Introduction

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Blake and the Gothic today

In the robust and expanding field of Gothic studies, William Blake remains a spectral, marginal figure. As early as 1973 David Bindman referred to Blake’s ‘Gothicised Imagination’, inviting readers to explore potential points of contact between this influential aesthetic and historical form, and Blake’s poetry and visual art. Yet Bindman seems to proffer and then revoke the invitation to further exploration of this topic, concluding that Blake’s attraction to the Gothic was to its ‘simplicity and purity of style’ and that, more broadly, ‘Blake seems … to have been immune in his early years from the artistic influence of “Gothic Horror”.’ Drawing on contemporary Gothic studies that present the Gothic as a rich and varied historical, aesthetic, political, and affective mode, the present study seeks not to establish lines of influence but to recognise aspects of Blake’s art that do in fact productively intersect with the Gothic horror taking shape contemporaneously with Blake’s career. While generally overlooked in studies of the Gothic, Blake’s art has, ironically, spawned a rich Gothic afterlife. Consider the horror fiction of Thomas Harris’s Red Dragon and Hannibal, which have, in turn, inspired Hannibal, an American television series. Or take graphic novels, such as Todd McFarlane’s Spawn (1992–present), Mike Mignola’s Hellboy (1993–present), and most notably British comic artist Alan Moore’s V for Vendetta (1982–89), Watchmen (1986–87), From Hell (1991–96), and even his recently published second novel, titled Jerusalem, which is a crippling one million words in length. This ‘strange beast’, as Moore describes it,
not only shares its namesake with Blake’s magnum opus, but, like so much of his work, draws on the Gothic tradition. As David Punter observes, Moore’s work is a tissue of referentiality, taking us back to Blake, Nietzsche and the Gothic and romantic traditions.

Beyond the page, Blake’s Gothicism proliferates in film, including Jim Jarmusch’s noir-Western Dead Man (1995), Ridley Scott’s sci-fi thriller Prometheus (2012), and Lars Von Trier’s Antichrist (2009). Of Von Trier’s film Roger Whitson keenly observes that the promotional poster art of a tree consisting of a multitude of writhing bodies dramatically resembles Blake’s 1808 version of ‘The Vision of the Last Judgment’. Moreover, the tormented and violent couple at the centre of the film resembles the horrific dynamic of Tharmas and Enion in Vala, or The Four Zoas, following Albion’s violent splitting into individuality. In a darkened Blakean vein, we should also recall the staged tableaux and photomontage of Joel-Peter Witkin’s Songs of Innocence & Experience (2004), a tour de force featuring photographs of gory, deformed bodies accompanied by Blake’s poems. What all of these works intuit is that if the ‘Gothic is of the soul (the phantomatic, the unseen, the fleeting)’, for Blake and for the art he inspires it is also emphatically ‘of the body (the horror, the blood, the distortion of the frame).’

In Gothic Riffs (2010), Diane Long Hoeveler argues that the Gothic is characterised by its highly repetitive quality, what she dubs its ‘riffs’. Nowhere is this clearer for Blakean iterations than in contemporary music. Blake has inspired the goth band Mephisto Waltz (Track 5. ‘The Tyger’, Immersion [2001]), and the black/death metal band Thelema, whose album Fearful Symmetry (2008) includes tracks with Blakean titles such as ‘The Fly’, ‘Tyger’, ‘The Crystal Cabinet’, and ‘The Human Abstract’. With tracks like ‘We Sleep’, ‘Blind to the World’, and ‘The Machine’ the technical thrash metal band Blake’s Vengeance (Demo 2014) imagines itself a sort of reincarnation of the poet-engraver. Even Goth-icon Marilyn Manson has given a public performance of Blake’s ‘Proverbs of Hell’. The collusion of Blake and Goth/metal music is cleverly suggested in a recent article titled ‘Death Metal Lyric or William Blake Quote?’ in which Eli Petzold lists ten aphoristic quotations – like, ‘Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead’ – for the reader to identify as either a line from a metal band or the great British Romantic poet himself. (Here, the answer is not Opeth or Meshuggah, but Blake.) It is not just that Blake’s ‘cult status’, as Whitson puts it, has ‘transformed to signify dark and daring innovation’, but that when taken together, these contemporary Gothic ‘texts’ (in the largest
sense of that term) operate as a cultural barometer for Blake’s influence, symptoms of Blake’s own profound Gothic sensibility that restlessly haunts and contaminates our vision of a brighter, more joyful Blake.¹¹

