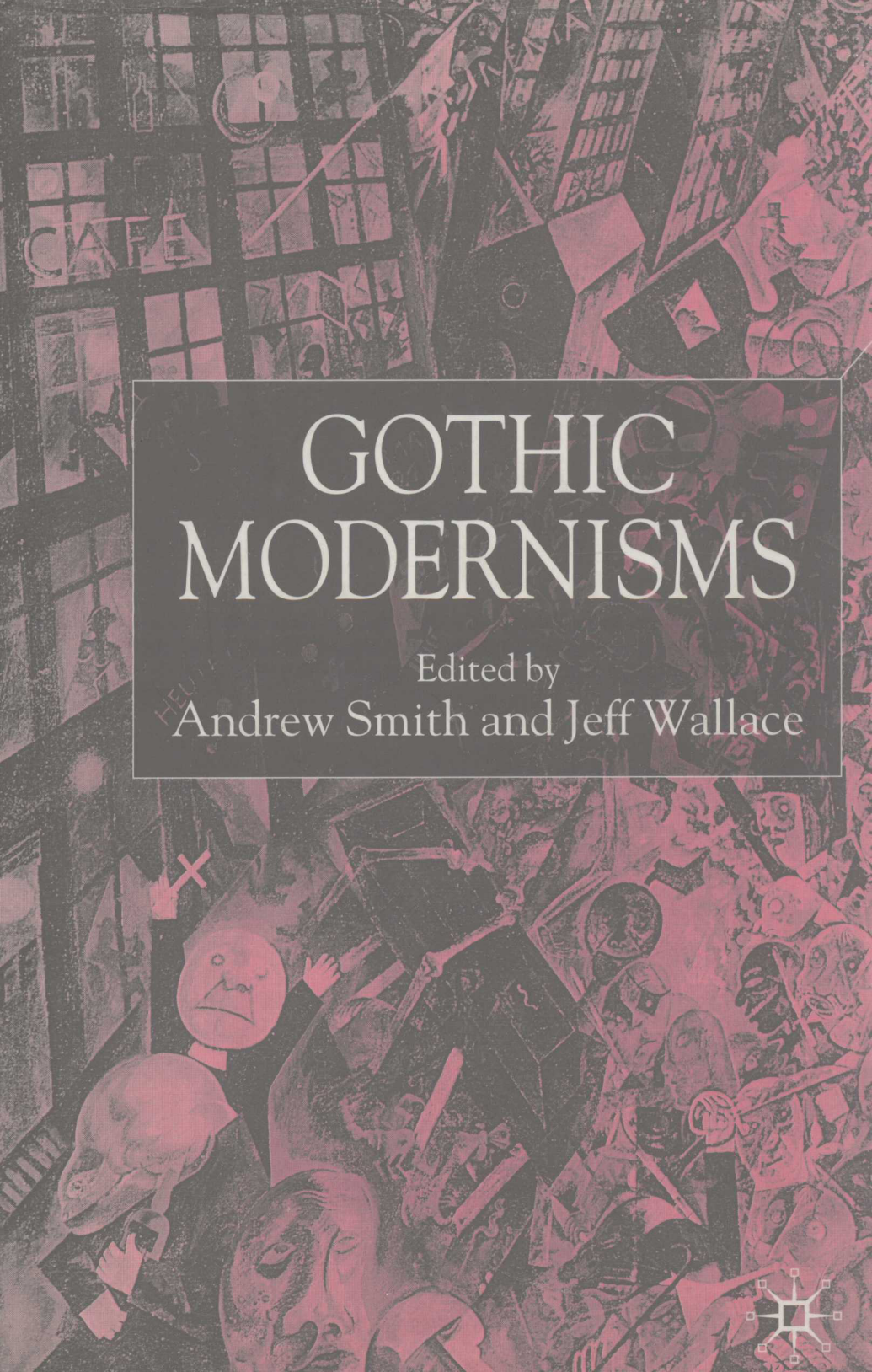

GOTHIC MODERNISMS

Edited by

Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace

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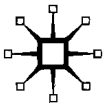

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Sue Zlosnik graduated in Government from LSE and went on to postgraduate work in literature at the Universities of Cardiff and Manchester. She is now Associate Dean of Arts at Liverpool Hope University College. Her long-established research partnership with Avril Horner has produced two books (most recently, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* [1997]). They are currently working on *Gothic and the Comic Turn*.

