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AETERNUM

The Journal Of Contemporary Gothic Studies

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EDITORIAL

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Avid readers of *Aeternum* may have noted that there was no 9.2 (December 2022) issue of the Journal published, nor is there are issue number attached to this current volume. As we reach the landmark tenth volume of the Journal this year, the Editors have made the decision to proceed with annual publication. *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies* will now be published as a single volume each August. The Journal continues to welcome article and review submissions on a rolling basis throughout the year and remains an exclusively online, open access publication.

In this volume, we bring together a collection of thought-provoking articles by scholars from across Australia and overseas, who each seek to shed light on various aspects of the enduring Gothic form, examining its impact and significance in contemporary popular culture. The authors herein seek to expand understandings of the gothic and horror in popular culture, by exploring their multifaceted connections to contemporary issues and human experiences across the globe.

In the opening article, Jennifer Loring's "Uncanny, Monstrous, and Sublime: ecoGothic Transformations in Horror Video Games" takes us on a journey through the realm of ecoHorror video games. Through a feminist ecoGothic lens, Loring explores the portrayal of female monsters in the games *Blair Witch* and *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard/Resident Evil Village*, investigating how anxieties surrounding both gender and ecology intersect. The article examines the intriguing intersections between gender anxieties and ecological concerns within these video game narratives, offering a fresh perspective of how monstrous-feminine characters challenge the boundaries between humanity and nature.

Coralie Jarvis Sanderson's contribution, "A Murder of *Corbeaux*: The EcoNoir Detective and the Gothic in *Black Spot*", examines a Nordic noir series that explores ecological concerns by invoking Gothic themes and tropes. Sanderson delves into

how this EcoNoir crime drama intertwines environmental themes with Gothic and Southern Gothic elements to mediate the collective eco-anxiety of our contemporary time. The article explores contemporary concerns of environmental and socio-political degeneration, through the lens of crime fiction genre and the Gothic mode, in the context of the 2017 French-Belgian television series *Black Spot*.

The third article of the volume, Ruth Barratt-Peacock's "An Uncanny Clair de lune: Interrogating the Role of Piano Music in Rendering the Gothic On-screen" draws our attention to the haunting connections between Claude Debussy's piano music and the Gothic in the films *Tokyo Sonata* (2008), *All About Lily Chou-Chou* (2001), and the K-drama *Move to Heaven* (2021). Barratt-Peacock unravels the Gothic undercurrents created by the contrasting inner world of the protagonists and their external interactions, examining how through the masterful use of classical piano music, these texts evoke a fundamentally Gothic portrayal of the modern condition, revealing the profound interplay between self and the surrounding world.

Jenny Wise and Lesley Mclean's article, "Crime Experiences at Dark or 'Gothic' Tourism Sites: Edutainment and Storytelling at the Melbourne Watch House (Australia)," explores the realm of Australian Gothic tourism. Focusing on the Melbourne Watch House, the authors explore how interactive storytelling techniques and immersive participatory theatre experiences create a captivating yet unsettling edu-tainment for tourists. This article explores the intricate balance such 'dark tourism' sites pose, of providing entertainment while addressing dark historical events, and raises the question of those silenced by the storytelling process and the potential reinforcement of political narratives around effective law enforcement.

The final article, Emma L. Baird's "Just a Phase? The Enduring Socio-Aesthetic Networks of Goth Identity", presents findings from a comprehensive study on the enduring phenomenon of international Goth identity. Baird's research offers insights into the interconnectedness of Goth communities, both online and in-person, and how socio-aesthetic networks play a fundamental role in shaping and maintaining this culture. By analysing data from long-term Goths across different regions, this article sheds light on how the gothic aesthetic endures and evolves through a global network of cultural experiences.

The volume is brought to its close by two monograph reviews and a television review. Sam Mayne reviews the recently published study, *Middle Eastern Gothics: Literature, Spectral Modernities and the Restless Past*, by Karen Greenburg (2022). Mayne adeptly reviews the ways in which Greenburg's book investigates how the Middle East is complexly situated in frisson with external and global Gothics in literature. Stephanie Farnsworth reviews Ellen Greenham's 2022 monograph, *After Engulfment: Cosmicism and Neocosmicism in H.P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick, Robert A. Heinlein, and Frank Herbert*, a broad and detailed study of what

Greenham defines as, neocosmicism and its presence in the writings of four popular science fiction authors. Lastly, Antonio Sanna's review essay of the recent Netflix series *Wednesday*, brings our volume to a close. Based on the character Wednesday Addams by Charles Addams, the series created by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, directed and produced by Tim Burton, stars Jenna Ortega in the titular teen goth role.

We express our gratitude to our authors for choosing *Aeternum* as the medium through which to share their valuable contributions and extend heartfelt thanks to our community of peer reviewers for their generosity with their time and insights. We hope you all will continue to support *Aeternum*; to write, review, and read this international voluntary undertaking, so we can continue to look forward to bringing you another ten volumes of leading scholarship in this fascinatingly frightening field.

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“Uncanny, Monstrous, and Sublime” ecoGothic Transformations in Horror Video Games

ABSTRACT

Ecohorror video games, analysed through a feminist ecoGothic lens, offer a critical opportunity for scholars to examine the impact of the environmental crisis in popular culture as well as the reasons why this “villainous” nature is still so frequently depicted as female. Like the nature they inhabit and/or represent, the monstrous-feminine characters in ecohorror video games cannot be controlled. Female monsters that have become hybridized in some way with nature – whether through flora, fauna, fungi, or by contagion which they then spread to others – are central to the ecohorror narrative. Using the games Blair Witch and Resident Evil VII: Biohazard/Resident Evil Village, I investigate how anxieties surrounding both gender and ecology intersect, seeking the ways in which these female characters’ transgression of categories interrogate the artificial dichotomy between humanity and nature. I argue that despite storylines seemingly embedded in ecophobia, it is possible to analyse ecohorror video games as narratives empowering both monstrous-feminine characters and the ecology that spawns them by using a feminist ecoGothic lens.

Keywords: ecoGothic, ecohorror, video games, *Resident Evil*, *Blair Witch*.

Simon Estok (2021) succinctly explains ecohorror as a subset of horror in which nature is the villain. It is thus rooted in ecophobia, a term Estok is credited with coining to explain the fear of nature's agency (83). He writes that ecophobia derives in large part "from modernity's irrational fear of nature and hence has created an antagonism between humans and their environment" (Estok 2018, 1). This antagonism can encompass everything from landscapes and animals to natural disasters and even bodily processes and products (1) – especially those of women. Yet an ecocritical lens, which investigates environmental concerns and the way texts intersect with culture and the physical environment, has rarely been applied to horror narratives and even less frequently to horror video games.

As the Anthropocene (a contested term, as Chloé Germaine notes) climate crisis continues to grow, however, more and more games contain ecohorror storylines that reflect the terror of an environment out of control, one that seeks revenge on humanity for the devastation it has caused due to "Western culture's long-held desire to alter, change and even destroy those aspects of our environments that (seem to) threaten us" (Hillard 2013, 105). A parallel emerges in the hegemonic, patriarchal cultures of the West: the desire to dominate, subjugate, and even destroy the feminine, with which nature is so strongly associated. Greta Gaard writes:

the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind. One task of ecofeminists [who analyze the relationships between humans and the natural environment through concepts of gender] has been to expose...the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth. (Gaard 1993, loc. 29)

Popular media has always possessed the potential to interrupt the dominant discourse, and scholars such as Germaine see horror games as a means of dealing with living in the kind of world climate change has necessitated, highlighting our interconnectedness with all living things (Germaine 2021, 132).

While definitions of both "ecocriticism" and "Anthropocene" continue to be contested, the Gothic is widely considered a modality defined by the past returning to haunt the present, or the uncovering of buried secrets, both signalling what Freud (1919) termed "the return of the repressed" (17). The Gothic evokes "feelings of being trapped or claustrophobia...leading to a 'sickening descent into disintegration' (of the mind, the body, or both)" (Germaine 2021, 131). The *ecoGothic*, then, is a critical lens through which we might examine our relationships with the more-than-human world as they pertain to our fear *for* and *of* that world (Dang 2022, 117). In the *ecoGothic*, the past that returns to haunt us is rooted in our violence against the

natural environment. This lens provides “the tools to explore the monstrous, sublime, spectral, and uncanny constructions of Nature – and, importantly, the significance of this” (Poland qtd in Dang 2022, 117). Ecohorror, on the other hand, is a genre focused on nature’s revenge against humanity. Tom J. Hillard overtly links the ecoGothic to material feminism by citing Stacy Alaimo, who imagines a corporeality in which human and the more-than-human world are always entwined, illustrating the extent to which the human is entangled with nature (Hillard 2019, 29). Moreover, Alaimo (2010) argues that these “sites of interconnection demand attention to the materiality of the human and to the immediacy and potency of all that the ostensibly bounded, human subject would like to disavow” (4). The human, in other words, does not want to be reminded of its inextricable connection to the natural world, but this is an inescapable fact of our porous Gothic bodies. Hillard thus observes a “decidedly Gothic” strand in material ecocriticism.

Ecohorror, analysed through a feminist ecoGothic lens, offer a critical opportunity for scholars to examine the impact of the environmental crisis in popular culture as well as the reasons why this “villainous” nature is still so frequently depicted as female. Like the nature they inhabit and/or represent, the monstrous-feminine characters in ecohorror games cannot be controlled. Female monsters that have become hybridized in some way with nature – whether through flora, fauna, fungi, or by contagion which they then spread to others – are central to the ecohorror narrative, the latter two examples particularly common in horror video games, such as the *Resident Evil* series (1996-present) or *Vampyr* (2018). Pinder writes, “[t]he ecoGothic... permeates survival horror spaces and has the potential to empower” the monstrous women who “represent the perceived degradation of the human form and delegitimation of man's dominion over nature” (Pinder 2021, para. 2). In other words, female characters who have merged with the more-than-human environment challenge human specificity and identity. Rather than remain separate from nature, they have become part of it, thus redefining “human” and our relationship to the environment. I will investigate how anxieties surrounding both gender and ecology intersect, seeking the ways in which these female characters’ transgression of categories interrogate the artificial dichotomy between humanity and nature. While these narratives may appear to reconstitute a phallogocentric social order entrenched in ecophobia, reading them through a feminist ecoGothic lens allows a radical reimagining of their monstrous-feminine characters, and nature itself, as agentic beings willing to challenge destructive male impulses. It is this challenge that empowers both women and nature by redefining both.

The Interplay of Materialism and Psychoanalysis

The scholarship on ecocritical readings of horror video games is sparse at best. As those working within ecocritical film theory have noted, little research has been devoted to the horror genre despite numerous films dealing with the specific anxieties of ecohorror and the ecoGothic, which include: “transformation, mutation,

and contagion” (Aldana Reyes 2014, 54). Even less has been dedicated specifically to video games, though in America they gross more annually than film and music combined--\$56.6 billion in 2022 (Electronic Software Corporation 2023), compared to \$6 billion (Yahoo 2023) and \$26.2 billion (Zippia 2023) respectively. These thematic concerns are prevalent in horror games as well and lay at the heart of three recent games – *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard* (2017) and *Resident Evil Village* (2021), which I will consider as one text given their shared main character and storyline, and *Blair Witch* (2019). Many studies of horror video games take a psychoanalytic approach based on Kristeva’s concept of abjection, which is understandable given that the experience of horror is a largely psychological phenomenon. However, corporeality plays as intrinsic a role in this experience, thus making an explicit connection to the Gothic and to material feminism. Alaimo and Heckman (2008) argue in their introduction that our physical reality “is often posited as a realm entirely separate from that of language, discourse, and culture”; thus, “in practice...feminist theory and cultural studies have focused almost entirely on the textual, linguistic, and discursive” (3). Kristeva’s theory of abjection is situated firmly within Lacanian linguistic and psychoanalytic theories of development rather than in the material. However, because both nature and women’s bodies are constructed as abject by patriarchal societies, a Kristevian interpretation can reveal equally troubling anxieties about women and nature in tandem with, rather than opposed to, a materialist analysis of these texts. In this sense, an integrated approach that understands “the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world – ways that account for myriad ‘intra-actions’ (in Karen Barad’s terms) between phenomena that are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological” (ibid, 5) is ideal.

Those explorations of ecohorror in video games that do exist emphasize the materiality of the female, which opens a space for feminist ecoGothic interpretations and argues against problematic representations of female bodies. These bodies, because of their fluctuability and processes that have no analogue in male bodies, were and are coded as Gothic and pathologized. In video games, this comes as little surprise given that most developers are male, according to a seven-year study by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) that claims 61% of the video game industry is male (GameMaker 2022). As a result, “the male subject... will attempt to keep this fact [of his own liminality, his own abhumanness, his own bodily fluctuability] at bay by insisting that only the female body is chaotic and abominable, never his own” (Hurley 1996, 123-124). It is this anxiety that *Resident Evil 7*, *Resident Evil Village*, and *Blair Witch* all exploit, for in the former two games, protagonist Ethan is infected with and eventually transformed/killed by the mould most closely associated with the female antagonists. In the latter game, the player can achieve the “bad” ending in which protagonist Ellis becomes the new servant of the Blair Witch and part of the woods she inhabits and controls.

Rather than re-establish the negative associations between “woman” and “nature” in Western culture, ecofeminist readings of these games permit an understanding of nature as agentic in its own right. Further, in deploying American Gothic conventions “to both empower and destroy the traumatised, monstrous victim,” ecohorror video games use a “process of corruption coupled with immersion and isolation in the wilderness” that “hybridizes the body, manifesting as the decay and the mutation of the human into uncanny manifestations of non-human biology” (Pinder 2022, para. 1). As mentioned previously, this hybridity reveals a fictitious separation between humanity and ecology. Material feminism also seeks to expose this false dichotomy, as well as the essentialism that binds women to nature – what Mary Mellor describes as a social construct (Mellor 2000, 110). However, this does not mean that ecofeminism should distance itself from nature, for that merely reinforces existing patriarchal structures by abjecting nature the same way the male hegemony has done for centuries. In analysing the monstrous-feminine characters in horror games, materialism provides a means of empowerment rather than a traditional feminist reading that positions them, and nature, as victims of phallogentric, heterosexist domination. “Women are not closer to nature because of some elemental physiological or spiritual affinity,” Mellor writes, “but because of the social circumstances in which they find themselves, that is, their material conditions in relation to the materiality of human existence” (ibid, 114). It is these social circumstances and material conditions against which the monstrous-feminine and the places they inhabit fight back. These “monsters” are haunted by the ruin the abject male – “the traitor, the liar...the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior” (Kristeva 1982, 4), all of whom have at one time or another been presented as “heroes” in video games--represents. As such, the monstrous-feminine are better able to develop relationships with what Germaine describes as the ecological others of the natural world (Germaine 2021, 133), since they are themselves Other as well.

Even so, “place,” that is, environment, is typically conceived as feminine and even as a body itself, whether it is a home, a castle, or the forest; in all three games, “place” is the site of secrets and past wrongdoings (usually against women and/or the environment) that threaten the patriarchal order established by the male player-characters. In both cases, the abject figure of the witch – the “implacable enemy of the symbolic order” (Creed 1993, 76) – arises, as the primary antagonist in *Blair Witch* and in a more abstract form in the *Resident Evil* games, as the “mad” scientist Miranda. Both *Resident Evil* games take place in homes located in remote wildernesses, including the castle of a female vampiric entity; *Blair Witch* is set deep in the woods but climaxes in the haunted house at its heart. I will now look at each game individually to examine how the female antagonists both exemplify the ecoGothic and empower monstrous-feminine characters despite the ecophobia at the core of these narratives.

***Blair Witch* (2019)**

Based on the 1999 film *The Blair Witch Project*, the game takes place two years after the original film and features the character Ellis as he searches for a missing boy in The Black Hills Forest. Dwelling in the forest, one she is capable of manipulating, the Blair Witch embodies the ecoGothic. Ellis, meanwhile, is a veteran of the Iraq War and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which makes him an ideal conduit for the witch's rage. As Ellis conducts his search through the increasingly labyrinthine woods, the Blair Witch preys upon his post-traumatic stress from the war, as well as his guilt for accidentally shooting a teenager while on duty as a police officer and the dissolution of his romantic relationship. The Blair Witch thus "uses the...site of her own trauma...to break Ellis down, and due to the multilinear nature of the story and the agency afforded the player, there is a very real chance she will succeed" (ibid). We can read Ellis' journey through a similar ecocritical lens as the characters in the original film, as described by Hillard (2013) in his work on American Gothic nature: "the inability...to navigate the woods; the failure of modern technology to provide relief or escape; and the deep uncertainty of not knowing what is lurking 'out there', just out of sight" (105). With only his dog, Bullet, for company, Ellis loses his way almost immediately. One by one, his phone, two-way radio, and flashlight fail. A series of increasingly bizarre occurrences, including the ability of the forest to change shape, suggest that he is in another dimension altogether.

The past wrongdoing that defines the narrative as ecoGothic is the death of Elly Kedward, who was ejected from the Puritan town of Blair due to suspicions of witchcraft and who allegedly died of exposure in The Black Hills Forest in the middle of winter. Thus, the Blair Witch was born, "integrated with the forest and seeking continued vengeance on those who stumble into her densely wooded labyrinth" (Pinder 2022). The role of Puritanism in the lore of the *Blair Witch* franchise cannot be understated. Hillard (2013) writes of the Puritans that:

The 'hideous and desolate wilderness'...is just an early version of what becomes the dark dungeon or haunted castle in later Gothic fictions – that fearful space inhabited by threatening characters, creatures or ideas and marked by deep-seated secrets or past transgressions that threaten the status quo. (ibid, 115)

What we see in many ecohorror narratives is a return to the woods of early Gothic fiction, for in America this is the site of what Hillard calls the "primal crime" (ibid, 111), the place where Native Americans were slaughtered and tales of women cavorting with Satan took root. We also see a return of Puritan attitudes toward both women and the environment in the wider culture, and perhaps games like *Blair Witch* are, as monsters themselves, a warning.

That Ellis' name so closely resembles "Elly" may be a coincidence, or it may point to his destiny; he is a descendant of those Puritans who left Elly to die – but he is also a traumatised being, and this may be why the Blair Witch does not kill him. Only by embracing the "feminine" and his new role as her/the forest's servant can he resolve his guilt for his role in enacting patriarchal, colonialist narratives that resulted in the deaths of children (shooting an unarmed teenager, accidentally killing an Iraqi girl during the war). The "bad" ending, curiously labelled by review sites and social media, is the only fitting ending for Ellis, as it forces him to come to terms with the legacy of masculinist violence – the game's true monster – by returning him to the site of the "primal crime."

Resident Evil VII: Biohazard (2017) and Resident Evil Village (2021)

The entire *Resident Evil* series, which began in 1996, is predicated on the ecohorror of contagion that results when humans meddle with nature – in this case, to create bioweapons. The experimental T-virus used in these early tests escapes the lab and infects nearby Raccoon City, from which a zombie plague ensues. An experimental thermobaric missile destroys the city at the end of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. Over the course of the series, both the viruses and their outbreaks have evolved, along with the games becoming more action- and less horror-oriented, until 2017's *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard* returned to the survival horror mode that made the series famous. The game focuses on the Baker family, who live on an isolated former plantation on the Louisiana bayou. Unfortunately for the Bakers, a crashed ship brings them in contact with a young girl, Eveline, an "engineered bioweapon" "cloned from human and fungus DNA, but still desperately desiring the affection of a family" (Pinder 2022, para. 7). As a result, she infects the Bakers with fungal spores that grow on their brains and mutate them. Eveline is also responsible for the fungus Ethan encounters throughout the Baker home and in the form of the Moulded, humanoid creatures made of a slimy black mould Eveline vomits. In this sense, as McGreevy, et al. explain, the house itself becomes an infected body (McGreevy, et al. 2020, 258) and a reflection of those living in it.

Slime has been explicitly linked with the feminine, though all bodies produce it, as Hurley notes: "Nothing...can...illustrate the Thing-ness of the human body so well as its sliminess, or propensity to become-slime. Slimy substances – excreta, sexual fluids, saliva, mucus – seep from the borders of the body, calling attention to the body's gross materiality" (Hurley 1996, 34). Because slime represents the abhumanness that men fear, it must be assigned to the feminine. Like the female body, slime "is a dangerous transcorporeal matter that threatens the very boundaries that it traverses" (Estok 2021, 86); "[i]t is beyond possession or control...a reality enmeshed not only with a fear of nature but with a fear of women, women's bodies, and female sexuality" (ibid, 87). Slime, like the toxic mould, queers the body, and these queer, toxic bodies populate the ecohorror narratives of recent video games. As in the real world, these fictional toxic bodies are:

produced and reproduced, simultaneously, by science, industrialized culture, agribusiness, capitalist consumerism, and other forces. Toxic bodies are certainly not essentialist, since they are volatile, emergent, and continually evolving, in and of ‘themselves’.... [T]heir borders are exceedingly leaky... (Alaimo 2008, 262).

McGreevy, et al. associate the mould in *Resident Evil VII* with its misogynistic connotations in America and England, but I cannot agree with their contention. As Tanya Krzywinska (2013) has observed, not all games that employ tropes of the American Gothic are made by Americans but are instead interpreted through various “intertextual and intercultural reflections and refractions” (208); she notes that European and Japanese developers are more likely to use the American Gothic than Americans themselves (ibid, 223). CAPCOM is a Japanese company; the likelihood that the game’s writers/developers were aware of the connection between ergot and the Salem witch trials, which the authors curiously stress, is remote. It is more likely CAPCOM drew upon the less specific implications of slime previously mentioned, particularly since it cannot be controlled; thus:

it should not be surprising that fears about slime are entangled with sexism and misogyny – each, to differing degrees, obsessed with power and control. Indeed, myxophobia (fear of slime) is deeply enmeshed with the fear of women’s bodies and sexuality and with fantasies of violence. (Estok 2020, 31)

This myxophobia is deeply embedded in the fear of the abject, as it does not respect borders or rules. It is, to use Kristeva’s words, “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (1982, 4). What makes *Biohazard* so interesting is that while the fear of women’s bodies is all too evident in the game, these “fantasies of violence” are perpetuated upon a male character mainly by female characters.

I am also suspicious of McGreevy, et al.’s claim that the character Eveline, as the game’s primary menace, represents “the threat of the infectious girl, who overwhelms the family and destroys them from within” and “perpetuates the erasure of women” (McGreevy, et al. 2020, 272), an interpretation that serves only to further victimize her. While they insist that the female characters in the game are “powerless to act,” (ibid, 271), Eveline and Marguerite are, much as an immune response does, constantly reproducing and attacking to defend themselves against Ethan’s intrusion into a female-coded space, the home, where they are indeed a threat to the patriarchal order he represents as a husband and father seeking to regain control over his wife (and later, his daughter). Furthermore, both the mould and the T-virus were created by a female scientist, “Mother Miranda” of the subsequent game. This illustrates how an ecofeminist analysis can empower characters rather than confining them to patriarchal narratives of passive victimization. Eveline also allows Marguerite to transcend her role of submissive

wife and mother to fearsome, violent defender of her home. Ethan may be relentlessly pursued Nemesis-style by Jack Baker throughout the game, but Marguerite is *Resident Evil VII*'s most memorable and terrifying opponent.

Ethan Winters returns in the direct sequel, *Resident Evil Village*, once again facing women and girls contaminated by the parasitic fungus. The primary antagonist, Mother Miranda, has spent a century experimenting with the mould on test subjects in a quest to recreate her dead daughter, Eva, who died from the Spanish flu, and in the process provided the technology necessary for the Umbrella Corporation's founder to create the T-virus. These host bodies, who are the game's first four bosses, and the asexual reproduction they represent position Miranda as a transgressor of boundaries – not to mention that she was a successful woman in a male-dominated field. Ethan must kill each of the “children” to progress, thus completing “the patriarchal narrative of the dangers of unnatural reproduction and matriarchal power structures” (Pinder 2021, para. 13), but this is precisely what Miranda wants him to do to complete the ritual in which his infant daughter will become Eva's new vessel.

