materialist perspectives, the agency of nonhuman nature that resists or outright defy domestication.

Yet stepping beyond the West into ancient Chinese gardens reveals a strikingly different ethos. Owned by the literati class with an explicit aim of harmonizing with nature, these gardens can blend seamlessly into their natural surroundings while incorporating architectural details that embrace the spontaneity of seasonal cycles and natural growth. Narratives about such gardens often further bring out the Daoist principle of cosmic oneness. Yet does this holistic vision render Chinese gardens immune to the underlying power struggles that haunt their Western counterparts?

From Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365–427) pastoral poetry to Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 (1715–1763) Dream of the Red Chamber, this presentation explores canonical literary gardens to illuminate an understudied dimension of premodern Chinese garden discourse. While literati extol communal harmony with nature, their garden narratives simultaneously grapple with political and socioeconomic pressures imposed on the self. These gardens—utopian and illusory in nature—function as sanctuaries for reclusion, self-sufficiency, leisure, and the cultivation of personal virtues. Ultimately, they expose a Chinese ecocritical paradox: a locus of reverence for nature collapses into a narcissistic site of anthropocentric self-affirmation.

I am a second-year MPhil student in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. My current research project applies a transcultural EcoGothic framework to analyze representations of posthuman ecologies in the short stories of Pu Songling (1640–1715) and Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849). Contact Details: jenchak@connect.hku.hk

3d. Folk Horror and Fairy tale: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Ageliki Velissariou, 'Searching for the Greek Gothic'

This presentation attempts to confront the question whether the Gothic duels in Greek culture in what form and to what extent. It is a common assumption that the "traditional" Victorian gothic era never came to be in Greece, a country that in the turn of the 19th century had more in common with eastern cultures than with central Europe. However, Greece had been, at that time, a crossroad for both the east and the

west, lingering between the old ways and the aftermath of 400 years of Ottoman occupation, and the fresh cultural stimulus blowing from the west. These influences combined created a rich literary body of works of roman de moeurs (study of manner) where the gothic, with its versatility, rooted and sprouted new plants. The integration of traditional Greek folk horror into literature is particularly represented in the works of Alexandros Papadiamantis. Researching the anthology *Dark Tales* (2005), a compilation of eerie short stories by Papadiamantis published from 1890 until his death in 1911, many gothic motifs emerge. This presentation intends to discuss these motifs, the similarities and differences with "mainstream" gothic fiction of the era, as well as the surrounding social atmosphere of the time and its alignment or not with the European gothic feel.

Aggeliki D. Velissariou graduated from DECEd-NKUA (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) in 2003 with a degree in Preschool Education and has been employed in Greek Public Kindergartens since 2006. In 2020 she got a Master's degree in "Cultural Studies and Children's Learning Environments" from SECEd-AUTH (School of Early Childhood Education-Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki). Her area of interest focuses on Children's Literature, folktales, folklore, oral narration, myths and gothic literature. She has a particular interest in the dark motifs and how they are manifested in various literary genres. Since November 2021 she's a PhD candidate at SPEd-AUTh (School of Primary Education of Thessaloniki), exploring children's and young adult's gothic/horror/fantasy stories, within possible educational scenarios for good practices in teaching.

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Carina Hart, 'The Gothic Fairy Tale as Multiversal Path: Eighteenth-Century Chinese Tales and European Folk Ballads'

This paper takes as its starting point the fairy tale conception of the path, and reads the gothic fairy tale as a multiversal path that is walked simultaneously by many texts/writers/movements without them necessarily being aware of each other at all. The dual case study presented here analyses Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* or *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, collected over the eighteenth century and appearing in print in 1766, alongside folk ballads from western Europe of the same period. Following consideration of the ways that gothic fairy tale might be defined in a global manner, analysis will turn to a selection of Chinese tales and European ballads that feature journeys, and the crossing of the living and the dead as they walk the same road – but in different dimensions. In particular, Pu's tales 'The Magic Sword and the Magic Bag' and 'Silkworm' will be studied alongside Matthew G. Lewis's rendition of 'The Erl-King's Daughter' (originally Danish) and Gottfried August Bürger's 'Lenore' (trans. William Taylor). In these tales, the path or road assumes multifaceted metaphorical significance as a permeable and dynamic threshold where life and death cross each other in a proto-

gothic exploration of uncanny attraction, fear and (im)possibility. In these tales that appear to echo and entangle with each other across great distance, the magical paths of fairy tale skirt the borders of death, desire and haunting that come to characterise the gothic mode.

Dr Carina Hart is Assistant Professor in English at the University of Nottingham, specialising in global Gothic folklore and fairy tale. She has co-edited a collection on *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland*, and guest-edited a special issue of *Gothic Studies* on 'Gothic Folklore and Fairy Tale'. Her monograph, *The Gothic Fairy Tale*, is forthcoming from Manchester University Press.

Anita Cazorla, 'Between Enlightenment, Faith and Folklore: The Search for National identity in Scottish and American 19th -Century Gothic'

This paper proposes a transnational analysis of the Gothic literary movement in the 19th century across Scotland and America, analyzing their similarities and differences informed by culture and historical context. Indeed, the Gothic tradition emerged in both America and Scotland following struggles for independence from the British Empire in the past century. Nonetheless, their respective goals differed.

While American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe sought to construct a new literary canon for a new nation, detaching from the English literary tradition, Scottish authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson and James Hogg aimed to preserve and redefine Scotland's national identity while being part of the United Kingdom. Through a comparative analysis, this paper explores how both traditions rely on themes of regionalism and the 'dead-alive' to evoke the uncanny. However, Scottish gothic authors heavily integrate folklore, religious themes, and Celtic mythology to anchor their works in a deeper cultural past. This often manifests in stories as physical Crossroads, places where human, divine, and demonic forces meet in works such as "Thrawn Janet" or "The Brownie of the Black Haggs." Oppositely, American gothic often emphasizes anxiety surrounding the frontier and individualism rather than culturally specific folklore.

Perfectly reflecting the conference's theme of "Gothic Crossroads," this paper highlights how these literary traditions converge and diverge at historical and thematic intersections. By navigating the cultural uncertainties of post-Enlightenment Scotland and post-revolution America, these Gothic texts reflect their nations' distinct struggles with identity and independence.

I am a senior from Marist University (New York) studying English, Comparative Literature, Digital Media, and Global Studies, planning to pursue a master's degree in Comparative Literature starting in the Fall 2025. My research interests involve English, French, and Korean literature. I have previously presented research at Harvard University during their National Collegiate Research Conference. **Anita Cazorla**
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3e. Queer and Trans Gothic: Seminar Room 5/1.04.

Isobelle Whinnett, 'Is the Ghost Ready to Die? Writing the Queer Teen Ghost to explore the Gothic'

This presentation will examine the unique discoveries and utility of creative writing and the use of the queer teenage ghost to discuss representation in genre fiction, queer temporality and queer pain in Young Adult fiction. The Gothic often finds itself preoccupied with creatures that inhabit the periphery of society, operating within undecided margins. The ghost is a figure that embraces this liminal existence, acting as a means to challenge our reality as well as appearing and representing both excess and absence, potential and stagnation. The position of the ghost, teetering on the edge of a future and fighting against the pull of an inevitable end to what had come before, makes it a surprisingly fitting companion to the Young Adult and queer experience.

Writing this character to life, the queer adolescent ghost, creates an opportunity to explore how closely death can accompany the vitality of the teenager and the queer individual. I will discuss my own interdisciplinary approach to creative and critical practice with the value of the spectre as another Gothic monster with broadening narratives available to it. I will examine how creative writing is an exploratory and curious tool to challenge literary tropes and stereotypes. Additionally, I will discuss how creative writing can continue to expand the ghost's purview from vengeful revenant, symbolic to repressed identities, the fatal woman, into an ever-expanding remit including complex representations of queer adolescents experiencing death, grief and nuances of identity in Young Adult fiction.

Isobelle Whinnett is a postgraduate researcher in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her PhD explores the Witch and the Ghost as queer figures in contemporary Fantasy Gothic literature.

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Quen Took, 'Nobody had "the Talk" with me about my unholy transition': Liminal Spaces, Deadly Decisions and the Transgender Vampire'

In my doctoral research, I explore the analogy of the monster and the Other through a specifically transgender lens, unpacking where trans people fit in horror.

We exist in a time where the transgender person is particularly monstered by the press and by governmental policy; this opens a ripe potential for discussing the trans as Other and as monster within Gothic narratives.

Half monster and half man, and walking between life and death, the vampire is no stranger to liminal spaces. In this paper, I will explore the vampire's relationship to transformation, transience, and – more specifically – the transgender identity. Using core, canonical texts such as *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, as well as the folkloric history, I will build my case for the trans vampire, developing my ideas across the genre from *Nosferatu* to *What We Do in the Shadows*.

Quen Took is a doctoral candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University, who has presented with Rural Gothic and the International Gothic Festival. Their specialism is Queer and Transgender Gothic, and recent publications include *Seaglass*, in Seaside Gothic, and *Dyke*, in *Twenty-Eight: Stories from the Section 28 Generation*.

Hayley Louise Charlesworth, 'Queerbaiting or Reading Queerly in 21st -century Teen Supernatural Drama'

Queer reading can be a powerful tool in the formation of a bisexual identity. As a form of imaginative play, queer reading can fulfil a psychological desire for bisexual youth to see themselves represented on screen. A lack of confirmed bisexual characters on screen in mass popular culture limits bisexual youth's access to sufficient models for behaviour; thus, queer reading practices help queer youth negotiate these identity needs. Queer reading may take the form of fandom activities, but particularly with the development of social media platforms, audiences can communicate these desires for representation directly to the creators of mass culture, including television series.

Queer reading is also a political act. Reading the horror film through a queer lens allows for a reclamation of gay male identity from the othering of a dominant heteronormative discourse. Revelling in the abject and monstrous, queerly reading the villains and creatures of a horror film, and reclaiming these characters as queer idols, strips a homophobic depiction or coding of its power.

This paper focuses on queer reading as a method of (re)claiming a bisexual identity through the supernatural teen drama, due to adolescence being a key period for identity formation, and due to the importance of adolescent-dominated social media in the act of queer reading in the late 2010s.

If queer reading is a political act, then queerbaiting is a marketing tactic, and in this paper, I will examine the conflict between the two. Queerbaiting is a way for media products to gain the interest, and money, of queer audiences, without alienating the dominant heteronormative culture, or angering the network executives and advertising sponsors to whom they must appeal. As social media opens creators up to increased pressure from viewers, queerbaiting is a negative term recognising an insincere attempt at engaging queer audiences for the purpose of profit.

Hayley Louise Charlesworth is a PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University, whose thesis examines bisexuality, biphobia and bisexual erasure in contemporary supernatural American television. As an interdisciplinary academic, her research

interests include queer and gothic studies, film and television studies, politics and new media. She is a member of the IGA and the Centre for Gothic Studies, and advocates for increased support for neurodivergent and disabled academics.

10.45 – 11.15 *Break*

11.15 -12.45

Session 4

4a. Scare Attractions, Dark Tourism and Memorialisation: Seminar Room 9/1.08

David Norris, "'There's always my way": Passing Thresholds in Ghost Tours and Scare Attractions'

The world of performance contains several doubles, as most notably associated with Antonin Artaud and his text *The Theatre and its Double*. One such binary within the world of performance is the difference between ledgerdemain and magic – the presentation of overt fiction versus feigned reality. This core difference over the issue of authenticity is strongly felt in a contemporary culture which values and often obsesses over the concept of what is "real".

The equivalent double in the world of horror performance is that of the scare attraction haunted house versus the ghost tour. The first of these being a fictional performance curated for entertainment, the latter feigned as a legitimate performance curated for the purposes of education regarding the supernatural and a version of history relating to the venue. These performance formats are aligned and yet wildly different in their production and presentation and despite sharing concepts, presentation and often even location have wildly oppositional relationships to their audience.

Despite this, in this presentation I analyse a facet common to both formats: the threshold. The physical affective act of stepping into the charged space of the "haunted house". I will touch on three case studies: The Disney Haunted Mansion ride, the *Manormortis* scare attraction at Scare Kingdom and ghostfinding events at the "legitimately haunted" *Samlesbury Hall* in Lancashire. I will identify elements common to each in terms of liminality, frame analysis and spectatorship. I will also draw from scholarship pertaining to the haunted house in this analysis and finally aim to conclude upon the specific shared similarities and differences that different layers of supposed authenticity impose on the physical haunted house threshold.

Dr David Norris is a postdoctoral researcher, graduating from the University of Birmingham in December 2024 with a thesis title of "Immersive horror performance as a site of contested identity and authenticity". This was inspired by over a decade producing, directing and performing within commercial scare entertainment as well as teaching in HE as leader of the BA (Hons) Acting course at Blackpool & the Fyle College. David's primary research interests focus on curated fantastical encounters from

museums to winter wonderlands, though often returning to a horror framework. David has produced for AtmosFear Scare Entertainment as well as acting as consultant for Blackpool Pleasure Beach's *Journey to Hell*. David also produces TIE escape room booster sessions in English and Maths for GCSE students in the Manchester region.

