

Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies

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Editorial

ii-iii ASHLEIGH PROSSER

Articles

- 1-16 Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*: A Gothic Fairy Tale That Reckons
with Trauma
MARIA COHUT
- 17-33 Sublime Whiteouts: Narrative Constructions of Whiteness, Otherness
and Terror in the Arctic Gothic
ANYA HEISE-VON DER LIPPE
- 34-44 Reflecting Millennial Identity: Romantic Zombies in the German Mash-
Up Novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther*
SANDRA ALINE WAGNER

Book Reviews

- 45-47 *The Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children: Essays on Anomalous
Children From 1595 to the Present Day*. Simon Bacon and Leo Ruickbie.
(2020)
- 48-49 *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*. David Punter. (2019)

EDITORIAL

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Once again, the publication of this issue of *Aeternum* has persisted despite living through unprecedented times. We have endeavoured to continue our commitment to publishing excellent scholarship on the contemporary Gothic with as much normalcy as possible, as many have done, despite the challenges that 2020 has brought to bear on our personal and professional lives. So I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks, on behalf of the *Aeternum* team, to our wonderful community of peer reviewers for their ongoing support, and to our contributors for their patience, understanding, and for choosing our Journal.

The following issue of *Aeternum* consists of three articles and two book reviews. The three articles within focus on a wide variety of contemporary texts, from fantasy novels to horror television series to a German zombie mash-up narrative, and when taken together they are clearly a testament to the depth and breadth of influence that the Gothic genre continues to have on popular culture. The first article of this issue, "Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*: A Gothic Fairy Tale That Reckons with Trauma" by Maria Cohut, explores the interplay between memory, forgetting, and trauma via the genres of the fairy tale and the Gothic as they function in Nobel Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro's most recent fantasy novel. In the second article of this issue, titled "Sublime Whiteouts: Narrative Constructions of Whiteness, Otherness and Terror in the Arctic Gothic" by Anya Heise-Von Der Lippe, the

intersections of genre are similarly examined, as Michelle Paver's novel *Dark Matter* is analysed alongside recent horror television series *Fortitude* and *The Terror* as exemplary Arctic Gothic texts. This issue's final article also addresses such narrative genre-crossings. In "Reflecting Millennial Identity: Romantic Zombies in the German Mash-Up Novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther*", Sandra Aline Wagner explores the parodic implications of Susanne Picard's 2011 German novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther* (*The Corpses of Young Werther*) as a mash-up narrative, for it combines a retelling of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1774 epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), with those well-known contemporary texts of the romantic zombie genre, through its zombie apocalypse setting.

Finally, this issue of *Aeternum* concludes with two book reviews of recently released edited collections in the field of Gothic studies. Annelise Edwards-Daem reviews Simon Bacon and Leo Ruickbie's edited collection, *The Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children: Essays on Anomalous Children From 1595 to the Present Day*, published this year, and Candice Witton offers her review of the expansive new collection from David Punter, *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, published last year. Like the authors of the articles in this issue, both book reviewers have chosen to explore how these works offer burgeoning insights into the ways in which the field has evolved and changed since its inception, and the many new directions its monsters may be heading in the near future.

Editor's Details

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Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*: A Gothic Fairy Tale That Reckons with Trauma

ABSTRACT

*In this article I analyse Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Buried Giant*, placed at the intersection of the Gothic mode and fairy tale tradition, to explore the concepts of individual and cultural trauma. I argue that Ishiguro's novel employs elements of the Gothic, as well as fairy-tale tropes, in order to expose trauma as a problematic socio-cultural heritage. To frame my arguments, I will use a view of the Gothic voiced mainly by David Punter (*The Literature of Terror*) and Anne Williams (*Art of Darkness*), who see this mode as defined by an uneasy relationship with the idea of "home," and who argue that the genre is consistently subversive and defamiliarising. To show how the Gothic mode and fairy-tale tropes are compatible, I will use Jack Zipes' (*Why Fairy Tales Stick*), and Marina Warner's (*Once Upon a Time*) explanation that fairy-tales enable the audience to negotiate difficulties and find solutions to problems of the social order. I will also refer to Manuel Aguirre's argument that the Gothic mode essentially aims to "exorcise" the broken social mores that "haunt" the narrative (*The Closed Space*), to demonstrate the commonality of purpose between the two genres. In discussing the interplay between memory, forgetfulness, and trauma I will refer chiefly to Jeffrey Alexander's concept of "cultural trauma" (*Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*). Finally, I will show that, in his novel, Ishiguro uses the double-sided device of memory and forgetting to look at how trauma resolution can pan out at the individual versus the social level.*

Keywords: Gothic, fairy tale, Kazuo Ishiguro, memory, trauma

Since the first humans faced loss, pain, and hardship, trauma has been central to the plethora of human experiences, at a personal and social level. Writers, philosophers, and scientists have explored this concept, aiming to understand it and navigate the baggage that comes with it. This article will provide a close reading of one example of trauma exploration through literature: Kazuo Ishiguro's 2015 novel, *The Buried Giant*. It makes equal use of tropes from the fairy-tale tradition and the Gothic mode to explore the impact of traumatic events on individuals and social groups, and to enquire whether trauma can ever have a satisfying resolution.

Memory and forgetting are central to this exploration, as they may have different implications for cultural trauma versus individual trauma. In an interview he gave to *The Paris Review*, hinting at the as yet unpublished *The Buried Giant*, Ishiguro himself highlighted the conflict that lies at the heart of trauma resolution:

I'd wanted for some time to write a novel about how societies remember and forget. I'd written about how individuals come to terms with uncomfortable memories. It occurred to me that the way an individual remembers and forgets is quite different to the way a society does. When is it better to just forget? [...] France after the Second World War is an interesting case. You could argue that De Gaulle was right to say, We need to get the country working again. Let's not worry too much about who collaborated and who didn't. [...] But some would say that justice was ill served by that, that it leads eventually to bigger problems (Hunnewell 2008).

Thus, one can argue that *The Buried Giant* subscribes to the mode of trauma fiction, which takes on the monumental task of describing and respond to an experience that often "overwhelms the individual and resists language and representation" (Whitehead 2004, 3).

The novel's narrative is set in post-Arthurian Britain and revolves around Axl and Beatrice, an elderly Briton couple who set out on a journey in search of their lost son and their obscured memories. During their quest, their stories become entangled with those of the Saxon warrior Wistan, who secretly aims to avenge the war-struck generation of his parents; young Saxon Edwin, who runs away from his village after an unlucky brush with ogres; and an aged Sir Gawain, sworn to guard Querig, the dragon whose breath has cast a mist of forgetfulness over post-Arthurian Britain.

As the story in *The Buried Giant* unfolds, it seems to suggest that, while it may be better for societies to remember past trauma – such as that created by armed conflict – in order to work through it, individuals may do better to forget past conflicts for the sake of a peaceful life. This, however, is not and cannot be a final call on trauma resolution. Throughout the novel, Ishiguro shows that while remembrance can solidify an individual's sense of identity, it can also take its toll on relationships.

At a social level, remembrance may help communities learn from past tragedies, but with it comes the danger of consolidating historical feuds.

These situations are astutely explored through the use of fairy-tale and Gothic settings and other elements pertaining to these two genres, both of which Ishiguro has previously acknowledged as creative wells of inspiration (Ishiguro 2015, Barr Kirtley 2015). Critics have already placed Ishiguro's previous works firmly in the context of modern Gothic and trauma fiction, noting that this genre provides "more than a [...] reflection of collective anxieties; [...] it is used to produce [a] psychological distancing effect from [the] horror" inherent to traumatic events (Joyce 2019, 201). *The Buried Giant* has also been placed in the context of the fairy-tale tradition as a vehicle for the exploration of memory (Borowska-Szerszun 2016, 30-40). By combining Gothic and fairy-tale elements, I argue, this novel creates an ideal, safe setting for exploring the impact of trauma by taking the reader outside the realm of immediate historical fact and into that of fantasy.

Fairy Tales and the Gothic Mode

Fairy tales and the Gothic work well together because they lend themselves so readily to the exploration of trauma thanks to certain shared elements, including liminal spaces and transformative character journeys. Fairy-tale narratives are situated atemporally and ageographically, which allows them to safely tackle topics that might otherwise prove more difficult to engage with. Marina Warner notes that, although "[p]rinces and queens, palaces and castles dominate the foreground of a fairy tale, [...] the depth of the scene is filled with vivid and familiar circumstances, as the fantastic faculties engage with the world of experience" (2014, 74). A similar point is true of many Gothic tales, which use settings that are remote in time and space in order to allow the reader to engage more easily with the unusual events or mores of the story. The Gothic, Manuel Aguirre argues, "can be said to postulate two zones," one of rationality and one of irrationality, which "are separated by some manner of threshold," a liminal, transgressive space where the tension of the story resides (2008, 2). In both fairy tales and Gothic stories, liminal spaces create room for the exploration and resolution of problematic or even traumatic events.

In Jack Zipes' definition, fairy tales are "survival stories with hope" that "alert us to dangerous situations, instruct us, guide us, give us counsel, and reveal what might happen if we take advantage of helpful instruments or agents, or [...] if we do not" (2006, 27). Most importantly, they carry their messages across generations and cultures, building a durable, heritable code of conduct: fairy tales "have arisen out of a need to adapt to unusual situations, [which] are similar the world over so that many of the same types of tales have [...] been disseminated and transformed so that new generations will learn to adjust to similar situations in changing environments" (ibid, 27). Thus, although fairy tales are filled with magic and unlikely turns of events, "[t]he genre's themes are real-life themes and the passions are real-life passions" (Warner 2014, 79).

Where fairy tales teach the best behaviours to adopt at a difficult time, Gothic narratives create tension to emphasize the existence of a problem with no easy solutions. The way in which Gothic narratives do this can differ greatly from story to story, due to the fluid nature of the genre. As Anne Williams notes, this mode is something that the reader senses as a set of inherent qualities as they read, and it does not lend itself well to linear definitions (1995, 14). Nevertheless, critics such as Williams and David Punter agree that works that qualify as Gothic have some consistent features. These include: a lyrical style, subversive themes, a sense of convolutedness, and an uneasy relationship with concepts of “home” and “belonging”. This uneasy relationship may have something to do with the Gothic mode’s historic connection with social trauma. Punter has argued that the Gothic has developed “as a specific reaction” to troubling social phenomena (1980, 403). This idea is based on Marquis de Sade’s original argument that the genre emerged in reaction to the trauma caused by the French Revolution (1994, 109). In turn, Williams contends that the genre “systematically represents otherness” (1995, 18), creating “exotic” characters, social rules, and environments that challenge readers to face uncomfortable situations; though, as in fairy tales, the geographic, and sometimes chronologic remoteness in Gothic stories render such situations safer and more palatable. Both Punter and Williams contend that the Gothic is characterized by a disorienting atmosphere created through maze-like narrative settings, a convoluted textual form, or the use of florid language (Punter 1980, 409; Williams 1995, 23–24). Finally, both critics suggest that the Gothic creates a sense of anxiety around the concepts of “home,” “identity,” or “belonging”. Punter, specifically, writes that – similarly to fairy tales – the Gothic emphasizes “the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes” (1980, 405) that form the basis of a healthy, functioning society. Thus, Gothic tropes and techniques act as a vehicle to question and destabilise the status quo, foregrounding tensions and competing ideas.

In exploring the impact of trauma on groups and individuals, Gothic and fairy-tale tropes complement each other. Fairy-tale formulas such as the main characters’ archetypal journey or quest combine with the Gothic quest for meaning in a world whose rules defy social norm and decorum. The Gothic and fairy-tale forms of the quest together shape a two-tiered symbolic journey: one that is transformative, building on a traumatic heritage, and expresses a search for meaning, whose aim is to make sense of the experienced trauma.

Trauma and Memory

In *The Buried Giant*, Kazuo Ishiguro makes use of both fairy-tale and Gothic elements to explore a concept that has interested him throughout his writing career: that of the importance of memory (Teo 2014, Drag 2014), in this case in relation to trauma. However, before looking at how Ishiguro uses Gothic and fairy-tale tropes to explore individual and cultural trauma, it is necessary to define “cultural trauma”. One of the most comprehensive definitions of this concept originates with sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander, who sees it as an experience that “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future

identity fundamentally and irrevocably” (2004, 1). The effects of cultural trauma can be long-lasting in a community, and transmitted through generations, breeding mistrust and instability.

Ishiguro himself has explained that he was inspired by modern instances of cultural trauma and its aftermath in writing *The Buried Giant*:

[The novel] was triggered by my being here in Europe when Yugoslavia disintegrated, and during the Rwandan genocide. Both of these happened very close together in the '90s. And they were puzzling as they were horrifying – how people who had lived so intimately for a generation [...] – suddenly turned on each other within small villages. [...] It did seem to be a case of some kind of buried memory having been deliberately resurrected so that people could feel this hatred for each other (Crum 2015).

