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The Gothic Horror Novel

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The topic of politics and genre fiction is fraught territory to explore. Very often the charge of a work being 'political' is used pejoratively, but reveals more about the critic than intended; in this case it is likely that it simply does not align with their own politics. In discussions of Gothic horror fiction the fields of gender, race, and class are often the subject of critical attention, with the assumption that this can reveal social 'anxieties.' A certain tendency in academia has been to cast individual texts in binary political terms such as reactionary/progressive, or conservative/liberal. None of this is necessarily reflective of the inherent complexity of an individual author's politics and how this translates into storytelling, and if anything might undermine the claim of any given work's aspiration towards terms like 'art' or 'literature', reflective of the expression of a unique vision. Debates about the role of the novel within mass culture and the idea of 'popular' as a fiction category are thus bound up with a discussion of politics and horror. This chapter will explore some of the ways in which American horror novels have been placed within politics and how we might assess their evolving content and critical interpretation. The term 'Gothic' is used here to denote a continuation of a European publishing phenomenon that arose (not entirely coincidentally) with the period of the United States founding as a republic. Novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) presented a faux-medieval setting replete with supernatural suggestion or actual events. Fred Botting ties the 'Gothic fascination with a past of chivalry, violence, magical being and malevolent aristocrats'¹ to the political upheavals characteristic of the late eighteenth century, specifically the French Revolution (and to which we might add the American). The notion of Gothic, Botting writes, 'resonates as much with anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past.'² The aesthetics of the Gothic changed in the move to the New World, with authors such as Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne, as Alan Lloyd-Smith points out, 'substituting the wilderness and the city for the subterranean rooms and corridors of the monastery, or the remote house for the castle.'³ More than this, however, 'certain unique cultural pressures led Americans to the Gothic as an expression of their very different conditions.'⁴ These pressures, which might include the legacy of Puritan attitudes to sexuality and human nature, as well as a cultural guilt over Native American genocide and African slavery, have led Leslie Fiedler to make the startling assertion that 'the American novel is pre-eminently a novel of terror'⁵ and that even 'our classic literature is a literature of horror for boys.'⁶

Fiedler's charge against the whole of American letters is perhaps a wider matter, but the assumption remains that the Gothic genre, which moves through the magazine tradition of the weird tale in the early twentieth century and repackaged as the horror novel in the later half, is inherently juvenile and sensationalist. Where the British Gothic novel had been associated with a corrupting influence on the minds of young women, the American horror tradition moves in the twentieth century towards a presumed (but not always valid) association with young men. Dale Bailey, for example, claims that 'males under the age of thirty or so [...] form the primary audience for the kind of fiction publishers market as horror.'⁷ Darryl Jones likewise points out that 'operating at one perceived limit of popular culture, horror is often characterized as a debased if not unhealthy genre.'⁸ This, however, does not preclude the possibility of a political reading of the Gothic. Jones

cites the Marquis de Sade's 1800 description of the Gothic novel as 'the necessary fruit of the revolutionary tremors felt by the whole of Europe,'⁹ explaining that:

[N]ot only is de Sade referring to what has become a traditional conception of the Gothic novel as an ideologically and aesthetically radical or revolutionary form in which societal taboos are examined and violated [...] but also to the ways in which the systems, not only of thought and identity but ultimately of power and government, which were to shape late eighteenth-century political history insinuate themselves into Gothic novels.¹⁰

If the content of the Gothic novel is transgressive, however, that does not necessarily imply that it takes a political stance, but instead may simply reflect contemporary political construction of identity, here specifically the portrayal of a fantastical and barbarous Catholic Europe. This in turn 'allowed a British audience conversely to identify itself as Protestant, rational, ordered, stable, and modern.'¹¹ If the same logic and trajectory can be extended to the American context, then it should likewise be possible to use the form as a gauge of national feeling, however fantastical the events might seem. Despite the sophistication of many readings of Gothic short stories and novels, and the recognition of its often-profound insights, for example of human psychology in Poe, the lurid sensationalism of much Gothic writing is inherently suited to a popular audience, and should not be discounted when thinking about the relationship between literature and politics.

