

BOOK REVIEWS

Literary and Cultural Criticism

Johan Höglund, *The American Imperial Gothic: Popular Culture, Empire, Violence*
(Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014)

The debate about popular culture and its influence on violence in America has long characterised the country as a social and political landscape where class, race, and gender identities are highly divisive. The competing national narratives surrounding violence, identity, and culture are further problematised by America's love and hate of the firearm. Outside these complex and on-going domestic encounters with violence, the US has remained central to numerous foreign conflicts from its earliest days in the American Revolution, to the most recent discussions about what, if any, role it should play in combating ISIS.

Despite this familiarity with conflict and conquest, Johan Höglund writes in *The American Imperial Gothic: Popular Culture, Empire, Violence*, that '[f]ew citizens of the West experience the violence with which the US empire asserts its domination outside Western borders' (p. x). Such disconnection to horror stories in faraway lands, Höglund argues, allows the US to narrate its place on the global scene as a kind of justified vigilante who fulfils a doctrine of salvation through violence. The book therefore addresses how, through various productions and representations of what he terms American imperial gothic, popular culture has pervaded the public imagination in such a way as to normalise horror, violence, and the demonisation of the Other. Importantly, the text goes beyond mere identification of such narratives and their underlying links to political ideology. That is, while Höglund positions American imperial gothic as a kind of accomplice in sustaining US imperial objectives, by 'align[ing] the gothic horror stories that it tells with the politics and practices that sustain the US empire' (p. xi), the study takes a bold step further, and challenges readers to resist such sinister narrative cycles and to acknowledge the root of and consequences for an empire of violence.

The first chapter of the book provides a foundational understanding of the relationship between imperial conquest and gothic from the eighteenth century to more contemporary contexts. Höglund relies on Patrick Brantlinger's construction and use of the term 'imperial

gothic' and provides a concise and clear view of how politics, terror, and imperialism play a complex role in narrating empire. Such narration, as Höglund demonstrates, is rife with contradiction and anxiety, and turns upon the structural and infrastructural traces of modernity in the development of empire. That is, empire has become a signifier of modernity. For Höglund, this conflation is most apparent in the mechanised aspects of American military culture and militarised technology. Ultimately, the American imperial gothic emerges in this text as a means to negotiate the ebb of empire and the anxiety caused by imperial crisis. *The American Imperial Gothic* then charts the development of the US as a global power from the eighteenth century and the pages of Charles Brockden Brown's novel *Edgar Huntly* (1799) to the Cold War and most recently, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

A constant strand within Höglund's analysis of American imperial gothic as a narrative of empire is its insistence upon overly simplistic perspectives of good and evil, self and Other. At the fore of this national mythology is the premise that violence is culturally mandated and in many ways, progressive. Höglund's interrogation of this narrative is well researched and draws from diverse cultural mediums that include film and literature. Among the selected texts are familiar titles and some that are, perhaps, not as well known. They include Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), the Hollywood film *King Kong* (1933), as well as the war-time horror movies *King of the Zombies* (1941), *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), and *Return of the Vampire* (1943). One of several contemporary texts discussed is the AMC television series *The Walking Dead* (2010–present). This is not to say that the book highlights the exception or rare example; instead, it carefully and effectively weaves together a canon of violence with which America has constructed itself and its Others since its very beginnings as a republic, when the nation unshackled itself from British control. In doing so, one can see a narrative of American exceptionalism begin to develop. The effectiveness of the author's argument is advanced due in large part to the links he builds with multiple cultural mediums, encompassing literature, film, and gaming. Furthermore, his explanations demonstrate for readers how these narratives dialogue with political speeches and foreign policy. Particularly effective is Höglund's reading of George W. Bush's 'Top Gun moment' on the *USS Abraham Lincoln* in 2003 as an act of performance. Through this and other examples, it becomes obvious to the reader that empire is not strictly a political space nor is art in its many forms depoliticised. The relationship between narrative and politics is a powerful one, and Höglund does well to demonstrate throughout the book how America has perpetuated its status as

global power by normalising horror and violence. That is, as politics, narrative, and social norms intertwine, American culture develops a kind of familiarity with violence to the extent that violence and horror become acceptable, if not anticipated, tactics against hostile forces. In Höglund's own words 'the gothic Other can [...] only be exorcised through violence' (p. 64).

Specifically, the path to normalising violence in various American national narratives has much to do with the figure of the American outlaw. Arguably, early discussion in the book regarding the roots of frontier gothic, its ties to manifest destiny, and the prevalence of the Western raises only old ghosts. However, recalling conventional tropes such as that of the helpless, white female in need of rescue, the frontier as a place of danger and in need of civilising order, and, importantly, male violence as a rite of passage in the development of performative masculinity, serves to emphasise the embedded and cyclical nature of America's narration and consumption of violence. The cultural patterns of performative violence within frontier narratives continue to evolve and have now begun to influence how Americans engage with technology and gaming.

One of the most engaging chapters in the book is Chapter 8 'Militarising the Virtual Gothic'. In it, Höglund addresses how the post-9/11 milieu created a self-sustaining bond between popular culture in film and gaming, empire, and performative acts of violence. In particular, he highlights how military combat, transformed into spectacle and entertainment through technology, allows 'subjects not only to consume and observe but also to inhabit and perform the world of the imperial gothic' (p. 117). As Höglund argues in his preface, the dislocation that the West experiences from the violence enacted by US imperial action makes it all too easy to accept violence as an acceptable, default reaction to crisis or insecurity. Thus, this chapter reminds us that complex cultural performances permit us to become detached from our actions, to live outside the consequences of our ideologies. Ironically, it seems that the modernity that surrounds us in an age of technology may transform us into the 'barbarians' that empire supposedly attempts to conquer.

The thought-provoking past and present manifestations of American imperial gothic Höglund that explores is strengthened by the book's clear and precise prose. Too often, critical analysis that engages so many cultural strands can become dense with terminology and tangential asides. This is not the case in *The American Imperial Gothic*. At the same time, the book's accessibility does not diminish the intellectual rigour Höglund uses to scrutinise American imperial gothic and its contexts; in fact, it serves to crystallise its argument for the reader. *The American Imperial Gothic* is an important text for scholars and

casual readers of literature, cultural studies, and politics. Through lucid prose and keen cultural readings, Johan Höglund harnesses a rich history of the economic, social, and political texts that create and narrate the ideologies that inform our individual and collective approaches to power, identity, and crisis. Importantly, it challenges readers to examine critically the role of violence as a practice of security, of freedom, and of modernity.

Kristy Butler

Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*
(Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013)

The English poet Michael Drayton, in his ‘Ode to the Virginian Voyage’, urged the people of Britain to travel westwards to the New World. He writes of

Virginia,
Earth’s only paradise!

Where nature hath in store
Fowl, venison, and fish,
And the fruitful’st soil,
Without your toil,
Three harvests more,
All greater than your wish.