In a reversal of the typical narrative in which a male player-character defeats the monstrous-feminine, most often with a phallic weapon, Miranda penetrates Ethan by tearing his heart out. Here, she becomes what Creed calls the “femme castratrice,” as Lady Dimitrescu does when she cuts off Ethan's hand early in the game. Both assaults to Ethan's body represent a figurative castration, similar to what Creed describes regarding male slashers in horror film: “the litany of horrific deeds enacted on [his] body reads like a passage from an ancient myth or legend about the fate of the wandering hero who was foolish enough to arouse the anger of the female monster” (Creed 1993, 126). This is precisely what Ethan has done; however, the mould has queered his body. By the time he can kill Miranda, a dying Ethan has mutated and essentially become one of her children. Ethan, as it turns out, was originally killed by Jack Baker in their first encounter; the regenerative power of Eva's mould revived him, which again throws both her and the mould's “monstrosity” into question, since without them Ethan would not have been able to pursue his wife, Mia, and their daughter, Rose – both of whom survive – to Miranda's village.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that despite storylines seemingly embedded in ecophobia, it is possible to analyse ecohorror video games as narratives empowering both monstrous-feminine characters and the ecology that spawns them by using a feminist ecoGothic lens. Intentionally or not, these games are often instilled with messages regarding the masculinist violence perpetrated on both the female characters and the environment and can therefore be interpreted as ecofeminist texts. When the interconnectedness between the human subject and the environment is

disavowed, nature responds by forcing the subject to acknowledge generations of human-caused trauma, as with Ellis in *Blair Witch* and Eveline and the Bakers in *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard*, or by revealing how toxic and “leaky” the boundaries of the human body are by hybridising and thus empowering that which is most often victimised by masculinist culture – women and nature – thereby disrupting human specificity and dominance.

Many video game scholars privilege the interpretation of monstrous-feminine characters’ deaths as punishment for transgressing social and biological boundaries, when we should also celebrate the fact that such powerful feminine characters exist at all. I have attempted to reclaim these monstrous-feminine characters as figures of rebellion, “liberating and transformative” (Creed 2022, 4), strong *because* they are monstrous rather than the reverse. More scholarly attention needs to be directed at the link between feminism, the ecoGothic, and ecohorror especially in video games, given that these narratives are proliferating in the face of environmental crisis. It is especially important to examine the connections these games make between the environment and the female body, and to resist “easy” interpretations of monstrous-feminine characters as non-agentive victims of patriarchal hegemony.

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A Murder of *Corbeaux*: The EcoNoir Detective and the Gothic in *Black Spot*

ABSTRACT

With concerns of environmental and socio-political degeneration swirling in the millennial zeitgeist, both the crime fiction genre and the Gothic mode are resurgent as products of the cultural imagination. The 2017 French-Belgian television series Black Spot (Zone Blanche) conflates the two forms. Underpinning its detective crime drama with a theme of environmental vandalism, Black Spot joins an emerging coterie of Nordic noir derivatives which express ecological concerns by invoking folkloric, supernatural, and Gothic themes and tropes. Collectively, these television crime dramas form a discrete mode of transnational cultural expression which I call EcoNoir. Black Spot employs the Gothic and Southern Gothic modes to reflect and mediate the eco-anxiety that currently afflicts a collective human psyche that is ineluctably entangled in an unfolding existential crisis. Black Spot's fictional logging town of Villefranche is an isolated, uncanny twilight zone somewhere in France, with a murder rate six times the national average. It is surrounded by a Gothic forest, where illegally buried toxic waste is polluting the wetlands. In her attempt to restore order, the detective (and eco-heroine by default) must not only confront the (human and non-human) monsters that dwell in the depths of the forest, but also the trauma that dwells in the depths of her own psyche. A focus on the EcoNoir detective illustrates how, in the new millennium, the vicarious alleviation of uncertainty through fictional representation is impeded by ambiguity.

Keywords: Gothic, Southern Gothic, crime drama, EcoNoir, eco-anxiety

Since their inception, detective crime fiction and the Gothic mode have never been too far apart. They might be described as two parallel streams of cultural expression that originated at the same headwaters of European Romanticism around two centuries ago. Both have flourished and developed as separate forms, but they occasionally converge, particularly at times of uncertainty. With anxieties around environmental and socio-political degeneration swirling in the millennial zeitgeist, the rational fictional detective and the irrational Gothic mode are both resurgent in the contemporary cultural product and, once more, find themselves irresistibly attracted. The Gothic is a “mutable and malleable” (Piatti-Farnell and Mercer 2014, para 4) mode of cultural expression that “re-emerges in times of cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties [. . .] by working through them in a displaced (sometimes supernatural) form” (Hurley 2002, 194, 197). However, when anxieties fail to be alleviated by the Gothic alone, the fictional detective is deployed into the supernatural realm, to temper the irrational with the rational, to explain the inexplicable and to unmask and disempower the source of fear. When Arthur Conan Doyle, in his 1902 novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, sent his detective Sherlock Holmes wading into the Grimpen Mire to debunk a demon dog, he was responding to a Victorian era preoccupation with death, the supernatural and the uncanny darkness of the Gothic. In this article, I examine the reinvigorated union of the detective and the Gothic as a cultural response to the uncertainties and anxieties of the new millennium; and, through an eco-critical lens, I observe the emergence of a discrete form of cultural expression on the televisual landscape, which I describe as EcoNoir.¹

What is EcoNoir?

The advent of digital streaming platforms, along with long-form serialised storytelling through the medium of television, has resulted in the proliferation of detective crime drama productions world-wide. This phenomenon can be attributed not only to the amenability of these new media to crime fiction’s established narrative formula of cliff-hangers, clue puzzles and red herrings, but also to the popularity of Scandinavian productions, such as *Wallander* (2005-2013), *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*) (2007-2012), and *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*) (2011-2018). These series have been widely recognised in screen studies scholarship as the progenitors of a distinctive genre of detective crime drama known as Nordic noir (Badley et al. 2020,

¹ The term eco-noir is first encountered in Nordic noir scholarship in a 2020 article by Anna Mrozewicz, who uses it to critique the geo-political landscape portrayed in the 2015 series *Okkupert* (*Occupied*). My use of the capitalised portmanteau ‘EcoNoir’ emphasises the point of difference in my argument, being that the cultural product under analysis is not so much a Nordic noir hybrid but, rather, a discrete and globally replicated form of cultural expression with Nordic noir provenance, which specifically reflects and responds to anxieties associated with the unfolding environmental crisis.

Bondebjerg and Redvall 2015; Hansen and Waade 2017; Hill and Turnbull 2017). Through trans-national adaptation, appropriation and emulation, the melancholic sublime of Nordic noir's "distinctive and highly adaptable style signature" (Griggs 2017, 284), has globally imprinted itself onto the cultural vernacular as a grand visual metaphor for the millennial mood. The "transportable style aesthetic" (ibid, 279) includes a desaturated colour palette and a misty landscaping gaze that evokes a brush with the cinematic sublime, aurally overlaid with a wistful musical score which augments the visual melancholic mood.

Over the last decade, the creators of serialised television crime drama have merged the Nordic noir style signature with supernatural, mythological, and Gothic themes and tropes to express environmental themes. This confluence of forms has manifested a coterie of EcoNoir series, including *Jordskott* (Sweden, 2015-2017), *Midnight Sun (Midnattssol)* (Sweden/France, 2016), *Black Spot (Zone Blanche)* (France, 2017), *Dark* (Germany, 2017-2020), *The Gloaming* (Australia, 2020) and more, which specifically reflect and respond to the global proliferation of eco-anxiety in the collective human psyche. In addition to the distinctive style signature, EcoNoir television crime dramas have inherited a suite of Nordic noir genre conventions including the pervasive melancholic mood, grotesquely staged murders, the police procedural, narrative complexity and, importantly, the key presence of the troubled female detective as the ethically conflicted protagonist. Echoing the socio-political critique for which Nordic noir is renowned, EcoNoir exclusively focusses its critical lens on nefarious corporate eco-crime and correspondent institutional corruption as immutable narrative conventions. By narratively entangling the detective's case with the underlying ecological premise, EcoNoir exposes the corporeal and psychological trauma that such activities inflict on both human and non-human alike. In particular, the fusion of crime drama with the Gothic mode in EcoNoir allows global audiences to vicariously confront the ecological monsters of the present and tentatively acknowledge the presence of "ghosts [. . .] that peer at us from a future without us" (Gan et al. 2017, 10). Andrew Smith and William Hughes argue that the Gothic "seems to be the form which is well placed to capture anxieties [about] climate change and environmental damage" (2013, 5). I suggest that EcoNoir, with its ecological focus and conflation of the Gothic mode with the conventions of Nordic noir crime drama, is a form of screen fiction that is even more finely attuned to the growing incidence of eco-anxiety and uncertainty in the real world.

Black Spot

The creators of the 2017 French EcoNoir series *Black Spot (Zone Blanche)* augment the existing commercial appeal of both Nordic noir and the Gothic mode with persistent allusions to enduring cinematic and televisual representations of the Gothic (and notably Southern Gothic) imagination. This intentional allusiveness sets *Black Spot* apart from its more sombre EcoNoir peers by infusing its detective crime drama with self-reflexive quirkiness and moments of darkly comic absurdity. When

interviewed, series creator, Mathieu Missoffe stated that: “We don't think in terms of constraint, we think in terms of a contract with the viewer” (Fernandez 2019, para 8). Acknowledging the “bubbling” nature of that contract (ibid), Missoffe purposefully shapes *Black Spot* as an eccentric pastiche to pique the interest of both audience and marketplace. The “deterritorialization of the narrative” and the concurrent “mobilization of mythological stories very specific to local history” (Evrard, 2020, para 6) presents a paradox which, nevertheless, helps to secure the place of a French-speaking production on the “glocalized” televisual landscape (Hansen 2020, 84). Despite its appearance as a whimsical mélange of borrowed Gothic elements, *Black Spot* intercepts its own slide toward post-modern parody by not only grounding its drama in the realism and narrative complexity that it inherits from Nordic noir, but also by elevating the production with the cinematic landscaping gaze for which the genre is renowned. *Black Spot* further leans on the amenability of the Gothic mode to accommodate incongruity without overshadowing the gravitas of its ecological theme; indeed, as kindred to the uncanny, incongruity reinforces the sense of unease that pervades its story-world.

Black Spot is set in the fictional logging town of Villefranche, an isolated backwater somewhere in France, which is perpetually shrouded in mist and surrounded by a sinister, yet cinematically sublime, Gothic forest. Myriad allusions to American popular culture in the series' production design allow an infusion of Southern Gothic sensibilities to imbue Villefranche with a twist of Appalachian mystique. Besides its EcoNoir credentials, this innovation in artistic direction sets *Black Spot* apart from other television series set in the Gothic forests of Southern Europe, such as the 2017 French crime drama *The Forest (La Forêt)* or the 2018 Spanish thriller *Bitter Daisies (O sabor das margaridas)*. In Villefranche, the townsfolk are plagued by an unremitting succession of gruesome murders and, consequently, exist in a state of perpetually heightened anxiety and existential trauma – as does the local ecosystem. The sawmill, which is the sole industry and employs most of the residents, is being closed by the owner and corrupt patriarch of the town's most powerful family, Gérald Steiner (Olivier Bonjour), who has found a far more lucrative enterprise in illegally burying barrels of hazardous waste in the town's disused quarry. The contents are leaching into the forest wetlands to create a toxic bog which is polluting the waterways, contaminating the soil, sickening the human residents, and killing non-human animals, both wild and domestic. In *Black Spot*, the premise of imminent socioeconomic and ecological collapse combines with the fictional representation of “pre-traumatic stress syndrome” (Kaplan 2020, 91–92) and “climate trauma” (Woodbury 2019, 1) to evoke the viewer's eco-anxiety through cognitive and affective engagement with both the human and non-human characters in the drama. In Villefranche, the resident Celtic horned god Cernunnos is watching, the bees are angrily swarming, and the omnipresent ravens are gathering. The Celtic wise woman and clandestine leader of the eco-activist group *The Children of Arduinna*, Sabine Hennequin (Brigitte Sy), feels a sense of portent: “The forest is

getting restless ... even I don't know what is going on" (Missoffe 2017, 10:08). Clearly, a reckoning is at hand.

The Unstable Detective

The deeply traumatised, yet highly functional, female detective protagonist is a convention which EcoNoir inherits from its Nordic noir progenitor. Manuel Aguirre argues that the centrality of the flawed protagonist is also "key to the Gothic ... [and that] ... the result is a hero who is not a hero, a liminal figure marked by ambiguity and a tragic destiny" (2013, 9). Catherine Spooner extends Aguirre's observation arguing that, "particularly in noir, the unstable protagonist is a narrative feature that most closely links Gothic and crime fiction" (2010, 245). In *Black Spot*, this liminal figure and conduit to the Gothic is police chief Laurène Weiss (Suliane Brahim). Although central to the narrative as the champion of law and order, she is also a haunted Gothic anti-hero. Her motivation, in direct contrast with that expected of a conventional fictional detective, is not solely generated by a desire to outwit criminals and restore order; rather, she is primarily driven by her own psychological trauma which is daily reinforced by the conspicuous absence of two fingers on her left hand. A series of flashbacks over the course of the narrative reveals that this trauma originated during a teenage 'rite of passage' in the forest, twenty years previous.

The mythological and folkloric figure of the punitive forest-protector occurs world-wide. In Europe, the treacherous Leshy presides over the Slavic forests, whereas the "archaic and powerful deity" Cernunnos holds dominion over the Gallic region where, in the Celtic religion he is "worshipped as the lord of wild things" (Britannica 2008, para 1). To appease Cernunnos, the residents of Villefranche faithfully adhere to a calendar of Celtic rituals, one of which involves a coming-of-age trial whereby the town's young people must spend an 'all-nighter' in the forest in their eighteenth year. Echoing the visual and aural style of the 'found-footage' film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), a group of Villefranche youth document their 'all-nighter' using a mobile phone rather than a hand-held camera. One of them is killed, thus contributing to Villefranche's body count. While analysing the phone footage for clues, police chief Laurène Weiss glimpses a ghostly figure almost fully obscured by the mist in the background, and she is troubled by an uncanny frisson of déjà vu. At eighteen, Laurène, like so many others, had dutifully entered the forest but failed to return from her 'all-nighter'. A flashback scene finds her at the bottom of a dark and dank ravine, chained to a cliff-face. For three days, she struggles to free herself until, in desperation, she hacks off two fingers with a rock to release her manacled hand. She is found wandering in the forest, disoriented and faint from loss of blood, and is rushed to the hospital. During her ordeal, she has only had fleeting glimpses of her abductor, an antlered creature in human form. The residual image haunts her so deeply that she will spend the next twenty years

scouring the Gothic forest to locate the ravine and prove that the creature exists as more than a figment of her imagination. When she is not on duty, Laurène spends most nights in the forest with a torch, a map, and a raincoat. Steven Bruhm argues that “what becomes most marked in contemporary Gothic – and what distinguishes it from its ancestors – is the protagonist’s [...] compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions, and blockages” (2002, 261) and Catherine Spooner reminds us that “when Gothic and crime fiction coincide, the protagonist is often racked by guilt, obsession, paranoia, or other psychological disturbances” (2010, 250). Tormented by her memories, Laurène Weiss is clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and her obsessive search is a symptom of this affliction.

PTSD, PTSS and Climate Trauma

In clinical psychology, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is recognised as an acute and chronic form of anxiety which is commonly associated with experience of war and is described as the “signature mental disorder of the early twenty-first century” (Horwitz 2018). In recent years, the disorder has also been recognised in those who have experienced the effects of climate change (Silveira et al. 2021, 1487) and is likely to “increase as a result of natural disasters, heat stress, social displacement and other climate-related factors” (Lemery, Knowlton, and Sorensen 2021, 497). The two most common adverse mental health outcomes of natural disasters are depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Silveira et al. 2021, 1487). Researchers have also found that the psychological response to the effects of climate-change, whether directly or indirectly experienced, can also result in “pre-traumatic stress syndrome” (Kaplan 2020, 91–92), or moderate to extreme anxiety about a looming crisis (Gifford and Gifford 2016, 292). Woodbury posits that the “deepening existential crisis presents an entirely new, unprecedented, and higher-order category of trauma: Climate Trauma [which] is continually triggering all past traumas – personal, cultural, and intergenerational” (2019, 1).

In its cultural reflection of climate trauma, *Black Spot* encompasses not only those forms that afflict the human but also extends the gamut of trauma to the non-human world. Although the forest is personified as darkly vindictive, it is, nevertheless, positioned as the aggrieved party, given that it too is suffering trauma inflicted by the anthropogenic hand. The Gothic mode readily accommodates this contradictory representation of the forest as both perpetrator and victim, through the invocation of that part of its nature which leans toward the melancholic sublime. As a *mise-en-scène*, the ancient forest surrounding Villefranche is often tightly framed and presented through canted camera angles as a claustrophobic and disorienting jumble of moss-covered branches, fallen logs and boulders, either dripping with rain or shrouded in fog, silent but for the occasional croaks of the ubiquitous ravens. There is a palpable heaviness in the heart of the forest that echoes the mood of the town, and the trepidation felt by human interlopers often escalates to terror when they are surrounded by strange guttural noises and ghostly whispers; and yet, when

broad shards of light stream through the mist onto the forest floor and the scene is composed through a more panoramic lens, the sublime beauty of the forest is revealed. The affective presence of the melancholic sublime as expressed through the visual and aural devices of screen fiction is integral to the cultural reflection of multi-species climate trauma in *Black Spot*. Film philosopher Robert Sinnerbrink describes the affective transaction between a screen text and the viewer as “cinempathy”, arguing that:

the art of cinematic direction is the orchestrated dynamic elicitation of aesthetic responses using all of the devices of cinematic composition [. . .] to create a plausible convincing cinematic world capable of engaging us affectively, emotionally, and cognitively (2015, 94–95).

The filmmakers of *Black Spot* deploy the visual aesthetics of the Gothic mode to create a plausible “multi-species worlding” (Haraway 2011, 5) which fosters the possibility of a viewer’s cinempathy to be extended to the traumatised forest and its non-human inhabitants as the primary victims of the crime drama.

***Black Spot* and the Gothic**

In the opening scene of *Black Spot*, the hyperallergic district attorney Franck Siriani (Laurent Capelluto) is driving toward Villefranche. He has been allocated the task of resolving the town’s thirty-seven outstanding murder cases and is to investigate the reason why the homicide rate is six times the national average. His car breaks down at the town boundary in front of a bedraggled sign which replicates the iconic entry to Twin Peaks in the ground-breaking supernatural crime series of the same name (*Twin Peaks*, 1990). In faded letters, it extends an ironic invitation to the newcomer to ‘Smile, you’re in Villefranche’. He attempts to get a signal on his mobile phone without success, then tries a roadside emergency telephone that is out of order, and, for good measure, is stung by a bee with almost fatal consequences. There is a sense that Rod Serling might suddenly appear to announce that Franck Siriani is about to enter the *Twilight Zone* (Serling 1959). The series’ original French title, *Zone Blanche* (which also suggests a pun on *The Twilight Zone*) is a term for an area that has no mobile phone reception. As Siriani recovers from his ordeal at the police station, Laurène explains: “We’re in a dead zone, here. No mobile signal, no GPS. Even microwaves can get a bit fickle” (Missoffe 2017). From the outset, *Black Spot* taps into an anxiety which is acutely specific to the 21st century – the fear of isolation and lack of connection – a sensation akin to the folkloric terror of being alone and disoriented in the deep, dark woods. As in *Twin Peaks*, these omens mark not only the beginning of weirdness more generally but also, more specifically, foreshadow that there is “something very, very strange in these old woods” (Lynch 1990) – something decidedly uncanny.

Elizabeth Parker argues that “the Gothic forest – that is the frightening and foreboding forest – is an archetypal site of dread in the collective human imagination” (2020, 1). In eco-critical terms, the Gothic forest demonstrates the “power of nature to subsume the individual in its sublime ineffability” (Yang and Healey 2016, 8). The fictional Gothic landscape is thus a space in which ideas of human exceptionalism and dominance are eroded and post-humanist imaginings of multi-species enmeshment are fomented. Yang and Healey elaborate:

Gothic’s ambience of uncertainty, delusion, fluidity, isolation, and instability is created mainly by landscape. In terms of natural landscapes, the power and sensory obfuscation of storms, fogs, dark forests, and night leave characters unable to orient themselves, unable to assert human power to perceive a shifting, even hostile, nature, let alone to control or define it (ibid, 5).

Prolonged engagement with the Gothic is arduous but, given the ongoing environmental crisis, contemporaneously attractive, as it can articulate “unbearable or unacceptable fears, wishes, and desires that are driven from consciousness” (Hurley 2002, 197). Although the Gothic might be seen as an appealing cultural refuge into which fears about climate change might be vicariously off-loaded, the worsening tangle of wicked problems in the real world provokes a cultural desire for explication and reassertion of control that, once more, lures the figure of the fictional detective into the Gothic mode to dispel the fog of uncertainty. As Jo Walton and Samantha Walton argue: “Now, in an era of widescale environmental crisis, the detective’s reassuring and restorative functions must, once again, be reconsidered” (2018, 2); however, *Black Spot’s* Laurène Weiss is not as cocksure as Sherlock Holmes, and the tenacious spectres that trouble the contemporaneous collective psyche will not be routed so readily.

The Raven as Motif of Gothic Horror and Portent

The Gothic is a mode of cultural expression that is noted for its “preoccupation with death, fear, excess, and monstrosity” (Schell 2017, 175). *Black Spot* displays its own repertoire of grotesque murders as self-contained spectacles in successive episodes which function as a sideshow of horrors operating on the fringes of the main event, being the protracted search for the missing teenager Marion Steiner, and the concomitant protracted torture of the forest ecosystem. In the first episode, we are introduced to Laurène’s offsider, Nounours (Hubert Delattre) and the local doctor, Leïla Barami (Naidra Ayadi), who is repeatedly called upon to double as forensic pathologist. All three are in the forest attending the opening exhibit in the sideshow – case number thirty-eight. Initially seen in longshot as an uncanny ghostly figure floating in the mist, the victim is revealed on closer inspection to be a local nurse, whose abject corpse has been left hanging from the branch of a tree. To add to the horror of this perverse display, the camera closely

follows the trio's forensic gaze. In lingering close-ups taken from various angles, the viewer is thus invited to vicariously scrutinise the young woman's body, from her bloodied feet up to the muddy strands of tangled hair which obscure her face. From this point the camera averts its gaze, and the viewer is left to imagine the ghastly sockets left by the omnipresent ravens that have pecked out her eyes. Mimicking the examination of the corpse, Laurène extends her scrutiny to the non-human world. Carefully lifting the mossy bark of a nearby tree she observes an infinity symbol newly carved into its exposed trunk and a sticky red sap oozing from the scar. Nounours sardonically comments: "The birds are going crazy. The trees are bleeding. It's going to be a shitty new year" (Missoffe 2017). As a fictional commentary on the state of the real world as the 21st century enters its third decade, in which humanity grapples with natural disasters, an alarming rate of species extinction and unmitigated acts of ecocide around the planet, Nounour's remarks, scripted five years previously, are uncomfortably and shamefully prescient.

In the second episode, the '*grotesquerie du jour*' is another woman's corpse displayed as a scarecrow in the middle of a field, complete with ravens nonchalantly perched on her outstretched arms. In one of *Black Spot's* darkly absurdist twists, the police are seen driving back and forth past the human scarecrow as they investigate her disappearance. The depiction of abject corpses speaks to the visceral nature of horror, whereas it is *Black Spot's* invocation of Gothic portent that invigorates the psychological creep of the uncanny and speaks more deeply to contemporaneous concerns. Contemporary philosopher Timothy Morton argues that "the basic mode of ecological awareness is anxiety [...] the feeling that something creepy is happening, close to home" (2016, 130). In the Gothic lexicon, the raven is the apotheosis of creepy.