Contents

Introduction: Gothic Modernisms: History, Culture and Aesthetics

Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace

The connections between modernism and the Gothic have largely been overlooked in studies of the Gothic and in modernist scholarship. Given the Gothic's appeal to a mass readership and modernism's associations with elite culture, such oversights seem initially justifiable. However, this is to ignore modernism's fascination with the everyday, as witnessed for example in two seminal high modernist achievements of 1922, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*; and it is to ignore the mutual obsession of the Gothic and the modernist with the rapidly changing relationship between culture and the quotidian. The refrain from T. S. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' – 'In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo' (1. 13–14) – illuminates one aspect of such a relationship.[1] The lines form a misogynistic image of women gossiping about a mode of culture which they do not understand; but the paradox is that such an image of cultural exclusion is both celebrated and breached by a modernist aesthetic which glimpses in the everyday, not a decline of cultural authority, but rather its rhetorical and image bearing status. In transforming Michelangelo into mass experience, mass culture both captures the essence of a cultural commonality and symbolically represents an attachment to a more profound world of longing, fear and nostalgia – a world, in other words, of Gothic dimensions.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* develops a different strand of the connection between culture and common experience: 'He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss. Here. Put a pin in that chap, will you? My tablets.'[2] Registered here is not only the stock vampiric iconography of bats, storms and stakings, but also the link with writing and so with culture. The description is a gloss on what Jonathan Harker in *Dracula* (1897) notes in his diary at Castle Dracula:

> Up to now I never quite knew what Shakespeare meant when he made Hamlet say:–
> 'My tablets! quick, my tablets!
> 'Tis meet that I put it down.'[3]

Harker's misquotation is itself revealing; the actual lines from *Hamlet* are:

> My tables, – meet it is I set it down
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain
> (Act I, Scene V, 107–8).[4]

A sentiment of duplicity which both captures the spirit of the Count's vampiric yet dandified demeanour, and the ambitions of a certain kind of writing which entertains the absurd in order to raise questions about reality. It is this process, or quest, which brings together the Gothic and the modernist text in their mutual search for a world of meaning which needs to be both recorded and affirmed, although via an employment of symbolism which privileges culture as the space where such debates take place.

The stylistic spirit of adventure in *Dracula* itself seems to anticipate a modernist aesthetic. As Kelly Hurley maintains in this volume, British literary modernism is indebted to an innovative, anti-realist tradition inaugurated in the popular fiction of the *fin de siècle* – Gothic Horror, sensation fiction, science fiction. *Dracula*'s use of diary extracts, newspaper cuttings and letters evidences an interest in the material here-and-now that is further underlined by reference to modish technologies such as a voice recorder and Kodak cameras. These images of the modern are, of course, threatened by the Count who represents an older, darker world. But the modernist cry of 'Make it New!' is ever apparent in a novel which manifestly finds its way into Eliot's *Waste Land*:

> A woman drew her long black hair out tight
> And fiddled whisper music on those strings
> And bats with baby faces in the violet light
> Whistled, and beat their wings
> And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
> And upside down in air were towers
> Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
> And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted
> Wells (v. 1.377–85)

This recontextualising of the Gothic within Eliot's myth of modern decay and dislocation highlights a further area of contention. In France in particular, the roots of modernism can be found in the Gothic's images of perversion and disorder. Peter Nicholls has explored the influence of the fantastical tales of Gautier on French modernism[5]; the influence of Poe's tales of horror and suspense on writers such as Maupassant and Baudelaire is already well known, and the impress of this French tradition on the early work of Eliot is equally clearly established. But W. J. McCormack's description of *Dracula*'s 'modernism' as 'a pre-emptive counter-revolution' against modernism because of its ultimate faith in moral absolutes and linguistic certainties, must surely also require revision, because it overlooks the fact that the model of desire proposed by Stoker's novel actually challenges the idea of certainty.[6] Gothic text and modernist text are joined, that is to say, by their fascination with the potential erosion of moral value, and with the forms that amorality can take.