Drayton’s Edenic vision of America, set out in 1606, would be followed only three years later by the ‘starving time’ suffered by the Jamestown colony, when the population of around five hundred people would be reduced to sixty by starvation, disease, and even cannibalism. This tension between optimism and darkness comes to characterise the American experience for Leslie Fiedler, who has described the United States as ‘a world which had left behind the terror of Europe not for the innocence it dreamed of, but for new and special guilts associated with the rape of nature and the exploitation of dark-skinned people’.¹ Fiedler’s 1966 thesis has since been taken up by critics including Teresa Goddu, Allan Lloyd Smith, and Charles L. Crow, who identify a distinctly ‘American Gothic’ tradition, and expand upon the colonial and ecological implications of such a perspective. Recent studies, including *EcoGothic*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) and a special edition of *Gothic Studies*

¹ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Champaign, IL.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), p. 31.

on ‘The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century’, edited by David Del Principe (May 2014), have specifically turned to nature as a focal point.

Bernice M. Murphy’s monograph *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* is, then, a timely intervention into a burgeoning area within gothic criticism. Murphy combines a historicised approach with a close analysis of texts viewed through the lens of genre. As with much current scholarship in the field of gothic studies, this takes a broad sweep from early colonial narratives to novels, films, and recent television shows. The five chapters presented here offer all of the topics that the reader might expect. The importance of the frontier in the formation of American society is a major touchstone for the study, as is the Puritan encounter with the wilderness. In keeping with the ecocritical focus of the current wave of criticism,² much attention is given to the idea that, as Murphy states, ‘the natural world will justifiably rise up against humanity’ (p. 194). This theme, here discussed particularly in relation to film, is positioned as stemming from a sense of guilt or anxiety surrounding our relationship with nature. Thus we see a surge of horror films including *The Birds* (1963), *Jaws* (1975), and lesser-known titles such as *Night of the Lepus* (1972) and *Frogs* (1972), which portray animals violently attacking humans, usually due to hubristic human attempts to control or otherwise interfere with the environment. In the post-2000 era, the disaster portrayed on screen is more apocalyptic in tone, and is embodied not only in films such as *The Last Winter* (2006), *The Happening* (2008), and *The Book of Eli* (2010), but also in Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), which serves as a touchstone for a wave of narratives that suggest that ‘the devastating effects predicted by Gore are not only underway, but unstoppable’ (p. 194). It is perhaps unsurprising, in this context, that the idea of nature’s revenge on humanity comes to be such a powerful wellspring of horror.

Nature itself is not the sole focus of the discussion, as human horrors also appear. In what may be the book’s most interesting argument, Murphy discusses the demonised figure of the ‘hillbilly’. Seen everywhere from H. P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Picture in the House’ (1924) to *Deliverance* (1972), the backwoods hillbilly serves as a representation of all that is rejected, or repressed, by ‘normal’ society. The imperative to construct strict, yet artificial, boundaries between whiteness and blackness (and the attendant civilisation/savagery binary) during slavery, Murphy argues, had the effect of creating a new racial category of ‘white trash’ associated with the ‘backwards’ past. The extremity of rural poverty in areas such as the southern Appalachian Mountains is exploited by ‘hillbilly horror’, which ‘depict[s]

² See also Tom J. Hillard, “‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’: An Essay on Gothic Nature”, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 16:4 (Autumn 2009), 686–95.

attractive, wholesome, middle-class outsiders who fall victim to clannish, insular, psychotic, and physically repellent backwoods/rural inhabitants' (p. 147). The simultaneous idealisation of some backwoods residents as remnants of self-sufficient early settlers, who live a family-orientated and God-fearing lifestyle, allows Murphy to use a structuralist approach, in that she categorises a broad range of these narratives within genre and cultural contexts. The supposed cannibalistic tendencies of hillbillies are explored, with this trope also being read as a displacement of mainstream anxieties. Cannibalistic appetite itself (often necessary for survival in the harsh conditions of early settlement, notably Jamestown) is related to Manifest Destiny and the ceaseless consumption characteristic of the capitalist system, which has led to the decimation of the environment. In this context, the mythical figure of the wendigo appears as a metaphor for this hunger, as seen in films such as *Ravenous* (1999). Overall, then, Murphy's approach to the material allows illuminating connections to be made between texts, while themes and character types that tend to be taken for granted by the reader or viewer are put solidly into context.

This approach can be seen throughout the book, where Murphy grapples with familiar archetypes from the world of literature, film, and television, and relates them convincingly to singular contexts from the formation and continuing development of American society. Nowhere is this offhand or general, but rather the comparative readings are rooted firmly in history and relevant references to contemporary documents, biblical narrative (particularly the Puritan interpretation), and mythology. At times this makes bedfellows of seemingly disparate topics, but always manages to convince. A notable example is Murphy's connection of 'captivity narratives' such as that by Mary Rowlandson (1682) with the figure of the 'Final Girl' as memorably described by Carol J. Clover in her influential critique of horror film, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1992). Both figures are seemingly vulnerable young women who are separated from their home and family, and thrust into unknown dangers, yet survive due to their resourcefulness and strength of character. Murphy herself points out the dangers of making too direct a link for 'reasons of historical and cultural accuracy' (p. 39), yet it is exactly these bold connections that make this book feel fresh and exciting, while the depth and accuracy of its scholarship is self-evident.

The scope of the book is so ambitious that it is difficult to boil down to one core thesis, but if such a unifying argument exists, it is based around the idea, as Murphy states in the introduction, that 'the Rural Gothic is characterised by negative encounters between individuals who have permanently settled in one place, and those who are defined by their mobility and lack of permanent relationship with the environment' (p. 10). This dichotomy

allows the author to make connections between colonial fears connected to the dispossession of native peoples (bringing to mind Hawthorne's eponymous Young Goodman Brown (1835), who fears that 'there may be a devilish Indian behind every tree!'³) and apocalyptic visions of complete social breakdown seen in so many contemporary narratives from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) to the ubiquitous zombie movie. *Rural Gothic* makes meaningful connections between all of the texts under consideration, offering fresh readings of familiar works, such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' (1948), and welcome reappraisals of those which have seen less scholarly attention than their cultural impact deserves, such as Thomas Tryon's *Harvest Home* (1973), and T. E. D. Klein's *The Ceremonies* (1984). It stands as a welcome contribution to an emerging field and as an informed, witty, and readable guide to texts that are often as unsettling and strange as their backwoods subject matter.

Kevin Corstorphine

Glen Whitman and James Dow (eds), *Economics of the Undead: Zombies, Vampires and the Dismal Science*
(Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014)

If there were to be an overarching theme to *Economics of the Undead: Zombies, Vampires and the Dismal Science*, it would probably be this: that the devil (or undead monster) you know is better than the devil you don't. Perhaps, the collection of essays suggests, it is time that we stop fearing the vampire and zombie for being unknown quantities, and embrace them on the one level where we can be equals: that of the market floor. For, as editors Glen Whitman and James Dow write in their introduction, '[i]f both parties get something valuable from [an] exchange — sustenance for the vampires, illicit thrills for the humans — then in theory, the monetary payments could go either way' (p. ix). In other words, if we meet the undead on a more even playing field, perhaps we won't have to keep running.