Across the span of *Black Spot's* sixteen episodes, dramatic tension is sustained by the sense of portent associated with an imminent occasion on the Celtic calendar, known as Samonios. It is the day of the year when Cernunnos, as the tutelary deity of the forest, will purportedly emerge with his wild dogs and unleash havoc on the town. Although this looming event might terrify the superstitious residents of Villefranche, the specific relevance to the viewer is minimal; thus, to support the sense of foreboding, *Black Spot* draws on broader cultural memory to summon the stalwart harbinger of doom and icon of the Gothic mode – the raven. *Black Spot's* ravens feature as a metaphorically loaded Gothic motif throughout, both visually and aurally. In the opening scene of *Black Spot*, one of the first shots is dedicated to an extreme close-up of two ravens who herald the forthcoming tragedy with their ominous caws. Drawing

on cultural memory of one of television's earliest avian trickster duos, the cartoon characters *Heckle and Jeckle*, these two ravens are often seen loitering around the police station, tormenting the trainee police officer Camille Laugier, with good reason. Camille is not only implicated by association with Gérald Steiner's eco-

crimes but is also hired by him to silence his own grand-daughter Marion who has threatened to expose his activities. *Heckle and Jeckle*, despite their unkind and conspiratorial tendencies, are comical characterisations of ravens. In a later scene, alluding to *The Birds* (1960), Camille will suffer nature's retribution when she is attacked by a massive, swirling murder of ravens of the more malignant Hitchcockian kind². She is then run through with a deer antler and dies in the same toxic bog in which she had dumped Marion's body (Missoffe 2017). The karmic metaphor could not be more overt.

In the annals of mythology, ravens have variously been associated with supernatural power, used as a divine sign or portent, or represented as avatars of death (Sax 2003). They have also been seen as uncanny and ambiguous creatures, both revered and reviled. In Norse mythology, two ravens sat on the shoulders of Odin (the God of war and the dead) as envoys and advisers. Although this reverence is still evidenced by the protection of resident ravens at the Tower of London, their tenancy is nevertheless associated with portent, in that both monarchy and realm are prophesied to fall if they leave. The association of ravens with death and horror stems from their behaviour as carrion-eaters among the corpses in the aftermath of battles. Despite their prominence in the human imagination as oracles of doom, ravens are also the epitome of insouciance and "often give an impression of sublime indifference to people, as though waiting patiently for the era of human beings to pass" (ibid). This potent combination of horror, death, portent, and terrifying ambivalence ensured that "the raven became, and remains so today, a standard feature in stories of Gothic horror" (ibid). In cultural memory, the raven is synonymous with the seminal nineteenth century novelist of the Gothic, Edgar Allan Poe. In drawings of Poe, the raven is often perched on his shoulder like a familiar. Poe's influence on American Gothic and the Southern Gothic tradition is substantial in both literature and film and his pervasive reach extends into *Black Spot* through multifarious filmic allusions which position the omnipresent ravens as cultural shorthand for impending doom. Given the ecological premise at the heart of *Black Spot*, the deployment of the ravens as masters of sardonic commentary is darkly ironic and particularly salient.

The Gothic, the Sublime and the Uncanny

In her book, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, Elizabeth Parker links the psychoanalytical notion of the uncanny, as famously explored by Freud in his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*, with our "Gothicised ideas about nature" comparing the

² Ravens and crows are both known in French as *corbeaux* and the word crow is generally used as a synonym for the entire *Corvus* genus. Here I use the term raven, because the species of the birds in *Black Spot* is *Corvus corax*. The collective noun for a group of ravens is said to be an unkindness or a conspiracy. Although *Black Spot*'s ravens are both unkind and conspiratorial, they are also murderous, so to describe the more serious intent of the swirling flock, I am applying the collective noun of murder which is usually attributed to the crow.

forest, which “switches from the benign to the perilous” with Val Plumwood’s observation that the uncanny is usually “something beautiful, which is at the same time quite frightening” (2020, 57). The invocation of the ‘beautiful yet frightening’ nature of the uncanny Gothic forest in *Black Spot* resonates with Edmund Burke’s eighteenth century philosophical concept of the sublime which influenced European Romanticism. In his book *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle argues that the notion of the Romantic sublime is inextricably bound up with that of the uncanny (2003, 8). In *Black Spot*, moments of contemplation are afforded by the sublime landscaping gaze, echoing the visual aesthetic of Romanticism, which is acknowledged as the well-spring of the Gothic sensibility in Nordic literature and film (Troy et al. 2020, 1). Demonstrating Sinnerbrink’s concept of cinempathy, *Black Spot*’s cinematic landscaping gaze over the forest, as I argued earlier, evokes affective connections to the non-human world; however, when the Romantic sublime combines with the uncanny dread inherent in the Gothic mode, *Black Spot*’s environmental premise is infused with a sense of portent that reflects real world existential anxieties.

In Victorian England, the slow demise of Romanticism imbued the aesthetic of the sublime with a spectral pallor. The wistful and wan figure, lingering in the liminal realm between life and death, has since persisted on screen as a recurrent Gothic character trope, most recently appearing in the television series, *Interview with the Vampire* (2022). In episode thirteen of *Black Spot*, aptly titled ‘The Maiden and the Corpse’, the filmmakers place the pallid titular characters into an exquisitely composed mise-en-scène, reminiscent of a Caspar David Friedrich painting. In a misty forest clearing, illuminated by celestial beams of sunlight, stands a grand piano in a state of decay. It is covered with slime and fungi, with its lid propped open and its disintegrating innards exposed to the elements. Autumnal debris is scattered on the strings of its rusted frame, and the whole instrument appears to be slowly sinking into a sea of bracken. The piano first appears as an incongruous curiosity but when a young blind woman, pale, blonde, and delicately refined, plays a sonata on its rotting keys, incongruity turns sharply toward the darkness of the uncanny, not only because the pitch is perfect and the notes are bright and clear, but also because her only audience is a dead man, languidly reclined in a wingback armchair. The darkness is tempered by the morbid humour inherent in this tableau which is reinforced when the ubiquitous pair of ravens announce the arrival at the crime scene of the prosecutor Franck Siriani, who apologises to his colleagues for his late arrival, saying “I took the time to wander around. Nature’s lovely this morning, isn’t it” (Missoffe 2017).

Freud describes the uncanny as a feeling that results from the *heimlich* being homely and familiar, becoming *unheimlich* being familiar, yet weirdly unfamiliar (2003), a feeling which psychologist Glenn Albrecht recognises in a form of eco-anxiety which he describes as “solastalgia – a feeling of homesickness while still at home” (2005, 45). The equation of solastalgia with the *unheimlich* recalls Morton’s observation about the uncanniness of climate change, that “something creepy is

happening close to home" (2016, 130). Morton also recognises the place of the sublime in ecological thought, positing that climate change is a "hyperobject": a thing so "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (2013, 1) that it cannot be fully described; a thing which is "uncanny, open-ended, and vast" (2011, 165). Morton's descriptions of the sublime terror inherent in climate change emerges in the new millennium like an uncanny Doppelgänger not only of Kant's recognition of "imagination's inadequacy, in an aesthetic estimation of magnitude, for an estimation of reason" (2008, 88), but also of Freud's claim that "an uncanny effect often arises . . . when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary" (cited in Schlipphacke 2015, 170). When the Gothic and the sublime converge, they "explore a terror of the unspeakable, of the inconceivable, of the unnameable" (Morris 1985, 313). In climate change discourse, there are those who vehemently cling to denial, rather than face the 'terror of the unspeakable'. Nevertheless, eco-anxiety abides, and humans instinctively turn to the familiar "alchemy of stories" (Telotte 2014) for explication and reassurance.

The Southern Gothic

The polluted swamp in *Black Spot* is the epitome of gloom, and thus offers a potent metaphor for the seemingly inextricable quagmire of the environmental crisis. Swampy descriptors such as bogged down, mired, sinking, struggle and impasse, which are commonly heard in climate change discourse, are also applied to the psychological symptoms of climate trauma, particularly the melancholic feelings of inertia and depression (Woodbury 2019, 4). Rodney Giblett identifies the equation of the swamp with melancholia "in the work of those masters of dejection, the Romantic poets" (2007, 155). When the melancholy of Romanticism merged with the Gothic, the swamp as a metaphor for gloom reached new dimensions of inextricability. In the annals of Gothic fiction, swamps are "profoundly ambiguous landscapes that are inhabited by meanings that go beyond the physical environment and touch on primordial inner landscape" (Meredith 2002, 319). In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Fall of the House of Usher", which is credited as the "Ur-text of the Southern Gothic" (Street and Crow 2016, 13), the titular decaying Gothic mansion splits apart and, "rushing asunder", disappears into a "black and lurid tarn" taking the lugubrious Usher siblings, Roderick and Madeline, with it (Poe 2003). In the 1960 cinematic masterpiece of Gothic horror, *Psycho*, adapted from Robert Bloch's novel, Alfred Hitchcock faithfully reproduces the scene in which Norman Bates nervously watches the car containing the body of his pale, blonde victim slowly sinking into a "muddy quagmire" until it disappears with a "sort of a sucking noise - a nasty and abrupt plop" (Bloch 1959). In what can be seen as a natural progression in cultural expression, films such as *Southern Comfort* (1981) and *Winter's Bone* (2010) imbue both the supernatural and psychological horror of their literary and filmic antecedents with realism, by settling the Gothic into its naturally sublime and uncanny habitat - the swamps and bayous of the American South.

The Southern Gothic mode on screen is commonly recognised as a site of degeneracy, decay and haunting as represented by visual tropes of crumbling plantation mansions, tangled vines and lichen, gnarled trees draped in shrouds of Spanish moss and an atmosphere of airless humidity; however, the Southern Gothic aesthetic is most evocatively visualised in the liminal realm of the otherworldly swamp. As a *mise-en-scène* the swamp is portrayed as a “corrupt, decomposing excrement of earth and water” (Giblett 2007, 170), where the imagination is troubled by uncanny will-o’-the-wisps and restless ghosts. Susan Street and Charles Crow argue that these Southern Gothic landscapes are “aligned with a pervasive sense of the grotesque, swallowing, and at times spitting back, the virulence of humanity’s ills” (2016, 83). *Black Spot’s* swamp, as an homage to the Southern Gothic, is a particularly noxious creation. How to describe its horror? It is a miasmatic, toxic, pitch-black bog full of the dismembered skeletal remains of “deer, wild boar, fox, coypu and a bunch of other rodents” which Villefranche’s forensic pathologist, Leïla Barami, describes as a “zombie Noah’s ark” (Missoffe 2017). The oily black sludge invites comparison with America’s La Brea tar pits, in which now-extinct mammals met their demise, mired in a bog of crude oil and asphalt. In keeping with the ecological premise of the narrative, such a comparison evokes concomitant nihilistic thoughts of species extinction (including our own) and emphasises the dark irony inherent in the fact that our self-destructive addiction to fossil fuels is the causative agent. There is little Romanticism to be discerned in Laurène’s waist-deep struggle through this putrid *mise-en-scène*, until she discovers the alabaster body of Marion Steiner arranged in a foetal position, cradled on a womb-like bower of reeds. The juxtaposition of ethereal beauty with the charnel horror of the bog recalls the Romantic obsession with the pale aesthetics of death. In this staging, the pathway between the Romantic sublime and the Southern Gothic swamp is illuminated. In *Black Spot*, the melancholic sublime of the Southern Gothic and the uncanny sense of portent go hand in hand. Their confluence is aurally reinforced not only by the croaking of the ravens, but also by the weirdly incongruent leitmotif of a non-diegetic solitary banjo, which evokes cultural memories of the unnerving sense of dispassionate menace which pervaded John Boorman’s iconic 1972 Southern Gothic film, *Deliverance*.

Although the Southern Gothic swamp “seems custom made to evoke feelings of gloom and hopelessness” (Sivils 2016, 83), it is, paradoxically, undergoing a revisioning as a beacon of hope. In the Western literary canon, the swamp has been habitually equated with “downright despondency and despair” and allegorised as a “sump of iniquity that would drag the unsuspecting and unwary Christian down and entrap him/her for all eternity” (Giblett 2007, 166-67). Contrary to this overwrought depiction, a reassessment of the ecological and cultural value of the swamp is in progress. This is evidenced by the semantic change in the notion of reclamation, not only in environmental terms of restoration but also in the current revisioning of the significance of swamps across African American history. The restoration of wetlands as functioning eco-systems is an example of positive action

to mitigate climate change which restores the swamp not only as a site of resilience, but also a site of the sublime – a place which is at once terrible and beautiful. This aligns with Morton’s opinion that “ecological art is duty bound to hold the slimy in view [...] rather than trying to make pretty or sublime pictures of nature” (2007, 159–60), a sentiment that is shared by the filmmakers of *Black Spot*.

Conclusion

In the fictional world of Villefranche, it is incumbent upon the local police chief, Laurène Weiss, to fulfil audience expectations of the rational detective by restoring order, defeating evil and dispelling uncertainty. In *Black Spot*, however, the pervasive presence of the Gothic exerts its uncanny influence, and Laurène’s post-traumatic entanglement with the mythos of the forest ensures that ambiguity abides. As Spooner argues:

When Gothic and crime fiction coincide [...] the protagonist’s instability places the pursuit of knowledge enacted by the detective narrative under question, often surrounding the process of rational and moral judgment with doubt (2010, 250).

By the end of the second series of *Black Spot*, the antlered Celtic god is revealed as a mere mortal and, having been shot, escapes wounded into the forest. In addition, the eco-crime is uncovered; however, there is little cause for celebration. The damage to the wetlands seems irreparable and a sense of portent remains, with the likelihood that Cernunnos might return (whether in human or supernatural form) to resume nature’s retribution.

As a product of the contemporaneous cultural imagination, EcoNoir mirrors the temporal ambiguity and impalpable shape of the Damoclean weapon that is suspended over humanity’s collective head. As the juggernaut of climate change continues along its inexorable path, the stream of fictional portent that flows into the increasingly *unheimlich* home (van Elferen 2012, 98) collides with the real-world portent that seeps through the defences of human exceptionalism. There is a sense that humans, much like their fictional counterparts in Villefranche, are sinking into a quagmire of their own making. In human history, when the only certainty is uncertainty, the quest for definitive resolution in the cultural product is increasingly futile and, as much as a rational fictional detective might attempt to assuage eco-anxiety, the nebulous ghosts of the Gothic continue to feverishly stalk the millennial zeitgeist. In 1902, the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes waded into the Grimpen Mire to confidently dispel uncertainty by declaring that a supernatural demon dog was just a dog. Over a century later, *Black Spot*’s EcoNoir detective, struggling through a man-made toxic bog, is not so sure. Given there is scope for forward movement in the notion of ambiguity as opposed to the stasis inherent in

maintaining a reassuring illusion, the supernaturally inflected fiction of EcoNoir is, paradoxically, a realistic cultural expression of hope.

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An Uncanny *Clair de lune*: Interrogating the Role of Piano Music in Rendering the Gothic On-screen

ABSTRACT

This paper brings together a seemingly unlikely web of texts connected by their use of Claude Debussy's piano music. It entangles the films Tokyo Sonata (2008) and All About Lily Chou-Chou (2001) with K-drama Move to Heaven (2021) to re-think the role that interiority plays in producing the Gothic at the disjunct of world and self. The contrast between the inner world of the protagonists, expressed through Debussy, and their external interactions renders the depiction of the modern condition fundamentally Gothic in these texts. In this paper, I argue that the pointed use of classical piano music creates a Gothic lens within the text itself.

Keywords: Debussy, Tokyo Sonata, Move to Heaven, All About Lily Chou-Chou, Gothic interiority, Romanticism.

Introduction

This paper brings together three apparently unrelated texts that, nevertheless, become webbed together by the very specific way in which they use music: Japanese films *All About Lily Chou-Chou* and *Tokyo Sonata*, from the first decade of the 2000s, and the recent Netflix original K-drama, *Move to Heaven*. In the following, I explore how the use of Debussy's well-known works for piano create Gothic interiority that is shared between the protagonists and the audience due to the popular reception of this music in cinema across time.

The body of the article is dedicated to an analysis of selected scenes from the three texts. These readings offer a new perspective on how the Gothic might function outside of its traditional signifiers. This paper explores Gothic interiority created by Debussy's music at the point where it signifies a disjunct between the world and self. In *Move to Heaven*, the interior space of the protagonist, Geu-ru, Gothicises the world through contrast as each trauma cleaning case he takes on in the story highlights a different societal issue that is rendered monstrous through his gaze. *All About Lily Chou-Chou* raises the stakes by using music to critique the grotesque structural systems at play in early-millennium Japan, and *Tokyo Sonata* shows how the use of a single piece of music can recast an entire film in a Gothic light. Through classical music the interior sonic landscape of an individual character comes to represent the disjunct between the desirable (connection, beauty, wholeness) and the monstrous structures of society. The Gothic interiority examined in this paper, is not monstrous in form but transcendent, peaceful, desirable, and beautiful. Rather than expressing dark desire, it expresses light desire against which the realities of a broken world become monstrous.

Debussy and the Sound Within

The two pieces used most prominently in the texts examined in this paper are the "Arabesque No. 1. Andantino con moto" from *Deux Arabesques*, composed between 1888 and 1891, and "Clair de lune," composed in the years between 1890 and its publication by Jacques Durand as part of the *Suite bergamasque*, L. 75 in 1905. These pieces are considered Impressionist (although Debussy himself rejected this term) due to their use of pentatonic and whole-tone harmonies and evocation of atmosphere. They reflect the multiple cultural crossings in the arts from the 19th century onwards. Whilst these crossings are by no means to be viewed as symmetrical in the cultural power dynamics between the West and Japan (and later, Japanese-colonized Korea), the threads of influence between Japan and Western classical music are closely enough intertwined to be able to speak of this music's histories as multiple and of this music as being now as endemic to Japan and Korea as to Europe or 'the West' (cf. Kim 2018, 183; Fujita 2018, 143-153; Galliano 2002, 95).

While Western art music was making its way into the cultural psyche of Japan and Korea, the Romantics and then, increasingly, the Impressionists in Europe were borrowing extensively from the East (Bhogal 2018, 113). Conversely, Debussy's piano music, particularly, "Clair de lune" was "in the air" in the USA by the early 20th century, having first been championed by Copland between 1906 and 1910 before making its way into popular culture via orchestral adaptations used by Disney and Hollywood after WWII (Bhogal 2018, 15, 97). It is fair to say that Debussy's music has found its way into modern popular culture via the screen. As will be discussed later, this cultural legacy creates a liminality between audience and screen that supports its the Gothicising function.

Writing on music and Gothic film, Van Elferen notes that "sound can be defined as the eloquent narrator of the invisible, the presence beyond the screen that enforces its reality through the ear" (2012, 37). In this paper, I suggest that the reality enforced through the ear sits in an interior place within the minds of the main characters. The self is thus represented as an interior space within the mind, formed by the auditive-spatial relationships within the music. More so than Gothic aural tropes, Debussy's music is further able to render interiority as place in these texts, by imbuing the interior of the individual mind with cultural meaning. In this regard, I am drawing on a postmodern understanding of place as space that has been rendered meaningful through culture. The reception of Debussy's music in popular culture renders this a liminal space between the world and the world as it is mediated in the self: a webbing, liminal interiority.

Gothic Interiority: A Gaze from the Inside Out

As Graça P. Corrêa writes, "the Gothic mode cyclically recurs in historical periods of social, economic and ethical crises, as a way of negotiating alterities (subjective, sexual, racial, political and social class)" (2021, 23). Each of the texts examined came at times of economic crisis (particularly *Tokyo Sonata* and *All About Lily Chou-Chou*) and intergenerational tension. Alterity is a central driver of the Gothic function that Debussy's piano music serves in all three. The texts set up their protagonists in various positions of othering: *Move to Heaven* depicts a neurodiverse character acting in a neuro-normative society; *All About Lily Chou-Chou* responds to the othering of the child as 'youth' or 'delinquent' vs. the adult world as gatekeeper; *Tokyo Sonata* places its subjects at odds with their previously unquestioned societal roles. The external situation, relationships, and actions of the protagonists indicate a more fundamental alterity between the inner world of the subject and their being in the world as social subjects.

Negotiating the self-other disjunct is part of the functionality of the Gothic that is deeply indebted to early Romanticism (Corrêa 2021, 35), particularly the philosophical writings of Friedrich Schlegel and his response to the epistemological philosophy of Kant and Fichte. The primary issue is the relationship between the I

and the Not-I or the self and the other. The Romantics identify this as an issue of language (Barratt-Peacock 2020, 49-55). If the self is defined through its ability to think in language, then language holds both the possibility of imagining and articulating a connection with the other while simultaneously reminding the subject of their position as a distinct identity, separate from the world. It is this conundrum that influenced the Romantics' reception of music, most famously, E.T.A. Hoffmann's Beethoven critique:

It [instrumental music] is the most Romantic of all the arts – one almost wants to say, the only *pure* Romantic art, – Orpheus' lyre opened the gates of Hades. Music opens an unknown kingdom to mankind, a world which has nothing in common with the outside world of the senses. This world surrounds him and in it, he can leave all those feelings behind which might be defined through words, to give himself over to the inexpressible. (Hoffmann [1810] 1994 227: translation added)

The critique is the prototype for definitions of Romantic instrumental "absolute" music in the Western classical canon (see Schafer 1975; Burkholder and Palisca 2006: 603). Being a form of art that does not represent objects or ideas through signs, music can transcend the self-world/self-other divide, at least temporarily. The Romantic legacy of privileging music over language continues into Impressionism, with Debussy himself saying that "music begins where speech fails" (Debussy as cited in Bhogal 2018, 32). With the epistemological scepticism of early Romanticism slowly peeling away over the course of the twentieth century, however, this attitude towards music becomes generalised into a narrative of transcendent universalism that remains attached to the reception of the Western classical canon internationally to this day. It is the latter narrative that allows texts to play with expectations surrounding music and its use from a narrative and functional perspective.

In *Move to Heaven*, *Tokyo Sonata*, and *All About Lily Chou-Chou* "Clair de lune" and "Arabesque No. 1" are used to characterise the protagonists' interiority as light or transcendent and, through the legacy of Romantic discourse on music, frame a desire for human connection in Romantic epistemological terms. That is, transcendence can only ever be posited as a possibility. It is, itself, a fundamentally paradoxical desire. Spooner identifies a historical view of the Gothic as the darker side of early Romanticism, "the space where Romanticism's darker urges could be indulged, its repressions divulged" and contrasts this with 21st-century Romanticism as haunting the Gothic with desires for "plenitude, for interiority and depth" (2006, 28). The use of Debussy in popular culture reflects Romantic discourse on music that has been heightened to modern popular sensibilities. Rather than haunting the Gothic, Romanticism's epistemological concerns regarding transcendence, wholeness, and connection as well as thematic concerns with

interiority and depth create a reimagined Gothic contrast between light and dark in mirrored form.

Romantic music discourse reflects a secularised, art-focused, and humanized version of medieval Gothic sacred architecture, with its celebration of reaching, organic form. This desire for transcendence is Romantic, not fundamentally Gothic in the nineteenth century literary sense. The two meet however, in the twenty-first-century in the point at which desire becomes uncanny and, as I will argue, articulates the monstrosity of the outside world. Particularly, in the understanding of Gothic interiority explored in these films and series, the traditionally dark space of the mind as a trapped Gothic interior is, instead, light, beautiful, desirable, and free. Because the interior of the self is encoded as beautiful, transcendent, and connective through the legacy of Romanticism that Western classical music bears, it contrasts with the societal structures in which the characters find themselves trapped. These structures are then rendered a) visible through this contrast and b) monstrous.