Lloyd-Smith puts the tension between disreputability and popularity at the heart of a history of Gothic in the United States:

Widely reviled as infantile, depraved, and potentially corrupting, American Gothic appealed to the popular audience in a rapidly growing readership, itself a consequence of private circulating libraries, the development of cheap printing methods, and an explosive growth in magazine production and consumption at the beginning of the nineteenth century [...] a concern with the behavior of the people, the dominant political force in the new American democracy, increased general interest in what had been dismissed as below polite consideration.¹²

The American Gothic, then, is rooted in the democratic project of the United States itself, and its concerns reflective of this new form of society. The focus of the Gothic, in a process that continues throughout the twentieth century, is turned towards the violent, aberrant, and grotesque in everyday life, as opposed to the exotic locales of the British Gothic novel, bound up in a Romantic fascination with travel, ruins, and the aesthetics of the sublime. What though, is the political implication of the American Gothic, besides a focus on the demos itself (rather than a corrupt aristocratic or monastic elite), and what kind of political order does it endorse? To return to the set of binary political oppositions set up earlier, Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall have posited the original Gothic novels as actually falling in neither of these camps: 'although Gothic Criticism wishes such novels to be excitingly subversive or, failing that, to be scandalously reactionary, the sad truth is that they are just tamely humanitarian: they creditably encourage respect for women's property rights, and they imply that rape, arbitrary imprisonment and torture are, on the whole, a bad thing.'¹³

If this translates across the Atlantic, then the American Gothic novel might be, if not strictly bourgeois, then what the twentieth-century's most successful practitioner of the form, Stephen King, has called 'neither more nor less than an agent of the status quo.'¹⁴ He specifically invokes US politics by claiming that 'monstrosity fascinates us because it appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within all of us. We love and need the concept of monstrosity

because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings.¹⁵ King's own writing does tend to reinscribe the essential rightness of 'American' values such as family, decency, and hard work, but only after spectacularly disturbing them through monstrosity that is often quite insidiously woven into 'normal' American life. Glennis Byron writes of Victorian novels such as Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, where 'evil is sinuously curled around the very heart of the respectable middle-class norm.'¹⁶ Similarly, for King, evil is both fantastical and banal at the same time, and in his world the evils of bullying and abuse are as likely to appear as the supernatural forces they are imaginatively aligned with. King's assumptions about politics are those of his baby boomer generation: injustice is bad, but the fundamental order of American society is not irredeemable. Jones, citing King's autobiographical *On Writing* (2000), notes that 'in Stephen King's cultural imagination, it is forever about 1961, or should be, and he is very aware of his own propensity for both anti-authoritarianism and nostalgia: "In my character, a kind of wildness and a deep conservatism are wound together like hair in a braid."¹⁷ King's novels are prolific and varied, but the 'typical' King storyline features a case of troubled but essentially decent people banding together to defeat some kind of evil, either newly emergent in society or representative of some ancient force. King's status in the publishing phenomenon of the horror novel as well as his wider cultural presence make his work essential to understanding twentieth-century American Gothic horror, but his political stance, while a useful yardstick, is not the only way to look at the genre. Examples of his work will be examined in more specific detail later in this chapter, but it is first important to take a more chronological look at the development of the American Gothic horror novel across the twentieth century, as well as some relevant parallel developments in American politics.

