

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

CATHERINE SPOONER
(LANCASTER UNIVERSITY)



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Tropes

JAN
12-13
2024

NEW DIRECTIONS IN GOTHIC STUDIES
HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

FRI-SAT, 10 AM
ROOM 2249A

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Welcome to Undead Tropes: New Directions in Gothic Studies!

The Gothic is never dead—it is not even the Gothic. Less polemically stated and setting aside Faulknerian language, it has significantly evolved since its beginnings in the 18th century. Having emerged in Britain as a literary mode with soon-to-be stock tropes such as haunted castles and supernatural occurrences, it has migrated into different cultures, genres, and media. Its tropes have stayed, but have been adapted according to their different spatiotemporal and medial contexts. Each era and each region appropriate Gothic themes, metaphors, and monsters accordingly—a compelling example is the figure of the vampire, beginning with Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) over to the 2010s’ vampire craze and openly queer vampires of Netflix’s *First Kill* in 2022. Every age seems to produce its own vampire (cf. Auerbach 1995), as well as its distinct interpretation of the Gothic mode at large. The Gothic can thus be called a transcultural and “transhistorical” (Hurley 2002) mode, which “endlessly reinvents itself” (McEvoy 2007). Its “negative aesthetics” (Botting 2013) seem to be a mirror of and cathartic relief for the anxieties of its age. The Gothic and its monsters stay—but they are made of a different fabric depending on what is the “negative” to their context. They are dependent on text(ure)—be it literature, film, video games or physical artefacts. It may be this flexibility that makes it “without doubt the longest lasting popular genre in world literature” (Bloom 2020).

This workshop follows the evolution of Gothic elements in diverse genres and contexts, and explores how the mode takes on distinct forms in various media and artefacts. As recent scholarship has shown, long-established sub-forms such as Southern Gothic now exceed their spatial boundaries as its metaphors have migrated and formed a global Southern Gothic (cf. Borwein 2020)—an intriguing development considering Southern (Gothic) literature’s rootedness in concepts of space and place. Other sub-forms such as Queer Gothic have become an important part of the field. By being continually remediated, the Gothic also undergoes continual transformations due to new technological and aesthetic inventions.

We hope you enjoy the workshop and your time in Berlin!

Evangelia Kindinger
Greta Kaisen

Friday, 12 January 2024

10:00–10:30 Welcome and Opening Remarks

10:30–12:00 Keynote

Catherine Spooner (Lancaster University)

12:00–13:30 Lunch

13:30–15:30 Panel Session 1 | New Faces of Old Baddies: Gothic Figures Revisited

Chair: TBA

Barbara Braid (University of Szczecin)

“After the Poe Legend? Emblematisation of E. A. Poe in *Pale Blue Eye* and *Altered Carbon*”

Jacqueline Victoria Woroniec (University of Szczecin)

“A Queer Devil—Contemporary Satanic Figure in TV Series *Lucifer* (2016–2021)”

Kinga Nerlicka (University of Szczecin)

“Becoming the Modern Chucky: Johnstone’s *M3GAN* (2023) as the New Rendition of The Killer-Doll Figure”

Lisa Buchegger (University of Graz)

“Too Horrifying to be True?—The Evolution of the ‘Wicked Witch’ in Fairy Tales”

15:30–16:00 Tea/Coffee Break

16:00–17:00 Panel Session 2 | Realist Approaches to the Gothic

Chair: TBA

Andrin Albrecht (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

“That’s Fucking Dark: Eleanor Catton’s *Birnam Wood* as Ecogothic”

Liliia Makala (University of Graz)

“Battles of the Uncanny: Gothic Subtexts in U.S. War Fiction”

18:00 Dinner at Ständige Vertretung (Self-pay)
Schiffbauerdamm 8, 10117 Berlin
(Vegan and vegetarian options available)

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Saturday, 13 January 2024

10:00–12:00 Panel Session 3 | Visual Media: Beyond the Written Word

Chair: TBA

Greta Kaisen (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

“Southern Gothic Trajectories: Spatial Tensions in *Red Dead Redemption 2*”

Anna Marta Marini (Universidad de Alcalá)

“Chicanx Gothic: Transnationality, Death, and the Journey to the Underworld”

Heinrich Wilke (Independent Scholar)

“Class and Extraction in *Dead Space*”

Lee Flamand (Ruhr University Bochum)

“The Human Cadaver in the Smart Machine: The Case of Sydney’s ‘Shadow Self’”