The interest in the amoral is historically grounded in a series of shared knowledges between the late Victorian Gothic and the modernist text. Theories of degeneration, for example, had a cultural prominence throughout the late Victorian and the early twentieth-century period. The idea that civilisation was threatened by the possibilities of atavistic reversion are developed in works such as R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and, in an instance which combines an image of physical decline with aesthetics, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).[7] Several of the essays in this volume allude to the role of discourses of degeneration in the Gothic modernist text; while Kelly Hurley, for example, identifies monstrosity and 'abhuman' transfiguration as central post-Darwinian elements in late Victorian popular Gothic texts such as those of W. H. Hodgson, Andrew Smith finds degeneration at work in a 'canonical' text of proto-modernism, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913). Lawrence's work, along with that of James Joyce and Djuna Barnes for example, exhibits a fascination with the body, its desires and functions. In both modernist and popular discourses, the body can seem to promise authentic personal identity, yet is ghosted by a sense of something potentially alien and strange. Anxieties about the physical health of the collective body – human species, race, nation-state, culture – become anxieties about the idea of the self.

The emergence of psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century was already foreshadowed in the Gothic's own images of perversion,

transgression and the forbidden. Nascent theories of desire to be found in the work of Freud were also being developed within the field of sexology within Britain at around the same time. The sense that the subject is not in possession of itself, because riven with desires which motivated it in telling if obscure ways, was always a key element of the images of compulsion that were at the heart of Gothic transgressions. Psychoanalysis, in other words, has the aura of the Gothic about it: Robert Young has recently maintained, for example, that '*The Interpretation of Dreams* was a Gothic novel', playfully arguing thereby for the essentially tautological nature of 'Freudian' interpretations of *Dracula*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.[8] It is thus not fortuitous that Freud's influential account of fear and desire, 'The Uncanny', was generated by a reading of a Gothic text, Hoffmann's 'The Sandman'.

Gothic and modernist instabilities thus have a complex relationship to each other. Images of the unstable self deriving from psychoanalysis bore an important influence on modernist representation of the self. Also, the modernist claim that the world can be understood through our symbolic connections to it supports the Freudian preoccupation with the placing of the body in culture, and suggests the inherently symbolic attachments which govern our relationships to others. Crucially, it is through writing (and symbolism) that such truths about the self are revealed. For modernists, as for Freud, fiction becomes the lie which tells the truth. As Harker mentions in the concluding 'Note' to *Dracula*:

> We were struck with the fact that, in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document! nothing but a mass of type-writing [. . .] We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story.
>
> (p. 378)

Doubt here is not denial, rather it is the case that Harker is struck by the very materiality of writing and representation, a concern which modernism comes to share with the Gothic.

The present volume thus seeks to address the relative neglect of the connections between Gothic and modernist in literary-historical scholarship – a neglect which in itself remains difficult to account for. Perhaps a clue lies in Marshall Berman's controversial re-ordering of modernist chronology. In comparison with the ceaseless play of contraries

to be found in nineteenth-century modernist thinkers such as Marx and Nietzsche, Berman finds in early twentieth-century modernism 'a radical flattening of perspective and shrinkage of imaginative range'.[9] Does the promise of unfolding technological progress, and unambiguous futurity, become so overwhelming that it swamps the dialectical subtlety of an earlier understanding of modernity – one which could appreciate, for example, that 'some very important kinds of human feeling are dying, even as machines are coming to life' (p. 25)? It is revealing, however, that Berman's sole illustration of this uncritical celebration or embrace of the modern is to be found in Italian Futurism. By contrast, two essays here insist that it is precisely in and through the confrontation with the idealised 'new' that an effect of spectrality, of the Other which haunts progress and presence, is produced. This specifically Gothicist modernism is located by David Glover in the issue of time in early modernist texts, the 'muddied temporality' of *Heart of Darkness* and *The Inheritors* attesting to the radical inability of modernism to have done with the past. David Punter, ranging widely, locates the spectrality effect at the level of style and form: beneath the aspiration to transparency there is always that Other which cannot be detached, the trace and proliferation of the 'unimaginable twin' or of Elizabeth Bowen's 'shadowy third'.