Rebecca Wynne-Walsh, 'Alcotraz: creepy cocktails, penal tourism and the commodification of trauma'

In 2017 Inventive Productions opened the first of its UK-wide cocktail bar chain, Alcotraz, in London. Alcotraz offers an interactive prison-themed cocktail making experience based on the notoriously unsafe, and often notoriously deadly San Francisco prison. The brand has faced criticism for fetishising misfortune and commodifying the traumatic history of Alcatraz prisoners and staff as well as exploiting the experiences of individuals whose lives have been harmed by prison systems in the present-day. The chain shows no sign of slowing down, with six locations throughout the UK and the latest branch opening in Melbourne Australia as recently as 2024. This paper considers the Alcotraz bars in the context of dark tourism and, more importantly, when dark tourism takes the wrong path. Recreational activities that revolve around dark heritage sites, especially those that deal with violent criminal activity, have always struggled to balance acceptable and insensitive transgression (Isaac 2021: 364). Certain dark touristic activities have the potential for education and raising awareness of traumatic histories. However, these cocktail bars exploit an actual historical site of crime, death and violence to commodify despair. Customers of this venue are given orange jumpsuits before being 'locked' in their cells (faux latrine and bunks included) and tasked with 'escaping Alcotraz' while performers act as corrupt guards, and bartenders. The staging of a false Alcatraz narrative nullifies the function of dark tourism to allow engagement with traumatic heritages. These bars 'contribute to the erasure of possible counter-narratives about imprisonment and punishment' (Walby and Piché, 2015: 243). The inhumane conditions of the infamous Alcatraz prison are rendered meaningless, a collection of signs with no intentional referent. These bars become counterfeit tombs, relying on the iconography of past horrors as a backdrop for hen dos and stag parties. This paper will explore venues such as these as taking away the voices of those whose histories are too often silenced in return for a lychee martini or a spicy margarita. Either way, the Alcotraz endeavour leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Dr Rebecca Wynne-Walsh completed her PhD on twenty-first century Basque Gothic screen media with Dr Xavier Aldana Reyes at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is now a lecturer in Film Studies and Production at Edge Hill University. She received her M. Phil in International History from Trinity College Dublin where she previously received her BA in Film Studies and English Literature. Her first monograph, entitled *New Basque Gothic: Trauma, Screen Media and Transnationalism,* is set to be released later this year with MUP.

Hannah Singleton, 'Lancashire's Corpse Path: memorialising the trial and executions of the Pendle Witches within and through the landscape'

This paper explores the ways in which site-specific artworks and heritage trails have opened up ways for audiences to remember and reflect upon the executions of alleged witches in the Lancashire landscape. Within this presentation I will compare two works which were unveiled in 2012 (the 400th anniversary of the executions) Louise Ann Wilson Company's *Ghost Bird*, a performance based temporary artwork where the audience were directed on a walking route through the moorland, and the Pendle Witch Trail a durational walking/cycle route from Pendle to Lancaster which features 'tercet markers' along the route inscribed with lines from a poem by Carol Ann Duffy.

Both of these interventions offer an experience of the Pendle landscape for contemporary walkers which follows in the footsteps of the condemned, whilst negotiating a way in which to communicate this narrative in the present landscape. In each piece movement through rural Lancashire becomes a key part of the work, this sense of journey and displacement also being a key element of the trials themselves.

As observed by Dunn (2020) in relation to corpse paths (the traditional routes between rural places of death and consecrated graveyards), the 'vernacular routeway' offers up an opportunity for walkers to engage with folkloric customs whilst linking past and present landscapes through an embodied experience. Here, I will be thinking about these routes and works as crossroads between then and now, opening up possibilities for the ways in which heritage organisations and artists can approach these past, traumatic narratives with sensitivity through an engagement with place.

Reference

Dunn, S. (2020). Folklore in the landscape: the case of corpse paths. *Time and Mind* Vol. 13 Issue 3, pp. 245-265.

Dr Hannah Singleton is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Art and Performance within Manchester School of Art, teaching theory units with a particular emphasis on memory, place and identity. Recent work explores séance in contemporary art practice and archives of mediumship; and exploring the legacy of the Pendle Witches through analysis of material culture, heritage and artworks.

3b. Ghosts and Space: Seminar Room 5/1.04

Sarah Martin, 'Most of these rooms have had people die in them': *Last Night in Soho* and the psychogeographic spaces of Horror

This paper aims to examine Edgar Wright's film *Last Night in Soho*'s representation of fractured identity through psychogeographic means. The paper will argue that the fractured nature of identity and influence of the physical landscape over the nature of

fractured identity is evoked through musicality and spatial elements. The film exposes how city space is layered with historic female oppression, embedded in the dialectic representations of temporal, physical and mental space throughout the film. The visual and musical elements of the film expose spatially imposed feelings and echoes of female oppression which form a dialectical influence between notions of the self and selves within the film, resulting in expressing the process of trauma through the gothic and uncanny aspects of the film. Moreover, the visual and musical elements of the film are analysed further to expose the psychogeographic nature of the film's expression of trauma embedded within the physical landscape, articulated through spatially imposed notions of identity. These intersections with the trauma of every day modern female experience calls upon the spatially layered past, as Elizabeth Groz suggests: 'the ways in which space has been historically conceived have always functioned to either contain women, or to obliterate them.' The paper explores the way the film, through representations of physical space, which includes the effects of music, lyrics, camera angling and setting, exposes the historical and spatially layered trauma of female oppression over time.

Dr Sarah Martin is a PTHP lecturer in English Literature at MMU. She is author of the forthcoming *Interwar Women: the Psychogeographic Nature of Detection in Golden Age Detective Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2026), and *Re-reading Golden Age Crime Writing: Time, Space, and Place* Ed. Sarah Martin and Stefano Serafini (Routledge: London, 2025). She is director of Golden Age Mysteries Ltd. which runs the international Agatha Christie and Golden Age of Crime Conferences.

Her specialisms lie in spatial theory, detective fiction from the nineteenth century to the present day, popular fiction, LGBTQIA+ literature and Twentieth Century literature and culture including modernism and women's writing.

James Bogdanski, "Handsome and Obscene": Taboo Desire and Gothic Heterotopias in *The Innocents*

Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) transforms Bly Manor into a potent heterotopia, a liminal space where rigid Victorian morality dissolves, and 'handsome and obscene' desires are laid bare. Inspired by Henry James's *fin-de-siècle* novella *The Turn of the Screw*, the film, like Foucault's heterotopias, explores spaces of intersection—crossroads where norms are inverted—spaces that "claw[] and gnaw[] at us." This paper shall analyze Bly as a heterotopia of crisis, deviation, and compensation, one which envelops Miss Giddens and her pubescent charges in a state of perpetual flux, where the boundaries between childhood and adulthood become fluid and unstable.

Bly functions as a crisis of sexual awakening for the inexperienced governess, its labyrinthine architecture resisting Miss Giddens's attempts to impose moral order on those who dwell within. As a space of deviation, it becomes a receptable for the ghosts' deviant desires, arguably overflowing with the addition of Miss Giddens's own sublimated carnality. Though initially appearing as a compensatory Eden, a sanctuary from the corruptions of the outside world, the manor gradually reveals its true nature as a crucible of transgression. Within Bly's shadowy confines, Miles and Flora's

interactions become a disturbing microcosm of the manor's deviant heart, hinting at incestuous undercurrents that extend to Miss Giddens as surrogate mother. Such taboo eroticism shatters the timeworn Victorian dialectic of womanhood—for she is both inviolable virgin and temptable Eve.

The film's crossroads—living/dead, victim/perpetrator, childhood/adulthood—underscore the Gothic's propensity for rupture, uncontainability, and its engagement with what Foucault termed the "great obsession of the nineteenth century," namely, history, with its "ever-accumulating past [..] its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world." Bly Manor, a heterotopia of these fractured spaces, exposes the fragility of Victorian ideals, revealing the interstices where Victorian propriety yields to its antithesis—raw, untamed impulses.

Works Consulted:

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Turim, Maureen, and Diane Waldman. *Desire and Consent in Representations of Adolescent Sexuality with Adults*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

White, Patricia. *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999.

James Bogdanski teaches film studies at Long Beach City College and El Camino College in southern California. His research interests include pre-Code Hollywood, feminist and queer theory, gothic horror and the posthuman. He has written on queer authorship in the television series *Penny Dreadful* in the anthology "Penny Dreadful and Adaptation: Reanimating and Transforming the Monster." His most recent essay appears in Wiley-Blackwell's "A Companion to Ingmar Bergman." It explores the gothic and the maternal abject in *Cries and Whispers*.

Elena Tchougounova-Paulson, 'The Concepts of the supernatural path and barrier as markers of "outsideness" in the works of Leonid Andreyev and M.R. James'

Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of *outsideness* as the denotation of the different perceptions that are allowed from the different vantage points of the world, or excess of seeing of *the other* can be used as a methodological tool for analysing the concepts of what can be described as the Supernatural crossings or thresholds, as well as its constraints or barriers.

The Russian Symbolist writer Leonid Andreyev came into the spotlight as an author of short stories with twisted endings and, later, plays. Quite quickly it became apparent that his experimental fiction contained strong Supernatural and Gothic elements; his novella "*He: An Unknown's Story*" (1913) perfectly matches the aforementioned description of *outsideness*.

If we look at one of the most famous ghost stories, "*Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad*" (1904) by M.R. James, we can notice that structurally "*Oh, Whistle…*" is also a classic Gothic narrative, which goes in parallel with Andreyev's novella and in which the encounter with Supernatural horror is ensured by the very dynamics of the plot, leading both heroes to a state of cathartic experience at the threshold and then to a dramatic denouement.

In our talk, we want to look at the possible intertextual connections ("mystery of hidden structures") between Andreyev's and M.R. James's stories, where "*the threshold*" has become a symbol of the Supernatural frontiers between worlds and a portal to the unknown.

I am Dr Elena Tchougounova-Paulson. At the moment I am an independent researcher, resident in Cambridge, an editor of *Lovecraftian Proceedings*, an official biannual issue of academic Lovecraftiana. My subjects of academic interest include Russian Literature, American Literature (Lovecraftian Studies in particular), Ukrainian Studies, Theory of Literature, History of Literature, Horror Studies. E-mail: tch.elena15@gmail.com

4c. Abject Bodies: Seminar Room 8/1.07

Jacky Towell, 'Either you eat, you off yourself, or you lock yourself up': Congenital Cannibalism and Free Will in Luca Guadagnino's *Bones and All* (2022).

This paper addresses the theme of crossroads by exploring the coming-of-age moment: an intersection where important decisions are made which will shape the course of a young adult's future. I discuss the role of decision making in Luca Guadagnino's romantic cannibal road movie *Bones and All* (2022), and how its two young protagonists grapple to navigate this process together. I argue that despite attempting to make decisions grounded in morality, they are entrapped within a narrative which leads them inexorably towards a tragic ending. This raises questions around free will and the futility of choice, when faced with forces more powerful the individual.

One major factor affecting self-determination in the film is dysfunctional family dynamics. I discuss the idea of 'congenital cannibalism' as a manifestation of intergenerational trauma within the film, and how this threatens the agency of the characters. Intrafamilial cannibalism is an extreme response to powerlessness, as characters are compelled to make morally ambiguous decisions to protect themselves and others.

This paper also moves beyond intrafamilial violence to analyse how cannibalism comes to represent issues within wider society, mimicking the harmful cycles which young people find themselves perpetuating. I argue that the tragic atmosphere of the film reflects the current climate of disillusionment and existentialism affecting younger

generations, as they attempt to make decisions and initiate positive change, to rewrite a future which has seemingly been partially written by the generations preceding them.

Jacky Towell studied at Manchester Metropolitan University, graduating with a BA (Hons) in English and French and an MA in English Studies: The Gothic. Her research interests include cannibalism, ghost stories, the *fin de siècle*, and the relationship between English Gothic literature and French Romanticism.

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Georgina Kett, 'Contemporary Postfeminist Media and Impossible Female Body standards'

This study aims to address the argument that within contemporary Postfeminist media, there has been a recent resurgence in the utilisation of Gothic motifs by female-identifying writers that enact as a social critique for impossible female body standards that are maintained by a social media driven, consumerist western society. By examining Eliza Clark's recently published short story collection: *She's Always Hungry* and Coralie Fargeat's 2024 body horror film: *The Substance,* this paper aims to analyse the continued relevance of Gothic tropes such as 'monstrous othering' and 'the duality of self' and how they are evolving in contemporary female fiction to critique unrealistic phantasms of female body image by addressing societal fears of aging, femininity, diet culture and motherhood.

This paper evaluates studies of beauty politics with "the beauty imperative" enacting as a catalyst of emerging postfeminist anxiety and fear generated around the 'natural' and 'aging' female body 'constantly under surveillance,'[1] amongst a plethora of inescapable advertised 'quick fixes,' with the explored pieces of media enacting as discourses of warning against succumbing to the beauty pressures of consumer capitalism.

Keywords: Postfeminism, Gothic, duality, othering, consumer capitalism, beauty imperative

Georgina Kett is a writer, teacher of English Literature and upcoming (October 2025) PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University whose main research area is Postfeminist Gothic literature. Her prospective PhD thesis is entitled: *Glass Coffins: A creative/critical investigation into the Gothic genre's regenerative ability to confront and disturb continuing social hypocrisies regarding performative boundaries and the commodification of femininity in a haunted 'postfeminist' society.*

Publications to date include poems: *A Cartoon Death* and *Leave Me to the Autumn Wind*.

[1] Craig, Maxine Leeds, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Beauty Politics* (London: Routledge, 2021)

Rachael Head, 'Women are Revolting: abject infantilisation and the grotesque in Mona Awad's Bunny and Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch*'

This talk explores the recurring theme of female infantilisation in the Gothic mode. Drawing on Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed's theories of abjection and the monstrous feminine, I will investigate whether infantilisation can be reclaimed or subverted in contemporary Gothic literature.

In the intersection of the Gothic tradition of infantilising women, and the contemporary application of the grotesque, lies the concept of 'abject infantilisation'. This is defined by its use of typically childlike tropes, including hyper-femininity, alongside the grotesque, in order to reject the male gaze and reclaim autonomy. I will explore this term using Mona Awad's *Bunny* (2019) and Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* (2021).

In establishing this term, I will highlight the persistence of the male gaze, evidenced in recent films such as *Poor Things* (2023) and *Nightbitch* (2024), where supposedly feminist viewpoints remained entangled with patriarchal perspectives. Ultimately, abject infantilisation seeks to function as a useful lens through which to view contemporary Gothic novels, adding another dimension rather than seeking to diminish or narrow potential readings.

Rachael Head is a theatre and events producer with a recently completed MA in Gothic Literature from Manchester Metropolitan University. With a professional background in cultural production, she has worked on projects with the Tate Modern, BBC, Penguin Random House, and Shakespeare's Globe, curating events that engage audiences in storytelling, social impact, and the arts. Her research interests include the gothic legacy of infantilising women, contemporary uses of the grotesque, and body horror as social commentary. Rachael is currently the Senior Events Producer for the Royal Society of Arts.