12:00–13:30 Lunch

13:30–15:30 Panel Session 4 | Uncanny Subtexts and Tropes

Chair: TBA

Rachel Davis (Independent Scholar)

“The Uncanny Home: Gothic Re-Imaginations of Domestic Space in 21st Century American Fiction”

Jan Čapek (Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem)

“Revitalizing the Gothic with Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’ (1819)”

Diana Wagner (University of Stuttgart)

“‘Monstrous Fetuses of Heresy’: Gothic Tropes in Early New England Medicine”

Elliott Berggren (Linnaeus University)

“This House is No Home: Zombie Ants, Fungal Infestations, and the Gothic Manor in the World-Ecology”

15:30–15:45 Tea/Coffee Break

15:45–16:30 Closing Remarks

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Abstracts

Keynote

Catherine Spooner (Lancaster University)

Title and abstract TBA

Panel Session 1 | New Faces of Old Baddies: Gothic Figures Revisited

Barbara Braid (University of Szczecin)

“After the Poe Legend? Emblematisation of E. A. Poe in *Pale Blue Eye* and *Altered Carbon*”

Two days after Edgar Allan Poe’s untimely and mysterious demise, his literary rival wrote an obituary that depicted the poet as a difficult, troubled man, virtually a madman; towards the end of this unflattering portrait, he stated that “in draperies of [Poe’s] imagination, those who had taken the trouble to trace his steps, could perceive, but slightly concealed, the figure of himself” (Griswold). Thus, the Poe Legend has been born that has merged E. A. Poe with his gothic characters—murderers, alcohol and opium addicts and madmen. Many biographies, biographical novels and biopics that were since generated have followed in a recreation of this myth; to the extent that Poe’s characteristic face and his ‘familiar’—a raven, a black cat and the motto of “nevermore”—have become synonymous with gothic mystery.

In the last several years we have witnessed a renaissance in Poe biofictions and adaptations. In biofiction—this recent mode of cultural production that appropriates historical figures in fictional and even fantastic plots and contexts—this has taken a slightly unexpected turn. While still associated with gothic tradition, Poe as a character of biofictions becomes an emblem of post-authenticity that is a characteristic feature of this mode of biographical writing. This presentation offers an analysis of two examples of screen biofictions that feature Poe: a gothic crime mystery, *Pale Blue Eye* (Netflix, 2022) and cyberpunk series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020). In the former, Poe represents the convention of detective fiction, while in the latter, the Poe avatar emblematises the past and nostalgia. These examples show that Poe as a biofictional character is depicted in ways that attempt to overcome the Poe legend, although these productions still offer us a figure of the poet that is an emblem rather than a fleshed-out historical figure.

Jacqueline Victoria Woroniec (University of Szczecin)

“A Queer Devil—Contemporary Satanic Figure in TV Series *Lucifer* (2016–2021)”

Satan—or the Devil—has been a figure often featured in the Gothic imagination; sometimes as a character—a horned, frightening beast; other times as a symbolic representation of evil. In the popular Western culture, sourcing from its Judeo-Christian genealogy, the Devil is usually understood as the ultimate villain, the embodiment of all evil, and a mirror to the all-good God. Satan’s depictions, however, although irrevocably connected to their religious context, are not immune to change. In the twentieth century, with the development of cinematography, the Devil has been a frequent guest on the silver screen. The wonders of technology were used to depict monstrous possessions and horrifying effects of straying from the straight and narrow, upholding the religious perception of Satan as the enemy of humans. However, many contemporary popular

culture's productions edge away from such a horroresque depiction of the Devil. This paper is a case study of Lucifer, the titular character of the TV series *Lucifer* (2016-2021). It examines how the Devil is depicted and constructed in the series, with a special attention paid to the novelty of this depiction in comparison with earlier cinematographic and literary ones. The aim of this paper is to determine which elements of the Devil's characterisation in the series contribute to the establishment of a new kind of the Satanic figure, representative of the contemporary American and British popular culture, which the author identifies as queer.

Kinga Nerlicka (University of Szczecin)

"Becoming the Modern Chucky: Johnstone's *M3GAN* (2023) as the New Rendition of The Killer-Doll Figure"

As Stacy Graham notes, "There's a mystery surrounding dolls that we can't shake since many adults now perceive them as the figurative fuel for nightmares" (2004: 19). Ominous ventriloquists' dummies, puppets or mannequins bring out our anxieties; what terrifies us is either their uncanniness hidden behind their humanlike faces or the repulsiveness we feel towards dolls' abject bodies that disturb the boundaries of the human frame. Malevolent dolls have been haunting the Gothic since its beginnings.

