Graphic Gothic
Introduction
Julia Round

'Graphic Gothic' was the seventh International Graphic Novel and Comics Conference, held at Manchester Metropolitan University in June 2016.[1] The event brought together fifty scholars from all over the globe, who explored Gothic under themes such as setting, politics, adaptation, censorship, monstrosity, gender, and corporeality. This issue of *Studies in Comics* collects selected papers from the conference, alongside expanded versions of the talks given by three of our four keynote speakers: Hannah Berry, Toni Fejzula and Matt Green. It is complemented by a comics section that recalls the conference and reflects the potential of Gothic to inform and inspire as Paul Fisher Davies provides a sketchnoted diary of the event.

Defining the Gothic is a difficult task. Baldick and Mighall (2012: 273) note that much of the relevant scholarship to date has primarily applied 'the broadest kind of negation: the Gothic is cast as the opposite of Enlightenment reason, as it is the opposite of bourgeois literary realism.' Moers also suggests that the meaning of Gothic 'is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear' (1978: 90). Many Gothic scholars and writers have explored the nature of this fear: attempting to draw out and categorise the metaphorical meanings and affect it can create. H.P. Lovecraft (1927: 41) claims that 'The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind fear of the unknown' (Lovecraft 1927: 41) and that this is the basis for 'the weirdly horrible tale' as a literary form. Ann Radcliffe (1826: 5) famously separates terror and horror, and later writers and critics such as Devendra Varma (1957), Robert Hume (1969), Stephen King (1981), Gina Wisker and Dale Townshend continue to explore this divide.

Definitions of Gothic, horror and terror all refer primarily to a fearful reaction, but to analyse literature without surveying reader response requires textual criteria. Heiland (2004) argues that we can seek out the textual presence of fear in the scenarios or characters offered. Other critics have also pursued more objective definitions based on particular markers or scenarios. Punter (1980: 1) argues that Gothic contains 'an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters, and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense'. Hogle (2002) proposes a 'gothic matrix' made up of four criteria: an antiquated space, a hidden secret, a physical or psychological haunting, and an oscillation between reality and the supernatural.

Reducing Gothic to a set of textual elements is required by most analytic approaches, but can feel somewhat reductive. Other critics have pointed out that Gothic tropes can appear in many different genres and that Gothic has effectively been commodified by its mobility. Hume (1969) argues that the

---

[1] Additional papers from the conference are collected in the recently published *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 8(6) (November 2017).

popularity of early gothic meant that its "trappings" were quickly adopted by other genres. Botting (2007) argues that today Gothic is a brand, as does Byron (2012: 72), claiming that things are "gothicked up" through the application of superficial symbols. Spooner (2007) also discusses the commodification of the grotesque, arguing that Gothic has never been more than a series of reinventions and revisitations of previously existing tropes and themes.

Gothic's mobilisation of weighty themes such as the sublime, the grotesque, the abject and the uncanny mean that definitions and typologies often feel insufficient and reductive. Many scholars in fact define Gothic as something more than a literary genre: a mode or 'ur-form' (Punter 2013a), or rhetoric (Mighall 1999), or poetics (Williams 1995). Exploring the resonance between Gothic and comics has been the basis of my own work since my PhD, and I've found it a fascinating project from multiple angles. There is rich material to be found in horror comics, of course, not to mention other prominent genres such as the superhero (whose divided identities, doubled antagonists and monstrous bodies invite such a reading), alongside more subtle Gothic themes of Others, authenticity and identity in genres such as autobiographix, graphic medicine and comics journalism. Comics' formal qualities (their depiction of time and space, their reliance on an active reader and their stylised, excessive art) also seem well suited to Gothic's treatment of time (fluid, non-linear, haunted) and its aesthetics (excessive, grotesque, dramatic). The cultures that surround Gothic and comics also share many qualities: resting on a tension between group/individual that is sustained by the industries and commodities themselves.