Basing their assertions on evidence provided by vampires and zombies from popular culture as disparate as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga (2005–08) and George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the economists and literary theorists featured in *Economics of the Undead* explore the real-world implications of the behaviours of the undead, thus

³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Young Goodman Brown', in *The Scarlet Letter and Selected Tales*, ed. by Thomas E. Connolly (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 315–30 (p. 316).

providing the reader with ways in which to benefit from their dalliances with the reanimated. Examples include improving vampire-hunting skills and farming zombies for profit. In the same vein as Max Brooks's seminal instruction manual, *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), the undead menace is discussed here in a completely deadpan manner throughout. 'When I was a kid', writes Dow, 'vampires didn't sparkle. Mostly they lived in earth-filled coffins and skulked around dank cellars, drinking human blood when they could and rat blood when they couldn't' (p. 77). Despite such disparaging remarks, essays are included on all topics relating to life with the re-animated: no issue is too big or too small.

On the more personal side there is 'Human Girls and Vampire Boys', in which Whitman outlines the optimum strategy to woo and win a paranormal beau by extrapolating from human-vampire relationships such as Bella and Edward of *Twilight* fame. Somewhat more practically, Michael E. O'Hara's 'Zombies as an Invasive Species: A Resource Economics Perspective' suggests ways in which zombies could be employed for the economic advantages of the still-living, including 'maintaining zombie hunting as a sustainable recreational sport' (p. 168). Matters of property law in *The Walking Dead* (2010–present) are raised in Brian Hollar's legally inclined essay 'Post-Apocalyptic Law: What Would the Reasonable Man Do in a World Gone Mad?' Indeed, the chapters all prove to be both as informative and entertaining as their titles are imaginative, and open up for the reader innovative new ways of considering the undead. 'Is there anyone', Eleanor Brown and Robert Prag speculate, 'who, possessed of zombification insurance, would analogously seek a zombie encounter?' (p. 94). 'How *did* the vampires get so rich', Dow asks, 'and more importantly, what lessons can human investors learn from them?' (p. 77). These are heady questions indeed, and ones that have remained unanswered for too long. The answers are frequently interesting (stage-four cancer patients, for example, might be tempted to seek a zombie encounter if insured, it is suggested) while not always necessarily practical (should human investors wish to follow the vampire example, a good starting point, we are told, would be immortality).

One potential criticism that could be levelled at the collection is that it relies too heavily on certain case studies to support its arguments. In particular, the TV series *The Walking Dead* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) are discussed *ad nauseum*. Certainly, these are staples of horror culture and thus deserve wide consideration. However, the current ubiquity of zombie and vampire narratives across all categories of popular media cannot be denied. As such, there seems to be little reason not to include essays focusing on a larger array of popular-culture products, even if simply to provide the reader with

recommendations for further reading and viewing. The collection also has a decidedly contemporary bias (notwithstanding the final essay, ‘Killing Time: *Dracula* and Social Discoordination’ by Hollis Robbins, which is a fantastic reading of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) as a struggle between natural time, governed by the sun and moon, and institutionalised Greenwich Mean Time). This is understandable but unfortunately leads to an omission of the influences of Mary Shelley and H. P. Lovecraft in the creation of the zombie narrative, to name but two.

Perhaps the best aspect of *Economics of the Undead* is that it links what is so often considered an escapist genre to the real world. As outlined above, many of the theories that are applied to the undead figures also have practical economic, social, and political applications. This is particularly highlighted in chapters like Daniel Farhat’s ‘Between Gods and Monsters: Reason, Instinct and the Artificial Vampire’, which demonstrates how algorithms can be used to predict future attacks from vampires (or indeed other intruders such as burglars), and ‘Eating Brains and Breaking Windows’ by Steven Horwitz and Sarah Skwire, which successfully deconstructs the argument that war (zombie or otherwise) can ever be economically advantageous. The reader is left in no doubt of the significance of horror literature in terms of wider social commentary.

Thus we are brought full circle, as the volume gives us a more complex sense of why vampire and zombie narratives resonate so deeply with the living. The undead clearly have much in common with us, whether that be the debate over the legal status of the zombie (should s/he be classified as wo/man or chattel?) or the vampire assessing the pros and cons of privatising her prey. All in all, this collection is a fascinating link between two subjects that are usually considered so disparate, and it is encouraging to think that there is so much scope for research such as this. Several mentions of ghosts and werewolves throughout suggest that there is room for further volumes on horror economics, while the collection also hints at the possibility of exploration into the economics of other genres like post-apocalyptic, dystopian, and fantasy fiction, film, and television.

Whitman, Dow, et al have certainly made a convincing argument for the relevance of undead workings in the field of economics. Recognising that a vampire can be persuaded to trade with the living rather than stealing their blood; having a sense of security under the terms of comprehensive zombification insurance; appreciating the fact that this dazzling creature in front of you might just be your new Tinder date — the volume encourages us to ponder these scenarios and more. *Economics of the Undead: Zombies, Vampires and the*

Dismal Science permits the reader to rest easy in the knowledge that their next graveyard encounter with the supernatural will be decidedly less one-sided.

Sarah Cullen

Fred Botting, *Gothic: Second Edition*
(Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014)

At the end of the first edition of *Gothic* (1996), Fred Botting declared the probable death of gothic. In support of this view, he cited Francis Ford Coppola's version of *Dracula* (1992) and its romantic humanisation of the monster. Almost twenty years later, he has revised this somewhat drastic announcement for the second edition of *Gothic*. Of all the recent developments and proliferations of the genre, Botting finds, somewhat unexpectedly, that the phenomenon corresponding most closely to traditional ideas of gothic monstrosity is Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005–08). In Botting's view, the novels' conservative values, hinging on prohibition and desire, resurrect key gothic features that were previously put to death by Gary Oldman's turn as lovesick Dracula, which attributed human emotions to the gothic monster. In Meyer's *Twilight*, by contrast, the vampire once more acts as 'an agent of conservative morality' (p. 201).

