

This book explores the connections between comics and Gothic from four different angles: historical, formal, cultural and textual. It identifies structures, styles and themes drawn from literary gothic traditions and discusses their presence in British and American comics today, with particular attention to the DC Vertigo imprint.

Part One offers an historical approach to British and American comics and Gothic, summarizing the development of both their creative content and critical models, and discussing censorship, allusion and self-awareness. Part Two brings together some of the gothic narrative strategies of comics and reinterprets critical approaches to the comics medium, arguing for an holistic model based around the symbols of the crypt, the spectre and the archive. Part Three then combines cultural and textual analysis, discussing the communities that have built up around comics and gothic artifacts and concluding with case studies of two of the most famous gothic archetypes in comics: the vampire and the zombic.

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GOTHIC in COMICS and GRAPHIC NOVELS

JULIA ROUND



Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels

A Critical Approach

JULIA ROUND



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Jefferson, North Carolina

In memory of my Grandpa,
Leonard Ball

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Foreword

by David Punter

“Horror and comics are old friends”: this is where the story begins, the story Julia Round tells in this book, a story about horror, a story about comics. It may seem, on the face of it, an odd proposition; after all, comics are meant to be comical, are they not? Certainly those of us brought up in the 1950s on a diet of the *Dandy* and the *Beano*, *Beezer* and *Topper*, found them so; the wheezes and pratfalls, the insurrectionist school children and the Bash Street Kids, this was all good hearty fun.

But the story is by no means as simple as that, and over successive decades it has become stranger and stranger. Above all, comics—now, of course, frequently referred to as graphic novels—have told tales which continually challenge and threaten societal assumptions; they have told stories of supermen and wonder-women, of ghosts, zombies and all manner of the non-human, of monsters, and of all that which does not fit comfortably into the “enlightened” assumptions of realism.

And in this address to darker spaces, corners of the mind that are never fully resolved, never completely dragged out into daylight, the continuity with Gothic, the major set of representations of horror, becomes, as Round traces it, apparent. For Gothic too arose, at least in part, to represent the fears and anxieties of an age, and it seems as though it has gone on, through a multitude of transformations, doing just that. There are stories, it would seem, which can never fully be told, which cannot be conveniently sealed off, stories which continue to haunt.

Comics, as Round reminds us, have had a golden age; so too did Gothic, and in both fields this heyday itself remains to haunt and condition current writing. Both Gothic and the medium of comics have an internal history; they both continually recapitulate themselves, seizing from the past upon icons, images which can be made to fit with present concerns. Sometimes these attempts to make things fit are not elegant: neither the Gothic nor the comic

book is always an elegant mode. Instead, in both cases there is violence, distortion, disproportion; but the need to address current concerns is still there, perhaps all the more powerful by being relatively unconstrained by convention.

What is said in this book—and it is surely right—is that both are forms of social critique, and at times this has been proven all too obviously right. From the attacks on the early Gothic by Wordsworth and many others to the numerous attempts to censor comics, which Round demonstrates for us in fascinating detail, there has been a perception of subversion—and perhaps this is where the “comical” comes back in, for if there is one thing which authority cannot stand, or withstand, it is mockery, a sense that all the panoply of power is in the end only relative, that there are other longer, older stories which render majesty laughable.

But surely comics have contributed to juvenile delinquency, it is said, and this has been a familiar argument; maybe. Maybe instead one might say that comics have served to articulate broad concerns about the alienation of youth. Gothic contributed, and still contributes, to a general dereliction of taste, others have said; again maybe. Maybe instead Gothic has produced and encouraged an element of social critique which re-values the “excluded other.” We might think here of Deleuze and Guattari’s vital work on the concept of a “minor literature”; admittedly they were thinking, so it would appear, of literatures “condemned to minority” through the often bitter conjunctures of language and violence, but it would certainly be arguable that both comics and Gothic are minor literatures in terms of their relations with accepted standards of taste.

Sometimes both are seen as somehow non-adult, but this should only encourage us to consider, or reconsider, what is meant by adulthood. Is it adult to drop bombs on civilians? Is it adult to send drones over territory where children may be harmed? Is it adult to shoot animals, such as, for example, badgers, in bulk? Is it—to turn the argument on its head—childish to imitate these sorts of behavior? Is it a good idea—or responsible, or adult—to market pink guns for pre-adolescent girls? What both comics and Gothic seem to suggest is that growing into adulthood may not in fact be a real process of maturation, but instead a collusion in the closing off of possibilities, a self-imposed blinking—and this can also be seen as a closing down of the possibilities of magic. Comics and Gothic, in their different ways—like myths, like folk story, like fairy tale—are very concerned with magic. But magic has its own time and space; and that is not here.

This book moves among a great variety of apparently separate disciplines. It deals in cultural studies; in media studies; in sociology; in textual criticism; in literary theory. There is nothing disjointed about this: we need insights from all these fields in order to appreciate the complex conjunctures at which

Gothic and comics sit. They speak about exclusion and they are mass market; they reject many of the established conventions of character and yet they evolve characterologies of their own; they seem to be fringe and yet they stir emotions and passions that go beyond themselves. Positive and negative; as we know, even to adopt Goth costume is sufficient in some quarters to call down a murderous wrath.

But leaving Gothic aside for the moment, in the case of comics and graphic novels—and after all that is what this book is about—we are called face-to-face, as it were, with the very notion of the “graphic.” For these texts deal in a variety of media which constantly exceeds, and therefore relativizes, the field of writing. The graphic: to do with writing, certainly, but also to do with the image, with inscription itself, that human practice as old as the earliest cave paintings of which we are aware, as old indeed, as we have only recently known, as the Ice Age.

Nothing entirely new, then, about graphics: and it is important to emphasize that what these graphics do is tell us not just stories but histories. Alternative histories, often. What we are seeing particularly at the moment is a whole variety of revisionist histories of the Victorian age, just as the original Gothic offered revisionist versions of the medieval. From chivalric illusion to steampunk, the continuity is clear, and it raises a horde of interesting questions which Round addresses. The most simple would be around alternative possibilities arising from the past—what would it have been like *if*...? But the more complex ones engage also with the future: what will happen *if*...? Or indeed with the present: what is it really like *now*, if we see the overt operations of the world through different eyes, under different perspectives?

In the end, one might say that it all comes down to dream. Dream: Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman*, perhaps the most distinguished of all the avatars of comics genius. Not dream in the sense of childhood dreaming about the glories of the future, all ballet shoes and an elite military force (not at the same time; it depends on your gender conditioning) but dream in the hard-edged sense, dream as the place without which nothing can ever be imagined to be different, dream as the propeller of imagination and change; what would we do without dream? “I have a dream,” Martin Luther King told us, and his words have reverberated through history ever since; dreams are not accidental, they are constitutive; and there is a joyous freedom within comics and graphic novels to lay before us these dreams. Of course there have been recountings of dreams in literature for millennia; but they have not been able to *show* us the visual, iconographic substance of dreaming, the realms where words—if they exist at all—only exist in their own materialisation, as artifacts to be visualized among a multitude of others. Comics offer us the possibility of the full, true *literality* of words.

Perhaps no canonical writer/artist has ever laid that before us as clearly as William Blake; and Blake, although his position was so thwart contemporary cultural knowledge, lived in gothic times. But as Angela Carter says (and Round reminds us), now we all “live in gothic times.” To assess what she meant by this would be more than the work of a foreword; but among many other things, she surely meant that no distortion, no grotesquerie, no excess is entirely foreign to our imaginations; and the graphic medium gives unique permission to address these “crimes of the future,” these heresies and perversions of the imagination. Perversion, as de Sade and Lacan—unusual bedfellows, but perhaps the relevant comic strip is yet to come—said, is the norm.