Twentieth-century American Gothic horror and its critical reception have both been bound up with psychoanalytic theory, particularly the Freudian notion of the return of the repressed, which lends itself easily to a literature of haunted places and imaginations. Jerrold E. Hogle credits Fiedler with using Freud to lend credibility to writing previously dismissed as unworthy of critical attention. Hogle, however, also notes how it was Marxist theory that allowed Fiedler to view the American mind as still 'haunted' by the Old World political hierarchies that it had overthrown. Citing Anna Sonser, he points out how this critical tradition has made 'both past and recent examples of US Gothic show, under a hyperfictional guise, that "American identity always comes back to social relations that are simultaneously economic and cultural."¹⁸ At the start of the twentieth century, the prime economic and cultural issue facing the United States, as expressed in Gothic literary productions, was that of the failure of Reconstruction. Authors like Poe (albeit not an explicitly political writer) had provided a template for what would become termed the Southern Gothic, which would become the dominant critical reference point for the term 'Gothic' in the US, at least when applied to respected literary forms. While there was a parallel thriving tradition of what is now often termed 'weird' fiction (after H.P. Lovecraft's definition), this was largely associated with the pulp magazine press. The Southern Gothic, on the other hand, intersected in more obvious ways with contemporary literary fashions, most prominently modernism, and is the mode most readily associated with the novel form. As Charles L. Crow points out, 'the modernist project, with its experiments in time and consciousness, was well suited to Southern Gothic's concern with history and guilt.'¹⁹ The South's secession from the Union and the question of racial politics following emancipation allowed authors like William Faulkner and Erskine Cardwell to write intensely specific and personal novels that nonetheless showed the traces of a contested past.

Writing on these authors, Louis Palmer suggests 'that we see the form of Southern Gothic that emerges in the 1930s as a liminal discourse, one that occupies a space between solidly defined locations of class and race. Furthermore, it is a discourse that, like its medieval counterpart, the

original Gothic art, uses the body as a grotesque signifier for material conditions.²⁰ Faulkner especially, 'deliberately appropriated the Gothic tradition'²¹ in a novel like *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), which features a manor house metaphorically haunted by the ghosts of the past, family secrets (specifically racial mixing), incest, and murder. Nonetheless the effect is not one of horror as such. Discussing the character of Quentin, who witnesses the burning of the Sutpen manor and the deaths of those within, Max Putzel writes that 'If the Gothic tale is intended to make us shiver deliciously at some imagined horror, that is certainly not what we feel as Quentin lies shaking bone-chilled in his dormitory bed.'²² Faulkner's writing is centered on the human specificity as well as a broader engagement with the identity of the South. Ambrose Bierce, in his short 'The Death of Halpin Frayser' (1891), describes how his protagonist 'grew to such manhood as is attainable by a Southerner who does not care which way elections go.'²³ Bierce's satirical comment is an important reminder that the Southern Gothic, even decades later, cannot be anything but political. Southern Gothic frequently links the past to the present, and portrays the attempt to move forward as frequently impossible, even if necessary. Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952) tackles the subject of religion in this way, as war veteran Hazel Motes sets himself up as a preacher in his new 'Church without Christ' in an attempt to abandon the notions of sin and guilt. It descends into a grotesque, and distinctly Gothic, chain of events that involves murder and self-blinding. The relationship between the Southern Gothic and what we define as a Gothic horror novel is a complex one, and the Southern Gothic mode continues to feed into the genealogy of horror. Despite this, the Southern Gothic remains a distinct form characterized by themes drawn from classic Gothic, but retains a quality (or aspiration) to high literary form, complex characterization, and social commentary as essential elements. It can be distinguished from the sensationalist, exploitative, and escapist characteristics of what we might call the horror novel.