4d. Vampires: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Camille Hellebuyck, 'From Monster to Protagonist: Navigating Liminal Identities and Self-Preservation in Vampire Narratives from 19th -Century literature to today's video games'

This study will aim to investigate politics of power dynamics and self-preservation in vampire characterisations from the *Vampire Countess'* (1865) Addhéma and "Carmilla" (1872), to *Baldur's Gate 3's* (2023) Astarion. In studying modern takes on the vampire archetype in comparison to early counterparts, there is not only something to say about the trope's evolution from a fear-inducing horror device to a mould for beloved characters, but also a call to read previous iterations of such characters through the lens of a textual role reversal—that is, as protagonists navigating hostile environments.

While research has often interpreted vampiric portrayals as embodiments of the social anxieties of their time, the act of vampirisation has been discussed in terms of consent and loss of bodily autonomy for the vampire-to-be. Its storyline then turns out to be one of bargaining with a monstrous identity in a world where it is shunned and the survival tactics this implies, eventually leading its characters to a choice between nature and nurture. Therefore, this paper shall argue that the vampire story can be one of struggle against, and liberation from one's imposed condition rather than that of an all-powerful omen signalling the disturbance or destruction of the status quo.

Camille Hellebuyck is a student at Sorbonne Université. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Sorbonne Université in 2022 and 2024 respectively. Her master's theses covered 19th century Gothic tropes in American and English literature, with a special focus on vampire, gender, and racial studies.
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Michelle Denise Phillips, 'Where am I? What is this Place? Dangerous Mixtures: Hybridity from Victorian Gothic to Iranian Cinema'

This paper examines how vampire narratives utilize literal and metaphorical crossroads as sites of cultural transformation and resistance. Through analysis of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), we explore how vampiric figures navigate and transform spaces of cultural intersection. Both works position their vampires at geographical crossroads—Carmilla in the liminal space of Styria between East and West; the Girl in the culturally hybrid 'Bad City'—where traditional boundaries become negotiable.

Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of hybrid 'conflictual structure' and Bhabha's theory of hybridity as resistance, this paper demonstrates how these works use vampire mythology to explore cultural transmission. *Carmilla* reflects Victorian anxieties about cultural mixing through its multilingual household—where French, German, and English create what the text explicitly calls a 'Babel'—a metaphor that captures both the perceived threat and inadvertent power of cultural hybridity in colonial discourse. The text's linguistic confusion mirrors broader Victorian fears about cultural instability, while its haunting portrait symbolism suggests the persistent nature of hybrid identity. *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* deliberately claims hybrid identity as revolutionary power, transforming traditional symbols like the chador into tools of resistance. These works reveal how crossroads function as sites where marginalized identities claim power through cultural mixing. Le Fanu's novella establishes the vampire as a potent disruptor of cultural hierarchies, laying the groundwork for contemporary narratives like Amirpour's film where the vampire's outsider status evolves from Victorian anxiety into an instrument of deliberate cultural resistance.

Michelle is an MA student in Literature and Culture at the University of Hertfordshire, focusing on the intersections of Gothic studies, postcolonial theory, and transcultural narratives. Her research focuses on how Gothic literature, from Victorian to

contemporary, engages with concepts of hybridity, cultural transformation, and diaspora. She is particularly interested in exploring how marginalized voices use Gothic conventions to challenge traditional power structures and create new forms of cultural expression and the way Gothic narratives incorporate and transform folkloric elements across cultural boundaries. Email: Michelled.phillips25@gmail.com

Rebecca Alaise, 'Faking the Operatic *Femme Fatale*: Reconjuring the Singing Women of Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction for the Twenty-First Century Imagination'

As a PhD candidate researching representations of singing voices in nineteenth-century literature, I have often found myself describing Gothic's haunting transmogrifications of operatic women to people that, though indifferent to both opera and the Gothic, have unwittingly asked about my thesis. Sometimes, registering the blank stares, I consider the modern relevance of nineteenth-century sopranos like Adelina Patti and Christina Nilsson; performers that walked a fine line between being lauded as angelic or lambasted for excessive virtuosity that could connote moral turpitude. How might their commodifiable voices and fetishised singing bodies be interpreted in the social media age?

Imagine my delight when, earlier this year, friends I assumed to have bored with my musings began sending me screenshots from TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, about the little known 'vampiric' soprano, Camille Monfort (1869 -1896). Trained at the *Conservatoire de Paris* before relocating to Brazil, she was rumoured to hypnotize audiences with her transcendent voice and physical beauty. Such audio-visual perfection was atypical enough to be deemed preternatural, and Monfort was blighted by accusations of occult practice. Before her death at the age of twenty-six, she was dubbed the Amazonian vampire. Over a three-week period, I received messages from eight people alerting me to the dark, sonic wonders of Camille Monfort, a figure so emblematic of nineteenth-century tendencies towards Gothicising sopranic women that she seemed too good to be true. It transpired that she was.

My paper questions why falsified 'historical' accounts of a 'demonic' nineteenth-century opera singer garnered such online interest. In what ways did the singing women of fin-de-siècle Gothic literature conjure enough cultural influence for reproductions of them to still titillate twenty-first century imaginations?

Rebecca Alaise is a 5th year PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University, working on a project on Gothic singing voices in the long nineteenth century.

12.45 – 2.00 ** LUNCH (included)**

Early Afternoon Programme

2.00-3.15: Plenary 2: LT.1 (G.37)

Rosario Arias, 'Assembling and Crossing the Human and the Non-Human: The EcoGothic in Neo-Victorian Fiction'

Neo-Victorianism has been acknowledged as "a quintessentially gothic movement" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012), which has spawned many critical studies on the intersection of the gothic and the neo-Victorian. Among them are well-known collections such as Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century* (2012), or the more recent *Neo-Gothic Narratives: Illusory Allusions from the Past*, edited by Sarah E. Maier and Brenda Ayres (2022). However, to the best of my knowledge, very little critical attention has been given to environmental concerns, and, more specifically, to the EcoGothic in neo-Victorianism.

In this talk I wish to redress this by examining contemporary texts that revise and reimagine several motifs that can be traced back to the nineteenth century such as the mad scientist, the monstrous vegetal, including fungi, and the gothic gardener, alongside posthumanist tenets, drawing on assemblage thinking and Plant Critical Studies. Theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the new materialists Stacey Alaimo and Jane Bennett as well as Timothy Morton and Michael Marder, from Plant Critical Studies, will be employed for the discussion of Donna A. Leahey's "The Wisteria" (2014) and Noah Medlock's *A Botanical Daughter* (2024), among others. I will argue that the commingling of the human and the non-human vegetal in these texts demands an in-depth exploration of EcoGothic elements in neoVictorianism, as well as underline the relevance of environmental posthumanism today.

Rosario Arias is Professor of English Literature at the University of Málaga, Spain. She has published widely on (neo-)Victorian fiction, contemporary Anglophone fiction, literary and critical theory, gender studies and feminism, as well as the intersections between literature and other disciplines as in Environmental Humanities and Health Humanities. She has co-edited (with Patricia Pulham) *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (Palgrave, 2010), (with Patricia Pulham, Christine Ferguson, and Tatiana Kontou) *Spiritualism, 1840-1930* in the Victorian Concepts series (Routledge, 2014), (with Lin Pettersson) *Reading the Trace in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Gylphi, 2022). Recently she has co-authored *Women and Entertainment in the Victorian Home* (with Laura MonrósGaspar, in Spanish) (Universitat València, 2023). She leads both the LITCAE research group and the Literary Assemblage Project (RELY), and is part of the Erasmus+ project "EcoStories", led by University of Graz. Arias is currently the President of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies (AEDEAN), and the President of Victorian and NeoVictorian Society in Spain (VINS). Arias is a member of Academia Europaea, and Fellow of the English Association.

3.15 – 3.45: *Break

Late Afternoon Programme 3.45- 5.15

Session 5

5a. Theatre and Music: Seminar Room 9/1.08

Catherine Wynne, 'Bram Stoker's *Snowbound* and the Travelling Stage'

Bram Stoker notes in *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (1906) that the Lyceum Company's North American tours began on 29 October 1883 and ended twenty years later on 25 March 1904 in the Harlem Opera House, New York. Over this period, these tours extended from the across North America with Stoker, who was the Lyceum's business manager, observing in the *Fortnightly Review* in February 1909 that he spent 'more than four years occupied with eight theatrical tours' ('Americans as Actors', 247), in addition to engagements in Britain and Ireland. Despite these numerous theatrical travels and a lifetime working in the theatre, Stoker's sole significant output focusing on the theatre is the collection *Snowbound* (1908). However, what unites the stories in *Snowbound* is Stoker's 'setting' for the collection which involves a travelling theatrical company, inspired by the Lyceum Company, whose train has become snowbound in Scotland. The company passes the time relating tales of theatrical life, rich in detail about the mechanics of performances, the social dynamics and shifting mores of theatre life, and the rigours of touring. Drawing on *Snowbound*'s stories which centre on travel, the paper reveals Stoker's cultural travels in theatre from his theatrical memoir to his fictions of the stage.

Catherine Wynne is Reader in Victorian and Early Twentieth-Century Literature and Visual Cultures and Associate Dean for Research and Enterprise, Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education at the University of Hull. She has published monographs on Bram Stoker (*Bram Stoker, Dracula and the Victorian Gothic Stage*) and Conan Doyle (*The Colonial Conan Doyle*) and a biography of Victorian Britain's leading war artist, Lady Butler (*Lady Butler: War Artist and Traveller, 1846-1933*). She has edited and co-edited books on Stoker's theatrical writings (two volumes), *Bram Stoker and the Gothic*, the afterlives of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes, Victorian mesmerism, and two novellas by Conan Doyle and Stoker.

Victoria Lord, Defying Her Adaptation: Crossroads and Repercussions in Stephen Mallatratt's Theatrical Adaptation of *The Woman in Black*

The first pivotal crossroads this paper examines is the Actor's adaptation of Arthur Kipps' manuscript; how does he handle the Woman in Black? After dismissing Kipps' reservations for "performing" his traumatic past, stilted rehearsal fades into full recital complete with sets hidden behind gauze and pre-recorded sound effects, indicating

significant preparation. The Actor's kind but ultimately flawed decision to erase her physical presence, opting for incorporeal pre-recorded footsteps, screams and voice, has tragic repercussions not fully realised until one of the great twist endings in theatrical history. Specifically, Mallatratt's use of a single stage to connect the realms of audience, actor, character and lived experience through a contagiously haunting figure stilled at the crossroads between ghost and corpse.

The Woman in Black's body, consistent with Susan Hill's original text, depicts standstill at a crossroads of death within a single figure; she is an entanglement of the ghost and corpse. Susan Owens demonstrates the critical interchangeability of the terms ghost and corpse by implementing 'walking corpse' as only a passing comment on her appearance. However, aligning with the Medical Humanities, this paper identifies early stages of human decomposition in Arthur Kipps' description of her body alongside her temporally disruptive abilities as a ghost. Mallatratt's framing narrative, the consequences of the Actor's adaptation, and the real-world production significantly heighten her disruption of past and present. This paper will outline the resulting reinstatement of the totality of death; that an understanding of the ghost must acknowledge the corpse as a remnant of death.

Victoria Lord (BA, MA) is an independent researcher currently working as Production Controller for Hachette UK, and volunteering with the Society of Young Publishers (London branch). In 2019 she completed an MA in English Literature at Cardiff University focusing on the field of Medical Humanities.

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West Ambrose and Oscar Anderson, 'Two Paths DIEverged: Faustian Bargains, NineteenthCentury Crossroads and queering the Gothic musical'

Elaine Showalter theorized that it is a "surfeit of feeling" is what dooms Gothic heroes while Howard Ashman said a musical's song must be written when a character can't speak their desires anymore. From the campy fin de siecle vaudeville to the 80s megamusical's symbiotic relationship with penny dreadfuls, come take a look at what makes the Gothic so very musical! We will first briefly deconstruct the period itself (Gothic stage tradition, popular adaptations at the time,) then the modern revivals (Wildhorn's *Jekyll and Hyde*, various *Dracula* adaptations, or Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*) and finally preview a song from our upcoming musical, *Into The Labyrinth*.

We will discuss what makes a song/chord progression/lyric specifically Gothic. Gothic aesthetic, stories and themes proliferate freely within musical theatre as well as the subgenre of 'dark academia.' Ambrose and Anderson's *Into the Labyrinth* is a full musical situated in the intersection of theatre and the gothic mode, satirizing the widespread romanticization of academia's tragic hustle culture. Set at a crumbling university where absinthe-fuelled burnout and Faustian bargains are just another part of campus life, the songwriting portion of this workshop will analyze what makes the "music" of gothic crossroads as spine-tingling as they are queer— using sonorous descriptions of the Sublime from *Dorian Gray, Carmilla,* and *Wuthering Heights*. Join us

in mapping a variety of interdisciplinary pathways including: devilish deals, lovers meetings, ritual ceremonies… and of course, faculty meetings!

We will bring glow in the dark skull shakers—please, bring your nascent dread!

West Ambrose is a nightmare choking on seawater and scales. He wishes to sing very prettily for you by the sea shore. But the sea shanties he sings, one can't always be sure of… Visit his website, westofcanon.com, where you can find my published work and blog.

Oscar Andersen is an independent scholar and writer located in the Great Lakes region of Turtle Island.