This alignment of Blake with contemporary Gothic subculture draws on the deep political history of the term. Even before its appropriation by Jacobin and anti-Jacobin factions as a structure for political feeling in the 1790s, the Gothic played an important role in defining British nationhood.¹² Sean Silver argues, for instance, that ‘The Gothic first emerged as a political category during the long and ruinous Civil War (1642–49)’ as parliamentarians sought grounds to oppose monarchal claims to absolute and divine right.¹³ Seeking a national origin that predated monarchy, republicans turned to England’s tribal heritage, one that ‘boasted distributed legal authority and government by a parliament of freeholders’ such that ‘the English government would henceforth be Gothic in origin, the Gothic influence on Anglo-Saxon political tradition accounting for England’s uniquely mixed mode of government’.¹⁴ This would, in short, account for the persistent counter-cultural strain in the Gothic, for its antiauthoritarian tendencies both political and aesthetic. Indeed, as a means to tell a different story about national origins, the Gothic is just as originally an aesthetic form – one, according to Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), characterised by its rebellion against ‘a neo-Aristotelian preference for order, regularity and stately symmetry’ that ‘came to be associated with centralized power’.¹⁵ It also provides context for some of the most important thematic, narrative, and psychological features of the Gothic: the uncanny return of the repressed that undermines patriarchal authority, the haunting of the present by a violent, traumatic past, and frequent obscurity or disjunction in the organisation of visual space and narrative order all find a common root in the Gothic’s political rebelliousness.

It should be no surprise, then, that Blake’s art is dispositionally and aesthetically congruous with the Gothic revival of the late eighteenth century. Blake has long been recognised as a ‘Prophet Against Empire’, urging his countrymen to ‘rouze up! rouze up’ (*J* 96:34; *E* 256) to oppose the tyranny of centralised authority.¹⁶ It is also in this historiographical sense that David Punter locates Blake’s intersection with the Gothic: Both Ossian and Blake, he argues, generate the uncanny impression in their poetry ‘that the reader is being exposed to a story already told, a tale he is supposed to know already’.¹⁷ Yet, if there is the sense that, instead of linear causality, history records ‘an event which recurs throughout human history in the manner of Blake’s quasi-myths’ – something is always
repeating but never coming fully into the light – this is the paradigmatic form of the ‘lost origin’ that agitates Gothic texts: ‘What Blake really wanted to find in the Gothic as he understood it’, Punter continues, ‘was an antiquity in which the whole issue of “source”; in the straightforward sense of historical antecedent, could be relativized; with the important effect of relativising the authority and power of those ‘original sources’. We see the restlessness of history occasioned by this constitutive loss (Punter draws attention to the pun on ‘Los’) of the origin in Blake’s writing and rewriting of Genesis across the Lambeth books, his redemptive history of the Civil War in Milton, and his revision of spiritual history and national origins in Jerusalem. Such revisions are also insistently corporeal, the past returning like the disjecta membra or scattered body parts strewn about Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764). Consider, for instance, the figure on plate 74 of Jerusalem (see Figure 1).

Here an androgynous body lies on its side, vegetating and enrooted with ‘streams of gore’ and ‘Fibres’ branching out of its neck, head, fingers, and lower extremities (J 74:37, 42; E 230). A composite of the mythical-historical figures mentioned in the plate’s text (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dinah), this body in pain represents the sons and daughters, the generations of Albion. But, it also takes a particularly Gothic shape as a body that cannot confine those names to the past, as a body that is invaded by the branches and limbs its own mythopoeic genealogy. In Blake’s (re)visionary history, it is in ‘Lambeths Vale / Where Jerusalems foundations began’, it is the historical ground in which ‘every Nation & Oak Groves

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Figure 1  William Blake, Jerusalem, copy E, plate 74, detail (1804 [1820]). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
rooted’ (M 6:14–15, 16; E 99). But rather than a proud English oak rising up out of the past, we have instead a gnarled stump.