“An inner voice that never stops screaming”: I pause on this quotation, which you will find in Chapter 8. It is a terrifying thought, and yet in a sense it is also an unafraid thought; it may be abject, but it may also be a measure of the difficulty of the human task, to carry on despite that voice and yet—and this is the more difficult thing—not to cease to attend to it, not to refrain from listening, even at those moments when we least want to, to that voice which comes from the most scared, the most alarmed, parts of the mind, those parts that cannot shut themselves down in the face of the onset of death—or, as we seem to prefer to think of it, the moment of birth.

Many introductions to graphic novels (and I would be the first to admit that quite a lot of them are far, far too long) pause at this sort of moment and say, “Well, that’s quite enough of me.” And so I shall do the same. Well, almost: but first (and thus last), I commend this book to you as a most exciting read; it will take you to strange places. Some of them may be ones that you may never have wanted to visit; but hey, you cannot know until you get there, can you?

Read on ...

Preface

I wonder now if my misspent youth was so misspent after all.

I started reading comics in my teens, thanks to my brother—beginning with *Sandman*, moving on through *Preacher*, and spreading outwards like a virus. The storytelling strategies grabbed me as well as the artwork, the energy and the types of offbeat, irreverent tales being told. It was about the same time I started listening to Alice Cooper and Nine Inch Nails, and again my tastes spread outwards from glam and goth rock to darker, industrial sounds. Similarly, here it was the energy and performance that attracted me: an alternative approach to sound and vision. In terms of literature and art held separate, I loved Goya and the Romantics alongside contemporary horror and digital images. Manipulating the surface to reflect on the depth has always appealed.

This book tries to bring together some of the narrative strategies of Gothic¹ and comics and to use them to reflect on each other. I was struck by the number of parallels that could be drawn between the themes, cultures and archetypes of comics and Gothic in Britain and America and wanted to look at the ways in which one could help understanding of the other. This book is not intended to be a detailed survey of horror comics or their history, but instead aims to use gothic criticism to reapproach and reconsider comics theory. The moments on the comics page that have had the greatest impact on me have been wildly variable, and I’ve often struggled to find a critical model that would help me explain why. I’ve flirted between cultural criticism, formal analysis, and close textual reading but never found a satisfactory way of demonstrating why *this* page, why *this* phrase, why *this* image is the one with resonance. This is my attempt to bring these critical areas together and to create a model that will allow these texts to be assessed on their own terms.

I am indebted to the ideas of many superior theorists who have devised formal systems of analysis or produced detailed histories and examinations of the comics medium. This book is intended to reinterpret them using gothic themes and ideas. It is aimed at any scholar with an interest in comics or Gothic who wants to find their way into the other.

Introduction

At a glance it might seem that contemporary comics and the gothic tradition are completely unconnected. Gothic is a literary mode with marked historical and national genres such as the English Gothic, Pulp Gothic, American Gothic, Southern Gothic and so forth. It is most commonly cited as beginning in 1764 with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (subtitled "A Gothic Story") with its revivalist medieval style and content. The popularity and critical reception of Gothic has given it great canonical clout; classic works from the likes of Mary Shelley, John Keats and Bram Stoker link Gothic firmly with Romantic literature and notions of individual genius and authorship. By contrast British comic strips rose to popularity in magazines such as *Punch* (1841), then spreading to reprints and then original collections (*Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, 1864). The American industry emerged similarly in the late nineteenth century from the "funny pages" of Sunday newspapers, emerging to compete with pulp fiction magazine publishing. Unlike the canonical and literary Gothic, comic books are often seen as a mass-market industry of disposable entertainment whose collaborative (and initially anonymous) authorship and ongoing serialization have frequently resulted in this medium being viewed reductively as throwaway entertainment.

But horror and comics have a long and intertwined history. Gothic can also be found in American disposable pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales* in the early twentieth century, at the same time as comic books were emerging from the pages of newspapers. Gothic's revivalist tendencies means that gothic stories frequently retell old or traditional tales—far removed from our understanding of the originality and genius of the Romantic authors. Gothic has also long been identified as containing a dual sense of play and fear, apparent in early parodic and reflexive works such as Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and the ghoulish humor of the later American Gothic (for example Edgar Allan Poe). The playful and subversive nature of the comics medium (with its emphasis on caricature and

exaggeration) can be viewed similarly, and also links to notions of excess; and many genres of comics (crime, horror, thriller) also recall the gothic literature of sensation in their subject matter and style.

Conversely and more recently, comics have been reinvented as “graphic novels” and have enjoyed a burst of critical attention and literary awards. Technological advances together with talented “star creators” have resulted in the medium establishing a kind of canon of its own. Within the mainstream British and American titles and imprints, golden-age superhero writers and artists such as Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, Bob Kane and Bill Finger created characters that still dominate popular culture and were developed further by silver-age creators such as Denny O’Neil and Neal Adams, alongside new creations, most obviously from the pen of Stan Lee. Subsequent star writers and artists (such as Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Frank Miller, Ed Brubaker, Mark Wade, Chris Claremont, Scott Snyder, Robert Kirkman—and many more) have cult followings. The independent and smaller presses also have their superstars: from R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar, Howard Cruse, Lynda Barry, Gilbert Shelton, Kim Deitch and Aline Kominsky-Crumb to Trina Robbins, Bryan Talbot, Dave Gibbons and Alison Bechdel. Across the industry and throughout its development, various creators have also worked in an explicitly gothic mode, including Jack Kirby, Sam Kieth, and Dave McKean and, within the EC Comics stable, Johnny Craig, Wally Wood, Al Feldstein and so forth. Already definitions of the two traditions seem less antithetical, and both comics and Gothic seem to contain a kind of shared paradox, of which the above points are only a few examples.

Henry Jenkins (cited in Duncan and Smith 2012: 10) argues that comics scholarship, still at its formative stages, must focus on becoming a “diverse and robust” discipline. The medium requires a vast inclusive approach that can take account of all aspects of comics study: from the cultural to the aesthetic, the structural to the thematic, as well as reflecting the import of trans-medial, intertextual and historical references. The gothic mode’s sprawling reach, that has absorbed and subverted so many genres, makes it an appropriate tool for building on the critical approaches to comics that have been put forward to date.

This book will explore the connections between comics and Gothic from four critical angles: historical, formal, cultural and textual. It will identify structures, styles and themes drawn from the literary Gothic and discuss the ways in which these inform the creative processes and production of today’s comics, paying particular attention to the first and second wave of the “Brit invasion” of American comics that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. As Williams and Lyons argue: “There are good reasons to understand North American comics in a transnational and transcultural context: the institutional

transaction of texts, creators and capital across national borders has contributed to observable productive tensions in the comics themselves” (2010: xiii). The particular “transaction” that sowed the seeds of DC Vertigo brought in writers who were drawing on a literary background, and in particular one dominated by an interest in Romantic and Gothic writers. For example, in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* Alan Moore translated his interest in English Gothic into American Gothic, to great effect, and Neil Gaiman plundered gothic imagery, horror tropes and mythology in the early issues of *Sandman*. The DC Vertigo texts thus form the basis of this study.

Part One offers a historical approach to British and American comics and Gothic; providing a brief history of both industries and traditions and summarizing the development of their respective creative content and critical approaches. It identifies parallel points and similar turns or events, including censorship, allusion, self-awareness and developments in criticism and audience. This section concludes with a Retrospective that summarizes the current position of comics theory with reference to writers such as Scott McCloud, Will Eisner, Charles Hatfield and Thierry Groensteen and offers a working contemporary definition of Gothic in accordance with theorists such as David Punter, Fred Botting, Jerrold Hogle, Julia Kristeva and Jodey Castricano.