At the widest level, and while trying to avoid emotional determinants such as fear, awe, wonder and so forth, what holds all of Gothic's traits in common? I suspect that creating my own definition might be a lifelong project. However my current thinking leads me tentatively to suggest that an effective model might be based on abstract themes that take on different concrete forms. This flexibility would accommodate Gothic's paradoxical elements and internal contradictions, such as its simultaneous drive towards conservatism and subversion. For example, a trinity of disturbance, defilement and distortion could be identified in a number of ways. These elements could exist in the content of a text (for example as the supernatural disturbs the present; morals or absolutes are defiled; and reality or truth is distorted). They could also take on linguistic or structural form (such as interwoven narratives which problematize and disturb each other; shocking imagery of defilement; or the tendency of metaphor and language to become distorted or uncertain). They have a subjective (reader response) application too, for example as feelings that might arise from the reading experience or be seen in its scenarios or the responses of its characters.

The papers brought together in this issue of *Studies in Comics* explore Gothic from a number of different angles that cohere under these themes. They discuss fictional worlds and monstrous bodies as distorted versions of our own, where expectations and ethics are defiled, and the borders (of the body, of reality) are disturbed. In our first article, "'A vastly different version of

terrestrial history": Magic, politics and literary criticism in Alan Moore and Jacen Burrow's *Providence'*, Matt Green outlines a revised approach to Alan Moore's comics work. Green's discussion focuses on *Providence,* which reworks Lovecraft's history, biography and myth and thus reframes Moore's earlier works in this area. The article argues that Moore's explorations of the borderland state between real and fictional worlds originate in the awareness that our intellectual culture is fundamentally bound together with the world of material relations. Through a consideration of areas such as metatextuality, adaptation, Marxism, magic, and reflection on *Providence* as a comment on existing scholarship, Green demonstrates that the strength of genres like horror and science fiction resides in their ability to offer us dramatically different vistas through which to contemplate our own world.

The following two articles explore the intersection of ethics and monstrosity. We are delighted to present Dragoș Manea's article 'Western Nightmares: *Manifest Destiny* and the Representation of Genocide in Weird Fiction', winner of the inaugural Sabin Award for Comics Scholarship. This piece approaches the comic as a piece of weird fiction, focusing on the way in which it juxtaposes genocide with fantastical creatures, strange habitats and superhuman acts of heroism. Manea explores the way in which these genre markers are used to outline the killers' awareness of the moral ambiguity of their actions, and to encourage readers' identification with genocide perpetrators. Building on scholarship from Ian Dawe, Darja Malcolm-Clarke, Simon Spiegel, and Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, the article explores formal narrative strategies and reflects on their ethical implications.

In '"I pledge *you!"*: Disability, Monstrosity, and Sacrifice in *Wytches*', Aidan Diamond examines the depiction of the freaked body, arguing that this comic reinscribes it as both heroic and wondrous. She draws attention the ways in which Scott Snyder and Jock invert the traditional equation of horror with madness and monstrosity, situating her analysis against a critical summary taken from the work of Michel Foucault and Rosemary Garland Thomson. The article thus emphasizes the inversion that is characteristic of the Gothic and argues against the longstanding social equation of difference as inherently evil.

Bodies are also the subject of our fourth article: 'Beware the Living Dead: The Corpo-Reality of Comics'. Tina Helbig explores the haptic elements of comics, arguing that our sense of touch enhances the uncanny and abject during the reading experience. Her argument draws on neuroscientific research on the processing of visual stimuli and the critical work of W.J.T. Mitchell and Julia Kristeva to interrogate the border between pictures and our own corporeality and the possibility of its transcendence. Our final article, from Alex Fitch, then moves to consider a different kind of physicality by exploring 'Gotham City and the Gothic Literary and Architectural Traditions'. Fitch traces the evolution of the city's landscape in its various cinematic and comics incarnations, demonstrating how these have drawn on each other, and arguing that Gothic elements frequently shape its form.