In the book, Ishiguro outlines a series of difficult issues: how individuals might cope with cultural trauma, whether it is it best to forget the events that caused it or remember them, and whether remembering can be dangerous. To explore this idea, Ishiguro has opted for a historically remote context, similar to the “long ago” and “far away” of fairy tales and Gothic stories: a British isle inhabited by Britons and Anglo-Saxons, set some time after the mythical times of King Arthur and before the Mercian Supremacy. Britain as pictured in Ishiguro’s novel is so strange as to be unrecognisable to the modern reader, populated by a mix of ogres, dragons, knights, poverty-stricken villagers, and austere Christian monks. The mishmash of historic fact and fairy-tale elements in Ishiguro’s novel creates a frame that is familiar enough for the reader to recognise, but sufficiently remote and strange for them to safely explore issues related to cultural trauma.

The Middle Ages in themselves lend an enigmatic aura to the novel, as they delineate a “time between,” something that came after the glory of the ancient civilisations, and before the enlightened developments of the Renaissance. In this context, the atmosphere of the novel borrows some of its fantastic elements from Greek-Roman myths, including the Charon-like figure of the boatman, as we shall later see. Moreover, the Middle Ages are in many respects so mysterious to the layperson as to seem almost mythical, as Jack Hartnell argues:

The centuries between the accolades of ancient Greece or Rome and the classical world reborn in the European renaissance are seen as a static and sequestering time, an idea we read in their different names: the “Dark” Ages or the “medieval,” from the Latin *medium aevum*, a “Middle Age”. It is a moment often defined by events outside itself, by what it is not (2019, 2).

The plot in Ishiguro’s novel revolves around Axl and Beatrice, two elderly Britons, as they journey through post-Arthurian Britain in search of their estranged son. However, at its core, their journey aims to uncover the cause of the strange amnesia that has enveloped the land. Wojciech Drąg has argued that “Ishiguro is a writer of memory and loss” (2014, 1). For Drąg, the author’s “entire novelistic output” up to *The*

Buried Giant places loss at the core of “the narrators’ sense of identity,” shaping “their subsequent lives” (ibid, 1). What allows these character-narrators to come to terms with loss and construct their identity is memory (ibid, 2). This is also true of Axl and Beatrice, whose memory loss, alongside the loss of their son sets them onto a journey of recovery, in which they seek to trace their way back to their memories and, thus, their identities.

The Buried Giant begins by painting a stark, unsettling Britain at its historic twilight, in which just about anything seems possible. It is explicitly described in contrast to what it is not – the modern, orderly Britain of much later centuries, and the carefully organised Roman Britain that came before: “You would have searched a long time for the sort of winding lane or tranquil meadow for which England later became celebrated” (Ishiguro 2015, 3). This landscape is characterised by “miles of desolate, uncultivated land,” “rough-hewn paths over craggy hills,” and “bleak moorland” (ibid, 3). Here, “[m]ost of the roads left by the Romans would by then have become broken or overgrown” (ibid, 3), the past modal form indicating a hypothetical situation, an assumption that may or may not be grounded in fact, plunging the narrative further into the “long ago, and far away” setting of fairy tales. The novel continues to build up a fairy-tale atmosphere: at the time of this story, “[i]cy fogs hung over rivers and marshes, serving all too well the ogres that were then still native to this land” (ibid, 3). Yet, as with any fairy tale, the presence of fantastic monsters seems almost incidental. Ogres and dragons present no more a threat or inconvenience than the changing weather: “such monsters were not cause for astonishment [...] [P]eople then would have regarded them as everyday hazards, and in those days there was so much else to worry about,” such as “get[ting] food out of the hard ground,” or “stop[ping] the sickness that could kill a dozen pigs in a single day” (ibid, 3). This, then, is the world that Warner describes, where fantastic beasts are found at every corner, but the real concerns are those of everyday life: hunger, sickness, sadness, and want.

Such monsters are also part and parcel of Gothic fiction. Fred Botting notes that, “[a]s exceptions to the norm, monsters make visible, in their transgression, the limits separating proper from improper, self from other” (2008, 8-9). Within the Gothic, monsters symbolise “the dark or evil side of the mind” (ibid, 9). In *The Buried Giant*, ogres and other looming monsters hint at the threats of repressed memories and the destructive potential of humans. The novel’s protagonists inhabit and must navigate this fantastic, subtly threatening world of monsters to find the source of their disquiet, a persistent feeling that there is something important that they have forgotten but wish to remember again. However, throughout the story is weaved the question of whether remembrance is truly a helpful or desirable outcome for the individual characters or their society. This question also lies at the core of real societies that have to process cultural trauma. Alexander puts it thus:

When bad things happen to good people [...] they can become so frightened that they can actually repress the experience of trauma itself. Rather than activating direct cognition and rational understanding, the traumatizing event becomes distorted in the actor’s imagination and memory. The effort to

accurately attribute responsibility for the event and the progressive effort to develop an ameliorating response are undermined by displacement (2004, 5).

Alexander explains that the weight of a traumatic event may cause a society to misremember or forget it, though “[t]rauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self [...], the truth can be recovered, and psychological equanimity restored, only [...] ‘when memory comes’” (ibid, 5). The action of *The Buried Giant* begins with Axl and Beatrice hinting at just such a need in the darkness of their hovel. Neither of them can remember much of their remote past, but they are both haunted by the persistent feeling that they used to live a different life: “Perhaps there had been a time when they had lived closer to the fire; a time when they had lived with their children” (Ishiguro 2015, 5).

A mysterious fog is mentioned repeatedly in the story – a mist that envelops not only Axl and Beatrice’s village, but the entire land. This fog constitutes both the background against which the characters’ adventures take place, and the focus of their quest, and it sets a Gothic atmosphere of dread, as well as being strongly rooted in the fairy tale. This we know because later in the story we find that this heavy mist that clouds the mind is, in fact, the magical breath of the she-dragon Querig.

Fog is an intuitive metaphor denoting forgetting, and it is also a pervasive trope in Gothic literature, as critics have shown. Robert Mighall describes the fog featured in nineteenth-century novels as “a supremely sublime element,” one that “makes certainty difficult” (2007, 56) at the same time that it reveals the sinister aspect of the Gothic space. Other critics have argued that fog acts as a liminal space, as well as an apparently mobile, nonhuman entity that people interact with, and which shapes their perception of the environment and themselves. According to Maria Borovnik and Kaya Barry, “fog breaches human and nonhuman boundaries” (2020, 160). The sense of disorientation that it produces does not only lead to an inability to find one’s bearings, they argue, it “can also enforce inner change [...] In this way, fog connects between the material outside and our human bodies and senses. It actively functions in [...] formative processes” (ibid, 164). In defining liminal spaces’ role in Gothic fiction, Aguirre characterizes them as “terrifying because [they do] violence to the expected order of things, [make] action seem futile and escape impossible, and [seem] associated with a vast inhuman power for obstruction and control” (2008, 10). This is also the role played by the mist here – it obstructs knowledge and hints at underlying, hidden terrors. Axl and Beatrice will traverse this liminal space, tracing the mist to its source, in the process of searching for their long-estranged son and their lost memories.

The Issue of Trauma Resolution

Beatrice and Axl’s journey lies at the core of Ishiguro’s exploration of trauma and its aftermath. This is, essentially, an initiatic journey, featured in many fairy tales. Fairy-tale protagonists often set out on journeys beset with perils that allow them to demonstrate their cunning and skill, and to learn a few valuable lessons along the way. Equally, initiatic journeys feature prominently in Arthurian romances in the

form of the chivalric quest, which historian Richard Barber defined as “a vow to leave the safety of the castle walls and to undertake the search for a physical object or person through whatever hardships may befall” (2004, 110). Arthurian romances and medieval tales of wonder have inspired and informed fairy tales, as critics have observed (de la Rochère 2016, 635-638). As in chivalric tales, the initiatic journey that fairy-tale characters undertake is transformative: “The concept of metamorphosis that characterizes the [medieval] wonder tale informs our understanding of the fairy tale” (ibid, 637). This metamorphosis is, essentially, a spiritual and emotional one, so when Axl and Beatrice set out on their perilous journey, the expectation is that, by the end of it, the two will not only have remembered what they had forgotten, but they will also have undergone a key transformation.

Quests also lie at the centre of Gothic stories, as Manuel Aguirre argues: “Gothic is about [...] haunting by an Other – by a dark power” (1990, 106). In *The Buried Giant*, this is the forgotten past, symbolised by the mist. Aguirre argues that the Gothic mode is characterized by the thirst for knowledge of this equally attractive and frightening Other, sublimated into “a quest that may transcend [the haunted space of the story] and restore meaning to the world” (ibid, 61). Thus, the Gothic quest is a search for existential meaning in a world where meaning is threatened by the haunting entity. The quest for meaning is also an important aspect of dealing with trauma. Psychologist Gilad Hirschberger notes that “the collective memory of traumatic events is a dynamic social psychological process that is primarily dedicated to the construction of meaning” (2018). That is why it is so important for Axl and Beatrice to uncover their lost memories. This will allow them to make sense of a life that, at the beginning of the novel, appears to lack continuity and significance: “[t]he creation and maintenance of meaning comprises a sense of self-continuity, a connection between the self, others and the environment, and the feeling that one’s existence matters” (ibid 2018).

The first step in Axl and Beatrice’s quest for restored memory and meaning is to depart from their own village and reckon with the first haunted space in their journey, a hill that is, in the story’s lore, a giant’s tomb. Beatrice warns Axl: “there’s one place we need to be cautious [...] when the path goes over where the giant is buried [though] [t]o one who doesn’t know it, it’s an ordinary hill” (Ishiguro 2015, 34). The buried giant that lends the book its name is the perfect visual symbol of the trauma that the characters have buried. For the time being, Beatrice and Axl choose to avoid it rather than risk its stirring in its “grave”: “It’ll do us no good treading over such a grave” (ibid, 35), says Beatrice.

One key moment is when Axl and Beatrice decide to take shelter at a ruined villa, the remains of an earlier era and a Gothic symbol *par excellence* of the haunted space. The Roman villa’s “[o]nce magnificent floors lay exposed to the elements, disfigured by stagnant puddles” (ibid, 37), and in this space of death and decay, the elderly couple finds two unsettling characters: a man and an old woman. The strange man reveals that he is a “boatman who ferries travellers across choppy waters,” though he is “but one of several boatmen,” which means that they can each take turns to rest “after long weeks of labour” (ibid, 41). He is a Charon figure that takes souls

across to the Underworld, but he is also the spirit haunting the ancient villa, the “house where [he] was once a carefree child” (ibid, 41). The man has his own “ghost” in the old woman, who “taunt[s] [him] hour by hour, night and day” (ibid, 41) and terrorises him with the gruesome act of slowly sacrificing a rabbit. The woman claims that this is an act of retribution. She recounts that she and her husband were planning to cross the waters to the island together, when the boatman tricked them, taking away only the husband, while leaving her behind. The boatman, in turn, explains that “the island this old woman speaks of is no ordinary one [...] it’s a place of strange qualities, and one who arrives there will walk among its greenery and trees in solitude” feeling as though they are “the island’s only resident” (ibid, 44). This description is reminiscent of the Roman underworld, populated by silent spirits, oblivious to their past after having drunk from Lethe, the river of forgetting that wipes away all suffering. The mythological elements add to the Gothic atmosphere by emphasising that the characters inhabit a liminal space: between reality and fiction, between worlds, and between historical times.

Moreover, the story of the animosity between the ancient woman and the boatman foreshadows the choices that Axl and Beatrice themselves will have to make at the end of the novel. The boatman claims that, though he would gladly have ferried the woman over to the island, he was unable to, because she refused to comply with the island’s rule of perpetual solitude: “she declared she didn’t care for such solitude and refused to go” (ibid, 44). Yet the woman contends that the boatman’s version is deceitful, entreating Axl and Beatrice to “search their own memories”: “The truth is there’s many permitted [...] to dwell together on the island. My husband and I knew this [...] as children. Good cousins, if you search through your own memories, you’ll remember it to be true” (Ishiguro 2015, 45). Like a fairy-tale character, the old woman faces the two protagonists with a challenge that, if successfully overcome, will allow them to reach their happy ending. If they remember, she seems to suggest, they may be able to pass the boatman’s test when it is their turn to be ferried over to the island.