5b. Latin American Horrors: Seminar Room 8/1.07

Itziar de Llanos Calzon, 'A New Gothic: The Andean Gothic in the Work of Monica Ojeda'

The Andean Gothic in the work of Mónica Ojeda is shaped as a literary exploration that merges the traditions of classical Gothic with the cultural and geographical particularities of the Andes. Through her narratives, Ojeda develops an oppressive and disturbing atmosphere set in rural and natural spaces, where the supernatural and the dark intertwine with the social and political realities of the Andean region. The author uses Gothic not only as a narrative tool but also as a means to question power structures, gender violence, and the historical traumas that continue to affect indigenous and rural communities. In this sense, Andean Gothic becomes a tool for reflecting on marginality, collective memory, and the tension between the traditional and the contemporary, where nature and the ancestral assume a central role as elements of the strange and unsettling. The aesthetic of horror and mystery in Ojeda's stories is complemented by the emotional complexity of her characters, who confront a world in which the inexplicable and the real constantly blur. Therefore, the aim of this proposal is to analyze how this neo-Gothic strand has become magnetized in new, less traditional forms of horror, such as creepypastas, and has gained increasing influence not only in written literary tradition but also in oral and technological forms, such as video games and social networks.

I hold a degree in General and Comparative Literature from the Complutense University of Madrid, with a focus on Gothic and Victorian studies. Currently working at a bookstore, I am completing my studies in publishing and preparing to resume my master's in Victorian Gothic at the University of Portsmouth. EMAIL: dellanositziar@gmail.com

Iris Irimia Núñez, 'Shunned houses: the haunted house as the clandestine detention centre of the dictatorship in Mariana Enriquez's short stories'

In his study of the chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin singles out the symbolic essence of the threshold, related to processes of crisis and rupture within the novel. Its main function of separating two realities makes it a frequent resource in fantasy fiction, which always takes place on the threshold, at the crossroads where two worlds converge, the known-natural and the unknown-supernatural. Since its birth in eighteenth-century English literature, the Gothic harnessed the suggestive potential of the threshold to explore the otherness that lies hidden within culture. One of its most celebrated creations is the literary motif of the haunted house, a liminal space that subverts the symbolic values of the home as the ultimate expression of security, protection and familiarity. Mariana Enríquez, a recognized renovator of the Latin American Gothic in the 21st century, builds in her short stories a number of haunted houses in which the strange, the other, refers to a specific political context and to a reality made invisible by the structures of power: that of the disappeared of the last military dictatorship in Argentina, a regime that 'created ghosts as state policy' (Enríquez in Semilla Durán, 2018: 267). In this paper, I will analyse the stories 'La casa de Adela', 'La hostería' and 'Los himnos de las hienas', which employ an elementary gothic resource, the house haunted by ghosts, as a tool for political imagination that explores the spectralisation of the disappeared and their detention in the so-called Clandestine Detention Centres, located within urban centres, in places as common as factories, schools and civilian houses. The fantastic and the political thus merge in the otherness that haunts these shunned houses, thresholds of a reality divided between two dimensions, the one that takes place outdoors, and the death zone created by the dictatorship.

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Iris Irimia Núñez is a PhD candidate at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain, where she completed her Master's degree in Hispanic Literatures. Her thesis researches the literary and political use of spectrality in 21st century Latin-American narratives written by women, but she has also carried out studies on 16th century mystical poetry and its relationship with contemporary poetry.

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Rafael Mendes, 'Becoming Gothic Monsters'

In most Western traditions, the human body is considered complete, whole, and outside the food chain, so normative structures regulate the body and dietary regimes to certain thresholds. Yet, from a decolonial perspective, these views are entrenched in the coloniality of power that places non-normative embodiments and practices into the realm of monstrosity. As such, the monster threatens social order as it represents what one must not be, for being continually in the process of becoming. In this paper, I draw on literary, queer/cuir, and decolonial studies arguing that in Mónica Ojeda's "Las voladoras" and Mariana Enríquez's (2022) "Carne", characters are monstrous for their eating habits and for having bodies in transformation. Exploring these short stories, I aim

to demonstrate how the Gothic is a fertile genre for queer/cuir counterpublics based on monstrosity.

Rafael Mendes is a poet and PhD candidate in the Hispanic Department at Trinity College Dublin. An early career researcher at the Trinity Long Room Hub, he is a secretary for the Postgraduates in Latin American Studies (PILAS) committee. He won the Ireland Chair of Poetry Pamphlet Series 2025. **Contact details:** silvar@tcd.ie

Emily Horton, 'Latin American Horror and the Maternal "Body-Territory": The Crossroads of Green-Wave Politics and Horror Aesthetics in the works of Samantha Schweblin, Giovanna Rivero, and Elaine Vilar Madruga'

Questions regarding motherhood and its problematic reading within a global capitalist world-system are central to contemporary Latin American Gothic, as it navigates neoliberal violence from a green-wave perspective and through the combined modalities of folk and body horror. Within this milieu, socio-political discourse and legislation seeking to control maternal bodies is positioned against a backdrop of ongoing (neo)colonial extractivism happening across the region, wherein maternal labour represents yet another unacknowledged bedrock for global Northern profit-making.

Foregrounding Samatha Schweblin's *Distancia del rescate* (2014) (*Fever Dream* (2017)), Giovanna Rivero's *Tierra Fresca de su tumba* (2020) (*Fresh Dirt from the Grave* (2023)), and Elaine Vilar Madruga's *El cielo de la selva* (2023) (*The Heavens above the Rainforest*), this paper investigates the political and aesthetic crossroads of these recent horror fictions, as locally informed representations of green-wave protest and socio-economic discontent from a Gothic perspective. In these texts, neoliberal violence against women emerges as an onus of regional Gothic critique, even as monstered mothers act to re-empower the maternal 'body-territory' (Gago 2020). Respectively navigating maternal anxiety and horror in the context of Argentine agrochemical toxins; Bolivian land redistribution; and Cuban guerrilla warfare, this fiction registers maternity's critical centrality in Latin America in maintaining capitalist patriarchy, but also its Gothic power or potencia (often in connection with the land and ancestral spiritualities) in fighting back.

Emily Horton is a Senior Lecturer in World Literature at Brunel University. Her research interests focus on contemporary British, American, and Latin American fiction, specializing in the Gothic; affect theory; and fictional critiques of neoliberalism and globalization. Her first monograph, *Contemporary Crisis Fictions*, was published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2014, and her second, *21st-Century British Gothic*, with Bloomsbury in 2024. She has also co-edited three volumes: *Ali Smith*, with Monica Germanà (Continuum, 2013); *The 1980s: A Decade in Contemporary British Fiction*, with Philip Tew and Leigh Wilson (Bloomsbury, 2014); and *The 2010s: A Decade in Contemporary British Fiction,* with Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Philip Tew (Bloomsbury, 2024).

5c. Neo-Victorian Fiction: Seminar Room 7/ 1.06

Sarah Dutson, 'The Female Medium as a "Feminist Killjoy": Spiritualist Crossroads in NeoVictorian Gothic Fiction'

This paper argues that the female spiritualist medium in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction operates, during the séance event, at a crossroads: the intersection of life and death. The female medium is a liminal figure who destabilises traditional notions of femininity, as she is consistently depicted outside the heteronormative family structure, either as queer, widow, or spinster.

Drawing on affect and feminist theory, particularly Sara Ahmed's (2010) figures of the 'feminist killjoy', who speaks out against female oppression, and the 'affect alien', who rejects the promise of happiness tied to the nuclear family, this paper explores how the female medium rejects normative attachments to the 'happiness object' of the family in favour of forming new, all-female, non-familial affective communities. Moreover, building on Susan Fraiman's (2017) view of the Gothic house as a space that traditionally imprisons rather than shelters women, this study examines how neo-Victorian novels reclaim the house as a female-centred space. By using the supernatural, these works reimagine the home as a site of female empowerment rather than one of patriarchal confinement. This reimagining of the female medium trope engages with longstanding feminist concerns while addressing contemporary issues of societal gender inequality.

The focus of this paper is on two contemporary novels: *The London Séance Society* by Sarah Penner (2023) and *The Other Side of Mrs. Wood* by Lucy Barker (2023). Both novels re-vision the Victorian period, presenting the female medium as a figure who, through her rejection of normative attachments, embodies both the 'feminist killjoy' and the 'affect alien'.

Key words: Neo-Victorian, Gothic, spiritualism, feminist, affect, female medium

Sarah Dutson is a PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University and a member of the Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies. Her research interests include women's writing and the supernatural, with a particular focus on spiritualism and the occult in neo-Victorian women's Gothic fiction. Sarah's current research examines the figure of the female medium, exploring how neo-Victorian Gothic novels by women writers use this character to reflect and interrogate the position of women in society.

Elizabeth Train-Brown, 'The Making of a Poltergeist in Urban Palimpsests'

Shlomit Flint Ashery and Nurit Stadler define the palimpsest as 'an object made or worked upon for one purpose and later reused for another', containing 'diverse layers [that may be] temporal, spatial, and imaginative or invented' (2021). These layers are evidence of the passage of time, through the human, upon a building. Of these palimpsest buildings, Denis Wood and Robert Beck theorise they 'embody the values and meanings that made, selected, arranged, and preserved them' (1994).

The churches of Peter Ackroyd's novel *Hawksmoor* and Newport Arch of my poem 'Eroding Together' are palimpsests made by murderers. The anachronistic power to transgress boundaries and threaten the present from the past assembles from the palimpsests embodying these macabre values.

It is this that develops the *palimpsest poltergeist*, a Gothic animation of the palimpsest that 'behaves as strangely as the space,' to borrow from Sara-Patricia Wasson (2019). The poltergeist *unlayers* itself. It peels off these temporal, spatial, imagined, and invented layers chaotically, threatening narrators of the present with this temporal disruption – 'atavistic entities' and 'cursed repetition' threaten to return from the past-layers cast off in the present – and it achieves a sovereignty of power over the present-human. These cast-off layers manifest in the text as stutter-memories, defined by Charles Baxter as that 'uncanny' sensation of half-remembered repetition (1996).

This creative-critical presentation will use *Hawksmoor* and 'Eroding Together', a series of palimpsest illustrations paired with poems, to analyse (1) the making of a poltergeist in urban palimpsests and (2) their unlayering in textual stutter-memories.

Elizabeth Train-Brown (they/them) is a Lancaster University MA student, specialising in genre fiction. Author of *salmacis: becoming not quite a woman* (Renard Press, 2022) and co-editor of the upcoming *Fantastika: SFF Poetry Anthology* (Hay Press, 2026), Elizabeth was awarded the Best Creative Writing Portfolio Prize in 2021 by Lancaster University. Contact details: B.Train-Brown@Lancaster.ac.uk

5d. Witches: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Kirsten Imani Kasai, 'The Crossroads Witch: Wish Fulfilment, Necromantic Memory and Ethno Gothic Thresholds'

Crossroads have long been a potent site of magic, transformation, and supernatural encounters—a liminal space where realms touch and choices carry weight. Within Gothic and horror studies, the witch frequently appears as a threshold guardian, occupying the boundaries between life and death, seen and unseen, self and other. Traditional representations of the witch have centered on the tripartite goddess—Maiden, Mother, and Crone—each symbolizing distinct life stages and powers. However, my dissertation research introduces a crucial fourth stage: the Transformer, an entity existing beyond the cycle of human temporality, engaged in energy transference, rebirth, and cosmic disruption. This stage aligns with AfroGothic and

EthnoGothic traditions, where magic is often an ancestral inheritance, spectral presence, or karmic force that defies linear time.

This paper explores the witch's role as an embodiment of transmutation, resistance, and necromantic memory; a threshold guardian at the intersection of magic, history, and trauma. Drawing from the legacies of Papa Legba, the loa of crossroads in Haitian Vodou, and the conjure women of the American South, I examine how these narratives disrupt Eurocentric notions of witchcraft by centering ritualized faith, ancestry, and nonlinear temporality in my short story "Tangee and Kick Sticks". Through this framework, I argue that the Transformer is not merely a culmination of past stages but an omnipresent force—a figure who reshapes Gothic horror into a site of ancestral reckoning, spectral resistance, and wish fulfillment.

Kirsten Imani Kasai Flournoy is a PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University.
www.KirstenImaniKasai.com

Chloe Campbell, 'A witch on a different wavelength': Intersecting Feminisms and Converging Witch Archetypes in John Updike's 1984 novel *The Witches of Eastwick* and George Miller's 1987 film adaptation *The Witches of Eastwick'*

In the twentieth century, the suburban witch is an ostensibly American everywoman who harnesses extra-ordinary power. Imbued with multitudinous metaphorical potential, the witch is a revelatory figure in the Suburban Gothic, as she embodies societal ideas and fears about women. Bernice M. Murphy notes that the witches in John Updike's 1984 novel *The Witches of Eastwick* eschew 'traditional notions of family and morality in favour of self-satisfaction and independence', reflecting 'the era's changing familial and social patterns' (2009, p.63). Texts like Fritz Leiber's 1943 story 'Conjure Wife' and the TV series *Bewitched* (1964 - 1972) characterise the suburban witch as a married housewife. *Eastwick* departs from this, characterising witches as divorced women, equating marital separation with empowerment for women. This paper demonstrates how Updike's novel and George Miller's 1987 film adaptation draw from Early Modern beliefs and twentieth century Neopagan Witchcraft, responding to tensions between The Satanic Panic and the Modern Witchcraft Movement of the 1980s. I argue that the *Eastwick* texts and the eponymous witch characters are sites of convergence, manifesting crossover in second wave and neoliberal feminist thought and cultural conceptions of witchhood. Drawing from Susan Faludi's 1991 *Backlash* and Heather Greene's 2021 *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft*, this presentation exposes the tension in representing powerful liberated women during the American second New Right, a time of rising conservativism.

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Chloe Campbell is a Commissioning Editor working in academic publishing. As a PhD student at Lancaster University, Chloe is researching the figure of the suburban, domestic witch in American mid-century popular culture. As a native Lancastrian, Chloe is interested in 'witch tourism' and cultural representations of the Lancashire Witch Trials.