I do not wish to argue that the texts at hand are Gothic by genre (they are not). However, the relationship between the interior emotional and sensory landscape of the protagonists and the social structures in which they act takes on a Gothic *function* because of how Debussy is used. That is, the use of Debussy's music creates a Gothic lens that does the cultural work of social criticism. The understanding of the Gothic in this paper then, is one of function over trope (cf. Spooner 2010, xi).

The Monstrous Outside: *Move to Heaven*

In contrast to the two Japanese films read in this paper, the 2021 Netflix K-drama *Move to Heaven* has surprisingly few horror elements considering that the main characters run a trauma-cleaning business. Claustrophobic settings and death seem like fruitful points of convergence with the Gothic. Yet, even when the bodies and possessions that the trauma-cleaning company "Move to Heaven" are called upon to clean up are found in tight, coffin-like spaces, they are not a source of Gothic horror in the series. Rather, they set the scene for a contrast between the beautiful and the monstrous which is taken to the extreme through music.

The pop-classic status of all the pieces the protagonist Geu-ru selects and listens to on his mp3 player while cleaning up gruesome scenes taps into the function of the cliché. In exploring the importance of Debussy's music's cliché status for its reception in popular culture, Bhogal draws on Stark's observations that the cliché has the "ability to create 'powerful connective pathos,' a deep psychological and emotional connection between the creative figures and their audiences as they coalesce around a single piece of music" (Bhogal on Stark 2018, 52). Applying this function to the music, it is possible to see how it forms a connection between the interior Gothic space created in the psyche of the main character and the inner ear of the viewer. The music can forge a connection between the interior of the

protagonists to the interior of the viewer precisely because it has reached the cultural-psychic embedding level of the cliché. The effect is that the audience is invited to share Geu-ru's interiority as a place defined aesthetically, and even morally, through the classical canon and the narratives of transcendence and connection ascribed to it, as noted in the section above.

The series opens with the death of a poor young man working in unsafe conditions and dying alone, having had a horrific workplace accident. Geu-ru's gaze sees in this young intern's poverty not an abject existence, but a life with order and beauty. This is expressed by his understanding of the deceased's cheap corner-store food choices as being varied (all different flavours), having been selected as a matter of taste rather than the necessity of poverty (ep 1 14'20''-16'). As Geu-ru and his father stand in the rubble of this young man's life, placing everything in black trash bags, we see the decease through Geu-ru's father's eyes: the young worker dying alone in his coffin-like room, looking up at a dirty ceiling covered in glow-in-the-dark stars. Geu-ru has poignantly chosen Schumann's *Träumerei* 'Kinderszenen' No. 7 (Daydreaming from Scenes from Childhood), and the idyllic nostalgic image of childhood is the lens through which we view the young man's final death scene.

This first scene is significant, despite not using Debussy, because the programmatic use of Schumann comments on the negative experiences faced by the younger generation caught between economic pressures and a poor outlook for the future. The basic structure of the series reveals aspects of the main characters' lives through contact with their cleaning jobs. Here, the broken child takes on new significance later in the episode with the death of Geu-ru's father.

Debussy's "Claire de Lune" occupies a privileged position as Geu-ru plays it in episode two during the first job he does after his father's death. The piece's cinematic association with longing for an absent loved one, memory and recollection (Bhagal 2018, 32-37) once again connects Geu-ru's interior emotional space with the fate of the deceased, rendering the latter horrific through its sonic lens. In this case, the deceased is a loving old woman whose son and daughter-in-law care only for any money she might have left them. The music creates a sense of place that emerges as beautiful, culturally encoded as transcendent and connective, and, finally, associated with a strong family bond and love for the deceased through Geu-ru's sonic gaze.

The vantage point from which Geu-ru views the world fulfils every function ascribed to music under Romanticism in these scenes. It is because of this that it can take on a Gothic function by rendering the rest of society (the uncaring relatives, profit-driven companies, the nation's failure to fulfil its paternal role for Koreans adopted overseas, etc.) monstrous in contrast. Thus, the interior becomes Gothic by dint of its lightness. The Gothic interiority of this and the following texts functions as a critique of society, rendering invisible structures not only visible but monstrous.

Looking Back in Horror: *Tokyo Sonata*

In the 2008 film *Tokyo Sonata*, director Kiyoshi Kurosawa transforms J-horror, turning “the quotidian experience of Japan’s working class into a discourse on the abject horror of the mundane” (Rosenbaum 2010, 116). The film uses the Gothic trope of the patriarchal family and family secrets to explore social crisis or *kakusa shakai* (gap-widening society) in Japan (See Yamada 2004). It does this in keeping with what is “the fundamental myth of the Gothic mode” as the patriarchal familial power “regulates sexual intercourse, marriage, family configuration and lineage, the legitimacy of succession and all the crucial activities of the social sphere, such as politics and economy” (Corrêa 2021, 31). The silence that permeates the family is, according to Kurosawa, “a reflection of Japanese society at large,” and criticism has followed this idea, identifying an archetype or even simulacra in the figure of the father-as-salaryman and the nuclear family (Kurosawa qtd. in Rosenbaum 2010, 125; Dasgupta 2014, 246; Boyer-Degoul 2017, n.p.n). The silence that weighs heavily between family members is reflected in its extensive use in the film. In contrast, the very final scene depicts the youngest son, Kenji, auditioning to get into a music school by playing “Clair de lune.”

There is consensus amongst scholars and fans that the film ends on a positive note. Rosenbaum, for instance, writes effusively: “As we listen enthralled to the final sonata, played expertly by the child prodigy Kenji, we are filled with hope arising from the healing power of music” (2010, 127). This might be a justifiable interpretation as the father, mother, and youngest son leave as a family unit were it not for the pointed use of “Clair de lune” which makes this scene the pivotal moment that retroactively recasts the entire film in a Gothic light.

The use of Debussy undermines any resolution that the film had posited in its second half by the contrast it creates between Kenji’s interior self and the external world in which his parents have finally regained a foothold after a period of economic and personal crisis. It feels claustrophobic and a little bit depressing, but it seems as though their life might be OK at the beginning of the scene, and the viewer can accept this as a resolution. Certainly, the director himself has expressed what appears to be a positive explanation of the ending: “I really did want to infuse the ending with some kind of real hope [...] The film ends with them attempting to start over...” (Guillén 2008). In another interview, Kurosawa describes the ending in the more Gothic terms of freedom vs constraint:

Living in the democracy that is modern-day Japan, I am told I am quite free to do what I want. But I think in fact, I am bound by common practice, laws and accepted morality, so I don’t feel very free at all. [...] I take a fictional character bound by all of these conventions and allow them an opportunity to break free. They can

walk towards what, until then, had been an unfathomable freedom.
(Mottesheard 2001 as cited in Rosenbaum 2010, 121)

However, in drawing on this quote, Rosenbaum misses the ambivalence of this freedom. Just because a figure “can” walk towards “unfathomable freedom”, it does not mean that they do. In contrast, it would appear that the final scene does not represent a moment of resolution or breaking free, but a metaphorical return to the attic, supported by the return to the nuclear family structure. This interpretation is supported by Kurosawa’s comments during a question-answer session in which he identifies a phenomenon all around the world, especially in urban areas, whereby people are unhappy with the roles society has placed them in, but are scared of losing their sense of identity if they break out of these, instead seeking out even simpler identities to cling to (Kurosawa 2008, n.p.). In light of this comment, the emotional complexity and flexibility of Debussy’s music may be said to highlight what is, in effect, a growing disjunct between the interior self and its exterior, socially determined identity.

Awareness of this disjunct occurs when the viewer hears Kenji perform for the first time. The viewer had been led to accept the father’s new employment, (cleaning a shopping centre) as resolution. The job allows for a return to the patriarchal family structure that had both been threatened by his unemployment and had, itself, become a source of threatening silence and disconnect. Hearing the family’s youngest play Debussy in the final scene and becoming privy to the richness and beauty of the inner self that the music represents makes the tentative equilibrium the characters find the opposite of a happy ending. Rather, the final scene reminds the viewer of the possibilities for development that were opened up by the personal and social crises explored in the film while simultaneously showing the parents returning to the same claustrophobic family structure, and, by extension, the social and national structures to which they had clung.

In addition to representing a return to the status quo, rather than an embrace of freedom from their societal roles, Kenji’s performance reveals another monstrous arm of post-bubble Japan. In this final scene, the loss of stability for one generation, due to the labour reforms, is shown to be an even more threatening loss of a linear progression from childhood to adulthood for the next (Arai 2016, 141, 37). Viewed from a Gothic perspective, the school system represses this loss of a secure future through its continued performance of linearity. Hope for the future is placed on the child’s shoulders and traps the child in a structure of linear progression towards adulthood and a future that the film shows only still exists in a dead-end, zombified form. The way that all the audience’s heads turn mechanically and silently like marionettes to follow Kenji and his family as they leave his music school audition drives home this evocation of a zombified future.

When Beauty Becomes Uncanny

Tokyo Sonata's use of Debussy to create a sense of interiority for Kenji in the final scene casts the outer world and its norms in an uncanny light. I use the term "uncanny" in the sense of "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud 2020, 60). Where, however, does the aspect of fear come into play? Further, where do we find in these texts those supposedly "primitive [sic] beliefs which have been surmounted" and "seem once more to be confirmed" (ibid., 80)? If we adapt Freud's original musings to contemporary media, a broader definition of the uncanny becomes fruitful, whereby the uncanny is the return of something as a real possibility that had seemed impossible, infantile, and out of step with contemporary ideologies.

In the context of the economic restructuring that shifted Japan from "the domestic protectionism of paternalistic socialism to a freer market-driven competitive capitalism" (Rosenbaum 2010, 122), the high-flown transcendent, yet human, self-other connection that the music signifies becomes the stuff of the imagination, impossible and even infantile. It is an almost laughable desire or belief in the face of Kurosawa's claustrophobic depiction of modern Japan. The diegetic depiction of Kenji's playing situates these Romantic desires in reality. This is what creates the uncanny effect that is, as Freud says, "easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something we have hitherto regarded imaginary appears before us in reality" (Freud 2020, 71).

Move to Heaven also addresses the repressive effect of economic pressures. The series works with contrasts, showing a young man pressing "stop" on a machine that then mangles his leg and limping past the "safe workplace" sign. The metaphor is clear as the machinery of Korea's industrial complex does not heed the stop button and has already permeated the young man's psyche to the point where his biggest dream is to "get a permanent job" (Ep 1, 14:20"), then mangles him to the point of death. The accident is due to corporate corruption, and he dies from sepsis due to the company's unwillingness to acknowledge the wound as a workplace accident even in the context of communal mourning at his funeral.

In *All About Lily Chou-Chou*, the idea of overcoming the self-other divide to experience genuine human connection becomes a desire repressed by society and it returns, uncannily, through music. Placing the characters' connection forged through Lily/Debussy's music in online chatrooms further delegates this connection to the realm of the imaginary, thus allowing it to return uncannily. The film exerts its critique through the uncanny by showing how the summation of the mythical and imaginary is not gloriously but brutally surmounted in the real world in which the protagonists act. The lightness of an uncanny interior (created using Debussy) works hand in hand with the horror of the protagonist's offline actions to render, not the youths, but rather the structures which are upheld by the adults, monstrous.

Debussy on the Brink: *All About Lily Chou-Chou's* Monstrous Liminality

The two texts discussed in detail up to this point, *Move to Heaven* and *Tokyo Sonata*, use a clear contrast between the interior of the self and the outside world to render the latter monstrous. *All About Lily Chou-Chou* does the same while capitalizing on the liminality of Debussy's music more extensively. Debussy's music occupies a liminal space in films due to its recognisability for the audience, which allows it to function simultaneously as background and foreground (Bhogal 2018, 32-33).

The music can function like this because, in the case of "Clair de lune" and "Arabesque no. 1," these pieces have been used so often throughout film history that they have reached the status of a cliché, as already noted. The music slips between on-screen and off-screen realities, and even on-screen it can reside in the fantastical gap between diegetic and non-diegetic modes (Bhogal 2018, 32). *All About Lily Chou-Chou* plays with the diegetic indeterminacy that Debussy's 'Arabesque no. 1' offers to show the failure of music to fulfil Romantic narratives of transcendence and connection. In doing so, it shifts the focus in the film from the horror of the protagonist's actions as individuals to a Gothic revelation of the structures which (de)form their social selves.

The film is from the start of the new millennium, "when Japan's media and politicians were whipping the voting public into a frenzy about juvenile crime" (Cremin 2019 n.p.n) and offers a nuanced response to these depictions of delinquent youth and the associated fears for the future by placing music at the centre of both its plot and aesthetic. Being very much a product of its time, the film plays with the figures having an online identity that should connect them as fans of the pop singer Lily Chou-Chou, only to pit them against one another in real life. This offline/online disjunct, however, is just another expression of the extreme emotional disjunct between the characters' inner selves and the structures which inform their actions (in the case of the protagonist, Yuichi) and their social roles.

The contrast between actions and music throughout the film is used to great effect and supports the statement that "the final betrayal is the realization that our most cherished music can be the soundtrack to the lives of our most hated enemies" (Cremin 2019 n.p.). More than this, though, the music fails to transcend the self-world disjunct or to create a human connection in accordance with the Romantic narratives attached to classical music. The film's horror lies in this disjunct between what we expect music to do and its failure to redeem. But it is the disjunct between the characters' emotional interior landscapes and their world where the Gothic creeps in.

Seven minutes and forty-nine seconds into the film, "Clair de lune" is first played off-screen, while on-screen, an advertising posterboard for Lily Chou-Chou's

album *Erotic* is shown, with Yuichi circling the posterboard against the backdrop of a rice field, eventually squatting down and contemplating it. The music of the story's pop idol character Lily Chou-Chou is constantly merged with that of Debussy, letting Debussy's work take its place symbolically in the film and adding to the sense of liminality between the film and the audience and between interiority and the external social world. The teens' interiority is connected to a shared love of Lily Chou Chou's music and Debussy early on. At only seventeen minutes into the film, Lily Chou-Chou's new album *Breath* is shown playing at the track "Arabesque." However, the audio playing for the viewer is Debussy's "Arabesque no. 1." The piece continues to play into the next scene, in which the student pianist Yoko Kuno is seen playing the piece in the school music room. By equating the narrative's pop singer's music with that of Debussy, music in the film per se sits in a liminal space of free play between the screen and the audience and between the diegetic and non-diegetic I have noted is a feature of Debussy's music in the film.

A direct contrast is made between the internal life of the 'youth' with their desire for genuine connection and the panic surrounding youth crime at the time, when a television show discussion of the issue of youth criminality and news of a bus hijacking carried out by young people is shown at 9'06". To say that these young people are all innocent and that Debussy's music represents some kind of purity or innocence would be too simplistic. Rather, as mentioned, Debussy's music in popular culture has been used to signify longing and loss. This loss and longing is transferred to the kind of community the young characters seek in the Lily Chou Chou fan forums through the association of Debussy with Lily Chou Chou. In contrast, Debussy is gone as soon as the dominant adult discourse on the 'youth' of the nation is shown. Instead, the sound of the television dominates.

The loss of this connection, and even more cruelly, the loss of any possibility of any true connection within the real-world structures in which these young people are trapped, is preempted at 10'40". Here, soft piano music bleeds into pop and accompanies Yuichi's online interactions with other Lily Chou-Chou fans, which saturates his perspective, even when out riding with the other boys, who casually (at first) bully him and take his money. The film thus already provides a sense of loss long before the climatic revelation that ringleader Shusuke was, in fact, Yuichi's closest online friend, Blue Cat, with whom he thought to have shared a genuine connection. The point is only driven home more cruelly when Shusuke takes away Yuichi's concert ticket and any chance he had of seeing Lily Chou Chou live, prompting Yuichi to murder him.

A response to the widespread panic in the late 1990s and early 2000s surrounding juvenile crime, the film could easily be reduced to the terrible things the individual characters do. However, by merging the music of Debussy with that of Lily Chou-Chou through diegetic indeterminacy, the film points to the grotesque structures in which all are trapped as both victims and perpetrators. That is, even as

the characters do horrible things, their interior selves remain beautiful so that the contrast between this interior place and their social selves renders the structures they are trapped in visible as inescapable, perverted, and monstrous.

The appreciation for music that the young characters share online is a shared interior space that fails to connect them offline. Marking that music through Debussy raises the stakes. It is not just that music fails to be the universal healing and connecting influence that it is said to be, but that the violent social structures in which the children find themselves, and so quickly end up perpetuating, are so much more terrifying in the face of the transcendent interior psychological space in each of them. The characterization of interiority through Debussy's music stops the viewer from being able to see the individual as a monster or the entire generation of youths as a monster against which adults can legislate. Instead, it creates a faceless, self-perpetuating darkness through contrast. This darkness saturates every aspect of life, as symbolized by bullying taking the form of forced public masturbation that makes the most private act an act of public shaming.

When Yuichi murders Shusuke the music is not Debussy but Lily Chou-Chou and the crushing mass of people Yuichi engineers (by 'spotting' the pop star) to hide the murder forms a horrifying anti-image to the idea of a shared fan community connected through music. After the murder Yuichi attempts to play Debussy on the piano as a beginner; it is broken and imperfect but diegetic as his inner and outer selves are brought together. Yuko is still playing "Clair de lune," like she is stuck, with Yuichi watching, as the film ends: they are all stuck. Once again, Gothic tropes of claustrophobia and entrapment reveal themselves, if in an unusual form, through the music.

Conclusion

Particularly because all the characters in these texts are minors, the music stands for what could be and what should be, what we want for the next generation. It is an ideal against which society is measured and found to be strangled by structures that are silent, claustrophobic, and monstrous in ways we might not see if we were not invited to gaze from that space of Gothic interiority. These texts are not Gothic per se, but the use of Debussy's most popular piano pieces offers a way of seeing them and seeing through them that is shared and deeply *unheimlich*, in the most literal sense of the word, precisely because we are so deeply familiar with this music.

Familiarity has propelled an inflation of terror that catapults recognisable Gothic tropes into the realm of irony and pre-packaged hyperreality (cf. Spooner 2006). How can the Gothic continue to speak in modern media so familiar with its traditions? This article has explored a way out of this bind by taking a fundamentally Gothic approach to the Gothic itself. If the Gothic has now become

that which is familiar, canny, and *heimisch*, it is its shadow that returns as the uncanny. Through the discussion of three contemporary texts which are not specifically Gothic, this article has explored a doubling of the Gothic and its Romantic shadow that shows how lightness, human connection, and beauty might take the place of madness in the attic as the monstrosities of our Capitalocene age move into the living room.

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Crime Experiences at Dark or 'Gothic' Tourism Sites: Edutainment and Storytelling at the Melbourne Watch House (Australia)

ABSTRACT

Storytelling is a vital feature of most crime and law enforcement related tourism sites. The Melbourne City Watch House (Australia) uses interactive and immersive storytelling techniques to create 'edutainment' opportunities for tourists, placing it on the 'lighter' end of Philip Stone's 'dark tourism' spectrum. This paper examines how the site utilises storytelling techniques and immersive experiences to provide a Gothically entertaining, yet educational experience for tourists. For example, tourists can be 'searched', 'locked-up' and have mug shots taken within a cell. Within the analysis, Philip Stone's 'dark tourism' spectrum and Gothic tourism frameworks are used to explore the tour and how the storytelling techniques become acceptable despite the 'dark' nature of the site and exhibits themselves. The use of actors to dramatise the experience provides audiences with a unique Gothic adventure that leaves visitors unsettled, yet entertained. Utilising participatory 'theatre' techniques and framing the narrative around 'law enforcement' versus 'offenders' enables such sites to promote 'lighter' forms of entertainment while nevertheless romanticising state power. It is evident that the voices of those detained at the Watch House are either silenced or manipulated through the storytelling process to reinforce political narratives around effective law enforcement.

Keywords: Dark Tourism, Storytelling, Gothic Tourism, Melbourne City Watch House

Introduction

Tourism sites that represent crime and criminal justice systems often include decommissioned penal institutions, and, to a lesser extent, historic courthouses and police museums. These types of sites are typically located 'on site' - that is, tours or the museum are in the original building where 'justice' matters were finalised or enacted. Further, the purpose of these sites is to share information on the practices of 'law and order', their personnel (police, judges, guards, prisoners etc) and their origins and evolutions (Ferguson, Piché and Walby 2019). For the majority of these sites, the aim is to "foster public reassurance and legitimacy" of criminal justice policies (Ferguson, Piché and Walby 2019, 318). This can often be achieved through presenting past practices (often barbaric and gothic, such as solitary confinement cells in prisons, or gallows etc) as a way to show the transformation of old 'barbaric' policies to more recent, allegedly humane, treatment of offenders. However, not all sites provide this reflection, and instead focus on providing tourists with an 'experience' that reinforces notions of policing as a necessary, and positive component of society. Further, these experiences are often presented as providing Gothic entertainment or 'dark tourism' opportunities.

The term 'Gothic' has a range of meanings, that originate from eighteenth-century literature focusing on horror and the supernatural (Light, Richards and Ivanova 2021). For Carol Davison (2017, 7):

... the Gothic rendered death fascinating and offered the unique invitation to experience what Elisabeth Bronfen describes as 'death by proxy' (2009, 114), an attractive and even desirable experience because 'apparently unreal' (113). It also allowed readers to engage with death-related subject matter considered too macabre, controversial, or sensitive within certain cultures and societies. In its pages, readers may indulge dark death-related fantasies and fears ...

Gothic, however, has moved beyond literature, incorporating a wide range of popular culture spaces including fashion, furniture, computer games, youth culture, advertising, media productions and contemporary events (Spooner 2006). As Catherine Spooner argues, Gothic has now "consolidated its position as the material of mainstream entertainment" and enabled consumers to experience the 'apparently unreal' or macabre in 'safe' and 'culturally accepted' spaces (2006, 25).

Emma McEvoy coined the term 'Gothic tourism' to describe certain types of tours and tourism sites, including ghost walks/buses/tours, themed Dungeons, ancient prisons and other 'suitable' buildings that offer a number of defining characteristics. Gothic tourism is a performance industry that "is immersive and theatricalized, and tends to be highly intermedial. It is indissolubly linked to Gothic fictions, and it is characterized by its emphasis on affect" (McEvoy 2016, 201). Affect is central to this type of tourism, and tourists travel to these sites and attractions "in

order to experience a gamut of sensations and emotions associated with the Gothic aesthetic – from curiosity, fear and wonder, to horror, disgust, and decentredness” (McEvoy 2016, 203). However, within Gothic tourism, tourists are also looking for fun and entertainment – people travel with friends and family to experience ‘live performances’ often with a focus on ‘scare attractions’. The tour guide, or ‘scare actor’ has an important role in interpreting their audience and how they are responding to the information being presented (and scares where relevant). These guides need to work on the body of a tourist indirectly through emotions (McEvoy 2016).

The key elements of Gothic novels, and now tourism, “rely on settings, atmosphere, characters and events to stimulate emotions such as fear, terror, horror and disgust” (Light, Richards and Ivanova 2021, 224). That is, Gothic genre intends to “provoke horror and unease, [and] it plays to audience expectations” (Spooner 2006, 8) of unease, fright and horror. In part, tourism sites, including crime and justice museums or tours affect a Gothic environment simply by providing tourists with an opportunity to experience a:

... fearful sense of inheritance in a time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration (Baldick 2009, xix).

In decommissioned law enforcement tourism sites, the past practices are presented to tourists, often in ways designed to horrify and titillate; at the same time, tourists are physically imprisoned in confined spaces creating claustrophobia and unease. Focusing on past ‘dark’ practices of social control allows visitors to experience horror and unease, while also providing comfort in the understanding that current practices are more ‘enlightened’. As Emma Galbally and Conrad Brunström argue, “Enlightenment is nothing without a darkness to enlighten” (2017, 63). Contemporary Gothic also incorporates the “end of innocence” (Spooner 2006), and in a way, exploring sites where offenders have been ‘arrested’, ‘tried’ and ‘imprisoned’ highlights to tourists what happens when the presumption of innocence is denied and ultimately rejected.