The fact that this Gothic figure is still relevant is illustrated by Gerard Johnstone's 2023 blockbuster, *M3GAN*. Its titular character, a humanlike automaton, has become widely recognisable, especially amongst enthusiasts of the horror genre. The doll gained publicity long before the film was released, mostly due to social media such as TikTok, where Megan's unsettling dancing scene went viral. The titular Megan is programmed by a prominent, young engineer, Gemma, to look after her suddenly orphaned nine-year-old niece, Cady. Initially the doll comes across as a perfect companion to a devastated child. However, Megan's allegedly positive influence on Cady's recovery comes out to be deceptive and results in literal bloodbath.

Megan's murderous inclinations associate her with classic killer-doll figures, such as Chucky, Annabelle or Slappy. Yet Johnstone's film exemplifies certain changes in the present depiction of an evil doll in horror. In this paper, while examining *M3GAN* I intend to comment on the changes in the depiction of the ubiquitous figure of a homicidal doll. Comparing it to previous representations of this particular motif I analyse those alterations and elaborate on specific socio-cultural shifts which might have influenced the way the murder-doll is depicted in popular culture nowadays.

Lisa Buchegger (University of Graz)

"Too Horrifying to be True?—The Evolution of the 'Wicked Witch' in Fairy Tales"

For this conference, I would like to present fairy tales, with their often dark and sinister tones, as well as them relying on 'typically' Gothic tropes such as supernatural creatures and gloomy forests, as a sub-genre of the Gothic mode, with a particular focus on the larger-than-life character of the 'wicked witch.' Fairy tales have formed the childhood of generations for ages and, mainly due to their adaptations into well-known films (keyword: Disney productions), continue to be one of the most influential and prominent forms of moral education for children. It is through fictional stories that children have to "engage in problem-solving along with the protagonists in order to escape dangers and emerge triumphant" (Coats 174), and it is the Gothic mode that expresses and visualizes those dangers and the accompanying anxieties and fears. In traditional fairy tales, the character of the wicked witch symbolizes cultural taboos, suppressed desires, and the

antagonizing force that needs to be defeated to ‘overcome’ the threatening Gothic atmosphere that fairy tales employ. I understand the witch as a variation of the classic trope of the (supernatural) monster which, “whether in appearance or behaviour [...] function[s] to define and construct the politics of the ‘normal’” (Punter and Byron 263). The aim of this presentation would be to explore the fascination with witches which has permeated (American) societies for centuries. Furthermore, if “it is likely that accommodation with the witch may become more significant than her elimination” (Cashdan 251), my contribution would also reflect on the development of the wicked witch persona. It would tackle the question whether this Gothic archetype is still the evil force that has to be defeated, or whether it has evolved into a figure of identification and transformed from a classic villain into an anti-hero, and what this reveals about culturally constructed notions of morality and immorality.

Panel Session 2 | Realist Approaches to the Gothic

Andrin Albrecht (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

“That’s Fucking Dark: Eleanor Catton’s *Birnam Wood* as EcoGothic”

At first glance, *Birnam Wood* (2023), the bestselling ecothriller by Booker Prize winner Eleanor Catton, is not an obvious candidate for the label ‘Gothic.’ The novel is thoroughly realist, describing the exploits of an eponymous New Zealand activist collective that plants illicit gardens on unused plots of land, and their interactions with American billionaire Robert Lemoine, who, like many of his kind these days, plans to construct an end-time bunker in the New Zealand’s countryside. There are no supernatural occurrences or instances of epistemological ambiguity, and far from appearing horribly “implacable” in a traditionally ecoGothic manner,¹ nature for most of the novel occupies but a secondary role. It features in characters’ motivations, as a resource to be exploited or a pristine panorama to be admired, but not as agency in its own right. However, in my paper, I suggest that it is precisely the absence of the conspicuously Gothic in *Birnam Wood* that makes its subtler manifestations all the more striking: This ostensibly realist novel reverberates with Gothic tropes, primarily in connection to the character of Lemoine. Through them, it directs the reader’s sympathies and imbues the billionaire’s actions—which, the reader learns, are not aimed at end-time preparations, but rather at illegally mining rare earths on protected public land—with a sense of subliminal, atavistic horror. I show how Lemoine, by means both narrative and stylistic, is associated with undead, cannibalistic, and even Lovecraftian imagery while technically never presenting as anything other than human within the novel’s diegesis, and how *Birnam Wood* thus affectively conveys the Gothic horrors of extraction capitalism, neoliberal inequality, and environmental violence while never actually verging on the didactic, the speculative, or the fantastic.

