# Introduction.
# Limits, Thresholds, Frontiers: Gothic Unbound

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## 1. From boundless to unbound

In *The Illusion of the End*, Jean Baudrillard suggests that our culture has been experiencing a process of "agonizing revision", of "rewriting everything" (Baudrillard [1992] 1994: 11), and Steven Connor makes a similar point when he notes that since the late twentieth century, contemporary fiction generally has been marked "by the imperative of the eternal return" (Connor 1994: 79). While both critics associate this specifically with the postmodern moment, it is also something that has always been and is increasingly closely associated with the persistent and ever adaptable genre of the Gothic. The Gothic's "imperative of the eternal return" has been evident throughout its history not simply through its interests in ghosts, curses, and violent eruptions of the past in the present, but also in the way it is, as a genre, so strongly marked by the recycling of its own most conventional narratives, strategies and motifs.

This issue of *Textus* provides space for discussion to researchers engaged in exploring, testing and redrawing the expansive frontiers of the Gothic and its multiple, evolving discourses and practices. While the Gothic has always resisted easy generic definition, this has become particularly notable over the past few decades as the Gothic has increasingly begun to merge or connect with such other genres, and sub-genres, as science fiction, urban fantasy, cyberfiction, crime fiction, westerns and romance as well as multiple non-text-based cultural manifestations, including fashion, music and performance art. New communities of content-makers from various fields of the arts and media are appropriating the

Gothic, further unpacking conventions and categories. Cultural production confirms the proliferation of new Gothic forms and cultural trends that use new forms of communication to redefine our understanding of what was long considered a predominantly literary genre. What new frontiers is the Gothic shaping in the 21st century? These considerations provided the starting block for *Gothic Frontiers*. Still, as suggested by the contributions in this collection, appropriate as this question may be it ought to be expanded in both cultural and spatial terms.

Fred Botting, for one, has recently suggested a revision of the differences in Gothic and its voices and bodies, discussing the various ways in which monstrosity has been reconfigured in recent years (Botting 2008). Similarly, Clive Bloom has drawn attention to changing concepts of the body, "the new architectural space of fear" that signifies "the sense of excess and disturbance that was once attached to buildings" (Bloom 2010: 183). Furthermore, John Paul Riquelme (2008) has argued for the unearthing of a silenced Gothic tradition. This revisitation envisions a submerged "dark" canon that rhizomatically expands – in the past, and even more so in the present – through infinite routes of adaptation, revision, and transformation. The concept of "Gothic frontiers" finally opens up to a plethora of transcultural and transnational manifestations that engage globally in diverse forms – from cinema, painting, multimedia art, comics, photography, dance and performance to fashion, music, and games – moulding and remoulding textual and material bodies. It is clear that textual dissemination, content circulation and participative culture, including new ways of discourse seeding are, by their very nature, reformulating the concept of 'cultural metaspace', including dismantling its obsolete apparatus of boundaries and limits.

On 9 April 2010 and again on 2 October 2011 the temporary residents of Zuccotti Park dressed up as corporate zombies to stage their protest against the greedy 1% of the population[1], and in so doing achieved immediate hyper exposure thanks to the gawking of the international press. Gothic discourse was

[1] We are, of course, referring to the political slogan of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, "we are the 99%", for which see, among many, "We are the 99%" (n.d.), a section of "Occupy Wall Street" (n.d.).

effectively appropriated and circulated among audiences who are not traditionally associated with the Gothic itself, drawing an equal dose of across-the-board enthusiastic endorsements and sceptical responses. Needless to say, news discourse quickly appropriated and ventriloquised slightly stale Gothic tropes as newscasters gleefully reeled off juicy stereotypes such as "the smell of fresh blood" (Grant 2011), and "fake blood dripping from the corners of their mouths" (Potter 2011) to typecast the mob of zombie-like protesters.

By offering an example of how the so-called 'Gothic mainstream' can be sourced, the Occupy Wall Street mock-zombies performed a telling narrative of what lies beyond the concept of "Gothic Frontier". As one of the organisers of the march stated when explaining their *Thriller*-like prank, "[w]e are really just trying to have a little fun, mix it up a bit" (Garrison 2011). One of the aims of the present issue of *Textus* is precisely to identify the sounds and sources of this Gothic 'mixing up'.