Many of the tourist experiences described by Emma McEvoy in her research would previously be classified as ‘dark tourism’ sites. However, Emma McEvoy (2016, 201) has argued that Gothic tourism is:

... both more and less than dark tourism ... Less, in that, though some of Stone’s examples are Gothic, others are not (his list, for example, includes tourism to disaster sites, and concentration camps). More, in that there is more to Gothic tourism than ‘Dark Fun Factories’ of the Dungeons range type, and its concerns and content cannot be contained within a spectrum concerned with death and disaster.

In particular, Gothic tourism focuses upon “space, place and performance” (McEvoy 2010, 144) that stimulates affect and emotion (McEvoy 2016) more so than focusing on education. While Gothic tourism offers a specialist lens through which to explore sites that elicit horror and unease, Duncan Light, Steven Richards and Preslava Ivanova (2021) adequately argue that Gothic tourism is not inherently different from other forms of tourism, with many types of tourism offering performance and scare tactics. As such, the larger framework of ‘dark tourism’ is just as useful to explore tourism sites of crime and justice experiences.

‘Dark tourism’ is “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre” (Stone 2006, 146) and is often used “as an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy or crime” (Light 2017, 277). For many, ‘dark tourism’ encompasses sites that deal with not only death, but also atrocities, violence, pain, crime and segregation. As such, there “are obvious parallels between Gothic tourism and tourism centred on places of death, disaster or suffering, usually termed dark tourism” (Light, Richards and Ivanova 2021, 229).

Theoretically, the term ‘dark tourism’ has many limitations, with Richard Sharpley stating that ‘dark tourism’ as a theoretical framework remains “theoretically fragile, raising more questions than it answers” (2005, 216). As such, there is ongoing research into what constitutes ‘dark tourism’, whether ‘dark tourism’ even exists, what the difference is between a ‘dark’ site and a ‘heritage’ site, and what it means for labelling tourists or sites as ‘dark’ (see Light 2017 for a comprehensive overview of these challenges and debates). However, what is recognised, is that tourism classified as ‘dark tourism’ comes in many forms and is highly differentiated (Light, Richards and Ivanova 2021). There are also debates over whether it is ethical to promote ‘dark’ sites for tourists to consume (Sharpley 2009a) due to concerns that “it is unacceptable to profit from the dead” (Seaton 2009a, 87). As Anthony Seaton (2009b, 525) notes, ‘dark tourism’ is often constructed as being “transgressive, morally suspect, and pathological”, which in turn has led to tourists being labelled as superficial (Bowman and Pezzullo 2010) or morbid. Linked to the concern of labelling sites as ‘dark’ or ‘Gothic’ is the notion that heritage sites should have a noble purpose – such as to educate, or provide a connection (religious, spiritual or national) to a cultural site (Bowman and Pezzullo 2010). However, while not all sites embrace the labelling of their establishment as a ‘dark’ or ‘Gothic’ tourist site, other sites openly apply the label themselves, hoping to create publicity and attention through what has become a world-wide popular culture term.

For the purposes of this paper, the theoretical perspective of ‘dark tourism’ has been employed, despite the challenges and debates it has undergone, because it offers a number of unique frameworks that do help to understand how specific sites can ‘sell’ or create infotainment ‘storytelling’ experiences centred around death, suffering, tragedy and/or crime. The additional theoretical framework of Gothic tourism has also been utilised to complement the ‘dark tourism’ theoretical

conceptions to further explore the 'lighter' elements of the site in question, and the desire for theatrical entertainment at a 'dark' site.

Edutainment: Education, Entertainment and Experiences

This is not a new area of study. Most, if not all, museums and dark tourist sites have contested histories and understandings that visitors consume, which has been studied with veracity by a range of international and interdisciplinary scholars. The information presented at museums and tourist sites usually offers a very specific narrative that reflects the politics of the managing authority at that time (and these narratives can of course change depending on political dynamics). As John Lennon and Malcolm Foley (2010, 162) have argued, curators determine "whose history" is presented, and exhibits are carefully selected with the interests of tourists in mind (Welch 2013). Many sites play an essential role in presenting a particular version of cultural and national politics of identity. Such sites are embedded within broader politics of remembrance (Light 2017) and these messages are often transferred unquestioningly to tourists. Of course, different types of sites have varying aims and messages: a memorial museum aims to educate and illuminate cultural heritage and to provide an experience that is affective and morally transformative (Sodaro 2018). In contrast more 'fun-centric' locations that still impart knowledge of a historical nature, such as the York Dungeon, aim to entertain first and foremost rather than to impart a serious political message or make tourists feel empathy with its former victims.

These 'fun-centric' locations are often Gothic in nature, and sites of Gothic or 'dark tourism' have their own set of expectations from visitors. Focusing on Gothic tourism first, it can be considered as a form of Gothic theatre, which "concerns itself with the uses and abuses of power" so that it can "explore the issue of repression, a concept that is hard to rid of political baggage" (Galbally and Brunström 2017, 67, 69). According to Emma McEvoy "Gothic tourists are indeed embodied creatures. They expect to encounter place as performance, and often to perform within it" (2013, 483-484). As such, through theatrical performances, sites or tours can entertain tourists with stories of abuse and repression that can ultimately leave tourists feeling unsettled and/or horrified. In essence, Gothic tourism presents historical information with its own unique "kind of heritage fetishization" (McEvoy 2016, 205). As Gothic tourism studies is still in its infancy, there is more literature available on how 'dark tourism' studies have approached the storytelling devices of dark or Gothic sites.

Most of the early studies in 'dark tourism' focused on how dark tourist sites, or those sites associated with death or suffering, were presenting themselves to visitors. As part of this, the commodification process was analysed, with frequent reports that sites "sanitised, distorted or otherwise misrepresented tragic historical events" (Light 2017, 283). The competing interests of 'education' and 'entertainment' have been frequently studied, with some researchers focusing on the role of the

spectacle and entertainment replacing, or overshadowing, the role of education. Richard Sharpley and Philip Stone (2009, 111) have referred to this as 'dark edutainment' and suggest that these are often inauthentic experiences that rely on replicas passed off as authentic items or experiences. Similarly, Crispin Dale and Neil Robinson have used the term 'dertainment' to describe "dark attractions that attempt to entertain" (2011, 213). Questions over authenticity of sites and their exhibits have also been widely researched, with an acknowledgement that many sites provide selective or partial historical or educational accuracy.

Later 'dark tourism' research focused on the tourist motivations for visiting sites, and also their interpretation of sites. Naturally, this has led to findings that, while a site may have a specific objective in mind, for example to educate or to provide entertainment, the site cannot control how each visitor will 'experience' their visit. Rather, "each visitor will experience a site in different ways so that 'dark' places will have a multitude of different meanings for different visitors" (Light 2017, 281). This is not restricted to 'dark tourism' sites; most museums and heritage sites are faced with similar difficulties, and the role of storytelling is paramount in guiding tourists' impressions, understandings, and emotions.

'Dark Tourism Spectrum'

There are many different types of dark or Gothic tourism sites with varying aims and levels of 'darkness'. Philip Stone has argued that 'dark tourism' products can be found along a "'fluid spectrum of intensity' whereby particular sites may be conceivably 'darker' than others, dependent upon various defining characteristics, perceptions and product features" (2006, 146). When trying to classify a site, researchers have looked at a range of issues, including: the type of information the site provides to tourists; the main aim of the site, for example, whether its main purpose is to provide a site of remembrance, commemoration, education, entertainment or a mixture of these; the authenticity of the site; and how long ago the atrocity occurred and whether or not the site is geographically located at the atrocity (Stone 2006). Richard Sharpley proposed four 'shades' of 'dark tourism', with 'Pale tourism' on one end representing "minimal or limited interest in death" and on the other extreme, 'Black tourism' where the site primarily exists for the "purposeful supply of experiences intended to satisfy" a fascination with death (2005, 226).

Building on this, in 2006, Philip Stone created a 'Dark Tourism Spectrum' and proposed that a site can move along a 'darkest-lightest' spectrum depending on a number of factors. For Philip Stone, the 'darkest' sites contain the following product features: a "higher political influence and ideology"; constitute the actual site of death and suffering (and therefore has 'location authenticity'); have an educational orientation; focus on conservation of history or commemoration; the information provided is authentic; represent atrocities that happened more recently; have non-purposeful supply; and have lower tourism infrastructure (2006, 151). Contrastingly,

on the 'lightest' side of the scale are those sites with "lower political influence and ideology"; sites associated with death and suffering (and therefore do not hold location authenticity); are orientated towards providing entertainment; have high levels of tourism infrastructure; are more commercial and romanticise events; are perceived to present less authentic exhibits or experiences; have a purposeful supply; and focus on events that occurred more historically (Stone 2006, 151). 'Light' sites can include those tourist attractions that instil "a sense of fear, trepidation, novelty and excitement into the customer experience" by utilising tactics that evoke shock, horror and revulsion because the experience occurs in a *safe* space and retains a focus of entertainment (Stone 2009, 169-170). Emma McEvoy (2010; 2013; 2016) would argue that these sites are actually Gothic tourism locales.

Exploring Philip Stone's (2006) assertion that political influences affect the 'darkness' of a site, it is important to examine exactly what dimension broader political agendas provide to dark tourist sites (Sharpley 2009b). Some sites present "selective story lines" that may reflect a particular political bias or serve to indoctrinate visitors (Sharpley and Stone 2009, 114). However, not all tourist sites will have a political dimension, and others may even clash with broader political objectives. Richard Sharpley argues, reinforcing Philip Stone's original argument, that those sites without "political exploitation", or even those that are "politically benign" will often fall into the 'light' to 'lightest' categories of the 'dark tourism spectrum' (2009b, 148). For some sites, usually those dependent upon government funding, there can be economic pressure to present a particular narrative; usually one that will attract the most tourists (Witcomb 2012).

Similarly, the overall narrative presented at each site, and the more detailed or nuanced narratives can affect where a site sits on the spectrum. Many sites present a passive position on the narratives that are being told to render such sites "emotionally innocuous" (Wilson 2005, 121), or else focus on those narratives that are easily romanticised or mythologised (Witcomb 2012); yet many also choose to focus on some select stories, often those with a "bizarre, catchy, romantic and striking" history to attract tourists and make the site "less dark" and "more interesting" (Shehata, Langston, and Sarvimaki 2018, 6). As such:

... this ensures that the stories being told contains 'recreational' jokes while having exciting 'educational' resonance, in addition to being 'fun, light and entertaining', reducing any sense of 'uncomfortableness', 'darkness', 'tragic' or 'horror' associated with the site (Shehata, Langston, and Sarvimaki 2018, 6).

The selectivity of narratives, of particular 'characters' and/or periods of history aids in making the site a "consumable tourism product" (McKercher and du Cros 2002, 128). Other tactics in making a site consumable include mythologising the asset; crafting a narrative around the site; forming links between past and present; "emphasis[ing] its otherness ... mak[ing] it triumphant; mak[ing] it a spectacle; mak[ing] it a fantasy; mak[ing] it fun, light, and entertaining" (McKercher and du

Cros 2002, 128). While not all of these elements are required, they should be selected to reflect the “physical and emotional characteristics of the asset, the desired cultural heritage management goals, the desired experience to be provided, and the existing knowledge and awareness of the asset and the tourist” (McKercher and du Cros 2002, 128).

Classifying the Site of Study

The site selected for analysis here was the Melbourne City Watch House, located in Victoria, Australia. It was selected because it offered interactive ‘crime and justice’ experiences; that is, it offered interactive and immerse tours of the site to educate and entertain tourists. Following on from most research within the ‘dark tourism’ literature, one researcher became a participant-observer within the tour at the site. That is, the researcher joined tours as a ‘tourist’, collected information and then analysed the field notes through a very personal lens.

Data was collected from the Melbourne City Watch House on two separate occasions, although online material and marketing brochures from other periods are also included in this analysis. One of the researchers utilised a covert participant observation methodology and joined the Watch House day tour as an active participant in August 2014 and then again in February 2015. Participant observation is a “key part of anthropological fieldwork”, enabling researchers to understand the “lived experience from the insiders perspective” (Palmer 2009, 4, 5). That is, through joining the tour as a ‘tourist’ the researcher was able to ‘experience’ the tour as it was designed to be delivered. Covert participant observation is routinely used in tourism studies, with many academics engaging in this activity (see Dalton 2015; Stone 2009), and often taking the tour on multiple occasions to analyse differences (although in many cases the researchers undertook tours much closer together). Participating in the tour on two separate occasions (and a few months apart) enabled the researcher to analyse similarities and differences in the way tours were conducted. Participating in separate tours also enabled the researcher to examine whether tours were altered depending on different tourist groups. For example, as Catherine Palmer (2009) has noted, all tours have some fluidity and flow that is impacted by different individuals and groups participating in the tour. This was certainly the case in this research, as will be explored below. In addition, there were different tour guides for both experiences, however, overall, the experiences of the guides were very similar indicating that the actors presenting the tours were providing a very structured experience for tourists.

While previous research has focused on the authenticity of ‘dark tourism’ sites or where a *site* sits on Philip Stone’s (2006) ‘darkest’ to ‘lightest’ scale, there has been less research on the supply of *tours* within these sites. That is, there is usually a broader examination of the site in question, rather than a focused analysis of a specific tour. The research presented here focuses on a specific ‘crime and justice’

type tour, adopting a supply-focused approach that analyses the storytelling effects of a tour on crime and justice.

Melbourne City Watch House

The Melbourne City Watch House is part of the wider *Old Melbourne Gaol: Crime and Justice Experience*. The site is located in the heart of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD) and the building is adjacent to the Old Melbourne Gaol. Entry to the Watch House can be purchased through the Old Melbourne Gaol gift shop. For context, the Old Melbourne Gaol provides tourists with many opportunities to explore the 'Gothic': it offers 'Hangman Night Tours'; 'Halloween Night Tours' (where customers are invited to dress up, and indeed the best costume receives a prize); and a 'Ghosts? What Ghosts!' night-time tour. These experiences are designed to scare and titillate tourists with macabre stories of death, pain and suffering, and links to Emma McEvoy's assertion that sites can go in for "Gothic accessorization when the season is right" (2016, 206).

In contrast, the City Watch House is less 'Gothic' – there have been no deaths at the site; although there would certainly have been pain, suffering and the incarceration of the underprivileged and minority groups. The Watch House was used to house "felons" that "were brought to face justice whether arrested in the streets of Melbourne for minor misdemeanours or being brought before the court for significant crimes" (Old Melbourne Gaol 2022). While the current tourist site has a long history as Melbourne's City Watch House (it was built between 1907 and 1909); the Watch House was originally housed from 1892 in the same location, but within a disused cell block of the Old Melbourne Gaol. This cell block was then demolished, and the current City Watch House was constructed to match the architectural design of the Magistrates' Court located next door. Between 1913 and 1994 alleged offenders were held at the City Watch House until they were officially remanded or released on bail. The interior of the building has been preserved (including the graffiti) and the website promotes it as being "complete in every respect" (Old Melbourne Gaol 2022). The site is comprised of the booking room; holding cells where prisoners were held awaiting trial or bail (including a wet-cell and padded cell); separate exercise yards for male and female prisoners; and an identification room, "where prisoners in ID parades were separated from their accusers by no more than a set of strong floodlights" (RMIT University 2022).

At the time the research data was collected, tourists could only enter the Watch House as part of an interactive experience where tourists were 'arrested', 'charged' and 'locked-up' on site. However, in 2021, tourists were offered the opportunity to participate in a more 'Gothic' experience of a night-time tour that lasted one hour and invited tourists to experience the cells inhabited by famous 'characters'. These night tours are no longer on offer (despite being advertised on the home page – when you click through however, visitors are told that this page no longer exists). Further, from the 27th September 2022, the only way that tourists can access the Watch House is through a self-guided tour utilising their smartphones to

immerse themselves in an “audio discovery trail” that is activated by scanning QR codes throughout the site (Old Melbourne Gaol 2022). Headphones are recommended to enable full immersion. As such, the presence of human actors have been removed entirely, although it may be the case that there is still some dramatisation of the stories within the audio guide – further research is required. The focus of this paper is on the ‘arrest encounter’, as neither the night-time tour nor the self-guided tour was available at the time of data collection.

Marketing Material

For many, the tourist experience starts with researching the site prior to travelling. The Old Melbourne Gaol has developed an attractive website that provides information about the site itself, as well as information about what visitors can expect. The website appears to be routinely updated to reflect new activities and experiences on offer. In 2018, the website advertised the City Watch House experience as a “40-minute interactive experience like no other. With a Charge Sergeant as guide, visitors are ‘arrested’ and encounter what it is like to be locked up” (National Trust Victoria 2018, n.p; Old Melbourne Gaol 2018). The website no longer displays this information, instead, in 2021 it promoted a night time tour of the site that allowed the tourist to be immersed “in the criminal underworld that was the Melbourne City Watch House in an experience set in the original cell block inhabited by the likes of Squizzy Taylor, Chopper Read and other unsavoury characters” (Old Melbourne Gaol 2021a). As mentioned, the focus of this paper is on the former experience, however, it is important to recognise the ongoing focus of the site through their online marketing and their efforts to ‘sell’ the site in terms of offering engaging and interactive activities (that are often Gothic in nature): not just through the process of being ‘arrested and processed’, but also through being in the same physical spaces as some of Melbourne’s (and Australia’s) most notorious criminals.

Such descriptions may have left the potential tourist with expectations of a fun and ‘light-hearted’ experience. However, on the ‘Visit and Contact’ page, the designers carefully discussed the suitability of these tours for younger audiences (both in 2018 and 2021). Visitors were warned that “the tour may be unsuitable for young children”, with class bookings only available to Year 5 students and above due to the nature of the exhibits, including “punishment equipment, death masks and execution areas” (Old Melbourne Gaol 2021b). Parents were advised to do “some research before attending the site to decide if it is appropriate for your family”, while at the same time reassuring visitors that the acting Sergeants “will use only verbal commands during [the] experience” (Old Melbourne Gaol 2021b). Importantly, readers were told that *actors* played the role of a police Sergeant, and that parents should be aware of traumatising material for young children.

While the website provided comprehensive and valuable information on the site, not all tourists conduct online research before visiting. For those tourists who

attended without prior knowledge, the site offered free brochures outlining the attractions. In the *Old Melbourne Gaol: Crime and Justice Experience Visitor Guide* brochure (three different versions were collected), visitors were provided the following information on what the Police Watch House 'experience' entailed:

Join one of our Sergeants and experience what its [sic] like to be arrested, charged and locked-up inside Melbourne's City Watch House. Cross the thin blue line and explore the place where Australia's most infamous criminals started their careers (n.d a, 4).

Join one of our Sergeants and experience a 'real life' encounter of what it would feel like to be arrested and locked up in a police station which only closed its doors in 1994. An opportunity to view the cells and the exercise yard (n.d b, 4).

The first brochure, collected during a field trip in August 2014 shows an image of an ill-kempt police Sergeant (messy hair, crumpled shirt) leaning on the desk of the City Watch House 'book-in' area writing in the police 'sign-in' book as the main image on the front cover. Contrastingly, the second brochure, collected almost seven months later in February 2015, has a well-presented (and groomed) police Sergeant also leaning on the desk of the City Watch House 'book-in' area writing in the police 'sign-in' book as the main image on the front cover. Both brochures advise that parental guidance is required for anyone under the age of 15, and that it is a "challenging environment", and has "course language and adult themes" (Old Melbourne Gaol n.d a, 4; Old Melbourne Gaol n.d b, 4).

In 2018, a more recent *Old Melbourne Gaol: Crime and Justice Visitor Guide* brochure was collected which shows yet another police Sergeant on the front cover; this time adopting a welcoming pose with no visible sign of the arrest book. However, on the inside cover, the same Sergeant looks stern and hardened, posing in front of two lines of 'prisoners' (tourists). This more recent brochure reflected almost identical wording to the brochure of 2015, promoting a "real life" encounter and the opportunity to experience the cells and exercise yard that had "only closed its doors" in 1994 (Old Melbourne Gaol n.d c, 5).

It appears as though a shift occurred in the marketing strategy for the Melbourne City Watch House. The emphasis of the earliest pamphlet appears to focus on attracting tourists through promises of being arrested and locked up where Australia's most infamous criminals were held. Later pamphlets shift away from focusing on the 'infamous criminals' but continue to reinforce the idea that visitors could experience being arrested and locked up in police cells which until very recently had been used for that exact purpose. This shift seems to reaffirm the Gothic appeal of the theatrical and immersive nature of the experience. Interestingly, none of the brochures indicate that the Charge Sergeant is an actor. As such, for those tourists not familiar with the website, it may have been unclear (particularly to

younger audiences) that the person ordering them around was not a police officer. The next section details what a *Crime and Justice Experience* actually entailed at the Melbourne City Watch House.

Melbourne City Watch House: The Crime and Justice Experience

As previously mentioned, the Watch House was visited on two separate occasions: once in August 2014 and the other in February 2015. Both tours followed the same theatrical format and routine; but each tour was conducted with different 'Charge Sergeants'. The first tour was run by a male Sergeant, and the second by a female Sergeant. For the most part, the observations recoded below come from the first tour, with differences from the second tour highlighted.

Both tours began with tourists directed to line up along the wall outside the Watch House with ticket at the ready. From the start, the Sergeant was 'in character', barking orders to create unease amongst the participants. In the 2014 tour, the Sergeant directed the 'boys' to line up on one side and the 'girls' on the other. Everyone was then issued an 'offence card' and asked to proceed into the Watch House. Once within the sign-in or 'booking area' of the police station (located directly inside the front entrance), the Sergeant randomly chose tourists including children to reveal the content of their offence sheets. This is a typical strategy to immerse tourists in the experience, particularly within Gothic tourism. The sheets were not 'censored', so some children received offence sheets with content they may not have understood. For example, offences included drink or dangerous driving, and 'stalking'.

The Sergeant then selected a single tourist and proceeded to conduct a mock book in. The tourist was asked if they had piercings, tattoos, scars or other identifying features. Over the giggling of some tourists, the Sergeant patiently explained that such information was sought as an alternate form of identification; as for example, beatings could distort faces rendering them unrecognisable. The remainder of the 'real book-in experience' consisted of the Sergeant talking about contraband material and how items such as prescription glasses would be confiscated (reason being glasses could be used as weapons to harm oneself or others). The explanations offered always took on a Gothic nature, with the aim to unsettle the group and create a sense of horror of the environment in which inmates were housed.

After the mock book-in, the group was led into the next area of the Watch Hall - a long hall where, again, 'boys' and 'girls' were asked to line up against opposite walls. Visitors were then 'searched'. This included holding up hands to the Sergeant's eye level (at which point visitors were told how things like band aids would be removed in case anything was hidden under them); opening mouths and placing tongues on the roof of mouths; and lifting feet, first the left and then the right foot. The sergeant then joked with one of the visitors that the next level of

search would ordinarily involve inmates removing their pants. The Sergeant then asked participants to follow him into the main hold area. The 'boys' were led into a cell and locked in together; the same with the 'girls'. Lights were then turned off. In the women's cell, as soon as the lights were turned off someone switched on the torch function of their iPad, perhaps in fear or defiance. They soon shut it off however. We sat locked in the dark for less than a minute before being released and directed to the indoor exercise yard. Enclosure in the cells provided Gothic claustrophobia and unease. Here, the Sergeant revealed that between 100 to 350 men could be kept in this one space with only one toilet out in the open (in the 2015 tour the female Sergeant explained that this was for safety reasons). He provided information on how guards sometimes did not flush the toilets to maintain order. The better behaved the men were, the nicer the guards were; in effect the guards adopted an incentive-based system. However, the Sergeant also noted at a later point that prisoners were, in general, well-behaved because the Watch House had been used to house people until they saw the magistrate; as such most were on their best behaviour because there was still chance of cases being dismissed.