The second section brings these two perspectives together and uses the Gothic to revalue formal comics theory. It reinterprets established critical approaches to the workings of the comics medium using gothic critical theory, and builds upon the work done in this area by identifying the ways in which tropes of the literary Gothic are apparent in the formal workings of today’s comics. Its introduction argues for a holistic analytical approach to the comics medium that uses three main gothic tropes (haunting, seeing and decomposition) to identify the idiosyncratic workings of an individual text in order that this model might be used to analyze it, as follows. Chapter 3 (“Haunted Places”) uses the gothic notion of haunting to discuss the layout and architecture of the comics page, paying particular attention to the manipulations of time and space and the use of echoes (of both format and content). Chapter 4 (“Excess, Embodiment and Artifice”) then analyzes the multiple and mobile perspectives used on the page; arguing that a self-consciously inauthentic narrative is created in comics through an excess of perspective: for example when an extradiegetic (or external) narrative voice is combined with an intradiegetic visual perspective (for example as embodied by a character in the story).¹ Finally, Chapter 5 (“Revenant Readers, the Crypt and the Archive”) discusses the active role of the comics reader in interpreting both the shown and unshown content of the page. It redefines the gutter as the crypt, a space whose contents can only be realized through a process of temporal disruption: in the reader’s “backward-looking thoughts.” Its interpretation recalls Michel Foucault’s ideas

about the archive (as a space reflecting a particular historical period and culture) and Derrida's thoughts about the crypt (as a place where the known and the unknown reside simultaneously). This section concludes with a Retrospective that puts these approaches together to analyze a series of case studies: pages from *House of Mystery* (Neal Adams 1969, Joe Orlando 1969), *Sandman* #1 (Neil Gaiman et al., 1988), *iZombie* (Chris Roberson and Michael Allred, 2010–2012) and *The New Deadwardians* (Dan Abnett and I.N.J. Culbard, 2012).

Part Three, "Culture and Content," then combines cultural and textual approaches to the medium. Chapter 6 discusses the subcultural status of gothic and comics, considering the communities and cultural practices that have built up around their artifacts. Chapter 7 looks at the use of gothic absorption and its atemporal effects in pursuit of allegory and (literary) authenticity. The final two chapters then discuss the presence of Gothic in comics at the *fin de siècle* by offering case studies of modern treatments of two of Gothic's most famous archetypes in comics: the vampire and the zombie. It situates these figures in their cultural and traditional contexts, summarizes their usage in comics, and applies the critical approach set out in Part Two to examples taken from a selection of contemporary British-American titles. This study then concludes with some final thoughts and reflections.

It is the intent of this book to provide scholars with an introduction to the historical, formal and cultural development of the Gothic tradition and the comics medium in Britain and America. By flagging key points in the development of both traditions I hope to suggest shared points of sub/cultural, semiotic and semantic significance. My critical model draws heavily on the formal critical work already done on comics narratology. It tries to provide a simple set of three tenets for approaching the comics medium that, when applied, can be used to create a holistic framework for analyzing each text on its own terms. This allows for the vast variation possible in creators' usage of different aspects of the comics medium. It approaches comics narratology as a spectral frame that emphasizes the reader's acts of discourse alongside the text's style, themes and story content.

Please, follow me into the dark...

PART ONE : HISTORY

1. A Brief History of Gothic

Horror and comics are old friends. The British tradition of mass-produced art can be traced back to fifteenth-century woodcuts sold in the streets that showed gruesome scenes of executions. Their prose equivalents would emerge in nineteenth-century England as "penny dreadfuls": fictional story papers that provided serialized and disposable pulp entertainment (Sabin 1996: 11–14). In America, dime novels and short fiction magazines were popular in the nineteenth century and then gave way to the pulp fiction (or "pulp") around the turn of the twentieth century. All told genre fiction, such as adventure stories, horror, romance and crime. In the 1950s, American crime and horror comics rose to popularity in both countries, telling tales of "disemberment, corpses come back from the dead, and premature burials" (King 1982: 440), until public outcry and censorship removed their bite. This winding path of mass-produced art thus ultimately leads back to the creaking door of Gothic—the realm of murders, monsters, ghosts, castles and mystery. This chapter will discuss the beginnings of the British gothic tradition (both its fiction and its critical approaches) and establish a working definition and model that will be applied to the formal properties and content of contemporary comics in Parts Two and Three.

Early Gothic

It is difficult to define Gothic consistently since it changes to suit its time. An initial focus on creeping terror and the unsaid gave way to melodrama and hedonism; later adapted into deviancy, violence and out-and-out horror. Richard Davenport-Hines summarizes Gothic historically, stating that its appeal "lies in the strength of backward-looking thoughts" (Davenport-Hines 1998: 385), in overwriting and subsuming other genres. For this reason, historicist critics have argued that Gothic's recycling of texts into a developing narrative is at least partially responsible for literary notions of poetic tradition and lit-

As this review shows, comics criticism has developed alongside the product, and it may be said the two areas reaffirm each other. However, it is further worth noting that certain developments in literary criticism have also contributed to these two areas. David Kunzle ties his criticism of comics to the emergence of children's literature, which genre alerts us to a new emphasis on the role of the reader. He considers the participatory nature of comic strips (that is, the emphasis on the reader's involvement) as a tool to mediate public response in light of the printed word (which removes the teller from listener) and mass reproduction/circulation (which emphasizes this distance) (1990: 3). This book follows the developments in literary criticism towards a consideration of the (active) reader and the text as defined by Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco. It argues for a holistic approach that considers the gestalt meaning of the text by establishing a theoretical framework for its analysis taken from the act of reading itself.

Retrospective: Critical Models of Gothic and Comics

Looking Backward

It seems useful to pause at this point to consider the literature (both critical and creative) that has been surveyed and summarize the key tenets of the gothic tradition and the comics medium that will be used herein as we move forward. Significant literary texts (from the likes of Shelley, Stoker, Stevenson, Potocki and Maturin) have been considered alongside critical work that approaches the gothic mode and the comics medium from a variety of perspectives.

Gothic is best defined as a mode of writing that has been particularly prominent at certain points in time and space, creating historical genres such as English Gothic, American Gothic, Decadent Literature and so forth. It is interesting to note that these periods are often at a time of extreme stress or social unrest; supporting David Punter's argument that Gothic is a response to social trauma—a subversive and critical way of addressing problems in society. Defining Gothic as a mode—an ongoing tendency or style—means it can subsume genre (according to Northrop Frye's [1957] categories) and cross media. This in part explains Gothic's simultaneous thematic incorporation of other genres—for example as romance, westerns and so forth are "done in a gothic style."

Many key elements and movements within the gothic tradition find parallels in the history and narratology of comics. Historically speaking, Gothic has sustained itself through the absorption of other genres; parodying and subsuming them in the process. This process is in many ways echoed by the development of American comics through processes such as retroactive continuity (the overwriting or addition of events to create a coherent character history). Gothic's subcultural status is reflected in the marketing and audience of contemporary comics, as are themes of commodification and consumerism. Finally, a gothic structure is apparent in the comics medium, as embedded

stories are presented in a spatial layout where all moments co-exist on the page, recalling tropes of haunting and multiplicity.

It therefore seems feasible to apply gothic theory to contemporary comics—especially those published at the end of the last century, a time of social change and impending visions of apocalypse (whether Y2K panic or new age interpretations of the Mayan calendar). Comics' recent revisionist treatments of superheroes and horror icons can then be understood as genres being redone in a gothic mode, and revisiting the main tenets of comics theory from this perspective may also help to clarify and simplify the plethora of approaches on offer, instead offering an inclusive framework for analysis that interprets the unique qualities of comics using gothic symbols.