Nicole Reynolds argues that ‘The Gothic privileges innovation, impulse and imagination over rule, conformity and reason.’ In so doing, ‘The Gothic values what the Enlightenment swept under the rug.’ So too does Blake. For Blake, the Enlightenment – personified as ‘This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon & Bolingbroke’ (M 40:12; E 141) – produces only a ‘Newtonian Phantasm’ otherwise known as ‘Natural Religion! this impossible absurdity’ (M 40:11, 14; E 141). In his address to the Deists in Jerusalem Blake again indicts ‘Voltaire! Rousseau! Gibbon!’ , asserting how ‘Vain / [are their] Grecian Mocks & Roman Sword / Against this image of his Lord!’ (J 52:22, 23–4; E 202). The Enlightenment is here aligned with Classicism and both are charged with spiritual impotence. The epistemological uncertainty that is characteristic of Gothic fiction – can I trust my senses? – and that undermines enlightened truth claims is the same lever with which Blake opens a space for the miraculous. For instance, where the guiding angel in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell sees horrible monsters, this is only ‘owing to [his] metaphysics’ (19; E 42), suggesting that reality might be perspectival. Indeed, where most look at the sun and see ‘a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea’, Blake, in his Description of the Last Judgment famously sees ‘an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty’ (DLJ; E 565–6). According to his reflections in the Descriptive Catalogue, moreover, Enlightenment historiography, premised on mathematical ‘probabilities and possibilities’, is only so much ‘reasoning and … rubbish’ because history is, in fact, ‘improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say, was impossible if we did not see it always before our eyes’ (DC 44, 43; E 544, 543). Blake, like other Gothic writers, is interested in a type of vision that eclipses common sense, that dips below the smooth surface of enlightened empiricism and calculation into the ‘Hell’ of desire, passion, and imagination and that does not conform to discursive reason.

TERROR, HORROR, AND THE ‘GOTHIC BODY’

Blake’s Gothic resistance to enlightened forms of knowledge is perhaps most powerfully expressed in his treatment of bodies, especially their visual representation. In Steven Bruhm’s words, ‘the “Gothic Body” is that which is put on excessive display, and whose violent, vulnerable immediacy gives both … painting and Gothic fiction their beautiful barbarity, their
troublesome power’. Recalling the revolutionary potential encrypted in the Gothic, such bodies proliferate in the context of the American and French revolutions, events to which Blake dedicates separate ‘minor prophecies’ and to which he responds more diffusely across his oeuvre. Indeed, throughout Blake’s work we are reminded ‘how the pained body troubled the intellectual enterprises of all revolutionary Romantic endeavours’.

Images of ‘distorted sinews’ (J 65:72; E 217), leaking ‘Marrow’ (J 58:8; E 207), and other viscera – ‘The Lungs, the Heart, the Liver’ (J 49:17; E 198) – gruesomely spill out across Jerusalem. Urizen, ‘In ghastly torment sick’ (BU 13:4; E 76), is born within a bloody, excremental chaos. So too is Enitharmon extruded from Los in The Four Zoas:

I saw
My loins begin to break forth into veiny pipes & writhe
Before me in the wind englobing trembling with strong vibrations
The bloody mass began to animate. I bending over
Wept bitter tears incessant. (FZ 50:10–14; E 333)

No wonder the Daughters of Albion cry and sigh. Blake’s illuminated work is made in Victor Frankenstein’s ‘filthy workshop of creation’, the printing house in hell where he engraves ‘in the infernal method, by corrosives’ (MHH 14; E 39). For texts like The [First] Book of Urizen (1794) or The Book of Thel (1789) are not only about their namesakes but physically of them – similar to how Buffalo Bill, the murderous psychopath in Thomas Harris’ Silence of the Lambs (1988), is literally a patchwork composite of the sewn-together skins of his victims. As various critics have noted, Blake’s texts invite the reader into a space wherein the boundary between body and book dissolves, as it does when we notice how the frontispiece for Visions of the Daughters of Albion, as Mark Lussier notes in his contribution, resembles a bisected skull (see Figure 21). The pages of these texts, with their nervous, bloodied framing take the reader voyeuristically through a textual and physical corpus. This conflation between body and book brings Blake uncannily close to British splatterpunk author Clive Barker’s famous description of humans as ‘book[s] of blood; wherever we’re opened, we’re red’.

