



The Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies International (CN-CSI) Presents: Halloween

Workshop: *Nineteenth-Century Gothic Afterlives*

Friday 31st October, 10.45am – 5.00pm (CET)

****All times are in Central European Time (CET)****

10.45am – 11.00am (CET): Welcome Address

11.00am – 11.45am (CET): Speaker 1: 'Melmoth in the Tropics: The Wanderer from Argentina to Caliwood', Dr Sonja Lawrenson (Manchester Metropolitan University).

11.45am – 12.00pm (CET) Break

12.00pm – 12.45pm (CET): Speaker 2: 'Adapting Heathcliff; or, the Gothic Has an anti-Roma Racism Problem', Dr Sam Hirst (University of Liverpool).

12.45pm – 2.00pm (CET) Break

2.00pm – 2.45pm (CET): Speaker 3: 'From Gothic Pages to Haunted Airwaves: Nineteenth-Century Horror in Radio and Podcast', Professor Richard Hand (University of East Anglia)

2.45pm – 3.00pm (CET) Lunch Break

3.00pm – 3.45pm (CET): Speaker 4: 'Re-Enchanting the Laboratory: The Occult Transformation of Science in Horror Video Games', Marijke Valk (University of Birmingham).

3.45pm – 4.00pm (CET) Break

4.00pm – 4.45pm (CET): Speaker 5: '*Taboo*, Regency Romance, Gothic and the Reframing of History', Dr Derek Johnston (Queen's University Belfast).

4.45pm – 5.00pm (CET): Closing Remarks: Dr Emma Merklings (University of Manchester, Durham University).

Full Programme and Abstracts

10.45am – 11.00am (CET): Welcome Address

**11.00am – 11.45am (CET): Speaker 1: Dr Sonja Lawrenson (Manchester Metropolitan University)
'*Melmoth* in the Tropics: The Wanderer from Argentina to Caliwood'**

Published in 1820, contemporary reviewers characterized Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a belated and outmoded gothic horror; one more at home in the 1790s than in the final decade of the Romantic era. It is perhaps somewhat surprising, then, that its eponymous anti-hero repeatedly resurfaces in the twentieth century across Latin America's shifting cultural landscapes. This revenant Melmoth testifies to the malleability and dynamism of Gothic's transnational transmission from the late eighteenth century to the present day. As a member of the Protestant Ascendancy in nineteenth-century Ireland, Maturin was a beneficiary of Anglo-Irish hegemony. His protagonist, Melmoth, is also anchored in this sectarian history as a soldier of Cromwell's Irish campaign. Maturin's text situates Ireland's fraught colonial politics within a larger frame of British and Spanish imperialism. Pursuing the colonial connections between *Melmoth the Wanderer* and the transnational fictions and literary worlds that it continues to haunt, this paper traces the elaborate nexus of cultural and political channels through which *Melmoth* circulated in Latin America. In so doing, it situates the text and its afterlives within an intricate yet uneven

economy of colonial and postcolonial exchange where generic and national hierarchies are often mutually reinforcing but equally unstable.

Sonja Lawrenson is Senior Lecturer in English at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she co-directs the Long Nineteenth-Century Network. Her research centres on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish fiction. She has published on a range of Irish Romantic writing, including the works of Frances Sheridan, Maria Edgeworth, and Sydney Owenson.

12.00pm – 12.45pm (CET): Speaker 2: Dr Sam Hirst (University of Liverpool)
‘Adapting Heathcliff; or, the Gothic Has an anti-Roma Racism Problem’

“You really don’t need to be accurate. It’s just a book.” Kharmel Cochrane, casting director for the 2025 *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights is, indeed, ‘just’ a book. But, there is very little ‘just’ about books as they both reflect and affect the world which creates them. The same can be said, of course, for the seemingly endless stream of *Wuthering Heights* adaptations which have hit stages and television and cinema screens since the first in 1920. The dismissal of Heathcliff’s racialisation encompassed by Cochrane’s response to complaints about Heathcliff’s casting not only ignores important currents in the original text, which reflect contemporary attitudes towards and conditions for Romani people, but reflects a present-day disinterest in Romani history, rights and marginalisation. Heathcliff’s racial identity is ambiguous; but this talk builds on Madeline Potter’s reading of this very ambiguity as reinforcing the Romani identity associated with Heathcliff multiple times in the text (he is referred to as a ‘gipsy’ six times). In discussing Heathcliff’s Romani racialisation, it also builds on a cinematic tradition, particularly strong in early adaptations, of describing and depicting Heathcliff as explicitly Romani and seeks to explore how this early acknowledgement of race became displaced in subsequent adaptations.