## 2. At the beginning of the end. A short survey of Gothic Studies in Italy

The rise of Gothic Studies in Italy dates back to the 1980s with Giovanna Franci's volume *La messinscena del terrore* (1982), which was followed in quick succession by Mirella Billi's well-known *Il gotico inglese* (1986), and Patrizia Nerozzi Bellman's study, *L'altra faccia del romanzo: creatività e destino dell'anti-realismo gotico* (1987)[2]. All of these studies individuate formal and generic contamination as a mark of the Gothic, perceived in its everlasting oscillation between realism and romance, and often verging on oneirism (Franci 1997; Billi 2005b). Moving from an openly re-evaluative approach to the genre, Franci focuses on three authors – Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew G. Lewis – as both canonic and exemplary case studies, albeit for different reasons. Significantly, Franci (1982: 10) perceives a markedly theatrical and spectacular subtext in the Gothic resulting from the evocative power of words. As a consequence, Franci repeatedly highlights the all-embracing and far-reaching

[2] A further contribution was offered in the same decade by Agazzi (1984).

practices of *mise-en scène*, fakery and staging which she considers typical of the genre.

As suggested by the remit in the prominent il Mulino series, "I contesti culturali della Letteratura Inglese", Mirella Billi's critical analysis substantially broadens the scope of Franci's earlier inquiry. In the wide-ranging and meticulously researched introduction to *Il gotico inglese* (1986) structuralist investigation is complemented by aesthetic and psychoanalytic approaches as Gothic texts and their contexts are conclusively brought together. There follow two sections with excerpts from both Gothic authors and scholars of the genre, and an illustrative anthological part with detailed comments which can be considered the first ever scholarly attempt to make the Italian readership familiar with the major eighteenth-century and Romantic Gothic authors. Billi (1985) agrees with Franci in finding a dramatic core in the Gothic, a field she had already investigated in an earlier essay on the Shakespearian models of Gothic novelists. In this essay Billi offers a contribution to the semiotic study of the passions, a typifying feature of both Gothic dramas and novels. Close focus on the ostension of passions and emotions is also continued in a more recent essay on Horace Walpole as a dramatist (Billi 2005a)[3]. Finally, towards the end of the decade, Claudia Corti published *Sul discorso fantastico: la narrazione nel romanzo gotico* (1989), a study which completes the Italian Gothic scene for the 1980s.

The 1990s coincided with a flourishing of Gothic Studies in Italy and with a progressive broadening in both critical approaches and chronology. From the analysis of Gothic interludes in the classic novels as indexes of anxiety, disorder and psychological disturbance, the enquiry moved to new discourses and themes, following paradigm shifts in critical theory. For one, the various forms of the so-called "female Gothic" were investigated by Mirella Billi in both their Victorian and present-day manifestations. Particularly influential were contributions on the work of Angela Carter (among which Billi 1988; 1990), a novelist also considered more recently by Mariaconcetta Costantini (2002). Billi also wrote several articles on William Beckford, focusing on the Gothic and Gothic-like features

[3] The collection edited by Saglia and Silvani (2005) offers the most important study to date of Gothic drama.

in narrative and the arts[4]. During the same period Sandro Melani started his research on Victorian Gothic, favouring a gender-based and thematic approach. Melani authored a critical edition of *Carmilla* (Le Fanu 2001) that follows on from his earlier book-length study of incuba, dark female characters and mythical figures in nineteenth-century literature, from Romantic vampire women to fin-de-siècle femmes fatales via a gallery of pre-Raphaelite pictures and other examples of Victorian and decadent visual art (Melani 1996). Over the years Melani has remained an advocate of Le Fanu's work in Italy, and he has recently translated *Uncle Silas* (Le Fanu 2008). Similarly, nineteenth-century Gothic has been made increasingly available to Italian readers through translations of both major works and specialist texts. These often appear in thoroughly-researched critical editions which have gone on to be reprinted, and have become standard works on the Italian university syllabi. Among these, standing out as either particularly successful or pioneering are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (trans. by Vittoria Sanna, 1984), John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Walpole's *Strawberry Hill* (both trans. by Giovanna Franci in 1984 and 1990 respectively), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (trans. by Benedetta Bini, 1992), and the three-volume edition of Edgar Allan's Poe tales (trans. by noted novelist, Giorgio Manganelli in 1996). In the last decade, the publication of the first ever Italian edition of Matthew G. Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* (trans. by Giovanna Silvani, 2006) demonstrates the increasing interest of Italian academics in Gothic drama and the various forms of Gothic spectacle (see Saglia and Silvani 2005).