On their continued journey, Axl and Beatrice pass through different places, each of which makes them recall a little more of their past, and join paths with other characters, each of whom struggles with their own memories. Little by little, Axl’s troubling memories of war and violence return. The narrative also reveals that Beatrice endures an additional pain of her own, which she had been keeping secret from Axl – a physical pain, symbolic not just of her advancing age, but also of the repressed memories eating away at her. To find a cure for Beatrice’s illness, the couple decide to head to a monastery deep in the mountains – joined by Edwin and Wistan – where they have heard that the wise monk Jonus could help them. On their way there, the travellers encounter a group of Briton soldiers who show animosity towards Saxons, despite the fact that, after King Arthur’s death, Saxons and Britons had been cohabiting peacefully. This episode suggests that, despite the mist that causes people to forget the painful memories of past wars, the former tensions persist under the surface.

Later, after the travellers encounter an aged Sir Gawain, Wistan begins to recognise Axl as one of the soldiers who had fought against the Saxons when he was

a child. Axl himself starts to recall a warrior's past, and the emotions that he had once repressed: "He remembered standing inside a tent, a large one of the sort an army will erect near a battlefield. [...] Axl, was angry about something, but he had understood the importance of hiding his anger" (Ishiguro 2015, 126). On the background of these troubled memories, Wistan and Sir Gawain enter an altercation with one of the bellicose Briton warriors from before. Wistan encourages Edwin to witness this ultimately lethal fight, potentially setting up a legacy for further violence and trauma.

The monastery with its secret passages is reminiscent of the trappings and labyrinths found in traditional Gothic novels, like the catacombs in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Once here, Axl experiences more flashbacks: of wartime violence, but also of his first meeting with Beatrice. Here also Beatrice is examined by father Jonus, who mysteriously tells her she "can go to [her] son with no fear" (ibid, 179), and also confirms that the she-dragon is the cause of the amnesia-inducing mist. This conclusion puts a worried Axl at ease, yet it signals to the reader that Beatrice is likely dying – their son, as the story later reveals, is long dead. Yet the reader finds out that death is not what frightens Beatrice; forgetting worries her more, whereas Axl is unsettled by what remembrance might bring about. "Beatrice, [Axl] knew, feared the boatman's questions, harder to answer than Father Jonus's, and that was why she had been so pleased to learn the cause of the mist" (ibid, 180–181), the narrator tells, implying that Axl himself is afraid of what might come of facing the dragon. The closer Axl and Beatrice draw to Querig, the more does Axl remember, and so do others around him. Another narrative begins to emerge, of a warrior Axl haunted by guilt, and of early rifts in his relationship with Beatrice.

In the final part of the novel, Axl, Beatrice, and their companions find out that Querig lives beyond "the giant's cairn," and the story circles back to the tomb in which a traumatic past has been precariously confined. As the characters are about to reach this landmark and face the dragon, the story pauses, and the narrator invites the readers to consider the tension between memory and forgetting in coping with trauma and in building meaning:

Some of you will have fine monuments by which the living may remember the evil done to you. Some of you will have only wooden crosses and painted rocks, while yet others of you must remain hidden in the shadows of history. You are in any case part of an ancient procession, and so it is always possible the giant's cairn was erected to mark the site of some such tragedy long ago when young innocents were slaughtered in war (Ishiguro 2015, 305).

The giant's cairn stands to commemorate an event, yet the event itself is forgotten, rendering the monument unreadable. Moreover, as a tomb, the cairn is a signifier of absence, of the past and of ancestors whose lives cast long shadows, as in the Brothers' Grimm "Cinderella" (1857), where Cinderella's mother's grave stands at the centre of the narrative, dictating its progress.

Before confronting the dragon, though, the young generations of the novel must confront the old. Wistan and Sir Gawain fight each other: Wistan, wishing to kill

the dragon, Gawain hoping to protect it, and with it the legacy set by King Arthur, that of ensuring peace by erasing the communal memory of war. In a final, symbolic act, Wistan kills Sir Gawain, the protector of the memory-obscuring mist. After he kills Querig, too, Wistan makes a dark prophecy:

The giant, once well buried, now stirs. When soon he rises, [...] the friendly bonds between us will prove as knots young girls make with the stems of small flowers. Men will burn their neighbours' houses by night. Hang children from trees at dawn. The rivers will stink with corpses bloated from their days of voyaging (Ishiguro 2015, 340).

This, for Wistan, is poetic justice: tragedy is bound to repeat itself, but this time the former victims (the Saxons) will become perpetrators, and vice versa. The warrior has already passed his own legacy of hatred on to his protégé, young Edwin. Nevertheless, some hope remains that remembrance will bring more than just the memory of animosity. Beatrice, horrified by Wistan's discourse, entreats the boy to "[r]emember [them] and this friendship" (ibid, 344) between himself and the old Briton couple when he grows up. This causes a struggle within Edwin's conscience: "As he heard this, something else came back to Edwin: a promise he had made to the warrior [Wistan]; a duty to hate all Britons. But surely Wistan had not meant to include this gentle couple" (ibid, 344). Edwin's hesitancy seems to suggest that, going forward, his memory will at least provide him with two choices, two narratives: that of hatred, and that of friendship.

The final chapter sees Axl and Beatrice reaching the river, and it brings a surprising revelation: the narrator, in this chapter at least, is the boatman, or a boatman. The first-person narrative from the perspective of this mysterious character renders the story unreliable, all of its details questionable, much like memory itself. Now that the dragon is dead, the paradigm of the story shifts. Where before, Axl and Beatrice could not remember the events of their remote past, now it is their recent memories that have become uncertain. Beatrice, exhausted and dying, fixates on crossing the river and reaching the island, where she is convinced her son awaits, while Axl attempts in vain to change her mind. Beatrice asks the boatman if she and Axl may cross the river together and remain together on the other shore, but before fulfilling her request, the boatman-narrator must interrogate the couple separately. These interrogations seem to have only one purpose: to test the endurance of the couple's bond, after such a long and difficult life together. The boatman declares himself satisfied with Beatrice, "for she speaks freely" (Ishiguro 2015, 353), confident in her love for Axl. However, while Axl initially seems to satisfy the boatman, gradually he stumbles, admitting to past feuds between him and his wife and to acts of intimate cruelty: "I forbade her to go to [the son's] grave," he confesses, admitting that this was "[a] cruel thing" (ibid, 356). Axl goes on to say that these rifts were "[a] wound that healed slowly, yet heal it did" (ibid, 357). Despite this, Axl allows the boatman to carry only Beatrice to the other shore, and as the boatman departs with her, Axl turns his back on them. The boatman-narrator ends by claiming that, though he instructs Axl to wait for him, Axl "does not hear and he wades on" (ibid, 362).

This ending recalls Kalí Tal's distinction between the separate ways in which the memory of trauma affects men and women, in a context in which men, as warriors, are the perpetrators of violence and women, as wives and mothers, are the victims. According to Tal:

Women [...] almost never control the tools of violence. Their traumatic experience – rape, incest, battering – is the most extreme form of the oppression visited on them by a society that generally reduces them to victims. Therein lies the most important difference between the trauma of the warrior and the trauma of the woman victim. Women view their trauma as a natural extension of powerlessness. Warriors are forced to realize the vulnerability of everything they have ever considered powerful (2004, 139).

This final, powerful, and puzzling scene suggests that the rift between Axl and Beatrice may not have fully healed. Axl's act of emotional violence – forbidding Beatrice to visit their son's grave – is one bound to have exacerbated the impact of the trauma of Drag's, and while Beatrice's open conversation with the boatman may suggest that she is now at peace with herself and her husband, Axl may not yet have reached self-forgiveness. In this sense, forgetting may have helped the elderly couple stay together, but in the final act of their life as a couple, forgetting without forgiveness and self-forgiveness is ultimately divisive. In an interview, Ishiguro hints at the tension that the memory of suffering can create within a couple:

Most relationships that go for a long time [...] – over time there are things that we think would be better to just leave behind. [...] With something like a marriage you have to ask, if you just deny that something's happened, and you literally forget it, what does that do to the love? Is it somehow inauthentic? Is it "real" love still? On the other hand, if you do actually go back and look at it squarely, would that destroy the love as well? (Crum 2015)

The novel's ending leaves the reader with a conundrum: does the memory of trauma create an unhealable rift not just between peoples, but between lovers? Or is remembering a necessary evil that may stir temporary disquiet, but which creates meaning in the long run by allowing people to construct a coherent narrative? These are two of the most important questions in the psychology of trauma. "Some writers have found more search for meaning to be associated with worse psychological outcomes, and 'finding meaning' to be associated with better psychological outcomes," psychologist Irene Smith Landsman writes (2002, 13). Yet "[o]thers have argued that it is the kind of meaning that is found that has implications for outcomes" (ibid, 13). What Axl and Beatrice (re)discover at the end of their quest are their memories of shared and private trauma. Axl recalls the wartime violence he reluctantly participated in, the hurt he caused Beatrice, and the pain that Beatrice caused him. This may have restored his sense of identity, but also the unbridgeable rift between him and his wife, symbolised in the story by the ever-receding figure of Beatrice, crossing the river towards the island of perpetual amnesia and no return. He has chosen to sit with the memory of the trauma he has both caused and experienced.

By contrast, Beatrice has chosen to embrace the perpetual serenity of forgetfulness, perhaps in death.

Some philosophers have made the case that active forgetting can be an important tool for healing after distressing events. For instance, Ciano Aydin writes that “[a]ctive forgetting enables selective remembering; it defuses and neutralizes past experiences that are not beneficial for present and future life” (2017). However, he also argues that communities that have encountered trauma are unable to actively forget and remember selectively. “Their capacity to forget has been damaged” by the trauma, and their relationship with memory has thus become warped (*ibid*). Therefore, the question is not whether it is more helpful to remember or forget past trauma, but how “the balance between remembering and forgetting” can be restored in its aftermath (*ibid*). “The confused psychic economy of a culture could be restored,” he suggests, “only by means of efforts that reconcile what has happened to the victimized group with the present ideas, expectations, and ideals of its descendants” (*ibid*).

In Ishiguro’s novel, at the social level, the hope for reconciliation is hinted at through Edwin’s acknowledgement of his people’s past victimisation, and of the fact that change is possible, since he was able to befriend his predecessors’ former enemies. Edwin is the mascot of a new generation: he has only learned of past feuds through Wistan, and he has run away from his home village, where he would have been destroyed by his own family’s rigid belief in tradition. The new generation that he represents has not directly experienced the trauma of war, and it is moving away from ancestors’ mores and traditions. As the old generations die or continue to struggle with the memory of trauma, the legacy of the quest for meaning is passed on to the young generation, which faces the choice of the ages: whether to perpetuate the same trauma by exacting revenge through war, or to build reconciliation.

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Sublime Whiteouts:

Narrative Constructions of Whiteness, Otherness and Terror in the Arctic Gothic

ABSTRACT

*Attempts at describing an Arctic or Polar Gothic often focus on the critical context of the Burkean sublime, highlighting common motifs of vast, white, and ultimately hostile landscapes and ecosystems. While nature is a central and recurring source of fear and terror in these texts, these affects are typically brought to the Polar spaces by Euro-American explorers and steeped in their expectations. A “white ecology,” that reads the Arctic as a blank space, is part of an “imperial linguistics” (Herzogenrath 2013, 8) that does not acknowledge the inhabitants of the space or their narratives. Drawing on theories of ecology and Gothic terror, my article will compare representations of Arctic spaces in several popular horror narratives, juxtaposing a brief reading of Michelle Paver’s Arctic Gothic novel *Dark Matter* with a closer look at two relatively recent horror television series (*Fortitude* and *The Terror*) to draw attention to their privileging of a perspective on the Arctic space that continues to read it as a source of terror based on radical Otherness. As I will argue, the fundamental distancing that dominates these perspectives only emerges where the underlying aesthetics and ethics of representation of these Arctic Gothic texts are contextualized within a framework of critical theories of whiteness and racialized Otherness.*

Keywords: Arctic, Polar Region, Gothic, Whiteness, Otherness

In Michelle Paver's Arctic Gothic novel *Dark Matter* (2010), the narrator's first glimpse of the Norwegian island of Spitzbergen triggers the sudden realization:

that despite all my reading, I'd made the classic mistake of imagining the Arctic as an empty waste. I'd thought that since it's too far north for trees, there wouldn't be much else except rocks. Maybe a few seals and seabirds, but nothing like this. I never expected so much life. Great flocks of gulls perching on icebergs, rising in flurries, diving after fish. An Arctic fox trotting over a green plain with a puffin flapping in its jaws. Reindeer raising antlered heads to watch us pass. Walruses rocking on the waves; one surfaced right beneath me with an explosive, spraying *huff!* And regarded me with a phlegmatic brown eye. The sleek heads of seals bobbed on the surface, observing us with the same curiosity with which we observed them (39-40).