The group was then given five minutes to explore the cells independently. During this time, the Sergeant suggested we pay particular attention to the padded cell used for solitary confinement, and the wet cell where there were no benches, just a large room and a drain in the floor where they put the drunks. The Sergeant explained the design of the cell was to minimise the amount of cleaning. With no benches and a drain in the floor, the guards could just hose the room down once the occupants were released. Up until this point no one on the tour appeared to be taking photographs, possibly because of the immersive nature of the experience. However, with more freedom and a break in the performative aspect of the tour, participants began to take photographs of this section of the site.

After the break, the group was taken to the women's exercise yard. This yard was much brighter and considering there were only around five women at a time in the Watch House, there was considerably more space than the men received. Much more information was imparted about this area in the later tour with the female Sergeant than was recounted in the earlier 2014 tour. For example, we were told that the female exercise yard had highest rates of violence because of the heat (very little shade was available in the outside courtyard). From the 1980s a television was placed in the yard with the intention of changing the inmate's behavior. Good behavior was rewarded by choice of television program; however, if they acted inappropriately, female inmates were made to watch *Play School* over and over again. Typical meals included vegemite on toast or Cornflakes or Weetbix for breakfast which was eaten in their cells; MacDonalld's or Pizza Hut for lunch; and something like sausages for dinner that was also eaten in their cells. Unlike the males, female inmates were entrusted with doors on the showers and toilets.

The performative aspect of the tours ended with stories about the last man to be hanged in Victoria and his escapes from the Watch House, and criminals of

'Underbelly' fame, such as Squizzy Taylor and Karl Williams, as well as Chopper Reid were recited.

In 2015 tours concluded with two opportunities for photographs commemorating the tour experience. Visitors could take their own 'mugshot' photograph in a police cell complete with a police board 'booking number' standing in front of a traditional mugshot height marker attached to one of the cell walls. Most people on the tour took up this opportunity. A second 'fee' paying photographic service was also offered. Tourists could have their pictures taken (along with family/friends etc) 'behind bars', which were subsequently sold through the Old Melbourne Gaol gift-shop. Photos came encased in a folder reading "Australia's most wanted experience", with photographs labelled "Australia's most wanted" (Old Melbourne Gaol n.d d, 2).

Many of the photographs taken by visitors themselves appear on the Old Melbourne Gaol Facebook and Twitter accounts where visitors share their pictures and experiences (and which may then be used on the webpage). The photographs reflect a mixture of content with people trying for either a 'serious' mugshot photo (such as posing as if reflective of a real criminal in locked up, which was the pose recommended by the Sergeant during the 2014 tour) or those smiling and laughing, demonstrating adoption of standard expressions associated with tourists having a good time.

Storytelling and the 'Dark Tourism Spectrum'

The process of situating a site upon Stone's scale is not straightforward, nor is the site wholly 'Gothic', with a particular absence of ghost stories. As Philip Stone himself admits "it would be foolhardy to suggest that all dark tourism products possess all of the defining traits which would allow them to be plotted precisely on this 'spectrum of supply'" (2006, 157). Instead, sites, and the products that they offer, are multi-layered, and will inevitably be perceived differently by individual tourists. In addition, with changes in exhibits or tours, sites can shift along the "Dark Tourism Spectrum, from darker to lighter, and vice versa" (Stone 2006, 158).

At the time of visitation, the tour of the Watch House site could be placed upon the 'lighter' to 'lightest' side of the spectrum. This reflects Duncan Light, Steven Richards and Preslava Ivanova's reflection that there is "a clear overlap between lightest dark tourism and Gothic tourism" (2021, 229). There was a clear 'entertainment orientation' to the tour, being a 'commercial' and 'romanticised' experience situated within high levels of tourism infrastructure; all of which place it on the 'lightest' end of the spectrum. However, the site itself held authenticity as a genuine disused police Watch House, moving it along the spectrum towards the darker side. Similarly, the Watch House was active as recently as 1994, again placing the site towards the darker end.

Many dark tourist sites focus on atrocities and deaths outside of living memory; or are at least created after a considerable amount of time has elapsed. Research has found that local communities can be hesitant or unwilling to have sites repurposed as tourism sites due to perceived shame, embarrassment or lingering hurt (Rofe 2013; Shehata, Langston, and Sarvimaki 2018). According to Waled Shehata, Craig Langston, and Marja Sarvimaki (2018, 5) the “longer the time, the more families of past inmates become deceased or relocated” the easier it becomes for sites to be reused as tourism industries. In the case of the Watch House, part of the focus is very much on still living inmates, and indeed celebrity inmates. While this helps to add elements of entertainment and titillation, the fact remains that there are still likely living relatives or even Watch House residents themselves still living in Melbourne. As such, the site should feel much ‘darker’ than it really does. Instead, the Gothic presentation of the narrative, and the staged experiences of being ‘locked-up’ make the site very much ‘light’.

Through selecting (and marketing) infamous crooks once housed in the Watch House, the site reinforces its consumable tourism product, thus keeping it ‘light’. Focus on infamous crooks and characters is therefore not that surprising. The selection of high-profile inmates means that the type of information available at the sites is usually available elsewhere – for example, in popular media and culture and therefore appealing to anyone who has heard those names and become fascinated by the crimes they have committed – and so the site offers tourists a unique insight into how these characters ‘lived’, if only for a short period of time.

With a particular focus on selective narratives and characters, the site has been able to produce a highly entertaining and successful consumable tourism product. In the Watch House experience, the process of being ‘booked’ and ‘charged’ was both discomfiting and striking. As a tourist it was difficult to choose between laughing and feeling horror at the treatment of ‘charge-es’. At the same time, the acting Sergeant’s request that tourists engage with their prisoner sheet helped to draw people into the story – for the tourist it felt like they were reading or hearing real life cases and getting a ‘real’ taste of what went on in the Watch House. Providing visitors with a ‘role’ to play is a common strategy employed within Gothic tourism to fully immerse tourists (McEvoy 2013).

At times, feelings of disquiet prevailed, however this was generally produced by the acting Sergeant rather than from the site itself (and again, is one of the aims of Gothic tourism). The integration of ‘recreational’ jokes and over the top acting created uneasiness, yet at the same time reduced any uncomfortableness that may have been generated by the site itself and/or representations of inmate experiences. The ability of the actor/guide to navigate audience interaction is an important element of Gothic tourism, referring back to Emma McEvoy’s (2013) work, the acting Sergeant needs to ‘read’ the audience to determine how far they can ‘push’ the crowd. So, while the actor is clearly guided by a script, the small diversities in the two tours indicates that the guides were skilled in adapting to the audience on the

go – perhaps less screaming when being ‘searched’ if children are present; or less time being ‘locked-up’ if someone shows discomfort. The body needs to be affected, but in a positive way to ensure ‘happy customers’. The acting of the Sergeant also reflects Stone’s ‘light’ scale – the actor is being playful and engaging – selecting specific members of the public to perform in the spectacle, in much the same way that the actor portraying a barber surgeon enthralled crowds at the York Dungeon (Stone 2009).

For the researcher at least, it was not until the tourists wandered the site themselves that a sense of the true pain and suffering associated with the site was felt. However, there were times during both visits that the more detailed narratives of what the inmates lived through instigated reflection upon crime and justice policies and the inventive forms of ‘torture’. For example, not flushing the toilets in the men’s recreational area on hot days or forcing the women to continuously watch Play School meant everyday aspects of life were repurposed as tools of punishment, which may have resulted in long-lasting impact on those held at the Watch House post release.

Increasing the entertainment aspect of the experience, the Watch House tour enabled, and encouraged, tourists to become active participants in the Watch House story by being ‘booked’, ‘charged’ and held in a cell. Throughout these processes, there are numerous ways in which tourists can shape their experience (and that of others) of the site. For example, the way in which tourists responded to the Sergeant’s instructions can change the nature of the tour, and each tour group will always be different as noted by Catherine Palmer (2009). Compliance on the part of visitors, for example, results in historical exposition of non-compliance rather than theatrical role-playing. In another example, the use of a device such as a torch in a dark cell demonstrates the ways in which tourists can subvert the original intention of the tour, as well as the different ways tourists will engage the site.

Several researchers have noted the role of smartphones in transforming visitors from mere interpreters to “active participants” (Light 2017, 291). Visitors can use their smartphones to check the authenticity of information presented at a site, seek further information, and of course take photographs and videos. Posing for a photograph captures the tourist in that place. While photography and filming were limited in both tours, it was still present. As mentioned, tourists seemed reluctant to take photographs at the beginning part of the tour, and from an internet search it seems most tourists adopt this approach with very few photographs of the experience of ‘being searched’ and none of the ‘booking area’. The majority of photographs are of individuals in cells (posing) or the sharing of mugshot images. However, while people may not have been taking photographs through that first section of the tour, as already mentioned, devices were very much ‘present’.

Essentially, the taking of photographs, and in particular, mock mugshots or posing within prison cells, places the Watch House site further along the ‘less

serious' scale. This part of the tour is pure entertainment and has a very purposeful supply element. It also romanticises and commercialises the taking of mugshots. While it could be argued that the decommissioning of this site as a Watch House lessens the ethical issues surrounding the taking of fake mugshots, it is still important to remember that countless individuals have had their photo taken without consent as part of a 'real' crime and justice experience. However, once commercialised, and romanticised, the sites can now use the same technology and the same atmosphere to create 'fun' and 'memorable' souvenirs.

Utilising Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros's (2002) suggested 'tactics' in transforming a cultural asset into a tourism product, it is clear that most, if not all, of the listed tactics have been adopted by the Watch House. The site has been mythologised in terms of providing insight into 'real-life' crime and justice experiences as well as focusing on famous criminals that have developed their own mythology within popular culture. The site has carefully constructed narratives that emphasise the 'Otherness' of those who break the law and those who enforce the law and there is a clear link between the past and the present. That is, the experience focuses on 'past practices' with the implicit understanding that many (if not all of) these practices still occur today. The site is triumphant because it is a profitable attraction; tourists are engaged and immersed within a 'spectacle' which is fun, light and entertaining. Essentially, the tour remains a Gothic fantasy. While it represents 'real-life' occurrences (however sanitised), ultimately, tourists can leave any time they like, inmates cannot. As such, the site is a prime example of a consumable tourism product.

The employment of actors to narrate and guide visitors through the Watch House encourages a narrow interpretation of the site. As Richard Sharpley and Philip Stone (2009, 114-115) argue:

... interpretation presents selective storylines which may be politically or ideologically biased ... or may be little more than indoctrination – the interpreter mediates between the attraction and the visitor and hence the latter's perception of the attraction and its meaning; and ... those storylines may be inaccurate or inauthentic, presenting a comfortable, rose-tinted or safe, sanitised version of past events.

In the case of the Watch House, the narrative is politically motivated – there is a clear storyline of what it was like for the guards, and how they controlled the inmates. There is no criticism or apology for the system it represents and there is no genuine commentary upon the conditions experienced by those incarcerated apart from general discussions of boredom, overcrowding and heat exposure in the exercise yards.

There is an absence of a discussion of the overrepresentation of many minority groups including the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous Australians;

or the embedded political injustices within the justice system that disadvantages those that are mentally ill (except of course to be shown the padded cell), non-English speaking individuals, people who do not conform to criminal justice notions of gender, or disabled people. This is not unique to this site, as Jacqueline Wilson (2011) and Heather Brook (2009) have explored, most crime or prison tourism neglects the experiences of minority groups at sites, particularly the experiences of Indigenous Australians (indeed little research focuses on Indigenous 'dark tourism', although it is a growing field, see Grant and Harman 2017). There is an absence of challenging "stereotypical portrayals of confinement" (Ferguson, Piché and Walby 2019, 321) and visitors are only cursorily told about the struggles faced by the criminalised (and in a way that implies they deserved any such struggles through misbehaving or being drunk etc). The humiliation that those arrested must face in the process of being searched is not merely glossed over but turned into a Gothic interactive spectacle designed to titillate and entertain consumers.

There is no explicit condemnation of the informal 'torture' methods inflicted on the prisoners – this information is merely related to 'shock' the audience. Despite this, or indeed perhaps *because* of these absences, while the tour is 'political' it remains on the lighter side of the spectrum. Indeed, the site can be described as politically benign because it fails to engage (or acknowledge) many of these contested political issues, or the injustices experienced by many of the inmates being held at the location. Instead, the site presents an uncontested political message that is normative to most people – as such it offers a 'light' experience, where visitors are not overly challenged in their feelings or beliefs about the narrative of citizens being forced to waive their liberties once they have broken the law. The police and the system of the Watch House are presented and reinforced as an important aspect of the criminal justice process. In this way, the site conforms to many Gothic or 'dark tourism' sites – the managers utilise the actors and their narrative to define the history of the site on their own terms. National Trust Victoria have complete control over the story being presented, enabling a deliberate construction of politically 'safe' social and cultural constructions of ideas and concepts. In this way the Watch House is a Gothic tourism site because it acts as a site of resistance (McEvoy 2016) against different, more inclusive, narratives.

The tour furthers the 'othering' process in primarily presenting the perspectives of the law enforcement officers. As Jacqueline Wilson aptly states in relation to prison guards offering tours:

... however truthful they are as storytellers, however entertaining as raconteurs, however some of them may attempt, in good faith, to empathise with those whose lives they confined and controlled with their keys and uniformed authority, they cannot, in the final analysis, tell those inmates' stories, nor the stories of those for whom the inmates' welfare was paramount, in other than the voices of prison officers (2005, 126)

This is applicable at this site, although further complicated by the fact that actors are presenting information, rather than 'genuine stakeholders' as 'real' law enforcement officers. The narratives of those controlled at the Watch House are silenced, making it easier to keep the tour fun, light and entertaining. It also aids in the Gothic element of the site. While 'ghosts' of former inmates may seem the straightforward Gothic approach, the use of an actor to intimidate and impose order upon tourist 'inmates' creates a 'scare' environment that is viewed as 'authentic', and as such more 'real' and confronting for visitors.

Upon entering the Watch House, tourists are "entering onto a stage set", where, similar to the Clink in London, "in the opening room visitors are positioned as spectators" (McEvoy 2010, 146) to the acting sergeant performing the past and the tour is designed as a journey. The tourists become a "captive audience", forced to move out of the role of "bemused spectators" and into active participants (McEvoy 2010, 146). The performative aspect of Gothic tours has been described by Emma McEvoy (2016, 205) as being most effective when the authentic is positioned besides the fake. In this case, the 'fake' Sergeant is given authenticity because of the way they are dressed, behave and the fact that they are acting within a decommissioned Police Watch House.

However, it is important to reiterate, that each tourist experience is different. So, while these are the reflections of the researchers, the sites may have felt 'darker' or less 'Gothic' to other tourists, particularly those tourists who may have a connection to the site.

Conclusion

Waled Shehata, Craig Langston, and Marja Sarvimaki (2018, 3) argued that "although it seems difficult to acknowledge, decommissioned gaols might not be so dark after all". Similarly, decommissioned police watch houses are not very 'dark'. While the focus of these sites necessarily centres around 'dark' material, such as crime, suffering, incarceration, and power imbalances; overall the visits are 'entertaining' and 'light'. Yet, the site retains a sense of conservation and education – visitors learn about previous (and present) crime and justice practices within these tours. There is an element of authenticity (however much diluted through entertainment) and opportunity to reflect on the site and the people that were affected by the site (in the case of the Watch house, the prisoners, and guards).

According to Jacqueline Wilson et al (2017, 5-6):

Whether such sites perform important educational work or fail to do so is often more dependent on questions of what is thought most likely to entertain, titillate, amuse or 'frighten' the average member of the public, with the added imperative in many cases to preserve the 'establishment' narrative pertaining to the former institution (Wilson 2008). As memory institutions,

museums can conceal and distort as much as they preserve understandings of the past (Crane 1997).

In terms of the site under analysis in this article, the tour was very much Gothically 'staged' and 'controlled'. The experience was crafted to create a palatable and sanitised version of the history of the Melbourne City Watch House. While the site does reflect some authenticity, the experience itself was romanticised and concealed numerous voices, particularly (and not surprisingly) the voices of the 'offenders'. On the Watch House tour, tourists were made to feel uncomfortable – yet, while feeling uncomfortable, there was no overt analysis of whether such treatment of (alleged) offenders was suitable or not – it is simply presented as 'how things are done'. In turn, the narrative throughout the experience centres upon how the captors behaved, and how this in turn changed how they were treated by the guards, with no evaluation or commentary on the humanity (or lack thereof) of these processes. As such, the site becomes politically benign, reflecting again its placement on the lighter side of Philip Stone's dark spectrum.

Yet, as a Gothic and/or 'dark tourism' attraction, the site delivers engaging and interactive techniques to immerse the tourist in an 'experience'. The staging of the arrest and lock-up of 'prisoners' provides a perfect example of Emma McEvoy's (2010, 140) Gothic tourism and its emphasis on being "performance-based, sitting uneasily on the boundaries between fiction and history, amusement and edification, mock-up and historical site". The walk-through of the Watch House, and the activities that tourists engage in whilst on this tour (being arrested, searched, locked-up) all blur the line between fiction and history – it is fictional because the tourists are not really being incarcerated; yet historical, because these processes happened to numerous individuals at that very site. As a 'light' dark/Gothic tourist site, the Melbourne Watch House provides opportunities for families to engage in crime and justice narratives and experience amusement and titillation, as evidenced by the numerous photographs of children taken at these sites and visible across the internet. The audience is allowed into the 'theatre' of crime and justice in a form of "gleeful generic trespass", where walking in the same footsteps as offenders summons the "invisible past" (McEvoy 2010, 141, 143).

The 'Otherness' of those arrested helps to distance the tourist from experiencing real discomfort while touring these sites or engaging in perhaps ethically suspect behaviours, such as taking 'cellfies' (selfies taken in holding or prison cells). The narratives have been carefully crafted and framed, with interactive activities dispersed throughout the tour to reinforce the overall story and to provide a lasting memory for tourists. As Emma McEvoy (2010, 150) asserts, "the most satisfying Gothic tourism ... employs forms and tropes that relate, in some fashion, back to the history of the area, recasting it, or its loss, playfully and inventively". This Gothic tour at the Watch House can certainly be conceptualised as a particular form of lightest 'dark tourism'. As Philip Stone has himself written "*lighter dark tourism* occurs when narratives of fear and the taboo are extracted and packaged up

as fun, amusement and entertainment and, ultimately, exploited for mercantile advantage" (2009, 169). Tourists are offered excitement and adventure, as well as disorientation and trepidation (Stone 2009).

The replacement of these tours with self-guided audio tours utilising QR code technologies adds a further complicating factor to this paper. The removal of the 'actors' and immersive 'experience' takes the site more towards the 'dark' end of the spectrum, and also eliminates many of the Gothic aspects of the tour. Although, as neither researcher has experienced the audio-tour, this may be a complete misassumption. Perhaps the audio guide provides more Gothic fright scare opportunities? Perhaps actors continue to be utilised – but rather than assuming the role of a charge sergeant, perhaps multiple voices (and therefore perspectives) are delivered? Further research is required to determine whether the site has become 'darker' and therefore less Gothic.

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Just a Phase? The Enduring Socio-Aesthetic Networks of Goth Identity

ABSTRACT

This paper presents research findings that inform contemporary perspectives on the complex phenomenon of international Goth identity. Explored here is the indelible relationship between the social networks and uncanny aesthetics of Goth identity, and evidence that connectedness is fundamental to the endurance of contemporary gothic communities. Emergent from this study is identification of the socio-aesthetic framework which underpins collective and individual Gothness.

Described throughout is how the online perpetuation of Goth, and gothic, aesthetics has reinforced the core tenets of the culture, by providing tangible connections to previous generations in conjunction with new in-culture experiences. This is informed by analysis of research, comprised empirical survey, observation and interview data from two distinct self-identifying cohorts: Australian and international older, long-term Goths. Over 2000 participants contributed to the dataset, identifying the constituent elements, spectrum of aesthetics and modes of engagement of Goth culture.

Findings here show that Goth is an example of an enduring globally connected network continuously recalibrating its aesthetic framework. While intimate and interpersonal networks remain essential, the prevalence and extent of online contact has transformed the nature and vitality of Gothness. Data illustrate how these uncanny communities have evolved modes of engagement, transitioning from solely in-person groups to increasingly embrace remote, then online networks to maintain cultural connections.

The complex phenomenon of Goth is thus intentionally formed, maintained, and evolved through shared cultural experiences. This paper proposes Goth should be considered as a mature cultural phenomenon and a socio-aesthetic framework around which identity is formed and endures through different life phases.

Keywords: Goth Subculture, Gothic, Socio-Aesthetics, Identity, Networks

Is Goth Just a Phase?

The Goth subcultural phenomenon is a global collective identity construct built on distinct, highly codified aesthetic preferences and behaviours. Explored here is the indelible relationship between the social and aesthetic elements of Goth identity. This paper examines how Goth aesthetics endure through different life stages, even without traditional modes of reliable in-person activities and resources readily available to participants.

The contentious, frequently-posed question 'Is Goth just a phase?' serves as the anchor around which this study is devised. With just a phase, 'What is Goth?' remains one of the most contested notions in the culture. Its co-reliant states of constancy and evolution are examined here in relation to the seemingly opposing forces of nostalgic reflection and emerging "newness", defined by its striking aesthetic and profoundly social characteristics.

This fertile discourse and continual evaluation of Goth aesthetics, argot, culture, and commodities was a strong impetus to investigate and better understand notions of *being Goth*, particularly in later life. It generates the points of investigation: How are the characteristics of Gothness perpetuated, and how is the phenomenon of Goth subcultural identity best described in academic literature?

Research Approach and Analysis

The following discussion is informed by the research project *Just a Phase? Goth Subculture as an identity constant beyond youth*. Findings are resultant of analysis of empirical survey, observation and interview data from two distinct self-identifying cohorts: Australian and international long-term, older Goths. Responses from over 2000 individuals (participants) were received, from over forty-three countries³ with 441 Australian and 1332 international participants in the principal survey round, plus additional data from shorter surveys and hundreds of hours of one-on-one and group community engagement. All surveys and interactions were conducted in English; electing to limit research interaction to English clarified the scope of research and enabled online interactions to be administered without third-party translations or software. Future research may address this limitation, potentially surveying and document Goth experiences specific to non-English speaking backgrounds and diverse ethnicities.

Surveys and data sources used existing Goth networks including real world and online communication channels, applying survey instruments to best connect

³ Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, SE Asia, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Unclassified/Other, United Kingdom, USA.

with the target cohort (Kempson 2015 1083). Additionally visual material, including a research business card was distributed to Goth retail outlets, on the reverse was a QR-code to enable interested participants to directly access the survey via a smartphone, thereby improving survey uptake. Through this approach the networks and practices of Goth identity, the presumed locus of the international Goth socio-aesthetic framework, were both activated and tested as part of the research.

While the volume of data alone does not ensure a quality research outcome, it indicates genuine interest in the research themes and demonstrates community willingness to participate in this academic study. An important feature of the research design included free-text sections throughout the surveys to encourage participants to provide personalised reflections on Goth. Over the course of the survey this built up a dialogue within the survey structure, creating a deep virtual interview. This approach resulted in an additional 371000+ words in free-text response data voluntarily generated by participants, outside set questions. These responses represent a unique data-set which provides candid insight into previously unquantifiable experiences of Gothness and the nature of Goth identity over extended life stages. The high volume of quality data generated by the research exposed lines of enquiry which enabled an evaluation of the Goth subculture across a broader geographic and demographic spectrum.

