The Shadowed Library

A Bibliography of Books About Gothic

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Introduction - A Gothic Bibliography

The history of literature, and literary history, has rarely produced so singular and strange a figure as Fr Montague Summers, not-quite Roman Catholic priest, bibliophile, theatre producer, one-time occultist, and expert (with caveats) on vampires, werewolves, witches, Restoration plays – and Gothic books. Before Summers published *The Gothic Quest* in 1938, everyone assumed that Jane Austen had made up the 'seven horrid novels' Isabella Thorpe quotes to a breathlessly excited Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*: 'are they horrid, are you *sure* they are all *horrid*?' Catherine gushes. Summers proved that these romances were real – *The Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, The Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine,* and *Horrid Mysteries*. Scouring obscure libraries, bookshops, and private collections, he managed to chase down all but *Orphan of the Rhine* which was left to Michael Sadleir to uncover some years later.

It took oddballs such as Montague Summers, or Devendra Varma whose fascination with Gothic culminated in *The Gothic Flame* in 1957 and which had begun, so he said, when he had found in the stall of a poor Himalayan bookseller a battered copy of a Gothic novel so rare that not one great world collection or library contained one – it took such souls to half-convince the academic world that Gothic was worth a second glance; that there was something, anyway, to be learned from those lurid and silly books. From then (or a little after) the world has not looked back, and the volume of works examining Gothic novels and art, and thinking about aspects of human history and endeavour in Gothic terms, is, by this third decade of the twenty-first century, overwhelming. There is also a growing literature about Goth subculture itself, approached from a variety of points of view – sociological analysis, popular history, music, and memoir. Sometimes, when writers are being particularly open-minded and imaginative, they think about how Goth links to the centuries-long explorations of the *haute-Gothique* (or doesn't).

I do my level best to read a lot of this. Not being an academic in the field, I allow most of the books at that end of the spectrum to pass me by, unless they seem especially groundbreaking, panoramic, or linked into the Goth experience (one of them I actually contributed to): there's too much of it, and I'm woefully unqualified to comment on anything but the most general of works. So here are those general works, as well as those who pertain particularly to the Gothic subcultural world and the way it functions. When commenting on the products of others who have (almost) always put, at least, a lot of hard work into what they make, I've always taken as my maxim 'If you

can't say anything nice, say nothing', but here I feel constrained to be more frank, if not, I hope, less fair.

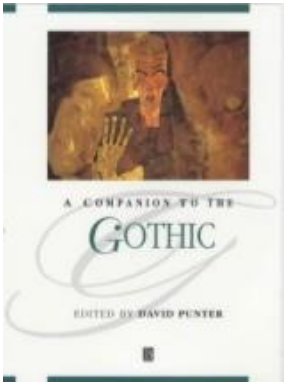
GOTHIC LIT

I've spent much time, and even wrote one book, arguing that the Gothic instinct is an abiding facet of the human experience, that it extends wider than just literature and further back in time than the axial 18th-century moment when Horace Walpole attached the title 'A Gothic Story' to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* – the instant when what we now understand as Gothic was first *named* as such. It's more than texts, at least in the narrow sense of *books*. But that immovable moment remains, the central pivot around which the whole Gothic continuum turns, the second when the electrical current races through Frankenstein's laboratory and vivifies the monster on the table. Unless we identify some other galvanising event, *Gothic* will always be lashed to the written word, and you can't think about it without putting books at the beginning.

Gothic, by Fred Botting (Routledge, 1996)

David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* and Eve Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, both published in 1980[1], may be more than four decades old now, but those books marked the start of the academy reassessing the worth of Gothic literature. The International Gothic Association, bringing together academics working in Gothic Studies, was inaugurated in 1991, and Dr Botting's book under consideration here came at the point where international Gothic Studies had surveyed its field, established the general outlines of the subject, and was just beginning to look beyond books for signs of the Gothic in wider cultural phenomena. It's part of Routledge's 'New Critical Idiom' series and, clearly designed as a summary of the subject for undergraduates, is just as useful for general readers too. It's clear, economically written, precise, and insightful. In the last chapter there are at least nods in the direction of what we might call the para-literary narratives of film and TV Gothic as well as one single subcultural reference in

the form of Bauhaus's 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. But this book is itself a narrative, and the challenge of a story is how to finish it. Dr Botting does it by positing the then very recent movie version of *Dracula* by Francis Ford Coppola (1992) as the point where 'Gothic dies' by its conversion from horror to sentimental romance; yet he concludes, basically, 'but it might come back again', in a sentence not even its author seems convinced by.

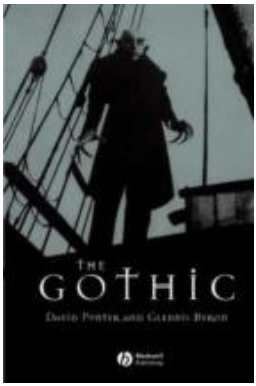


A Companion to the Gothic, edited by David Punter (Blackwell, 2001)

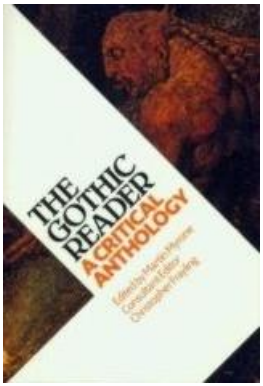
In contrast to the speedy surveys by Fred Botting above and David Punter himself below, this volume is weighty, academic, and does not spare its readers in complexity of thought and language. However, it covers more or less the same ground as the lighter tomes, combining essays by a variety of scholars on chronological episodes in the development of Gothic literature and the themes discernible within it. I could observe that academics seem to be drawn to think and write about Gothic because it's fun: it gives Dr Punter a chance to invent words in the very introduction, for instance ('is the Gothic … pestifugous, or is it a pestiduct? Does it spread contamination, or does it provide a channel for the expulsion of contaminating materials?'), and how else can you pen scholarly examinations of vampires and get away with it? Perhaps the most worthwhile essay in the collection is Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall's skilful dissection of Gothic criticism up to that point as 'a form of Gothic discourse in its own right, compelled to reproduce what it fails to understand', which is strong stuff for lit crit.

The Gothic, by David Punter & Glennis Byron (Blackwell, 2004)

There's no need to guess who's the intended audience of this book - 'advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students', the authors claim in the very first words – but that it at least might aspire to be more than a university textbook is hinted by Blackwell's choice to stick Nosferatu on the cover and use the Dark 11 font for the title and headings. In fact *The Gothic* is clearly comprehensible to the general reader who wants to bother. Where Fred Botting's survey takes a broadly chronological view, Profs. Punter & Byron offer short, breezy essays mainly on Gothic themes rather than epochs (though

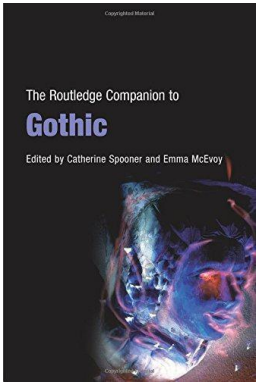


their account of 'Goths and Gothic Subcultures' essentially concludes in an admission of defeat in the face of the subject), 88 important authors, 18 key texts, and a concluding section on Gothic tropes and motifs. All of these are cross-referenced to one another so that a student can follow any trajectory through the book from a starting-point that suits their current object of interest, an admirable if not completely successful exercise. The authors venture beyond written narrative fiction with accounts of the Gothic in film and graphic novels, but don't include any of their makers or examples, presumably because they don't expect their students to study them.



The Gothic Reader: A Critical Anthology, compiled by Martin Myrone (Tate Gallery, 2006)

Compiled to accompany the Tate Gallery's 'Gothic Nightmares' show in 2006, focusing on Fuseli and Blake, this book daunted me at first and it sat on the shelf for over a year before I got around to reading it. When I did, I found that, far from being a dry collection of near-incomprehensible 18th-century writings, it was thoroughly readable and fizzed and crackled with interest. It investigates the crucial epoch when the 'Gothic' sensibility was established through a well-chosen, and very wide-ranging rag-bag of extracts and contemporary comments, many of them *attacks* on Gothic, sprinkled with images from the exhibition itself, and by doing so traces the links Gothic had with elements already circulating in popular culture (old-fashioned ghost stories, for instance), the theory of the Sublime, and art. All of these combined to produce Georgian horror literature, that great outflowering of Gothic which has defined ever after what the term has meant. *A Gothic Reader* begins with a tremendous introductory essay by the great Sir Christopher Frayling pointing towards the incorporation of the visual arts in the history of the Gothic, though the book itself makes only a nod or two in that direction. It seems to have been very roughly proof-read – on one page I counted three typos – and is of course tied down to the scheme of the exhibition itself, but manages within that to be great fun.

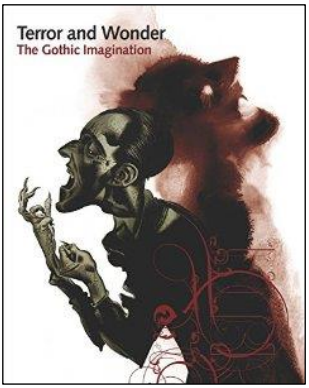


The Routledge Companion to Gothic, ed by Catherine Spooner & Emma McEvoy (Routledge, 2007)

Routledge's *Companion to Gothic* was one of a series of such treatments issued by academic presses around the time, and marked another step forward in the integration of literary and non-narrative Gothic. A series of chapters examine the history of Gothic in European writing, and then trace the influence of place and setting on the development of the tradition. The third part, 'Gothic Concepts', is a delight, and includes the most deft description of Julia Kristeva's theory of 'abjection' I've come across within Gothic criticism, immensely enlightening for those of us who haven't tackled the original. The final section, 'Gothic media', is more groundbreaking but patchier. Emma McEvoy's chapter on theatre and Kamilla Elliott's on film both read like rather rushed and breathless summaries of their subjects (and *Dr Pickle & Mr Pryde*, p.223, wasn't a 'Laurel & Hardy film' since Oliver Hardy wasn't in it); but Dr Fred Botting's apparently recent discovery of the possibilities of 'Gothic Culture' results in a stunning, if rather self-congratulatorily clever, bit of work, printed with a dashed line along the edge so that you can cut it out and rearrange the pages or discard it entirely, were you philistine enough to do such a thing. In fact, I wonder whether this essay, slinkily making its way around the web of representations and re-representations by which Gothic art and Gothic reality interact and affect one another, actually points towards the end of Gothic Studies itself. It certainly depicts a kaleidoscopic phantasmagoria of imagery and play-acting that (as Catherine Spooner and Paul Hodkinson in their essays keep reminding readers of this book) it's difficult to make any conclusion about. Hodkinson's chapter, too, warns against treating Goths as though their activities and experiences were just outgrowths of the meanings Gothic academics read into their favourite texts. Whatever else, this volume marks the point where it really became impossible for academics to refer merely to 'The Gothic' without any qualifier, when what they actually *meant* was books.

Terror and Wonder, edited by Dale Townshend (British Library, 2014)

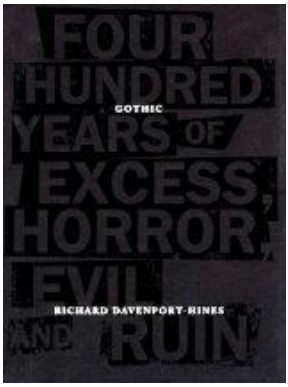
Terror and Wonder isn't a catalogue of the exhibition of the same name at the British Library, but accompanied it. However, although it stands alone as an account of the development of the Gothic imagination, it very naturally



follows the outline of the exhibition in that the focus is on how Gothic is expressed in narrative form, whether literature (most of the time) or film, with other material brought in as support and illustration. That means that, for the most part, we've heard the story before, although there are lots of unfamiliar examples (the ludicrous 'Quintilia the Quadrigamist', pp.122-3, is delightful) and, as one would hope from the calibre of the contributors, the writing is very good. The kaleidoscopic meanings of Gothic are deftly teased out, and one of the most valuable contributions this collection of essays makes is to try to identify the various anxieties Gothic has expressed at different times. Catherine Spooner's examination of the book as Gothic artefact in contemporary fiction is particular fun. As in the exhibition itself, the photo-essay on Goths at Whitby is appended a bit awkwardly and more context would have been welcome.

GOTHIC CULTURE

My contention has always been that Gothic is more than a literary phenomenon, and by the mid-2000s the academy was beginning to come round to that point of view, driven by a couple of pioneers. Before that happened, the way ahead for Gothic Studies was cleared by a handful of earlier works of varying quality.

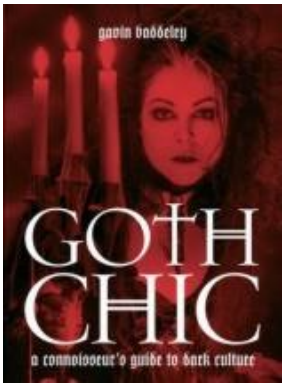


Gothic: 400 Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin, by Richard Davenport-Hines (4th Estate, 1997)

By 1997 bald and bespectacled professional historian Richard Davenport-Hines had begun branching out from his early work in the overlooked and unregarded field of commercial history and corporate biography with a book on the development of UK law on sexual behaviour, and a life of WH Auden. I have no idea how or why he settled on Gothic culture as the next place to turn his intellectual spotlight, but in doing so he produced the first, and I would argue still the best, general survey of the subject, one that touches, however roughly and sketchily, on virtually everything you might want to know.

The book's subtitle was deliberately over-the-top and lurid for an over-the-top and lurid genre, but nobody before Davenport-Hines had tried to trace the links between culture, literature, the visual arts, and what made the producers and consumers of Gothic art – who he boldly calls *Goths* regardless of what epoch they live in – embark on their reckless endeavours. 'Goths choose to stand on the giddy edge of things: they take the riskiest path up the volcanic slopes to peer into the crater', he declares, appropriately starting his survey with the visions of Hell provoked in the post-Reformation and pre-Enlightenment European consciousness by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1631. From volcanoes to bandit painters, to Horace Walpole, follies and ruins, to architecture, horror films, splatter fiction and modern art *provocateurs*, Davenport-Hines packs in everything he unearths from a kind of Gothic stratigraphic core bored out of the entire culture of the world. He may get Siouxsie Sioux's real name wrong, but at least he has her in the cauldron. I have the odd quibble about the history, and I think there could have been a little less about 18th-century landscape gardening, but this is a remarkable

achievement by someone who is, after all, looking into the Gothic world rather than taking part in it.



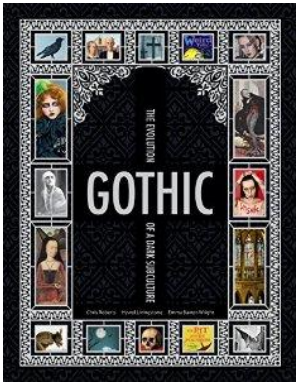
Goth Chic, by Gavin Baddeley (Plexus, 2002)

Goth Chic is very deliberately intended to fill in the gaps in Davenport-Hines's book, which are largely the popular culture side of Gothic, so it serves up more pulp comics, modern fiction, and metal bands than 18th-century heroines in dark castles: a catalogue of the sensational and often lurid (but then, wasn't *The Monk* both?). Intelligently written, as Mr Baddeley is a bright cove, but I think it skates rather across the surface of the Gothic phenomenon. All the right staging-posts on the journey are there, but when the blood-spattered destination seems to be the band Cradle of Filth you may question whether you've been led entirely the right way. I wonder how much the editor credited on the title page, Paul Woods, was responsible for.