Are Blake’s bodies terrible or horrible? Before Ann Radcliffe’s codification of this opposition, ‘terror’ played a key role in Edmund Burke’s discussion of the sublime in his 1757 Enquiry. The term, however, acquires a political resonance through the 1790s. As Angela Wright notes, ‘In “The Terrorist System of Novel Writing” [1793], the anonymous “Jacobin
Novelist” specifically linked the rise of the Gothic romance with the rise of the tyrannical and over-reaching Robespierre, who, by the late 1790s, had become infamous for his “reign of terror” in Paris. In the wake of the Revolution’s turn to terror as official policy, “‘Terror’ as an aesthetic Burkean concept … was summarily stripped of its intellectual credentials in relation to Gothic fiction, and became a synecdoche … for a more specifically threatening literary movement.”

In ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ (1826) Radcliffe seems to recover something of Burke’s sense of the concept in her opposition of terror and horror. For Radcliffe, terror involves obscurity, uncertainty, or, as Punter might say, a pervasive and profound ‘doubt’, whereas horror follows deadly certainty: ‘Terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.’ Milton’s Satan is, for example, ‘more of terror than of horror; for it is not distinctly pictured forth, but is seen in glimpses through obscuring shades, the great outlines only appearing, which excited the imagination to complete the rest.’ Like the Burkin sublime, Gothic terror spurs thought. ‘Terror, then, is that carefully regulated aesthetic experience that can use intense feeling to seek objects in the world … Conversely, horror “contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates” the passions which lead to community, and forces the horrified spectator to enclose and protect the self.’ Explicitly and implicitly, the contributions in this collection engage this crucial opposition in the context of Blake’s work. Yet, they also invite us to reflect on whether Blake’s horrible bodies produce closure or whether, through them, we might rethink the tendency to align disembodied abstraction with imaginative flexibility.

All horror, Jack Morgan argues, is ‘essentially bio-horror’. Xavier Aldana Reyes echoes this point, stressing the need to ‘reclaim the importance of the body to the gothic text’. Certainly, Blake’s bodies are often horrific – fully, excessively anatomised, exposed, and visible. Even organic creation itself is a horrifying process, one that threatens to confine the divine vision to a corporeal Bastille. In The [First] Book of Urizen, for instance ‘Urizen was rent’ from Los’s ‘side’ in a violent parody of Eve’s formation from Adam’s rib (BU 6:4; E 74), only then to morph into a full skeleton:

A vast Spine writh’d in torment
Upon the winds; shooting pain’d
Ribs, like a bending cavern
And bones of solidness, froze
Over all his nerves of joy. (BU 10:37–40; E 75)
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The physiological composition of Blake’s famous Tyger, similarly, sounds as if it takes place in one of Giovanni Piranesi’s Carceri d’invenzione (Imaginary Prisons):

And what shoulder. & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?  
What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp.  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp! (SIE 42:9–16; E 24–5)

Like Urizen, the Tyger is physically crafted through hammering, firing, and twisting of the sort that easily evokes scenes of inquisitorial malevolence. The moment when the body is most bodily – that is, in the moment of its reproduction – is also when it becomes most horrific. Examples proliferate: In The Book of Los and Milton, organs ‘Dim & glutinous as the white Polypus’ tie spirit with ‘living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing / A self-devouring monstrous Human Death’ (BL 4:57; M 34:25–6; E 93, 134). The image here recalls Abraham Trembley’s 1751 discovery of the hydra or polyp, a creature capable of ‘regrowing missing parts and [re-creating] complete organisms from small pieces, in a process that turns dismemberment into an opportunity for propagation’. Physical life was never more monstrous and deadly.