As part of Routledge's 'New Critical Idiom' series, *Gothic* has been a valuable introduction and companion for the student of or newcomer to gothic studies for almost twenty years. This updated, heavily revised edition offers a completely re-drafted introduction, and two new chapters tracing the developments of the genre in the twentieth and twenty-first century, as well as more or less extensive additions which give greater space to American gothic, women writers, and film. However, despite the cover's announcement that it also provides updates in relation to media and technology, these are brushed over rather than dealt with in any depth. Considering the vast sweep of material that this introduction covers, this is hardly surprising and a fuller treatment may have been too much to expect. The wealth of information and knowledge that Botting presents in this short volume is still very impressive and he has amended some omissions from the previous edition. Thus Richard Marsh's best-selling *The Beetle* (1897), which has received much more scholarly attention in recent years, now finds mention. Most importantly, *Gothic* now features an Index and a Further Reading section divided by chapters. This should prove very helpful for anyone

interested in a more in-depth study of any gothic work or the gothic more generally in a certain period. As was the case in the first edition, Botting does not refer to secondary sources within the text and, for someone not versed in the relevant scholarship, it might prove difficult to discern what has influenced and contributed to the way gothic is introduced in this volume. On the other hand, it avoids overwhelming the reader by too many references and sources, and maintains a succinct and consistent tone and style, which is easy to follow. The author also successfully situates each period he discusses within its cultural context and refers to contemporaneous literary criticism, often by writers whose fiction he also introduces, and thus creates a vivid picture of the germination and understanding of gothic literature at various points in time. In this expanded edition, new texts are included and others are discussed in more detail, which is conducive to a better understanding of individual authors and their relation to the gothic than the limited space of the previous edition allowed for.

In the new introduction, titled 'Negative Aesthetics', the author uses a much clearer structure than previously. Jumping repeatedly and without chronological order between outlining key elements of the genre and its chronological development, the first edition's introduction was rather confusing. In the new version, Botting first describes key characteristics of the gothic under the term 'Darkness', by which he means anything opposed to light, reason, and Enlightenment, or, put more positively, '[n]ot tied to a natural order of things as defined by realism, gothic flights of imagination suggest supernatural possibility, mystery, magic, wonder and monstrosity' (p. 2). He then introduces theoretical frameworks for reading the gothic in the section called 'Negativity'. Here, he pays particular attention to the ideas of monstrosity, transgression, and the crossing of boundaries. Two further sections briefly sketch the transformations of the genre through time and gothic criticism to date. All in all, this new introduction gives a succinct and brief overview of the important features and developments of gothic literature and criticism, and sets the tone for the following chapters, which delineate the transformations of the gothic from its origins to the twenty-first century.

Apart from some minor additions and alterations, Chapters 2 to 7 remain relatively unchanged. Once we reach the twentieth century, however, Botting includes two completely new chapters. Chapter 8, 'Phantomodernisms', traces developments from the beginning of the twentieth century up to World War II, and demonstrates how gothic became more diffused and less defined during this period. In particular, he asserts, newer art forms such as film often adopted a gothic mode. This new chapter is much more coherent and focused than the previous edition's final chapter, which tried to bridge the entire twentieth century in considerably less space. In Chapter 9, Botting returns to his guiding idea of monstrosity, aptly

calling the chapter ‘Consuming Monsters’. However, as he convincingly argues, the traditional idea of the gothic monster is no longer adequate in a post-war world where monsters have come to represent the underdog, and where the Other has gradually taken on positive associations. Moreover, Botting explains how, in the second half of the twentieth century, gothic has proliferated in a variety of new media forms, such as comics, cartoons, music, and video games. He justly suggests that, especially in more recent years, this repetitive recycling of gothic monsters has led to an overfamiliarity and subsequent loss of significance. While this argument is compelling, his otherwise excellent control over a wealth of material reaches its limits in this final chapter, in which, despite his assertions, he remains focused on fiction, film, and TV and does not discuss other media forms in any detail.

As this indicates, just as is the case with the first edition, *Gothic* is sometimes too compact to be useful for a first-time student unfamiliar with the genre. It is certainly a good introduction which allows readers to gain a broad overview of the gothic, but anyone looking for detailed analyses or in-depth discussion of any particular period or text will need to find this elsewhere. A revision was needed and this edition succeeds on that account: as it illustrates, gothic has proven resilient and transformative, and has enjoyed a boom of popular interest, be it via vampires, werewolves, witches, or zombies. The genre is by no means dead, but has continuously found new forms and functions, as Botting demonstrates with this new, lucid, and well-structured edition of *Gothic*, which will surely prove as valuable a companion for any researcher of the gothic as its first edition has.

Laura Habbe

David J. Jones, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern: Desire, Eroticism and Literary Visibilities from Byron to Bram Stoker*
(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

The efforts to understand cinema as one stage of a much longer history of projected media have fertile implications for scholars of horror and the gothic, especially in terms of the fearful potential of the magic lantern (sometimes known as ‘the Lantern of Fear’) and its ancillary media. David J. Jones’s *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern* is an excellent source for anyone interested in such explorations. Jones furthers the work of scholars like Terry Castle, Laurent Mannoni, and Mervyn Heard, which recovers the place of the magic lantern and the phantasmagoria in media history, and takes this narrative in new directions in

a book less about lantern practice itself than how the lantern took its place in the stock of modern media metaphors, especially literary ones.

As his title implies, Jones emphasises the close allegiance between sex and death. The shadowy, ghostly images of lantern projections proved not only available to gloomy meditations on death, but also to eroticism (the frankly pornographic lantern slides that Jones reproduces will be instructive to many). Indeed, lanternic imagery is often evoked in literature at the juncture of gothicism and eroticism. A set of ‘lanternist sexual codes’ (p. 203), Jones argues, provided gothic writers with a set of stock images and scenarios that could be transferred from the lantern to the page while retaining a powerful set of implications.

It is with the classic seduction sequence from *Dracula* (1897), in which Jonathan Harker is accosted by a set of three vampire women, that *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern* begins, and it may be a revelation for students of *Dracula* to learn the significance of those lines comparing the vampires’ laughter to the ‘intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand’ (qtd. p. 4), which harkens back to a similar image in Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819–23), when the title character has a forbidden encounter with a Spanish woman disguised as a friar. Jones asks, ‘why is the sound of fingers on glass evoked in texts at either end of the nineteenth century so readily or even at all in these dark evocations of transgressive sexual encounters? [...] Was there something in this unearthly, tantalising sound which contemporaries understood as a cue for fear and erotic frisson, part of a great submerged shared cultural heritage which readers in the twenty-first century have lost?’ (p. 5). These are compelling questions and provide an ideal entry point into Jones’s project of unearthing lost contexts and restoring the magic lantern’s status in the history of media.

Jones eventually returns to *Dracula* and its less-frequently discussed semi-sister novel, Stoker’s *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909), as one of his case studies of the ‘lanternicity’ of nineteenth-century literature. Earlier chapters explore the lanternic qualities of other literary works, including Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Lord Byron’s *Cain* (1821), *Manfred* (1817), and *Don Juan*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), and J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872). Jones’s characterisation of Carmilla herself as ‘a character [who] flickers seductively between picture, corporeal presence, vaporous absence and dreams, and passes through those quick alterations repeatedly and ambiguously’ (p. 147) and the novella itself as ‘the literary equivalent of a phantasmagoria show’ (p. 142) is particularly provocative, and useful in terms of Le Fanu’s shadowy representation of lesbianism. Jones locates these works

within a history traceable back to lanternists like Georg Schröpfer and Philipstal, shaping that history to recover the currents of eroticism in the gloomy spectacles of the phantasmagoria and its descendants. Jones pays particular attention to the ways in which stock gothic scenarios familiar from lanterns — including the Matthew Lewis-derived ‘Bleeding Nun’ and the rape of a woman by a demon — appear and reappear in literary works. In the book’s conclusion, Jones discusses the lantern-influenced neo-gothic works of dramatist Len Jenkin, visual artist Kara Walker, and graphic novelist Guido Crepax, and the continuing tendency to deploy magic lantern codes with respect, especially, to eroticism.