Contemporary Gothic, by Catherine Spooner (Reaktion, 2006)

In between writing the thesis that became *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* and this book, Catherine Spooner taught at Reading, Goldsmith's, Falmouth, and finally arrived at Lancaster University, having widened and honed her account of the Gothic continuum enough to tackle it with a subtlety, range and knowledge that virtually nobody else at the time could match. *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* was a slightly disconnected collection of essays, while *Contemporary Gothic*, one of a range of 'combative' books Reaktion intended to 'address the pressing ideas, problems and debates of the new millennium', was given the scope to range much more freely over the whole field of Gothic, producing something accordingly more coherent and more satisfying to read, and better illustrated, than the previous more narrowly academic tome. It's a great pleasure to find an academic analyst not trying to convince us that Gothic is 'about' any one thing in particular, but instead acknowledging its multifarious aspects, its ability to absorb and

process conflicting ways of looking at the world, and its sheer perversity - and, in fact, ascribing to that much of its continuing power. The chapters on the contradictory presentations of Goth and Gothic in *Buffy*, and Goths' self-representations through what they consume, are enormous fun. The slipperiness of Gothic makes it a hazardous field to traverse, but Dr Spooner's analyses of widely-divergent cultural phenomena are insightful and incisive - the book seems almost completely free of that great academic vice, stating the obvious in impenetrably complicated language. Its approach is also confidently interdisciplinary, Gothic demanding it if any subject does. From high literature to trashy films to adverts to fashion to Gunter von Hagens, *Contemporary Gothic* catches everything relevant in its net and makes something useful of it. Of course with a cultural phenomenon as expansive as Gothic, any one book can only shine a light into a few darkling corners, but the beam this one casts is fascinating.



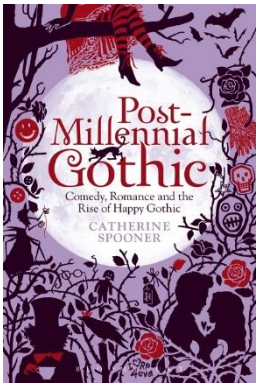
Gothic: The Evolution of a Dark Subculture, by Chris Roberts and contributors (Goodman, 2014)

Most books seem to have a particular audience in mind, and make assumptions about who it is that will be reading. I'm not sure who is meant to read *Gothic: Evolution ...* . I think the people who may get most out of it are those who have an attraction to Goth or Gothic and want to know a bit more, but whether there are enough of them to make this very glossy and high-quality publication ever pay for itself I'm less certain. Also, as the scheme is thematic rather than chronological, there isn't an overarching story, which might be more helpful to someone coming fairly new to the world of Gothic. Emma Baxter-Wright's chapter on Fashion is near-academic in tone, while Chris Roberts's one on Music (which you suspect is the only one he really wanted to write) is much more popular and colloquial. This book is gorgeously illustrated, and there's a very welcome chapter on medieval Gothic and Gothic Revival architecture, but I wonder where the idea for it came from.

(If you look around, you will also find Chris Roberts and his fellow essayists' names attached to tomes entitled *The Gothic Subculture*, published by Sevenoaks, and *Goth: the Art, Design and Fashion of a Dark Subculture*, from Carlton Books. Each has an appealing Goth model on the cover. Do not be deceived: they're all the same book, differently packaged, which makes its genesis even odder).

The Gothic: 250 Years of Success, by AJ Blakemont (Dark Romantic Worlds, 2014)

The author is a writer and enthusiast for fantasy and science-fiction (it seems) and we must assume he simply wanted to write a brief summary of Gothic for a general reader. Accordingly, this short book (barely a hundred pages even with the index) reads a little like an extended Wikipedia article or undergraduate essay. There's nothing to object to in it, but it's quite superficial, and it's hard to see who's going to take up Mr Blakemont's offer to show them what Gothic is all about: serious students and casual enquirers are both likely to look elsewhere.



Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance, and the Rise of Happy Gothic, by Catherine Spooner (Bloomsbury, 2017)

Dr Spooner's works over the years have never failed to entertain and fascinate, but this book, arguably, transcended them all and, in its staking-out of an entirely new territory in the field, virtually everything else as well. This is why.

The academic sub-discipline of Gothic Studies got going in the 1980s as members of university English faculties across the world decided that the trashy horror-and-thrill novels of the late 18th and early 19th centuries could tell us important things about literature, society and ourselves, and that the condescension of the Eng Lit establishment over decades towards them was unjust. Some of the authors in the field then began to recognise that the young men and women who wore black eyeliner and outlandish fashions and called themselves Goths (or were called it by others) were, in some distant and ill-defined way, part of the same sort of phenomenon because they played with the same imagery and occasionally even read the original Gothic novels too. By and large, the Gothic Studies academics tended to steer no closer to the Goth world than acknowledging its existence, although that stance was made a bit more complicated as Gothically-inclined people began making their way into the academy and becoming dons themselves.

Now, Gothic Studies is a serious business studying serious things, and has to be to justify research grants, thesis topics, conference fees and book contracts. But Goth isn't; although everyone knows the stereotype of the morose teenage Goth hanging round the town War Memorial, living a Gothic lifestyle can't be perpetually solemn: a lot of the time it's quite frivolous and fun, burlesquing the very serious business of deathliness and fear, and just getting on with life but doing it with a particular aesthetic. The trouble for weighty old Gothic Studies is that Goth is the very filter through which modern Gothic tends to be produced, assimilated, and displayed to the general public, and that's the bit of the story that Dr Spooner has grasped.

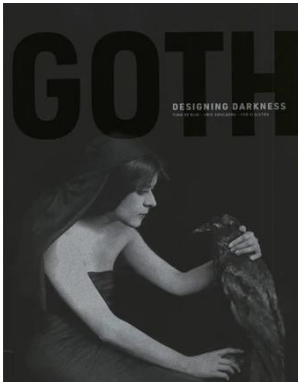
Hence the subtitle of *Post-Millennial Gothic*: 'Comedy, Romance, and the Rise of Happy Gothic'. Happy Goths are likely to manufacture relatively light-hearted Gothic produce, and this and its reception by mainstream culture is what Dr Spooner writes about: as far as the world's concerned, she points out, Gothic is what Goths do, rather than a strain of literature or a revivalist architectural style, and the elements of that representation with the highest profile include film director Tim Burton (who gets a chapter of the book to himself) and the approachable vampires of the *Twilight* series. Spooner delineates entirely new categories to analyse what's going on, the 'monstrous cute' and the 'whimsical macabre', and traces them through Burton's work and into street style and Chris Riddell's *Goth Girl* series of books, among a welter of other influences and instances. The comedic representations of Gothic, she points out, have moved beyond using Goths merely as ridiculous figures of fun to sympathetic acceptance, a shift which parallels the emergence of 'friendly monsters' in young people's fiction and reflects the campaign for tolerance waged in the name of Sophie Lancaster (and even more radically Spooner hints at the sociological paradox such acceptance poses to the Goth community: when you demand acceptance, and get it, what happens to any sense of yourself as opposing a mainstream world you don't feel part of? What becomes of Gothdom's appeal for the marginalised and lost?).

All the book's chapters, dare one say, sparkle, but the first and the last are the most impressive of all. Distinguishing between 'Gothic lifestyle' (what Goths do) and 'lifestyle Gothic' (bits and pieces of Gothic paraphernalia imported into the lives of 'ordinary' people for decorative purposes), the first chapter traces how the one influences the other via TV shows and the press. The last chapter examines Whitby as the Gothic locale *par excellence*, its layered Gothic history affecting the way even strait-laced English Heritage presents the town.

There's an occasional clunky bit of explanation necessitated by assuming, as one is supposed to, complete ignorance on the part of the audience ('Whitby [is] an historic port and fishing village on the north Yorkshire coast') but as

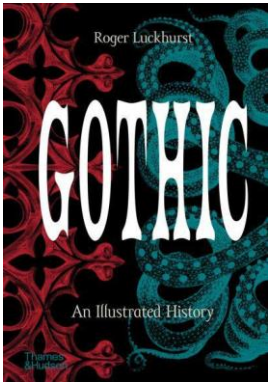
we have come to expect of its author the book is refreshingly free of clotted technical language and written with a speedy clarity which cracks along at a positively novelistic pace. There aren't any pictures, but Dr Spooner deftly writes around the lack of visual material. I even adore the index, which has separate entries for 'pink', 'glitter', and 'Lady Gaga'.

Post-Millennial Gothic isn't a mass-market book, despite the appropriate levity of the lovely cover illustration by Alice Marwick – try to spot all the pop-culture references – and Goths themselves will probably be too busy actually 'doing Gothic' to fret overmuch about any sort of analysis. But here is a triumphant assertion of the validity of *their* experience, in *their* terms.



Goth: Designing Darkness, by Tim de Rijk, Erik Smulders & Yvo Zijlstra (Museum Den Bosch, 2021)

In 2021 and 2022, the Museum Den Bosch at s'Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands staged a major exhibition examining Goth and Gothic. The Museum concentrates on design, and one suspects (though it's never really been stated in as many words) that the curators decided to think about how these strange people who dress in black go about 'designing' their identity, and then inevitably broadened their interest out into the vast hinterland of Gothic that stretches back temporally for centuries and sideways culturally across the whole world. Being that as it may, this book isn't a catalogue of the exhibition, although there was some crossover, but accompanies it, meditating on Gothic's themes and ideas. There are no fewer than 16 short chapters, each covering some abstract aspect of Gothic, and each introduced with a page of dialogic musings from de Rijk and Smulders which shoot off interesting ideas all over the place but never quite get to grips with any of them. We then plunge into the images curated by Yvo Zijlstra, amounting to an extended and often oblique reflection on what Gothic means. They're an impressive selection from the worlds of art, reportage photography, film, even dance, theatre, and artefacts, with the occasional queasy and uncomfortable turn; but there's a strange disconnect between pictures and text, which rarely refer to one another. If anything, this book goes to demonstrate how difficult making any final statements about the Gothic truly is.



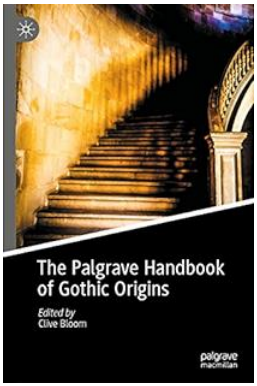
Gothic: An Illustrated History, by Roger Luckhurst (Thames & Hudson, 2021)

Do we really need yet another 'history of the Gothic'? What professor of English Literature at Birkbeck, Roger Luckhurst, does to justify writing one is to take a strictly analytic and thematic approach, breaking the multifarious extremity of the Gothic tradition into its constituent elements, into which the history emerges sidelong and in passing, Horace Walpole rubbing shoulders with modern film – lots of film, as it turns out, Dr Luckhurst's preferred medium for illustrating how the Gothic has morphed into its contemporary manifestations. He identifies four domains of human thought in which the Gothic expresses itself – form (buildings and structures), landscape, 'the Gothic compass' (how the Gothic imagination orders the earth and beyond it), and monstrosity – each of which are then neatly divided into five sub-chapters. Sometimes these divisions are perhaps overly neat, as Gothic thinking about the far North and far South turn out not to be that different, and neither are the uncanny undoings of structure signified by 'Tentacles' and 'Formless[ness]', but the format allows Dr Luckhurst to examine ideas and themes in a fruitful way.

And this is, as the name suggests, an illustrated history - illustrated nothing short of sumptuously. It's not a physically big or even a long book, but it packs in 350 pictures and more. I think there's a paperback edition, but I bought the hardback, and what with its heavy, embossed covers and thick, glossy paper making all those images shine, it's almost too weighty to hold up in comfort. The prevalence of the pictures means the writing is brisk and concise, and, even if just occasionally the pell-mell listing of films reflecting this or that theme gets a bit bewildering, if nothing else you'll come away with a list of scary movies you want to look up. The mainstay of the book isn't literature, but I was pleased to see Emily Dickinson get a mention: 'One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted', she warned, and this beautiful book shows how right she was.

The Palgrave Handbook of the Gothic, ed by Clive Bloom (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021-22)

Although I ended up contributing to Dr Bloom's *magnum opus*, I cannot review it so much as merely point to its existence. The editors were happy enough to receive my chapter on 'Gardens and Designed Landscapes' despite



my lack of academic credentials, and it sits among accompanying essays about Visual Gothic - Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill and the like – with tolerable comfort. The three massive volumes of the *Handbook – Gothic Origins, Steam Age Gothic,* and *Contemporary Gothic* – are, as reviewers note, gatherings of multifarious accounts of wildly varying topics, swept together in vaguely chronological order. I say reviewers, but it's hard to see how any one person could possibly give a helpful account of such diffuse material. *Contemporary Gothic* alone has over 1200 pages, for heaven's sake. Let's just say that you're virtually guaranteed to find something useful and interesting in this work, provided you have the £450-or-so you'll need to buy it.

GOTHIC SUBCULTURE

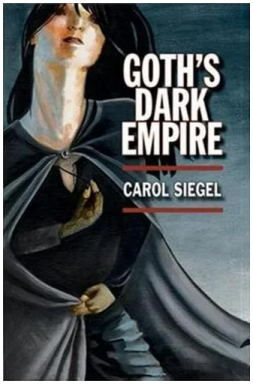
Once upon a time I felt I was knocking my head against a wall attempting to argue that there were links between Gothic as the academy understood it, and the Goth world it seemed to overlook completely. Then suddenly it seemed as though academics couldn't leave Goth alone. The field is so vast that it will be a long while before it exhausts study, but even twenty years after Paul Hodkinson's pioneering work was published, a lot of what's written about Goth seems to tread the same sort of ground without getting into the kind of granular detail that would make a difference. There are other examinations of Goth subculture out there, notably at least three published in Germany in the early 2000s[2], but they remain in their native languages, which places them a bit beyond me, I fear.

Goth - Identity, Style & Subculture, by Paul Hodkinson (Berg, 2002)

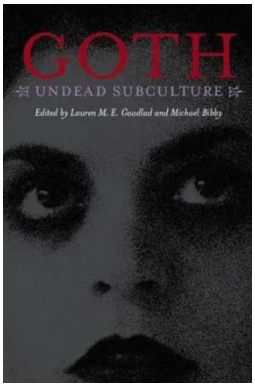
Paul Hodkinson's study never disguises what it is – a sociology doctoral thesis turned into a book. This means it begins in a dialogue with the discipline's established views of what a subculture is and how it might function, and uses survey work carried out among its subjects as its prime source of data. More than twenty years on, a lot of its conclusions seem obvious (and even the author sometimes admits this in the text as it stands), and although Goths always used to be pointed towards it I wonder what they might actually get out of it. Its function seems more to be to explain Goth to the world outside. That said, it's clear, concise, and it was the first book actually to treat the subculture as worthy of any kind of attention beyond mockery and contempt; and we should all be grateful for the breaking of that ground.

Goth's Dark Empire, by Carol Siegel (Indiana University Press, 2005)

A controversial and peculiar contribution to academic analysis of the Goth world, which – notwithstanding Carol Siegel's very obvious sympathy for Goths and her efforts to seek their views in building up her case – tended to annoy the Goths who read it very much indeed. Dr Siegel reads Goth through



the lens of the sexual politics of the United States and, while sexual radicalism might be part of the story, for her it *is* the story, and frankly nobody wants to be dragooned into someone else's cause. The relentlessness of the argument makes the book quite tough going if you don't find it completely obvious in the first place, which is a shame as some of the insights into the subjects Siegel chooses to examine are worthwhile in their own terms; and she did, after all, set out to defend Goths against the prejudices she felt they were subjected to in the post-Columbine culture of the US. She does this by picking a variety of topics and relating them to the Goth world. Her origin story for her quest describes how, one evening in the mid-1990s, she crossed the footbridge over the freeway in Portland, Oregon, 'saw a group of Goths streaming like black smoke down under the freeway overpass', and found herself wondering where they were going and what they would do. I think that's rather lovely. I don't think she answered her own questions completely right, but at least she asked them.