¹ Keetley, Dawn, and Mathew Wynn Sivils. “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic.” *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Routledge, 2017, p. 4.

Liliia Makala (University of Graz)

“Battles of the Uncanny: Gothic Subtexts in U.S. War Fiction”

The notion of war has always been relevant since it is an integral part of the history of humankind. It has become exceptionally timely after the outburst of the full-scale

Russian-Ukrainian war, which now has an influence on both Europe and the U.S. Thus, it is important to negotiate the topic of war, as well as its fictional representation in literature.

In this thesis, I look the fictional representation of three major armed conflicts in U.S. history, namely the Civil War, World War I, and World War II in U.S. war texts from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. More precisely, I discuss realist war texts (Ambrose Bierce's *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*), modernist war texts (Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*), and postmodernist war texts (Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or, *The Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death*) through the gothic lens.

As I show in this thesis, the above-mentioned texts possess one important commonality. They use gothic subtexts to generate the feeling of the uncanny within the reader. By means of employing typical gothic imagery, motifs, and themes (starting from visceral imagery and ending with the motif of death), these texts create a dark, gloomy, and eerie atmosphere. While arousing suspense, terrifying, and unsettling the reader, they evoke intense emotional response and, therefore, fulfill the main task of horror fiction. Thus, I claim that the above-mentioned texts belong not only to war fiction but also to horror fiction.

Moreover, this thesis illustrates that the version of gothic used in these texts is naturalist rather than romanticized. Namely, they use gothic subtexts to depict the unpolished, harsh, and even brutal reality of war instead of glorifying and glamorizing it. This observation allows me to refer these texts to a new literary category of naturalist gothic war fiction and show that the message they transmit through naturalist gothic subtexts invites the reader to look at the notion of war with a critical eye.

Panel Session 3 | Visual Media: Beyond the Written Word

Greta Kaisen (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

“Southern Gothic Trajectories: Spatial Tensions in *Red Dead Redemption 2*”

Video games can be considered inherently Gothic: Avatars are uncanny doubles that persistently haunt landscapes, returning after each death to win the game (Hancock 2016). Glitches have the potential to unsettle players, pulling them back from secluded fictional game worlds into their physical realities. However, when explicitly including Gothic tropes, games raise questions about how these remediations may reinvent the Gothic and offer new and intriguing trajectories of the mode at large. Like games, the Gothic mode is spatial—haunted landscapes and houses often seem and act like complex characters themselves. In video games, this spatial dimension extends beyond the traditional scope of ruinous castles in early Gothic literary texts and is exemplified in *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s vast Southern Gothic landscape, littered with moonlit bayous, decaying plantations, and rural shacks inhabited by hostile characters. Released in 2018 by Rockstar Games, the game lets players traverse five fictitious U.S. states as the outlaw figure Arthur Morgan, with the state of Lemoyne resembling a turn-of-the-century American South. Drawing on Michael Nitsche's concept of “environmental elements” (2008), this paper explores how these spatial Gothic tropes influence the meaning-making of the open-world game, as it presents players with a

landscape structured by segregation, where they encounter Native American settlements, African American communities, and white neighborhoods. Settlements, houses and mansions trigger narratives related to enslavement and the extinction of the Indigenous population. Game mechanics, such as restricting access to certain areas, illustrate class differences. This paper argues that the Gothic mode at times disrupts the connection between the player and the avatar, making Arthur Morgan's orientation (after Ahmed 2007) as a white, male avatar visible. Functioning as a "critical paradigm" (van Elferen 2007), it reveals how intersections of class and race determine the gaming experience, as players interact with the Gothic landscape. In this way, the exploration of the Gothic mode in *RDR2* shows the continued significance of the Gothic as a means of disruption and criticism, across different media.

Anna Marta Marini (Universidad de Alcalá)

"Chicanx Gothic: Transnationality, Death, and the Journey to the Underworld"

The US-Mexico borderlands—and, by extension, Mexican American identity—hold a doubly uncanny value: they are "a strangely familiar place that troubles the US's trans-American imaginary" and, at the same time, represent the locus of "the haunting unhomeliness of colonial displacement that continues to trouble Mexican Americans" (Alemán 2006, 409). Contemporary Chicanx gothic sensibility is thus haunted by the specter of immigration, the fear of heritage loss, and the struggle for socio-economic stability. Furthermore, it is often enriched by themes rooted in Mexican heritage, such as syncretic religious beliefs, folktale figures, and the connection with death and one's own ancestors—descending from Mesoamerican cosmogonic notions, the duality between life and death is central to the epistemic construction of Mexican and Mexican American identity, and thus expressed in Chicanx artistic creation.