This talk will explore a history of *Wuthering Heights* adaptation from 1920 to the current day, looking at a variety of case studies and charting the ways in which Heathcliff’s racialisation has been acknowledged, erased or depicted. It will chart the move towards a ‘white’ Heathcliff from early adaptations’ insistence on his Romani identity and will chart the history of later adaptations attempts or failure to grapple with Heathcliff’s racialisation. While contemporary discussion of Andrea Arnold’s 2010 depiction and its casting of James Howson celebrated the series as a unique attempt to address this racialisation through representation, this talk will argue that Arnold’s version should not be seen as ground-breaking in its approach. Rather, this talk will showcase how earlier stage productions addressed the racialisation of Heathcliff through casting and that Arnold’s version fails to explore in any depth Heathcliff’s racialisation. It will also discuss whether the contemporary celebration of Arnold’s adaptation owes more to the desire to appear inclusive than the sincere will to grapple with the difficult and demanding questions of the text, and its adaptations, can and should pose for the contemporary viewer. It will also argue that the failure in both current adaptations and scholarship to address the racialisation of Heathcliff as Romani is part of a wider trend of apathy towards the realities of anti-Roma racism’s insidious grip on modern British society. Beyond the broader issue of erasing the racialisation of Heathcliff in the text, this session will focus on how ignoring Heathcliff’s association with Romani identity relates to a larger problem in popular culture and Gothic studies – the failure, or lack of desire, to grapple with the Gothic and contemporary society’s depiction and treatment of the Roma.

Sam Hirst is a Tutor in Continuing Education at the University of Liverpool. They are a frequent collaborator with the Bronte Parsonage and are running a course on 'Bronte Afterlives' this year online. Sam created and manages Romancing the Gothic, an accessible programme of Gothic talks with an annual conference. You can find the schedule and recordings of past talks here: <https://romancingthegothic.com/class-schedules/>.

2.00pm – 2.45pm (CET): Speaker 3: Professor Richard Hand (University of East Anglia)
‘From Gothic Pages to Haunted Airwaves: Nineteenth-Century Horror in Radio and Podcast’

Audio is uniquely suited to Gothic horror, translating the shadows, whispers, and dread of nineteenth-century literature into intimate, immersive experiences. From the howls of wolves and rattling chains to the subtle creak of a door, sound evokes the unseen terrors that define the Gothic tradition. Horror sound designer Graham Reznick observes that audio can “unwrite and rewrite reality,” a power that aligns perfectly with the atmosphere of classic Gothic fiction.

This talk will trace the adaptation of nineteenth-century Gothic literature into over a century of horror audio. From early US and UK radio broadcasts – including *The Witch’s Tale*, *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, *Quiet, Please* and *Appointment with Fear* – to contemporary podcasts, these productions demonstrate how the Gothic imagination thrives in sound. Hand will explore how scriptwriting, voice acting, and sound design transform canonical texts into terrifyingly vivid experiences, while examining the interplay between literary source material and technological innovation.

Drawing on both historical research and his own work as a scriptwriter for the *National Edgar Allan Poe Theatre on the Air* – a podcast series now preserved in the Library of Congress – this talk will demonstrate how audio adaptations sustain and reinvent the Gothic, proving that the nineteenth-century imagination continues to haunt the airwaves today.