In addition, Berman's over-simplified distinction – the death of human feeling, the birth of machines – needs to be reassessed via the emergence of film, a technology of narrative or representation peculiar to modernism. Terry Castle has suggested, for example, that film, following photography, instantiates the spectralising habit of modernity itself, attesting to 'our compulsive need, since the mid-nineteenth century, to invent machines that mimic and reinforce the image-producing powers of consciousness'.[10] It is not, then, the death of human feeling over which cinema presides, but the transmutation of it, according to a historical logic whose origins coincide with the Gothic narratives of the late eighteenth century. Curiously, however, Castle's analysis reminds us of D. H. Lawrence's shrill anxieties about modern cinema-going, which he similarly saw as complicit with the growing spectrality of the human subject. The final two essays in this volume indicate that no study of Gothic modernism would be complete without an assessment of the role of film in the representation and construction of modern subjectivity.

David Punter in 'Hungry Ghosts and Foreign Bodies' examines the work of three writers, all of whom awkwardly straddle the boundaries of the modernist project: Walter de la Mare, Elizabeth Bowen and T. S. Eliot.

What Punter explores is not how modernism is ghosted by a tradition of writing but rather modernism's inbuilt sense of its own surpassing, and so the possibility that it is itself haunted by a half-imaginable future. Punter argues that this sense of the ephemeral is linked to the Gothic through a fascination with the 'foreign body', a body which is hatching and yet imperfectly glimpsed. Punter explores a series of liminal images and concludes that such images become lodged, through a Gothic paradox, within the very heart of modernism itself. Punter is one of the leading theorists of the Gothic and his essay makes an important contribution to theorising the link between modernism and its Gothic legacy.

David Glover, in '"The Spectrality Effect" in Early Modernism' explores two transitional texts: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Ford Madox Ford's *The Inheritors* (1901), arguing that each text evidences a complex relationship to popular genres. Their use of the Imperial Gothic and Scientific Romance reveals a crisis in historical confidence, a sense that the final culmination of the civilising process may be a higher form of barbarism. Glover argues that the incursions of the Gothic into English modernism mark the point at which the cumulative impact of liberal modernity upon traditional cultural forms begins to unleash an uncontainable and radically disruptive reaction, leaving behind an eerie kind of partial amnesia, or what the narrator of *The Inheritors* calls 'a memory of confusion'. Glover's essay provides a significant reassessment of how this use of the Gothic suggests that modernist texts plot the future as a potentially new form of calamity that recapitulates, yet also dramatically reconfigures, the worst features of the past.

David Seed, in '"Psychical" Cases: Transformations of the Supernatural in Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair', takes as his starting point Virginia Woolf's famous review of Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, where Woolf emphasises that the importance of the Gothic lies in its attempt to evoke a transcendental 'sense of the unseen'. Seed explores how Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair use the supernatural as a means to problematise perception in their short stories. Seed explores how they construct enigmatic objects and extreme psychological states without any of the traditional Gothic trappings. Seed accounts for how modernist notions of terror are indebted to a Gothic vernacular which is then transcended in an attempt to replace it with the specifically modern.

Judith Wilt, in 'The Ghost and the Omnibus: the Gothic Virginia Woolf' argues that Woolf used the Gothic in order to provide her

writing with images which suggest a shattering of consciousness and the dissolving of rational boundaries which lie at the heart of the modernist project. Wilt examines how the Gothic furnishes a model of haunting in Woolf's novels: hauntings which demonstrate the fragility of the modernist self. Wilt argues that Woolf formulates a world of emanations and apparitions, one in which the Gothic figure of the ghost is pervasive and complex: the ghost as privilege and punishment, the ghost exorcised and incarnate, the ghost single and the ghost as a multiple complex entity. Significantly, Wilt positions Woolf's work within a wider modernist framework in order to illustrate how Woolf's images of the Gothic differ from other writers' use of the Gothic tradition.