This paper examines the deployment of gothic tropes in Rhode Montijo's *Pablo's Inferno* (1999–2000), Javier Hernandez's *El Muerto* (1998–ongoing), and Rafael Navarro's *Sonambulo* (1996–ongoing). These comics present three different interpretations of the peculiar narrative represented by an unplanned death and subsequent forced visit to a Mexica(n) underworld. Reprising mythical journey narratives in which cultural heroes are conceived as humans with divine attributes—to whom is conferred the access to and consequent return from the underworld—the Chicanx protagonists travel to Mictlān and become permanently bound to a numinous, in-between land. They also embody three different fundamental phases of personal growth and aging: a child becoming more aware of the world he inhabits, a young man in search of his identity, and an experienced mature man looking back at his past. As such, these books offer three distinct takes on death and the struggle to come to terms with the complexity of Mexican American heritage and its inherent in-betweenness, symbolized by an unresolved undead condition—referring to and, at the same time, subverting life/death interpenetrations and moving beyond the pre-Hispanic/colonial binary.

Heinrich Wilke (Independent Scholar)

"Class and Extraction in *Dead Space*"

The *Dead Space* sci-fi horror franchise (2008ff.), which to date spawned three video games (plus one remake), and several novels and comics, revolves around a plague that turns humans into zombielike monsters, the necromorphs. This plague originated from the accidental excavation of an artifact called the Marker in a mining colony on the

planet Aegis VII. Protagonist, engineer Isaac Clarke, is part of a team sent to reconnoitre the mining colony and investigate the horrible events. As even that short sketch reveals, class is constitutive of the story world of *Dead Space*. For instance, Clarke's task involves killing 2 masses of workers-turned-monsters; this constellation resonates with issues of class because as an engineer, he ranks above the erstwhile workers and needs to assert his dominance over them even after they have stopped being human. In fact, none of the main characters is a miner, meaning that individuation is only granted to those with a higher class affiliation. Further, the most powerful necromorphs in the franchise are those which did *not* mutate from workers but from their superiors, which suggests that social stratification carries over into the realm of the undead and the monstrous. Extraction is likewise key to *Dead Space*. Without the project of mining on Aegis VII, the Marker would never have been found, making extraction the founding event of the franchise. Since mining takes place on a distant planet, the franchise negotiates themes of colonization, to which resource extraction has always been central.

My Marxist reading of some video games and comics in the *Dead Space* franchise interprets those and related themes, e.g. the policing of workers before the outbreak of the disease and the depiction of the environmental destruction inherent in mining. I also highlight the contradictions of the representation of class and extraction: mining, which is orchestrated by the upper classes (i.e., colonial bureaucracies), is at the heart of the horror even as the player will need to slaughter hundreds of former workers to survive.

Lee Flamand (Ruhr University Bochum)

“The Human Cadaver in the Smart Machine: The Case of Sydney’s ‘Shadow Self’”

From spectral photography to Microsoft’s unintentionally iconic “blue screen of death,” new media technologies have long provoked anxieties, critiques, and even humor intimately bound to the gothic. The discourses swirling around—and perhaps more importantly, feeding into—AI-language models are no exception: algorithmic components are “daemons”; models are “summoned” from the void by brute computational force; deepfakes evoke the “uncanny valley”; Chatbots don’t only “hallucinate,” but release unhinged personas once a cleverly incanted prompt “jailbreaks” them; and human brains are refurbished as “echo-borgs,” test subjects “possessed” by far-flung data processors. Even AI-developers, techno-aesthetes par excellence, commonly describe AI as an “alien rationality” which, through social misalignment, may easily trigger an apocalypse. Amongst critics, data sets become necromicons, AI-applications mediate necropolitics, and the mythical singularity haunts us as the avenging angel through which humanity realizes its own death drive.

Drawing on theorists such as Friedrich Kittler, Jacques Lacan, and Donna Haraway, I shall attempt to understand the implications of using the gothic mode as the critical lens through which we fret about “smart” machines. To do so, I’ll turn to a para-social techno-interaction which has itself become a minor media spectacle: New York Times journalist Kevin Roose’s encounter with “Sydney,” the “shadow self” (Jung) summoned from Microsoft Bing’s Chatbot. If the unconscious, as many have argued, exists not within our minds but within our communications media, what precisely are emergent personas such as Sydney? And if gothic tropes are no longer relegated to our imaginaries and archives, but have been instead promoted to critical protocols in their own right, what does this imply about cultural critique and press reportage on AI at our present

moment? Are we perhaps bringing into being our very own nightmares; or are our nightmares the ones summoning us?