Thematically, Gothic is characterized by a tendency towards inversion, parody, subversion and doubling. Some of its most memorable texts (*Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) weave all three into a mutually reliant web. In addition, it can be structurally complicated (to say the least). A key symbol is that of the crypt, which critics such as Jacques Derrida, Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok and Jodey Castricano use to decode the complex signifiers of gothic and psychoanalytic language. The content of gothic texts is often symbolic, and the crypt (which guards a hidden secret) reflects this.

Multiple (and often contradictory) narratives are also common. Tales may have several "layers" of embedded stories (as in *Frankenstein*), some of which may be hidden or a-chronological (for example as Frankenstein's creature literally bursts into Robert Walton's framing narrative). Temporality is therefore also an issue: gothic stories may conjure a false historicity, or take place in an alterity such as the near-past or not-so-distant future (steampunk fiction arguably combines both). They can tell dis-located, timeless tales, or the narrative itself may be disrupted, atemporal, or circular. Even if a linear temporal structure is used, multiple voices or perspectives may destabilize this (as in *Dracula*), and unreliable or multiple narration is therefore a mainstay of gothic fiction.

Therefore the Gothic contains the possibility of a kind of three-dimensional structuring, where stories may be layered (either chronologically or spatially) or told from a variety of perspectives within a singular narrative (again, either diachronic or synchronic)—or a combination of both. In this way, gothic structure is also linked to the theme of veracity. Paratextual material such as footnotes or purportedly extratextual material (letters, extracts from historical documents or manuscripts) are frequently used to raise the question of authenticity, or multiple stories contradict each other, or unreliable narrators omit the truth. Emotional affect and the self-conscious creation of subversive or sensational fiction means Gothic also holds the active reader at its center. These elements will now be explored.

PART TWO : MEDIUM

Introduction: A Gothic Critical Model of Comics

Looking Forward

This section will expand upon and reinterpret three main areas of comics narratology in accordance with Gothic, new literary criticism, and formal comics theory.

Early comics criticism such as the work of Will Eisner and Scott McCloud puts forward the idea that "time equals space" in comics, but it will be argued here that the representation of time in comics is more complicated than this, as Gothic reveals. Thierry Groensteen's notions of braiding and arthology employ the notion of retroactive reevaluation of panel contents, a "looking backwards" type of reading where the meaning of each panel relies upon the preceding and subsequent one. Temporality in comics is not straightforward, and the following chapter will explore it using the metaphor of haunting (as both a legacy and a promise) and the symbol of the crypt. It will argue that the layout and architecture of the comics page illustrates a view of time as a co-present and static structure that we only experience sequentially. Echoes of past and future are used to emphasize key moments or themes, and the architecture of the page layout uses deviation from a standard grid in pursuit of ornamentation and/or function.

Notions of artifice and excess abound on the comics page, as exposed by Charles Hatfield's art of tensions, which employs opposed concepts to explain the workings of the comics medium. In addition to Hatfield's four tensions, multiple points of view, co-existing storylines, alternate realities and self-conscious fictionality structure the appearance and content of the page. The tensions that Hatfield identifies can therefore be viewed as part of an *aesthetic of excess* where conflicting information or imperatives structure the text. This excess creates and validates a multiplicity of perspectives, where multiple worlds or interpretations can co-exist, and Chapter 4 will therefore revisit

comics aesthetics (color, style) and use of embodied and disembodied perspectives: considering these as an *excess of seeing*.

Thirdly, the active reader (who performs what McCloud calls “closure”) and the interpretative and bridging powers they bring to the comics text will be analyzed in Chapter 5. The reader brings into being the comics creator, who is not dead (as Barthes would have us believe), but undead. Theirs is a spectral authorship, relying upon a revenant reader to create (decompose) the narrative from the page’s spatial layout. This reader’s activity takes place in the gutter, here redefined as the crypt, for although the reader creates and realizes the bridging events of the story these will never be viewed: their existence is known, but unseen, locked away in the gap between the explicit elements of the story. The boundaries between self and Other are blurred here, and this final tenet also informs the two previously discussed: for haunting also structures the reader’s gutter activities (as the reader must have viewed the next panel in order to fill the gap), and an excess of seeing blurs the boundaries between self and Other (for example when we are given the perceptual point of view of intradiegetic characters).

These three main areas underlie many contemporary analyses of comics. For example, Paul Atkinson also uses similar divisions incorporated into a holistic whole in his comparative discussion of reading comics and paintings, saying:

If we focus on the material construction of the page the emphasis will be on the spatial properties of solidarity, for its dimensions can be analyzed and described without reference to a reader. However, if the focus turns to the reader, the emphasis shifts to the temporal properties for this solidarity is only constituted in movement. This relates both to vision, where the eye is in constant movement as the saccadic lines follow and articulate the key features of the visual field, but also to consciousness where all phenomenal properties are formed over a definite duration and where our conscious state is always in flux [Atkinson 2012: 69].

Of course these ideas are all interlinked and interdependent—for example, as Jan Baetens (2001) argues in relation to Philippe Marion’s work, artistic style (“trace”) affects the viewer’s interpretation of a scene or character. The reader must recognize echoes (if present) and stylization or perspective may of course contribute to this.

The following model considers these three essential areas of comics narrative under the following gothic labels: haunting/architecture (layout, echoes of past and future, iteration); seeing (perspective, fictional signifiers, artifice, embodiment and excess); and crypting and decomposition (the reader’s response and interpretation of shown and unshown events via the gutter/crypt and archive). In accordance with new criticism it attempts to show how we must move away from critical views of the text as having a singular, refer-

ential meaning, containing an independent truth to be discovered, or as an attempt to re-present reality. Instead, as Wolfgang Iser argues, literary meaning should be viewed as “the product of interaction between textual signals and the reader’s act of comprehension” (1980: 9). Thus comics can be approached as gothic narratives that expose a *performance* of authenticity through their haunted layout/architecture (as a literalization of Iser’s model of literary experience that defines the text as “an ever-expanding network of connections” [116]), their excess of style (Iser’s “transformations of perspective”), and their active readership (Iser’s “wandering viewpoint”).

This model therefore offers a holistic approach to comics analysis and attempts to demonstrate how the criticism of comics must go beyond taxonomies and classifications. James Chapman (2013) notes that, in what he names the “cultural theory” approach to comics (formal models relying on the language of semiotics and structuralism), “the emphasis on signifying codes and structural processes too often seems to deny space either for any creative agency on the part of the writer or artist, or any sense that the readers of comics are individuals rather than an undifferentiated mass.” I therefore suggest here that textual analysis should be drawn from the narratological features of the medium, and that the variety possible in comics suggests that, rather than noting the standard deployment of devices, we should look for the moments within an individual text where the medium draws attention to its own workings and performs its own narratology. By looking closely at these three main features of the comics medium (page layout/architecture; an excess of perspective; and an active, ghostly reader) in gothic terms, I hope to identify some of the effects they can achieve. I will argue that using these three main areas to identify the idiosyncrasies of each text allows the comics critic to build a unique critical model for each text.

This is similar to Iser’s “productive matrix,” which the reader uses to produce meaning during reading. According to Iser (1980: 60) the reader must discover the codes that underlie each literary text (for example the establishment of an unreliable narrator; the use of metaphorical or surrealist images, and so forth) as only then can they proceed to an act of reading that is unique to each text and which, when performed, will bring out its meaning. As he suggests, we must look at what literature *does*, rather than what we speculate it might *mean* (53). I therefore propose that we should extend this approach to literary criticism as well as literary consumption: in this instance, by considering the dialectic between haunting, excess, and crypting/decomposition in order to create a unique critical model for each comics text.