This description of the Arctic as a space that is – unexpectedly – brimming with life serves to highlight the discrepancy of expectation and reality but, by criticizing the narrator's preconceptions, it also draws attention to the question of whose subject position will usually be privileged in observations of the Arctic. For Paver's protagonist – an outsider both at home and in the Arctic – some of the "life" he observes is looking back, "observing us with the same curiosity with which we observed them" (39-40). The passage raises several important questions that will concern me in the following: most prominently it draws attention to how Gothic/Horror texts often present Arctic spaces from the position of an outsider, unfamiliar with the space and full of preformed judgements about its emptiness and threatening nature and it suggests that any affective engagement of the protagonists with the Arctic space must also be read in the light of these preconceptions. Lorna Piatti-Farnell, discussing Norwegian horror films, argues that "one element that appears to remain a constant presence, and an essential factor in the construction of the Gothic atmosphere, is the conspicuous use of the landscape as an agent of terror, horror, and fear" (2019, 1). This sense of threat is most often experienced by outsiders – European or North American travellers – unfamiliar with a landscape which they see as profoundly alien and, therefore, a source of horror. These narrative interpretations of Arctic spaces rooted in the Gothic/Horror tradition frequently draw on the pre-rational sublime (see Burke 1999), highlighting the vastness and emptiness of a landscape that is different from the homely, but also not entirely rationalizable within the framework of the narrator/focaliser's expectations of what might be discovered in the far north. Brigid Cherry lists several threatening motifs that recur in Arctic Gothic texts – from the unpredictable movements and treacherousness of the ice itself, to encounters with threatening wildlife or frozen cadavers on the tundra, and the overall sense of being lost in an infinite white void (see Cherry 2010). Such readings foreground a privileged subject position that is unfamiliar with the environment, interpreting the unknown as threatening.

Dark Matter is a somewhat unusual Arctic Gothic text in that it does not posit the natural environment as its central source of horror – even though the climate becomes much more threatening to the protagonist and his fellow travellers once they go further north. Rather, the novel suggests, human cruelty and imperialist exploitative practices (namely the expansion of coal mining in the Arctic) fuelled the traumatic events that haunt the abandoned outpost at Gruhuken (the syllable ‘gru’, which the protagonist is unable to make sense of [see Paver 2010, 18], signalling ‘cruel’ in the Norwegian languages). The novel invokes this tension between Arctic environment and intruders from the outside in the form of a haunted space that is, however, not a part of nature itself but tied to the remaining structures of a former settlement. The most striking symbol of this haunted man-made architecture is the “bear post” (Paver 2010, 64) – a wooden column that would have been used by hunters to bait polar bears and which turns out to have played a central role in the traumatic events at Gruhuken. When the bear post seems to become animate and move closer towards the house in a threatening manner it creates an uncanny atmosphere of uncertainty between reality and the protagonist’s imagination, but it also draws attention to a foregrounding of non-human agency that is typical of Arctic Gothic texts.

The *Dark Matter* referenced in the title reflects the protagonist’s interest in (1930s’) particle physics, as well as the experience of his own insignificance brought on by the prolonged darkness of the Arctic winter: “That’s the truth. The dark. We’re the anomaly. Little flickering sparks in the crust of this spinning planet – and around it the dark” (Paver 2010, 230). The novel’s foregrounding of matter as animate, and even potentially malignant, could be read as a distinctly more Gothic sibling of Jane Bennett’s concept of *Vibrant Matter* (2010). Bennett’s critical work troubles the idea that only humans possess agency, reading “lively things” as possessing a “vitality” – that is, “the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). For Paver’s protagonist, Jack Miller, the interminable pitch dark of the Arctic winter is infused with a materiality that is only partly explicable through his understanding of physics and which, over time, transforms from the eerie sensation of not being alone into a full-on haunting presence invading his safe space inside the cabin. Paver’s text is, of course, a Gothic novel and not a philosophical treatise, but the confrontation with the dark raises crucial questions for the protagonist, who expresses a potential shift in his understanding of the universe through biblical reference:

Some people think of death as a door into a better place. *For now we see but through a glass, darkly; but then face to face ...* What if it’s not like that? What if there is no enlightenment, and it’s all just dark? What if the dead know no more than we? [...] To be conscious in eternal night. You would pray for oblivion. But there’d be no one to hear you (Paver 2010, 231).

Beyond the conceptualization of haunting as a kind of lingering on after death, this passage highlights an entanglement of human and non-human agents through the

materiality of a universe in which human and non-human bodies, people and things, the living and the dead are made-up of shifting, interpenetrating matter. This realization is a universal one that is merely brought to the foreground of the protagonist's perception through the confrontation with the interminable darkness of the Arctic winter. The emphasized juxtaposition of 'dark' and 'light', moreover, draws attention to an underlying complexity and problematization of this binary pair - as well as its associations and connotations. In the context of the Arctic Gothic light and dark emerge in the stark combination of vast landscapes of snow and ice with the months-long darkness of the Arctic winter, but in the Anglo-American cultural imaginary they are also fraught with multi-layered cultural and philosophical implications, from race to religion and ethics. As Virginia Lea, Darren E. Lund, and Paul R. Carr argue, whiteness is "a representation of cultural hegemony", drawing on "less visible cultural mechanisms [...] that are so much part of the dominant cultural fabric of society that we take them for granted as normal, natural, and common sense" (2018, 3). As such, racialized connotations of whiteness also permeate narratives of Arctic exploration which are usually written from the perspective of the intrepid (white, male) Anglo-American explorer.

As I will argue in the following, Arctic Gothic texts historically imagine the Arctic from a privileged 'white' perspective that attempts to align itself with the pristine, untouched whiteness of the landscape and rejects the 'dark' as a radical, frequently also racialized Other. There seem to be different levels of rejection at play in the same narratives, as both Indigenous perspectives beyond the white male gaze and approaches that focus on an understanding of the world beyond the anthropocentric perspective are equally read as Other. It would, however, be a romanticized oversimplification akin to the idea of the 'noble savage' stereotype to conflate these levels of Otherness based on an understanding of Indigenous cosmogonies as more inclusive of non-anthropocentric perspectives. Instead, I would like to suggest a reading of Arctic Gothic texts that troubles preconceived notions about the space and acknowledges the possibility of a variety of perspectives on the landscape, but also argue that these different perspectives, where they exist (see for instance the short story collection *Taaqtumi*), have not yet made it into the mainstream of Arctic Gothic narratives.

Despite recent debates on diversity and representation, mainstream media narratives still predominantly present an outside perspective of the Arctic that ignores local political and cultural realities. As Ken S. Coates and Else Grete Broderstad argue concerning contemporary political realities in the Arctic:

[f]ifty years ago, most Indigenous peoples had been pushed to the political, economic and social margins within various nation-states, relegated by the dominance of the resource economy and smothered by the intrusions of the activist and southern-based welfare state. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Indigenous peoples had established a substantial international presence, captured a great deal of media attention and secured (outside of Russia) a significant measure of self-government and the beginnings of influence over northern policy.

Indeed, in much of the region, Indigenous peoples have power and authority that belies their small numbers while still lacking the financial and political resources to resume control over traditional lands (2020, 9).

This representation is not adequately reflected in mainstream media, which still often marginalize Indigenous cultural representation and, perhaps equally importantly, Indigenous perspectives on the areas traditionally inhabited by Indigenous people. In the following I would like to take a closer look at episodes from the British television series *Fortitude* (2015-18) and the American television series *The Terror* (2018-), which will serve as examples of how contemporary medial narratives continue to present the Arctic space as a canvas for European encounters with a stereotypical Other. I would like to argue that, even considering recent attempts at a more accurate representation of diversity, a deeper critical reassessment of the conceptualization of whiteness as a privileged perspective is necessary to allow mainstream media and Arctic Gothic criticism to move beyond this ingrained focus on the Arctic space.

Arctic Gothic

In the preface to the essay collection *Echoing Silence*, John Moss draws attention to the role of literature in contemporary conceptualizations of the Arctic: “What we know of the Arctic now, even of the oral tradition, is largely filtered through a screen of literacy, so that the Arctic of scholars, adventurers, and to some extent of the Inuit themselves, is a literary construct” (1997, 2). Moss reads the Arctic as a postcolonial space that can no longer be understood as uninfluenced by colonialist readings. Gothic/Horror criticism has, to date, produced few extensive studies of the Arctic Gothic – potentially because historically an ‘Arctic Gothic’ (or Polar Gothic) cannot be as easily established as an Irish or American Gothic – that is as a canon of texts produced by writers from a specific region who position themselves within both the literary and cultural traditions of that region and the Anglophone literary tradition of Gothic/Horror. The reasons for this are complex, having to do with the different ways in which humans have historically inhabited Polar spaces (settling in the Arctic but not the Antarctic, traversing spaces as nomads rather than permanently settling in specific areas, or considering the Arctic as a space for adventure and exploration, to name only a few), but also with the ways that whiteness has historically taken centre stage in fantastic fiction. As Helen Young argues, “[h]abits of Whiteness in Fantasy [...] simultaneously influence who can be present, and what is seen, thought, and done by creating patterns of bodies and spaces alike” (2015, 11). Gothic/Horror texts in British and American literature and culture have traditionally overwritten the realities of the Arctic, and sometimes the Antarctic, with stories of fictional polar spaces, using these regions and their nature as a foil for an imagination that is altogether alien to the spaces themselves. Moreover, for writers from the Arctic drawing on a rich oral tradition of Indigenous stories full of hauntings and monsters specific to their culture and environment the labels ‘Gothic’ and ‘Horror’, steeped in Anglo-American cultures and colonialist practices may seem less like a straightforward description of their writing than an invitation to the mainstream to appropriate, overwrite and often also eradicate their culturally specific tales. As Renée Hulan argues, the work of literary studies scholars who wish to engage with

Indigenous writing in an ethical manner needs to be guided by “practices of active listening and reading from the inside out”, as well as an “awareness of the difference between dialogue and cultural appropriation” (2018, 8). One could certainly make the same argument about mainstream medial engagements with the Arctic space.

Historically, European, or American Gothic texts set in the Polar regions draw on the vast, frozen space as a source of the sublime and the uncanny. These are, however, affects brought to these spaces by travellers from elsewhere – typically Europe or North America – drawing on conceptualizations of these regions from their own cultural background. Gothic/Horror criticism tends to echo these categorizations. Katherine Bowers, for instance, describes the fictional geography of the Arctic as an “extreme uncanny space at the end of the world”, arguing that “the ice creates a negative space, which gives rise to supernatural beings that reflect the self” (2017, 72). “End of the world” is, of course, a telling localization in this context, as it speaks to the self-positioning of the observer in a perceived ‘centre’ that is far removed from the ‘remote’ polar space. Bowers’ reading may be even more telling in its understanding of the ice as a “negative space” that does not possess any qualities of its own but merely serves as a reflective surface for the adventurer’s own fears. Bowers reads Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as one of her main examples of this monstrous geographical imagination. The novel begins and ends in the Arctic, which also serves as the dramatic frame for the final confrontation between the conflicting narratives of Victor Frankenstein and his creation. In his opening letter the explorer Walton describes his expectations of what he may find further north on his expedition, creating an imaginative landscape based entirely on speculation:

I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There [...] the sun is for ever visible; its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing perpetual splendour. There [...] snow and frost are banished; and sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. [...] What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? [...] I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man (Shelley 2012, 7).

While Walton’s opening account is not yet influenced by the dual terror of being stuck in the ice and *Frankenstein*’s tale of monstrous creation, there are several discourses at work in this passage, which reflect nineteenth-century positions towards voyages of exploration and how they are connected to national colonialist projects:

1. The imaginative poetics of travel writing as a form of fiction steeped in the travellers’ expectations, opinions and cultural context.
2. The narrative of ‘discovery’ and of leaving one’s footprint on the ‘discovered’ space, which reflects a hierarchical view of Europe as the centre of civilization and the rest of the world as empty spaces to be conquered.

3. In terms of motif, this is tied to the Romantic conceptualization of eternal light and beauty that charges the region with positive affect as well as sublime qualities – creating the impression of a landscape that is ultimately constructed by its affective relationship with the (invading and conquering) agent whose whiteness/lightness is projected onto the landscape.

Both Bowers and Jen Hill argue that the Arctic played a central role for the nineteenth-century British imagination, as Arctic explorations formed an important part of “an empire-building project, an attempt to fill in and claim the last ‘blank’ spaces on the Globe” (Bowers 2017, 73) and prove one’s heroic masculinity in the process (see Hill 2008, 3). Jeffrey Weinstock makes a similar argument for the connection of Arctic exploration and “American manhood” (2017, 1) but suggests that fictional Arctic explorers rarely find the promised land they are looking for. As Weinstock argues, Arctic Gothic texts foreground such readings, because:

rather than conquering space, extending the dominion of humanity, and making the world knowable and exploitable, human action instead reveals the existence of a fundamentally inhuman underlying reality [...] The inhospitable polar region of Gothic narrative is thus figured as a kind of liminal zone, a space where the façade of reality wears thin, allowing humans (male adventurers and accursed outcasts) glimpses through the translucent skin of the world of monstrous shapes and ominous movement beneath (3-4).