Blake does not just describe this body horror verbally, however. He also shows it to us graphically. In this respect, his practice recalls how antiquarianism visualises the Gothic for Romantic historiography. As Rosemary Sweet notes, ‘Antiquarianism was widely regarded as the inferior partner to history – it was the “handmaid” whose primary role was to provide corroborating evidence or illustrative material for narrative history.’ These ‘illustrative materials’ form the reliquary of tropes that define the distinct visual style of the Gothic. It was within antiquarianism that there developed an ‘appreciation of the importance of the visual record and of accurate illustrations.’ In the Gothic, this interest in illustration combines with the fascination with the body’s otherness. Hence, ‘The Gothic in its multitude of trans-medial manifestations turns on the making visible of horror’, it revels in ‘the skeleton jumping out of the closet, the curtain drawn back, the flash-light that fleetingly illuminates
an unspeakable scene of incest and/or cannibalism. So, if ‘the visual has come more forcibly under analysis within Gothic Studies’ following the “pictorial turn” in intellectual and cultural life at the end of the twentieth century, Blake’s visual art constitutes a vital if generally overlooked Gothic archive.

GOTHIC IMAGES

Some of Blake’s most enigmatic bodies resemble well-known eighteenth-century Gothic figures. For instance, Blake’s illustration of the hunched skeleton in The [First] Book of Urizen strikingly resembles the tormenting imp or incubus in his friend Henry Fuseli’s famous painting, The Nightmare (1781), a painting that Blake reworks again in Jerusalem on plate 37, where the figure of Jerusalem lies beneath a looming, bat-like Spectre (E 33). Blake’s 1795 colour print of The Night of Enitharmon’s Joy (plate 3, see Figure 2), formerly called ‘Hecate’ is, as Robert Essick notes, ‘as neo-gothic as Monk Lewis.’

Indeed, the owls and bats flitting over Enitharmon/Hecate’s head recall Alexander Runciman’s The Witches Show Macbeth the Apparitions (c.1771–72), and Fuseli’s The Mandrake, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1785. Even Francisco Goya’s The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (1799) (see Figure 3) resonates with Blake’s earlier composite of the ‘Kings & Priest’ who ‘copied on earth’ Urizen’s ‘brazen Book’ in Europe a Prophecy (Eur 1:3; E 64): his massive bat-like wings unfurled, they partially obscure the facade of a Gothic cathedral in the background (see Figure 4).

Blake’s œuvre teems with Gothic iconography. The twisted, ominous trees of Songs of Innocence recall the theory developed by James Hall in Essay on the Origin and Principles of Gothic Architecture (1797) that trees were the primary influences for Gothic architecture. There are the monstrous serpents of Europe a Prophecy and creepy crawlers (toads, centipedes, and spiders) that inch along the borders of Jerusalem. Beyond the stock supernatural figures of devils and angels, Blake’s pantheon includes witches, haunting spectres, and protean shadowy figures – for example, the ‘nameless shadowy female’ in Europe a Prophecy (Eur 1:1; E 60). There are also monstrous, chimerical bodies such as Cerberus, The Red Dragon, The Ghost of a Flea, and the grotesque cat Blake designed in his commissioned illustration to graveyard poet Thomas Gray’s mock epitaph ‘Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold
Fishes’ (1748) – a poem based on the real-life tragic death of Selima, the beloved cat of Gothic forefather Horace Walpole.

While certainly there are representations of positive transformations in Blake – forms of apotheosis – there are also darker processes, Gothic ‘mutations’ that place stress on disintegrative negativity, degeneration, anatomisation. Illustrated in his commercial engravings are the horrors of racism and slavery depicted in the bleeding body of *A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*, the first of Blake’s commercial engravings completed for John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative, of a Five Years’ Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796). More incredible transformations include the metamorphosis of human into animal, as in the case of Blake’s *Nebuchadnezzar* (1795–c.1805) (see Figure 5).