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Tasnova Sarmin, 'The Doctor is a Witch: The Gothic Crossroads of Science and the Supernatural in Anne Rice's Mayfair Witches Trilogy'

Lives of the Mayfair Witches is a trilogy of supernatural horror/fantasy novels by American novelist Anne Rice. It centers on a family of witches whose fortunes have been guided for generations by a spirit named Lasher. The series began in 1990 with *The Witching Hour*, which was followed by the sequels *Lasher* (1993) and *Taltos* (1994). It presents a profound gothic conflict between science and the supernatural, underscoring the limitations of scientific discourse in explaining the occult. Rowan Mayfair, a neurosurgeon and the most powerful witch in the Mayfair family, is at the center of this struggle. The novel's thematic tension between science and the supernatural is embodied by her dual identity both as a medical professional and as a supernatural being. While Rowan is trained to view the world through a scientific lens, her inherited powers challenge the foundations of medical rationality, situating her at a crossroads where clinical detachment meets mystical intuition.

This paper explores how *Mayfair Witches* critiques the authority of medical science when faced with supernatural forces that defy rational categorization. The Mayfair family's hereditary witchcraft is frequently interpreted through medicalized frameworks, with characters subjected to diagnoses of mental illness, hysteria, and hereditary degeneration. However, these attempts to impose scientific order on the supernatural prove futile, as the witches' powers transcend medical knowledge and resist institutional containment. By examining the interplay between scientific discourse and supernatural phenomena through close textual analysis, this paper situates *Mayfair Witches Trilogy* within a broader Gothic framework that interrogates the relationship between science and the supernatural, ultimately reinforcing the limits of human knowledge and the mysteries of human existence.

Keywords: Gothic Fiction, Supenatural, Science, Mayfair Witches, and Anne Rice.

Tasnova Sarmin is currently a PhD scholar in the English Department at Diamond Harbour Women's University, West Bengal, India. She has completed her graduation and post-graduation from Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India. She has participated and presented papers in various National and International seminars and conferences. As of now, she has written and published five book chapters and two articles in an International Peer-Reviewed journal. Her areas of research interest are- Gothic and popular culture, Horror fiction and films, Children's Literature and films, Fantasy fiction, Gender Studies, Psychoanalysis, Post-colonial Literature, and Feminist Theory.

Evening Programme

5.30 – 6.30 Workshops/Screenings/Reading Group

GE. Manchester Poetry Library: Contemporary Gothic Reading Group: Quen Took will host a discussion on Andrew Joseph White's novel, *Hell Followed with us* (a new trans horror).

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/contemporary-gothic-reading-group-3-hell-followed-with-us-tickets-1336403521909?aff=ebdsoporgprofile

LT1 (G.37): Screening/Q and A:

Amaia Mugica, 'Horror (and the body) in theatre'

The embodiment of horror and the quest to create horror in audiences has always been a subject of interest for humans. Mainly developed in literature and film, the horror genre has remained shy and marginalized within the performing arts field. Subsequently, horror in theatre has been targeted to niche and specific audiences or treated as entertainment within theme parks and immersive experiences.

The human body has long been used to create horror. The different forms of non-hegemonic embodiment have helped the authors expand into the realm of the genre. Canonical forms of bodies are changed for highly altered, opened and transformed images of bodies. For instance, monsters, paranormal and supernatural creatures such as demons, witches and vampires, living dead bodies such as zombies and blood and viscera are mainly used to transmit horror. Therefore, the body becomes the primary tool to create horror.

Historically, different theatre artists have weighed in, from Theatre Du Grand Guignol created in France by Max Maurey in in1894 and with Andre de Lorde as a scriptwriter, from various authors, such as Spanish Franc Zalbidea, in the 80s and 90s, to contemporary companies, such as Jakop Ahlbom, in the Netherlands. Theatre Du

Grand Guignol concentrated on refusing the supernatural and used only human behavior. Franc Zalbidea focused on the different themes that can generate fear in the audience and pioneered in site-specific theatre. Currently, Jakop Ahlbom Company creates magical and cinematic physical theatre horror.

Even though the horror genre in theatre is a fascinating theatrical concept for both makers and audiences, it remains unexplored. This investigation deepens into the singularity of horror in theatre and delves into the work of the body within the genre.

Amaia Mugica is a Senior Lecturer in Movement in the Manchester School of Theatre (MMU) with expertise in physical theatre, movement for actors, and devising. Amaia has a diverse educational background that includes Acting, Audiovisual and Performing Arts Technology, and Dance Movement Therapy. She holds an MA in Movement: Directing and Teaching from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Her eclectic practice utilises a person-centred approach and features innovative works that seamlessly blend theatre, movement-based techniques, and moving image/documentary. Her cutting-edge practice remains at the forefront of devised, interdisciplinary theatre-making.

Currently, she is pursuing a Professional Doctorate, focusing her research on women in physical theatre and somatic actor training methodologies. Some of her further research interests include: the embodiment of languages and accents, and the horror genre in theatre.

Amaia's work has been showcased in various settings, including artistic organisations, educational institutions, and community-based projects such as Camden Peoples Theatre, Streatham Space Project, MMU, Guildhall, All In Actors, The Cockpit Theatre, London College of Music, Arcola Theatre, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, IDSA, ALRA, WAC, and Hackney Shed, among others.

Seminar Room 9/1.08:

Leonie Rowland, Creative writing workshop: 'Gothic Writing for Therapeutic Purposes'

This therapeutic writing workshop invites participants to explore the various 'crossroads' in their own lives through creative enquiry. By identifying points of divergence, confusion and questioning in our present experience and engaging with these creatively, we might reach a place of increased clarity, self-knowledge and involvement in our reality.

Therapeutic writing, like the Gothic, provides tools to speak the unspeakable. It offers a strength-based approach for creatively inclined people and places value on the process of writing rather than the product—on uninhibited creative expression as a potentially healing force. Through exercises that encourage the development of personal voice and the compassionate witnessing of stories, therapeutic writing creates a space where transgression is celebrated and everything is welcome—monsters and all.

If monsters are buried at crossroads so they do not know which path to take, this workshop examines the impulse to equate confusion with monstrosity and invites participants to reimagine uncertainty as a creative state. It explores the crossover between the Gothic and therapeutic practice and experiments with the language of monstrosity as a language of liberation. What happens when the things that scare us become a sanctuary? To a fearsome (or fearless) beast, all roads are walkable, and so the question becomes not which one is right, but which one do we choose?

Independent scholar Leonie Rowland is a therapeutic writing practitioner and writer based in Liverpool. She is the author of *In Bed with Melon Bread* (2021) and *This Time of Life is Meant for Savages* (2024). Previously, she was a postgraduate student with the Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies, which she still haunts occasionally.

Friday 27 June

Morning Programme 9.30 – 11.00

Session 6

6a. Gothic Architecture and the City: Seminar Room 9/1.08

Eamonn Canniffe, 'Reactionary Gothic: an architectural response to the industrial revolution in the era of international neoclassicism'

The reappropriation of gothic architectural forms and styles in the decades around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an alternative to the prevailing neoclassicism had many sources and intentions. However, its employment in support of political repression and conformity is evident in the political choices pursued by the victorious western powers in the aftermath of the defeat of Napoleon. Ecclesiastical case studies from the 1820s in Manchester and Berlin (Francis Goodwin's St. George's Hulme 1826-28 and Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche kirche 1824-31) are compared to explore the significance of architectural style in in re-establishing tradition in the face of industrial, political and societal upheaval. Gothic style represented a national identity presumed to be under threat and was employed to reassert those values in the period characterised by the Concert of Europe.

Against this reactionary political context new technological developments also allowed the organic forms of the gothic tradition to be experimented with through innovative building materials while conforming to recognisable but flexible architectural precedents. As the European city responded to the new physical and economic situation established by industrialisation the gothic reemerged through the proliferation of churches to serve new neighbourhoods. The case studies selected derive from the

beginning of that process and form exemplary precedents for the edification of populations in the growing industrial town or the expanding national capital in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

Eamonn Canniffe is a Principal Lecturer at the Manchester School of Architecture. He is the author of '*Urban Ethic: Design in the Contemporary City'* (Routledge 2006) and '*The Politics of the Piazza: the history and meaning of the Italian square'* (Ashgate 2008), which he presented at the De Bosis Colloquium in Italian Studies at Harvard University in 2009. He is co-author (with Tom Jefferies) of 'Manchester Architecture Guide' (1999) and (with Peter Blundell Jones) of 'Modern Architecture through Case Studies 1945-1990' (Architectural Press 2007), a Chinese edition of which 现代建筑的演变 1945—1990年 was published in 2009. He also edited '*The City Past and Present: Global perspectives on urban history and change'* (Ashgate 2009).

Caterina Daolio, 'At the Crossroads of Gothic Architecture: from Abbeys to Country Houses.'

English literature, from *Beowulf* onwards, has consistently made allusions to architecture. However, it is "the Gothic novel of the eighteenth century [that] brought architectural setting from its ordinary position as an unobtrusive background to a place of prime importance in the narrative." (Smith 1970: 2). This genre, therefore, proves essential in offering insight into English architectural history.

This presentation considers Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) as a pivotal text reflecting the cultural legacy of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, implemented by Henry VIII in the 1530s. This historical event—one of the most revolutionary in English history (Bernard 2011: 390)—led to the creation of a number of country houses and a transfer of former monastic properties to the nobility. What emerges in Austen's novel is a fictional – yet historically-grounded – domestic space of medieval origin, described in detail, and shaped by the pragmatic "domestication" (Clarke 1998: 95) of ecclesiastical architecture. This process ensured the survival of many medieval buildings but also diluted their spiritual and aesthetic integrity. Austen's critique of such architectural alteration taps into a long-standing English nostalgia for lost monastic spaces—a sentiment that intensified in the centuries following the Dissolution. In the novel, only Catherine, the heroine, perceives the historical and emotional depth of Northanger Abbey, whereas the Tilneys, its owners, remain indifferent to its sacred past (Moore 2011: 71). Ultimately, the aim of this presentation will be to assess the Dissolution of the monasteries and their transformation into country houses from a cultural point of view as well as consider how Austen uses architecture as a narrative crossroads—between past and present, sacred and secular, history and fiction.

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Caterina Daolio is a 1st year Ph.D. student in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Bologna. She is enrolled in the EDGES curriculum, which is focused on Women’s and Gender Studies. Her work concerns English literature, with particular reference to the production of novels by English women writers of Gothic fiction in the Romantic period and during the Golden Age of detective fiction. Caterina holds a Master’s degree in Modern, Comparative, and Postcolonial Literatures, as well as a Bachelor’s degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures, both awarded by the University of Bologna.

Deniz Yilmaz, ‘Toronto Gothic and the Financialized Crossroad’

Toronto is a little explored site of gothic theorizing and cultural production. Disguising colonialism under auspices of multiculturalism policy, the city is often painted as a global crossroad where immigrant dreams can flourish. From a Global South feminist lens, this paper explores the city through autobiographical and archival methods centering experiences of the ‘periphery’ (the outer neighborhoods primarily consisting of working class, immigrant, and racialized communities). As the migrant workers and displaced peoples of the Global South, we are both haunted and haunting the city, pushed to its outskirts amidst crumbling infrastructure. In the downtown core, ghosts of Victorian mansions overlook newly built condominiums threatening to swallow up all trace of the city’s past. With rapid gentrification and financialization, the spectre of “speculation” emerges from a housing market in perpetual crisis. Toronto is at a crossroads. It is a crossroad. What does it mean to build among its ruins? The gothic is both metaphor and reality for much of Toronto’s periphery both witnessing and resisting the “uncrossable”. Drawing on local ghost-stories, urban ethnography, and archival research, this presentation explores class boundaries through interdisciplinary gothic theorizing.

Deniz is a graduate student at the University of Toronto. Her previous research focused on mining and extractive colonialism in her home country Mongolia, and her current

research explores media, mythology and political theory through a feminist global south perspective. As an artist and writer interested in cultural production for "times to come" – she is interested in the gothic as a way to explore the ruins of global capitalism.
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6b. 'Mad Wolves, Strange Trees and Queer Cows: Creative/Critical Approaches to Gothic Animals and Plants': Seminar Room 8/1.07

In this panel of four papers introducing new work from Lancaster University's Gothic, Science Fiction and Fantasy Research group, creative and critical approaches intersect to explore multiple crossings between the human and more-than-human.

Catherine Spooner (Lancaster University): Unwilding 'Bersicker': vampire ecosystems and the wolf at the crossroads

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is full of animals: rats, cats, spiders, flies, wolves. These creatures form part of 'lunatic' Renfield's vampire ecosystem in which Dracula himself is the apex predator. In the wake of works such as Kiran Millwood Hargrave's *The Deathless Girls* (2019) that reclaim the narratives of *Dracula*'s marginalised characters, my short story 'Bersicker' is fuelled by the desire to retell the story of one of the animals in Stoker's novel. Bersicker is the wolf that Dracula releases from London Zoo, in an act of both prototypical rewilding and aggressive mastery. Bersicker, as I see him, is an animal at the crossroads between wild and domesticated, and this makes him a particularly powerful figure for thinking through the tensions between human and more-than-human in the vampire narrative. Taking up Donna Haraway's challenge to 'look back reciprocally' at non-human species (*When Species Meet*, 2007), my story considers how the wolf's point of view can be captured in human language. I tell it through the sense of smell, the dominant sense for canine species and therefore one way in which a wolf might 'look' at humans. My initial aim was to carry out an act of fictional 'rewilding', decentring the human, but in the process of writing I discovered this was impossible: the act of naming the wolf and him recognising his name inevitably imprisons him within the structures of human language.

Ines Gregori Labarta (Lancaster University): Translating Cow in *The Three Lives of Saint Ciarán*

The Book of Cow, a self-contained novella part of my novel *The Three Lives of Saint Ciarán* (2024), is a queer retelling of the life of the Irish saint from the sixth century. As a multilingual writer interested in pushing language's boundaries, I set myself the challenge to narrate my version of Ciarán's epic from the perspective of the cow he was said to ride everywhere. This was important for two reasons: firstly, an essential part of Saint Ciarán's lore is his uncanny ability to communicate with animals. Secondly, as a writer interested in the dark and the weird, it was important to me to find a distinctive voice to engage with my own dark version of sixth-century Ireland ravished by war and angry deities. After volunteering at a cows' farm and reading about cow psychology, I found gothic and experimental approaches much more interesting such as Crow's

voice in Porter's *Grief is the thing with feathers* (2015) and the poem *Cattle Ancestor* by Les Murray (1993). These allowed me to embrace the darker aspects of the plot which include cannibalism and human sacrifice. Eventually, I realised that I needed to embrace the mythological aspect of my work, which brought me to ancient epics such as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and S*weeney Astray* which feature supernatural animal voices. In the end, it wasn't about creating a cow language, but learning how to translate it.