In the new millennium the Italian fortunes of the Gothic – and horror literature at large – have significantly increased through the interest of small publishers specialising in genre literature, such as Gargoyle (Rome), as well as the many paperback collections of Gothic, or 'noir' literature compiled by passionate editors like Malcom Skey, Riccardo Reim and Gianni Pilo. As the Gothic has gradually been introduced to the Italian syllabi, various major publishers have begun to reflect this interest[5]. Slowly it has ceased

[4] For a bibliography of Billi's Beckfordian contributions see Billi (2010).

[5] This is the case, for example, of Venetian publisher Marsilio, which published the aforementioned critical edition of *Carmilla* (Le Fanu 2001) along with an edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole 2008). Saggini has recently (2013b)

to be the guilty pleasure of Italian academics and has achieved all-rounded respectability. Scholars have been looking through Gothic lenses at less predictable works and authors, including James M. Barrie (Giovannoli 2008) and James Joyce (Pelaschiar 2009), while important Research Projects of National Interest (in Italian: PRINs) are obtaining substantial funding. Among these, "Il teatro romantico inglese: testi, teorie e pratiche sceniche", directed by Lilla Maria Crisafulli (2002-03), completed a pioneering study of Gothic dramaturgy (1760-1830). This mapped in detail the most significant types of dramatic practices in Romantic Gothic. One of the main discoveries of this project, which involved several Italian universities and scholars from different critical backgrounds, was an awareness of how the Gothic cannot be compartmentalised into distinct disciplinary domains.

The Gothic stage as the elective site for this multi-domain investigation was further probed by a number of studies that have come out over the last decade or so. Diego Saglia is the editor of an electronic edition (1999) of Sophia Lee's *Almeyda. Queen of Granada* (1796), and, more recently, author of an essay on Thomas Holcroft's Romantic melodrama *A Tale of Mystery* (Saglia 2012). Francesca Saggini has investigated the visual, page and stage interface of Gothic dramas and spectacles (Saggini 2009; 2013a), while Mariaconcetta Costantini has offered insightful readings of Wilkie Collins's Gothic drama, *The Frozen Deep* (Costantini 2006a; 2006b)[6].

Finally, the books of Romolo Runcini (1985) and Maurizio Ascari (2007) have offered complementary takes on the relationships between the Gothic and other literary sub-genres, notably detective and sensation fiction. Indeed, like contemporary crime fiction, the Gothic is showing a remarkable formal and thematic pliability, the ability or perhaps the resilience, to spread and adapt to both the old-school imperatives of the editorial market and the infinite possibilities offered by new communication environments. Paraphrasing Michael Gamer, we could think of the Gothic as a

completed a Victorian Gothic omnibus in Italian translation for Bononia University Press.

[6] For a discussion of Radcliffe's word-painting technique: Elia (2005). For a book-length study of Radcliffean romances: Battaglia (2008). On the architecture and the topologies of the Gothic novel: Billi (2004).

site of cultural heteroglossia, a mobile discourse crossing the genres (2000: 3-4). This "mobile locus" of culture (Lotman 1985) is turning out to be a dialogic and plurilinguistic metaspace that liquefies limits and boundaries (Bauman 2000). In their turn, these spaces give way to new environments, new thresholds, and new frontiers – as well as to new finely-tuned vantage points from which to explore the Gothic, past and present (see Costantini 2011).

*Dracula* offers a significant example of the shifting contaminative and incorporative practices that Henry Jenkins (1992) has effectively dubbed "textual poaching". Until the first half of the Noughties only two to three *Dracula*-related cultural products were published in Italy every year. Recently, this number has undergone an exponential increase in line with a more global trend as *Dracula* has moved from the realm of the un-*dead* to the realm of the un-*fixed*. We can now talk of a parallel canon – more and more inseparable from the original Stoker canon – which goes from pop-up books to children's retellings (Knister 2007; Anon. 2011; Colton 2010), on to prequels and sequels, produced and consumed by fan communities in Italy as much as in the rest of the world (Lucas 2011; Watson 2011; Essex 2010; Rocchi 2010), to mash-ups and rewritings, including in Italian regional dialects (Stoker 2010). Furthermore, the *Dracula* paper canon is flanked by a growing corpus analysing the media afterlives of the novel (Lonati 2007; Santamaria 2009; Leonforte 2010), to the point that now one could almost speak of a collectively distributed (Jenkins 2006) Italian 'Stokerverse'.