The traditional ethnographic approaches of observation, survey and idiomatic interview practice was then examined by an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) perspective. Goth and the gothic share cultural space within both mainstream and Goth consciousness, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the differing emphases of each. IPA provided a method of observing Goths from a research perspective that was simultaneously within and outside the immediate context of the study, a continual happening of a phenomenon external to the artificial boundaries of study. Crucially IPA situates the researcher within the ethnographic study, identifying the insider role of the researcher as part of a symbiotic research relationship where each perspective is essential to deriving outcomes (Paley, 2016 p. 121). Through this approach the phenomena of Goth networks and practices of Goth identity – the socio-aesthetic framework – is revealed.

Critical Context

On reviewing the literature on Goth culture, there is a significant gap in discourse in relation to Australian participants and the global phenomenon of Goth. To date, most ethnographic studies had been conducted in small, discreet interpersonal cohorts around narrow, often local research topics. This research works toward addressing this gap, examining how notions of Gothness are expressed across networks of Goth culture in aesthetic, social and global contexts.

Studying Punks and Mods in the 1970s UK, Dick Hebdige pioneered an ethnographic approach which simultaneously observed the sometimes "spectacular" social contexts of these groups as well as the community of belonging achieved via their spectacularity, emphasising the interconnectivity of private and social selves (Hebdige 1979, 101). Crucially, Hebdige recognised that when observed iteratively subcultural style was as a form of discrete visual language that could communicate belonging and shared socio-aesthetic values in otherwise disparate and powerless groups (Hebdige 1979, 64). By identifying the significance of style in their social vocabulary, Hebdige began to shift sociological discourse away from the language of youth disempowerment towards a more nuanced examination of "youth subculture".

Subculture theory as described by Hebdige examines how Punk exploded in a state of rapidly evolving assemblage and energy, drawing on existing shocking imagery for affect, to create new fashion and appropriated cultural significance. Hebdige expressed this concept as *bricolage*; a behaviour which remains evident in Goth garb and affords it by-proxy cultural and historical gravitas. This is directly connected with notions of the literary/artistic *gothic mode* and its relationship with Gothness. Hebdige consequently remains a vital reference in the discussion of style and the socio-aesthetic mechanics of Goth culture. This further resonates with phenomenological approaches wherein a participant's sense of belonging and emotional attachment to their culture is balanced with physical and behavioural expressions of that commitment.

As explored by Ken Gelder (2007), Goth can be considered as a cultural phenomenon within the context of the gothic mode, a dark expression of anti-beauty muddled with Punk-inspired ideas of alternative identity, visual spectacularity, and non-conformity. In parallel to this, Goths appear equally concerned not to be neatly categorised in such a way that "the mainstream" can readily absorb or commodify their culture (Gelder 2007, 90). Pop culture commentary has at times ascribed a narrative of immorality and shame to Goth, insidiously othering participants, crucially not due to genuine evidence of criminality, rather based on aesthetic choices and perceptions of deviancy and Gothness being a threat to the social equilibrium (Furek 2008, 91).

Paul Hodkinson builds on these theoretical foundations, establishing Goth as a compelling area of academic investigation and theoretical debate (Hodkinson 2002 p. 11). Hodkinson provides a key entry for Goth in academic discourse, utilising both survey and insider-researcher insight to establish a critical position on Goth as an influential cultural phenomenon worthy of rigorous discourse. Importantly, in the first significant study of its kind into Goth identity in *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture*, Hodkinson also advances the theoretical underpinning of subcultural research through a detailed examination of Goth as a mode of image-based identity, furthering positions proposed by Hebdige (Hodkinson 2002). Hodkinson provides a re-working of Subcultural Theory, in which the scholarly constructs are broken

down and re-contextualised to allow for the maturation of Goth over several generations. In his discussions, Hodkinson identifies common Goth signifiers which remain present today as the definitive characteristics which set Goth apart from mainstream youth culture and communicate its sartorial standards to participants (Hodkinson 2002, 41).

As used by Hodkinson, style is perhaps the most accessible 'umbrella' descriptor to apply to Goth, as it allows for diverse interpretations. Compelling arguments have also been made by Keith Kahn-Harris (2006) and Jon Garland (2015, 2012), and Isabella Van Elferen (2008, 2011) for a more nuanced approach to post-subcultural studies and Goth. As discussed by Shane Blackman, post-subculturalists suggest a move away from the notions of rebellion and oppression, instead placing

academic weight on the study of how young individuals find agency and empowerment through the application of self-fashioning and social association (Blackman 2014, 505).

Findings here are further discussed in relation to the concept of *plenitude* as described by Grant McCracken. Citing the Goth subculture as having a "coherent, defined and engaging worldview" McCracken pinpoints a fundamental characteristic of the culture (McCracken 1997, 24). This has enabled its longevity and simultaneously provided a catalyst for its diversification and evolution over time. This theoretical position provides a persuasive outlook and exploration of 'subcultures' in which antiquated notions of deviance have faded, and analytical dialogue has matured into a more inclusive discourse. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach to Goth is in accord with this concept, as McCracken's model of 'little cultures' or lifeworlds replete within their own microcosm of societal norms best articulates the socio-aesthetic complexity and profundity of Gothness (McCracken 1997, 25).

By connecting the analytical and theoretical premises of plenitude, post-subcultural context and phenomenological analysis, a solid methodological framework was established through which quantitative and qualitative data could be examined, including highly personal experiences of Gothness.

Research Findings

Goth: A Profound Cultural Phenomenon

In its forty-plus year history Goth subculture has been labelled strange and unusual, its participants outsiders and misfits. Significantly however, the performative, sometimes spectacular aesthetic displays of Goth culture are explicit and, most crucially of all, conscious visual signifiers of distinctiveness. Of all "Goth stuff" the predominance of black clothing and spectacular, heavy or pale make-up remain it's most well-known and easily identified characteristics. Aesthetic

preferences simultaneously shield participants from unwanted attention and act as an invitation to look, yet look on self-stipulated terms.

Black clothes become the template into which less conspicuous stories are woven and Goth cultural substance is constructed (Demers 2010, 139). It draws on themes and styles which may be confronting to non-participants, yet much of the communication of Goth remains largely imperceptible to the outsider. Far from a superficial spectacular shock-only fashion, for many participants in this study, Gothness is intrinsically linked to social meaning-making and communities of belonging. Goths' capacity for evolution within its aesthetic parameters is the very essence of Goth aesthetic steadfastness; it is broad enough to shift with its participants as they move through different life stages, organically maintaining authentic Gothness while simultaneously absorbing new interpretations. Conceptions of Goth identity are contingent on at least some instantaneously tangible socio-aesthetic context; identifiably Goth aesthetic motifs, atmospheric traits which mirror the Gothic in combination with social connections and/or niche musical interests. As evidenced by survey and interview responses, in social settings the experience of deciphering substance in the style of other Goths becomes "the connecting tissue", the subcultural glue which creates lasting bonds and enables longevity of association (Ferrell et al. 2008, 198). It is through identifying and aggregating community behaviours and motifs rather than seeking to define any overall Goth look that the authentic nature of Gothness is identified.

Despite constant reinvention, Goth aesthetics are peculiarly orthodox; writing in 1991, Mick Mercer noted "Goths are instantly recognisable now in a way they weren't when it was simply post-Punk" (Mercer 1991, 7). This is a salient point which remains valid and one which bridges the notional gap between 1980s fledgling music style and contemporary Goth culture. Unlike Punk, Goths maintain an unyielding tonal foundation and recognisable aesthetic palette and a poetic melancholy to create their own uncanny community. Individual stylistic motifs and elements are then saturated with symbolic meaning and provide a wealth of insider knowledge of the culture. Older Goths retain traditional aesthetics, simultaneously absorbing new themes as younger generations proliferate new sounds, styles and visual status.

By remaining unfixed to an ultimate version of the genre, Goth has presented audiences and critics alike with a sophisticated moving target and perhaps avoided the fate of the more stylistically entrenched Punk movement. In research discussions and survey responses, Goths describe a strong feeling of uniqueness realised when wearing Goth style and engaging in Goth social rituals. In describing how they defined their Goth style, many respondents opted to self-define their identity/style or added 'all of the above', such as:

I don't like to place myself in a box, I love Deathrock, vampire Goth, industrial,
Trad Goth

[International Participant Age 49]

You just know, it can't be explained, it's more than clothing or a look, a 'true' Goth could stand a fluoro suit and somehow it would still just be there.

[Australian Survey Participant Age 45]

Self-esteem and “mattering” is generated through belonging within a subculture, and participants describe actively seeking out social networks which scaffold identity choices (Moran 2017, p. 389). As found by Hodkinson, in research discussions for this study, Goths in fact describe a strong feeling of individualism realised when wearing Goth clothing (Hodkinson 2002, 67).

What I love to this day about the Goth scene is the variety of interests and looks, yet all somehow connected. Horror, rock music, electronic music, fetish kink, dark humour, great drinking buddies and parties, great gigs, great fans... And it's alive and evolving, it's not stagnating like so many other subcultures. Over the twenty years I have been in the scene, so many looks and trends have come and gone, it's fascinating. Yet the people always stay the same at heart, great friends... they just look different every couple of years.

[Online Comment – Reddit Discussion]

Such savvy bricolage creates contextual reference-points based on explicit subcultural capital, with the appropriation of objects and styles otherwise external to the culture used to engender causal authenticity. For example: the use of goggles within the Goth context to signify connection with either the Cyber-Goth or Steampunk subgenres. Items such as kitsch vampire capes, Victorian boots, and fishnets become symbolic Trad Goth artefacts rather than an occasional aesthetic flirtation from another era. Goths may absorb aesthetic markers further than a single object or motif and overlay an entire suite of aesthetic choices such as Victorian mourning garb, replete with literary references, artistic, social and imagined fantasy elements (Roberts et al. 2014, 182).

As a consequence, Goth is not stagnant and as indicated above has comparable trend sequences to mainstream culture, drawing on self-reference and appropriation from outside the culture to refine it for each generation. The following Melbourne participant interview extract highlights the idea of a variety of influences beyond the once ubiquitous Victoriana.

Goth107: Goth is so hard to specify. Coz like - no matter how many branches there are they still don't cover that much!

What I am really interested in is the kind of vampy 1920s and Egyptian 1920s revival. That is the most beautiful thing to me! It is not really a subgenre of Goth - and I feel like it should be.

It influenced so many things, especially the whole Egyptian thing.

ELB: Yes, like the make-up of early flappers, that really extensive eye make-up?

Goth107: Exactly - long lashes, sad eyes, dark lips, dolly faces

It is so beautiful, I love it. I think that is SO Goth. The whole flapper movement was so rebellious and very punk for its time – first women in western culture to cut their hair off, first women to wear dresses above the knee! That was scandalous!

Yeah – it is like old-school punk! Ye OLDE olde!

[Australian Interview Participant 107]

The notion of Punk as an attitude mentioned in these comments is significant, suggesting conceptions of Punk underlying Goth spectacularity and its wider bricolage of subversive historical references which include use of latex (from BDSM/sex scenes), Japanese Lolita and Kawaii influences as well as traditional Rockabilly pin-up style. These visual approaches have equally been cultivated to infuse Goth with implied heritage and notions of the science-fiction and obscure, collectively resulting in a culture that demonstrates an uneasy dichotomy of belonging within and remaining outside established conventions (Lamerichs 2014, 117).

Remaining obscure, yet conveying taste differences across the spectrum of Goth affords participants opportunities to diversify their aesthetic palette, whilst simultaneously maintaining transience and authentic Goth identity at different life stages. However history is no restriction; Goth-Industrial and Cyber Goth stylings for example allow for futuristic/mechanised attire and cosmetics which conjure up dystopian worlds and fantastical futures. Other subcultural crossovers are also widespread, with hippies, Punks, Skates and the BDSM communities prominent in different locales. In parallel to this, Goths appear equally concerned not to be neatly categorised in such a way that "the mainstream" can readily absorb or commodify the entire culture.

Such renewal in the Goth scene creates strong connections between members as they contribute to and discover the boundaries of their identity through experimentation with varied Goth exemplars for example: Victorian Goth, Trad Goth, Nu-Goth, Metal Goth etc. Michel Maffesoli (1996), and Andy Bennett (1999, 2005, 2012) after him, characterised such sub-subcultures as tribes and neo-tribalism. As noted by this online participant below, the tribal groupings within Goth indeed come and go, likening these behaviours more to micro-trends or sub-genres within the parameters of Goth rather than true tribes, yet for some aesthetic choices remain consistent:

I don't think [Goth] fashion is as fluid as people think. Trends do come and go but along the way you get people who pick up on a look they like and mostly stick with it, making variations and modifications along the way. Like when Gothic Lolita was big. You don't see it anywhere near as often as you used to but for some people it's their mainstay. As for me, I'm stuck in the 90s...

[International Participant - Reddit Discussion]

It is vital to appreciate Goth aesthetics are no accident, rather an explicitly conscious assertion of difference (Spooner date as cited in Punter 2012, 51). Consistent re-use over time establishes such tropes as being Goth, often with additional layered sets of aesthetic signifiers to create multiple desired looks or influences. By engaging in these bricolage practices unique Goth attributes are established and the aesthetic foundations and subgroups of the culture are amplified as well as extended.

This complexity has perhaps obscured from outside analysts its significance as an identity framework. Grant McCracken explores the social and philosophical significance of subcultural identity in the development of sophisticated collective values and how the complexity of this framework belies the apparent simplicity of broadcasting a particular spectacular aesthetic. As observed by McCracken:

...the culture of commotion is doing something more than simply throwing off variety. It is generating deeper cultural types, each its own reckoning of the world, each an entire culture in little, carrying its own view of the world. If the surface difference is impressive, this deeper difference is simply breathtaking. (McCracken 1997, 23)

That subcultural labels can be equated with cultural types is significant; like Hodkinson, McCracken recognises that the aesthetic exterior of subcultural groups correlates with a deeper, more profound cultural phenomenon closely aligned to self-agency and moral outlook (Hodkinson 2016, 631). McCracken describes this as plenitude; an observation which is acutely reflective of contemporary Goth attitudes and expressions of identity which actively exhibit plurality.

The plenitude McCracken describes indicates contemporary subcultures existing as mirrors of the lived experience of being Goth; it reflects the experience of maintaining simultaneous relationships across sometimes contradictory aspects of life. McCracken's plenitude tolerates a profusion of styles and types, simultaneously sustaining and breaking down cultural boundaries to create a sublime commotion (McCracken 1997, 103). As such plenitude encompasses Hebdige's model of bricolage as a factor *within* plenitude; it provides a holistic schema through which we can look upon subcultures anew and fully observe the complexities of the phenomena.

Digital Evolution: Uncanny Community

The complexity of Goth identity with its manifold aesthetic and social expressions requires a model of examination that accounts for its historic duration as well as its translocal effect. Findings from this study demonstrate that even without physical sites of Goth sociality, Goth culture has persisted as an example of an enduring, active identity network founded on a constant yet aesthetically diverse socially disseminated framework. It is conceivable that without the internet the Goth culture may have died away, its musical and stylistic ingenuity spent by the

commercial heyday of the 1990s, and any kind of cultural endurance limited to isolated local pockets of truly subcultural expression.

The internet provides a means of endurance as well as a launching point from which satellite incarnations of the culture have spawned in recent generations, each with their idiosyncrasies and histories. Self-identification as a Goth on social media provides participants with an immediate mode of belonging, a succinct way of demonstrating subcultural affiliation, acting as a "...efficacious vehicle for personal transformation" into those preferred style metonyms (Sherlock 2014, 27). The mobility of online networks enables participants to incorporate global influences and diverse eras of cultural expression as well as a variety of Gothic modes, from architecture to literature (Jones 2006, 93). As noted by this Australian survey respondent, the unique conditions of Australia necessitate invention and dedication:

Australian goth scene is small, we don't have any large events on a regular basis, the country is large, primarily hot, and we don't really have control over any old romantic or dated buildings or venues... however the scene is still rather stubborn and independent, though I think the best of us take our cues from Europe.

[Australian Survey Participant 030, Age 45]

In a scene of limited numbers and discrete tastes, as in Australia, broadcasting these tacit aesthetic judgements greatly aids social and potentially romantic interactions, establishing a level of shared perception, expediting personal connections. It also visually expresses safety, saying 'we like the same things, we might get on, we share cultural values'. Such social interaction once relied heavily on physical sites such as record stores, night clubs, or parties, Goths now turn to the internet to share music, socially network, obtain/share retail purchases as well as a raft of emerging virtual interactions. In this way gothic styles spectacularise the everyday, rewriting the rules of mainstream consumerism through its distinct aesthetic code and symbolic use of imagery.

Goths continue to find inspiration from local customs absorbing them into the culture to create meaningful connections, bold new looks, and context (Baddeley 2010, 112). Participants describe this in various ways utilising the argot of Goth and gothic, subculture to expand understanding of what Goth is. As illustrated in the free-text participant quotes below, the identification of particular aesthetic markers aids the classification of Goth types for older participants and serves to delineate stages of life or differences in engagement modes in the culture.

I started as a sex pistols punk in '77. Became hardcore thru 1984 various types, Mohawk, death rock, etc. became trad Goth and then a variety of types like vampire/club Goth, Wicca/pagan Goth, back to Deathrock/trad hybrid, am now more pagan, hippy, trad.

[International Survey Participant 562 Age 53]

As part of this response, we note the participant identify the Mohawk hairstyle, linking it with death rock, a more Punk-influenced style of Goth, during their journey in the Goth scene. We can see this spectacularity mellowing into a "more pagan, hippy trad." mode of Goth identity as the participant ages. Such distinct motifs may also signify local musical taste or particular bands or festivals (t-shirts, tattoos and the like) as well as incorporating local traditions or icons as is the case with skull motifs where the bricolaged versions of the Mexican Calavera are common (Brandes 2009, 120).

Significantly, travel emerged from research findings as an important networking element of Goth community; and it has accordingly evolved to incorporate a variety of distinct aesthetic expressions. Goth can support not only niche local interests but also large-scale commercial enterprises such as the M'era Luna and Wave Gotik Treffen festivals in Germany catering for 20000+ attendees each year. Within these contexts, there are clearly identifiable types, including "über Goths" (wearing extreme styles), reflecting the performative environment and stylistic tribal affinity in-keeping with the exceptional context (e.g. huge audience, international media attention, band concert etc.). Similar performative expression can be observed at distinct events or expressed specifically for an occasion such as Whitby Goth Weekend, a gig, small local club, community picnic, party or other gathering (Bennett 2000, 50).

Expression of diverse style types at major events broadcasts and visually identifies subgroups where individuals might best fit, and in so doing help define social networks and meaning structures to participants (McCracken 1997, 25). Findings from this research identified the importance of such social events as a vital source of maintaining an in-person connection with long-term participants as well as a source of knowledge sharing. Participants noted the event itself sometimes holds less importance than dressing up for the occasion and the inherent social aspect of catching up with long-time friends. The intensity and spectacularity of Gothness consequently alters dependent on the individual's role or engagement within a local and/or wider global community.

In *The Gothic and the Everyday* Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Maria Beville provide a rich contemporary conception of the "Living Gothic as a living culture in its own right, through its intersections with the everyday, and with the communication and expression of shared experience" (2014, 1-2). Here we see how Goth identity presents on two simultaneous planes; as the individual acquiring and enjoying Goth identity as well as a socially acknowledged performative action within a broader social or collective group. This social acknowledgment provides validation of individual Gothness and in so doing perpetuates aesthetic stereotypes and variations particular to everyday living Goth communities. Piatti-Farnell and Beville recognise Goth personal expression as both a symbolic reaction to mainstream trends and as a steadfast desire to maintain particular aesthetic and artistic frameworks (ibid, 11).

Young generations of Goths are experiencing the broadest continuum of Goth culture to date, able to access generations of historic Goth material alongside daily contributions of new digital content and fresh perspectives on Goth identity. Participants' free-text survey responses evidence this, describing how the internet has greatly influenced contemporary Goth identity and how social media, in particular, has evolved the way Goths memorialise their culture and bond without physical intimacy.

As early adopters Australian Goths populated internet chatrooms, forums, listservs, and message boards and set up fledgling websites to sustain local Goth communities. That Australia, an isolated and widely dispersed Goth community, was at the forefront of this ideas-sharing network is significant. Virtual chat rooms removed the social scrutiny sometimes associated with the Goth scene, reducing social anxiety and enabling more in-depth interactions than noisy club environments allowed. Importantly this change in social behaviour toward online communities has created a powerful archive of Goth material, images, discussions, and lived experiences for participants. It pioneered early examples of Goth 'wiki' or FAQ-style sites which listed current activities such as nightclub nights, record stores, clothing stores, etc. in each city via services such as the now-defunct *alt.gothic* and *aus.net.goth* forums. These emerged as crucial mechanisms for connection, resulting in Australian Goths having a rich community record of online-habitation and a tangible digital socio-aesthetic historical evolution (Gibson and Kaplan 2017, 133).

For older Goths, contemporary social media affords reconnection by reviving the 1980s-1990s heyday of in-person Goth society held in these original repositories; Goths relive memories through posted images, stories, sounds, and artefacts. Australian Goths referencing 'back in the day,' can name-check long-departed places such as *Memory Lane*, *Charley Weavers*, *Vicious Venus*, *Moulitatas*, *The Proscenium*, *The Loft*, *Alysian Empire*, *Cabaret Nocturne*, *Reload*, *Mortisha's*, *Faith*, *Outpost*, *The Firm*, *The Hell Fire Club*, *DV8*, *Abyss*, and *Fruition*, etc. Much like the forever-lauded *Batcave* in London, such places trigger nostalgia and encourage sharing of old photographs, experiences, and stories.

As well as serving nostalgic purposes, such overt name-dropping validates lived experiences, with only "authentic" Goths able to identify and/or claim association with historic Goth locales and genuine sociality. As a result, Australian Goths have preserved unique Goth social lineages, oral history and an archive of imagery. This preservation of experiences is supported by platforms that are now able to conserve the artefacts of each scene down to a particular DJ set⁴, posters and ephemera.

While intimate and interpersonal networks remain vital modes of Goth engagement, the prevalence and extent of online contact has transformed the nature and mechanism of these connections. Together the online and in-person Goth

⁴ See: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5ZRpsc6LUemsXBFZfBeju?si=p4LAMnh1TW2osm_L5Xyfg

community forms the social structures around which the traits, behaviours and norms of the culture are not only developed but controlled.

This new Goth paradigm has prompted a re-evaluation of previous understandings of gothic and the Gothic Mode in parallel with emerging analysis of contemporary Goth culture (Thomas 2016, 3). It has promoted rigorous discussion on "What is Goth?" as well as reintroducing archived and ancient ideas, digitally preserved generational memories to the Goth aesthetic canon.

Strange and Unusual

Goth culture is itinerant, it traverses multiple dynamic and evolving theoretical bases, which have shifted and expanded in line with the culture's own evolution. Gothness sits steadfastly outside normative cultural expectations; uncanny, morbid, and deathly imagery maintains primacy in its canon, in direct contrast to westernised ideals of beauty (Scharf 2001, 33). Hebdige argues that dread is used by subcultures (including Goth) as a cultural commodity to cultivate an oppositional, intimidating demeanour and communicate an abject lack of enjoyment or mirth. However participant responses suggest that where Hebdige sees dread, Goths see a dark beauty and humour replete with recognition of the fragility of life and the terminal nature of existence.

Dread forms a key feature in both Goth and the Gothic Literary Mode, horror themes are often overlaid with motifs of psychological and mental distress, foreboding and the "other" (Gelder 2007, 44). In Goth aesthetics, recognition of death and decay are omnipresent and integral to the overall beauty paradigm (Furek 2008, 113). Goths embrace dread/the other, not to shock and threaten rather to ward off inevitable doom, overlaying it with dark humour and eccentricity. It is paired with excessively indulgent appearance which grasps for every era at once in an anachronistic display of awareness of its fragile temporality. Divested of preconceptions of stylistic rigidity, status or deviance from a hegemonic mainstream, Goth is not rebelling, it is simply not conforming to traditional beauty, social and aesthetic standards.