The “strangely active matter of the world” (4), a description which also resonates with the passages from Paver’s *Dark Matter* above, allows the travellers to confront their own demons in a heightened capacity, which may allow them to gain insights that would not have been possible at home. To allow this to happen, the Arctic space itself must serve as an empty canvas from which “indigenous people [are] for the most part absent” (Bowers 2017, 73). As Hill points out, “native migratory traditions ensured their evacuation from the Arctic in the popular imagination, an erasure enabled by the representation of polar space in two hundred years of exploration accounts as uninhabitable” (9). In newer versions of this myth, Adriana Craciun argues, “Arctic opportunism” presents a space “emptied of Indigenous people and its multiplicity of histories, and reduced to an environment full of energy awaiting extraction” (2016, 230).

While the native Inuit population is, thus, largely omitted from exploration-centred narrative accounts of the Arctic space – along with local interpretations of its natural surroundings – there may still be non-white presences in classic Polar Gothic tales. As Toni Morrison’s (1993) reading of an “Africanist presence” (46) in Edgar Allan Poe’s *Antarctic Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* suggests, non-white characters serve a specific function in American literature, which is defined in relation to both the white characters and the white space. As Young points out, this is also a prominent feature of “Fantasy [which] often constructs the self through Whiteness and Otherness” (11). In these texts, whiteness figures as the invisible ecological and aesthetic default position, from which darkness (of people or landscapes) can be

perceived and ultimately rejected as Other. In the opening chapter of *Prismatic Ecology* Bernd Herzogenrath asks, “is not a white ecology – at least in the political, racial sense [...] what is silently (or not so silently) practiced as the default mode of ecology?” (2013, 1). As Herzogenrath argues, there is an ‘imperial linguistics’ at work in describing the subpolar landscape of Alaska as a:

“white continent” in the sense that the landscape's whiteness has invited “imperial inscriptions” insofar as the polar regions have been taken as a blank space of exploration for white people, who do not necessarily acknowledge that the regions have long been inhabited (8).

Herzogenrath’s argument draws attention to an underlying tension of whiteness and darkness brought to the Arctic space by white people who attempt to align themselves with the landscape by imposing their reading on its perceived blank spaces. Herzogenrath’s discussion of a white ecology focuses on how the work of composer John Luther Adams negotiates this problematic heritage by attempting to incorporate local traditions and the landscape itself into his compositions. The installation *The Place Where You Go to Listen* at the Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks draws on meteorological data, translating them into pink (rather than white) noise in real time, thus focusing, as Herzogenrath argues, on the landscape as *becoming*. Pink noise is present in steady, low frequency nature sounds (like wind or rain). The installation necessitates a constant means of interaction with the landscape that, in Adams’ work, is provided by the weather stations spread throughout it. Beyond the technology, this setup presupposes a willingness to engage with the landscape, a posthumanist (see Braidotti 2013), non-colonialist theory of ecology that does not read the Arctic space as an empty canvas to be marked by the (white) explorer but as an ecosystem, a consolidation of “vibrant matter” (see Bennett 2010) influenced by and influencing human beings in turn. Adams’ installation assumes that the landscape is expressive in itself and that this expression can be captured through the medium of sound in a manner that avoids human mediation and replaces it with technological mediation. Moreover, by emphasizing sound, instead of vision, the installation moves away from the kind of visual “Arctic Spectacle” that Russell A. Potter (2007) has identified as a driving factor of European engagement with the Arctic during the 19th-century’s main period of exploration, and which continues to influence visual depictions of the Arctic. In Herzogenrath’s argument, Adams’ installation represents “a way to think the environment as a negotiation of dynamic arrangements of cultural and natural forces, of both nonhuman and human stressors and tensors, both of which are informed and ‘intelligent’” (1). To practice ecological thinking in such a manner – especially from a perspective steeped in Euro-American thought patterns – requires a constant, active process of disengagement from the human(ist) perspective, but it may ultimately allow us to disentangle our view of the Arctic from the affective reactions of the white explorer figure that is still popular in mainstream depictions of the Arctic.

'This is [/] not how Englishmen act': The Arctic in the Anglo-American Popular Imaginary

Fortitude

Fortitude (Sky Atlantic) is set in an imaginary community on the island of Svalbard, Northwest of the Norwegian mainland. Various economic interests clash as the small town, which also houses a scientific lab exploring polar bears and other Arctic animals, faces the severe change from mining town to tourism spot, as well as having to deal with shadier outside interests involving a mysterious treasure allegedly buried under the ice – a thinly veiled metaphor of mining operations in the Arctic that often drive present-day corporate engagements with the space. The progress-oriented governor's efforts to draw investors for a glacier hotel are undermined by a series of violent deaths seemingly connected to a mysterious pre-historic virus. Suspense is created via discrepant awareness as the audience sees two children discover the remains of a mammoth newly thawed out of the permafrost, and the following scenes suggest an impact of this find on the young boy, but for various complicated reasons the police and the scientists take much longer to discover the cause for the violent attacks on a scientist and the local doctor by two somewhat marginalized but otherwise blatantly non-violent members of the community. Racial markers may, however, play a role here, as the first person to be hijacked and turned into a 'mindless' killer by the mysterious prehistoric virus is a young boy of Afro-British descent. As the investigators struggle to keep up with the increasing violence, the audio-visual narrative frequently returns to an image of the storage shed in which the mammoth remains are hidden, underlining the growing threat they pose to the inhabitants of the town with a weird soundscape (that combines musical notes with an ominous rumbling and insect buzzing noises). This uncanny imagery is used as a reminder of the underlying connections between the murders and the inhuman presence of the pre-historic creature.

The narrative combines full-on body horror, as several people are ripped open with kitchen implements or become hosts to pre-historic wasps, with the personal entanglements of the characters and an effective police procedural narrative, creating a network of interests and influences that is also reflected in the visuals of the opening titles. The ever-changing rhizomatic structures of black ice can be read as a visual metaphor of events and connections between the different narratives in the series, but they also suggest Arctic darkness, rather than whiteness as the ruling image. Snow and ice are often presented as marred by blood or mysterious holes and crags, suggesting an underlying presence of evil or threatening doom, especially towards the end of the first season, when it becomes clear that there are more wasp-infested, thawing mammoth carcasses hidden in local ice caves. It is not the Arctic itself that is presented as a threat here, but rather human interaction with and intervention into the landscape in the form of mining, tourism and climate change that causes the thawing of the permafrost and brings the humans in contact with the prehistoric wasps that carry the killer virus.

While the town of Fortitude houses an international community of Norwegians, Brits, other Europeans and Americans, the only Indigenous presence in the series is a Greenlandic Inuit running a taxidermist's shop, who is introduced mid-series as a shaman performing a ritual involving a Tupilaq – a blood-soaked rope-figure meant to protect the boy who committed murder. In contrast to most of the white and even a few black characters in the series, the one Indigenous character is not introduced with any kind of depth or a backstory, as his role is limited to providing an extra-layer of mystery surrounding the ritual and the need for half a pint of 'murderer's blood' to perform it. The narrative here seems to appropriate and bend Inuit myths to fit its story arc, as the making of a Tupilaq traditionally seems to have required small bones and other human body parts, but not 'murderer's blood' specifically. The Inuit character, played by a British actor of Indo-Fijian and Malaysian descent, Ramon Tikaram, does not even possess a stable name throughout the series, as the cast list features him as Tavani or Tavrani in different episodes (a blatant symbol of a character being perceived as unimportant by the series' creators). Before agreeing to prepare the Tupilaq, Tav(r)ani presents himself as a harmless fake, suggesting that he cannot or does not dare to openly identify as a shaman in the current cultural context of what is, presumably, his home country. The visual narrative clashes real and fake animal parts in the taxidermist's shop, suggesting an ambiguous reading of the scene, as well as Tav(r)ani himself, who is, thus, visually associated with this distorted version of the natural surroundings. His character is, however, generally presented as supportive – in any sense of the word – as he provides what is needed and then fades into the background, until he is needed again.

Tav(r)ani is presented as an Other, but certainly not THE Other to the predominantly white characters of *Fortitude*. Instead, the series foregrounds a non-human viral narrative to highlight the violence already inherent in the main characters and their struggle to remain human under duress. The series' main source of horror is the sense of remote-controlled zombification surrounding those affected by the virus, which drives them to open their victim's chest cavities and vomit into them to create a host body for the wasps. Scientific explanations given in the series draw connections to *Ophiocordyceps* – a type of fungus whose spores spread by hijacking insect's brains and turning them into remote controlled zombies – and the series presents a general sense of nature being somehow 'out of joint', as the scientists discuss strange phenomena among reindeer populations in the area and uncharacteristic bouts of cannibalism in local polar bears. The pristine whiteness of the Arctic is constantly posited as treacherous, as the steadiness of the icy landscape is undermined by the image of cracks in the ice and the question of what other pre-historic threats the thawing permafrost might set free. But the driving factor of the slowly emerging catastrophe is often human greed, rather than nature itself.

The Terror

There are a number of similar motifs in *The Terror* (AMC) – a horror series whose first season revolves around the ill-fated Franklin expedition to find a northwest passage through the Arctic. The series focuses on the confrontation of Europeans with an Arctic environment they are ill equipped for, in spite of the technological

advancement of their ships, which were state of the art for 1845. One of the reasons for the failure, historical accounts of the expedition suggest, might have been hubris, which had Franklin rely on British expertise in shipbuilding, naval equipment, and navigation, rather than local knowledge of the Arctic space. As Hill argues, however:

[i]t is easy to read a distinctly “Victorian” narrative into the Franklin expedition’s failure, one of men done in by knickknacks: taking silver tea services instead of lightweight sledges; wearing the blue cotton and wool of the British Navy in place of sealskin anoraks; reading novels and plays by Shakespeare in lieu of survival manuals. Under this rubric, Franklin’s disappearance is a product of what we think of as Victorian hubris; the confidence that led Franklin to scoff at provisions for his rescue in planning his mission is a direct extension of the same self-confident assumption of privilege with which the British Empire claimed the globe (2008, 2).

The series visualizes these ideas in the images of the elaborate china and silver cutlery underlying its opening titles, but also by presenting British hubris in the behaviour of the leading officers, contrasting Franklin's arrogance as a commander with Crozier, the Irishman’s, struggles with having to take over after Franklin’s death. The unsure fate of the Franklin expedition contributed to the mystery surrounding the disappearance of its two ships, the *Terror* and the *Erebus*, which became a cultural myth in its own right (see Hulan 2018, 1).

The Terror is based on a novel by Dan Simmons, but also relies on popular knowledge about the failed expedition. In the opening scene, the captain of the 1850 rescue mission interviews a Netsilik hunter who describes an encounter with a group of starving survivors led by a fatally ill Crozier and pursued by a mysterious creature, a Tuunbaq. His explanation is vague and incomprehensible to the English navy: Tuunbaq is introduced as a liminal monster, made “of muscles and spells”, seemingly endowed with intelligence and animal strength (the creature itself is not a part of Netsilik mythology but rather seems to combine different myths). The nameless Netsilik hunter also conveys a dire message from Crozier, whom he calls Aglooka (“long strider” in Inuktitut): “Tell those who come after us not to stay. The ships are gone. There’s no way through. No passage. Tell them, we are gone. Dead and gone”.

While this scene is mainly introduced to create suspense and a sense of doom at the beginning of the narrative, it also suggests an unprecedented interest of the British navy in enlisting the help of the Inuit population. Media accounts of how the *Terror* and the *Erebus* were finally discovered instead reveal how a narrative hegemony privileging European discourses and scientific knowledge over the experiences of the local Inuit population caused a delay of over 150 years in finding the two abandoned ships. Paul Watson (2016), reporting on the find of the *Terror* in 2016, describes how the *Erebus* was discovered “in the same area of eastern Queen Maud gulf where Inuit oral history had long said a large wooden ship sank” and how “Inuit knowledge was also central to finding” the wreck of the *Terror* in Terror Bay. Moreover, as Hulan argues with Craciun, the way the search for Franklin’s ships was

later framed as a success story of discovery by the Canadian government reveals “a long history of ‘Arctic opportunism’ in Canada that is seeing its most recent manifestation in the treatment of the HMS Terror and the HMS Erebus as artifacts that cement Canada’s claims” in the Arctic (Hulan 2018, 10; see Craciun 2016, 229).