While Southern Gothic continues to influence the aesthetics and tone of popular fiction, as well as film and television, and has notable literary descendants, for example in the work of Cormac McCarthy, the horror novel has been formed from a different stream of the American Gothic tradition. In the United States especially, the Gothic found its natural home in the nineteenth century in periodicals, where the short story form condensed the narrative but also enabled great inventiveness in the hands of the best writers, such as Poe. In the first half of the twentieth century, horror became somewhat split from literary culture, notably modernism, although the connections between the themes and techniques of the authors concerned continue to be reexamined. Both responded to a rapidly-changing world, and to the necessary political upheavals brought about by a century of war and the collapse of the great European empires. These changes, of course, would put the United States at the forefront of global politics, but the fear and loathing engendered by any change can be seen in horror writing, particularly that of H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft published few novel-length works, and even those were serialized and can only really qualify as novellas, such as *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) and the posthumously-published *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1941). Nonetheless, it is essential to consider the influence his work has had on subsequent authors, who have adopted not only the specifics of his 'weird' style of writing, but a world view that impacts on the politics of their fiction. Discerning these politics is a task that often falls to the literary historian, to infer from the author's personal beliefs the political leaning of the fiction, or to analysis of the fiction itself in context. In the case of Lovecraft this has caused considerable friction between critics who have claimed that Lovecraft was a xenophobe and racist, impacting on a reading of his work, and those that argue, as prominent Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi has consistently insisted, that he should be judged simply as a man of his time. This strikes at a core issue in examining the horror novel and politics: whether the very existence in the text of a monstrous 'Other' is inherently a

political representation, or if it can be seen as either simply fantastical or appealing to some primal fear, universal to humankind.

Lovecraft's racial prejudice has been much noted, particularly in the context of his private correspondence, although also in early poetry and in short stories such as 'He' (1926), where the lack of whiteness evident in a New York undergoing immigration is portrayed as inherently horrific:

The throngs of people that seethed through the flume-like streets were squat, swarthy strangers with hardened faces and narrow eyes, shrewd strangers without dreams and without kinship to the scenes about them, who could never mean aught to a blue-eyed man of the old folk, with the love of fair green lanes and white New England village steeples in his heart.²⁴

The fear of New York City and the immigrants that impacted on its changing dynamics at the start of the twentieth century lines up with Lovecraft's own life and views, and in this case the fiction can reasonably be read as reflective of his nativist and conservative politics. Michel Houellebecq reads this as feeding directly into his paranoid invocation of place: 'a fundamental figure in his body of work – the idea of a grand, titanic city, in whose foundations crawl repugnant nightmare beings.'²⁵ Like Joshi, Houellebecq (whose own novels attack both liberalism and corporatization) attempts to distance this attitude from a specific manifestation of racism and towards a generalized misanthropy. The fear of sinister non-white Others and an appeal to a rural idyll of blue-eyed white folk, however, is clearly very difficult to separate from the racial politics of Germany at the time (with Lovecraft expressing an early admiration for Hitler), and of course a segregated and often nativist United States. Elsewhere in his work, there is a consistent fear of racial mixing, notably in 'The Shadow over Innsmouth' (1936), where villagers of a small New England town are found to have been interbreeding with fish-like creatures known as 'Deep Ones,' producing a distinct 'Innsmouth look.'²⁶ The parallels with contemporary eugenics and notions of racial purity are not only clear but in fact directly addressed in the text with references to influence from 'queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else,'²⁷ leading Steffan Wöll to read the village as 'a signifier for the crisis of the American immigrant society and melting pot narratives of the 1920s.'²⁸

It is important to note the enormous influence of Lovecraft on subsequent horror authors, because of the way that these aesthetics and sentiments feed through so strongly, for example in the abject terrors of an author like Stephen King. The novel *It* (1986), for example, centers around a malevolent evil threatening the small town of Derry, Maine. Most prominently appearing in the form of a clown called Pennywise, the creature is actually a shapeshifter, and originally from outer space, echoing Lovecraft's immensely powerful and malign alien beings such as the iconic creature of 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928). If the mythology of the horror novel is rooted in early twentieth-century fears of invasion and miscegenation, then this presents a deep challenge to its claims to a kind of benign, even apolitical, liberal humanism. Despite the shadow he casts over American horror, Lovecraft is only one author, and the tendency towards a fearful Othering goes back further in the Gothic horror tradition. Tabish Khair argues that the Gothic, originating in a well-educated and cosmopolitan social scene in eighteenth-century England, was largely about the ways in which these authors responded to 'a world of many invasions, ambiguities, uncertainties, all of which were brought home to them not only by their knowledge of Empire but also by the physical presence of Empire in metropolitan spaces in England.'²⁹ Thus, the non-white Other becomes a locus of fear, even if this fear is displaced into fantastical forms of monstrosity. It is perhaps because of this characteristic of the Gothic mode that while it does not always engage overtly with political discussions, social change and questions of identity and belonging are never far below the surface of its seemingly escapist narratives.