Retrospective: Putting the Monster Together

Looking Backwards

In this section I have proposed that, rather than separating and classifying the compositional elements of the panel or page, we should instead reflect on its strategies to build a holistic approach to comics analysis. My gothic model thereby suggests that the reader should consider the comic using the following terms: the presence of haunting; the excess and use of (dis)embodied perspectives; and the role of the revenant reader in the gutter/crypt/archive. This analytic approach to the formal layout of the comics page allows consideration of the structural and formal elements that convey and complement the manifest content of the comics narrative (i.e. the diegetic story). Their use and interactions with each other create a spectral framing that realizes Iser's act of reading through the demands they make on the reader. It is this "productive matrix which enables the text to be meaningful in a variety of different contexts" (Iser 1980: 231). Identifying the productive matrix of an individual comic book gives a picture of its gestalt potential for meaning and so by using this to criticize the text (rather than reducing its processes to a more general system or taxonomy) we can approach it on its own terms and identify the ways in which it constructs meaning.

The approach can be summarized as follows:

Haunting and architecture:

- Intratextual and paratextual echoes (of content or layout) at multiple embedded levels.
- Intersections between ornamentation, function and scaffolding.
- Mirroring and doubling (of content or layout).
- Temporal disruption (repetition or flattening/stretching of time).
- Use of depth (obscuration; indicating focus/asides/diegetic levels; use of backgrounds; transgression or removal of panel borders).

Excess and embodiment:

- Supportive or subversive relationship between panel contents that doubles meaning.
- Excess of style (color, line, emanata, effects).
- Excess of perspective (embodied or disembodied).
- Multiple/hidden levels of diegesis.

Ghostly reader:

- Direct address to the reader or implicit invitations (cliffhangers, paratextual material).
- Using the processes of the archive in *crypting* or *decomposition*, as follows:
- *Crypting*: creating the unshown events in the gutter/crypt/archive, which can be:
 - within the panel (obscured through emanata, effects, or false gutters);
 - outside the panel's temporal scope;
 - outside the panel's spatial scope.

These unshown events are buried in the crypt (the interior of the panel) and contain the potential for multiple interpretations (via the archive).

- *Decomposition*: interpretation using extratextual, paratextual, intertextual or intratextual information, to:

- interpret the shown content of the page;
- identify echoes relating to earlier events in the comic; about the comic;

from other fictional texts; or events/people in the real world. These echoes may be reflecting (taken from another source and used faithfully to give an extra interpretative level to the story) or absorbing (taken from another source and revalued through acts of absorption and overwriting).

These shown events contain the potential for multiple interpretations (via the archive) based on the reader's knowledge and surrounding discourses.

These strategies may not all be present in each comic, but a text's tendency to use some (and not others) should be read as indicative of its potential for meaning and thereby they should form the basis of the critical approach we use to analyze it. The following case studies demonstrate this at the level of the page, the prequel, the individual comic book, and the series.

Case Study I: "The Game" House of Mystery #178

(Neal Adams, DC Comics, 1969)

In "The Game," Neal Adams makes use of the page's architecture to create a sense of the uncanny. Angular panels are first used when protagonist Jamie, caught out in a storm, decides to shelter at "the old Unger House" which he "is not even supposed to go near," and persist for the rest of the story (with the exception of the foot of page six where Jamie's father is reasserting normality and a right-angled panel is used to reinforce this point). Haphazard and angular shapes feature in particular on the page where the two children begin playing the mysterious board game together. However, looking closely at a single page (shown at figure 11) reveals the ways in which Adams uses the gothic potential of the comics medium to create atmosphere and subtly indicate the central motifs of his story. Depth and layout are both used within the page architecture to indicate the bed that will be the central location and conjure of the story's uncanny content: the bed appears at the centre of the page and transcends the panel borders above it. Its wooden post appears again at the bottom right of the page (a place of significance), where it is shaded so as to gleam, and again cuts across all three of the panel borders shown on this page. It is bigger than Jamie's head in this instance and so size, position and depth are all used to draw attention.

The page contains other examples of haunted architecture: its first panel shows Jamie out in the valley during a torrential storm. The branches of a tree are used to create ersatz panel borders but in fact this is a single panel in which Jamie is repeated four times in an example of haunting using the de Luca effect. Our perspective zooms in on his face during the course of these first three "panels," which enhances affect by displaying his fear and panic. The thought bubbles are actually only assigned to one of these images (their emanata ties them all to the final picture of Jamie) but are used to direct the eye across these four different iterations of the character.

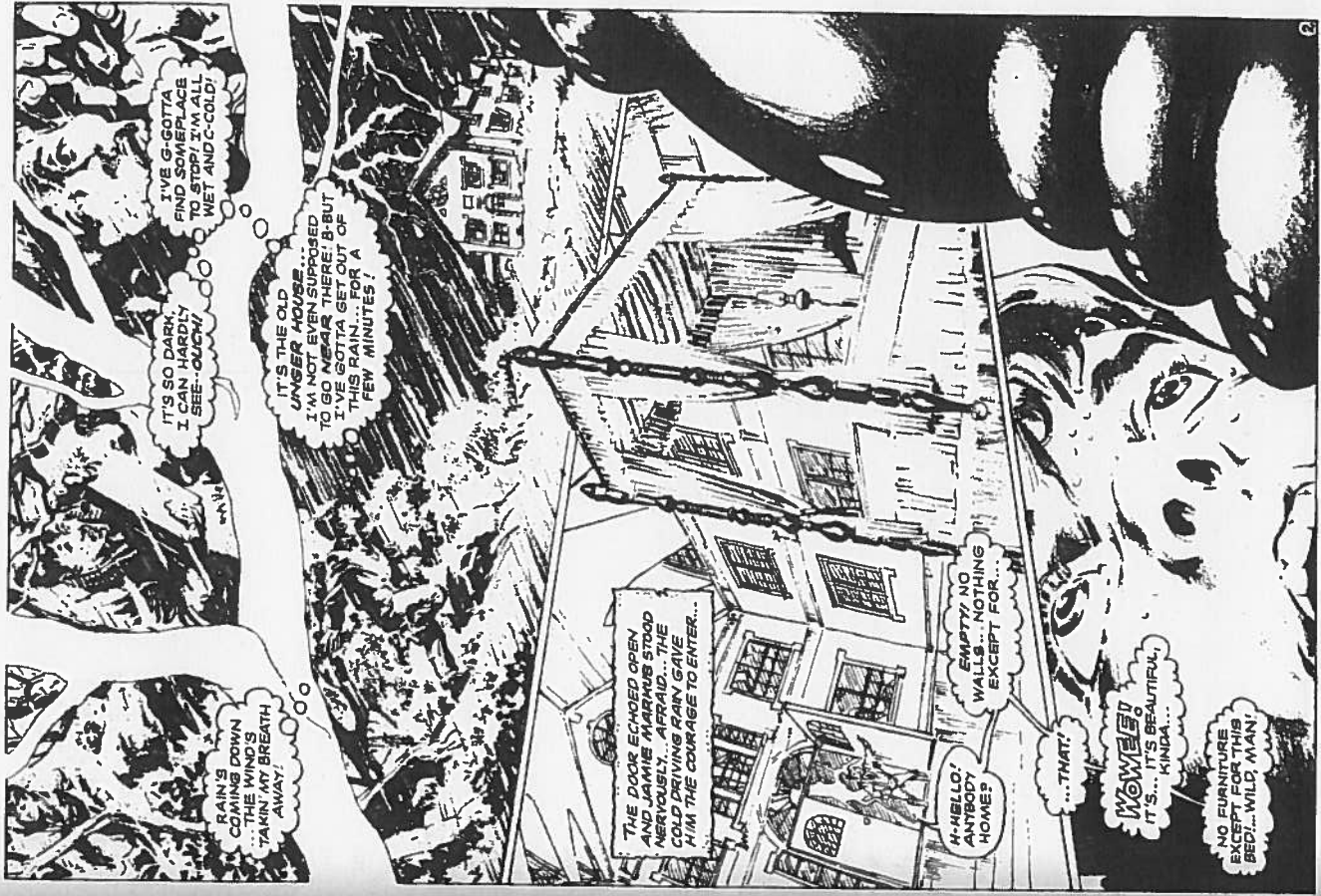


Figure 11. The Game, by Neal Adams, *House of Mystery* #178 (© DC Comics).