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, in 'Strolling in the Dark: Gothic Flânerie in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*', explore how *Nightwood* (1936) blurs generic boundaries between prose and poetry, linear narratives and dream visions. The novel's story also represents the rejection of conventional boundaries. The novel destabilises, amongst others, the boundaries between Jew and Gentile, masculine and feminine, human and animal, sane and insane. The novel's model of transgression is indebted to the Gothic. Moreover the novel reassesses the modernist concern with the city. Whereas writers such as Eliot, Joyce and Woolf represent the city as a space for mobility (hence the flâneur), Barnes portrays it as a Gothic labyrinth. The various European capitals featured in the novel are indistinguishable as urban spaces and function merely as sites for interior experiences: the reader passing through a series of claustrophobic rooms which represent the irrationality of the interior mind. What is at issue here is the defining of the female flâneur, and its relationship to the Gothic. Horner and Zlosnik's article teases out the novel's Gothic references but also makes a unique reassessment of the city space within modernist fiction.

Deborah Tyler-Bennett, in '"Thick Within Our Hair": Djuna Barnes's Gothic Lovers' argues that the Gothic is a vital element of Barnes's writing. The focus in this chapter is on the representation of lovers across a range of Barnes's poetry, short stories and novels. Tyler-Bennett argues that Barnes's lovers echo images of Gothic lovers to be found in the work of Coleridge, Le Fanu and Stoker. She argues that Barnes's work combines modernist perspectives on gender with a distinctly Gothic vocabulary concerning trysts between living lovers and dead 'beloveds'. Additionally she argues that various scenes in *Nightwood* are indebted to *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Nosferatu*. Such an argument gives testimony to the complex Gothic presence in Barnes's writing as well as acknowledging the experimentally modernist aesthetic in her work, one

which can only be properly appreciated through this examination of the Gothic.

In '"The stern task of living": *Dubliners*, Clerks, Money and Modernism', Jeff Wallace explores the economics of Joyce's Gothic modernism. Like contemporaries such as Woolf and Forster, Joyce evinces a fascination with those figures, typified by the clerk, whose lives are an enigmatic struggle for survival, to 'keep body and soul together'. Instrumental in the ghostly automatism of the *Dubliners* (1914) stories is an economic system, along the lines of Marx's 'vampiric' capital, which creates predatory, devouring relationships, moral vacancy or uncertainty, and alienated subjectivities. However, Wallace argues, the stories are equally distanced from any vitalistic or 'vivocentric' alternatives to money. They offer instead an unidealised analysis of life and death within the closed economic circuit, and contribute to the developed, comic celebration of the posthuman subject within such circuits in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* (1938). Wallace thus provides an important reassessment of the Gothic inheritance in Joyce's work.

Kelly Hurley, in 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', explores how Hodgson's experiments with a variety of anti-realist narrative techniques work to fracture conventional constructions of human identity. Hodgson uses post-Darwinian ideas within a framework of Gothic horror to create a variety of posthuman subjects, conceived as species hybrids or as the product of human degeneration. Hurley largely concentrates on Hodgson's *The Night Land* (1912), arguing that its monsters owe a debt to both *Dracula* and *The Time Machine* (1895). Hurley concludes that the novel's sometimes hysterical affirmation of a restabilised and 'sound' human identity contrasts with its unabashed pleasure in the elaboration of its monstrosities. Hurley's essay explores a relatively neglected writer and puts him at the centre of the modernist debate concerning the limits of subjectivity.

Andrew Smith, in 'Vampirism, Masculinity and Degeneracy: D. H. Lawrence's Modernist Gothic', places Lawrence's work in the context of late nineteenth-century theories of degeneration. Lawrence develops these theories through a range of Gothic images in his work. Most typically the figure of the vampire haunts his fiction. The vampire is associated with desire but also with degeneracy and decadence. Lawrence thus uses covert images of vampirism in order to make comment on issues such as class, sexuality, and masculinity and femininity. Lawrence also links the figure of the vampire to a fear of syphilis which