Goth: Undead Subculture, edited by Lauren Goodlad & Michael Bibby (Duke U.P., 2007)

The best way of tackling a subject that sprawls across disparate academic disciplines is to engage the services of a collection of experts in the fields involved. Before *Goth: Undead Subculture*, studies of Gothic tended to be either scattergun takes on the whole genre, or focused investigations of this or that topic. This book broke that pattern and, even more admirably, actually tried to do so from the viewpoint of the Goth-on-the-dancefloor.

Of course, what you end up with is academics - mostly, there is the occasional exception - discussing their favoured topics, but a good few of them could be characterised, as Trevor Holmes so wonderfully puts it, as 'a goth-identified subject [with] an interest in things horrific and gloomy, in a postromantic decadent aesthetic overdetermined by punk, in embodiment through gender transitivity'. There's a certain amount of that breathy Stateside academic-speak, but in actual fact most of the essays in this collection spark a good deal. In fact, Trevor Holmes's is a good instance of the collision between the

personal and the subcultural with his account of life as, well, a professional dancer cavorting gothically in an LA gay club, morphing into a debate on the slipperiness of gothic gender generally. Kristen Shilt writes a lovely account of the Austin Faerielanders in their 'liminal enclave', and Rebecca Schraffenberger owns up to her own Goth development.

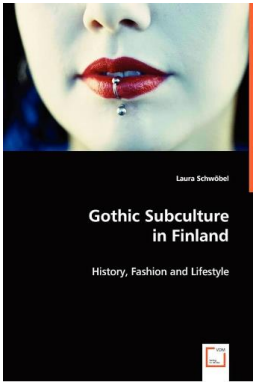
Throughout the book there seem to be two twin and allied efforts which set it apart from anything attempted before. Firstly, there's a serious intention to think, and discover where possible, exactly how 'gothic' cultural products function in the Goth community, how they are used and processed in sifting and developing a sense of identity. Secondly, there's an openness to considering in that task all sorts of cultural products. We expect such interdisciplinary boldness of Catherine Spooner, also represented in the book (albeit by an old essay), but here everyone has a go. Michael Bibby, for example, is a professor of English, but has a stab at analysing the role of the post-punk band Joy Division in formulating early Goth, looking at their work (lyrics, production, music), stage performances, and visual image promoted through album artwork. This is more than he has any right to know about.

This is marvellous, if you can do the work of ploughing through the four hundred intimidating pages. There is nothing that can really do justice to the fissiparous and contradictory beauty of modern Goth, but this book did better than anything else published before it. My only wonder is whether Goths themselves welcome such microscopic analysis; at least, in this case, it comes not-entirely from the outside.

Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality & Style, by Dunja Brill (Berg, 2008)

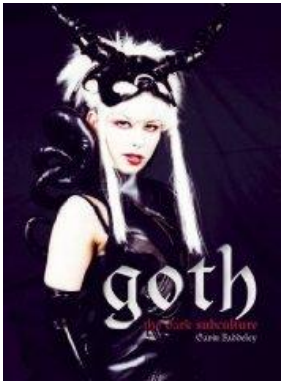
One of the criticisms that can often be directed at sociological studies is that they can take a long while telling you in great detail what you already know. Dunja Brill's book, though, coming from the same series as Paul Hodkinson's *Goth* (2002), bears no such charge. The Goth scene prides itself on an attitude of 'genderlessness', proud of the fact that within its safe subcultural spaces people can express their individuality free of the constraints of the wider culture, especially in terms of sexuality and dress. Dr Brill, writing as a Goth insider, points out the limits of this in practice, describes the gap between ideal and reality, and marshals an impressive argument that the Goth scene is in fact profoundly 'gendered', especially and

increasingly where the possibility of making a living from it allows the mechanisms of the market to penetrate, bearing with them the sexual ideologies of the mainstream. Individuals who step beyond the subtle gender codes of Goth are rarer than one might think. I wonder whether Dr Brill considers as much as she could the privileging of beauty as a concept within Goth, but her basic thesis definitely coincides with my own observations. The book is also, for the most part, lucidly written without too much clotted academic terminology (if only all the Gothic scholars who actually have English as their first language showed the same trait), and the personal accounts of visits to clubs and interactions with individuals make it all the more engaging and convincing.



Gothic Subculture in Finland, by Laura Schwobel (VDM, 2008)

I see that at the time of writing this slim book is on sale via Waterstones for over £40: you would have to be a committed completist not to think that somewhat overpriced if you bought it. Laura Schwobel was a doctoral student at Jyvalskyla University in 2005-6 when she carried out her research, and one slightly wonders why as her actual thesis was on Sikhs in Finland: she seems to have used the Goths as a dry run for them. In terms of style, monoglot Brits can only applaud her decision to have the book published in English, but it means it reads rather oddly and naively. Ms Schwobel is very, very much an outsider looking in on Finnish Goths, and treats them with the same external curiosity as an Imperial anthropologist investigating a native tribe, which does feel a little uncomfortable: she gatecrashes a Goth picnic in Tampere and describes it more like a secretive ritual than a group of friends meeting in a park. Mind you, this approach does lead to a very detailed discussion of her informants' clothes and how they relate to them which – curiously, considering how important style is to Goth – nobody else seems to have tried. Even if she maintains that 'Goths regard [black] as simply a nice and easy colour to wear', which I don't believe for a moment, she recognises that that's not what non-Goths think. Much of the analysis is necessarily sketchy, so this book is only an outline for something bigger – something which, of course, has never actually emerged.



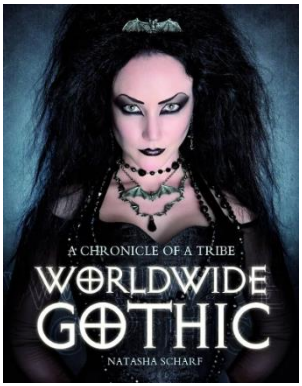
Goth: Vamps and Dandies, by Gavin Baddeley (Plexus, 2009)

Now, I've had my problems in the past with Gavin Baddeley's books, and he's had problems with me having problems with them. But *Goth: Vamps and Dandies* is a real pleasure. It's intended to address a criticism levelled at Mr Baddeley's previous account of Goth, *Goth Chic*, which, as he admits, didn't contain a great deal to do with the modern Goth look and lifestyle at all despite its title. The current work falls into two halves, the first outlining what Mr Baddeley terms rather nicely at several points 'Goth's DNA', the amalgam of influences from literature, art, music, movies and TV that emerged as Goth at some vague and indefinable point between 1979 and 1981. The second half looks at the various mini-movements and figures who've nudged the development of the Goth subculture in one direction or another. It succeeds pretty well: I was delighted to see the Marquesa Casati get a mention, and there are bits and pieces I wasn't aware of too. The style is fluent and relaxed, and even affectionate, not just towards modern Goths but also in the book's account of their forebears such as Theda Bara and Bela Lugosi. The illustrations are very full and very good, if occasionally confusingly placed (why does Voltaire crop up on p.76?) and slightly over-representative of one Goth club and one Goth clothing retailer. While I thought 'dark cabaret' could have done with a mention - perhaps that's just the circles I move in - virtually everything else gets one, at least within the British Goth world: contentious subcurrents including Steampunk and Cybergoth are deftly treated and describing the profound effect of the murder of Sophie Lancaster leads to some insightful thoughts about the political significance of simply being insistently individual.

Because Goth is a shapeshifting thing which doesn't actually have a stable 'ancestry' but continually discovers new antecedents as it moves forward, setting out to tell its story is a near-foolhardy enterprise - but I think the author rather pulls it off. At the very least, he manages to outline a convincing and entertaining narrative.

Worldwide Gothic, by Natasha Scharf (IMP, 2011)

Modern Goth emerged first in Britain, and of course long before that Britain was the land of ruins and Horace Walpole. Almost everything written about the Goth movement is UK-focused and English-language; and yet the biggest

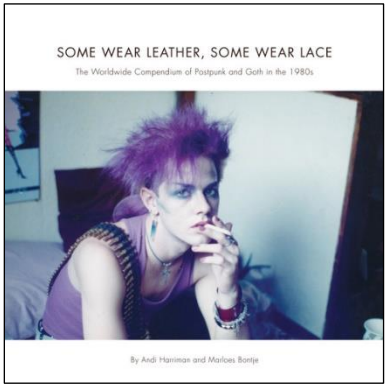


festivals are European (I gather there were about 25,000 souls at Leipzig in 2011 as opposed to the fifth-to-a-quarter of that who find their way to Whitby). In *Worldwide Gothic* Natasha Scharf set out to tell a broader story than anyone had attempted hitherto. The real triumph of her book is to assemble accounts of the emergence of Goth scenes in Europe and beyond, and how, in Germany and Japan particularly, Goth shook free of British influence and generated something different. The list of international interviewees shows how Ms Scharf worked hard to build up a convincing picture of the global spread and generic sprawl of Goth by speaking to people who might actually know what they were talking about, and I don't believe anyone had put this all down on paper before - at least not in one place. The sections on the tiny and courageous Goth scenes of the Middle East (pp.86-9) are particularly revealing and there are some insightful passages on the role of the Internet spreading Gothic style in the 1990s (p.63), and on the way Goths (at least in the UK) now interact in more socially complex ways than merely thinking of themselves as adherents of sorts of music (pp.95-6).

That leads into my one main criticism, which is that with its kaleidoscopic cataloguing of bands and musical genres, *Worldwide Gothic* depicts Goth musicians as subcultural 'producers' with everyone else appearing only as consumers; I don't think this is what actually happens. As the Appendix points out, once the G-word made its appearance at some point in the early '80s it immediately bolted the nascent musical genre onto something bigger and older, meaning that the music would be continually contaminated by the 'Gothic' culture beyond as people discovered that for themselves; bands and their fans don't just come out of nowhere, after all. The most historically interesting bit of the book is the account of the pagan scene's role in the revival of British Goth (pp.51-2), which neatly shows the complex interaction of bands, promoters, and essentially non-Goth events (there isn't any necessary connection between Goth and paganism). The elision discernible at the time between Goth, Steampunk and Vintage scenes was similar: it certainly wasn't bands leading that. *Worldwide Gothic* is visually very sumptuous with lots of good photographs; it would have benefited from closer editing, and if any book ever cried out for an index, it's this, but indexing was a distant luxury in 2011.

Goths: A Guide to an American Subculture, by Micah Issitt (ABC CLIO, 2011)

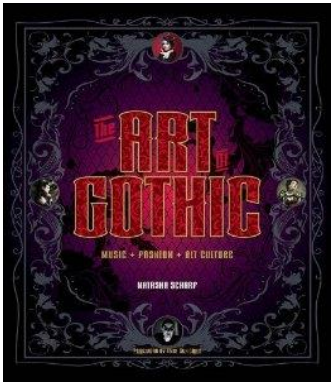
Of course the title is going to get any number of people's backs up, but it's clear that what the author – a writer-for-hire, but not a bad one – means by it is that Goth is a subculture *found* in America, not that it *uniquely belongs* there. In fact, Mr Issitt's summary of the development of Goth subculture is wider-ranging and more international than one might expect, and he even bothers to interview the editors of *Goth: Undead Subculture*. The book is part of a series (disconcertingly including a volume on the Ku Kux Klan, which I hope was written by an actual sociologist rather than someone paid to look stuff up) and is tidy and effective, especially if you're an American student looking for a summary of Goth for an essay. Some statements such as 'There is no better way for music aficianados to show their love than by making a mix tape' have a nostalgic cuteness that wasn't there in 2011.



Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace, by A Harriman & M Bontje (Intellect Books, 2014)

The author of the text's first language doesn't seem to be English, which leads to some very unusual syntax and vocabulary, but once you get through that, this is a fantastic and strangely moving book. The early years of postpunk and Goth – largely before the movement was even given that label – did clearly have a different timbre from Goth as it is now, still then constrained (or, arguably, liberated) by the do-it-yourself ethic of punk, and this book tells that story. Or rather, because the text is so subordinate to the photographs, lays the story out before you. *Some Wear Leather …* has a very impressive worldwide focus when the temptation would have been to concentrate on the UK. Interviews illuminate the visual content rather than the other way around, and you have the impression of a group of people very keen to make sure that a profound moment in their lives is recorded and captured. There are some musicians posing on or off stage, but mostly the photographs show young people struggling to be different and hanging out in

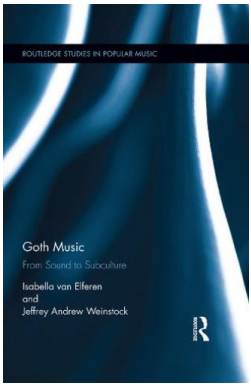
clubs, on street corners, or in their bedrooms, and, considering the dramatic nature of the subculture, looking curiously unselfconscious while doing it. This is a missive from a different and less narcissistic age to the era of the selfie, a time in which to take a snap of yourself you either had to have a friend with a camera (which not everyone did) or dip into a passport-photo booth; and that gives the book a haunting quality. 'Heroic', the author says of the youngsters in the pictures, and you can only agree – all the more so because they didn't seem to know it.



The Art of Gothic, by Natasha Scharf (Omnibus Press, 2014)

Natasha Scharf's first book, *Worldwide Gothic*, was enough of an achievement – gathering material, much of it via interviews, on the development of the Goth scene not just in the UK but far beyond it – but this second volume, if perhaps less wildly ambitious in scope, manages an even greater success. It aims to look at what Goths produce and consume that expresses their nature as Goths, going far beyond the obvious confines of music and fashion; when most books on the subject refer to 'Gothic art' they mean high art, the kind that finds its way into art galleries, whereas *The Art of Gothic* avoids all that (Anne Sudworth excepted) in favour of applied art. While there are a lot of record sleeves on display within its pages, the book manages to include novel covers, jewellery, toys and even furniture. The author tries to distinguish the various streams of reference and influence which feature in Goth produce, and while others might draw the lines differently, her account is persuasive. It's helped by the glorious work of Paul Palmer-Edwards of Grade Design, who makes this book a sumptuous visual artefact in its own right: it's no more than justice that he gets a credit. Perhaps the most valuable element of all are the interviews with a range of 'subcultural producers' which inform several of the subject-chapters: the account of how the chaps who run Alchemy Gothic got going (and in fact how they actually make things) is rather wonderful. This makes *The Art of Gothic* an important work in terms of oral history as much as anything else, Ms Scharf becoming a spiritual heir to the curators and researchers of the mid-twentieth century who hunted out the oldest local craftsman they could to explain how to make a Windsor chair or a woven basket (it isn't always clear whether a particular text has originated in an interview or not, however): it tells you what people actually *do* with Gothic. The author's style is clear,

relaxed and confident, even if the word 'iconic' does pop up quite a lot, making *The Art of Gothic* a very pleasurable read. This is a massive, glossy, heavy hardback (almost a foot square) but pound-for-pound it's worth anyone's money. It even has a careful, comprehensive index.



Goth Music: from Sound to Subculture, by Isabella van Elferen & Jeffrey Weinstock (Routledge, 2017)

Rather than start from the history of Goth (which would be the obvious tack to take), the authors instead open this book from two contemporary Goth events, Dracula's Ball in Philadelphia and Gottertanz in Leipzig (part of the bigger festival Wave-Gotik-Treffen), and think about what the Goth experience consists of. 'Each event is defined by the music presented, the music is extraordinarily different in each venue, and yet both events are 'goth" (43) so the unity cannot come from any technical or stylistic elements of the music itself. Neither, despite the centrality of social ritual to the subculture ('horror film samples … corsets … and the scent of patchouli are as much part of goth musical reality as [the music] … Goth music is intricately linked to listening practices and social situations' (51)) can it derive from any other such element, as these, too, are colossally diverse. Despite its apparent inconsistency, Van Elferen and Weinstock are still convinced that 'music is the glue that holds the goth scene together', not just 'one equivalent subcultural practice among many' (11).