Oliver K. Langmead (Lancaster University): Deanthropomorphising Trees: Realising Anti-Ents in *Slow Kingdom*

Science Fiction, Fantasy and the Gothic have a grand tradition of anthropomorphising non-humans (C. S. Lewis's Aslan, Tolkien's Ents, Angela Carter's gothic reimaginings of fairy tale characters in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*). Anthropomorphisation does, however, feed into the problematic value system at the heart of climate catastrophe, wherein non-humans are only valued for their (mostly exploitational) relationships with humans, or relative human-ness, instead of on their own merits. There is a contemporary movement in genre fiction towards deanthropomorphisation: finding creative ways to give non-humans expression in literature on their own terms – functionally working towards realising Timothy Morton's Strange Stranger (*Dark Ecology*, 2016). Over the past two years, I have been working on a novella called *Slow Kingdom*, which takes aim, specifically, at Tolkien's Ents. I would argue that Tolkien's Ents have very little in common with trees (they are essentially just big humans who talk slowly and have bark skin), and have been using *Slow Kingdom* as a means of trying to realise tree voices without anthropomorphising them. Trees express themselves in so many fascinating ways (*How to Read a Tree*, Tristan Gooley, 2023 / *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben, 2015), and bringing those expressions to life in a contemporary, commercial piece of fiction works to give trees value in their own terms, for their strange and brilliant tree-ness.

Kwasu Tembo (Lancaster University): Black Skins, White Fangs: On Salves, Selves, and Weremorphology as Afro-Gothic Intensity

In the seventh chapter of Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Book of Werewolves*, a thirteen year old boy, of "dark olive" complexion, also described as "dingy and black", says to a trio of would be victims: "I am dark-coloured, because I wear a wolf-skin sometimes" (Baring-Gould 1865). From Baring-Gould to Ian Woodward's *The Werewolf Delusion* (1979) lupanthropic (werewolf) or hyaenthropic (werehyena) therianthropy seems to always be a matter of epidermialization. Whether it is the putting on of a skin to change one skin-form into another, to interrupt, rupture, trouble, destroy or remake one skin-form within/without an/other, or influencing the skin in some way - through the rubbing of some substance or object, be a it a stick or a salve - metamorphosis and mediation of intensities that trouble and affirm embodied states often, in some way, redound to the skin. In this sense, the figure of the werewolf/werehyena presents an epidermialization of the interface between the natural and the supernatural, between animality and humanity, between skins, surfaces, essences, occlusions and superimpositions, of truth and representation. Gesturing to Franz Fanon's critique of the ontology of epidermialization/epidermialization of ontology in *Black Skins, White*

Masks (1952) and Lyotard's concept of the great ephemeral skin in *Libidinal Economy* (1974), I will consider the weremorph as a way of thinking – inside out and outside in – the unsynthesizable dialectic between curses and powers, transformation, identarian non-localizability resulting in multiplicity and/as intensity.

Catherine Spooner is Professor of Literature and Culture at Lancaster University. She has published seven books including *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, *Contemporary Gothic*, *Post-Millennial Gothic* and *The Cambridge History of the Gothic Volume 3: The Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*. She is also a prize-winning writer of poetry and fiction with a Gothic slant.

Inés G. Labarta is a migrant fiction writer. Her publications include the horror gothic *McTavish Manor* (Holland House, 2016) and the genre-bending novel *The Three Lives of Saint Ciarán (*Blackwater Press, 2024). Her short fiction has been featured in Extra Teeth, Dead Ink and others. She lectures in Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

Oliver K. Langmead writes speculative fiction. His verse-novel, *Calypso*, was named one of the best Science Fiction books of 2024 by the Guardian and Esquire magazine, and his previous novel, *Glitterati,* was shortlisted for a British Fantasy Award. He is a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Lancaster.

Kwasu D. Tembo is a lecturer of Global Anglophone Literature at Lancaster University. He has published widely on themes subtending power, otherness, and identity. He has also written about genre and form, which can be noted in his monograph *Genndy Tartakovsky: Sincerity in Animation* (Bloomsbury, 2022). His interdisciplinary teaching covers numerous areas, including music, literature, media, film, critical theory, and science fiction.

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6c. Folklore and Fairies: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Richard Jorge, 'The Anglo-Irish at a Crossroads: Questioning Colonial Ireland in J.S. le Fanu's 'The Child that went with the Fairies'

The crossroad is not only a physical space – in the Irish folk tradition, it is a symbol, a heterotopia, which connects the realm of the living and the dead, as symbolised by the stone heaps signalling these places (Ó Súilleabháin 2014, 123). As such, they are present in many Irish legends and folk tales, which constituted a source of inspiration for J.S. Le Fanu's writings. This influence is well attested, as seen in his earlier usage of folkloric

narrative elements resulting in “a comic or pseudo-Gothic effect” present in his *Purcell Papers* (1838-40) or in his later narrative deployment of such elements, where “legend now becomes the material of conscious fiction” (McCormack 1991, 239). In this sense, “The Child that went with the Fairies” (1870) directly stems from this source, as the story is an adaptation of the Irish myth of the changelings, portraying how the human and the otherworldly interact at “the old cross-road that leads to Owney” (Le Fanu 1994, 56). Thus, the folktale conditions both the story’s content and its narrative pace, style, and language. However, a deeper reading unveils how the narrative is suggestive of many of the problems distressing J.S. Le Fanu’s contemporaries – Ireland’s colonial situation, the legitimacy of the Anglo-Irish, or their fear of a Catholic uprising. By conducting a postcolonial analysis of the structural elements in the story, this paper aims to reconsider how J.S. Le Fanu adapted the Irish fairy tale to convey a narrative encapsulating his contemporaries’ concerns in national and class-related terms, revealing the tale to be a questioning of the Irish colonial situation.

Keywords: J.S. Le Fanu, Irish Gothic, Anglo-Irish Literature, nineteenth century literature, postcolonial literature.

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After graduating in English, Richard Jorge gained an MA in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College Dublin with a study on the relation of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and the Gothic tradition. He completed his PhD at the University of Santiago de Compostela on the relationship between the short story and the Irish Gothic tradition. He currently lectures at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Spain.

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Hannah Dwyer, ‘The History of the Irish Fairies and the Causes of their Demonisation within Irish Folklore’

This paper considers the history of the Irish Fairy and the importance they have in Irish culture and how they are demonised in the eighteenth century. Irish fairies, or Aos Sí as they are often referred too, are deeply rooted in Irish mythology and folklore. To begin with I will be reviewing John Rhys’s evaluation of the history of the Irish Fairy in his work ‘lectures on the origin and growth of religion as illustrated by Celtic heathendom (1892)’ as well as Mark William’s interpretation of ‘the story of a nation’s fantasy, and of the crossing-places where imagination meets belief’ in his work ‘Ireland’s Immortals: a History of the Gods of Irish Myth (2016)’. The ancient Celts believed in the Tuatha Dé Danann, a mythical deity associated with divine beings, and we can trace the origins of Irish fairies back to them. I will explore how Norreys Jephson O’Connor explains the

importance of the Irish Fairy in her book 'The Early Irish Fairies and Fairyland (1920)' as 'Fairies are mentioned first and most frequently in the literature written in the Irish Language of centuries ago' and why it is 'not mere popular superstition'. This paper will reflect on why the demonisation of the Irish fairy in the eighteenth century occurred and the effect this had on Irish culture by analysing Jarlath Killeen work in 'The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction (2013)' as he explains Irish Anglican attitudes towards the Native-Irish beliefs and superstitions was down to their anxiety of 'living everyday life in a country mostly populated by diabolical monsters'. There is a massive contrast in the portrayal of the Irish fairy in literary work in the eighteenth century from those that respect the traditions in the south like W.B. Yeats and T. Crofton Croker in comparison to protestant writers like William Allingham and Samuel Ferguson in their poetry. The different portrayal of the Irish fairy by the protestant writers, at this time, is due to the habitation of Anglo-Irishmen in an ascendancy Ireland where 'class, theological and political difference' seeped into every aspect of their lives. The fairy was the symbolic for the fear that they felt for the history and tradition of a land.

Should we consider the demonisation of the Irish Fairy in the eighteenth century a result of the Anglo-Irish fear of the Native-Catholic 'other' and that the Fairy was monstrified in order vilify the traditions of the Native Irish land?

Hannah Dwyer is an MA student in English Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Rebecca McLuskie, **Gothic Crossroads: Diasporic Folklore in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights***

> [Nelly:] I came to a stone where the highway branches off on to the moor at your left hand [...] Hindley and I held it a favourite spot twenty years before. I gazed long at the weatherworn block; and, stooping down, perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles which we were fond of storing there... (Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*)

In traditional folklore, it was believed that leaving items such as empty snail-shells and pebbles in the crevices of rocks opened portals between the natural world and the other world. By opening this portal, the bearer of these offerings risked inviting supernatural entities – known as changelings – into their home.

While popular criticism of *Wuthering Heights* suggests Heathcliff is either the illegitimate son of Mr. Earnshaw or an orphan he took pity on, this presentation assesses the ways in which Heathcliff conforms to the image of the changeling as outlined in folklore. By analysing Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* alongside writings such as Carole Silver's 1986 essay 'On the Origin of Faires' and Jacob Grimm's 1888 *Teutonic Mythology*, I will discuss my theory that Heathcliff is a changeling accidentally summoned by Nelly, and inspired by the Irish influence of Brontë's father.

My name is Rebecca McLuskie, I completed an undergraduate degree in English and History at the University of Strathclyde, and recently graduated from the University of

Glasgow with a Masters degree in English Literature. I am not currently enrolled in University, but am hoping to submit applications for PhD study shortly.

I can be contacted by email at rebeccamcluskie5@gmail.com.

6d. The Weird: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Andrew Fehribach, *Child of God*: Aquatic Space and Repressed Consciousness in Appalachian Gothic Literature

Cormac McCarthy's 1973 novel *Child of God* uses Appalachia as a setting for American Gothic Literature, thereby moving the genre away from the Southern landscape that William Faulkner all but trademarked in the first half of the 20th century. Through this case study, I interpret how McCarthy's representation of flood water reflects Freudian repressed consciousness similar to domestic spaces in other American Gothic texts, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe (1843) and *Wise Blood* by Flannery O'Connor (1952) among others.

By intersecting Appalachian Gothic Literature with aquatic studies through a close reading of *Child of God*, I interpret how populations in spaces seemingly apart from water, such as Appalachia, actually connect water meaningfully to their history and homes. This connection to personal and communal history feeds into American Gothic literary traditions of an everreturning haunted past while reimagining the significance of water in non-oceanic aquatic space.

McCarthy's use of water within this genre also reconfigures the perception of aquatic spaces as fundamentally undefined. Flood water in *Child of God* uniquely straddles the line between the concreteness of land and the fluidity of water, since flooding allows for both spaces to occur in the same geographical location at different times. Appalachia in particular serves as an important setting for this analysis of non-oceanic aquatic space because of events such as Hurricane Helene at the end of 2024, which flooded spaces related to those that McCarthy wrote about in his novel.

Andrew Fehribach is a Research Masters student at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Harry Rooke-Kelly, 'The butterfly's last judgement draws nigh: weird manifestations of Capitalocene anxieties in Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014)

Jason W. Moore suggests that the relationship between the core and peripheries is one of exploitation and commodification, as capitalism insists upon a mandate to privilege economic growth above all, even to the detriment of environmental stability. Within this context, the degradation of the natural world fuels a climate crisis replete with existential

horror of the type often reserved for Lovecraftian old-ones. This manifestation is made explicit in Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014), where Area X serves to highlight contemporaneous world-systems transactions – as the expeditions attempt to colonise and commodify the exclusion zone to better serve capitalistic interests, but also nature's increasing fragility in the context of extractivist violence. Through the weird encounters of *Annihilation*, including uncanny wilderness and gothic isolation (visible in the landscape and its architecture, and the monstrous creatures and flora inhabiting within), human supremacy and authority mandated by capitalism is challenged as something insecure, increasingly faltering in contest with the power of the natural world. Area X thus functions as a transitory crossroads, where weird aesthetics complement world-ecology, presenting paths to salvation or complete annihilation as simultaneously possible.

Harry Rooke Kelly is a doctoral candidate at Brunel University of London, where they will be starting their PhD on the Trans legacy of Vampires in September 2025. Their research concentrates on Gothic and Horror fiction, including the Victorian Gothic (the focus of their undergraduate work) and contemporary weird writing (their MA thesis).

Fredrik Blanc, 'The Mercreature as Metonym: Suspension and Onto-Epistemological Resistance in the Blue Weird'

The mercreature illustrates a transcorporeal and porous reality where the human and the nonhuman come together in the hybrid imagery of enmeshed scales, gills, and fins, thereby functioning, along with the tentacularity of the cephalopod, as a central metonymy of the Weird's imagery and affect. The mercreature, with its abhuman liminality, moving between visible shores and invisible watery depths, between the discrete and the multiple, underscores the centrality of ontological anxiety in the modern subject (Hurley, 2004). In the Weird fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and William Hope Hodgson, the ontological uncertainty of aquatic hybrids creates unease and ambivalent revulsion, yet their watery bodies also epitomise the liminality and liquidity of the Weird mode itself. At the same time, the mercreature, in its protean fluidity and grotesque liveliness, embodies a suspended onto-epistemology, a boundary-defying refusal of ontological certainty. In their re-appropriation of the Weird, authors such as China Miéville use aquatic hybridity as a metaphor for political freedom in *The Scar* (2002), while Black Weird authors such as Rivers Solomon confront the memory of colonial atrocities through its posthuman potential. In _Poetics of Relation_ (1989), the Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant underlines the colonial project as necessarily underscored by hegemonic processes of transparency that require the unveiling of the world and the flattening of difference into a binary and reductive clarity. In calling for a 'right to opacity', Glissant argues for the necessity of the unknowable and the unclear as an act of decolonial resistance (Glissant, 1989). Thinking weirdly through the liminality of the mercreature is to envision its suspension in between bodies and in water as an act of ontological resistance as part of an array of enweirded hydropoetics, wayward and opaque, unmoored and unknowable, underscoring the centrality of the mercreature within the Blue Weird.