## 3. Gothic frontiers

*Gothic Frontiers* aims at illustrating the current mobility as well as the potentials of the genre. For these reasons throughout the volume critical focus stays close to certain significant themes and intersections as illustrative of the new dialogues and the new audiences in/of the Gothic. Among these, we draw the attention to the Gothic and technology (which, incidentally, is also the theme of the forthcoming International Gothic Association Conference, 2013), intermedia and transmedia Gothic, Gothic readings of history and politics, the Gothic body (a digital and hyperreal metaspace [Richtin 2008], which takes on and embodies the concept of mobile frontier itself), the agelong *topos* of the double

across its contemporary media declinations and transformations, and, finally, the redevelopments and reconceptualisations of monstrosity.

While its characteristic doubts and its penchant for the irrational might set the Gothic as the very antithesis of the discourses of science and technology, it is nevertheless a mode of writing that has been in close engagement with these discourses from the start. The first three essays in this collection all consider to one extent or another the connections between Gothic and technology in the contemporary world. In the opening essay, "'If It Hadn't Been for You Meddling Kids': The Explained Supernatural in an Irrational Age", Maria Purves considers the debunking narratives of *Scooby Doo* and *Sherlock Holmes* and argues that changing attitudes to the rational underlie recent shifts in these incarnations of the eighteenth-century Radcliffean "explained supernatural". While the power of the mind may have been celebrated in eighteenth-century narratives of the explained supernatural, she argues, in these contemporary texts rational thought turns out to be incapable of providing all the answers. The possibility of the supernatural is restored as the cognitive pleasures of debunking are denied: all possible narratives are now accepted and the supernatural and rational become complementary. Reason has lost its relevance in the wake of our unquestioning faith in the magic of science and technology, in particular our belief in the powers of science and technology to make our bodies invulnerable, strong, powerful. It is not surprising then, that the perfected physical form becomes emphasised in these narratives at the same time as the cognitive is marginalised: we are offered newly agile and muscular protagonists reminiscent of superheroes, a Holmes no longer lean and cadaverous but instead punchy and muscular.

The issue of science and technology and the updating of a traditional form are also central to the next essay, Ruth Heholt's "Subversive Ghost Hunting: A-Technology, the Imagination and the Gothic Spaces of *Most Haunted*". Since the Victorians first used cameras in their attempts to capture spirits, technology has been appropriated to reveal the 'truth' in scientific investigations of the supernatural. And as living room séances once brought spirits into the Victorian drawing room, Heholt argues, so today television brings hauntings into the domestic arena once more and in so doing becomes one more ghost hunting tool. Nevertheless,

Heholt's analysis of Living TV's popular ghost hunting programme *Most Haunted* shows this British venture to have little in the way of the high-tech equipment and sophisticated investigative processes that have characterised American ghost hunting shows. With *Most Haunted*, she suggests, technology repeatedly fails, is mishandled, or misses the point, and evidence – should any emerge – is never enhanced. There is instead a distinct refusal to prioritise professional expertise, technological wonders, efficiency and evidence, and the result is to make the viewer listen and watch more carefully. The frequently bumbling and confused antics of the ghost hunters, along with the distinctly unproven phenomena they supposedly encounter, reinstate Gothic as something celebratory and carnivalesque: the aim of the ghost hunters is clearly not a real search for knowledge in the masculine and scientific tradition of Victorian ghost hunting, but – in a manner similar to Victorian sensation fiction – rather to immerse the viewer in the sensations of the ghost hunt.

Technology continues to be a central concern in our third essay, "Gothumentary: The Gothic Unsettling of Documentary's Rhetoric of Rationality", in which Papagena Robbins and Kristopher Woofter show not so much the revisioning of older Gothic forms, but the emergence of something new through the generic fusion of Gothic fictions and documentary. The discourses of the Gothic and the documentary collide, as they put it, at the intersection of the desire for and dread of knowledge. Again, as the title of this essay suggests, knowledge, brainwork and rationality become suspect. If in *Most Haunted* there is a distinct lack of evidence, in such gothumentaries as *Cropsey*, *Resurrect Dead*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *In the Realms of the Unreal* and *Must Read After My Death*, there is a wealth of evidence. Such evidence, however, fails to provide any answers. The gothumentary is consequently concerned primarily with the problems of documentary's reliance on evidence: its aim is ultimately not to discover some truth but rather to unsettle our ideas of truth and reality. Indeed, as the gothumentary focuses on some central subject that can be known only through the documents left behind, all that remains is interpretation. Gothumentary consequently unsettles, destabilises and defamiliarises our constructs for (re)-presenting reality.