In this remarkably Gothic print (and current cover-art for the Tate Britain’s William Blake app!), the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II, sporting a shaggy mane and sharp finger- and toenails, crawls on hands and knees. As Alexander Gilchrist (1828–61) remarked, we see the ‘mad king crawling like a hunted beast into a den among the rocks; his tangled golden beard sweeping the ground, his nails like vultures’ talons, and his

Figure 2  William Blake, *The Night of Enitharmon’s Joy* (formerly called ‘Hecate’) (c. 1795). Tate Images.
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Figure 3 Francisco Goya, *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* [The sleep of reason produces monsters] (1799). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 4  William Blake, ‘Albions Angel rose …; Europe a Prophecy, copy A, plate 12 (Bentley 14) (1794 [1795]). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
wild eyes full of sullen terror. The powerful frame is losing semblance of humanity, and is bestial in its rough growth of hair, reptile in the toad-like markings and spottings of the skin, which takes on unnatural hues of green, blue, and russet.  

Still more Gothic elements are found in Blake's representations of ecclesiastical characters – corrupt, despotic priests and monks that are symbols of that 'blackning church' (SIE 46:10; E 27). In 'The Chimney Sweeper' in Songs of Experience, it is the 'Priest & King / Who make up a heaven of our misery' (SIE 37:11–12; E 23), a sentiment more forcefully expressed in 'A Little Boy Lost' when a sadistic priest burns a young boy alive for asking an innocent question (SIE 50:17–24; E 28–9). Orc's plagues in America a Prophecy threaten, moreover, to transform the Bard of Albion into a reptilian clergyman:

Hid in his eaves the Bard of Albion felt the enormous plagues.
And a cowl of flesh grew o'er his head & scales on his back & ribs;
And rough with black scales all his Angels fright their ancient heavens
The doors of marriage are open, and the Priests in rustling scales
Rush into reptile coverts, hiding from the fires of Orc[.]

(Am 15:16–20; E 57)
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Even Blake’s little-known poem ‘The Grey Monk’, from the Pickering Manuscript, features a Lewis-like scene of torture: ‘The blood red ran from the Grey Monks side / His hands & feet were wounded wide’ (PM 5–6; E 489).

That ecclesiastical figures appear in various forms throughout Blake’s work speaks to what Mark Canuel identifies as a hallmark of the Romantic Gothic: the ‘complex and fluctuating role’ of religious authority. Canuel suggests that the Gothic both challenges the Church’s oppressive institutionalism and imagines its revision, a tactic we find at work in Blake whenever he imagines the New Jerusalem or when he projects himself into the sympathetic figure of the Grey Monk – a character likely inspired, as Morton Paley suggests, by Blake’s time in 1804 spent on trial at the Gothic Chichester guildhall, which was formerly the chancel of the Grey Friars. As we have come to expect from Gothic novels, priests in Blake’s work might be benevolent (like Jerome in The Castle of Otranto) but are more likely than not malevolent (like Father Schedoni in The Italian).

In the 1760s, William Blackstone famously describes the English constitution as ‘an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for modern inhabitants.’ As Jerrold E. Hogle points out, calling such architecture ‘Gothic’ was actually ‘a misnomer’, a phantasy projection ‘applied by later neoclassicists to the “barbarity” of pointed-arch buildings … which were wrongly linked to the fifth-century “Goths”’. How might Blake respond to this derisive application of the term ‘Gothic’? From the formative years of his seven-year apprenticeship for James Basire (1772–79) where he copied medieval tombs in Westminster Abbey to his time on trial at Chichester, Gothic architecture played an important role in in Blake’s life. We find its mark in the entranceways, chambers, and churches of his art, as several of our contributors discuss. Even the architectural afterlives of other poets have been shaped by Blake’s Gothic vision: Walt Whitman famously modelled his own crypt after Blake’s illustration of ‘Death’s Door’, after encountering the design in Alexander Gilchrist’s Life of William Blake (1863). So, while ‘the Gothic’ proves to be a complex tangle of historical, political, aesthetic, corporeal, psychological, and even architectural concepts, Blake’s art intersects with several of these strands, suggesting that we might reconsider Blake as a Gothic artist just as we might rethink the history of Gothic in light of Blake’s multi-media approach to embodied horror.
BLAKE’S GOTHIC LEGACY