While these elements work very well, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern* includes a rhetorical framing device about cinema, especially horror cinema, that is less fully realised. The introduction links debates about the cinematicity of literature to questions of lanternicity, and raises the fact that authors like William Peter Blatty, Stephen King, and Ira Levin frequently reference cinema in their horror novels; the influence of cinema on these and other literary works is manifest and undeniable, and provides an analogue to help us understand how lanterns influenced literature in previous centuries. This much is a point well observed. When the conclusion returns to this subject, Jones notes that the rape scene in Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* not only harkens back to a familiar horrific/erotic lantern scene (the rape of a young woman by a demon mentioned above) but is full of cinematic and newsreel imagery. Jones notes that the book was, of course, adapted by Roman Polanski in 1968, but, rather disappointingly, does not discuss how the scene adapts to the screen. This is illustrative of the way in which, while Jones discusses the survival of certain stock lantern images into cinema, he does so in a rather cursory fashion, and devotes just one paragraph to the literal presence of magic lanterns in films; one of the most prominent, Ingmar Bergman’s *The Magician* (1958), goes unmentioned. It is particularly surprising to find only a few isolated references to Georges Méliès, whose *La Lanterne magique* (1903) features a gigantic magic lantern and whose entire body of work is full of resonances with lantern practice.

It seems unfair to critique the book for not being something it doesn’t claim to be, but I hope some other scholar finds a way to employ the very useful concept of ‘lanternicity’ to explore the survival of the gothic magic lantern in cinema. As it is, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern* should prove a valuable read for scholars of representations of the supernatural, for the history of projected media, for the gothic, and for historians of pornography as well.

Murray Leeder

Charles L. Crow (ed.) *A Companion to American Gothic*
(New Jersey: Wiley and Sons, 2014)

In *A Companion to American Gothic*, Charles L. Crow contributes to the field of gothic American literary studies by answering, expanding, and contributing to many of the questions which have been raised in previous years concerning the gothic. What constitutes American gothic? What are the parameters that separate Southern gothic from the rest of the topics covering the genre? How has the figure of the vampire evolved, and specifically, how does the American vampire distinguish itself from the other types of vampires throughout the centuries and across geographical boundaries? Extensive debate concerning all these questions and more can be found in the volume. The volume is unified by an ambitious, yet successful, purpose: it compiles almost every possible subject concerning American gothic and explains each one thoroughly, giving the reader an updated, convenient compilation of the topics that have constituted the genre throughout the years, and still do, and have raised debates about it. This book is therefore vital for scholars working not only on the gothic, but also on broader aspects of American literature. Crow's introduction gives the reader a clear sense of what the book is and does; moreover, this volume has 42 chapters and at the end of each chapter, there are four sections: cross-references, notes, references, and further reading, which are especially helpful to scholars. Crow selects important essays by leading scholars and classifies them into seven parts: 'Theorizing American Gothic', 'Origins of American Gothic', 'Classic American Gothic and its Legacies,' 'American Gothic and Race', 'Gothic Modern and Postmodern', 'Gothic in Other Media', and 'American Gothic and World Gothic'. These interesting categories serve as receptacles for almost every possible topic present in American gothic, and more specifically its literary aspects, since its very beginnings. Unfortunately, however, due to the 587 pages that comprise the volume, this review will only be able to give a detailed consideration of a small number of essays within the collection, those which stand out as being particularly representative of American gothic scholarship.

In Part I, David Punter opens his essay 'Gothic, Theory, Dream' by situating the gothic as representing American otherness, specifically in the form of forgotten history, trauma, and repetition. Punter theorises on what constitutes American gothic, mentioning, among other concepts, the contrast between the wilderness and settlement, the 'infatuation'

with the past, and the links between the two. He reminds us that ‘the Gothic is infatuated with the past [...] but it is also infatuated with the possibility that the past can be laid to rest’ (p. 23). This assertion serves as a useful introduction to Part II, and to one of its most noteworthy essays, ‘Early American Gothic Drama’ by Benjamin F. Fisher. American gothic drama has been a neglected field of enquiry, and Fisher argues for greater critical attention on early-American gothic plays, just as his counterpart Jeffrey N. Cox has demanded more attention for the British gothic plays of the same period. Fisher asserts that some critics such as Arthur Hobson Quinn have failed to use the term properly in their approaches to the texts, perhaps because they considered the gothic mode as ‘insignificant, worth little or no scholarly attention’ (p. 99). Fisher writes that the term ‘Gothic’ has only been properly applied to dramatic texts in recent years, having previously been termed ‘tragedy’ or ‘romantic tragedy’. Fisher’s research demonstrates that Dunlap’s *The Fatal Deception* (1794) is the first gothic American play, therefore making a valuable contribution to how we understand the history of this genre. Since American gothic cannot be understood without the ‘Dark Romantics’, which play a leading role in the genre’s most illustrious years, Part III includes an essential contribution, ‘Descendentalism and the Dark Romantics’ by Ted Billy. This chapter briefly covers Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville, and examines how Transcendentalism influenced their works. Billy provides strong evidence that American Transcendentalists and European Dark Romantics share more similarities in their philosophical outlooks than has hitherto been supposed. Billy sees Hawthorne’s ambiguity as analogous to the Dark Romantics’ attitudes towards nature, individualism, and reform; the Dark Romantics, he writes, ‘realized that nature has its perils, individualism has its excesses, and social reform has its limitations’ (p. 162). Moreover, Billy suggests that Poe was influenced by — yet harsh in his criticism towards — Transcendentalism; and, as Transcendentalists did, he too highlighted the innate hyper-subjectivity of human nature which is very present in the writings of this group. As Billy argues, Transcendentalists similarly commended the infinite within oneself, and, like Poe, employed organic metaphors to demonstrate how all entities are interconnected.

Part IV elaborates upon the close ties that American gothic has with issues surrounding racial difference. In Chapter 19, ‘Gothic Transgressions: Charles W. Chesnutt, *Conjure*, and the Law’, Justin D. Edwards covers Chesnutt’s writings on the United States during the post-Civil-War era. Chesnutt’s writings, Edwards argues, depict white men as demonic characters and highlight how the law lacks transparency to underscore other recent legal issues. What Edwards wants to clarify is that the gothic in this context is used to

highlight the issues of slavery and the times when the supposed permanent boundaries between blackness and whiteness become blurred, and that ‘any judgment about a person’s innocence or guilt [...] needs to move beyond racial hierarchies and identity politics to develop a more nuanced approach to crime and punishment’ (p. 245), punishment here being understood as a part of law enforcement during the post-Civil-War era.