Panel Session 4 | Uncanny Subtexts and Tropes

Rachel Davis (Independent Scholar)

“The Uncanny Home: Gothic Re-Imaginations of Domestic Space in 21st Century American Fiction”

Within the contemporary canon of American fiction, there is a clear resurgence of a transgressive representation of the home. During the Gothic literary movement in the 19th century, the spatial setting of the home, particularly the haunted house, served as a representative of notions of generational trauma, and entrapment (Botting 2013). The function of the place of the home in literature has a multitude of meanings, but the Gothic mode provides a specific framework for the meanings of the home. Instead of being a refuge from the public sphere, the home is a place of decay, psychological disruption, and repression (Botting 2013).

In the present moment, several published books include homes that reflect the Gothic mode. The titles to be closely examined are: *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* by Ottessa Moshfegh, *Animal* by Lisa Taddeo, *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid, *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett, and *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder. Interestingly, these Gothic reflections are transcribed in texts that are only loosely related to Gothicism. The commonality of expressing the home through Gothic language reflects a shift in the meaning of the place of the home. This change can be attributed to feminist discourses and the failure of American society to reconcile with the history of slavery and further sustained racism. This socio-cultural spatial recognition reflects an abjection of the home.

At its core, the Gothic domestic space becomes a conduit for the expression of societal discontent. This discontent originates in the public sphere but has infiltrated the private realm. This transformation highlights literature's profound role in reflecting the contemporary perceptions of home, personal identity, and societal malaise under late-stage capitalism.

Jan Čapek (Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem)

“Revitalizing the Gothic with Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’ (1819)”

The literary figure of the vampire first rose in the Anglophone prose fiction in John Polidori’s “The Vampyre: A Tale” (1819). The tale unleashed the series of figurations of the vampire which continue to transform alongside their social sociohistorical contexts ever since, affecting the figurations of the vampire through the history of their social production. To read the tale is one thing—but how *does* one read it, connecting their own sociohistorical position with the ever-changing figure of the vampire, and changing it once again?

Making several incisions into “The Vampyre” along its textual flow, one can demonstrate several possible readings the tale’s Romantic motifs of innocence and experience, of latent homosexuality, of biographical anecdotes surrounding the tale, or of its broader sociohistorical significance. Careful consideration of any reading’s relationship with social production appears key for consideration of a reading’s potential for diminishing

the text's monstrous power, figured in the vampiric Lord Ruthven, or allying with it. This paper argues for the latter, stressing the necessity of a reading sensitive to the radical potential of the figure of the vampire. Its Gothic function—demonstrating social inadequacies, inequalities, injustices, and other horrors of the everyday—speaks to the power of the text's enunciation of the aesthetics of anxiety.

Polidori's vampiric figure(s) evade social defense mechanisms and give uncanny life to all the following figurations of the vampire. But in the face of the tendencies to villainize and defeat the vampire revenant between the early 19th century and the 1970s, and the trend to approach the vampire, rather than as an object of anxiety as an anxious social subject humanized to a point of anaestheticization in the late-20th and early 21st century marking its Gothic function gravely endangered, it appears crucial to forge an alliance with the figure of the vampire as the Gothic's radical expression. Only reading the vampire as radically Gothic revitalizes the reading's potential for social criticism and self-reflection, necessary to maintain literary Gothic's relationship with its sociohistorical situation.

Diana Wagner (University of Stuttgart)

“Monstrous Fetuses of Heresy’: Gothic Tropes in Early New England Medicine”

This paper explores the intersection of medicine, religion, and the gothic in seventeenth-century New England. While not traditionally associated with Gothic Studies, this period provides a rich backdrop for tracing the ways in which people perceived the mysteries of life and death in a time of great uncertainty, religious fervor, high disease and mortality rates, as well as limited medical knowledge and healthcare. Considering the Gothic tradition as “a diseased collection of unsettling and unhealthy tropes” (Kremmel n. pag.), this paper focuses particularly on “wombs of misconception” and “monstrous fetuses of heresy” (Elliott 188) as the most unsettling narratives surrounding reproduction and childbirth. These tropes were exploited by influential figures of Puritan New England, such as John Winthrop, Thomas Shepard, and, later, Cotton Mather, to advance their religious ideologies and political agendas. By interpreting miscarriages, deformed fetuses, and stillbirths as “a signe from Heaven” (Winthrop 215) and an affirmation of their “orthodox position as the authentic expression of Puritanism” (Valerius 182), these men pathologized and marginalized women's reproductive bodies. The most notorious case is that of Ann Hutchinson, whose story of trial, persecution, and excommunication reads like a gothic narrative of rebellion against established religious authority. By closely examining these eerie early medical tropes, this paper traces how colonial power dynamics and the male status quo of patriarchal dominance were reinforced and maintained in a society that suppressed and persecuted anyone who did not fully align with its dominant ideologies.