The interviews in this issue come from two creators who have worked closely in the Gothic mode and whose writing and art conveys many of its themes. Hannah Berry speaks to Alex Fitch about her comics *Adamtine* and *Livestock*, the creation of psychological horror, and the strengths of the comics medium. Toni Fejzula then talks to Julia Round about his path into comics, his artistic techniques, and his work on titles such as *Veil*. Our reviews section covers two recent books that demonstrate the strengths of the comics medium and interrogate its changing cultural value. Esther Szép reviews Nick Sousanis' *Unflattening* (2015), drawing on notions of embodiment (itself a very Gothic idea) to explore the book's contribution to contemporary comics studies via both its form and the questions it raises. Daniel Marrone explores Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo's *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time* (2016), drawing attention to the way in which this book's provocations expose the hidden structures and ambiguities of the comics canon. Finally, we close this issue with Paul Fisher Davies' sketchnotes from the Graphic Gothic conference, which offer a snapshot of the event as well as a demonstration of the power of this type of graphic recording.

I have argued in previous work that 'Horror and comics are old friends' (Round 2014: 11). It brings us great pleasure to share this work from new friends that continues to explore this junction. Gothic is a fascinating tool for critical analysis: simultaneously presenting and uncovering that which is buried, encrypted and hidden. We hope this edition of *Studies in Comics* brings shocks and solutions alike.

References

Baldick, Chris and Mighall, Robert. 2012. Gothic Criticism. *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter. Oxford: Blackwell.

Botting. 2007. Gothic Culture. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic.* Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, eds. London: Routledge. 19-36.

Byron, Glennis. 2012. Gothic, Grabbit and Run: Carlos Ruiz Zafón and the Gothic Marketplace. *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Pop Goth*. Justin D. Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, eds. 71-83.

Heiland, Donna. 2004. *Gothic and Gender.* Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Hogle, Jerrold E. 2002. Introduction: the Gothic in Western Culture. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hume, Robert. 1969. Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel. *PMLA* 84.2. 282-90.

King, Stephen. 1981. *Danse Macabre.* New York: Berkeley Publishing.

Lovecraft, HP. 1927. Supernatural Horror in Literature. *The H.P. Lovecraft Archive.* http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx. Accessed 3 March 2017.

Mighall, Robert. 1999. *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moers, Ellen. 1978 [1976]. *Literary Women: The Great Writers.* London: The Women's Press.

Punter, David. 1980. *The Literature of Terror.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Punter, David. 2013. Theory. *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic.* Hughes, William, David Punter, Andrew Smith, eds. Oxford: Blackwell.

Radcliffe, Ann. 1826. On the Supernatural in Poetry. *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal,* 16(1), 145-152. http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/radcliffe1.html. Accessed 16 October 2016.

Round, Julia. 2014. *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels: A Critical Approach.* Jefferson, CA: McFarland.

Spooner, Catherine. 2007. *Contemporary Gothic.* London: Reaktion Books.

Townshend, Dale. 2016. Gothic and the Cultural Sources of Horror, 1740-1820. In *Horror: A Literary History.* Reyes, Xavier Aldana, ed. London: The British Library. 19-52.

Williams, Anne. 1995. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wisker, Gina. 2005. *Horror Fiction An Introduction.* London: Continuum.

Varma, Devendra P. 1957. *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England.* London: Arthur Baker.

Huge graphics overhaul for Gothic 2 including new textures and meshes for trees, flora, rocks, new graphics for water + more. Manual download. Preview file contents. VORTEX. The powerful open-source mod manager from Nexus Mods. Learn more. Nexus Mods. Get commercial use gothic graphics and vector designs. Download high quality gothic images in AI, SVG, PNG, JPG and PSD.Â 44 gothic graphics and designs gothic 44. Get commercial use gothic graphics and vector designs. Download high quality gothic images in AI, SVG, PNG, JPG and PSD. All Vectors44 PSD0 PNG/SVG0 Logos2 icons0 Editable0. Premium vectors by iStock. Promocode VEXELS15 and get 15% off. Graphics to Download. Print ready. American Gothic Cat T-shirt Design. AI Format. PREMIUM. Download All 26 â€œgothicâ€ graphics unlimited times with a single Envato Elements subscription. All from independent designers.Â All items Stock Video Video Templates Music Sound Effects Graphic Templates Graphics Presentation Templates Photos Fonts Add-ons Web Templates CMS Templates WordPress 3D. Graphics. Search Items. All Items.