Part V includes Ronja Vieth’s exceptional chapter on Cormac McCarthy and his gothic of guilt, boldly reconciling McCarthy’s oeuvre with American gothic literature, although McCarthy’s gothicism is rarely acknowledged by critics, and supplying powerful insights and views that have usually been left out of the existing scholarship. Another gem is William Hughes’s ‘Sexuality and the Twentieth-Century American Vampire’, which focuses on works by Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite. Hughes argues that the vampire has always been the perfect tool by which to express ‘the myriad and conflicting cultural implications of human sexual activity and identity’ (p. 341) and that all undead must come with an additional sexual secret. He further claims that what has been said throughout the years about the vampire is no longer radical, asserting specifically that America’s cultural heterosexism makes the gay vampire a mainstream figure, and that the vampire sometimes represents a palimpsest of the gay man. Therefore, something new that breaks the norms and challenges the canon must come into the equation, another turn of the screw to the already twisted vampire sexuality. In this same line of transgression, Hughes also underlines how child vampires, as sexual beings, as queer figures, and as predators, transgress the normally accepted notions of childhood.

In Part VII, the essay ‘Fluid Bodies’ by Antonio Alcalá González highlights the rise of Latin-American gothic, with specific attention to the works of Carlos Fuentes. Alcalá González studies past and present gothic short stories, avoiding Fuentes’s masterpiece *Aura* in an attempt to draw attention to Fuentes’s other, shorter works. He suggests that Fuentes uses the gothic to shed light on the forgotten past that has made Mexico what it is now, and therefore affirms that Mexico can only plan a future if it confronts its repressed past. Specifically, in an attempt to ‘Mexicanise’ the gothic, Alcalá González positions Fuentes as focusing on houses as representatives of the typical architecture of Mexican gothic. In this context, Alcalá González refers to the city as a ‘monster of concrete and asphalt’ and states that ‘the events that take place inside it are also monstrous’ (p. 537). Indeed, he uses the gothic motif of the lurking monster to explain how an analogy between a house possessed by spirits, and a city possessed by traumas of the past, works in this innovative context.

As all of this implies, '[t]he Gothic is now seen as essential to understanding [American] literature' (p. xviii), a point made by Crow in the preface. For those willing to gain this understanding, this is, consequently, a formidable collection of essays covering an ample range of topics, from its origins to its legacies; touching upon postmodernity, Transcendentalism, race, film, media, and even American gothic as an influence on later gothic in other countries. This volume is, therefore, a 'must' for current and future specialists in American gothic, a field that still has considerable scope for exploration, and whose many works, starting with the early ones that helped establish a basis for the genre, await further consideration.

Cristina Perez

Alison Peirse, *After Dracula: The 1930s Horror Film*
(London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013)

Alison Peirse's intent in this book is to turn the spotlight of critical attention away from the two US films (both dating from 1931) that inaugurated 1930s horror — Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* — and towards other, more neglected examples of the genre from that decade. Although her book only specifies *Dracula* in its title, the shadow cast by *Frankenstein* is just as long, as her analysis of those other films shows. The range of films considered tracks across a wider variety of horror subjects (*White Zombie* of 1932, 'the first zombie film' (p. 60), is particularly interesting, given the recent ubiquity on film and television of lurching flesh-eaters), and she goes well beyond the Universal Studios line in the US to 1930s examples of the genre from France and England. The latter is particularly unusual, given that critics associated with the British horror film such as David Pirie (whose classic study, *Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema, 1946–1972* (1973), has recently been updated and expanded by the same publisher) have argued that the form only emerged in the 1950s.

After Dracula does not declare a single theoretical approach. Reacting to what she describes as an immersion in critical theory while studying film in the UK, Peirse determines to shy away from it here, though she is not above resorting to psychoanalytic theory when discussing her one vampire film, Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1929). There is a consistent and welcome interest in gender throughout the volume, not only in relation to women in the

horror film, but also to the relationship between the men who vie over them, frequently with a homoerotic sub-text. The one female monster is the panther woman in 1932's *The Island of Lost Souls*, whose 'passion, agency and ferocity' (p. 38) make her virtually unique in that decade. Peirse throughout pays detailed attention to the publicity surrounding the making of these films and the reviews they garnered upon release. Her approach pays off handsomely in relation to *The Island of Lost Souls*: the 19-year-old Chicagoan, Kathleen Burke, the focus of much of the pre-release publicity as the panther woman, is elbowed aside by the film reviewers, who concentrate almost exclusively on Charles Laughton's performance as Doctor Moreau.

These films and more are satisfyingly treated in *After Dracula* in a range of chapters focusing on individual works and the issues they raise. What the interested reader first has to do, however, is to keep their interest alive through the short and unsatisfactory introduction. For one thing, Peirse ducks any definition of the horror genre; the remark that the films she analyses 'do remarkable, despicable, often supernatural and frequently murderous things on screen' (p. 8) is as close as she comes. Secondly, she claims there were no horror films before the arrival of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in 1931, to which one is entitled to ask: what of the German Expressionist classics like Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and the formidable array of grotesques portrayed on screen by Lon Chaney? Peirse seeks to defend her claim by saying that the term 'horror film' was not in circulation until the early 1930s; but the act of criticism would not have got far had it not learned to deploy critical terms where and when it saw fit, rather than await their historic emergence.

Thankfully, in practice, Peirse *does* make meaningful connection with these 1920s precursors, such as when she shows how the publicity surrounding the extensive makeup regime to which Jack Pierce subjected Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster and the Mummy drew on similar stories concerning Chaney's elaborate physical transformations. It was salutary to be reminded that Chaney had been signed to appear as Dracula before his sudden death and replacement by Bela Lugosi. Nonetheless, why does she not stay with the decade rather than insisting on 1936 as the cut-off point? Is there not Rowland Lee's 1939 *Son of Frankenstein*, with Karloff, Lugosi, and Basil Rathbone, not to mention the 1940s cycle inaugurated by Lon Chaney Junior as the Wolfman? Peirse sees a dilution of the genre occurring with the arrival of the draconian Production Code in 1936, which did away with the frequent displays of disrobing heroines on which the villains and the camera linger, and with increasingly sadistic scenes as the films unfold. And, certainly, *Son of Frankenstein* is a rather anaemic and sanitised thing when put beside James Whale's two florid predecessors,

Frankenstein and 1935's *The Bride of Frankenstein*. But the evidence overall is against Peirse, in that it suggests strongly that the genre continued throughout the 1930s and well into the 1940s, before expiring in 1948 with *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