The horror novel as a distinct entity arises in the post-War United States as a response to the social and political circumstances of the time. Cold War fears of a Communist invasion, either physical or ideological, are evident in popular films of the time, for example *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), where the invading enemy replaces humans with alien 'pod people'. The film can be read as an allegory for the Soviet threat, or conversely for the stifling social conformity that arose in the US in opposition to it. Horror novels too, in juggling their role as genre fiction and as a response to the social conditions they arise within, often show an ambivalent attitude. Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) is a good example of this. Ostensibly a vampire novel, it is filled with racially coded undertones that reflect its writing at the cusp of the Civil Rights era. *I Am Legend* takes its cue from the blending of Science Fiction and horror that characterized weird fiction, giving pseudo-scientific explanations for the vampire myth and grounding it in a world built up around the character of its protagonist, Robert Neville. Tormented by the death of his wife and daughter, and seemingly alone, Neville barricades himself in his house at night and goes on daytime missions to destroy as many vampires as he can while they sleep. The threshold of Neville's house becomes not only a physical barrier but an ideological one, a barrier against contamination, not so much by the vampire plague as he is immune, but by what the infected humans represent. The way Neville is described gives some clues as to what he might be afraid of:

He was a tall man, thirty-six, born of English-German stock, his features undistinguished except for the long, determined mouth and the bright blue of his eyes, which moved now over the charred ruins of the houses on each side of his. He'd burned them down to prevent *them* from jumping on his roof from the adjacent ones.³⁰

Especially in the immediate post-war period, it is difficult to claim such a purposefully Aryan hero as an ideologically neutral protagonist. Not only that, but the inflected '*them*' in this context is more usually seen in implied racist discourse. In addition, the vampires are continually categorised by Neville as 'dark' or 'black', despite them being described elsewhere as bloodless and pale. Early on in the novel Neville feels dejected: 'He sank down on the couch and sat there, shaking his head slowly. It was no use; they'd beaten him, the black bastards had beaten him.'³¹ In the end, Neville is captured by a group of vampires who have developed a medication to curb their symptoms, and who have come to see him as the true monster, due to his daytime killing sprees. If we do read Neville's story as one of the dominant order of white supremacy being replaced by a new one, then it is one that the narrative tentatively embraces, or at least portrays as inevitable: 'and the dark men dragged his lifeless body from the house. Into the night. Into the world that was theirs and no longer his.'³²

If horror tends to avoid taking a direct political stance, it does at least cling to a certain reliance on conservative values in order to set up a dichotomy of normal vs monstrous in the text. As US society moved in the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the most successful horror novels dramatized these conflicts in oblique yet spectacular fashion. As young Americans protested the Vietnam War, racial injustice, and restrictive sexual mores, mainstream horror novels moved away from the speculative excesses of the weird tradition (which continued to flourish in cult fandom and comic books) and drew on older American obsessions with the intrusion of evil into the everyday. In one direction of this impulse, a novel like Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959), gives a secular vision of evil. Here, seemingly mild-mannered Norman Bates has developed a split personality, internalizing a twisted version of his mother's persona, driving him to murder. Bates, like the tired motel he runs, situated on a stretch of road outdated by the construction of the new interstate highways, is trapped in an old value system that no longer serves him in a changing world. His shame over his lack of a nuclear family and his own sexuality are what mark him out as deviant. Similarly, Shirley

Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), has its protagonist Eleanor Vance driven insane by an inability to take advantage of the possibilities opening up for a young woman in American society, and driven instead to a dangerous identification with a seemingly haunted house. The idea that someone might be dangerously different, but living among us, is clearly tied to Cold War fears of subversion, but also hark back to nineteenth-century Gothic writing. Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835) depicts a young man going into the forest at night and discovering that his respectable Puritan community is engaged in Devil worship at night. This is something he has been complicit in through his motivations from the start, but he is nonetheless disturbed to find that his peers, and specifically his wife, have been involved in this heresy all along. Hawthorne's short story is ambiguous in its presentation of the reality of the supernatural, but Paul J. Hurley reads this as a willful act: 'Goodman Brown sees evil wherever he looks. He sees it because he wants to see it.'³³ This pessimistic tone is one that characterises much Gothic horror writing in the 1960s and into the 1970s, or certainly those that strike a chord with a wide readership, notably popular novel such as Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971).

Dale Bailey argues that it is at this point in American literary history that the horror novel is cemented as a recognizable entity, noting that 'writers like William Peter Blatty, Ira Levin, and Stephen King [...] not insignificantly, would soon come to identify themselves as genre writers, horror writers, in a way that would have been alien to most of their predecessors.'³⁴ King has become one of the world's bestselling authors and his work has both a cult following among genre fans and a wide readership, as well as many successful film adaptations produced from his work. Despite drawing consistently on horror, and specifically many of the authors mentioned here, King's concerns, across dozens of novels and hundreds of short stories, are broad. Don Herron points out that from the start, King has embedded into his work 'important adult concerns about politics, relationships, or economics, which invest an otherwise popular novel or film with serious intent.'³⁵ *The Shining* (1977) is a good example of his engagement with broader themes such as the nuclear family, masculinity, and the meaning of work within the American capitalist system. The protagonist, Jack Torrance, is an aspiring playwright who has lost his job teaching English after assaulting a student in frustration. He has suffered from alcoholism and the trauma of an abusive past at the hands of his father. He takes a caretaking job looking after the Overlook Hotel in the Rocky Mountains over winter, taking along his wife Wendy and young son Danny. The hotel transpires to be a kind of 'psychic battery'³⁶ that has stored all of its own past traumas, such as mafia killings and drug overdoses, as well as the previous caretaker's brutal murder of his own family. These 'ghosts,' bound up with the presence of the hotel itself, torment Jack and eventually possess him, driving him to attempt to kill Wendy and Danny. The plot is complicated by Danny's psychic power, the 'shining' of the title, that allows him to read minds and to see into the past and future. Politically, the novel comments on the aspirations and realities of the United States, with the hotel reflecting both the grandeur and the seediness of the capitalist American dream. Despite the prevalence of social commentary in his work, the marketing of King as a horror genre author tends to flatten out and conceal this aspect. He has even complained in interviews of this misunderstanding, writing of his novel *Needful Things* (1991), where a junk shop owner sells people whatever they desire most, but for the hidden cost of their soul, that 'I thought I'd written a satire of Reaganomics in America in the eighties' but that this was lost on most readers and reviewers.³⁷

The racial politics of the United States are perhaps the clearest indicator of the what constitutes horror. Given that the historical horrors of the African American experience transcend fictional ghost stories, then this impacts on how we might read the fiction. The idea that the typical horror narrative is rooted in a particular kind of white suburban experience is pointed out by Bailey in a discussion of Eddie Murphy's 1983 comedy show *Delirious*. Murphy's jokes point out the

absurdity of the white protagonists in films like *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and *Poltergeist* (1982), who refuse to accept what is happening and flee their clearly haunted houses. Bailey notes that ‘the subversive horror of the routine grows from our shared awareness of a central but unpleasant truth of American culture: blacks live in a fundamentally different world from whites and the foreclosed possibilities of that world do not allow the haunted house story to operate by its usual rules.’³⁸ In fact, it is in the horror novels very avoidance of unpleasant social realities that a conservative tendency to maintain the status quo might well predominate. Horror, however, can be used to comment on the past and to instigate social change in the present. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) stands out as an example of late twentieth-century Gothic horror writing with a clear social conscience. Morrison uses the framework of the ghost story to present a novel about the agony of the past. *Beloved* is based not on myth, but on the real-life story of Margaret Garner, who killed her own daughter rather than have her returned to slavery. Sethe, who has been enslaved in the past, has to reckon with her own repressed guilt and trauma when a woman who she believes to be a flesh-and-blood incarnation of her deceased daughter returns to her. *Beloved* is undeniably Gothic and has much of horror in it, but defies the codified conventions of the horror genre novel to produce something more politically engaged and potentially transformative.