The shifting contingencies of reality are frequently emphasised in Gothic fictions through the trope of the double. While this

traditional Gothic trope remains hugely resonant in the postmodern world, what changes is the ways in which it is produced. As Michael Fuchs demonstrates in "Gothic Hauntings: Uncanny Doubling in *Alan Wake* and *Supernatural*", uncanny doubles can emerge in new ways in contemporary fictions. On the one hand they are produced as contemporary Gothic narratives explicitly or implicitly reference previous texts in order to position themselves within the genre. Adaptations, inevitably familiar and yet strange, are perhaps in themselves inevitably uncanny. Indeed, the Gothic present is so haunted by the Gothic past in *Supernatural*, Fuchs notes, that at times it is nearly submerged by its intertexts. On the other hand, uncanny doubles are also produced by the transgression of medial boundaries we find in the twenty-first century, by the new transmedia narratives.

The next three essays demonstrate some of the ways in which the Gothic reads history and politics today. Interestingly, all three explore the ghostly in contemporary contexts, thus highlighting reworkings of traditional themes like the uncanny and the haunting presences from the past, tenaciously displaced at both individual and collective level. Robert Harris's novel *The Ghost*, Lidia De Michelis astutely remarks, may be contextualised in the tradition of Christmas ghost stories, albeit divested of their traditional yuletide atmosphere of geniality. In fact in Harris's story the phantoms of the past "come back from the grave in order to influence the present" with hardly any redemptive or educative purpose (see below, p. 77). Gothic tropes to represent the evil are given a new lease of life: the ruthless wife of the former Prime Minister at the centre of the plot is portrayed as a political vampire, while the spectres of war and murky political and intelligence scheming are reconfigured as the new un-dead. Martha's Vineyard in bleak midwinter and the Rhinehart Compound where Adam Lang is exiled reconfigure the claustrophobic spaces of the Gothic where topological exploration often coincides with psychological probing and the investigation of the past. In Harris's novel ghostly enterprises can take on all shapes, from ghostwriting, of course, to the sinister manoeuvres to manipulate and contaminate fact and fiction. The very meaning of 'substance' and 'absence' is corrupted and ultimately erased, thus condemning any attempt at narration – particularly that of a story that does not have to be

told by someone who does not really exist – to little more than a vanishing act, an inexorably vain attempt at conjuring in textual shape the ghosts of truth.

In addition to literal ghosts, De Michelis notes, *The Ghost* raises the spectres of a corrupt and cruel political system haunting the national body: Guantanamo, the Iraq war and the corrupt manoeuvrings of the CIA. Catherine Kroll's "Bodies of Evidence: South African Gothic and the Terror of the 'Twice-Told Tale'" offers an even more overt example of a haunted nation. In her reading of three South African texts, Kroll analyses the ways in which Gothic functions, through its figuration of the white body as horrifically deficient, to attack apartheid's white supremacist assumption of comprehensive power and legitimate authority. Gothic has, of course, frequently been exploited in order to contest national narratives, and it is no doubt of some significance that Kroll draws upon Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* (1837) for the title of her essay. This, much like the title of our special issue, *Gothic Frontiers*, may inevitably bring to mind the notion of American Frontier Gothic as identified most notably by Mogen, Sanders and Karpinski in their seminal collection of essays, *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature* (1993). Produced by the drive to bring civilisation to America during the westward expansion, Frontier Gothic derives from "the conflict between the inscripted history of civilization and the history of the other" (Mogen, Sanders, Karpinski 1993: 17), precisely the issue that Kroll identifies as central to the three South African texts that she discusses.

With the devil ejected from the wilderness, the Wild West a distant memory and the environment generally tamed, if not precisely healthy, Frontier Gothic in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sense is no longer feasible. There are, of course, contemporary revisionist reworkings of Frontier Gothic, such as Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) or David Milch's HBO series *Deadwood* (2004-06), both of which dispute notions of the American frontier as a site of rational progress and expose the violence inherent in all attempts to impose law and order. But a new Frontier Gothic has been emerging, one that is produced by the sweeping away of progress, of civilisation, that is characteristic of the currently popular apocalyptic narratives, particularly those which combine apocalypse

with a renewed interest in zombies or vampires. Apocalypse produces a wasteland that offers the opportunity for new beginnings, provides new frontiers to be conquered, and, once again, as Neil McRobert demonstrates in "'Shoot everything that moves': Post-Millennial Zombie Cinema and the War on Terror", central to these narratives is the questioning of stable distinctions between law and lawlessness, order and disorder. The "post-apocalyptic world", as McRobert puts it, is a "a neo-con playground, an environment that rewards the possession of arms, personal survival, and the homogenisation and demonisation of the enemy" (see below, p. 111). The Gothic trope of the zombie is consequently rewritten: the zombie's conventional role as cultural other subverted. Real horror lies in the political or military system that is no fiction but a barely disguised representation of a real world counterpart.