Perspective and excess are also used to create a feeling of unease, as in the central panel which uses giddy angles to create a sense of mirroring in the interior of the house; the floor slopes off towards us on a disconcerting plane and there are no interior walls. This makes the central image of the bed (supported by the strong vertical lines of its poles and the definite right-angles of its frame) even more effective. Perspective remains disembodied, which fits with the tone of the story—we are helplessly watching Jamie transgress one of horror's oldest tropes (entering the "old" house he has been told to stay away from). Typography is used to emphasise his amazement ("WOWEE!") as is language (the bed is introduced with his statement "Empty! No walls... Nothing except for... that!"). The bed thus becomes a nameless thing, further indicating its uncanny potential. The final panel has his face in extreme closeup, with emphasis on the eyes, perhaps encouraging the knowing reader to recall the centrality of this motif to pre-Code horror comics—we wonder what Jamie will see in the bed, and how it might damage him. Other than this the reader is not invited to do much here except warch—architecture and excess are instead the primary strategies used by Adams on this page to create and sustain a sense of uncanny helplessness.

Case Study II: "House of Secrets Promo," *House of Mystery* #182 (Joe Orlando, DC Comics, 1969)

In "House of Secrets Promo" (figure 12), the strengths of the comics medium are used to add interest to the page in which Cain introduces new sister title *House of Secrets*. In terms of architecture, the page is mirrored vertically, with a single panel in the top and bottom rows, and a central motif of circular panels. The top row contains a bleed between the two "panels," allowing for Cain to be repeated uncannily in the same space as he first addresses the reader and then turns to look out of the window. Panel borders are transgressed by both Cain and his two monstrous companions, whose feet invade the space of the second row. The switch to circular panels is both ornamental and functional; it draws attention to the middle row, the shown content of which (Abel's house) is the subject of this page. The page, as a promo, gives a lot of information, and subversive relationships between word and image make up part of this excess, for example in the juxtaposition of Cain's gargoyle with his unthreatening name ("Gregory") and status as a "pet." Cain's final words are similarly subversive, working against the shown content of the page as he tells the reader that *House of Secrets* will "be on sale in August! Don't buy it!"

The circular panels at the center of the page are functional as well as ornamental, since they indicate that the reader is being assigned an embodied intradiegetic perspective: that is, the view through Cain's binoculars. Existing alongside this shift of perspective (between disembodied and embodied) is the direct address of the reader in both word ("Well, well, well ... you finally made it here. Come on over to this window...") and image (the first and last panels in which Cain breaks the fourth wall to gaze straight at us). The strategies all work together to immerse the reader in the page and create an intriguing sense of the uncanny.

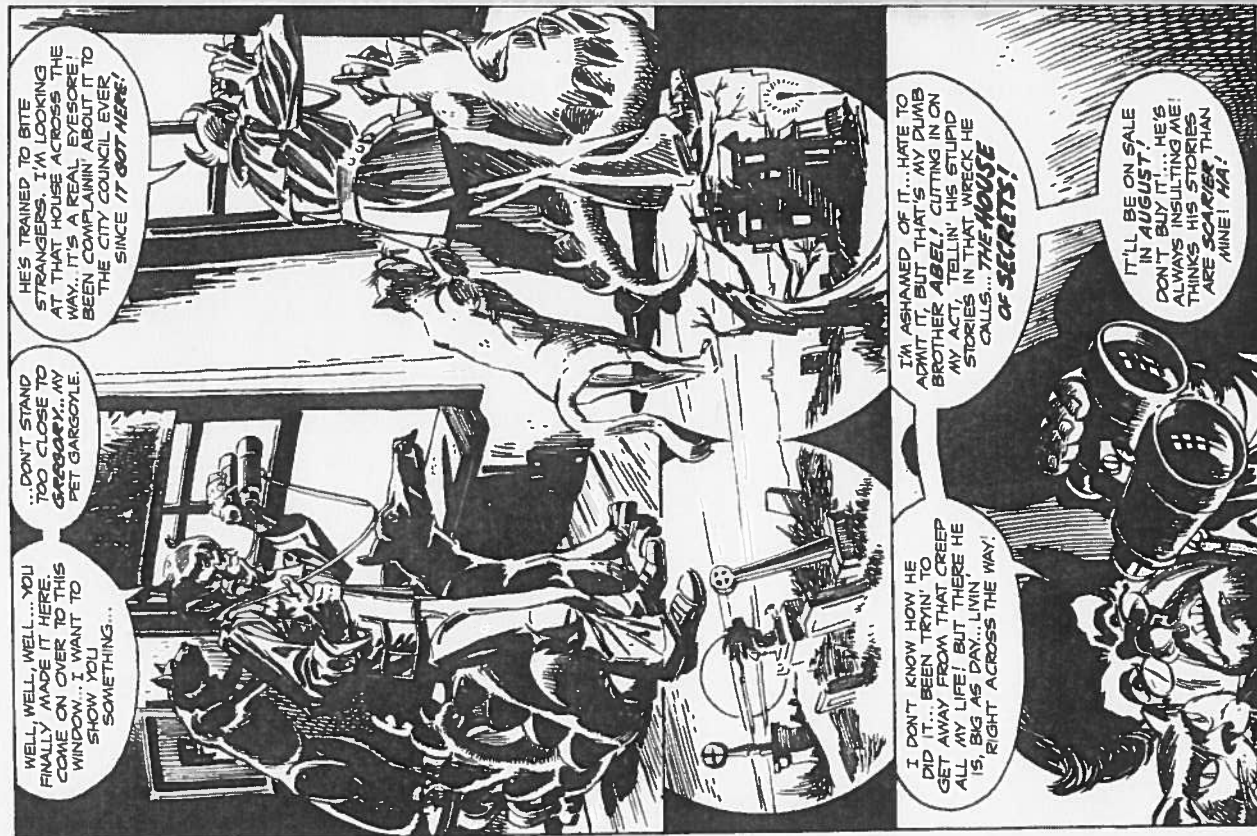


Figure 12. House of Secrets Promo, by Joe Orlando, *House of Mystery* # 182 (© DC Comics).

Case Study III: Prequel to *iZombie* #1

(Chris Roberson and Michael Allred,
DC Vertigo, 2010)

iZombie's protagonist is Gwen Price, a zombie/gravedigger who can pass for human as long as she eats a brain every month to prevent her from losing her identity and memories, an act that also gives her access to the deceased's memories. The opening seven pages of *iZombie* were included as a preview to the series in the Vertigo anthology *House of Mystery Halloween Annual* (2009). Gwen and her friends (ghost girl Ellie and weretierrier Scott) are trick-or-treating and interrupt a masked man about to torture a helpless male captive. I will describe the analysis page-by-page in order to demonstrate this process before summarizing in more analytical terms.

iZombie opens with a yellow extradiegetic narrative box indicating we are in "Eugene, Oregon" and subsequent narration in contrasting purple boxes. The space/time dichotomy is summoned here since, while the first narration only tells us about place, the second narrative strand deals in time, telling us it is "Halloween, when all the ghouls and goblins come out to play." While the use of two distinct colors indicates this is a different voice, probably belonging to an intradiegetic character, it remains disembodied (as it is unidentified). The narration then comments supportively on the first panel's visual content, for example in the phrase "Some of the monsters stay home" which refers to the occupant of the house shown, indicating impending menace. The establishing shot of the street then gives way to smaller panels showing the house's interior at the foot of page 1.