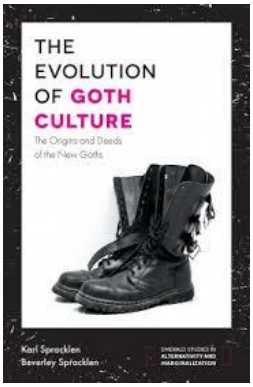
They find their way forward by borrowing the notion of the *chronotope* from 20th-century Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. A chronotope is an artwork's setting in time and space, the range of spatial and temporal associations it evokes. Gothic in general – although van Elferen and Weinstock don't discuss this explicitly – deals with the intrusion of the monstrous into improper places and times, and human responses to it. Goth music, a more concentrated artform than novels or film, also creates windows into other realities and jars them against the familiar, or takes a familiar world and introduces the monstrous into it: it explores our relationship with these other times and places, or monsters, which can be characterised by desire or revulsion or both. It dislodges time and dislocates space, and its chronotopes are thus in critical dialogue with the everyday present. The authors identify five typical chronotopes that can be used to analyse Goth music (86-7). I'm not convinced that their distinction between the 'intimate' and the 'expansive'

versions of the past or the future are very helpful categories, but the larger point is well made: they are trying to direct attention not to the surface details of Goth music, but to its effects and intentions.

Further, they argue, particular chronotopical fantasies are reflected in corresponding substyles of Goth and, therefore, in the subcultural practices (such as fashion choices) that gather around them: 'the temporal and spatial dislocations of goth musical chronotopes … find imaginative instantiation through associative clustering, which then prompts particular social actions and practices that further develop the world of the chronotope' (120). Phew. To put it in a more concrete way, if you like listening to, say, neo-medieval or dark folk substyles of Goth music, you're more likely to dress in a way that evokes a fantasy version of the Middle Ages or the pagan past, to *be* a pagan, and to go to crossover events with medieval re-enacters and LARPers, stay in a tent (probably not made of real animal skin as you are likely to be a vegan), and drink mead out of horns. You are very unlikely to be a stompy Cybergoth in towering boots and multi-coloured plastic hair extensions, as that fits in with an entirely different, future-directed fantasy and a different sort of music (not that you might not dip into both on separate occasions). Yet there is still a family relationship between all these versions of what Goth is: 'the consistent distinctiveness of goth subculture inheres in the shared fantasy narratives clustering around the defeat of time and mortality' (123). I'd argue that 'defeat' is a misleading word, but otherwise this is surely right and explains why Goths can always acknowledge each other as fellow-travellers while appearing completely different and listening to such wildly divergent stuff. Well, almost always.

This is very, very good, as it picks beneath the argument I sometimes hear from some older Goths that 'Goth is about music, not fashion' and complaints that 'people have become clothes-horses'. Setting up music and dress (or any other subcultural practice) as antagonistic elements within Goth misses the point that both are expressing and performing an underlying discontent with things-as-they-are, and an underlying awareness that not everything we desire is uncomplicatedly positive. That's where the unity, and the point, is to be found.

Goth Music tries for the first time to prise beneath the sonic characteristics of the stuff Goths listen to get at a deeper truth, and I think succeeds. Like Dr van Elferen's earlier book, it's not the easiest of reads, but rewards the effort.



The Evolution of Goth Culture: the origins and deeds of the new Goths, by Karl & Beverley Spracklen (Emerald, 2018)

I was excited to hear about this book on Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed*, and having waited until a copy came up for sale whose price didn't make me wince I was more excited when it arrived through the post. There are things wrong with it, and I will dispose of those first; I am also not convinced about aspects of the authors' core argument, but that's not necessarily a problem with the book as such, so I'll relegate discussion of the actual case until later.

The Evolution of Goth Culture is dreadfully proof-read. Everywhere there are missing or superfluous letters, stray apostrophes, signs of sentences having been rewritten halfway through but not made consistent, and on a couple of occasions a missing negative which actually reverses the sense of a statement. Although most of the time the authors refer to themselves in the first person plural in a refreshingly conversational manner, on p.126 they revert to standard academic-speak and Karl Spracklen appears merely under his surname as though he was someone else. Given that the authors are proud sticklers in matters temporal and grammatical (pp.69 n2, 76), I'm sure they're even more upset about being so badly served than I am on their behalf.

Karl Spracklen is a lecturer in leisure and tourism studies at Leeds Beckett University and his wife Beverley used to work as a bellydance teacher and performer. They've written a lot of stuff together and with others, and can't quite resist inserting wodges of that research into the book. The section on the development of heavy metal substyles in the 1990s (93-97) is dizzying and basically irrelevant, and neither explains what heavy metal is, nor how it differs from or resembles Goth. There is some point to this section as the cross-fertilisation of Goth and metal is important, but the rehearsal of the history of the Internet (122-126) is of no use whatever. Equally, we all have our favourite bands and much as I loathe The Sisters of Mercy I can concede its crucial role in the formation of Goth *recte* in the early 1980s, but the chapter about the band (71-87) seems to be mainly an exercise in Eldritch-baiting, an amusing and popular sport in the Goth world but of strictly limited interest. It would have been more informative to pick a less well-known group and look at what it was that got them started, and how they developed. The book has an odd habit of quoting sources at length, then rephrasing what they have said. All this adds up to a lot of essentially superfluous wordage.

My last quibble is about how to understand Romanticism. I disagree with the Spracklens over the extent to which Goth can be interpreted as an aspect of Gothic more widely, but that's a debatable matter. The problem is that wanting to downplay the role of Gothic in Goth, and Goth in Gothic, because Gothic isn't anti-capitalist enough leads you astray. For the Spracklens Romanticism, of which Gothic is part, is nothing but 'insipid', passive and unpolitical, a matter of swooning women in long dresses and soppy poetry. They blame Gavin Baddeley's 2002 book *Goth Chic* for introducing the connection into Goth's self-awareness (20-21) – unaware, apparently, of Richard Davenport-Hines's *Gothic* (1998) which boldly described anyone ever involved in producing or consuming Gothic culture from the 17th century onwards as a 'Goth', or Jenny Grey's Gothic Society (founded in 1990) which made the same link. I've had my arguments with Gavin Baddeley, but he rightly points out in *Goth Chic* that Romanticism was revolutionary – the insistence that individual experience and sensibility, and not objective authority, was the basis of moral order and artistic value – and you don't get more Goth than that.

But I come to praise Caesar, basically, an apposite phrase considering the splendidly pompous title of the book, alluding as it does to a history of the original Goths in the ruinous centuries surrounding the collapse of the western Roman Empire. The Spracklens show an aptitude for pinching amusing allusions from other disciplines, referring to the 'Whig interpretation' of the history of Goth and the 'Received Standard Version' of what happened to Goth in the 1990s.

Now, for some time I have been suggesting that there are features in the development of Goth which someone should write about, and here, at last, someone is doing so! The Spracklens take the narrative from the first stirrings of something dark in the welter of post-punk music and activity that came to be tagged 'Gothic', through the formulation of the 'goth' template in Leeds around the Sisters of Mercy (I'm not completely convinced that's the whole story, but we let that pass), what was different about 'goth rock' compared to early Goth, and what happened afterwards. Once the mainstream music world had got goth rock out of its system, they suggest, the scene went underground, its radical 'communicative alternativity' being maintained by fanzines, clubs, and websites – 'goth fans found community and identity in the goth spaces that were available to them, especially independent record and clothing shops' (186). This was the phase Goth was still in when Paul Hodkinson wrote his groundbreaking sociological study of the scene for Berg in 2002. However, at the same time the growth of the Internet allowed a global dispersal of Goth motifs and their increasing commodification; Goth became redefined not in terms of music but a broader 'dark aesthetic' which could, eventually, be

bought off the shelf by anyone: 'anyone [can] play at being a goth for one video, or one album, or just for one weekend … Dressing like a Goth is now very easy, unless you live in a place ruled by conservative reactionaries or crazy autocrats' (170). It is – as already memorably described in one of Karl Spracklen's earlier articles – 'the entropic heat death of the goth aesthetic'. When all *can* be Goth, none truly are.

In the course of this analysis, we are given some real gems. The authors' exemplar for the commodification of Goth is what has happened to Whitby Goth Weekend over the twenty-odd years of its existence, and they make their case very convincingly (137-153). They are absolutely right to cast doubts (37-38) on the well-worn 'origin myth' that the word 'Goth' came from a joke told by Ian Astbury and others against Andi Sex Gang of the band Sex Gang Children, a yarn which I have doubted for a long while (and which I first read in 2003, long before the 2009 date they quote). There is a fine little section on Goth in Uzbekistan (116-118) and, as well as making it clear that modern Goth differs significantly from what it was in the 1980s, the Spracklens make a stab at explaining why, arguing that the Internet allowed the diversification of Goth substyles and subgenres (129-130). The most interesting claim is that Cybergoth style actually developed out of the experience of using the Internet and associated technology. A lot more work is needed on these statements which at the moment remain just insightful assertions, but at least they are asserted. The methodological approach – a bit of global analysis, a couple of case studies, moving back and forth over the field of study – is entirely appropriate to such a disparate and elusive thing as Goth.

But make no mistake: this book is a polemic. Karl and Beverley Spracklen are very, very annoyed about what they believe has happened to the subculture they love. Their rage at the betrayal of what they want to paint as an anti-capitalist crusade reaches its feather-spitting climax in the chapter 'Goth as Fashion Choice' (155-171), especially their attacks on a hapless Goth model who calls herself Wednesday Mourning ('becoming a goth is becoming seen to be just one other way of becoming rich and famous … one way people without power are fooled into accepting the inequality of the world' (165)), and on Steampunk ('Steampunks … desire to be elite Victorians fighting for the Empire' (169)). There's a deep paradox, they argue, within which Goth is caught at the present time – the desire to signal alternativity versus the need to be acceptable. 'Goth is not dead, but it has changed so much that it is in danger of losing its meaning and purpose' (183).

So, *The Evolution of Goth Culture* is a good book. It tells a coherent story, and examines critically themes which have been becoming apparent for some time,

but which nobody has tackled before. Much applause for Karl and Beverley Spracklen is in order. But are they right?

Three sentences from across the book summarise the argument. 'Goth in the early 1980s embraced the punk fear of selling out, doing things underground and DIY'; then in the 1990s 'goth culture started to replicate the instrumentality of the mainstream by constructing its own logic of production and consumption'; and after twenty years of this 'goth will only survive if it becomes a radical, transgressive and counter-cultural space again … returning fully to its communicative alternativity' (69, 103, 188). On the one hand, this is a correct account of what happened; on the other, it's a misreading of that past.

It is absolutely correct that first-wave Goths made, adapted, cadged, and probably occasionally stole their clothes and bodged together their music like punks. But they did this more because they had no other option than out of a sense of principle, though they may have made a principle out of necessity. Young people in the late 1970s and early 1980s didn't have much disposable cash, and so there was no market to supply what they wanted. The Spracklens' account of how this changed to what we have now is, I believe, spot on, although it still needs fleshing-out with actual data. But although they continually describe first-wave Goth as an anti-capitalist phenomenon, their key evidential text is an article by a music journalist in 1989 *analysing* Goth, not anything that comes from Goths themselves (67). Turning to my own pet band, Siouxsie and the Banshees were defiant elitists (Steve Severin once dismissed the democratic ethic of punk with a terse 'No, everybody *can't* do this') who were certainly interested in artistic integrity but also out to make a successful career for themselves, and did. There is very, very little to demonstrate that first-wave Goth was anti-capitalist *as such*, except by accident. What it *was*, was anti-conformist and anti-authoritarian, and it's a mistake to confuse these with economic radicalism. They can be linked, but they aren't the same.

The Spracklens themselves quote the German band Pink Turns Blue, formed in 1985: 'we wanted depth, doubts, darkness, eeriness. We wanted to sulk' (61). So much for the music: as for the clothes, while reading *Evolution*… I visited Brighton Museum, whose costume gallery contained a Goth outfit worn by Paula Huntbach in the mid-1980s. It consists of a customised black leather jacket, a long black dress with flounces at the calf – not far from 'Victorian', although it's closer to Morticia Addams – spiky jewellery and winkle-picker boots which Ms Huntbach decorated with Klimt-inspired swirls. In a caption, she describes how she would attach bits of old scarves to her outfit: 'This was the whole important thing to me for Goth … that your

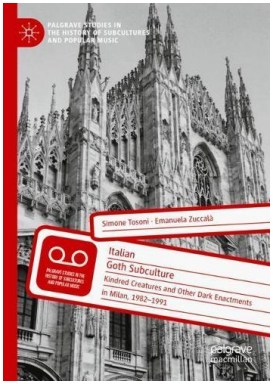
clothes looked slightly shredded and old, as though you'd been maybe hanging round in a castle or somewhere gloomy for a while'. Notice, she doesn't say 'my clothes were a statement that I wanted to smash the prevailing economic system': she says they were an expression of a personal fantasy, framed by Gothic imagery. Goth's was, is, an individualistic rebellion – a Romantic one, dare I say. Pink Turns Blue also expressed a dislike of 'consumerism', but experience has demonstrated that this doesn't mean Goths reject consuming *anything*, only what the *majority* consumes. Capitalism can sell you anti-conformity as it can anything else; and, because Goth never had a critique of capitalism in the same way it did of conformism, when forced to choose it makes its peace with the market. Goth individualism might sometimes be sentimental and unrealistic (I think it often is), but it's at the core of the whole thing.

It is true that Goths are now socially acceptable in a way they weren't when I first encountered the subculture about twenty years ago and certainly when the Spracklens got involved a bit earlier. It's a shame it took a young woman having her head stamped on until she died to achieve that (I believe the murder of Sophie Lancaster in 2007 is the single biggest galvanising event in Goth since it began – strangely the Spracklens' book only has two passing references to it, and nothing in the index). For most individual Goths, the choice to be acceptable comes in the form of getting a job and discovering that having some money to spend on what makes you happy is preferable to the insecurities of other forms of living.

But if a conscious critique of capitalism has never really been part of Goth, perhaps the Spracklens are right in this – to preserve what Goths really do value, they might have to discover one. The history of Whitby Goth Weekend suggests that without doing so, space to be themselves will be eroded. 'To feel human, we need to resist the inequalities and injustices of modernity, even if in resisting all we can do is find a space where we can be alternative among others like us' (188), and that does mean a neverending tension between genuine community and the marketing of identifiers of community. This story, I suspect, isn't over yet.