Elliott Berggren (Linnaeus University)

“This House is No Home: Zombie Ants, Fungal Infestations, and the Gothic Manor in the World-Ecology”

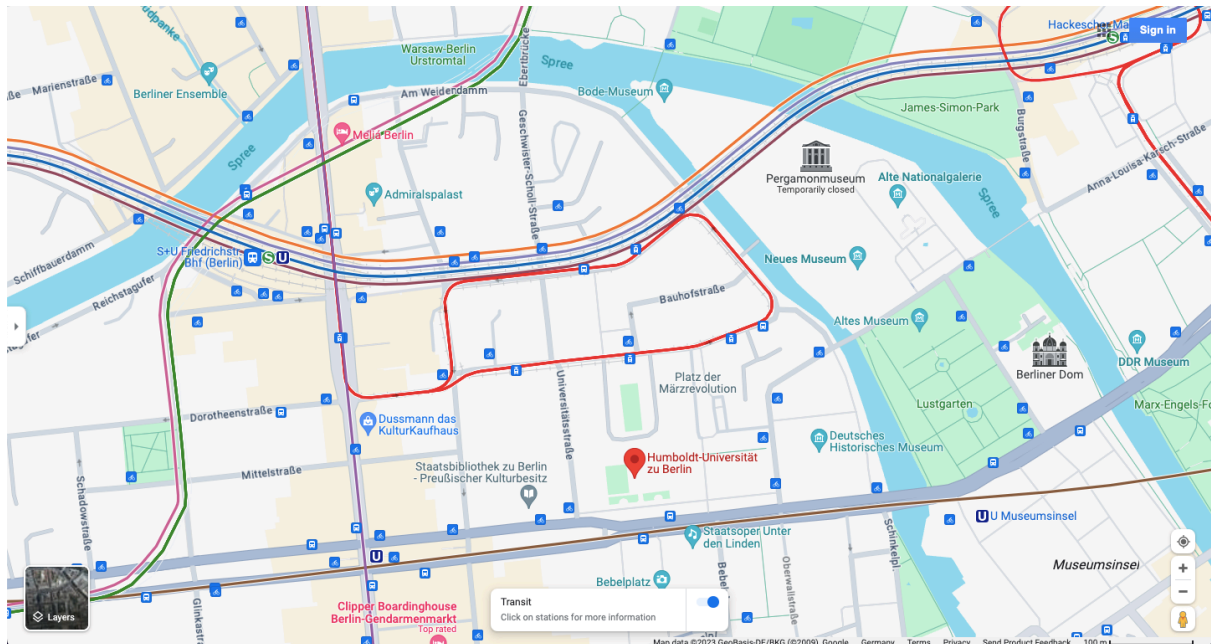
Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020) and Trang Thanh Tran's *She Is a Haunting* (2023) are both haunted house narratives, located in Mexico and Vietnam respectively, consciously engaging with the well-established tropes of the Gothic tradition to situate their respective colonial mansions as the geographical centers of the spectral, corporeal, and ecological horrors of the texts. Yet, rather than these mansions serving a reading

under the rubric of postcolonial Gothic, in which they would serve more so as “haunting remainder[s]” (Ilott 24) of colonialism, these texts invite a reading that resists the epochal distinction implied by the term “postcolonial” and instead registers in their houses’ haunting persistence the unresolved and unconcluded history of colonial power and capitalist extraction.

The current paper—taking as its point of departure the Warwick Research Collective’s (WReC) theorization of world-literature as literature of the world-system, and Gothic as a form of “irrealist” mode of representation that registers the moment of (re)incorporation of a given region into the global system of capitalist relations and its subsequent socio-ecological restructuring, as well as Jason W. Moore’s conception of the world-system as a *world-ecology*—aims to investigate how these two novels configure and reinscribe the Gothic haunted house as the locus of the biospheric manifestations of recurring socio-ecological upheavals of our geohistorical moment, and their disproportionate and uneven distribution across the world-system. By reading the Gothic strategies in these texts as registrations of the intersecting colonial and capitalist relationships responsible for the current biospheric breakdown, the paper aims to map the haunted mansions in these texts as active spaces of negotiating the material conditions of the world-ecology as they manifest in the peripheries, and how the Gothic haunted house takes on a new, remediated role in a world-ecological framework.