The first episode of *The Terror* establishes a connection between the expedition as intruding into a dangerous territory and the warning of a shaman conveyed via a sailor who is already at death's door: “he wants us to run”, the sailor shouts before dying of fright. The dire warning sticks in viewers’ minds as the ships are shown to press further North, where they are eventually engulfed by the ice. When the shaman is accidentally shot by an advance party mistaking him for a polar bear, his daughter is taken on board. The expedition’s anatomist, Harry Goodsir manages to establish a bond with the Inuit woman, whom the sailors nickname ‘Lady Silence’ (ironically, as the woman does, in fact, speak Inuktitut and teaches Goodsir her language). The naming somewhat undermines the series runners’ choice of casting Greenlandic Inuk actress Nive Nielsen in the role, as it literally presents her as the mysterious Indigenous Other to the dominant white male characters. Goodsir’s equally speaking name mirrors his good-natured attempts at a cultural exchange by learning Inuktitut and attempting to convince her that “People [in England] are good” and “This is not how Englishmen act”. His efforts are, however, undermined by his own belief in the usefulness of the expedition’s purpose for “the glory of the Empire” and “for trade”, as well as the fact that his fellow Englishmen do, in fact, behave abominably.

The anti-imperialist criticism of the series is connected to a visual and narrative argument about the Arctic as a vast and pristine space best left alone by outsiders. Crozier’s comments that “in this place, technology still bends its knee to luck” and that “this place wants us dead”, dismissed as pessimism by Franklin, turn out to be accurate as the ships, deemed close to finding the northwest passage are instead locked in the ice for several winters. Crozier’s previous knowledge of both the Arctic and the Inuktitut language, which allows him to communicate with the Indigenous population, seem to cast him in a somewhat more sympathetic role than the power-hungry Franklin. But the series also pits his attempts at keeping the men under his command alive as long as possible by killing the Tuunbaq against the interests of the Inuit, whose carefully balanced, precarious eco-system is threatened by the intrusion of such a large party of outsiders unfamiliar with the environment. As the Netsilik hunter explains:

There are too many of them. Just as there were too many caribou the year of the Falling Stars. Too many bear the year before. And it’s because of these men the island has nothing for us. Everything on legs has fled. We are starving now but for what the sea gives us. The island gives us only wind now (*The Terror*).

While this explanation suggests an ecocritical reading, the series’ main narrative strand focuses on the horrors caused by a slow failing of the command chain and moral standards among the ships’ crews. The episodes describe in minute detail, how the crews descend into mutiny and the ever more gruesome horrors of survival as

stocks run low, hunting becomes scarce and the food cans turn out to give the crew lead poisoning, until one faction of survivors decides to resort to cannibalism. *The Terror's* visual narrative is, consequently, full of the Gothic body horrors of mid-19th-century shipboard surgery, men dying of scurvy, cannibalism, and the bloody attacks of Tuunbaq – the ultimate monstrous Other. The series' production values also reflect the idea of an imagined Arctic landscape, as most episodes were filmed on a sound stage in Budapest, Hungary (see Travers 2018). While the Arctic winter was produced through special effects, the summer scenes were filmed in warm temperatures on a rocky Mediterranean island, creating an ominous sense of the Arctic sun as an additional threat to the stranded sailors. Hallucinatory images of the starving crew are presented alongside Mr. Hickey – the mutiny leader's – megalomaniac ravings, creating a surreal atmosphere for the final encounter with the monstrous Tuunbaq. While Crozier manages to kill the creature, Lady Silence's attempts at reviving it suggest, that Tuunbaq is in fact part of the Arctic environment's equilibrium. This ecocritical message pales somewhat in the light of the narrative's project to centre a white saviour figure.

While Lady Silence disappears, never to be seen again, the narrative comes full circle in the end, revealing that Crozier's has, in fact, not disappeared or died alongside the rest of his crew, but is hiding from the rescue mission and trying to steer them away from new attempts at finding a northwest passage. The final shot of the series romanticizes Crozier's inclusion into the Arctic space, presenting several layers of "sublime whiteness" in a visual narrative that casts him as a saviour figure to a native population helpfully blending into the background. Crozier's integration into the Arctic space, once again, returns the narrative to its original pattern of a white hero defeating the Arctic monster – a narrative that leaves no space for Lady Silence's fight to restore balance for her people and their environment.

Conclusion

Like *Fortitude*, *The Terror* also seems to present the message that the Arctic is pristine, an incomprehensible, uninhabited white space that would fare better without external intervention but is ultimately a blank canvas for the affective self-exploration of the (white) explorer. In both series, the horrors of the Arctic Gothic do not arise from the landscape itself but are brought about by the hubris of explorers and colonizers in search of ways to leave their footprint in its sublime whiteness and prevail under duress. As the narrator of Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley and Rachel Qitsualik-Tinsley's short story "Lounge" in the Arctic Horror collection *Taaqtumi* (which translates as "in the dark") summarizes, it is a characteristic of the Arctic that "[p]eople go there to become more of what they are" (Qitsualik-Tinsley and Qitsualik-Tinsley 2019, 64). While both *Fortitude* and *The Terror* seem to be aware of the fact that Arctic explorers bring their horrors with them, both series also use an inhuman agency closely connected to the space as a narrative catalyst to hold a mirror up to the European intruders and the problems they bring. They reinforce traditional Eurocentric narrative omissions of the local Inuit population, who are romanticized as a helpful background presence in these Arctic narratives, whose focus remains on the predominantly white character's interactions with and affective reactions to the imagined space of the Arctic. Where

these outside perspectives prevail, the Arctic is not allowed to exist outside of any relation with white, European conceptualizations of humanity and the natural environment in a manner that is particularly meaningful in view of its accelerated disappearance in the Anthropocene. To see these concerns as marginal not only privileges the same Euro- or Western-Centric perspectives as the Arctic Gothic narratives I have analysed here. Such a position also denies the impact of anthropogenic climate change that may find its accelerated expression in Arctic spaces, but which is ultimately a global catastrophe. As recent theoretical engagements with the vitality of non-human agents and our entanglements with our natural surroundings suggest (see Bennett 2010; see Tsing 2015) we would be well-advised to pay close attention to what is happening in the Arctic and to such texts that can provide a more locally involved and less anthropocentric understanding of the space (for example the stories in *Taaqtumi*). Arctic Gothic criticism can pave the way for such fruitful readings by highlighting useful connections between the theoretical and the fictional engagement with Arctic spaces.

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Reflecting Millennial Identity:

Romantic Zombies in the German Mash-Up Novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther*

ABSTRACT

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's world-famous novel The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774) did not escape the zombie mash-up-wave that washed over literary classics ten years ago. It was rewritten not only as a parody of Goethe's classic epistolary novel but also as a parody of romantic zombie comedies à la Warm Bodies (2010). The romantic zombie is a specifically millennial phenomenon that reflects the increasing polyvalence of the zombie throughout the past decades. No longer is the zombie only a horrifying metaphor for a dog-eat-dog society or for the fear of a foreign culture invading our own culture, but rather a trope for the millennial being itself: the romantic zombie represents the millennial desire for individuality, the confusion caused by the blurring of social and sexual boundaries and the dulling of emotions that this generation is experiencing due to dating apps and the subsequent separation of sex and love in today's society. The romantic zombie has also become a reflection of the ideal state of being for millennials who suffer from the pressure of performance society and acceleration of everyday life: the zombie has no duties, no job, no money issues, no social restrictions – this aspect is also addressed in Susanne Picard's mash-up novel Die Leichen des jungen Werther (2011). This article aims to outline how the romantic zombie differs from the Romero zombie and to show in how far the parody of the romantic zombie in this mash-up novel reflects millennial concerns of identity and love.

Keywords: Zombie, Millennials, Romance, Mash-Up Novel, Goethe

In the last decade we have seen the rise of a new generation of zombies: the romantic zombie. This undead incarnation appears to be the monster of choice for the millennial generation. It seems that the zombie reached its most terrifying form in the early twenty-first century – the running super-zombie à la *28 Days Later* (2002). In contrast, the zombie portrayed over the last decade is not frightening at all; it is boyfriend/girlfriend material. Novels like Adam Seltzer's *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It* (2010) or Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies* (2010) helped to introduce the zombie as an eligible romantic partner. In recent times, romantic vampire and werewolf narratives have dominated the paranormal romance genre. The romantic zombie offers a refreshingly different alternative, especially since the zombie, unlike the vampire or werewolf, does not have a history as a sexual predator. A zombie romance is a narrative in which at least one partner in the relationship is considered to be a zombie – whereas romantic relations between humans in a zombie apocalypse setting (like e.g. in *Zombieland*) cannot be defined as a zombie romance (Harkness 2014, 33). Unlike the romantic zombie, romance in the zombie genre is nothing new: in one of the first zombie movies, *White Zombie* (1932), a romantic subplot was introduced (Szanter and Richards 2017a, 7), and has been present in several of the movies of the early zombie era that followed (e.g. *The Love Wanga (Ouanga)* (1936)). With the rise of the Paranormal Romance genre in the new millennium, the appearance of the romantic zombie is a logical consequence.

Romantic Zombies – Overview and Differences to the Romero Zombies

In order for the zombie to become a romantic zombie, some more or less severe changes to the characteristics of this figure are necessary, changes that have been criticised by a range of horror scholars. Kyle William Bishop (2017) claimed that “to depict a conscious zombie realistically in a serious narrative requires major alterations to the fundamental characteristics of the zombie” (3). These alterations leave the figure lacking most of the features that are essential to the classic zombie, such as loss of identity or physical decay. To become a socially acceptable romantic partner, the zombie needs agency. Unlike the instinct-driven and dehumanised Romero-zombies or super-zombies, these new zombies are able to think for themselves. Sometimes they can even remember their human existence and build new undead lives based on their own subjective needs (Bishop 2017, 2). Furthermore, the romantic zombie must have choice and be able to experience emotion and empathy in order to strike up a consensual romantic relationship with a human or another zombie. In this way, the zombie is turned from object (or rather: abject) to subject – becoming a romantic zombie means losing the most striking characteristics that distinguish the zombie from other monsters and that make it the most monstrous and terrifying monster of all. It is no longer the uncontrollable abject that threatens our identity (Kristeva 1982, 4). It has now become humanised, a subjective character through which the millennial generation, the generation that was born between 1980 and 1999, can negotiate their

ideas and concerns about individuality (Szanter and Richards 2017b, 100), sexuality and their contemporary perception of love.

It can be argued, then, that for millennials to identify with undead romance protagonists, they cannot be portrayed as having the decaying physique of traditional zombies. The gore and rotting bodies of the horror zombies gives way to an attractive, pale appearance – all in all, he or she could be identified as a “paler human” (Harkness 2014, 42). But this depiction as a “clean” zombie is usually reserved to the male protagonist and female zombies. Male zombies are often portrayed as decaying and repulsive – this is to underline the attractiveness and uniqueness of the romantic zombie hero (43). At times, despite his (or her) appeal, the romantic zombie may be lacking a body part. Unlike the super-human vampire body, the zombie body manifests as one that is lacking something, for example, colour: the skin, hair and eyes can be colourless like e.g. in the comic book series *iZombie* (DC, 2010-2012). The comics by Chris Roberson and Michael Allred depict protagonist Gwen as an attractive girl with white hair, pale skin, and pale-green eyes. The zombie body can also lack in grace, as demonstrated by the staggering movements and difficulties speaking experienced by zombie R in Isaac Marion’s novel *Warm Bodies*. The attractive zombie Doug in *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It* has problems speaking up and seems to be in constant pain.

Unlike the classic Byronic Hero of the romance genre, and his current incarnation, the romantic vampire, the romantic zombie is a sentimental lover. He is kind and caring – he embodies a new type of a male concept that is more up to date with contemporary social conventions. The zombie protagonist can be healed if he meets the right woman – she can literally help him to become a (better) human (again). The love of the right woman heals the zombie’s aching heart as well as his lacking body – in *Warm Bodies*, the protagonist learns to think, speak, dream and feel again, and finally is freed from his zombification by entering a new form of post-zombie life (Harkness 2014, 40).

As such, the romantic zombie narrative focusses on emotion rather than on sex – in the novels, sex is barely mentioned. If sex is described, it is completely de-sexualised: in *Warm Bodies*, zombie R walks in on his zombie wife and her new lover:

There they were, naked, awkwardly slamming their bodies together, grunting and groping each other’s pale flesh. He was limp. She was dry. They watched each other with puzzled expressions, as if some unknown force had shoved them together into this moist triangle of limbs. Their eyes seemed to ask each other, ‘Who the hell are you?’ as they jiggled and jerked like meat marionettes (Marion 2011, 59).

The zombies described cannot partake in these normal aspects of human life; even sex has become impossible, and therefore irrelevant for them.