Like the narration, visual perspective also remains disembodied throughout the first two pages, however the second page begins to disrupt the panel layout by using more acute angles as scalpels are revealed, building towards a dizzying bird-eye shot perspective for the final panel, which is wider than the

rest, quite literally having a wider scope (and giving us more information). The disorientation caused by both doubles the effect of this page's final panel, which reveals a captured chained man. The narration in this panel ("Between Halloween and a poke in the eye with a sharp stick, I'll take the stick, thank you very much") comments subversively on its contents, which show a long sharp metal rod being brandished by the house's occupant, presumably with the intent of using it on his captive. This also references older horror comics' injury to the eye motif for those readers with this extratextual knowledge.

Page 3 then offers some shifts in perspective: panel 2 uses emotive background images and coloring, as well as a disembodied over-the-shoulder shot that nonetheless (in cinematic terms) aligns us with the potential victim, before panel 3 moves to the embodied point of view of a character's hand pressing the doorbell. The central panel on this page offers a wide shot of the downstairs of the house, before the final row of three panels first uses spatial exclusion (showing the voices of the characters outside, who we assume may be the police: "Come on, open up!"), then embody the perspective of the house's owner as he reaches for a mask, and then finally exploit the space of the page in a final cliffhanger as the door is opened ("Is there some ... something I can do for you, off ... off ... officers?") This bottom row thereby offers the reader the perspective of the potential murderer through all three devices: we are aligned with his assumption that the police are outside, just as we embody his visual point of view. The devices used on these first three pages build tension, disorientate the reader, and raise questions and expectations.

Page 4 then refutes all these assumptions, being a splash page that reveals Gwen, Scott and Ellie (who are trick or treating) as the unwanted callers. It indicates that Gwen is our narrator ("if they think I'm putting on a mask, they're nuts") as the only unmasked character in this scene and this is reinforced by the use of color (her skin matches the narrative boxes). An extra level of irony is in fact present here in the form of a reflecting intertextual echo that refers to cult zombie film *Shaun of the Dead* and to the *iZombie* series as a whole. This is because Scott really is a werewolf and Ellie really is a ghost; so in fact Gwen (who is a zombie but here is dressed as Shaun) is actually the only one masking her identity. Perspective is then used again as Gwen breaks the fourth wall in panels 2 and 3 of page 5, as she says "Quit stalling. Make with the trick-or-treat already"—statements that arguably the reader has been directing at the comic until this point in terms of its narrative debunking and slow reveal.

The final panel of page 6 is shaped to resemble looking through the eyes of a mask or similar, with its black border reminiscent of a balaclava or costume; the upward-looking angle indicates the reader is most likely embodying the perspective of a nearby child in Halloween costume, looking at the trio. The remainder of the prequel gives us some exposition from Gwen on her job

and her friends, and hints at (though does not explicitly state) her zombie status through her narration, which adds to her dialogue ("Oh, Ellie") by conveying her simultaneous internal thoughts ("My friend the ghost-girl will believe *anything*"). Page 7 is the first time a "typical" Vertigo layout (of both vertical and horizontal symmetry) is used. The final wide panel of page 7 is a summary panel that seems outside the main diegesis as it shows the main characters from the first story arc (many of whom have not yet been introduced) in tableau. Given the Halloween context, which might mislead readers into thinking this is a diegetic scene of a selection of costumed characters, this arguably seems a hidden extradiegetic level. It is further enhanced by the use of color (red sky) and lightning/effects lines that frame Gwen, as well as perspective (since all the characters are breaking the fourth wall to look directly at the reader). The background emphasizes Gwen's central position, and she stands in a stereotypical zombie pose, indicating the irony of the overall series.

In summary: Haunting is not used extensively in the *iZombie* prequel, which is not terribly surprising given these are the opening pages of a series. Backgrounds (where present) are pure black and irregular panel shapes are used subtly (for example acute angles to indicate increased tension). Traditional tropes (for example the use of panel size and depth to indicate a switch to an interior or a closer focus on a scene) also feature. However, excess and embodiment are key to the narration of this prequel, which opens with anonymous narration and disembodied visual perspective; echoing its content which aims to raise suspense and questions to entice readers into the series. Switches to an embodied visual perspective are brief (occurring only in two single panels) where they are also employed to mislead the reader: again increasing suspense. Color and style are used to indicate emotional mood; and a hidden level of extradiegetic summary is apparent in the final panel. Finally, the revenant reader is engaged through the space of the page, as cliffhanger panels are positioned to raise tension further, and is never directly addressed. The majority of the narrated sentences begin with "I," stressing *iZombie's* titular focus on identity (knowing readers will also recognize an allusion to *I...Vampire!* that indicates a humanized monster). Reflecting echoes of other texts and the series-as-a-whole thus invite the reader to use intertextual knowledge to increase the sense of irony.

Using this model thus reveals the ways in which the *iZombie* prequel uses the comics medium to enhance its creation of suspense and mystery, just as its manifest content raises questions to which it only offers partial answers. The textual strategies it uses also indicate this comic's knowing awareness of its own ironies, which are also apparent from its title (that both flags up its subject matter and emphasizes personal agency) and its treatment of the zombie (both traditional as a brain-munching gravedigger, and non-traditional as heroine and individual).

Haunting and Architecture

Various pages in issue #1 use ornate architecture, for example when Burgess is first introduced (2). Ornamental frames border the page (metapanel) during the spell-casting which snares Morpheus and its build-up (4-7). These frames are also prefigured on page 2 (where Burgess gets the Magdalene Gri-moire, the last remaining necessity for his spell), although they merge with the décor of his office here. This page framing returns again at the end of the issue, when Morpheus casts his spell on Alex (35-39), and thus ornamentation signifies magical activity. Page 3 also uses its architecture reflexively, positioning the introductions of Ellie Marsten, Daniel Bustamonte, Stefan Wasserman and Unity Kinkaid within the gates of Burgess's mansion: their stories are quite literally shaped by his actions.

Later, when they "began to wake up" (33) the page uses a 3 x 3 grid for the first time (albeit with some panel borders removed), and this explicit display of scaffolding perhaps indicates that "normality" is beginning to return. Page layouts throughout the issue carry meaning: for example page 25 where the top row is split into three panels, the second into two, and the third composed of just one, as Alex repeatedly returns to offer Morpheus a deal. Haunting via the repetition of panel shape and composition is used here to stress the cyclical nature of his visits, and the diminishing number of panels gives a sense of a countdown to some sort of resolution. Other examples of significant layout might include page 31, which is vertically mirrored around a jagged central panel, showing Morpheus entering and then leaving Mort Notkin's recurring dream.

Panel shapes like this also carry signification: for example Alex's claustrophobic nightmare on page 34 is conveyed through a series of narrow panels as he experiences his house as a labyrinth. Many panels in this issue are irregular: shaped like prisms or (when showing Morpheus's point of view from within the crystal dome he is trapped in) circular with a fish-eye perspective (see further below). In this way the architecture of the page stresses the unnatural and magical events of the story and the antithetical perspectives and attitudes of its main characters.

Depth is also used to emphasize transgression as panel borders are broken: most obviously during the summoning ceremony the Order conducts, for example the knife Burgess holds cuts across the panel borders (5) just as his ceremony transgresses the normal order of things. Depth is used again most effectively at the close of the issue, after Alex is cursed with eternal waking: a single panel showing him in the "real" world/main diegesis is distinguished from the hypodiegesis of his dream through depth, and the position (whether over- or under-laid) varies between the two facing pages.