More broadly, the title of Peirse's study, *After Dracula*, has a rich ambiguity, which her subsequent analysis highlights. The films she considers not only come historically and chronologically after *Dracula* (and *Frankenstein*), but she also acknowledges the considerable shadows these two films cast in a variety of ways. Sets are reused, most likely on economic grounds, but their recognisability also feeds into the complex role that memory plays in the works themselves. And a good many of the films she considers have either Karloff or Lugosi in a leading role and, in one memorable instance, Edgar G. Ulmer's 1934 *The Black Cat*, both of them. The actors extend their range in these films: Bela Lugosi effectively deploys a black sense of humour absent from his Transylvanian count and Karloff gets a good deal more to say in his lisping English tones than he ever did as Frankenstein's monster. Notwithstanding, the films frequently reference the two men's most famous creations, as when Lugosi's eyes are lit up in *White Zombie*, 'a repeat of his glowing eyes in *Dracula*' (p. 71), or when Karloff adopts a stiff, lurching walk in 1934's *The Ghoul*. During this decade, the two stars appear to enjoy equal status, as opposed to the 1940s when Karloff continued in lead roles whereas Lugosi was often reduced to a scene or two. Both were seeking to inhabit new roles, but with mixed success. When they appear together in *The Black Cat*, Karloff has no problem vocally or facially in playing the villain. But Lugosi's persona complicates his 'good guy' role; as Peirse notes, he 'may be polite and well-dressed, but his slicked back dark hair, heavily shadowed eyes and thick Eastern European accent' (p. 107) cannot but recall *Dracula*.

What is fascinating to observe across the book is how such binaries break down. In gender terms, there is often a sexual complicity between the two male leads; at first, the villain is in pursuit of the beautiful heroine but, once she has been rendered passive (unconscious, hypnotised, in a trance), the sexual interest turns to the alpha male who is seeking to rescue her and who comes to confront the villain. In *White Zombie*, for instance, Bela Lugosi whispers something into the hero's ear which the audience never gets to hear or share. Peirse writes that 'the scene is explicitly homoerotic' as 'the two men touch and whisper. Beaumont's frightened [response] "no, not that" can be read as a rebellion against Legendre's [the Lugosi character's] suggestion that, in order to have Madeline, Beaumont must relinquish himself body *and* soul' (p.70, emphasis in original).

The most interesting breakdown of binaries is between the Hollywood horror films, heavily plot driven and generic, and the European avant-garde represented here by Dreyer's *Vampyr*. The latter was made in France and follows a very different aesthetic, more dream-like and meditative, much less focused on plot and character. But a good many of the European filmmakers, especially from Germany, emigrated to Hollywood in the early 1930s, and a number of them worked on horror films. The director of *The Black Cat*, Edgar G. Ulmer, for instance, had been a set designer for Max Reinhardt's theatre in Berlin and had worked on *The Golem* (1920). As Peirse notes, 'German expressionism infiltrates the set design' of Ulmer's *The Black Cat* in its art-deco modernist setting, strikingly different from the gothic (and clichéd) haunted house. Instead of dark shadows and gothic buttresses, *The Black Cat* foregrounds a glass and steel house with 'gleaming floor and long Corbusier ribbon windows' (p. 106). Similarly, when Michael Balcon tried to stimulate a native horror-film industry in Britain in the 1930s, one of his first moves was to woo back British film actors who had made it big in Hollywood, including Karloff, of course, but also Claude Rains, star of 1932's *The Invisible Man*. But their appearance in these British films perversely required much to be made of those Hollywood antecedents. Karloff in *The Ghoul* appears particularly wearied by the now over-familiar horror moves expected of him; and, as Peirse rightly notes, the film is stolen from him by the masterful camp of Ernest Thesiger, who was promptly signed up to appear with Karloff back in Hollywood in *Bride of Frankenstein*, itself directed by the expatriate British film director, James Whale. Britain would have to await the coming of its two home-grown stars, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, in the 1950s before it would see its true horror-film efflorescence. Indeed, the Hammer versions were more distinctive and less hybrid than earlier attempts at British horror, not least because Universal insisted they steer clear of imitating Karloff and Lugosi's iconic appearance.

As all of this is meant to suggest, Alison Peirse's strength is in close reading, both of the filmic texts and of the immediate historic contexts of publicity and review. What she shows in a variety of fascinating ways is the hybridity of the horror film, its contaminating impurities. Although these 1930s examples of the genre are not as 'forgotten' as Peirse claims in her introduction — *The Island of Lost Souls* has been notorious since its first release — they are the more memorable after her detailed and incisive analysis.

Anthony Roche

Jessica Robinson, *Life Lessons from Slasher Films*
(Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012)

Life Lessons from Slasher Films offers a detailed analysis of some of the founding texts of a subgenre that won over thousands of fans during the 1970s and 1980s, producing a long series of sequels and, recently, of remakes. Jessica Robinson defines slasher films by means of reference to Adam Rockoff's list of their seven constitutive elements, such as the use of the killer's point of view and his/her preferential choice of a sharp and penetrating weapon. The author explains the ideas involved very clearly, using comprehensible language, which makes this book easily accessible to any reader. This is immediately evident from the brief initial section providing the synopses of the films, detailing the year of release, the various characters' names and the basic plots, and focusing the reader's attention on their 'slasher' elements. The list includes, among others, genre 'classics' such as *Black Christmas* (1974), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and *Scream* (1996), though the author is very precise in pointing out the differences between the plot elements of the various films. The six chapters are titled according to a specific lesson that slasher films could teach us, although, by the beginning of the first chapter, readers have not been fully introduced to their contents yet.

The first lesson ('The past will catch up with you') addresses the traumatic events motivating the killers' malevolent actions and, specifically, their attempts to recreate a conservative past in the present, although Robinson emphasises that such a past actually never existed and is only an ideal construction that stems from 'a culture that only existed within their minds' (p. 15). As in all of the following chapters, Robinson's analysis is rigorously and coherently conducted with reference to all of the films under examination. Unfortunately, this can sometimes generate repetitiveness, especially in the last two chapters, which apply again the arguments elaborated in the previous chapters to the modern remakes.

The second lesson ('Listen to your elders') focuses on the figures of the adults, arguing that the killers are surrogate authority figures who take the place of absent or ineffectual parents, and who act (through obsessive-compulsive behaviour that implies a projection of their own neuroses) as representatives of the ideals of a repressive culture. Robinson associates killers with the allegorical demons and bogeymen represented in fairy tales, seeing them 'as an instructive device to teach children the proper ways to act within a culture' (p. 31). The ritualised actions of the killers, the author argues, are intended to re-

produce a static society passing down from the past its values, morals, and ideals. This is opposed by the Final Characters who refuse to be part of such a repetition.

Lesson three ('Learn from your mistakes') reverses the perspective by considering the teen years as a rite of passage from childhood and into adult society and maturity. In order to complete such a rite, teens have to be removed from parental control and must be placed in a realm where time does not matter or is suspended — an argument that is resumed in the fifth and sixth chapters. Particular focus is given to the relationship between the teens' practice of (deviant) sexual behaviour and the undermining of social regulations on the one hand, and their chances for survival on the other. Most interestingly, Robinson affirms that the characters' gender liminality and their ability to combine both masculine and feminine traits as well as to mix work and play (or seriousness and facetiousness) are decisive for the outcome of the fights.