Therefore, the romance that occurs between humans and zombies is one of emotion and tenderness rather than sexual corporeality – this stands in contrast to the

oversexualised contemporary society in which we live and shows again how the romantic zombie negotiates millennial concerns about identity and boundaries. Ashley Szanter and Jessica Richards (2017a) point out that romantic zombie narratives are “related to a desire for persistent self-examination” (8) and confirm the romantic zombie to be a crucial metaphor for the millennial generation’s anxieties: it is a way to negotiate the struggle that this generation experiences in regard to romantic connections and defined social roles (15). Millennials’ love life and social life is dominated by digitalisation – social networks and dating apps like Tinder introduce this generation to a never-before-felt disconnection from reality while at the same time being permanently in contact with others. In her study *Why Love Hurts*, sociologist Eva Illouz (2011) has demonstrated how online dating impacts on its users: meeting potential partners online causes a separation of emotions from sexuality – emotions refer to the online persona and not the real physical being, which more often than not leads to disappointment when going on a date (410). Additionally, being partly socialised by contemporary media, our expectations become unrealistic which makes it even harder to choose from this massive pool of potential partners. All of this leads to an emotional numbness that helps explain why millennials feel drawn to the zombie as a metaphor of choice – as Szanter and Richards point out, millennials have the idea that “we are the zombies” (2017a, 12).

These studies specifically engage with American millennials; thus, before analysing the 2011 German novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther* (*The Corpses of Young Werther*) by Susanne Picard – a novel which is both a parody of the original novel, as well as a parody of the romantic zombie – it will be essential to draw a comparison between these findings and how they can be related to the millennial generation in Germany. Oliver Jeges (2014) illustrates the inner void that German millennials feel constantly – this correlates with the numbness mentioned by Szanter and Richards. In a world of too many opportunities, millennials seemingly have everything they need but still, they experience a lack of something which they cannot quite put their finger on (13). When it comes to relationships, German millennials also suffer from their longing for true and everlasting love, which contradicts their reality of dating apps, casual sex, and frequently changing partners in a pornographised society (95). The contradiction between what millennials are looking for in love and what they act out in real life has become one of the core problems for this generation. Jeges blames the fact that for millennials, everything is sexually possible, and refers to famous clubs in Berlin like the Berghain or Kitkat-Klub, where it is perfectly normal to have sex with a stranger at the crowded bar while other people are buying drinks (98).

Romantic Zombies and Zombie Romance in *Die Leichen des jungen Werther* (2011)

The first mash-up novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith was published in the United States in 2009. In this novel, Jane Austen’s famous characters Elisabeth Bennett and Mr Darcy are situated in a Victorian zombie apocalypse which shifts this literary classic into the horror genre. This genre shift allows us to categorise the mash-up novel as a contemporary form of fantastic literature. For most mash-up novels it is typical to combine romantic plots of literary classics with elements of the

fantastic. The result of this postmodern remix is the creation of a *mashed-up* paranormal romance.

The term *mash-up* originates in the computer and music industries. Mash-ups originally describe a website whose contents are assembled from other websites' media contents. In the early 2000s, so-called mash-up songs blended two songs of different musical styles into one song. Over the last decade, the idea of *mash-up* developed as a cultural technique not only in music and literature, but in media in general. A literary mash-up is defined as "a work that combines two or more sources into a new work that sheds new light on the original, while modernising it with references to current popular culture" (Pulliam 2014, 168). Adding monsters to classic novels creates a dialogue between the pretext and pop-cultural myths of the millennial society. The outstanding success of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith caused a wave of literary mash-ups that still has not ceased, with new mash-up novels being introduced to the American book market every year. One of the latest being *Pride and Prometheus* (2018) by John Kessel, a mash-up of Austen's novel and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818).¹

In Germany, literary classics were mashed-up in similar fashion as well. Between 2010 and 2011, five German mash-up novels were published, hoping to emulate the financial successes of the American mash-ups. They are Susanne Picard's *Die Leichen des jungen Werther* (2011), Claudia Kern's *Sissi, die Vampirjägerin* (2011), Peter Thannisch's *Winnetou unter Werwölfen* (2010), Peter H. Geißen's *Heidi und die Monster* (2010) and Wolf G. Heimrath's *Werther, der Werwolf* (2010).

Mash-up novels find their origins in fantastic literature as well as in fanfiction: these postmodern texts use certain rewriting strategies (Jenkins 1992, 163-71) that are typical for online fanfiction stories. Fanfiction began with the science-fiction TV-series *Star Trek* in the 1960s. The early seasons created a subculture whose participants printed fanzines that were distributed via mail order amongst fans. As the internet developed, fanfiction gained considerable attention and entered mainstream as a "re-writing of shared media" (6), as Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2014) put it in

¹ Even though vampire mash-ups appear to be more popular, a substantial range of zombie mash-ups has been published up to the present: After *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) by Seth Grahame-Smith and its prequel and sequel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (2010) and *Dreadfully Ever After* (2011) by Steve Hockensmith, the most notable mash-ups containing zombies are Ryan C. Thomas' *The Undead World of Oz: L. Frank Baum's Beloved Tale Complete with Zombies and Monsters* (2009) Ralph S. King's *Wuthering Heights and a Werewolf – and a Zombie too* (2009), Paul A. Freeman's *Robin Hood & Friar Tuck, Zombie Killers* (2009), Alan Goldsher's *Paul is Undead: The British Zombie Invasion* (2010), Bill W. Czolgosz's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Zombie Jim* (2011), Nickolas Cook's *Alice in Zombieland* (2011), Adam Roberts' *I am Scrooge: A Zombie Story for Christmas* (2012), Eric Brown's *The War of the Worlds, Plus Blood, Guts and Zombies* (2014), Joshua Chaplinski's and Molly Tanzer's *Kanye West – Reanimator* (2015), C. H. Charles' *Anne of Green Gables and Ghouls* (2016) and Jay Coates' *Zombies in Neverland* (2019). The only major academic publications on monster mash-up novels to date are Megen de Bruin-Molé's *Gothic Remixed. Monster Mashups and Frankenfictions in 21st-century Culture* (2019) and my own thesis, *Monströse Romanzen und romantische Monster. Zum Zeitgeist der Millennial-Generation in deutschsprachigen Mash-up-Romanen* (2019), which is, so far, the only monograph published on German mash-up novels.

their seminal work *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. Although fanfiction was first dominated by the re-writing of TV-Shows (Jenkins 1992, 170), the internet's expansion slowly shifted the focus of fan cultures to book series such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* and *Lord of the Rings*, including their extensive franchises. This millennial book-centred fanfiction embeds mash-up novels in another online cultural context. The application of techniques such as alternative universe stories and eroticisation adapt the classic novels for a contemporary audience. They are a product of the participatory culture that has developed in the age of the internet. Henry Jenkins, one of the first scholars to research fandom and fanfiction, defines the participatory culture as:

a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created) (Jenkins 2009, XI).

A participatory culture expresses itself through the production of new and creative forms of cultural techniques. Both fanfiction and mash-ups are rooted in the online culture of the twenty-first century, where the playful modification of existing material is an acceptable form of art.

This article focuses on one of the aforementioned German mash-up novels: *Die Leichen des jungen Werther* (2011) by Susanne Picard, which parodies Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's best-selling epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) by re-writing it in the setting of a zombie apocalypse. Goethe, one of Germany's most celebrated authors and essayists up to today, published his novel in 1774 at the young age of 25. Goethe quickly rose to fame not only in Germany, but all over Europe. The novel's success was followed by an extensive fan cult and an unprecedented wave of adaptations and parodies known as *Wertheriaden*. The so-called *Werther Fever* encompassed everything from copying Werther's specific clothing (a blue tailcoat and yellow waistcoat) to collection cups with motives from the novel to copycat suicides (Engel 1986, 91-93). The novel was glorified as a reflection of the ideals of the Sturm-und-Drang-movement, a proto-Romantic movement occurring between the 1760s and 1780s. However, because it embraced these ideals, it was despised by both the clergy and those who continued to value the ideals of the Enlightenment. Not only does the protagonist reject bourgeois rules of living, but he also decides to commit suicide to escape life's pressures and his complicated feelings for a girl called Lotte. Although the novel is not as controversial as it was at the time of publication, it still remains an influential part of German literary history and is adapted to this day.

Zombie love – Lotte's and Werther's undead love story

In the mash-up novel *Die Leichen des jungen Werther*, the protagonist Werther is presented as an arrogant philanderer who is convinced of his own geniality, despite

not being very clever. When he moves to the small village of Wahlheim to start work as a paralegal, he meets the woman of his dreams in a local butchery. With her pale-greyish skin and black eyes, Lotte embodies Werther's ideal of beauty; additionally, she seems very well-behaved as she is only giving one-worded answers in a low voice. Werther does not realise that Lotte is infected with the zombie virus that haunts the area – until it is too late, and she bites him. The reader follows Werther's slow but steady metamorphosis into a romantic zombie and gains insight into his thoughts and feelings through Werther's letters and diary entries up to the (happy) end. This inner view and projection of the protagonist as a subject comply with the criteria of the romantic zombie and help render him as a believable and acceptable romantic partner for Lotte. At the same time, this one-sided view of the love affair through Werther's eyes presents some of the problematic aspects that have been raised within the discussion of romantic zombies: Lotte does not have a voice to express her side of the story which degrades her to the object through which Werther creates the reality he desires.

The objectification of Lotte through Werther's male gaze is evident in the famous Klopstock-scene. In Goethe's original, Werther and Lotte discover their spiritual kinship during a thunderstorm at a local dance, when Lotte says "Klopstock!", referring to the poet's famous oeuvre *Die Frühlingsfeier* (*The rite of spring*) (1759). In the mash-up novel, Werther is convinced that Zombie-Lotte says "Klopstock!" – then he adds: "Jedenfalls klang es so!" (Picard 2011, 98) ("At least, that's what it sounded like!"). For the reader, it is obvious that it is highly improbable that a zombie would refer to a famous poet in order to hint at the connection between his work, his reception and the thunderstorm. After this dance and their alleged congeniality, Werther is convinced that he needs to conquer Lotte: "Ich muss sie besitzen!" (112) ("I need to possess her!"), he writes in a letter to his friend Wilhelm. Again, Lotte is objectified as a trophy that he needs to acquire.

Early in his pursuit of Lotte's heart, he visits her at home where she lives with her father and numerous siblings who are infected with the virus as well. At this occasion, Werther gets the impression that Lotte is overwhelmed by her desire for him: "[Sie] wusste sich vor Gier, meine Haut zu berühren, nicht mehr zu halten! Ich schwöre, dass sie sogar in meine Hand hineinbiss [...]" (Picard 2011, 125) ("[She] could not restrain herself, she was greedy to touch my skin! I swear, she even bit my hand [...].") This bite initiates Werther's transformation into a zombie – the infection with the zombie virus creates a bond between Lotte and him that gets stronger the closer he gets to full "zombification". This parallel between his increasing love for Lotte and his metamorphosis addresses the idea of "infectious love" – for millennials, love comes with commitment, deep emotions, and vulnerability – one has to open up for the other which leaves one's identity at a risky exposure to the other. When Werther realises that he is infected and that Lotte has been a zombie all along, he finds an explanation for their congeniality in the mutual disease:

Deshalb verstanden wir uns immer besser, denn sie und ich sind von gleicher Art! Das muss der Himmel sein, das Paradies, was sonst könnte ich empfinden

darüber, dass wir uns näher sind, als der Rest der Welt es wusste! Sie und ich – wir sind wahrlich geschaffen füreinander [...]

This is the reason we got along better and better, because she and I are of the same kind! This must be heaven, paradise, how else could I feel about the fact that we are even closer than the rest of the world knew! She and I – we are truly made for each other! (Picard 2011, 259).

But the disease not only creates a paranormal spiritual bond between Lotte and Werther; it also changes Werther's life experience. Turning into a zombie is not a curse for him, but a gift. All cognitive boundaries and social restrictions are dissolved. Existing as a zombie brings unexpected freedom: as Jeffrey Sconce (2014) points out: "Zombies do not have jobs, mortgages, bank accounts, property, household chores, utility bills, laws, marriages, children etc" (106). The zombie is free and living in the moment – which is exactly the kind of lifestyle that millennials are longing for, a state of being that they are constantly trying to reach in a contemporary accelerated environment. In a zombified state, one can enjoy life to the fullest, at least on a physical level, without being held back by conventions and social rules.

At the same time, the simplicity of zombie life is especially attractive to millennials who are suffering from the complexity of their reality (Szanter and Richards 2017b, 103). This complex reality, in which millennials have an infinite range of possibilities, attitudes and lifestyles to choose from, leads to a constant indecisiveness or fear of decisions (Jeges 16). The 'positive' aspect of zombism – a simpler life without decisions – not only goes hand in hand with life expectations of the millennial generation, but also implements the original Werther's pursuit of living in a world without rules and restrictions in an ironic way. Where Goethe's Werther commits suicide in order to escape life's social conventions, mash-up Werther continues an ideal undead existence in which he is capable of experiencing a supernatural state of freedom. He can live out his full genius potential and eventually even changes into a more sympathetic being. Whereas a human, he was insufferably arrogant, misogynist and egocentric, he now becomes considerate and loving as a zombie. As a result, he decides to rescue his undead soulmate Lotte from her wedding with Albert, a zombie slayer, which he suspects will be killing Lotte as soon as they are husband and wife. Letters from Werther's journey to the wedding ceremony show that – even though losing structure and coherence – he still is conscious of his actions and emotions. Werther succeeds in freeing Lotte from the clutches of Albert and marries her instead in a quick ceremony – before escaping together and living *zombily* ever after.