Keywords: Blue Humanities; The Blue Weird; Hydropoetics; Hybridity; Onto-Epistemology; H.P. Lovecraft; William Hope Hodgson; China Miéville; Rivers Solomon; Édouard Glissant.

Fredrik Blanc (He/Him) is a PhD researcher and Graduate Teaching Assistant in English at the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), currently writing his thesis on Hybridity, Thalassophobia, and Transcorporeality in modern and contemporary Weird fiction. His research interests include the Weird, Blue Humanities, and the EcoGothic.

11.00-11.30: *Break*

11.30 – 1.00

Session 7

7a. Horror Audio/Podcasting: Seminar Room 9/1.08

Anna Maria Ronewicz, Curated Crossroads: The Old Bacchus Road and The Devil in the Labyrinth of *The Mistholme Museum*

The central space of the weird fiction audio drama *The Mistholme Museum of Mystery, Morbidity, and Mortality* features the eponymous museum — an impossible labyrinth that encapsulates the enigmatic nature of a curiosity exhibition, conating it with anxieties of disorientation, entrapment, and the impossible. This paper analyses the narrative and symbolic crossroads constructed within the museum, focusing particularly on three elements: the exhibit of "The Old Bacchus Road," a liminal path of emotional healing and existential ambiguity, "The Guitar of the Man Who Met the Devil" exhibit, a Gothic retelling of the folklore trope of the Devil encountered at the crossroads, and the labyrinthian enigma of the museum itself. Drawing from Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias, I discuss how these crossroads and the museum function as "other spaces" where narratives and identities continuously intersect, collapse, and recongure.

The paper explores the functions of roads and crossroads as necessary places for narrative transition, temptation, and transformation within the inherently liminal circumstance of the museum space. "The Old Bacchus Road" embodies a threshold space where the meaning of memory and forgetting converge, while "The Guitar of the Man Who Met the Devil" highlights the crossroads as a site of choice, ambition, and consequence, typical for Gothic narratives.

Additionally, I examine how the podcast's auditory storytelling amplifies the museum's inherent Gothic liminality, using carefully designed soundscapes—voices (with focus on The Devil, also known as "The Man with a Voice like Honey and Chocolate and Coffee all at once"), echoes, and silences—to blur distinctions between past and present, reality and unreality.

Anna Maria Ronewicz is a PhD student at the University of Szczecin, Poland, working on a dissertation on queer liminality in weird fiction audio dramas. Her academic focus lies within the fields of weird fiction and horror transmediality, as well as their intersection with Queer and religious studies. anna.ronewicz@usz.edu.pl

Violet Brew & Daniel S Martin, Presenting the Influence of Gothic Horror Conventions Through our Practical Audio Drama Series: *The 6th of February 2184*.

Presenting our practical work of a sci-fi horror audio drama - *The 6th of February 2184*. Here we are examining the influence and technical qualities of a contemporary gothic horror in building urban soundscapes.

We want to discuss how we employed and developed the gothic horror tradition of depicting the supernatural into a scientific supernatural through characterising and mediating on mechanical and cosmic horrors. In an urban landscape creating an atmosphere resemblant of a more contemporary gothic horror we strived to utilise the limitations of a solely auditory medium to tell our stories. This includes episodes of the show that rely on horror to present something uncanny through sound alone, as well as the primary obsessions within the drama - the living machine.

Our largest tool in creating *The 6th of February 2184* came to be an ability to create and maintain a tone and atmosphere - especially in regards to the types of stories we find ourselves attracted to. A large contributor to this was the framing device of collected tapes, which established the groundwork for our main narratives. In this framing device, we found our narrator allowing us to layer plots and stories - consistently coming back to their perspective.

This then culminates in using these techniques and concepts to develop traditions to discuss contemporary themes of mental health, feminism and queerness. With particular focus on how these aspects gave us the freedom and ideal creative playground to discuss the topics we feel passionately about.

Violet Brew is a West Midlands filmmaker. Studying Film Production at Arts University Bournemouth, she uses a varied range of artforms to tell character-focused stories about underrepresented voices. Recent projects include *The 6 th of February 2184* and the short film *Limbo; a cautionary tale* about the future of the NHS.

Daniel S. Martin is a writer from the West Midlands. An avid reader, Martin enjoys experimenting in his work. He has studied at the MMU Writing School, had three short stories published and co-created *The 6 th of February 2184*.

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Lethe-Medea Dickinson 'Is Anybody Listening?': Structure and Audience Positioning in Horror Narrative Podcasts

Narrative podcasts have been somewhat overlooked in academic research and so I am aiming to bring attention to them as an avenue of academic research, especially in Gothic and Horror Studies. Horror narrative podcasts adapt and emulate aspects of Gothic mode to fit the audio medium.

Narrative podcasts have surged in popularity in the last decade, which is no surprise considering that it is a way for amateurs, independents or small businesses to create stories and bypass the restrictions in publishing and film making. Horror is a popular subgenre in narrative podcasts, not unlike the popularity of horror in OTR (Old Time Radio), with the imagination being utilised in the suspension of disbelief.

Narrative podcasts generally are structured in two distinct ways. The first follows the protagonist as the narrator of 'real time' activity. The second is through incorporating audio recordings into the narrative, either through the protagonist is recording or broadcasting audio or through an assimilation of 'found tapes', derived from the horror trope of 'found footage'.

The format chosen positions the listener in accordance. In the first format the audience occupies the space of a traditional audience, which without images leads to the story told to the audience by the protagonist's narration accompanied by foley sounds. The second positions the audience as interacting with listening equipment. In doing so, Gothic mode is emulated in narrative podcasts as the horrors described and encountered are positioned as real, similar to the effect of including letters in Gothic literature.

Lethe-Medea Dickinson (pronouns: they/them) is a current Gender Studies and English postgraduate student at Lancaster University. They graduated the University of Chester with a first-class English Literature with History degree. They are interested in the intersection of feminist and queer theory in Gothic and mythological literature.

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7b. "Transmedial borders, Genre Boundaries and Liminality in Horror": Seminar Room 8/1.07

Horror and Gothic Group (HaGG), Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia)

This panel presents a snapshot of research by members of the Horror and Gothic Group (HaGG) at Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia). This interdisciplinary group of scholars includes staff and postgraduates from disciplines including screen studies, literature, and creative writing. These papers deal with liminality and boundary crossings in terms of gender, genre, spatiality, and multidisciplinary arts.

Isabel Peppard's Multidisciplinary 'Dark Surrealism'

Claire Henry, Flinders University, claire.henry@flinders.edu.au

Working across film, sculpture and stop-motion animation, multidisciplinary Australian artist Isabel Peppard has forged a distinctive visual style. She is known for her animated short films: *Butterflies* (2012), which screened at over 50 festivals including Sitges and Annecy, and *Gloomy Valentine* (2006), which was included in the Australian female-led horror anthology, *Dark Whispers Volume 1* (2019). Peppard also co-directed the feature hybrid documentary *Morgana* (with Josie Hess, 2019), which incorporates elements of sculpture, miniatures and visual art in vignettes.

This paper examines how Peppard has shaped a distinctive 'dark surrealist' aesthetic working across medial borders in roles including director, animator, set and puppet designer, painter, sculptor, and silicone technician. Peppard began her career as a SFX makeup artist and Creature Technician in the late 1990s, building technical skills that she later deployed to explore horror in her own creative practice across performance, costuming, sculpture, and animation. She worked with artist Patricia Piccinini as a silicone technician and with animator Adam Elliot as a character painter and sculptor on *Mary and Max* (2009). Peppard's films are underpinned by a convergence of crafts – including the artistry and technical skills of stop-motion animation and silicone sculpture – and an alchemy of influences (notably Japanese fairy tales, surrealism, and horror). I examine the significance of her multidisciplinary practice on the development of her visual style, tracing transmedial crafts and transnational influences that shape her aesthetic vision of the female body and sexuality at the intersection of what she terms 'dark surrealism' and 'feminine body horror'.

The Unhinged Woman Trope and the Genreless Anti-Heroine in Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings* (2018)

Charlotte Elliott, Flinders University, charlotte.elliott@flinders.edu.au

Presently, literary horror is experiencing a new feminist direction, coinciding with an overall changing nature of the genre which is challenging its own conventional boundaries. Within this context, the 'unhinged woman' trope is an emerging trend characterised by themes of female rage, monstrosity, instability, gore, and chaos. My research concerning the 'unhinged women' newly identifies four distinct sub-sets of the trope in 2020s horror literature: the merciless murderess, the female monster, feminine madness, and the genreless anti-heroine.

This paper will focus on the text *Earthlings* by Sayaka Murata (2018), and its protagonist Natsuki, as an example of the genreless anti-heroine. Blending magical realism with horror elements such as incest, sexual abuse and cannibalism, this 'genreless' novel explores societal expectations, taboo, and feelings of alienation during the transition from girlhood to womanhood. *Earthlings* demonstrates how the unconventional anti-heroine embodies a new wave of radical feminist horror, which acknowledges the anxieties of the feminine experience through extreme gore and revulsion. 'Unhinged'

anti-heroines like Natsuki are not only being positively received by female readership, but function to empower and provide catharsis. Finally, novels such as Murata's *Earthlings* illustrate the need to examine tropes such as the 'unhinged woman', which are contributing to the expansion of the horror genre outside of its traditional parameters. Ultimately, these texts convey newfound complexity in their depictions of women, through monstrous and horrific expressions of femininity and the feminine experience.

Womb Envy and the Feminist New Wave: A Comparative Analysis of David Cronenberg's and Alice Birch's *Dead Ringers* (1988/2023)

Tabitha Knight, Flinders University, knig0196@flinders.edu.au

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of two texts—David Cronenberg's 1988 film *Dead Ringers* and Alice Birch's 2023 television reimagining of the same name—in order to establish the New female mad scientist archetype and compare her to renditions of the male mad scientist in horror texts. I propose that the New female mad scientist archetype differs from Eva Flicker's six categories of fictional female scientists, in that she is not merely an extension of the male scientist (as Flicker's categories are) but a distinct, contemporary archetype that originates from the Feminist New Wave Cinema movement, as outlined in Creed's study of the Monstrous-Feminine (Flicker, 2003; Creed, 2022). The New female mad scientist therefore stands at a crossroads between Flicker's categories and portrayals of male mad scientists. Furthermore, her current prevalence in horror media highlights an increased interest in themes of female agency, fertility, and bodily autonomy within the wider genre. This paper is taken from a chapter of my PhD thesis, entitled *Anatomica: Gender and Mad Science in Horror Literature and Film*, which explores the New female mad scientist archetype in relation to her sentient, humanoid creations in "Frankenstein" narratives. A comparative analysis of *Dead Ringers* serves to outline the characteristics of the New female mad scientist as a contemporary archetype in feminist horror, and examine how she is utilised as both a facet of the monstrous-feminine and as a figure in the Gynaehorror subgenre (Harrington, 2018).

When the Universe Doesn't Add Up: The Impossible Spaces of Liminal Horror

Oscar Sparkes, Flinders University, spar0115@flinders.edu.au

The concept of liminality and horror fiction have long joined side by side. Originating in anthropological studies, the liminal or threshold was the middle stage in a rite of passage, an ambiguous realm where it is not 'what was' neither 'what will be'. In a genre where ambiguity and the unknown thrive, horror narratives of new and old have often posed a horrifying premise: what if we found ourselves permanently trapped in the point of transition, as if we are endlessly running through a tunnel and will never reach the light at the end? Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic, the newfound liminal horror genre

weaponised our increasing fears of disconnection to the outside world and our isolation within confined spaces that no longer felt familiar. In their various forms, liminal spaces have existed within the horror genre since its origins in the Gothic, with these in-between realms serving as temporal or spatial thresholds that lie on the borders of existence. This paper will first identify the liminal horror genre, before offering a case study of Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*. The house at the centre of this Russian doll narrative is arguably the quintessential liminal space in horror fiction, a crossroad where familiarity and the unknown intersect, and reality gives way to the impossible. This analysis will demonstrate how liminal horror narratives employ liminal spaces to reflect anxieties surrounding the loss of identity, our relation to reality and spatial existences, and the threat of oblivion when confronted with nothingness.

Claire Henry is an Associate Professor in Screen at Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia). She is the author of *Eraserhead* (BFI Film Classics, Bloomsbury, 2023) and *Revisionist Rape-Revenge: Redefining a Film Genre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and co-author of *Screening the Posthuman* (with Missy Molloy and Pansy Duncan, Oxford University Press, 2023).

Charlotte Elliott is a PhD candidate in English at Flinders University with an interest in contemporary feminist horror literature, social media reading subcultures such as 'BookTok' and Tumblr, and body horror – particularly cannibalism.

Tabitha Knight is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at Flinders University with a focus on feminist theory and the horror genre. She also has research interests in horror theatre – particularly the Grand-Guignol theatre movement – and sibling incest as a Gothic trope.

Oscar Sparkes is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at Flinders University. His current research is exploring the liminal horror subgenre and its evocation of horror through the concept of liminality, presented through liminal spaces. His other areas of interest include horror cinema, the Gothic and weird fiction.