Case Study IV: "Sleep of the Just," *Sandman* #1

(Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg, DC Comics, 1988)

The first *Sandman* comic sets the scene for the events of the series, showing the capture and imprisonment of Morpheus by magician Roderick Burgess: the consequences of which will be the catalyst for the series' plot. Burgess and his cult attempt to trap Death but instead capture Dream/Morpheus. They imprison him for over seventy years (causing a bout of "sleeping sickness" across the world) before he finally escapes and revenges himself on Burgess's son with a nightmare of eternal waking.

Sandman #1 signals its gothic content from the opening page, which contains standard motifs of gargoyles, a creepy isolated mansion (complete with very British servant who leaves the door on the chain, opening it just a crack with a "Good afternoon, sir"), and a disembodied narration in a parchment-style box that indicates only date ("June 6th, 1916") and location ("Wych Cross, England"). These elements imply this story will be a prequel, and connote Gothic's revivalist tendencies.

The background on this page is in fact a splash page that shines through in panel 4 and it sets the scene, showing Professor Hathaway looking worried and clutching his book. The perspective flits between the disembodied (jumping from a wide opening shot to a dizzyingly aerial view) and embodied (Professor Hathaway). The layout is mirrored (the top and bottom panels both show a long view of the house, and the page's most gothic elements (Hathaway's use of the ornate door knocker to produce what is doubtless a hollow-sounding echoing hollow, and his entry into the house) take place in the gutter/crypt.

Excess and Embodiment

Repetition is combined with embodied perspective when Morpheus escapes, as we are shown three repeated panels of the guard Frederick's dream of his beach holiday from the embodied point of view of Morpheus. The images include his/our hand reaching in to take a handful of sand. Architecturally, the lack of borders (as these panels run off the bottom of the page, which is where Morpheus's hand reaches in from) emphasizes this further. While Frederick's dream is ostensibly a hypodiegetic level, blurring our position with that of Morpheus hides this, as the dream's events have reciprocity with the main diegesis (Morpheus will use the sand to escape from his prison). The most obvious use of embodied point of view comes from the visuals assigned to Morpheus while in his crystal prison: his fish-eye perspective makes his captors look warped and inhuman (see for example page 12). Non-realistic color is used as Alex's "eternal waking" nightmares reveal themselves as such (38–39) along with stereotypical horror tropes such as a melting face and a decapitation. Colored text is used to emphasize moments of extreme stress, such as the final "COME!" that summons Morpheus (7), or Alex's entry into eternal waking ("NO!" [38]). Morpheus's speech and narration are colored black with white typography, a style that will continue throughout the entire series, and grants his first words ("Trapped. Observe" [12]) uncanny weight. The issue contains a few examples of interplay between word and image in the pursuit of black humor. After transforming from a cat, Morpheus taunts Alex "Cat got your tongue?" (35); Stefan Wasserman "went over the top" (11), and color is also used as Wasserman's shell-shocked face is an uncanny green hue. Excess is thus used to emphasize monstrosity and call attention to horror and black humor.

Ghostly Reader

The revenant reader is required to perform a number of decompositional acts in reading *Sandman* #1. These mostly include recognition of intertextual and extratextual echoes, setting the tone for the entire series. The issue draws on many of the tropes of magic and horror: Morrow and Hildebrandt (2007) suggest that Burgess's incantation might reference the Tarot (coin, stick, song and knife corresponding to Disk, Wand, Cup, and Sword suits), and also note the use of the names of historical pantheons of gods and demons. The summoning spell and ritual also recall British horror film *The Devil Rides Out* (1968). In this movie, Satanic cult leader Mocata chants "With salt I summon thee, with hair I summon thee, with blood I summon thee"; in *Sandman* Roderick

Burgess recites "I give you the blood from out of my vein... and a feather I pulled from an angel's wing [...] I summon with poison and summon with pain." While the incantation may not be identical, the *mise en scène* shares many elements (including runic circle and chanting, cloaked acolytes), and Morpheus's prison is also similar to the circle of chalked runes the Duc de Richelieu and his companions will use to protect themselves at the end of the film. Morpheus's appearance (conveyed in flickering red [7]) also echoes the demonic apparition that entrances Rex later in the film. These supportive echoes lend credence to Gaiman's scene. In a similar manner, Burgess's introduction and reappearance in circular panels (2; 17) also resonate with the EC horror comics, whose hosts often appeared in such panels.

Absorbing intertextual echoes are also present, for example in the retcon of Wesley Dodds, the golden-age Sandman, shown in his costume on page 18, whose activities are here overwritten as a response to Morpheus's imprisonment. Similarly, Morpheus' use of sand to put his captors to sleep (29) coheres with the traditional powers of the Sandman in children's stories, and so Gaiman begins to overwrite both these versions with his mythological figure. Morpheus' use of the line "Lord, what fools these mortals be" (36) (from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) is not just a literary reference but also coexists as an intratextual supportive echo and an act of intertextual and extratextual absorption (since *Dream* will be revealed in *Sandman* #19 as the first play William Shakespeare is commissioned to write for Morpheus: overwriting both the play's content and its history). Multiple extratextual absorbing echoes continue throughout the issue: Burgess is situated as a contemporary of Aleister Crowley (he mentions him explicitly as a competitor on page 4) which fits with the period and location specified on the opening page. Burgess is also visually reminiscent of Crowley in later life, doubling and reinforcing the parallels between them and lending authenticity to his activities. Minor events such as the killing of a cat (17) may also have parallels in Crowley's life; such activities were referenced in his libel suit against Nina Hammett (*Guardian* 1934).

The battle of Jutland that Professor Hathaway mentions (2) adds further credence to Gaiman's time period. More strikingly, however, the sleeping sickness (*Encephalitis Lethargica*) that Ellie and Unity are diagnosed as suffering from (20) is a real epidemic that spread around the world between 1915 and 1926. It has never recurred (except for isolated cases) and never been explained. This event in world history is overwritten by Gaiman in a grand absorbing echo, explained as a consequence of Morpheus's capture. Even the zombie tradition is referenced here, via in the sleepwalking Daniel Bustamonte ("The superstitious say he is zombie, a walking dead man" [20]). Various cultural references also appear, most obviously in Mort Norkin's dream which features

American celebrities including Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and John Wayne (31). The reader's knowledge of events and people thereby affect how they decompose the page, demonstrating the processes of the archive.

In this way, processes of haunting, architecture, excess, and decomposition are all used to situate *Sandman* #1 as a gothic story and to set in motion the strategies Gaiman will develop and use throughout his series.

Case Study V: *The New Deadwardians*, #1–8

(Dan Abnett and I.N.J. Culbard,
DC Vertigo, 2012)

The New Deadwardians is set in a post-Victorian England where the upper classes are composed of vampires ("Youngs") and the lower classes made up of zombies ("Restless") and humans ("Brights"). The plot follows Chief Inspector George Surtle who discovers a wider plot than he imagined as he attempts to solve a series of murders of "Youngs."

Haunting and Architecture

The comic uses a symmetrical regular page layout on most pages, with even, regular panel borders. Exposing its scaffolding in this way gives the impression of impassive and methodical regularity. The gutters and page borders are white throughout the first six issues, as George proceeds methodically through the case. Towards the close of #7, however, panel borders become more angular as Mr. Salt lies to George, telling him that he has been using his body to perform these murders. The diegesis we have been following literally disintegrates with these words, which is replicated by the panels' sudden switch to an angular shape and the disappearance of their borders for the first time in the entire series. This change is both ornamental and functional as it comments on the story content by continuing the whole time George believes Salt's story, until Louisa exposes the story to him as a lie and the panels return to right-angled normality. Page borders also vanish during this time, but return for issue #8. In this final issue, however, these borders and backgrounds are dark grey/brown, providing a different mood (perhaps indicating George has learnt too much?) as the case closes.