Italian Goth Subculture, by Simone Tosoni & Emmanuele Zuccála (Palgrave, 2020)

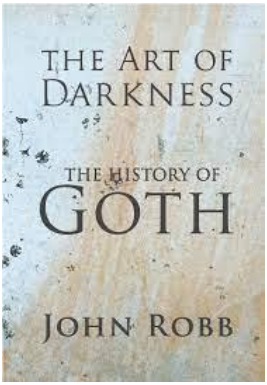
The authors' earlier *Creature Simili* came out as long ago as 2013; the newer book covers the same ground, but has been considerably reworked – so they



say, but as I don't read Italian that fluently I will have to take their word for it! This is a thorough sociological examination of Italian first-wave Goth, at least in the vicinity of Milan, a very precise context. The 'Creature Simili' (Kindred Creatures) of the title were an absolutely specific, and in fact self-named, group, the editors and originators of a fanzine called *Amen*. They had been taking part in the radical punk-based squatting movement in the city, a response, Tosoni & Zuccala's interviewees felt, to the eclipse of the sort of political hopes engendered in the 1970s. The punks were desperate, nihilistic, and made their point by rejecting everything from the surrounding society. The Creature Simili collective felt the same, but found the punk template restricting and unimaginative and, while maintaining sympathetic links with the world of the squats, wanted to branch out musically and socially, activist but not so extreme: they were the punks' 'Kindred Creatures'. They and the black-clad folk they drew in didn't refer to themselves as Goths for several years, when the word made its way over from London, and instead became known as 'darks', and their subculture, simply 'Dark'. Tosoni & Zuccala describe the different groupings within Milanese Dark, the loners and the club-goers, the hangers-around in public squares, the mutual scorn between the fancy-dressers who changed in the safety of the toilets at clubs like the Hysterika, and the hardliners who crimped their hair and wore black every day and risked the wrath of families, teachers, and other young people. The interviewees describe how music, clothing, and the wider Gothic tradition (including aspects of it very few people outside Italy would be aware of) fed into their sense of self and helped them navigate a way forward. They describe how violent the streets of Milan could be for darks, and how often they had to run away from skinheads and *paninari*.

Tosoni & Zuccala's approach concentrates on what they call the 'enactments of dark', as a way of trying to escape from previous analyses of subculture based on thinking about subcultural practices. An 'enactment' is a particular social context within which a subculture is experienced, and individual practices can have different significance and weight in different enactments. Once you've grasped that you can put aside the sociological theorising; you also need, to an extent, to cope with the translation which seems to have been done by someone who isn't completely fluent in English. There is one particular phrase which kept catching me out: 'breaking someone's balls' in Italian seems to mean 'giving someone grief', but the literal translation reads very oddly in English.

What this book does is show clearly how Goth evolved in a particular social, geographical, and historical context, and how the Gothic tradition enabled groups of young people to explore their sense of self and the world in that context. I imagine parallel studies in other countries would reveal illuminating differences and similarities, so I hope someone is writing them!



Art of Darkness, a History of Goth, by John Robb (Louder Than War, 2023)

It is not, I think, an easy matter to write well about popular music. It is often very, very hard to account for the appeal of a particular artist, album or track, even if you feel it yourself. You're tempted to grandiloquise, or you find yourself falling back on clichés and, if you have even the remotest degree of self-awareness, you then try to avoid those clichés and end up producing text that reads like a thesaurus. What you write stands in constant danger of collapse into meaningless sentences, pretentious metaphors, and, if you don't check back properly, repetition.

Art of Darkness, I fear, drops straight into all these traps and rarely clambers out, to the extent that I find a lot of it actually hard to read. I won't dwell on the typos, maladroit expressions and strange *lacunae* which scatter almost every page, mainly because a reader can also easily appreciate the colossal work and commitment the author has put into it. Instead, there are deeper problems which relate to *Art of Darkness*'s aims and methods, and I *will* talk about them.

Mr Robb might be taken to task for, to all appearances, being unaware of the extensive academic work on Goth culture and subculture, and the early chapters of the book rehearse what is now a very familiar story of Gothic art across the centuries. But it is a different book which haunts *Art of Darkness*, one more directly relevant to the subject: Simon Reynolds's *Rip It Up and Start Again*, the 2005 history of post-punk which, for all its controversies, still stands as the baseline for anyone wanting to tackle the topic. Reynolds's chapter on early Goth in *Rip It Up* tells the same story in twenty pages that John Robb covers in 530; it's an account with plenty to contest or at least expand on, so the point must be whether *Art of Darkness* answers any of the questions Reynolds skates past in his breezy and vigorous prose. I would expect any 'history of Goth', especially one claiming to be '*The* history of Goth', to have a go; but a passing reference in an interview with Andrew

Eldritch is the only sign that *Rip It Up* or the questions it begs featured at all in Mr Robb's considerations. The biggest of those questions is how is it that we recognise as 'Goth' all these completely disparate forms of music?

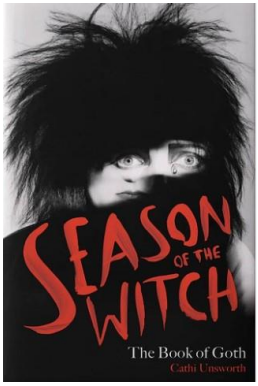
Chapters 6 to 12 are intended to highlight the 'dark' elements of glam, mainstream rock, and the like which helped to produce what we now think of as 'Goth', but only occasionally do we get any insight into how this happened. Interviewees in the book repeatedly state that the importance of David Bowie, for instance, to the post-punks who started bands lay less in anything he wrote as such, but in his presentation of possibility, of non-mainstream models of sexuality, of drama and pretence; and that the role of punk was to open up a space in which young musicians felt they could create with minimal resources. We don't actually *need* lots of information about Bowie, glam, or punk, to make any of these points. Once we pass beyond the early Goth bands whose members Mr Robb has interviewed so diligently we are promised an account of 'How dark energy infected Indie' (chapter 33), but what we get is a list of Goth-ish artists, not an examination of how this came about. Incidentally, you would expect me to look for a mention of PJ Harvey, and here she is, featured in three paragraphs across which Mr Robb manages to get wrong the year when she got going as an independent artist, mangles the title of her breakthrough album, and adapts his most striking statement, unacknowledged, from Andrew Collins's famous *NME* review of *Dry* in 1992. If that's the case with an artist I know something about, what reliance can I place on the rest?

The substantial worth of *Art of Darkness* lies in its interviews with musicians, but even more with the accounts of clubs, retailers and Goth experience beyond the membership of bands. The first chapter begins with a nice re-imagining of a night at an alternative club; there's a breathless list of regional clubs on p.11, any and each of which could do with a written history of its own; and the descriptions of venues across the country in chapters 19, 25 and 28, of the way they focused musical life, of what it was like to attend them and the risks you took to do so – club manager Doreen Allen eventually provided a bus so her clientele at Planet X in Liverpool could get home without being beaten up – are easily the most valuable elements of the book. They're also some of the easier to read: the description of Pete Burns holding court at Probe Records in Liverpool during the late '70s is a hoot (p.399).

And it's in the experience of these early Goth clubbers that we might find the beginnings of an answer to the question of how all this stuff comes to be thought of as Goth at all: that certainly can't come from the interviewees, who, almost to a soul, scorn the word. There's a 'history of Goth' to be told that wrests itself free from bands and is instead organised around the consumers of

Goth culture: it's their active filtering and processing of the fare offered to them that actually settles what is or is not Goth. John Robb continually approaches this idea and then backs away from it, but his book does provide lots of material for anyone who might want to pursue it in the future.

Art of Darkness's last few pages enter very interesting territory, though it's mainly through the words of the Goth academics Mr Robb has asked for help, Claire Nally of Northumbria University and freelancer Kate Cherrell, and the passionate paragraph by Kai Asmaa from Morocco describing being a Gothic person in a conservative Muslim culture. There are books waiting to be written around Nally and Cherrell's suggestions about the interaction between Goth online and in real life: perhaps *they* will do so. It's on the very penultimate page that John Robb suggests he might actually understand more than he seems to, with the statement that 'Goth itself had no manifesto. It was … a retrospective term for something already happening'. That's the key to its history which, for the most part, he has left unused.



Season of the Witch: the Book of Goth, by Cathi Unsworth (Rough Trade, 2023)

When it's worth reading a book's Acknowledgments because of their wit and warmth, that volume deserves high praise. Such is Cathi Unsworth's *Season of the Witch* – very possibly the best book about the early years of Goth yet produced.

Ms Unsworth starts with four late-1970s bands which defined what turned into Goth – Joy Division, Magazine, the Banshees, and the Cure – and includes virtually everyone else you might have heard of over the course of the next near-400 pages, but *Season of the Witch* isn't a catalogue of What Robert Smith Did Next and Where Nick Cave Got His Ideas. Serious-minded students of the post-punk will get the information they might want (and will also, on p.277, find the best explanation of what 'subcultural capital' means in a single paragraph where Paul Hodkinson once took a whole book), but the pieces are scattered and woven into something grander. This book is a single, unfolding story (the author uses that word repeatedly) of how a subculture emerged in response to the state of a nation which seemed to be in decline and whose alleged revival took a malign and darkened form.

In 1979 Cathi Unsworth was the eleven-year-old daughter of middle-class liberal Christian parents in a Norfolk village, reading Dennis Wheatley under

the bedclothes with a torch. There are two 'witches' who frame her narrative: the Wicked one, Margaret Hilda Thatcher, who her parents raged against as 'a traitor to her class, her sex and her country'; and the Good, a stranger figure she became aware of at the same time and who her adolescent mind wondered might be riding out at night to save Britain from the Satanic influence of the Iron Lady – a figure with electric raven hair, black lipstick, and torn fishnets on her arms, who went by the name of Siouxsie Sioux. The proto-Goth pre-teen emerged from beneath her blankets to find her way, eventually, to the handful of East Anglian venues that might play the music that spoke to her, to London to find kindred souls and finally, at 19, to write for *Sounds* and share what she felt about those songs, albums, and bands.

But she is not the focus of her own narrative: she observes from a distance the interactions of the artists who express the malaise of Thatcher's Britain in their work, their combinations, fallings-out and dramas, heard far off in Norfolk like armies clashing by night. Eventually, as she says, they all knew one another, these often fractured souls, a sort of cosmic kaleidoscope shifting and moving the individuals around like shards of sparkling glass to channel the stream of Goth in new directions. But whereas histories of Goth tend to organise themselves around the bands, thriller-writer Ms Unsworth turns these eleven years, bookended by Mrs Thatcher's ascension and then downfall, into something like a myth – a blackly comic one, shot through with true tragedy. We range from Siouxsie running through a train in a blind rage to hunt the band members who'd abandoned her mid-tour, to the blanching realisation that Elizabeth Fraser of the Cocteau Twins was working through her abusive relationship with bandmate Robin Guthrie in music everyone else thought was 'the voice of God', mainly because they couldn't understand the lyrics. *Wire* called *Season of the Witch* Goth as 'Dickensian epic'; I think of it as a classical historical drama with added backcombing: 'Eyeliner Claudius', if you will.

Where *Art of Darkness* is a stiff-legged Frankensteinian stumble through the Goth past, *Season of the Witch* gambols like a lambkin across a meadow scattered with Spring flowers. That's not the mood, of course, but you get my drift. It would be hard not to enjoy it even if you had little interest in the subject as the narrative continually pulls back and zooms in filmically, delineates the peculiar local horrors that inspired Gothic souls from Melbourne to Morecambe, and offers us historical scope not just in the political landscape of the time, but in the subcultural forebears Unsworth points to at the end of each chapter. These 'gothfathers and gothmothers' (as well as the pointers to books and films the Gothic-curious might like to consult) are not always the obvious ones: as well as Poe and the Brontes we are also given Maria Callas and, most wondrously, *Fenella bloody Fielding*. I am an

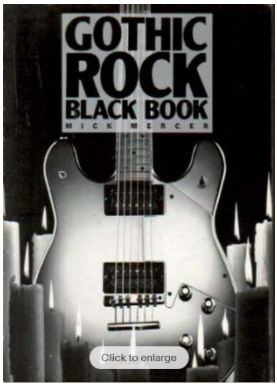
almost-exact contemporary of Ms Unsworth and can testify, as she does, to the formative influence of what Mark Kermode called the greatest movie ever made, *Dougal and the Blue Cat*, and Fielding's eerily prophetic, Thatcher-prefiguring performance as the Blue Voice who wants to eliminate all other colours: 'Blue is beautiful, Blue is best. I'm Blue, I'm beautiful, I'm best!'

This marvellous volume is not a textbook – it is a soap-opera of both a grand and an intricate kind. But it is also a triumphant justification of a way of being. Ms Unsworth titles her first chapter 'The Rebel Alliance', insisting that 'Goth in the time of Thatcher was a form of resistance against stupidity and ignorance', elitist but also meritocratic: 'Those who created the best music of the 80s came from all backgrounds and many of them overcame all manner of abuse, poverty and neglect'. Her final paragraph is like the raising of a banner on a battlefield:

> *… So if anyone picks on you for being different in any way, please use this book to hit them about the head with the facts and rest assured, you are in good company. Goth has been ridiculed and derided for decades as being miserable, morose and moronic … [but] it stands for all the essential forces of creativity, friendship and vision, not to mention humour … Forty years on, it's time for the curse to lifted and the words spoken in darkness to be heard in the light. I am a Goth.*

GOTHIC LIVING, MEMOIRS & SPECIFIC TOPICS

Gothic is as Gothic does, and modern Goths, to a significant extent, enact their enthusiasms by producing and listening to music and dressing up; this section contains accounts of books that deal with those topics, with what it's like to live Gothically. At its deepest, as with Leila Taylor's essay on the Gothicism of being a Black American, Gothic becomes a mode of thinking that affects how you analyse the society you live in; sometimes, as two young people found in a Lancashire town in 2007, the most malign and brutal elements of that society may turn on you, and do you harm.

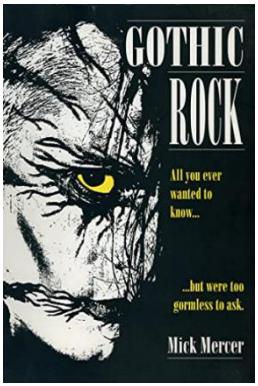


The Gothic Rock Black Book, by Mick Mercer (Omnibus, 1988)

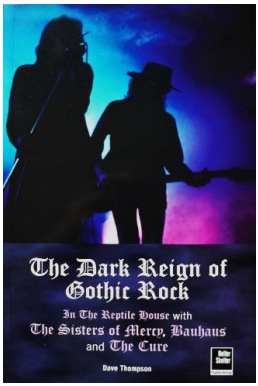
Mick Mercer was Goth music's earliest champion and chronicler and, as he tells you on p.11 of this book, in those primeval days 'I was there, lurking in the corners and nibbling my pencil' as he scratched out song, gig and album reviews for *Record Mirror*, *Melody Maker* and *Zigzag*, the magazine he eventually edited and which gave him scope to report whatever he wanted. So the Goth world owes his commitment and support a debt, and this book counts as a collector's item (though not that an expensive one). Its core is five breathless, short and snarky accounts of bands whose heyday came in the late-1980s outgrowth of Goth Rock; a useful row of portraits for anyone looking back at how things felt in those days, though marked by what you expect of a lot of music journalism – almost unreadably overwritten passages, and sarcastic jibes at the very things it celebrates.

***Gothic Rock*,** by Mick Mercer (Pegasus, 1991)

Print copies of this compendium, originally published by Pegasus in the UK and Cleopatra in the US, will currently set you back several hundred pounds, but Mr Mercer has generously put an edition on Kindle so even though that means interacting with the evil empire that is Amazon it does mean you can read it without taking out a mortgage.