7c. Ghosts, Mummies and Men of Science: Seminar Room 7/1.06

Han O'Flanagan, Apparitional Spinsterhood: transitional asexual identity in Marjorie Bowen and Edith Wharton

My thesis illuminates the connections between the spectral fiction of the fin de siècle and the development of modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through modern understandings of non-heteronormative sexual identities. Asexuality and non-sexuality are not uniquely contemporary concepts, and there is an urgency to respecting and broadening our sense of the history of such experiences. The doctoral project takes up that challenge, through magnifying the presence of asexuality and non-sexuality within the ghost stories of the *fin de siècle*, moving away from the currently established norm of reading sex as a repressed or oppressed subject within them, as the ghost story is uniquely placed to record the disturbances of cultures in an

intensified and magnified form. Conventional conceptions of Victorians as staid, prudish and rigidly normative individuals are increasingly contested; by using new queer critical frameworks I will contribute to and extend this understanding of the *fin de siècle* as an epoch in which modern identities are formed.

This paper is taken from a chapter of the thesis focusing on 'sexual apathy' and asserts specifically that the figure of the spinster within 'The Crown Derby Plate' by Marjorie Bowen and 'Miss Mary Pask' by Edith Wharton is reflective of asexuality and asexual people in the way that they are pushed to the periphery by society and often overlooked. The central characters are made spectral or apparitional by their status as spinster, and therefore haunt the stories in which they appear alongside the ghosts. In addition, this paper argues that both Wharton and Bowen use the conventions of the spinster trope in order to produce a parodic criticism of the spinster's invisibility and treatment by society.

Han O'Flanagan (they/she) is a fourth-year PhD candidate at Lancaster University, where their thesis focuses on asexual identities and experiences at the fin-de-siecle, examined through the lens of supernatural short fiction. Their research seeks to establish new readings of nineteenth century sexology and sexological terminology inclusive of non-heteronormative and non-sexual identities.

Madhuchhanda Ray Choudhury, 'At the Crossroads of the Spectre and the Undead: A Reading of Daphne du Maurier's Short Story, 'Split Second''

Gothic tropes of the spectre and the undead explore ramifications of existing at the crossroads of ontology. Daphne du Maurier's short story "Split Second" intriguingly engages these concepts through the protagonist, Mrs. Ellis, who finds her house overtaken by strangers when she returns from a walk. Desperate to assert her identity and prove her ownership of the house, she is horrified to discover that she does not exist in any official record. Nor can she find anyone to vouch for her identity. In the end readers realise that Mrs. Ellis was killed in an accident in 1932 and she returned to the world of 1952. Mrs. Ellis is thus located at parallel crossroads between the present and the future, between physical presence and ontological absence, between the spectre and the undead. Though unlike the spectre and the undead Mrs. Ellis suffers rather than perpetrates classic Gothic emotions of horror and disorientation during her struggle to assert her identity, she still resembles them in her liminal status. As Mrs. Ellis's identity becomes fluid and contingent upon others' narratives, be it documentary or mnemonic she resembles these liminal entities because like them she embodies the horror of unstable identities. Gina Wisker notes that du Maurier uses Gothic horror in some short stories to destabilize our everyday certainties and "the inner narratives by which we construct [our identities] and interpret our worlds". My paper will apply Wisker's argument to "Split Second", the story she does not discuss and demonstrate how du Maurier's reconfiguration of the tropes of the spectre and the undead amplify this deeply existential theme.

Madhuchhanda Ray Choudhury is Associate Professor at Sister Nivedita University, India. Her research interests are in 18th Century British Novel, Gothic writing, Monsters and Monstrosity. She has published several articles and book chapters in national and international publications and has served as resource person at renowned universities in India. **Email: madhuchhanda.r@snuniv.ac.in**

Karen E. Macfarlane, 'Necroimperialism: Mummies, Desire, Empire'

I have argued that the monstrosity of reanimated mummies in turn of the century British fiction can be understood through the ways in which this figure actively challenges the terms that shape fantasies of imperial power. The mummy simultaneously occupies series of ostensibly oppositional positions in these narratives. As they reanimate, they are both subject and object, living and dead, artefact and scholar and these contradictory positions create a space for exploring *fin de siecle* anxieties about the imperial project's almost fetishistic preoccupation with the limits of European knowledge, power and its empire's place in history. But when the body at the centre of the stories is that of a woman, the latent fetishism that shapes the fascination with the mummy in nineteenth century Europe becomes a necrophilic display of desire and control. The erotic desire for these mummies plays out the pull and the fear of the forbidden that underpinned imperial relations: of miscegenation, the control of the body of the woman/corpse, of the power of dead empires, and of a fascination with the inevitable end of the British empire.

Drawing on Lisa Downing's theories of necrophilia in literature, and Achilles Mbebe's necropolitics, I argue that the eroticised relations between the mummy and the Men of Science in these stories articulates a drive toward a non-reproductive future that plays out the desire for, and fear of, the inevitable demise of empire.

Karen E. Macfarlane is Professor in the Department of English at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Canada. She is past president of the International Gothic Association and organised the association's 17th Biennial conference in 2024. She has published widely in Gothic studies, with a specific interest in monsters at the turns of centuries. Her recent publications include "Where Have all the Monsters Gone?" (*Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*) and "Creepy Little Girl"(*Gothic Studies*). She is has also published on zombies, post humanism and technology, haunted real estate and on reanimated mummies. Email: karen.macfarlane@msvu.ca

Jenny Lange, 'The Gothic scientist: Science or Science Fiction?'

Gothic literature and science fiction have often been influenced by scientific research and discoveries, the most prominent example being Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The popularity of psychiatry and the emergence of neurology as a scientific discipline had a profound impact on the Victorian imagination. Traces thereof can be seen in novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde", H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and even Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, as his brother, Sir William Thornley Stoker, was a renowned neurologist. Not only did science exert a pronounced influence on literature, but literature also served as a source of inspiration for scientists. Moreover, neurologists often produced detailed art of human brains and cells observed

under the microscope, blurring the lines of art and science. In the Victorian era, science was displayed alongside other cultural artifacts in exhibitions, museums and extensively discussed in public lectures, and as such operating in the public eye, further contributing to a less clear division of science and arts.

Here, I will discuss the representation of science in Gothic literature, as well as moral issues associated with the development of research techniques that represented a significant part of writing about contemporary scientific topics in the Victorian era. Highlighting how neuroscience has progressed from ideas in Gothic fiction, such as the idea that we can reanimate a brain with electricity, I will provide examples how scientists are still artists, as well as showcasing the dark beauty of science. Because what is more Gothic than growing a brain in a dish?

Dr Jenny Lange is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the UK Dementia Research Institute, UCL, specialising in uncovering mechanisms of rare neurological disorders. She's a regular speaker on medical history, at London Month of the Dead and the Old Operating Theatre, where she explores the intersections of science and culture.

7d. Trauma and Carceral Spaces: Seminar Room 6/1.05

Shareed Mohammed, 'Mervyn Peake's Gothic Landscapes in *The Gormenghast Trilogy*'

Mervyn Peake (1911-1968) is best known for his writing, particularly *The Gormenghast Trilogy*, but he was also a prolific artist and illustrator. His fiction and artwork interest a wide audience. In 1946, Peake worked for the British government as a war correspondent. He was commissioned to travel through the German landscape and visit the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Significantly, his vision of this landscape of death and ruin were transposed not only to his war paintings but also to his three fictional novels of the *The Gormenghast Trilogy*. In fact, Sebastian Peake, the son of Mervyn Peake, in an interview with the British media in 2011, stated that the Gormenghast books were influenced by his father's visit to a Nazi death camp. This research presentation argues that one of the most important and complex aspects of Peake's work- his engagement with gothic landscapes- reveals a crucial influence by his experiences of war. This research also claims that a robust engagement with Peake's eerie and haunted landscapes is integral to an understanding of his conception of modernist gothic fiction. The literary analysis of Peake's gothic landscapes will be guided by Paul Celan's notion of the "death dealing speech" which was used to memorialize the dead of the Holocaust in his poetry. The findings of this research will demonstrate that a failure to take Peake's personal experience of war into account leads not only to a misunderstanding of his philosophy of art but also the creation of gothic landscapes in his fiction.

Key words: Mervyn Peake, gothic landscapes, *The Gormenghast Trilogy*, war, Paul Celan.

Shareed Mohammed is currently a PhD candidate in the Literatures in English programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and

Tobago. His PhD thesis "Wilson Harris's Shamanistic Quantum Imagination in *The Carnival Trilogy*" has been completed and examined. He is also a member of the British Art Network and in 2022 he presented "The Magical Logic of Voodoo Aesthetics" at the Curating Magic online seminar. His research article "The social cults of cinematic gendered violence: A challenge and transformation" is published in the *Caribbean Journal of Education and Development* (CJED), Vol. 1 No. 3, 2024. You can access this article at https://caribed.scholasticahq.com/issue/10929.

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Maria Cohut, 'Carceral Gothic: Freedom Crossing over into Oppression in Mr K Released by Mati Visniec'

My paper proposes to look at a novel that falls within the remit of the "carceral Gothic," and which explores the conceptual crossroads between dictatorship and democracy: *Mr K Released* by Romanian author Matei Vișniec (originally published in 2010, and translated into English in 2020), which pays homage to Kafka's *The Trial*.

The premise of Vișniec's story is simple: Kosef J, inmate, is suddenly informed he has become a free man. Kosef finds this unexpected freedom disorienting and oppresive. When he crosses the threshold of his prison cell into freedom he is, by turns, lost, driven to become an oppressor himself in order to reintegrate within the now-familiar space of the prison, and finally caught up in the world of democracy-seeking rebels, which he finds alienating and corrosive.

Carceral spaces are often found in Gothic narratives. In *The Prison of Democracy*, Sara M. Benson speaks of a "carceral gothic tradition [...] defined by a certain relationship between the prison's inside and outside," arguing that the "prison house door" signifies "the possibility of a return—of being 'recalled to life'." Within a carceral state, the prison door links the promise of freedom with an inherent sense of unease because this type of state, she posits, is built on the "idea of equal deprivation." This "carceral gothic," I will argue, lies at the centre of Vișniec's narrative, set in an unnamed country that is consistent with the sociopolitical environment of Eastern European communist countries.

Using the lens of the grotesque, which defamiliarises, distorts, and in a sense even "exoticises" familiar experiences, Vișniec's carceral Gothic problematises the notion of freedom, and emphasizes the complicity of the individual in the atrocity of carceral/dictatorial systems.

Dr. Maria Cohut specialises in 18th- and 19th-century literature, feminist perspectives, and different aspects of Otherness in Gothic and weird fiction. After a few years' break from academia, she is now resuming her research efforts – particularly on different iterations of the Gothic. Recently, she has been teaching women's movements and feminist literature at Brunel University.

Joe Howsin, 'The Self in Crisis: Fractured Narratives and fractured identities in suicide narratives and Gothic autofiction'

From its theorisation as a set of tropes to its modern conception as a mode, the Gothic has grown more porous and wide-reaching in the past few decades. Similarly, conceptions of a rigid division between fiction and non-fiction, and between the novel and the biography, have broken down.

This paper expands upon the intersections between the real and the unreal, fact and fiction, and the blending of genres, by proposing that the Gothic mode – and its accompanying poetics of excess – has been and continues to be utilised as a vehicle for articulating the unique form of trauma connected to bereavement by suicide. The Gothic facilitates the articulation of suicide bereavement's conflicting and painful emotional truths through the use of equally dichotomous imagery and depictions of the self in conflict – both with the figure of the Other, and with the Othered-self.

For modern writers like Georgi Gospodinov, as well as classic figures like Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf, the fictional and the biographical blend so seamlessly that it becomes hard to prise them apart. The result is the arrival of a different kind of 'truth' in literature, one that does not necessarily present itself as 'real' or 'not real', but is concerned instead with emotional resonance and an affective sense of authenticity.

For both writers and readers, the Gothic mode offers a distanced view of suicidal ideation and suicide bereavement. This allows for the exploration of troubling, and often personally distressing, themes and ideas from behind a safe veneer of fictionality.

Joe Howsin (He/Him) is a PhD researcher with Manchester Metropolitan University. His creative critical project, 'Gothic Autofiction and Suicidology: Autofiction and Gothic Suicide in 20th Century and Contemporary Literature', is being supervised by Dr Matt Foley and Andrew Michael Hurley. He can be reached via email at JOSEPH.HOWSIN@stu.mmu.ac.uk.

Scroll down for info about our final plenaries!

Early Afternoon Programme

2.15 – 3.45: Plenary 3: LT1 (G.37).

'Gothic and Horror Writers in Conversation': Readings and discussion from authors Michael Stewart (*Black Wood Women*, 2024) and Susan Barker (*Old Soul*, 2025). Followed by Q & A.

SUSAN BARKER is a British-Malaysian novelist and short story writer. Her first two novels were *Sayonara Bar* (2006) and *The Orientalist and the Ghost* (2009). Her third novel, *The Incarnations* (2014), was a New York Times Editors' Choice and Notable Book, a Kirkus Reviews' Top Ten Book of the Year and shortlisted for the Kirkus Prize for Fiction. An excerpt from her fourth novel, *Old Soul,* won a Northern Writers' Award for Fiction in 2020. Her short fiction has also appeared in the collection of horror stories, *Of The Flesh: 18 stories of modern horror* (2024). Susan currently lives in Manchester, where she is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

MICHAEL STEWART is a multi-award-winning novelist, short story writer, poet, and playwright. Born in Salford, he now lives in Bradford. He is the author of four novels, including *King Crow* (2011) and *Ill Will* (2018), two short story collections, *Mr Jolly* and *Four Letter Words*; two poetry collections: *Couples* and *The Dogs* and numerous plays for radio and theatre. He has also written a hybrid memoir: *Walking the Invisible: Following in the Brontës' Footsteps* (2021). His latest novel is *Black Wood Women* (2024).

He is also the creator of the Brontë Stones project, the Editor-in-Chief of Grist Books and the Director of the Brontë Writing Centre in Haworth. He has recently put together a programme for the Haworth Festival 2025, called **Haworth: Home of Gothic Literature**, including creative workshops, haunted walks and talks on Female Gothic. https://haworthfestival.org.uk/haworth-home-of-gothic-literature/

3.45 - 4.00: Manchester University Press Gothic Prize and Closing Statements, followed by author signings organised by Blackwells bookshop.

Conference Close