The fourth lesson ('Never feel sympathy for the killer') deals again with the traumatic events constituting the basis for the murderous actions and dysfunctional life of the various villains — motivations that the audience, according to Robinson, sometimes takes for granted or that it receives passively. Robinson further demonstrates that the differences between the original versions of the films and the remakes produced between 2003 and 2010 consist mainly in the latter's exploration of the villains' pasts, in which the family unit assumes fundamental importance, as a source for the trauma (as in Rob Zombie's *Halloween* (2007)) or as supportive of the murderous actions — as in both *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and its 2003 remake.

The author's argument may sometimes appear to be simplistic to an expert of the horror genre, as when reducing the killers' motivations to mere hostility to sexual practice or to affection towards a parental figure (as is the case, she claims, with Jason in Steve Miner's *Friday the 13th: Part 2* (1981) and Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)). However, previously published critics' arguments are well embedded in the main text and offer a good support of the author's thesis, although there are no references to the current academic debate on 'remakes' and their relationship with the original sources.¹ Only in the fifth chapter ('Teens never learn') are the differences that have been introduced by the modern versions of the films explained in terms of a process of defamiliarisation intended to

¹ Useful sources on the subjects are: *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Jennifer Forrester and Leonard R. Koos, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

upset the audience's expectations — undoubtedly an original argument. The volume could also have made use of more illustrations and film stills to exhibit further the author's arguments, and would also have benefitted from a more detailed study of individual scenes, including the *mise en scène*, camera angles and framing, or the use of lighting and sets.

Nevertheless, *Life Lessons from Slasher Films* eviscerates the slasher films' characteristics and exposes them in front of the reader, just as the works linger on the gruesome and gory particulars of the victims' wounds for the pleasure and horror of the spectators.

Antonio Sanna

Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition*

(Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013)

Simply because of its subject matter, Eric Parisot's book would be a much-needed contribution to the field, even if it were not the insightful and thoughtful exploration of the topic that it is. 'Graveyard poetry', a poetic moment that sits uneasily between the Augustans and the Romantics, is an area that has seen little attention in recent years. Meditating on mortality, and of what might be learned of the soul in conversing with the dead, it is a genre often mentioned in passing, relegated to the periphery of gothic, sentimental, or Romantic literature, or as a footnote in cultural histories of death and mourning. A full-length study, centred on the in-depth reading of key texts, is therefore a welcome addition to the study of eighteenth-century literature.

Parisot focuses closely on Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), and Thomas Gray's *Elegy* (1751). This comes as little surprise for those conversant with the subject, but it is important to be clear that elucidating the 'mid-eighteenth-century poetic condition' of the title entails here a discussion of the context that gave birth to these poems rather than a grand survey of the (relatively small) graveyard genre. The foundation of Parisot's study is what the author sees as the period's declining public piety in favour of private religious meditation, and the role of reading within this. The book's first chapter, on the 'theology of poetic salvation', discusses the period's debate over scriptural authority, the role of faith in individual salvation, and the nature of the soul's moral character after death. Though the author recognises the challenge offered to mainstream

religious thought by Natural Religionists, Parisot presents here what is arguably only a simple dichotomy between ‘Protestant’ and Catholic understandings of death, the soul, and the afterlife. In neglecting the very real divisions between the various Dissenting creeds, the Church of Scotland, and the established Church of England, the study fails to address the significance of cultural differences in religious belief and practice that (at the very least) distinguish Blair from his Episcopalian peers.

Parisot’s chapter on Blair does not neglect the poet’s Calvinism, however, and the author argues that *The Grave* represents Blair’s (ultimately unsuccessful) struggle to reconcile the doctrine of salvation by faith alone with the authority and value of poetry. Parisot asserts that

The poem itself is self-reflexively critiqued as both ephemeral and apocryphal and is presented as a self-sacrificing expression engulfed by its own grave, simultaneously exposing a suspicion of the didactic authority of the poet as a purveyor of self-instruction. (p. 73)

‘What remains’, writes Parisot, ‘is the sense of loss and absence, the subjective experience of death itself’ (p. 74).

Conversely, the author sees Young’s *Night Thoughts* as ‘an argument for the necessity of faith in poetic works’ (p. 8). Like Blair, Young seeks knowledge of the divine in consultation with the dead. Also like Blair, Young ‘resigns his poetic will and text in deference to the unknowable Almighty’ (p. 103). Where Young goes beyond his predecessor, Parisot argues, is in claiming a poetic authority that derives from the poet’s self-positioning as an active conduit for divine and poetic revelation (p. 102).

For Parisot, however, graveyard poetry’s achievement culminates in Gray’s pursuit of an autonomous poetic authority, not merely seeking to learn from the dead, but to assume their status as both a source of spiritual truth and as an object of commemoration. The author contrasts the passive endurance imagined in Gray’s early unpublished draft ‘Stanzas Wrote in a Country Church-Yard’ with the *Elegy*’s willing acceptance of death. Parisot argues that, through suicide, the elegist attains poetic agency and authority. The author invokes both Adam Smith’s theory of the impartial spectator and Hume’s sympathetic contagion, in a reading of the *Elegy* that ties poetic immortality to the creation of emotional affect. As he states,

In successfully cultivating sentimental response, ensuring perpetual reading and negotiating a tangible social being, the *Elegy*, and the elegist, achieve the

highest office of undying poetic originality. For the elegist, and for Gray, poetic apotheosis is complete. (p. 151)

Parisot's study holds up the *Elegy* as both end and pinnacle to the genre. The author seems to position graveyard poetry as a bridge between the devotional poetry of the early eighteenth century and the sentimentalism of the later, with Gray representing a breakthrough moment; he therefore sees such works as striving 'to imaginatively recreate the experience of death rather than to peer down upon the truths of the grave from the safety of the living world' (p. 154). I am inclined to criticise the implicit teleology of Parisot's argument. The author makes a persuasive case that the three 'greats' of the genre each stretch towards an idea of which only Gray fully takes hold, but Parisot appears to continue from this insight to the point of claiming the *Elegy* as a major cultural pivot. As receptive as we might be to such a claim, in the light of Parisot's argument, the implication from this is that graveyard poetry's literary significance rests on its value as a link between cultural moments. For those of us who regard the idea of artistic 'evolution' with some scepticism, it is a sandy foundation for the genre's stature.

These criticisms may appear tougher than they are meant. There is much to praise in Parisot's book, from its engagement with the literary theory of the eighteenth century to its review of over two centuries of secondary criticism. Most importantly, *Graveyard Poetry* is an intelligently argued work of textual and historical criticism that explores an often-neglected field of literature — the sort of work that is an asset to any library, and one that addresses a now conspicuous gap in the field.

Richard Gough Thomas
