



50+ Shades of Gothic

The Gothic Across Genre and Media in US Popular Culture

Defining the Gothic has proven to be a difficult and elusive task for scholars, possibly as this literary current often pervades cross-genre narratives and media, embracing many topics related to the very essence of human nature. Indeed, the nature of whatever it may mean to be human seems to be at the core of William Veeder's definition the Gothic as a healing mechanism found in societies that "inflict terrible wounds upon themselves," especially in order "to help heal the damage caused by our embrace of modernity" (1998: 21). This wide definition of the Gothic acknowledges the pervasiveness of the genre and its ramifications when it comes to reacting—"healing and transforming" (1998: 21)—to the perils of societal structures and thus confronting the manifold disruptions of social and moral codes, as well as the actual and imagined fears intrinsic to the cyclical crises our societies face. The advent of modernity represented a major concern in the post-revolutionary United States. Inspired by the literary genre that emerged in 18th century England and its subsequent evolutions, Gothic fiction became a suitable means for exploring the newfound anxieties relating to the specific configurations of the colonial societies and their challenges as new communities. Drawing on European gothic tropes and arguably starting with Charles Brockden Brown's tales, American Gothic fiction has been popular throughout the centuries up to the present day. Furthermore, many popular culture products engage—in more or less overt ways—with gothic elements in the attempt to confront myriads of conflicts, anxieties, and epochal concerns that have marked our societies.

The struggle between dictated social conventions and the repressed, multifaceted self—liable to fragmented identity and ambiguity—has been central to Gothic narratives. Hidden moral, social, and scientific aspirations emerge, often accompanied by the tension toward a liberation of repressed desires and the fear of the consequences of such liberation. Moreover, the creation of taboos and moral codes set hierarchical boundaries for society to theoretically function without disruption. Gothic characters and dynamics blur such boundaries, thus facing social and psychological dilemmas peculiar to contemporary contexts, and struggling against uncertainty, mistaken self-conceptions and perceptions of reality, contradictory behaviors, feelings of guilt, and exasperation. Terror might lie in altered psychological states, be intrinsic to an incomprehensible or unacceptable alien outsider, or haunt the places where a character would naturally feel safe.

Gothic modes have also been characterized by the notions of disturbance and indulgence, or by a peculiar sense of irony and self-consciousness. An underlying presence of the supernatural and the unspeakable quality of many anxieties facilitate revelations that often remain implicit to a complex narrative structure. Gothic narratives are populated by devil figures and dreamlike sequences that blur the line between the conscious and the unconscious. The conflicts permeated by gothic modes tackle the unresolved battle between good and evil, the tension between the body and the psyche, the passage from childhood to



adulthood, and the transgression of social and moral codes. The gothic panoply includes spatial tropes (isolated places, Medieval monasteries, caves, graveyards, ruins, family houses, etc.); claustrophobic urban settings or overwhelming wilderness; scientific experiments that challenge divinity and defy the boundaries of knowledge; allegorical non-human entities; anxieties toward the future and technocratic realities; and ambivalent stances toward the past that oscillate between fear and attraction, and are fueled by the instability of memories.

In recent years, many popular culture artifacts outside of the usual terrain of horror and the Gothic have exploited Gothic modes to reveal the terrors of everyday life. Sophisticated narratives have employed gothic modes to take on disruption, questioning reality, as well as challenging the boundaries of conformity and raising issues related to xenophobia, death, social anxieties, alienation, displacement, and self-consciousness. Because of the versatility and diversity of gothic modes and their—more or less subtle—exploitation across media and popular culture products, we call for contributions fitting the thematic lines described below.

This is a call for presentations that will be organized thematically in different sessions, as detailed below. However, the analysis of any type of popular culture products across media is welcome. We invite presentations on gothic modes in **film, (web)tv series, comics and graphic novels, video games, animation, products aimed at children and young adults, genre fiction, and theatrical performances.**

Each session will be composed of a talk with a keynote speaker (30 min. approximately) followed by panels, each organized as a sequence of short presentations (each 12-15 min. maximum) and a moderated discussion among participants. Scholars at any stage of their career are welcome, and the panels will be organized accordingly.

Panels will be pre-recorded in their entirety: the presenters and moderators will agree on a date for the pre-recording, with a limited public composed of PopMeC editors. The session will be post-produced and uploaded to the PopMeC YouTube channel and social media platforms, according to the series' calendar (to be defined, starting early April with an introductory session and streaming a new session every week). The participation in the sessions is free of charge.

PopMeC accepts **presentation proposals** (300-350 words approx.) about any aspect related to the call. The proposals will be **peer-reviewed and selected on a rolling basis** by our editorial team and external collaborators, who will get back to you as soon as possible. Please, send your proposal to popmec.call@gmail.com, attaching your text, inclusive of a short bio (100-120 words), name, affiliation, and email contact in a single file (.doc, .docx, .odt).