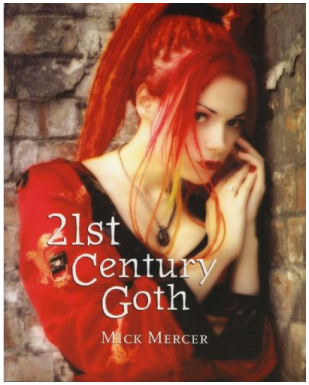
Reading it, though, in whatever format, is a very peculiar experience. Mr Mercer wrote it, he says in the preface, 'eager to make amends' for the *Black Book* three years prior, which he felt was 'less than informative'. This volume, though, is informative only in strange fever-dream fits and starts, spending page after page with Runcorn Goth-band-no-one-remembers Adam's Family, interviewing Jonny Melton of Specimen and fanzine editor Jake at leisurely length, and yet pausing to insult Siouxsie & the Banshees in a mere couple of paragraphs. We are offered entries, not just on bands, but on Bombasine (the fabric), Edgar Allen Poe, and the journalist Barbara Ellen who seems to be included purely so the author can dismiss her as irrelevant. Lots of it, in fact, is a wee bit *de trop,* as the bands described as not Goth at all probably outnumber the ones who do fit the Mercer template, whatever it is (he never actually tells us). It's all very personal: '*my* book on Goth', the author declares on Amazon, as opposed to the ones he wrote 'expressly intended to be useful'. This is what lies behind statements which now read most amusingly, such as 'Every New Dead Ghost have built themselves up to the point where they should start getting taken seriously in 1992', the very year they ceased to exist. It's the interviews that form the lasting worth of *Gothic Rock*, especially those with young Goths in far-flung and unlikely corners of the UK such as Bournemouth and Sutton Coldfield. Nobody else was talking to them, so we should be grateful Mick Mercer did for this book. But don't fork out £400 for it.



The Dark Reign of Gothic Rock, David Thompson (Helter Skelter, 2002)

The most interesting thing about this book is how few people ever refer to it. One of a series of popular music monographs from its publisher, it's an efficient narrative of Goth music up to the Millennium, and as nothing similar existed at the time you might have thought more would have been made of it, even if we can set aside the author's nebulous introductory attempts at definitions and delineations between 'Gothic Rock' and 'Dark Rock' (and could All About Eve really be considered either, notwithstanding Mick Mercer also had a chapter on them?). Efficient – but perhaps

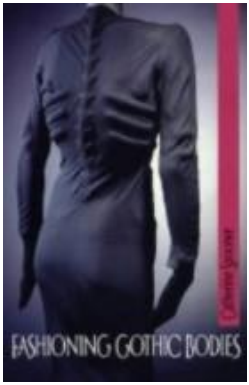
unsatisfying, because with a rare sally here and there, the book never really seems to recognise a world *outside* music for music to relate to. The convolutions of bands, their squabbles and dynamics, are all that matters, and the personalities involved seem barely like human beings, not really existing beyond each group. Even in those terms, we'd perhaps like to know how it was that a handful of Goth artistes *became* huge stadium rock performers: how did what they were producing interact with the music press, the record industry, TV and radio, clubs and music shops – the actual economic mechanisms behind what was happening on stage? Having identified his handful of key music-makers, Mr Thompson only mentions their 1990s successors – Rosetta Stone, London After Midnight and so on – in passing, and he *really* wants us to know that industrial music is an unwanted bastard child of Goth, Trent Reznor being 'little more than a pretentious modernist who wallowed in ugliness'. And if it's a particular band you're interested in, *Dark Reign* will tax your patience as you try to trace its story fragmented through 200-odd pages without the help of an index.



21st Century Goth, by Mick Mercer (Reynolds & Hearn, 2002)

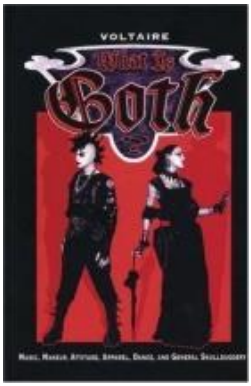
From the vantage point of the 21st century's third decade, it would be hard to conceive of an odder artefact than this – a book telling you what to find on the Internet – and I include it *for* its historical oddness. A successor to the author's *Hex Files* from 1996, even a generation ago it seemed a quixotic project, and in his Introduction *doyen* of Goth journalists Mick Mercer justifies it on the grounds that he's done the work of looking up these links to the websites of bands, retailers, clubs, magazines and so on, so you don't have to find out about them by chance. All very well, and perhaps some of the hundreds of 'subcultural producers' he includes deserved to be found by his readers, but the whole thing had the pall of a doomed quest over it from the start. The book contains one interview, with Shirin and Finn who comprised the early-2000s Cornish band Mothburner, discussing their music and their online presence; it's a helpful historical document in its own right, but I wouldn't advocate buying it for that. *21st Century Goth* is a snapshot of a moment in time, not least because Mr Mercer thought in 2002 that the Japanese genre *Visual Kei* was going to be a far greater influence on Western Goth, or Goth anywhere, than it turned out to be.

The same author's ***Music To Die For*** (Cherry Red, 2006/9) was another directory project, this time based exclusively around the content found on Myspace, then the major provider of templates for bands to build a mini-website as a shop window. In its pages – which run to 600 in the second edition – Goth behemoths like the Sisters of Mercy rub shoulders with bands that, for all Mick Mercer knew, didn't exist outside the bedrooms of a teenager or two. He tried to contact them all, but not many got back to him with any additional information. Scanning the globe, the book's a work of colossal labour, but even in 2009 it would have been hard to know how to *use* it beyond opening at random and wandering around until you found something you liked when you checked the relevant Myspace page.



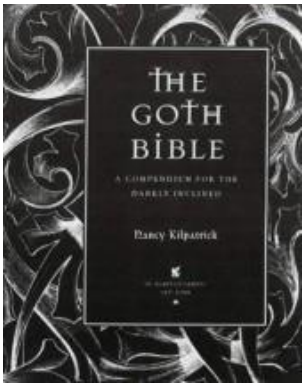
Fashioning Gothic Bodies, by Catherine Spooner (Manchester University Press, 2004)

Goldsmiths College allowed Catherine Spooner's doctoral thesis, the basis of this book, to trespass across any number of disciplinary boundaries, as it had to – and then Manchester University agreed to publish it, really the first attempt from within the academy to synthesise literary and visual Gothic. Most of the chapters spend the majority of their time within the pages of Gothic fiction (one concentrates on film), but the book makes a bold effort to keep remembering that the Gothic clothes you imagine or see displayed in these narrative forms do relate to actual material culture. This leads to the last chapter which draws in Goth subculture and relates the schmutter Goths wear, again for the first time so far as academic Gothic Studies is concerned, to the longer tradition it's part of. Of necessity, this is a story without an ending, as Dr Spooner admits in her concluding pages about the role of clothes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and keeping the literary Gothic and the real world connected across the seven scattergun chapters is a struggle, but being a trailblazer is never easy. A fashion history needs more pictures, but who was going to pay for that?



What Is Goth? (Weiser, 2004); ***Paint It Black, a Guide to Gothic Homemaking,*** (Weiser, 2005), both by Aurelio Voltaire

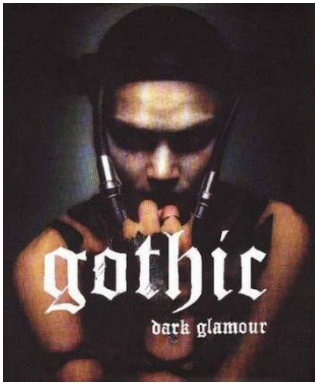
Let us include the author's first name, as he now prefers. *What Is Goth?* is a very funny sketch of Goth culture from someone involved in it, as the autobiographical introduction informs you, replete with pictures and an affectionately scathing commentary on Goths and all their subcategories and little quirks. It should, on its own, have given the lie to the two then-current stereotypes about the subculture: the American one, that Goths were drug-addled psychopaths who would murder your children as soon as look at them, or the British one, that they were witless scene-conformists who never ventured further than the local war memorial and would sooner stay in their bedroom anyway, and dared not crack a smile for fear of being ostracised by their moronically gloomy friends. In contrast, *Paint It Black* includes actually practical descriptions of how to avoid spending ridiculous amounts of money on candelabra, and spooky journals to fill with miserable poetry, by making them yourself. These small books are fun and good-looking, and untouched copies will, at the time of writing, cost upwards of £150 each to ship from the US, so you have to be *very* interested in them.



The Goth Bible, by Nancy Kilpatrick (Plexus, 2005)

A book intended to justify the ways of Goths to the world outside and to themselves, as its name implies this is a recklessly ambitious project; or would be, if it was less humble and humanistic, less gentle and understanding. Instead of striding across the landscape of Goth culture and categorising it, laying it out like an Enclosure commissioner of the melancholy, it's content with observing and reflecting. Much of the reflection arises from the interviews Ms Kilpatrick carried out – with 95 internet-trawled correspondents she calls 'the ☥ section' and

whose views frame the outer margins of each page; and with a wide variety of subcultural producers, from bands to manufacturers of prosthetic fangs. You could, should you be a young aspirant Goth, fill your life entirely with *The Goth Bible*'s information, whether you're picking reading matter or trying to brew 'proper English tea' (as viewed from Canada). It might be maddening, if it wasn't so ingenuously and modestly written, and so warmhearted: 'Know this', Kilpatrick tells her Goth readers, 'your existence is precious'. (There is one cartoon which will catch you out with what we now see as a jarringly inappropriate contrast to the gentleness of the rest).

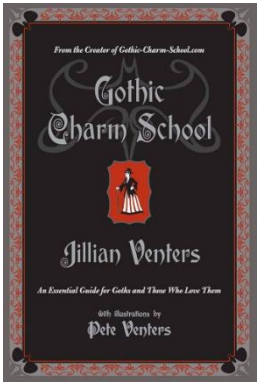


Gothic: Dark Glamour, by Valerie Steele & Jennifer Park (Yale UP/FIT, 2008)

This is a book of two parts: the beautifully-produced, glossy photographs, and the text, and they are very different matters to consider. The authors both work at the Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, but the book doesn't appear to have arisen out of an exhibition, or anything definite. It's divided in two: the first section comprises an account of the development of the Gothic imagination, with a slightly shorter second half looking at Gothic manifestations within the world of high fashion; while the second section claims to examine 'Gothic Rock and Fashion'.

Now, there are some very laudable things here. Medieval Gothic - ladies in horned headgear and long-sleeved dresses, and the Danse Macabre – receives a rare mention, and there are some attempts made to connect Gothic imagery across the decades with what people wear. But the authors don't seem to know as much about their subject as they need to. They make some remarkably contentious statements about various Gothic subcultural styles, and seem to rely for their information on a couple of photographer contacts and a solitary Goth clothing designer. The high fashion section free-floats above the narrative: we move from a Gothic-themed McQueen outfit to a Gothic-themed Galliano one, acknowledging the strange beauty but wondering what it's all supposed to mean. The only lesson we learn is that some fashion designers have a liking for darkness and disturbance. As for the rock-and-fashion section, there's precious little relating of music to street style, and (in stark contrast to the first part of the book), the text dismisses Goth after 1983 in five paragraphs. It's as though one bit was written in complete isolation from the others.

Overall the signs of imaginative analysis one finds in the book are outweighed by the sense that the authors' interest in the Gothic tradition, and Goth culture, as such is enthusiastic but superficial. It will, however, look very good on a bookshelf.



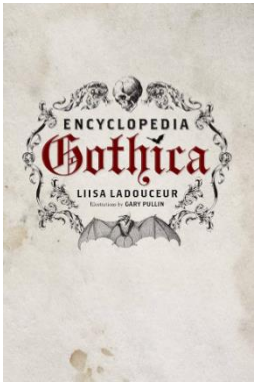
Gothic Charm School, by Jillian Venters (HarperCollins, 2009)

The founders of *The Chap* magazine used to argue that politeness and antique social conventions counted as revolutionary acts in modern society, and Jillian Venters wants to claim the same for the young Gothic people she advises here. Gothic is in some ways a backward-looking genre, and Mrs Venters channels the kind of manuals of etiquette and behaviour we associate with the mid-20th century, playing the beneficent aunt to the confused and alienated; she would like non-Goths to be kinder to Goths, Goths more understanding of non-Goths, and the Goth world itself to be internally gentler and more proper. Hers is perhaps the most individual, though far from the only, work prompted by the Columbine High School shootings in 1999 which convinced a generation of US parents that a preference for the colour black meant their children were turning into serial killers. Imitating her own 'Gothic Charm School' website, Mrs Venters continually refers to herself in the third person as 'The Lady of the Manners', making the whole book as arch as the north aisle of Salisbury Cathedral.

Weirdo. Mosher. Freak. by Catherine Smyth (Pomona, 2010)

Although Rob Maltby insisted that neither he nor Sophie Lancaster were 'Goths', there's no membership list, and no other single event has affected Goths' self-understanding or wider society's understanding of *them* as much as the appalling attack on the young alternative couple in a Lancashire town in August 2007 that resulted in Sophie's death. Despite what her publishers' blurb claims, Catherine Smyth wasn't 'the first reporter on the scene' – she tells us she went there with her four-year-old son the evening after and

wasn't even sure what had happened until hearing it on BBC radio the following morning – but in this exhaustive account of the event the then news editor of the *Rossendale Free Press* describes not just what took place, but her own passionate investment in the story. The extracts in ch.18 from the emergency calls made by the three children who attempted to help Rob and Sophie are heartrending to read, but make Smyth's deeper point: as well as a narrative of violence, loss and unanswered questions, this is also one of courage and of good arising from an act of profound evil.

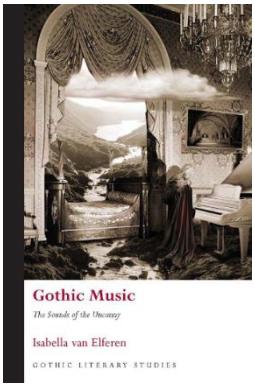


Encyclopedia Gothica, by Liisa Ladouceur (ECW Press, 2011)

It may be either because Goth entered one of its cyclical declines soon afterwards, or because its global dissemination and generic fissiparousness meant it became impossible to grasp comprehensively within one work, but Liisa Ladouceur's compendium of 'all things Goth' was the last of a series of book-form 'guides to Gothic living' that emerged in the 2000s and 2010s. It was increasingly clear that any such works were condemned to be fatally selective: I know, because I'd tried it a few years before, though approaching from the opposite direction, beginning from historic Gothic culture and showing how it linked to Goth, while Ms Ladouceur focuses on modern Goth with some illustrations from within the wider Gothic continuum. The *Encyclopedia* has lots of entries, but they are universally so brief they read like footnotes to some bigger work; perhaps one day someone researching Goth clothing brands and beauty products will use it as a guide to what to look up. The book's very well-presented: in a nice Gothic conceit, the page-edges are rough and irregular, as though it's been sold uncut.

Gothic Music: Sounds of the Uncanny, by Isabella van Elferen (Cardiff UP, 2013)

Dr van Elferen is nothing if not ambitious: she notes right at the start that 'Above all, Goth music is described by those who make it, those who distribute it, and those who listen to it, as dark' (p.2) but that this 'darkness' is very seldom analysed or given content. She sets out to do this by defining



Gothic sounds not so much in reference to their intrinsic qualities as by their function, what they do in particular contexts. Nobody has tried this before, we think, so it should be fun.

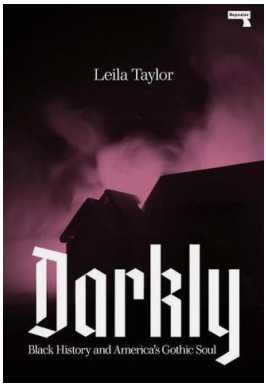
We have to pay by forging through some tangled cultural-studies academic jargon, but that's not unfair considering the milieu the book emerges from. More seriously, I think Dr van Elferen is misled by her own philosophical terms (using Jacques Derrida's idea of 'hauntology') into overstating the essential uncanniness of music itself; all music is uncanny, she says, because it recalls into phantom presence feelings, reflections, or realities which aren't there (pp.15, 26-8). Arguing this underestimates the specific nature of the *Gothic* uncanny, the hint that something bad is about to happen to a character in a narrative - and by implication might happen to a consumer of that narrative, a reader, viewer, player or listener. Not all music suggests imminent damage or madness; furthermore, Gothic relies not just on hint and implication, but also on the occasional revealing of the horror which threatens. These methodological misapprehensions affect some of the argument (such as the dogmatic statement that Hammer films contain 'nothing Gothic' because they are too explicit and consequently not uncanny enough (p.51)).