*Richard J. Hand is a Professor of Media Practice and Head of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, UK. He has a particular interest in cross-media forms of popular culture, especially horror. He is the author of two monographs on horror radio *Terror on the Air: Horror Radio in America, 1931-52* (2006) and *Listen in Terror: British Horror Radio from the Advent of Broadcasting to the Digital Age* (2014); the co-author of four volumes on Grand-Guignol horror theatre (2002, 2007, 2016, 2022); and numerous other studies of diverse horror media including, most recently, as the co-editor of *American Horror Story and Cult Television: Narratives, Histories and Discourses* (2023). Aside from academic work, he is a theatre and radio scriptwriter and director. He is the lead scriptwriter for the US-based *National Edgar Allan Poe Theatre on the Air*, a podcast drama series which, in 2020, was acquired by the Library of Congress for preservation in recognition of ‘its cultural and historical importance’.*

3.00pm – 3.45pm (CET): Speaker 4: Marijke Valk (University of Birmingham)
‘Re-Enchanting the Laboratory: The Occult Transformation of Science in Horror Video Games’

While science is often regarded as a tool to demystify the unknown, its power to shape the natural world imbues it with almost magical qualities, evoking both awe and fear. In many modern horror narratives, supernatural threats are reimagined as what Asma (2009) terms ‘medicalised monsters’: phenomena once linked to the magical or occult are now rationalised through science, making the monstrous biologically comprehensible. However, this paper argues that contemporary horror video games often resist such rationalisation, entwining science with occult aesthetics, ritualistic symbols, and Gothic imagery.

Video games such as *Bloodborne* (2015) and *Resident Evil Village* (2021) create worlds in which science and the occult are inseparable, challenging our conceptions of what is ‘unnatural’. In these games, virology, genetic mutation, and blood transfusion are presented not as rational processes, but as esoteric, channelling a distinctly Victorian Gothic tradition that re-enchants science as arcane, unknowable, and uncontrollable. Science, once a promise of mastery over the unknown, now carries its own mysteries, making it feel less like progress and more like dark magic. By tracing these Gothic continuities, this paper demonstrates how video

games reconfigure nineteenth-century anxieties into modern fears of genetic manipulation, bodily autonomy, and the limits of scientific mastery.

Marijke Valk is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham. Her project explores the Victorian alchemical revival and the re-enchantment of science in fin-de-siècle fiction. She has a forthcoming chapter with Palgrave Macmillan in Victorian Gothic and the Occult on Rosicrucian alchemists in early and mid-Victorian Gothic fiction.

**4.00pm – 4.45pm (CET): Speaker 5: Dr Derek Johnston (Queen's University Belfast)
'Taboo, Regency Romance, Gothic and the Reframing of History'**

The Stephen Knight and Tom Hardy series *Taboo* (BBC / FX, 2017) presents a mysterious man returning to England in 1814 to take up an inheritance, having made his fortune overseas. He revives a past mutual attraction with a woman, with a ball representing a key turning point in their relationship, including fighting a duel over her honour. All of these are recognisable tropes from Regency romances, but for *Taboo* they are only a part of its presentation of a darker, more Gothic version of the Regency, one which is explicitly based in exploitation and imperialism, represented primarily here by the East India Company. The fortune made overseas was taken from a murdered slave trader, the ball is a chaotic debauch, the duel is rigged. And the woman is the man's half-sister.

This paper uses *Taboo* as a case study in how different generic frames and modes of presentation influence our expectations of and interpretation of dramas. This includes the ways that different time periods have different associations, which these transformations challenge, and may encourage us to consider the role of the media and of accepted ideas of historical periods in relation to power and identity. The case study is also used to consider how this is relevant in the transnational television streaming market, as the need to engage international audiences reshapes the presentation of history, potentially moving from one standardised version of the past to another. This research therefore fits with concerns around control of the past and narratives of the past in a time of fragmented, transnational audiences confronting national narratives and the identities involved with those narratives, as well as conceptions of the gendered and classed audiences for historical drama.

*Dr Derek Johnston is a Senior Lecturer in Broadcast Media at Queen's University Belfast. His research into media and cultural history has been published in various articles and book chapters, including the monograph *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween* (2015), the chapter 'The Folk of Folk Horror' in *Folk Horror, The Return of the British Repressed* (2023), and as editor of *Nigel Kneale and Horror* (2025).*

4.45pm – 5.00pm (CET): Closing Remarks, Dr Emma Merkling (University of Manchester, Durham University)