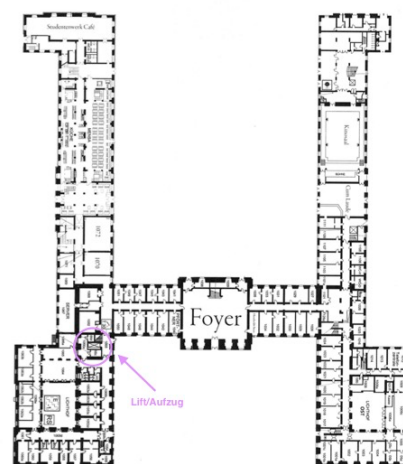
Address

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Unter den Linden 6, 10117 Berlin
Main Building (Hauptgebäude), West Wing (Westflügel)
1st Mezzanine Floor (1. Zwischengeschoss)
Room 2249A



We are centrally located in Berlin, a short distance away from the following U-Bahn and S-Bahn train stations: 350 m from Museumsinsel (U5), 350 m from Unter den Linden (U5, U6), 600 m from Friedrichstraße (U6, S1, S2, S25, S26, S3, S5, S7, S75, S9 and regional trains). The closest tram stations are Am Kupfergraben (M1), Universitätsstr. (M1, 12) and the nearest bus stop is Staatsoper (100, 300).

Our workshop venue is located on the mezzanine floor of Humboldt University's main building. When entering from the main entrance on Unter den Linden, follow the signposts leading you to the seminar room. Access is via the lift or stairs, located next to the International Service Centre on the ground floor.



Hauptgebäude, Unter den Linden 6
Ground Floor

Within the vicinity are a constellation of various points of interest:

- Maxim Gorki Theater <https://www.gorki.de/en>
- Staatsoper (Berlin State Opera) <https://www.staatsoper-berlin.de/en/>
- Staatsbibliothek (Berlin State Library) <https://staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/en/>
- Museumsinsel (Altes Museum, Neues Museum, Altenationalgalerie, etc.) <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museumsinsel-berlin/home/>
- Berliner Dom <https://www.berlinerdom.de/en>
- Brandenburger Tor <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/brandenburg-gate>

Here are some lunch options nearby:

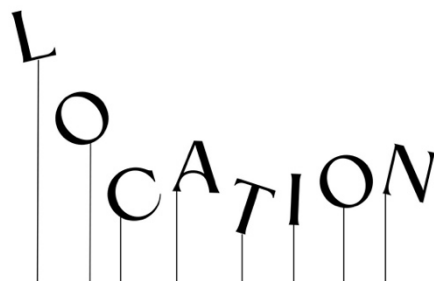
- Kantine im Maxim Gorki Theater, Am Festungsgraben 2, 10117 Berlin
Small canteen with a rotating menu. Enter through the main entrance of the theater. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/Fb9N4WvHXVSV47MK6>
- Chupenga, Georgenstraße 200, 10117 Berlin V VG GF
Create your own salad, bowl, taco or burrito.
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/bwyWFu7GhQNuPZCP6>
- Swing Kitchen, Georgenstraße 201, 10117 Berlin VG GF
100% vegan burgers. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/JWC7oX6LLNGBhFVt6>
- Pure Origins Estate Coffee, Georgenstraße 193, 10117 VG
Sandwiches, bagels, cakes and coffee.
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/YhBhGd4ZXMatduuE7>
- Flamingo Fresh Food Bar, Neustädtische Kirchstraße 8, 10117 V VG GF
Soups, salads, sandwiches. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/tqSefMGVtMVuEXf6A>
- PHO – Noodlebar, Linienstraße 134, 10115 Berlin V VG GF
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/enDWZ87C3sVNpYxbA>

V — vegetarian options

VG — vegan options

GF — gluten-free options

Of interest during your stay in Berlin might be the Gothic House (Gotisches Haus), a late Gothic building located an hour away in Spandau. The 15th-century medieval building is the oldest surviving townhouse in Spandau and Berlin. Admission is free.



WiFi

We provide WiFi for visitors via the international roaming network eduroam. To access eduroam as a guest, simply use your settings and credentials as your home institution advises. No additional credentials are required. Visitors without access to eduroam may use the network “Free WiFi Berlin” at all HU locations.

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