However, once the book moves on to considering the precise ways Gothic music functions, in literature, film, TV, gaming, and finally the Goth scene, the verve and originality of the analysis overcomes any shortcomings. The culmination is the dazzling chapter on Goth clubbing and Goth music itself, which boldly stakes a claim that Goth, far from being a jejune offshoot of the great Gothic tradition of literature and para-literary narrative, is in fact the most radical expression *of* that tradition because it enables participants to immerse themselves physically in it: 'the Goth club night can be described as a ceremonial enactment of Gothic heritage that seeks to playfully explore and transgress the limits of self, here and now' (p.136). Well; bravura enough?

Yet you only discover what Dr van Elferen is really up to right at the end of the book: finding in Gothic (and therefore most especially Goth) a chance to rediscover metaphysical philosophy. Again, this section takes some getting through, but the basic idea is clear: Gothic confronts not only particular psychological or social fears - such we know already - but the very limits of human thought, the possibility of nothing and how such nothing relates to being, and Gothic music does this especially profoundly. It sounds impenetrable, but sentences like 'God is a DJ: phonography is hauntography,

and the music it creates announces the sonic annihilation of finite Being' (p.188) are sheer delight, and for them you can forgive much.

You're unlikely to find out about much you didn't know in *Gothic Music*, and persisting with the book may not be easy; it isn't about imparting information, but building an argument. Yet if you do persist, your own sonic landscape will never be the same. You'll be haunted in an entirely new way by the Gothic sounds around you.



Darkly, by Leila Taylor (Repeater, 2019)

Leila Taylor is weird because she is a Goth, although she had a period away, trying to attain to normalcy. She is also weird, she would argue, because she is Black in the United States. Combine the two, not always comfortably (the young Taylor regularly asked herself why she was obsessed with these white-faced freaks – was she a race traitor?) and you get multiplied degrees and levels of out-of-placedness. You are double-unAmerican.

To argue that America is haunted by slavery isn't original; using your personal Gothic history and awareness to observe and analyse how that haunting happens definitely is. Ms Taylor wonders about the meanings of black and the functions of music, memorialisation, and ruins, in shaping how her home country understands Blackness. *Darkly* is reflective and often works more through questions than declarations, but is no less forceful for that. The personal and the cultural are skilfully interwoven, and the author never allows herself complacency: Goth is inescapably frivolous, but frivolity, Taylor realises, is a privilege, and one that she, living in the state of endless unease that Black Americans have to inhabit, may not be able to exercise. Elegantly and strongly written, while never over-written, *Darkly* makes other Gothic memoirs and analyses look superficial. Here are real horrors to deal with.

***Phantoms: the Rise of Deathrock from the LA Punk Scene*,** by Mikey Bean (2019)

Knowing where to begin with *Phantoms* is a struggle – there is such a huge amount to grapple with. Many books are labours of love, but author Mikey Bean has redefined the term. Over a decade or so he conducted more than 200 interviews with people who'd been around in the Los Angeles punk and post-punk scene of the late 1970s and early '80s, and then, rather than present each interview sequentially, he cut them up into sentences and built the bits into histories of bands, clubs, and individuals, decorated with the odd photograph from someone's shoebox collection and masses of reproduced flyers, gradually growing more sophisticated from their cut-and-paste punk origins. How he managed to keep track of all this is beyond me, speaking as someone who enjoys writing but loathes research. Some of his interviewees were no longer living when the book finally came out.

I confess that for a little while I was almost distressingly bewildered, until I worked out what the format was, and that the sections didn't represent group interviews as I originally thought, but assembled fragments of individual encounters. Sometimes they do read like actual conversations as Bean makes his interlocutors comment on each other from a distance, as it were. You begin by admiring the sheer industry, the overwhelming work, involved in *Phantoms*, but then realise how much Bean has rescued from the oblivion of memory. There is so very, very much in the book's six hundred close-printed A4 pages (what a lot of text that is!) that I had to have a pencil at hand to mark the passages I most wanted to remember, and even extracting a summary is a challenge.

The thing that strikes me most, and which I didn't know clearly before, is that what becomes Goth in the US – or least in California – was a parallel but independent movement from what happened in Britain. It quickly made connections, but had a different flavour from the start because of the materials it was working with (Natasha Scharf's *Worldwide Gothic* gives a summary of what was happening but necessarily only in a couple of pages). Deathrock grew from the alienation some felt as a result of what was happening to punk – as Mikey Bean puts it in an interview from a few years ago, 'the jocks who used to beat up the punks becoming punks themselves'. LA punk wasn't exactly a tolerant landscape: punks referred to Christian Death as 'fag music' and Michael Ely of Red Wedding described the whole scene as 'very very anti-

gay'. Thrown out of seminal LA punk band Germs by its lead Darby Crash, Don Bolles joined girlfriend Mary Sims (who'd been in a radical all-female horror-punk group called Castration Squad and whose inspired stage name was, and is, Dinah Cancer) to form a band called 45 Grave; they, and other outfits, drew on horror-movie imagery ('more Plan 9 from Outer Space than Hammer', said Sims, though she also modelled herself on Ingrid Pitt and Barbara Steele) and became more obviously what could be recognised as 'deathrock'. The more arty and less campy the music and the fashion grew, the more it could be thought of as 'goth', even though the term didn't arise until at least 1983 or so.

In theory all these genres were separate and people on the ground could tell the difference. Bruce Duff of 45 Grave described how Mary Sims and Paul Cutler 'went to the Roxy to see Bauhaus, which would have been the descent of straight-up Goth on LA as opposed to the harder-driving deathrock we were playing'. They were impressed by 'how they looked all regal in tuxedos and whatnot' while Don Bolles was scathing in terms I'm not going to repeat. When Bolles went to a club called Séance a couple of years later, 'I felt really old [in his late twenties!] coz these were the younger kids who were more like modern Goths than deathrockers proper'. Goth – once people recognised what it was – was felt to be something foreign. One of the best lines in the book is Scott Maxson's reaction on meeting Patrik Mata: 'his face was white and he had lipstick on and this long jacket. He looked like he was British or something'! Steve Darrow succinctly defined the difference by stating that Siouxsie & the Banshees' music went better with acid than punk did.

In practice, though, the individuals involved moved around fairly freely from one band and genre to another. Mary Sims says 'most of my friends kind of ricocheted between five scenes' and there was even a significant overlap with metal – Steve Darrow states 'we were all really into Alice Cooper and Sabbath' (he left Eva O's band Super Heroines to join Guns 'n' Roses so there you go) while Michael Ely remembers that Red Wedding 'associated deathrock with lame heavy metal music masquerading as punk'. Mary Sims described 45 Grave's outlook as not really deathrock at all but 'existential nihilism with a comedic edge', but look at images of her from the mid-1980s and you won't see any difference from self-identified Goths. Pompeii 99, who joined Rozz Williams in 1983 to make up the second version of Christian Death, look in a photo more like Bow Wow Wow rather than anything identifiably 'dark'.

Phantoms makes very clear a point I've always stressed, that Gothic is an extensive cultural tradition and once you make contact with it, it will start to draw you into its pre-existing world of references and identifications. In LA, there were local and universal aspects to this. You can see individuals

responding to the same set of influences that European proto-Goths were discovering: Shannon Wilhelm of Castration Squad and Cloudia Wintermute of Die Schlaflosen both modelled their look on Theda Bara ('I was a sort of Cleopatra vampire', said Wintermute) while Margaret Arana of Kommunity FK 'just loved Louise Brooks and the 1920s' and in 1978 was the only person in the area with her hair bobbed. Red Wedding 'often dressed up in vintage wedding attire … inspired by the Victorian-like vampires in The Fearless Vampire Killers'. The flyers and posters included in the book often 'quote' imagery from artists such as Harry Clarke and Aubrey Beardsley, from *Weird Tales* and religious tracts (as well as S&M pornography, which is another matter). All this is 'universal' Gothic, if you like, but living in California added other elements: the decaying glamour of Hollywood, memories of the Universal horror films of the 1930s, the great cemeteries, even locations such as the old Bela Lugosi estate with Lugosi's spider-shaped swimming pool where scene photographer Edward Colver took 45 Grave for a photoshoot. This meant that the LA scene could develop its own distinctive flavour quite apart from anything that might have been happening in the UK: there was a history here which Europe didn't have.

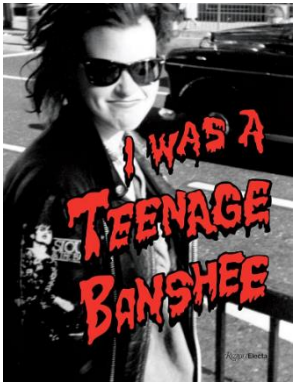
One of the very pleasing elements of the book is the way it draws attention not just to bands and their kaleidoscopic interactions but also to the clubs where people saw them and the shops where their stuff was sold. In Pomona, Rozz Williams's home town, there was an influential store called Toxic Records, run by Bill Sassenberger whose acidic commentary Bean very sensibly tends to let luxuriate down the page rather than chop it up. The store found 'a niche catering to the local malcontents', says Sassenberger. Williams and Ron Athey lived in one of his back rooms for a while but he tired of their challenging behaviour and ended up organising his own band in a parody of Christian Death, Moslem Birth. Along Melrose in Hollywood there were a number of businesses which catered to the scene such as the clothing store Poseur. Jwlhyfer de Winter summarised the problems for anyone trying to look good: 'if you thrift-stored for black clothes you were as likely to find some horrific polyester night-gown as anything else and a lot of people ended up taking that kind of stuff and fiddling around with it, because … you couldn't go to Hot Topic and buy a Goth dress'. Clare Glidden set up a club called Brave Dog 'to make a safe place for some of the people to perform and hang out … It was a pivotal time in my life and it changed my whole life'. Other clubs included Fetish whose owners eventually tired of the scene, held a 'Death of Deathrock' funeral event and turned it into a glam-rock club. Lhasa had an angular, *Cabinet of Dr Caligari* aesthetic and a black and white epoxy floor, and projected silent movies on the walls (and sometimes the bands). This all makes the important point that creativity isn't only found in musical form.

I learned less salubrious stories: about Radio Werewolf's totalitarian-themed Satanism which may or may not have been that tongue-in-cheek after all, or Mephisto Walz's awful experience in Europe in the early 1990s which led to two band members being unable to get home and subsisting on bread and alcohol for weeks; about Rozz Williams and Ron Athey crucifying a cat at one of their art performances, which they always claimed was dead when they found it, though not everyone believed them. 'I, for one, failed to see what the artistic statement was in this exhibition of depravity' remarked Bill Sassenberger icily. I was glad to discover 'lesbian Jewish deathrock artist' Phranc writing a song called 'Take off your Swastika' after she got fed up with every second punk in town wearing one (Siouxsie did that, remember). I marvelled at the description of the mid-teenage Rozz Williams: 'there was this guy with peg safety-pinned pants, a clear Mickey Mouse children's raincoat, and thrift store men's pointed slip-on shoes, one painted pink and the other black'. And I noted, sadly, the pervasive influence of hard drugs on the scene and the shocking number of times Bean notes in the text that somebody referred to has died.

And most of all I was glad to meet the late Jwlhyfer de Winter, arguably the most creative individual in the whole book. De Winter's mother was, Gothically enough, a medical illustrator who was often mistaken for Carolyn Jones, the actor who played Morticia in *The Addams Family*, but that didn't necessarily make for a comfortable home life and as soon as she could de Winter ran away to live with her grandmother. Influenced by Caroline Coon's 1977 book *1988: the New Wave Punk Rock Explosion* which covered UK punk (including Siouxsie & the Banshees), she began absorbing elements of universal Gothic culture – art, movies, poetry and literature, Salome, Beardsley, Bara, Nosferatu. She began showing silent movies at home with partner Vaughn Thorpe, and wearing veils, antique gear, crucifixes: friends accused her of emulating Rozz Williams but she'd reached her Gothic identity independently. She became a regular performer at club nights, not in a band, but reading poetry and dramatic monologues, and devising a vampire character who had been a Sibyl in ancient Rome, presenting her experiences in a theatrical piece called 'Theosomorphia'. The band Die Schlaflosen, who had a similar range of interests, provided the musical accompaniment for that, and for 'Masque of the Sirens', a tribute to Theda Bara. Jwlhyfer de Winter's Gothic creative work never stopped, though the rest of it falls outside the scope of this particular book.

In years to come *Phantoms* could provide enough jumping-off points to keep writers in this area busy for ages. And they will need to keep returning to what is an unchallengeable sourcebook for a dramatic, creative, and not always comfortable moment in subcultural history.

One final fun quote, from Magie Song about Eva O of Super Heroines and other projects: 'Eva became a Goth for Christ. I reckon the only adjustment to the costume was to turn the crucifix the right way up'.



I Was a Teenage Banshee, by Sue Webster (Rizzoli, 2020)

One Wednesday morning in 1978 the eleven-year-old Sue Webster sat beside the letterbox of her family home in Leicester, waiting for the highlight of her week – the arrival of music magazine *NME* - and its plop to the floor on this particular morning was to bend the trajectory of her life, like a prism twisting the light. 'I found myself catapulted across the room by a pair of killer-heeled, thigh-length patent leather boots … The figure I saw rising above me, wearing Cleopatra-style make-up and sporting a Nazi swastika armband, belonged to the surrogate mother I'd long been searching for'. Bowie, Kate Bush, the Slits, the Sisters, and a Leicester band or two, are all present in the book as well as Siouxsie Sioux, but they are barely even support acts; years later, Webster reflects that 'everything I ever learned in life was from listening to the first four albums of Siouxsie and the Banshees'.

But the narrative doesn't start there. It starts in the middle, with Webster leaving for university and her father packing three cardboard boxes full of tat which she then carts around with her for the intervening years, never examining them until the day in 2014 when she and Tim Noble part. That's when she chooses to open them. Box one contained school work and juvenile art work. Box two sheltered diaries, personalia, and 'letters written to me by friends I had forgotten and who had once cared for me'. Box three was the Banshees box.

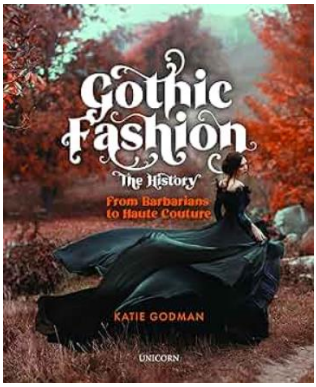
It was, Webster says, 'the obsession that dragged me kicking and screaming throughout my adolescence': LPs and singles, concert tickets and coach passes, 'crumpled posters with economical squares of Blu Tack still attached', her Banshees fan club membership card, bootleg tapes and 'much sought-after concert T-shirts held together for dear life by safety pins, not for the punk aesthetic but in order to retain their very existence'. She uses the memorabilia to prise open the story of her life.

I Was a Teenage Banshee is a big, floppy paperback, pricey and quite difficult to handle both physically and conceptually. Ms Webster presents her tale, a narrative of difficult growing up, love, loss and art, as an excavation of artefacts, elaborating on 'Crime Scene', the wall-collage she made out of the bits and pieces from the cardboard boxes and the links between them. Some items come from the boxes and some are the artworks she and Tim Noble make, apart and together: especially together, filtering their own enthusiasms and the works of past artists through their own trashy and deeply committed aesthetic. There are two contextualising essays – 'A Touch of Insanity', about Webster's teenage skirmishes with the mental health system; and the concluding 'I Was a Teenage Banshee', laying out how she encountered and fell for Siouxsie Sioux – and, straying and rambling through memory and rant, they are moving and illuminating, but for the most part we have to draw our own conclusions from those juxtapositions of paper scraps, photos and artwork.