The transgressive potential of Gothic horror novels has perhaps been present throughout their production. Clive Barker, creator of *Hellraiser* (1987), views the true nature of the horror novel as that of the imaginative power of the fantastical, rather than by the conventional narrative structure that bounds it. Writing on King, he claims that ‘if we once embrace the vision offered in such works, if we once allow the metaphors a home in our psyches, the subversion is under way.’³⁹ Gina Wisker points to the potential of horror narratives as ‘a vehicle for imaginative change, equality, rewriting forms and relations of power.’⁴⁰ This has certainly proved to be the case in the twenty-first century, where the writing of H.P. Lovecraft, for example, has been both reimaged and critiqued in novels such as Victor LaValle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016), Matt Ruff’s *Lovecraft Country* (2016), and Paul La Farge’s *The Night Ocean* (2017). Without diminishing the vastly different perspectives offered by Gothic horror novels through oversimplification, the most accurate way to summarize their politics might not be so different from any other form of fiction. The Gothic horror novel reflects, and often actively exploits, the fears of society at any given time. In its compulsive focus on bringing the repressed and the abject to the surface, and often showing a disregard of notions of good taste, it has proven to be particularly revealing of truths that are politically unpalatable and yet crucial to examine.

¹ Fred Botting. “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,” in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 3.

² Botting, “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,” p. 3.

³ Alan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 4.

⁴ Alan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 4.

⁵ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Gothic Novel* (Funks Green, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), 26.

⁶ Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Gothic Novel*, 29.

⁷ Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 52.

⁸ Darryl Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film* (London: Arnold, 2002), 127.

⁹ Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film*, 9.

¹⁰ Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film*, 9.

¹¹ Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film*, 9.

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- ¹² Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, 25.
- ¹³ Chris Baldick & Robert Mighall, "Gothic Criticism," in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 227.
- ¹⁴ Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner, 1993), 56.
- ¹⁵ King, *Danse Macabre*, 55.
- ¹⁶ Glennis Byron, "Gothic in the 1890s" in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 137.
- ¹⁷ Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film*, 138.
- ¹⁸ Jerrold E. Hogle, "The Progress of Theory and the Study of the American Gothic," in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 7.
- ¹⁹ Charles L. Crow, "Southern American Gothic," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 146.
- ²⁰ Louis Palmer, "Bourgeois Blues: Class, Whiteness, and Southern Gothic in Early Faulkner and Caldwell," in *The Faulkner Journal*, Fall 2006/Spring 2007, Vol. 22, No. 1/2, Special Issue: Faulkner and Whiteness (Fall 2006/Spring 2007), 137.
- ²¹ Palmer, "Bourgeois Blues: Class, Whiteness, and Southern Gothic in Early Faulkner and Caldwell," 121.
- ²² Max Putzel, "What Is Gothic about *Absalom, Absalom!*?" *The Southern Literary Journal*, Fall, 1971, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Fall, 1971), 18.
- ²³ Ambrose Bierce, "The Death of Halpin Frayser," in *American Gothic from Salem Witchcraft to H.P. Lovecraft: An Anthology*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 220.
- ²⁴ H.P. Lovecraft, "He," in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 332-333.
- ²⁵ Michel Houellebecq, *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*, trans Dorna Khazeni (London: Gollancz, 2005), 103.
- ²⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction*, ed. S.T. Joshi. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 821.
- ²⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," 810.
- ²⁸ Steffan Wöll, "The Horrors of the Oriental Space and Language in H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Shadow over Innsmouth,'" in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 68(3), 241.
- ²⁹ Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 41.
- ³⁰ Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: Gollancz, 2002), 8.
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