In *Gothic Writing, 1750–1850: A Genealogy* (1993), Robert Miles asserts that ‘the deepest energies of the Gothic novel announce themselves as a Blakean agon of Orc contra Urizen’. Yet, nowhere in that study does he actually read Blake. As Miles’s remark suggests, Blake seems like he should be central to a thinking of the Gothic, that he even provides a model for its ‘deepest energies’. Nevertheless, Blake studies and Gothic studies have rarely overlapped in substantial or sustained ways. Discussions of the literary Gothic tradition tend towards canonical novelists (Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, et cetera) or ‘supernatural’ poetry that still ignores Blake. Similarly, while the dark and dangerous parts of Blake have been explored (see, for instance, Philippa Simpson on Blake’s pornography, Tristanne Connolly on his ‘bad sex aesthetic’, and Timothy Morton on his ‘dark ecology’), few critics have directly linked Blake with the term ‘Gothic’. This critical silence mirrors the near absence of the term ‘Gothic’ in Blake’s work, appearing as it does in less than a dozen texts. Yet, readers intuit that Blake’s art embodies a Gothic sensibility even if the word itself is rare in his work.

An exception to this critical disconnect is William Richey’s 1996 study, *Blake’s Altering Aesthetic*. Richey argues that the coordinates between Blake’s aesthetics and politics shift over his career: ‘In his pre-1800 texts, Blake used a largely neoclassical idiom to engage his political opponents and ridicule their repressed and repressive philosophy. By the time he was composing *Milton*, [however,] Blake had come to see that this kind of strategy only replicated the antagonism and self-righteousness of the classical tradition.’ If in Blake’s earlier work the Gothic signified tyranny and repression and the classical liberty and virtue, over time Blake’s conception of the Gothic trades places with the classical, such that the Gothic in his later work embodies ‘a biblically inspired aesthetic based on imaginative vision rather than the moralistic allegory of the classical tradition.’ While Richey illuminates much respecting Blake’s Gothic aesthetics, one limitation his analysis faces is that the Gothic remains defined exclusively by its difference from the classical. While symmetrically pleasing as an argument, the problem is that the Gothic becomes identified with whatever is anti-classical in visual art, a tendency typified by Richey’s suggestion that ‘Jerusalem becomes an image of Gothic form, not because she embodies the characteristics of actual medieval or Gothic art, but because she represents..."
the antithesis of those features of classicism that Blake had come to reject.\textsuperscript{60}

Continuing in this stylistic vein, Anne K. Mellor notes that, aside from the influence of ‘Michelangelo and romantic classicism’, Blake’s conception of the line was ‘strongly stimulated’ by ‘the English gothic style’.\textsuperscript{61} Mellor argues, in fact, that ‘in Blake’s late art … these seemingly contradictory Gothic and neoclassical idioms can be successfully united’.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, as Jean Hagstrum suggests, Blake would have had access, during his time in Westminster Abbey, to a number of medieval manuscripts and may well have been influenced by these works in his own graphic design.\textsuperscript{63} All this suggests a biographical, historical, and stylistic way to link Blake with the Gothic. Yet, it also strips the Gothic of its affective, psychological, and richly varied aesthetic content. As the foregoing suggests, the Gothic is a much broader and more nebulous field than what can be defined as the inversion of Classicism. It is to a more dynamic and multifaceted sense of the Gothic that, as the chapters in this book suggest, Blake is alive.

The 2006 exhibition at the Tate Britain, ‘Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination’, represents another rare occasion wherein we are invited to read Blake and the Gothic in terms of each other – an occasion that also, happily, invites a more expansive definition of the Gothic. Exploring the visual dimensions of Blake and Fuseli’s shared ‘taste for the Gothic’,\textsuperscript{64} the exhibition suggested that not only did these two artists share a thematic interest in ‘the perverse, strange and supernatural’, but ‘the same range of new strategic possibilities regarding audiences, marketing and the power of sensation’.\textsuperscript{65} As Martin Myrone notes, Blake was among the few visual artists who illustrated ‘modern Gothic subjects’ by drawing on sensational and Gothic themes in ‘the classics, national history, Dante and Elizabethan and Jacobean literature’, as if they were a ‘repository of Gothic horror, visionary excess and kinky eroticism’.\textsuperscript{66}