Doing it isn't that easy, and clearer statements about Webster's actual interactions with Siouxsie and her music come from other sources than the book, for example a recent account in US magazine *Interview*. Here, she describes how she listened to the Banshees' first album *The Scream* and heard not raucous punk but 'almost like a soundtrack to a film … it left a lot more to the imagination'. Goth hadn't really been synthesised at this stage but that's as good an account of the difference between the two as you might ask for. Webster's leather jacket with studs and painted Banshee images she made herself: 'it was my pride and joy, my armour that I put on when I went to the gigs … It's the thing that defines you, because you aren't afraid to step out of your front door wearing something that you've made'. By the time she went to Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham in 1988, there to meet her future lover and collaborator, Webster had dyed her hair blonde, acquired a baseball cap, and, whether her earlier phase was best described as Goth or Punk, she'd left it behind. No Banshees music later than 1984's baleful album Juju gets a mention, but Webster doesn't forget completely: she sees Siouxsie perform again several times in the 2000s, adding to that pile of fading concert tickets. She doesn't tell us what she thinks about those later meetings with her idol, coming to her again after so many years have passed, more experienced, more secure, much better-off, and with her hair black again albeit not as spiky as in 1984. There's a lot she doesn't tell us, in fact.

But really all you need to unlock the mystery is that statement that Siouxsie became Webster's 'surrogate mother'. If her natural birth into a working-class Leicester family promised nothing very exciting, her second parturition from that dark musical and sartorial womb created a new potential life, one of exploration and provocation, one of different responsibilities. 'I came home

from school and hacked off my beautiful long shiny black hair with a razor blade. That's when everything changed and my life became a serious matter.'



Gothic Fashion, the History, by Katie Godman (Unicorn, 2022)

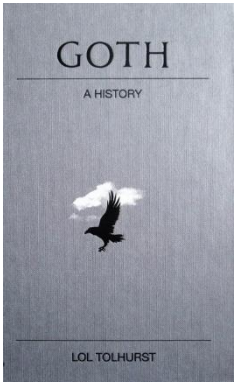
I'm starting to be wary of any book claiming to be 'the history' of anything. In this case, I heard Katie Godman talking about *Gothic Fashion* on the radio with excitement, intelligence and insight, so I can only presume it was her publishers who persuaded her to pitch the actual book at the level of a school project. For anyone who enjoys good writing, its ready resort to cliché and repetitions ('another type of sleeve …', 'another undead being …') make it positively challenging to read. Sometimes you find yourself trying to decode what the author means, because the words she's used don't express what she seems to want to say.

To an extent the problem lies with the scope of the book, which needs to summarise the whole history of elite fashion (at least in Britain) and then relate it to the Gothic, whose history it *also* needs to summarise. Such a grand task requires a masterly hand. Unfortunately, *Gothic Fashion* gives us statements such as 'in the late 1700s, gothic novels created a hunger for plays and artwork' (p.43), which leaves one gasping at the number of questions begged; or 'people [in the 1820s] turned to religion, especially the newer evangelical churches, for guidance, as they felt let down by an unpopular monarch' (62-3), which relates to no version of Britain's religious or political history that I'm familiar with. The necessarily broad-brush history is, to say the least, wayward.

Katie Godman clearly knows about the details of fashion, but the lengthy passage on changes in Victorian clothing (85-104), for instance, overlooks the fact that none of this schmutter is Gothic until it is *used Gothically*. It isn't Gothic simply by virtue of being Victorian. And this is the deeper issue with *Gothic Fashion*: that it's content to *describe* clothes and Gothic, but not tease out how they relate to each other through what people do with them. Through the generous illustrations we can guess at how this might have happened, and Katie Godman clearly sees the connections, but she doesn't seem to want to tell us about them. Even when the book does get close to examining how the process of exchange and development works, the result is sketchy, for

instance: 'women in gothic novels have often been sexualised … The crossover between fetish fashion and the gothic is, therefore, hardly surprising' (128). There isn't a single quotation or allusion to the actual experience of a real consumer of fashion to back up any of the statements, so the question of whether (for example) the *kind* of sexuality expressed through women depicted in gothic novels is the same as the kind people take on themselves when they wear a latex catsuit or dress like Bettie Page is never asked, let alone answered.

If all you're looking for is a summary of where modern Gothic gets its dressing-up box from, then this book will do what you ask of it. But it's not *The* history of Gothic fashion: we don't have one yet.[3]



Goth: A History, by Lol Tolhurst (Quercus, 2023)

It's only at the very end of his second book – his first, *Cured* (2016), described how The Cure came into being, what he did in the band, and how he crashed out of it – that Lol Tolhurst lets us in on the plan. At first he thought of writing an encyclopaedia, he says, before concluding that he wasn't up to it and that nobody would be satisfied by anything he might produce. So, instead, he wrote a memoir – which is why I categorise it here, and not in the subculture section. But its subject isn't 'my time in The Cure' – the earlier volume covered that – rather it tells how music, literature and aesthetics have fed into Mr Tolhurst's sense of who he is and how he looks at the world. You do *get* a thirty-page account of the life and times of The Cure, but you also get encounters with other great names in the post-punk and Goth world, the bands Messrs Smith, Tolhurst *et al* saw perform, met, or worked with. Sometimes the connection is a bit oblique: a discussion of Depeche Mode begins with the author describing how he bumped into Andy Fletcher when they were both being treated at The Priory, and I can't see any overlap that justifies two pages on the Sisters of Mercy at all, but along the way Mr Tolhurst addresses exactly the kind of questions other works don't tackle. What was it like being a teenage music fan in the 1970s? He outlines the importance of John Peel's Radio 1 show, the music press and local record shops. What led proto-Goth young people to start playing music in the first place? He describes the drabness of his and Robert Smith's Crawley surroundings and how their first visit to Salford revealed *exactly* why Joy Division sounded like they did; he relates Julianne Regan of All About Eve's similar feelings about the landscape she grew up in, and David J of Bauhaus's

about Northampton. During an account of The Cure's tour supporting the Banshees in 1979, he ponders the differences between London and the suburbs, laments the grotty venues they often played, and marvels at Siouxsie's brisk methods of dealing with the unenlightened males who gave her grief at concerts. Why did musicians keep going? Mr Tolhurst tells us how making new music with French group The Bonapartes made him feel better after the stresses of his own band; David J describes performing as 'an exorcism' of negative feelings; Julianne Regan confesses that making music was a compensation for a decidedly unromantic existence. The chapter on the poetry that's meant something to the author, and the concluding section on wider Goth culture, are there, again, to stress his sense of being part of something bigger than just one Goth band at one moment, something that ultimately brought him meaning.

You will look in vain here for Lol Tolhurst saying a single bad word about anyone. The closest he gets to being personally critical is in an account of The Cure's first trip to California in 1981 when they find themselves staying in the same 'kitschy motel' as Joe Jackson: 'Joe represented the new wave movement. Oh dear'. And that's it. For all the gloomth of the Goth world, this book is overwhelmingly positive. It's kind, humane and humble, conversationally-written and easy to read, and there is nothing else like it at the moment. Take off the odd paper half-jacket around the cover, and it's even rather beautiful, bearing an embossed black raven against a cloud on the front and a feather on the back, with a neutral grey background, a bit like a children's adventure book from the 1950s. Lol Tolhurst's girlfriend in 1977, when the book starts, was a black-clad girl with straight black hair he calls The Raven; and we know that, in the dark, All Cats Are Grey.

Modern Gothic Art

It strikes me as curious that there is no book about Gothic art *per se*. Gothic Studies began with literature, and academic work that touches on Goth subculture deals with music and fashion, but the *visual* arts have been mainly left aside. Richard Davenport-Hines's *Gothic* and Roger Luckhurst's *Illustrated History* are wider surveys, the first historical and the second thematic, while Natasha Scharf's *Art of Gothic* is about applied art; there's no Thames & Hudson volume (for instance) on Gothic, bringing together Salvator Rosa, Fuseli and the Surrealists, and one feels there really should be. *Modern* Gothic art has got a bit more coverage, but it's fair to say we will need a few more decades' distance to be able to sift the transient from what really matters.

Hell Bound, New Gothic Art, by Francesca Gavin (Laurence King, 2008)

Once you step outside the historical, or the ranges of critically-defined 'high art', 'Gothic Art' could be depressingly stereotyped and superficial. At first glance much of the produce of the 35 artists selected for *Hell Bound* by curator and journalist Francesca Gavin – or 36 if you count Sue Webster and Tim Noble separately – is what you might predict it to be, a collection that revels in images of disgust and gore. A second look, though, reveals a lot of wit and thoughtfulness: the old repertoire of skeletons, blood, ghosts and ravens (and a lot more) is pulled into the service of something deeper and more rewarding that investigates that profound and abiding Gothic concern, the undoing of the human. Luke Caulfield obscures his paintings with what look like bits of wooden packing cases; Dr Lakra defaces old advertising media; Izima Kaoru photographs models in designer clothes, far away amidst the scenes of their imagined deaths in dreamlike images. There's the occasional misfire (the imagined comics by the artist known as Putrid don't tell us much about anything) but this very international assemblage, ranging from the US to Finland to Japan, and incorporating film and sculpture as well as drawing and painting, manages to be worth your time. Webster and Noble are the only artists you'll ever have heard of, which is why the essay introducing each one is helpful. Heavy metal rather than Goth features among the musical enthusiasms of many of them, but so do family experiences, parents who were interested in birdwatching, Catholicism, or 'eccentric DIY' in Des Hughes's

case, and Ms Gavin's introduction, if not especially groundbreaking, is at least well-written.

Gothic Art Now, by Jasmine Beckett-Griffith (Ilex, 2008)

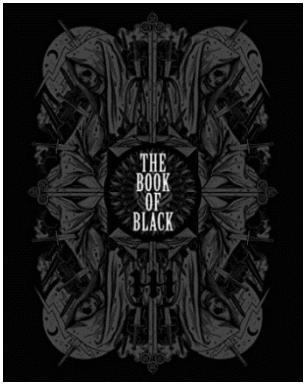
If other books I'm reviewing in this section deal with the undoing of *our* world, *Gothic Art Now* wants, in the main, to transport us to others. Most of the 85 artists it covers sit comfortably within the pale of 'fantasy'. Those fantasies are occasionally quite dark indeed (chapter 5, 'Lurking Horror', and chapter 7, 'Creepy Creations', contain most of that), but, as the compiler says herself, 'sometimes a hot vampire chick is just a hot vampire chick', and a lot of what appears in this book is strangely comforting and familiar even when it's supposed to be edgy. The artists included usually comment on their work, giving helpful insights into how it's made, although the best-known maker represented here, HR Giger, doesn't avail himself of the opportunity. Just occasionally, the real world interrupts the fantastic imaginings: John U Abrahamson answers the Columbine shootings (p.57), and Joachim Luetke's 'The Veteran' (pp.84-5) has a genuine compassion and outrage to it.

(The cover shown here is the edition I have: there are at least two others).

Gothic Art, by Nicola Henderson (Flame Tree, 2013)

Hidden in this glossy, foot-square slab of a book is a hint of just the kind of 'history of Gothic art' I would like to see. Nicola Henderson scans through both that and the various themes you might find reflected in its past and present - yet the works she refers to in her commentary don't appear in the illustrations. Instead, this is another showcase of fantasy art that, 'dark' as it

tries to be, won't give anyone nightmares, unless you're really scared by stereotyped werewolves (two exceptions, for me, are perhaps Melanie Delon's *Toile* and Rivenis's witty *Symphonum Insomnium*). The process of making ten pictures is examined in 'Technique' sections, and this is admirable, but as they're all digital images the techniques are the same each time. Mick Mercer provides a breezy introduction, but the text is often Gothy word-soup rather than anything very helpful. We do get to see how, at her best, Anne Sudworth rivals the Pethers.



The Book of Black, by Faye Dowling (Laurence King, 2017)

Opening with starscapes and an image of a dead tree highlighted white against a black sky, *The Book of Black* is even more abstract than its publishing stablemate *Hell Bound*, and its keynote is unsettlement rather than wit, even if Dr Lakra and Webster & Noble pop up again. Although Faye Dowling identifies as Goth (she uses the first person plural a lot in her introduction), if the artists seem interested in any musical form, again it's not Goth but Metal, and it might be interesting to speculate why that might be. The text and occasional comments on the artworks are a welter of generic Goth-speak, and Ms Dowling's section divisions don't seem very different from one another – until you reach the intriguing last chapter of the book. This looks at the inclusion of 'sacred geometry' in Gothic art – mandalas, sigils and occult patterns; there's a 17th-century engraving and a 1901 print of 'Thought Forms' by Annie Besant to make the point that these images are part of a meditative continuum. Some of them derive from tattoo art, which is, again, something no one else has taken notice of.

NOTES

1. Both of these works are now hard to come by and are very expensive for what they tell you. *The Literature of Terror* is a two-volume *magnum opus* and most non-academic readers can make do with shorter summary works. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* is comparatively short at 175 pages in its 1986 edition, and does most of its most important work in the Introduction. Again, Dr Sedgwick's themes are ably taken up by subsequent writers so nobody except specialists will find much need to consult the original.

2. Klaus Farin, *Die Gothics* (Thomas Tilsner: 1999); Peter Matzke & Tobias Seeliger eds., *Gothic! Die Szene in Deutschland aus der Sicht ihrer Macher* (Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf: 2000). A sequel to the latter was published in 2002, covering international Gothic, and a third volume in 2006. In 2003 the authors also produced *Das Gothic und Dark Wave Lexikon. Die schwarze Szene von A -Z*, which sounds a bit like the 'guides to Gothic' being produced in English at the same time. Dennis Burmeister and Sascha Lange's *Our Darkness: Gruftis und Waver in der DDR* (Ventil Verlag: 2022) describes the experiences of Goths in 1980s East Germany and the particular challenges that milieu posed, but again the book's in German.

Another book I haven't read – even though it's in English – is Sasha Blum's *The Gothic Subculture* (VDM Verlag, 2009). Dr Blum wrote as a Berkeley, California clinical psychologist 'with a special interest in subcultures' who set out to investigate whether Goth identification might be particularly linked to depression or addiction. She concluded it wasn't, and that practitioners 'do not need to be on high alert when faced with a client who appears to be a Goth affiliate'. That, unless you're also a clinical psychologist, is probably all you need to know.

3. One of the works quoted in Ms Godman's bibliography is a book that accompanied an exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Harford, Connecticut in 2016, Lynne Zacek-Bassett's *Gothic to Goth: Romantic Era Fashion and its Legacy*. This sounds very worthwhile – but obtaining a copy now is also very expensive!

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The academic establishment once overlooked and disregarded the disagreeable literature of thrill and shock that descended from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, and then, about forty years ago, began to recant its former opinion, and discovered something worthwhile in these blotchy and disreputable imaginings. Before long, Gothic academics couldn't stop writing about them.

Curiously, at around the same time, some young people began to think of themselves as 'Goths' thanks to the ominous music they listened to or made, which bore strange and remote linkages to that literary and para-literary heritage. Eventually, they began to think about, and write about, themselves too.

What you might call commentary on *haute-Gothique* and *basse-Gothique* have therefore been flowing into one another for decades now, and the bookshelf groans under the weight of Goth and Gothic tomes. Here are accounts of some.