The changes that Werther goes through not only make him a better and more likeable person, also the gender roles shift through this transformation: in the beginning, Lotte is the active partner in the relationship, expressing her interest in him (that might be on a physical level only) in biting his hand not only once, but twice. This first bite (instead of a first kiss) parodies the classic zombie's hunger for flesh, as Werther believes that Lotte is expressing her sexual desire for him in biting his hand. In a similar manner to the vampire bite, the zombie bite can be interpreted as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. However, since the zombie is lacking phallic fangs,

the zombie bite can be seen as a female expression of sexuality. On the other hand, human Werther's male role is further undermined by his self-staging as overly emotional and by his preference for sweet desserts. Turning into a zombie, Werther takes on stereotypical male behaviour; he now prefers red meat and instead of being passively bitten, he actively rescues Lotte from a zombie slayer, who now plays the role of the damsel-in-distress. In the end, the traditional gender roles that are typical for schematic romance literature are restored.

This swapping of gender roles addresses the confusion that millennials experience due to dissolving boundaries and blurring social conventions; this generation has the opportunity and freedom to create any kind of (sexual) identity they can think of for themselves. Traditional role models that used to set examples and give guidance to help with the development of our personalities are outdated. This freedom of choice creates anxieties and insecurities about settling for one identity. Growing up in a digitalised world, millennials use social media to try on new and different personalities – but that does not make the decision easier. The paranormal romances that dominated the literary market in the past decades, as well as many monster mash-ups, work with schematic romance formulas that, on the surface, may seem to involve contemporary gender roles, but at a closer look reveal the conservative stereotypes of outdated gender concepts (Wagner 2019, 281). In consuming these novels and films, millennials are given the freedom to express their anxieties about living in a world where these obsolete constructions no longer offer guidance in the development of their identity. It also allows them to express their longing for certain – even stereotypical – standards that were once accepted as the norm. In Germany, as elsewhere, millennials are longing for security more than anything else – this is because this generation arguably lacks any kind of security in either their job prospects, or their romantic relationships. As Jeges (2014) puts it, the motto of this generation could be “no risk, more fun” (105). This constant insecurity explains the re-emergence of existential angst amongst the German millennial generation – as well as the millennials' love for everything vintage and retro, that are potentially, symbols of a better, more secure time (125).

To conclude, the romantic zombie with its various facets follows the tradition of the zombie as a monster that has become more and more polyvalent since its emergence in the early twentieth century. Thus, the romantic incarnation of this creature reflects the way in which it has been naturally developing in recent years. Having grown up with, and effectively been socialised by zombie movies, the millennial generation found ways to embrace this monster and turn it into a metaphor that reflected their current concerns (Szanter and Richards 2017a, 15). Zombies no longer negotiate topics of consumerism and a 'dog-eat-dog' society. The deadly horde is no longer the central piece of imagery. Millennials, often accused of being a self-centred generation of narcissists constantly concerned with questions about identity and their place in a multifarious society, moulded their zombie into a symbol through which they can discuss their main concerns of identity, individuality, and romantic relationships. Compliant with the principle of participatory culture, millennials take the established figure of the zombie and modify it in a way that suits their needs. In this way, the romantic zombie itself turned out to be a kind of *monster mash-up*.

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BOOK REVIEW

Simon Bacon and Leo Ruickbie (Eds.). *The Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children: Essays on Anomalous Children From 1595 to the Present Day*. Anthem Press, 2020. 242 pp. Book. ISBN: 978-1-78527-520-3

Reviewed by Annelise Edwards-Daem (Nottingham Trent University)

The Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children is a rich and varied edited collection that examines the figure of the anomalous child or adolescent in history, media and literature. This text defines the figure of the child from Victorian times when children are perceived as unsocialized and chaotic, to the twenty-first century where children embody hope and innocence, as well as societal anxieties.

The chapters are divided into four sections, following a chronological structure. The first section establishes detailed and well-researched historical case studies of the anomalous child, beginning from the sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. These case studies map the move from supernatural beliefs of demonic possession to more scientific and psychological causes of the monstrous child; each chapter exploring elements such as witchcraft, telekinesis, Lycanthropy and Freak Shows. The next two sections explore more gothic aspects of the anomalous child. The second section explores fictional representations of the undead child, including representations of the ghost child, zombie child and the child as a vampire. Section three examines fictional representations of the monstrous child particularly in film, including further vampiric depictions, gender non-conforming and queer children and ecocritical representations of the vegetal child. The fourth section concentrates on twenty-first century cases that attempt to rationalize, demonise or accept the anomalous child; exploring anomalous twins, child criminality, the 'black-eyed child' and Indigo Children.

Whilst the definition of the child is predominantly seen as a scientific matter surrounding age, this text questions this definition through examining more

psychologically and social aspects of the categorisation of the child. The text examines aspects 'largely separate from physical age' (p. 3), and grouping anyone considered 'other' as within the category as the child, such as 'women, the mentally impaired and outsiders in general' (p. 3). Chapter eight particularly 'troubles and destabilizes the dominant constructions of childhood', Allison Moore writing further that "childhood', as both a discursive construct and a corporeal reality, resists easy categorization' (p. 137). Though this text still primarily examines the traditional definition of the child (as someone under the age of 18), its re-examination of the category of the child adds to the existing literature that seeks to branch away from dominant and traditional understandings of this early developmental phase.

This text also places the child in the category of 'other' and 'abhuman'; as a figure which is 'anxiety inducing' (p. 6). This allows readers to place the figure of the child in a gothic framework, something that is to be feared because of its liminality, and its changing body; a sight of the Gothic, the supernatural and the monstrous. Furthermore, sexual maturation and gender are painted as aspects that are 'often imposed upon the anomalous body rather than a quality inherent to it' (p. 7), opening the critical framework to notions of enforced gender identity and sexuality; 'the child is sexually blank, queer, until adult fantasies are projected upon it' (p. 7). This text also addresses the figure of the child from a queer perspective in the films *Splice* and *Let the Right One In*, establishing that 'the anomalous, abhuman child's body does also suggest elements of queerness' (pp.6-7), which supplements literature on queer theory, the body and the child.

Whilst this text touches on the postmodern child in film, it does not explore any literature from the postmodern era extensively; a period which is saturated by texts that explore children and adolescence as anomalous, such as texts by Stephen King, Angela Carter, Iain Banks and Robert Coover. This is a missed opportunity as the chapter on postmodernism also explores the subversion of fairy tales which features in many of these authors' works. Moreover, the repetition of some films seems like a wasted opportunity to explore a wider breadth of sources; for example, the reiteration of *The Awakening* in chapter 5 and 7; *Wicked Little Things* in chapter 6 and 7; and *Let the Right One In* in Chapter 7 and 8. However, this is remedied by the rich saturation of sources, both film and literary, used throughout these chapters which is to be commended.

One of this text's strengths is its ability to illustrate nuanced perspectives regarding the anomalous child; it represents the anomalous child as misunderstood, as well as inherently evil. Though the focus of this text is on the monstrous and harmful aspects of the misunderstood anomalous child, it also illustrates how the anomalous child can be perceived in a positive light (such as Greta Thunberg) and, most importantly, how the anomalous child is a product of society. I believe this is a particular strength as the contemporary gothic or anomalous child has been regularly perceived as an aberration rather than a harbinger for hope and this adds an innovative interpretation of the misunderstood category of non-adults in popular culture. It is also interesting how this text subverts the regulations used to protect children, by establishing them as tools used to create the anomalous child, stating 'any

type of enforced ‘protection’ can just as easily lead to increasing forms of othering and monsterization’ (p. 131). Furthermore, the way historical cases are linked to more modern fictional texts, for example, the telekinesis of the teenager, Jeanette, in the second chapter being compared to Stephen King’s *Carrie*, is another particularly stimulating aspect of the collection, though it is a brief comparison.

Overall, this text is relevant to scholars of the Gothic, Victorian and early modern history and literature, and any aspect of childhood and adolescence, including the child in psychology, criminology and contemporary media and culture. This text is incredibly detailed and specific in its analysis of the anomalous child and, therefore, it would be most suited to university students and academics who are studying the Gothic or psychoanalytic perspectives of the child.

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BOOK REVIEW

**David Punter (Ed.). *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*.
Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 540 pp. Book. ISBN: 9781474432351**

Reviewed by Candice Witton (Independent Scholar)

The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts, edited by David Punter, is a collection of thirty-three essays exploring the Gothic within the arts, including its different forms, themes, histories, and cultural impact, throughout a range of disciplines. The *Companion* sets out to place the Gothic within its aesthetic contexts, with Punter stating in his introduction that the book does not aim to answer the question, "What is the Gothic?"; but instead aims to demonstrate the large variety of ways in which the Gothic has inflected form and meaning across a huge range of cultural discourses (1). The collected chapters provide a thorough analysis of the themes of the Gothic in the arts, from architecture and literature, to music and the electronic arts. Chapters are divided into five topic areas: Architectural Arts, Visual Arts, Music and the Performance Arts, Literary Arts, and Media and Cultural Arts. The texts examined are as varied as the nature of Gothic itself, from the 'magical practicality' in the geometrical origins of the Cologne Cathedral Choir, to the most contemporaneous example of Gothic new media, 2009's dark web 'creepypasta' *Slender Man*, the *Companion* spans a huge cultural landscape. Chapters are from established and new scholars, providing a wide range of perspectives.

This *Companion* is a valuable resource for any interested in the influence of the Gothic in the arts. The large range of topics and number of chapters ensures there is something for everyone. For instance, Part IV on the Literary Arts, is inevitably the largest, and is subdivided into Poetry, Fiction, Theatre, and Children's Literature. Punter describes this as the 'heartland of the Gothic' (6), and chapters within this topic area cover works from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, exploring themes of transgression, the supernatural, death, darkness, and the unconscious. For example, Angela Wright's chapter on Gothic and Nineteenth-Century Poetry explores

thresholds and boundaries in order to examine the origins of Gothic poetry and prose. Wright argues:

Gothic poetry and prose from the 1790s, is a vein of literature that exposes and challenges the boundaries of the real and the supernatural, the barriers between self and object, [...] supernatural tales in ballad and fictional form, nineteenth-century poetry embraces these earlier literary thresholds with equal measures of scepticism and enthusiasm (271).

A main strength of this *Companion* lies in bringing together the past and future of the Gothic in art. In each section, and to a degree within the book as a whole, there is a chronological thread that runs throughout. Progressing through the chapters the reader will gain an overall understanding of the history of the Gothic in the arts; a history that is interwoven and interrelated, and according to Punter, “resistant to linearity, constantly looping, circling, reinventing itself” (1), and one which bleeds off into other disciplines, forms, and categorisations. A main theme running throughout the *Companion* is the underlying psychological nature of the Gothic. From Fuseli’s famous *The Nightmare* (1781), to Dorian Gray’s Faustian bargain, or Warpole’s *Otranto* (1764–5), to newer art forms like video game *Arkham Asylum* (2009), the psychological nature underpinning the Gothic, its dualities and hybridity, and how it navigates cultural anxieties is addressed thoroughly throughout the *Companion*.

It is important to acknowledge that the *Companion* is primarily focused on the Gothic in art in Western culture. It does however, aim to address Gothic as a transmuting cultural form on a global scale, in as much that Gothic is a universal concept. One chapter does, for example, bring together poets who might normally be grouped together, W. H. Auden, Stevie Smith and Maya Angelou. Maria Beville’s chapter on ‘*Gothic and Modern Poetry: The Poetics of Transgression*’, demonstrates the underlying Gothic thread in each poets’ work, and how it translates into political and social critique, challenging ideological conventions, and postcolonial disruption.

At 540 pages, the *Companion* is robust, and with thirty-three heterogeneous chapters it is impossible to discuss them all. My personal favourites included Anne Williams’ chapter exploring the interdependence of opera and the Gothic, and the more recent trend of setting Gothic works by writers like Poe, Henry James, and Stephen King to operatic form, and also Antonio Alcalá González’s chapter on the work of painter Ivan Albright, exploring the grotesque, haunting and shocking portraits that reflect the artist’s post war mentality. In summary, *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts* succeeds in bringing the multifaceted history of the Gothic in the arts to life. The collection is partnered with a beautiful collection of both black and white, and colour illustrations. The chapters provide an outline of the rich, interwoven tapestry that is the history of the Gothic, and they are well-researched and entertaining. The scope and depth of the collection is ideal for researchers and students interested in the role that Gothic has played in the arts.

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