Goth culture embraces an otherworldly way of life where death and the Victorian Gothic notion of *Memento Mori* is revived, literally pinning it to their sleeves and woven into fabrics. There is therefore an argument that the otherness applied by subcultural scholars has been embraced by Goths, leveraging being strange and unusual to enhance feelings of individual and collective worth, as demonstrated in the participant excerpts below:

Maybe there is something deeply spiritual about what makes a person a Goth.
You see the beauty in things. We see and hear the echoes of the past.

[Australian Interview Participant Age 40]

I think it's a view on life that sets us apart, we see beauty in the shadows, we live life by accepting death as a positive thing. It includes a huge array of artistic types, a variety of music, and a bunch of clothing styles, which are all "goth".

[International Interview Participant Age 40+]

Goths draw heavily on the imagery and atmosphere created in Gothic works; diligently adopting vampires, ravens, black cats, bats and otherworldly creatures as mascots to the culture. Their forms are in jewellery, fabrics, furniture and tattoos. Glorifying in the macabre extends further into the philosophical attitude of the culture; it is open to new forms of beauty, sometimes the bizarre, sometimes the ethereal, yet almost always other from mainstream culture.

These elements of Goth fashion speak to the culture's adherence to outsiderhood and accepting this as a form of Goth constancy. The stable thematic spectrum of Goth aesthetics is the foundation of both its sense of belonging and its constancy; no Goth idea is ever lost, no style irrelevant and the seasonality of mainstream fashion is of negligible influence. Outsiderhood is generated by this unconventional stylistic mode which perpetuates dark in-culture constancy instead of mainstream conformity and fashionability (Scharf 2014, 191). That these characteristics are correlated with sustained feelings of belonging by participants, and active interest over time, is significant.

The capacity for online anonymity also allows Goths new to the scene, or those curious to experiment, the opportunity to research and 'pre-check' their Goth outfits or to receive social sanction for music choices or to just gain confidence in their general Gothness. This has contributed to increased liberty around Goth tropes, with participants using social media forums to expand the spectrum of what is Goth. It has also elevated once "old Goths" to Elder Goths, an affectionate and venerable term for senior members of Goth society.

This has resulted in the perennial question *What is Goth?* being addressed from increasingly diverse perspectives. There has been a marked increase in 'living Gothic' exemplars: Goth-produced online content including vloggers, bloggers, Reddit contributors, and YouTube personalities eager for their perspectives to be integrated into the commemorative discourse on Goth (e.g. see: [The Blogging Goth](#), [The Belfry Network](#), [Black Friday](#)). Comments demonstrate a stepping forward of the younger generation to claim a "Nu Goth" generation, calling out older Goths for "gate-keeping" when younger Goths are seemingly unfairly challenged online. This is demonstrated through not only musical choices and personal blogs, but also through commercial resources supporting the culture.

Increased Goth visibility can also be observed online, where the use of '#Goth' to identify Goth content has increased over recent years, both by younger conversational Goths as well as more nostalgic Elder Goth posts. Goth culture has incrementally breached the theoretical barrier of subculture and established itself as a culture in little, within and apart from the mainstream, an anachronous uncanny

community of spirited participants. The authentic nature of contemporary Goth is unsurprisingly intensely debated, with everything from the traditional nineteenth-century Gothic gloom to emergent Goth tropes including Perky or Pastel Goths with their glitter-encrusted Doc Martens and candy pink hair avidly examined in online chats. A common meme⁵ demonstrates how Goths have attempted to codify differences and classify their place within the ever-evolving spectrum of Goth aesthetics.

Young Goths now have the opportunity to learn from, adapt, and reject the choices of their subcultural forebears, even borrowing from their parents to revive once redundant attire. As in any culture, younger members both challenge and look to the more established in the cohort for guidance on appearance, music and behaviour. For some, increased confidence in the culture as a whole has seen a general relaxation of 'rules' or tenets of Goth to incorporate previously unimaginable iterations, such as the emergence of a Goth football team in Whitby. Perhaps most significantly, the increase of *#Goth* has seen negative connotations with the term diminish and the phenomenon of Goth pride intensify. It also illustrates how younger participants are beginning to find a more resolute voice and circulate new discourse on the culture.

In parallel to this maturation, supported by global internet communities which may comprise disparate members of local or remote members, Goths are able to freely transition between not only styles but social networks. This has resulted in Gothness now able to be demonstrated, validated, and refined using solely online platforms. Free of cost, social media participants can post/like/share images of Goth attire etc. without actually owning the items or displaying them in a social setting. Online discourse reflects the generational changes occurring in the subculture and the apparent transference of cultural capital from the elders of the scene to the young, less experienced members of the community. These digital Goth networks now form an invaluable social record, capturing and preserving for future generations the aesthetics and transient locus of Goth culture in real-time. This is a fundamental shift in the notion of being Goth and represents a defining moment of generational change.

Conclusion: Goth as an Enduring Socio-Aesthetic Network

Goth has developed constantly and cohesively for over forty years, with a strong suite of cultural capital and behaviours formed around its complex community of belonging. Among the plenitude of Goth aesthetics, there is a constant communication of style, meaning, and substance, with each bricolage element adding to the layered visual code of the culture. Engaging in specialised practices of pattern-recognition, Goths are able to recognise social and aesthetic cues in order to establish peer-groups, friendship networks and spheres of influence.

⁵ <http://www.blackwaterfall.com/>

As evidenced by survey respondents, modes of Goth expression can be modulated to respond to particular settings, dialled up or down to emphasise Gothness, or demonstrate relaxed yet present stylistic markers. In so doing Goth identity gives licence to engage in little acts of refusal and ritual, creating lifestyle practices that do not conform to rigid traditional models of 'acting your age' (McCracken 1997, 21). Finding identity stability within Goth, therefore, necessitates an ongoing personal negotiation of Gothness and a succession of conscious decisions around which aspects of the culture are to be emphasised: 'what music do I like, what sort of clothing do I want to wear, how do I do my hair/make-up, what events do I want to attend, do I change my look for work, what will my family think, does this impact my religious/spiritual beliefs' ... While there are no definitive answers to such questions, the choices individuals make do influence how intense their relationship is with the Goth culture and perhaps how protracted that involvement becomes.

Appearance projects this relationship to outsiders and insiders alike, with varying adaptations, engaging Goths in constant communication of Goth attributes and style mitigated by particular social contexts. The consistency of the subculture sustains a social value system into adulthood, intact with a discrete yet wide-ranging suite of aesthetic signifiers, defining for participants dependable 'ways of being' within a geographically diverse community context. For many participants, these elements remain relatively consistent throughout different life stages, constructing a reliable mode of visual communication within the culture. Thus the Goth spectrum incorporates the plenitude of difference of contemporary society, whilst harking back to the artistic and literary traditions which first utilised Gothic themes.

Goth culture facilitates change within its uncanny community whilst simultaneously reflecting an outwardly constant image to non-participants. Importantly, virtual networks enable ever larger communities of Goths to inspire, influence and direct the evolution of Goth cultural practices. The complex phenomenon of Goth is thus intentionally formed, maintained, and evolved through shared socio-aesthetic experience. Discourse should now shift to consider Goth a socio-aesthetic framework around which identity is intentionally formed, maintained, and evolved through lived cultural experience.

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BOOK REVIEW

Karen Greenburg. *Middle Eastern Gothics: Literature Spectral Modernities and the Restless Past*. University of Wales Press, 2022. 240 pp. Format eBook. ISBN: 978 1 78683 928 2

Reviewed by Sam Mayne (University of Western Australia)

In her introduction to *Middle Eastern Gothics: Literature, Spectral Modernities and the Restless Past*, Karen Greenburg identifies the principal aims of the volume. The book seeks to investigate the ways in which the Middle East operates as a complex literary site that exists in generative friction with external and global Gothics. Moreover, it does so through a situated framework that refuses readings constrained only to the local or the global – the transnational region: “a cohesive geographic space with specific cultural and historical networks that parallel, intersect or overlap” (2). The eight chapters that follow meet this challenge admirably, operating to theorise texts from diverse, yet interlinked Middle Eastern linguistic, cultural, historical and religious lineages. In doing so, they articulate a transnational Middle Eastern Gothic that takes shape in relation to the Western Gothic primarily at points of confluence, rather than influence. As a result, this collection acts as an excellent addition to the growing body of Gothic scholarship that works to decentralise narrow, Westernised conceptions of the Gothic and supplant them with a richer assemblage of complex, sovereign Gothics that extend beyond the Western sphere.

The first section of the book is concerned with establishing a sense of Gothic lineage specific to the Middle East and North Africa region. Jacob Berman’s ‘Maqāmāt: Towards the Middle Eastern Gothic of the War on Terror’ does so by reading a transcorporeal Gothic that extends from Hishām ibn al-Kalbī’s ninth century *Kitāb al-aṣnām* (The Book of Idols) to Aḥmad Sa‘dāwī’s 2014 Gothic novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Berman makes clear through this survey not only a Gothic that emerges from the “raw material of the Arab, Islamic and Middle Eastern literary history” but one which reasserts the materiality of Iraqi bodies against the dematerialising strategies of gothicised Western political and literary rhetoric. In doing so, he persuasively theorises a politically and regionally situated ‘War on Terror’ Gothic. Michael Beard’s ‘The Iranian Gothic and its Parts’ raises important questions about what the potential provenance of Iranian Gothic means for the genre, namely: “Does western narrative architecture undermine a book’s Iranian identity (is it derivative?)” (67). He approaches these uncertainties via a study of the difficult-to-categorise assemblage of Gothic fragments in the writing of Sadeq Hedayat, making a compelling argument for a sovereign Iranian Gothic. Together,

Beard and Berman's chapters did exemplary work in situating me as a reader. They drew my attention to my own residual notions of the Gothic as a force that rippled out from the West, leaving permutations in its wake, and instead encouraged a readerly perspective for the chapters that followed which "positions the region not at the periphery, but rather at the centre" (Berman 38).

Spectralised Modernities, the volume's second section, theorises a series of regionally-informed Gothics. In outlining the contours of a contemporary Middle Eastern Gothic corpus, it investigates the numerous Middle Eastern identities that the Gothic configures and is configured by. Roni Masel interrogates narratives of decay and resurrection in relation to the Hebrew revival, critically questioning how revenant depictions of the Jewish diaspora have been read through a lens of 'ambivalence'. Masel offers a well-grounded argument that the notion of ambivalence may conceal conflicting authorial positions regarding Jewish revival. Adriana Raducanu elegantly delineates a Sufi Gothic which explicitly connects Gothic haunting and the Sufi *alam alarwah* ('world of spirits') and Tuğçe Bıçakçı Syed identifies a Turkish Gothic that emerged in response to the fall of the Ottoman empire and the rise of Kemalist nationalism. Approaching this text with very limited knowledge of Turkish history, I found the historical and political context that Syed offered in this chapter immensely helpful in informing my reading; the chapter is approachable for any reader regardless of their knowledge of the region as a result. Similarly, Alexandra Shraytekh foregrounds her study of the *efendi* Gothic with an overview of Arabic literary history and taxonomy, along with a clear definition of the *efendi* socio-economic identity. Her compelling chapter on this iteration of Arabic Gothic, its connection to the Arabic 'artistic novel' and the relationship between the *efendi* class and contradictions in modernity will read very clearly to scholars who might otherwise be overwhelmed by the complex milieu in which it takes place.

It is the third and final section of *Middle Eastern Gothics* that, I think, is the highlight of this collection (a difficult task given the strength of the chapters that precede it.) Brahim El Guabli's *Saharan Gothic: Desert Necrofiction in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Desert Literature* and Federico Pozzoli's *Well-Founded Fear': Dead Narrators, Displaced Authors in Iraqi Gothic Fiction* are, in my view, exceptional pieces of criticism. Both chapters are remarkable for the novel critical concepts that they figure: El Guabli's theorisation of the 'desert necro-ecological' and the 'desert necrological' as discrete sites of Gothic contact with desert ecology and Pozzoli's consideration of undead narration constructed via *mantiq* ('point of utterance') as an affective device for telling Iraqi trauma. Furthermore, both works showcase the way in which the transnational region cultivates distinct Gothics, instantiated in and by particular deserts, histories, bodies and traumas, while also contributing to broader globalgothic body of theory. It is not difficult to see, for example, where aspects of El Guabli's desert necroficiton might impact Australian Gothic scholars reading our own historically and ecologically troubled arid regions.

I would not hesitate to recommend this book to anyone within the field of Gothic studies, particularly anyone who wishes to continue the ongoing project of decolonising their own approach to the genre. Its contents provide more than adequate guidance for those not well-acquainted with the historical context of the region, without sacrificing complexity central to the criticism each chapter offers. Taken together the chapters of *Middle Eastern Gothics* act as a comprehensive scholarly introduction to the transnational Middle Eastern Gothic, while also being suggestive of a reading strategy for approaching the region and its Gothics going forward.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ellen J. Greenham. *After Engulfment: Cosmicism and Neocosmicism in H.P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick, Robert A. Heinlein, and Frank Herbert*. Hippocampus Press, 2022. 340 pp. Format (Paperback). ISBN: 978 161 498 377 4

Reviewed by Stephanie Farnsworth (University of Sunderland)

After Engulfment (2022) is a broad and detailed text examining concepts of cosmicism and, what Greenham defines as, neocosmicism and their presence in the writings of four popular science fiction authors. Concepts of cosmicism are somewhat in vogue, indicated by the recent paper *Eco-Cosmicism: Re-Reading Lovecraft in the Wake of the Climate Crisis* by Jemma Morgan presented at MultiPlay's Gothic Games and Disturbing Play conference in October 2022. It would therefore seem an ideal moment for the release of Greenham's text.

The text is divided into three parts, following a thematic structure. Part I tackles the ideas that bind our understanding of the universe and cosmos together, defining those two concepts. Part II establishes the tenets of cosmicism. The final section puts forward the idea – Greenham's idea – of neocosmicism, defined by the author as a philosophical extension of cosmicism whereby one chooses engulfment of the universe rather than to merely be an outsider, to be part of, rather than outside of or separate to. The text itself includes a helpful glossary for the definitions and interpretations the author seeks to establish.

The text is motivated by the desire to “demonstrate how science fiction interrogates the experience of being human in the universe, and the ways in which the human creature responds to the universe in which it exists and of which it is a part” (7). There is a focus upon four well-known names in science fiction's history: H. P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick, Robert A. Heinlein, and Frank Herbert. H. P. Lovecraft work in particular becomes the foundation of this text, as his work is referenced throughout every section – perhaps an inevitable outcome given Lovecraft's role in establishing cosmicism in the genre of science fiction. The text addresses Lovecraft's legacy as emerging from the looked down upon pulp scene (named for the process of making texts and therefore associated with cheapness and availability) to becoming an iconic figure within science fiction. The text engages with the classism that delayed his work (and its method of production) as being accepted as classical texts. There is engagement with the work of Roger Luckhurst

who charted the history of science fiction, its production and delivery to audiences, and how the genre became mainstream and revered.

One point of focus of H.P. Lovecraft's work became the limitations of maps and cartography in understanding place. Chapter One touches on spatial theory as H. P. Lovecraft's characters warn of the limitations of only trusting and using maps to navigate the world as "parts of this town are made not grown" (.34), with the accompanying explanation from the author that maps fail to represent territory, nor do they give us an understanding of the history or sociology of a place. The text then references the limitations of viewing the horizon – it is the same straight line (not vertical), which fixes our perceptions to one way of seeing, while not revealing everything that is in a landscape image because our sight simply cannot fathom all that is happening. This example is used to underscore the difficulties and limitations of perceiving truly the cosmos. It is the justification for the argument that we/humans/the creature need to be engulfed, and not just act as observers, to understand the world around us. As it is pointed out, Lovecraft's 'The Music of Erich Zann' has no maps that accurately depict the narrator's journey.

The opening chapters address the ideas of what lies beneath the universe and how the cosmos operates; the cosmos is questioned as contradictory for being labelled as ordered when physics defines it as chaos. Chapter Four specifies the universe as an indifferent mechanism, the human as a biological mutation. The theme of the universe as a machine is repeated throughout: "The machine is not human, and it is not unreasonable to extend this view to the idea that in the universe as machine, the universe and the human creature are also separate and incompatible" (66). The idea of the universe as a cold equation is explored further in Part III when Herbert's *Dune* is addressed substantially. "Cosmicism's answer to those individuals who face the universe as it is always, as I have said before, madness or death" (100). This is reinforced within the text of *Dune*, as Greenham demonstrates that as the protagonist Paul grows less empathetic, he becomes more part of the universe. There is some comparison with the universe as schizophrenic and while the metaphor is in-depth and probing there is a continual conflation with bipolar disorder and psychosis, muddying the analysis with the unclear labels and descriptions.

One of the frustrations expressed by Greenham in the examination of cosmicism is the perpetual idea of binaries: good versus evil, "an obsessive drive to evaluate everything in terms of binary opposites with one of the poles being the right, best, and favourable at the significant expense of the other" (55). Neocosmicism is the answer to the revolution against the binaries: "This shift is primarily about recasting the meaning of the dark from being negative, and therefore evil, to simply being" (197) as "the human creature fears the dark it does not understand" (91).

Overall, the text succeeds in putting forward an interesting and thoughtful conceptualisation of neocosmicism and argues succinctly for its need as a contrast to cosmicism. This text is relevant to scholars of the Gothic, cosmicism and science fiction. It is also a text of note for scholars interested in the field of religious philosophy. The text is broad in scope, well-structured and written in an accessible style, making it a worthwhile read for students and academics alike who have an interest in these different disciplines, and those interested in engaging with emerging interpretations of classic science fiction stories.

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TELEVISION REVIEW

Burton, Tim, dir. *Wednesday*. MGM Productions, 2022. <https://www.netflix.com/title/81231974>.

Reviewed by Antonio Sanna (Università degli Studi di Sassari)

The 2022 Netflix series *Wednesday* presents the iconic daughter of the Addams Family as its central protagonist, thus reprising a set of characters that were first created in Charles Addams' cartoons in 1938, reproduced in the 1964-66 black-and-white series on ABC and subsequently re-adapted several times on TV and in cinema (including the 1991 and 1993 films), both in live and animated versions. References to the previous series and films on the goth family abound throughout the eight episodes. Exemplary is Jenna Ortega's allusion to the 1968 dance of the original TV character during the ball sequence, which has become a cult trend on TikTok, but also represents perfectly how a lonely or troubled adolescent might rehearse their own dance in front of a mirror, mixing opposite styles and techniques as well as not considering the subsequent involvement of their partner in it. The series also thickens some mysteries of the family represented in the previous versions when wondering about the origins of Thing, implicating Gomez (Luis Guzmán) in a decades-old murder and presenting Uncle Fester (Fred Armisen) as a robber, and by presenting a conflicting relationship between Wednesday and her mother, the statuesque and sensuous Morticia (Catherine Zeta Jones), portrays a mature version of the character uncharacteristically sad and nostalgic.

As in the previous cinematic incarnations of the character, Wednesday is here equally characterised by her coldness, sadism, icy demeanour, and sharp remarks as much as by her critical language and apparent lack of warm feelings. After being expelled from a public high school, she is sent to Nevermore, an academy for outcasts in the middle of the woods in Jericho County. This is the setting for the exploration of her adolescent rebellious dynamics of refusal of peers and institutions as much as of social media. For Wednesday this is, as Nina Metz has noted, "teen purgatory." Adolescent angst is indeed the central thematic concern of the eight episodes constituting the series and is expressed by many of the teenagers attending the school – which thus aligns this production to teen horror dramas such as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-17) and *Teen Wolf* (2011-17). Related to the protagonist's turmoil is also the fact that she is experiencing visions, which help (but also confound) her in her investigation of a series of murders committed in the woods surrounding the school. Equally interesting is the fact that Wednesday evolves during the narrative, becoming the heroine, but also softening

her coldness and realising how her selfishness and lack of feelings can hurt those people who care for her.

The series was created by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, co-creators of *Smallville* (2002-2011), *Into the Badlands* (2015-2019) and *The Shannara Chronicles* (2016-2017). Tim Burton, its executive producer, also directed the first four episodes. His style is evident in the use of frames (positioning the characters according to their affinities with the surrounding context and background), the juxtaposition of gaudy colours and monochromes, and the focus on details such as black and white striped shirts and Gothic clothes. Less dreamy (or nightmarish) than some of the American director's previous works – including *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Batman* (1989) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) – *Wednesday* generally maintains a realistic atmosphere in spite of its supernatural characters and events. This is revealed especially in the treatment of thematic concerns such as loneliness, isolation, and monstrosity which, in typical Burtonesque style, allies the spectator's sympathy with the "weird" characters that society would normally see as different – as the Other – finally revealing that real monsters can be the unsuspected, "clean" persons.

Independently of the different directors in the last four episodes of the series (Gandja Monteiro and James Marshall), the Burtonesque atmosphere and pace are maintained throughout *Wednesday* and are further reinforced by Danny Elfman's and Chris Bacon's atmospheric music, especially in the rendition via cello of the protagonist's solo performances, in the use of brass for primary melodic material and of melodic/harmonic dissonance as well as the use of choirs, the predilection for the use of minor keys and the location of music with respect to the diegesis – all staples of Elfman's timbral palette (Powell 2017, 57-58). Moreover, the narrative is frequently flavoured with a good dose of irony, provided by the frequent use of black humour, the protagonist's cold reactions and remarks and her interactions with Thing (Victor Dorobantu). Certainly, the successful reception of the series is due to the excellent performance by Jenna Ortega (with her hypnotic eyes, her silences are more expressive than her verbal statements), which is supported by the compelling acting of Gwendoline Christie, the school's Junoesque principal, Larissa Weems, who is willing to do anything to protect her school and students, and of the various actors and actresses performing the other students.

Apart from the recurring Burtonesque visual tropes, *Wednesday* is specifically Gothic in its secondary plot on the murders committed by the monster whose identity can be attributed to different characters until the revelation occurring in the penultimate episode. The details of the victims' bloody bodies or body parts (which the camera does not linger on, however) and the suspense generated by the threat for the young characters' lives are present in each episode. These are accompanied by the choice of several typical Gothic settings, including cemeteries, vaults, abandoned mansions, and secret passages – locations where evil is perpetrated at night and plots against it or secret gatherings are planned. References to other horror films include the nocturnal frames of the woods recalling Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*

(1981), Stan Winston's *Pumpkinhead* (1988) and Burton's own *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), but there are also visual citations from Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976). Furthermore, the historical references to the Pilgrim Fathers and the Salem witch trials in the narrative are accompanied by cinematic allusions to those films involving young boys and girls possessing special powers (each student at Nevermore possesses different abilities), the story thus being a mixture of Brian Singer's *X-Men* (2000), Burton's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016) and the *Harry Potter* films (2001-2011).

Reviewers who applauded the series include Kylie Northover (who defines it as "gorgeous" and "worth the wait"), John Anderson ("delightful, despite its deliberate darkness") and Brian Lowry ("generally a delight . . . [in which] even the smaller ingredients are tasty"). Javier Estrada lauds the fact that "dark and humour live side by side efficiently in a production that is for all audiences, in which death is treated with courage and weird becomes something to live with" (reviewer's translation). Indeed, though it appears as mainly targeted to teenagers, the series is equally entertaining for adults. On the other hand, Nina Metz considers *Wednesday* "a teen drama . . . one with style, though not an especially inventive one [which] works best when it's simply being funny." While praising the series at large, DarkSkyLady criticizes the white-saviour behaviour exhibited by the protagonist and her rivalry against some of the Afro-American characters. Nick Schager dislikes the series as "a drearily formulaic makeover . . . a pale photocopy of *Harry Potter* . . . misbegotten on almost every front . . . all the more depressing for being the handiwork of the very artist who decades ago pioneered such macabre teen terrain: Tim Burton." Despite some negative reviews, *Wednesday* is nevertheless an entertaining production for all fans of the originals and their adaptations as well as for the lovers of the Gothic, the macabre and Tim Burton's work.

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