Confirmed keynote scholars so far: Xavier Aldana Reyes, Kyle Bishop, Michael Howarth, Evert J. van Leeuwen, Julia Round, Jeffrey Weinstock, Maisha L. Wester

Please, [check this page for updates on keynote talks and panels.](#)



Organizing committee: Anna Marta Marini (PopMeC chief editor), Mónica Fernández (board editor), and associate editors Laura Álvarez, Paula Barba, Trang Dang, Michael Fuchs, Sofía Martinicorena.

THEMATIC SESSIONS:

1. THE HOUSE AS GOTHIC LOCUS + THE UNCANNY AND THE US FAMILY

Ever since the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" in 1839, the house as a locus of all sorts of personal, sexual and spatial tensions has been a preeminent site for the Gothic in US popular culture. In a country that had purportedly left the aristocracy of the Old World and its decaying ruins behind, the ordinary site of the family house became the favored space where gothic narratives and modes could be channeled, giving rise to a long-standing tradition that explores the perils lurking in the realm of the familiar. Gothic modes have been exploited to tackle the spatial dimension, especially in relation to the idea of home and family, family trauma, the destabilization of the domestic, the uncanny, and the idea of home as a metaphor for the nation.

Deadline for presentation proposals: February 28, 2021

2. GOTHIC AND THE ETHNIC OTHER + BODIES AND BOUNDARIES

Gothic narratives revolving around invading non-humans and unspoken anxieties related with the assumed dangers of "racial intrusion" have been used to elaborate more or less overtly on ethnic otherness. The contact and confrontation with the ethnic other have been linked to the unwanted blurring of both metaphorical and material boundaries. The ethnic minority body has been perceived as the unsettling product of a physical and cultural miscegenation, an unstable blend evoking ambiguous representations transgressively exotic and immorally, savagely inferior altogether. At the same time, Gothic narratives protagonized by ethnic minority subjects have been created, giving voice to their own anxieties and perceptions of ethnic boundaries and xenophobic terrors.

Deadline for presentation proposals: March 7, 2021

3. ECOGOTHIC

American culture has maintained a strained relationship with nature and the environment ever since the arrival of the first settlers. The vast lands that they encountered were conceptualized simultaneously as a bountiful Garden of Eden that would facilitate the colonial experience, and as a "howling wilderness" that threatened the first, precarious settlements. Environment-related anxieties have permeated into all cultural forms, often through Gothic imagery. More recently, environmental concerns have more to do with the durability of the planet and the increasingly worrying consequences of human activities upon it, often resulting in (post)apocalyptic narratives.

Deadline for presentation proposals: March 14, 2021



4. BODIES AND BOUNDARIES + GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE GOTHIC

Body-related anxieties have often been connected to gender, sexuality, and physical otherness, as fears and struggles intrinsic to the wish for liberating repressed, unconventional, or assumedly immoral desires. Socially imposed boundaries blur, connecting with feelings of guilt, degeneration, excess, disruption. The corporeal “other” becomes the image of transgression, depravity, and the breaking of taboos related to the body in all its forms. Themes related to sexual pleasure, physical abjection, body transformation, and gender become at the same time stigmas and boundaries to cross in order to express and face one’s own true self.

Deadline for presentation proposals: March 21, 2021

5. CHILDREN AND YA GOTHIC STUFF

Children and YA gothic narratives have dealt with anxieties related with development, a growing awareness of the self and one’s own sexuality, the transformations within the family environment, the increasing necessity to cope with external contexts. The creation of gothic worlds—belonging to either an alternative reality or the characters’ imagination—has also been exploited as a means to represent the complex passages between different stages of life, coming-of-age experiences, and conflicts internal to the characters’ everyday life as children.

Deadline for presentation proposals: March 28, 2021

6. AUTOMATA, CYBER TERROR AND TECHNOCRATIC REALITIES

The extent of contemporary human reliance on technology has stirred up new embodiments of the uncanny elements found in traditional gothic horror. As a response to the fear of technological advances, anxieties about the future and parasocial relationships, robots and automata have replaced the ghouls of our nightmares. Similarly, in lieu of a haunted mansion or a labyrinth, we come to find the liminal space of our technological anxieties represented in our immaterial existence in the online realm.

Deadline for presentation proposals: April 4, 2021

Presenters will be welcome to submit an article related to their presentation topic, to be peer-reviewed and published on our platform (<https://popmec.hypotheses.org> ISSN: 2660-8839) as part of a special section dedicated to the subject. According to the feedback and participation the series raises, we will consider proposing the publication of an edited volume collecting selected contributions.