Rewriting, in particular the rewriting of the Gothic trope of the double, is also the focus of the next two essays. In "Gothic (Dis)-Embodiments: Kureishi's *The Body* and Richard T. Kelly's *The Possessions of Doctor Forrest*" Aline Ferreira first analyses two fictions which rewrite Faustian pacts and the fantasy of body swapping. The horror of the body has always played a significant role in Gothic fictions, from the moment Emily St. Aubert first sees the wax figure of a mouldering body in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. If each age has its own particular anxieties about the body – from the horror of decay that results in the notion of the beautiful death in the eighteenth century to the Darwinian related fantasies of the devolving body in the nineteenth – then it may be justifiable to risk the generalisation that for the excessively image conscious age of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, it was inevitable that the ageing body would become a particular source of Gothic horror. In these two books, as Ferreira therefore shows, traditional Gothic motifs of the doppelganger and the Faustian pact, along with specific echoes of such fictions as Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, are reinvigorated through the more contemporary horror of the aged body.

Few books have cast as long a shadow over the popular imagination as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a Gothic fiction that has been repeatedly rewritten, revised, and adapted for a wide variety of media, such as Dave Morris's recent critically applauded *Frankenstein* IPad app, retelling the story in interactive format, in

2012. A notable number of *Frankenstein* films have been recently released or are in development or production, including Tim Burton's reconfiguration of *Frankenstein* as children's animation in *Frankenweenie* (Walt Disney 2012), and Universal's new version of the 1931 studio classic with Guillermo del Toro; film adaptations of adaptations also abound, including forthcoming film versions of Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2008) and Kenneth Oppel's prequel, *This Dark Endeavor: The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein* (2011). In addition to being the focus of many films, *Frankenstein* has also recently returned to the stage with both *Frankenstein's Wedding*, a musical drama broadcast live on BBC 3 from Kirkstall Abbey in March 2011, and the more successful Danny Boyle/Nick Dear production discussed in the next essay of this collection, Claudia Capancioni's and Sibylle Erle's "'Have you no compassion?': Danny Boyle's and Nick Dear's Re-examination of Monstrosity in *Frankenstein*". As Capancioni and Erle point out, in Shelley's *Frankenstein* visual monstrosity puts compassion to the test. The visual adaptations and retellings of *Frankenstein* are consequently of particular interest for the degree to which they emphasise or downplay monstrous visual spectacle, and the degree to which they emphasise or downplay the ambiguity over the site of the monstrous that was present from the start in Shelley's novel. Few appropriations and rewritings have managed to emphasise this ambiguity quite as effectively as Dear and Boyle's recent production, and this, Capancioni and Erle demonstrate, is most specifically the result of the decision to have the two lead actors, Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller alternate roles.

Ambiguity towards monstrosity is also a significant theme in the penultimate essay in this collection, Heta Pyrhönen's "'Putting Out Fire with Gasoline': The Gothic Core of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* Trilogy". The trope of the tortured female body dominates Larsson's highly popular *Millennium* Trilogy, Pyrhönen demonstrates, and this is embodied primarily in the heroine or anti-heroine, Lisbeth Salander. But Lisbeth is no victim; rather, she exploits this Gothic role of female victim in monstrous ways to avenge herself on a series of conventional Gothic villains. The sympathetic representation and reception of Lisbeth is part of a wider trend in popular culture, evident since at least the making of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* in 1992, to "humanise" the monstrous and provide

the monster with human motivations, and this trend is also evident in the final essay in this collection, Benjamin Brabon's "Gaga Gothic".

It is surely appropriate that we should conclude with an essay on Lady Gaga. That a performer so central to twenty-first-century popular culture (and notably declared 2011's most influential person in the world by *Forbes*) should be so imbued in a Gothic aesthetic says much about how central, how main stream, the Gothic is today, but also, perhaps how the Gothic has lost some of its sting. Monstrosity is no longer seen negatively, or even ambiguously, but instead becomes something to be celebrated; the Gothic is no longer associated with threat but with empowerment. For Lady Gaga, Benjamin Brabon argues in "Gaga Gothic", it animates, individuates and empowers by offering a mode of self-expression. And from here, where can Gothic now go?

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