In *The Gothic* (2004) David Punter and Glennis Byron sketch some lines of possible investigation for Blake scholars:

In the case of William Blake (although, of course, his status as a ‘romantic’ poet is hotly disputed), his early work includes imitations of Spenser and of other writers rehabilitated by the Gothic revival. Blake had a strong interest in the ballad form, as we can see from such conventional works as ‘Fair Elenor’ (1783) and, rather differently, from the thematically highly complex but formally simple works in the Pickering Manuscript, such as ‘The Mental Traveller’. Some of the prose pieces in the *Poetical Sketches* (1783) appear to have been
influenced by ‘Ossian’, and there is also an influence from the graveyard poets, evidenced outstandingly in Blake’s illustrations to Edward Young and Robert Blair but also in the constant preoccupation with ‘graveyard vocabulary’, as strong in *Vala, or, The Four Zoas* ([1797–1807]) and *The Keys to the Gates* (c.1818) as in his earlier work.  

For Punter and Byron, Blake’s status as a Romantic poet may be undecided even while his affinity with the Gothic is beyond doubt: they place Blake alongside Coleridge and de Sade, naming them all ‘Gothic masters’.  

In spite of such prompting, in Blake criticism the Gothic still tends to appear – if it does at all – in passing. Steven Goldsmith, for instance, in *Blake’s Agitation* (2013) notes that Blake’s corrosive dissolution of the human into a series of affective intensities, such as ‘a red Globe of blood trembling’ (J 17:51; E 162) or ‘a pulsation of the artery’ (M 28:47; E 126), generate what he, following Barbara Johnson, calls ‘figures of half-aliveness’:  

Whenever literary texts make their readers aware of these “half-alive” emotions, it is tempting to consider such moments in terms of paranoid, gothic discovery … Blake’s work is full of such gothic moments, with selfhoods revealing their possession by inauthentic specters: the long night of Enitharmon is a night of living machines who pass themselves off as human forms.  

Goldsmith here gestures towards Blake’s Gothic potential in affective terms, citing the centrality of uncanny and haunting forces in his work that, in perfectly Gothic fashion, deconstruct categories such as self and other, alive and dead, real and imaginary.  

Occasionally recognised though generally underdeveloped in extant criticism, Blake’s ‘kinship’ with the Gothic was also sensed by his early readers. John Ruskin, the Victorian critic who greatly influenced the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival, reported in a letter to Mrs Hugh Blackburn (27 May 1850) that on the subject of the German love of horror ‘[w]e have had one grand man of the same school – William Blake – whose “Book of Job” fail not to possess yourself of – if it comes in your way; but there is a deep morality in his horror – as in Dante’s’. Gilchrist said similarly of Blake’s *The [First] Book of Urizen* that ‘the poem is shapeless, unfathomable; but in the heaping of gloomy and terrible images, the *America a Prophecy* and *Europe a Prophecy* are even exceeded’. He goes on to remark that ‘[t]he design, like the text, is characterised by a monotony of horror’. Likewise, Algernon Swinburne saw Blake’s work as ‘grotesque almost to grandeur, and full of strength and significance’, a sentiment echoed in the mid-twentieh century with Georges Bataille celebrating,
in *Literature and Evil* (1957), Blake’s ‘excessive violence’ through which ‘Evil attains a form of purity’. Taking up these scattered hints and intimations, the chapters that follow represent the first sustained and focused treatment of Blake as a Gothic artist, taking ‘Gothic’ in the fullest sense of that term. While contributions do attend to architectural and art-historical applications, they also take us beyond these confinements and into the fuller range of psychology, identity, history, sexuality, feeling, and embodied aesthetics that has occupied Gothic studies in recent decades. Contributors also frequently focus on Blake’s images – a move that, in turn, may contribute to and spur more action on this front in Gothic studies as a field. While the chapters do consider a wide range of Blake’s *oeuvre*, the collection is, admittedly, non-comprehensive. Indeed, as readers will notice, there are several ‘nodal points’, a selection of Blake’s images or texts or figures to which different authors often return. Rather than a complete survey of Blake’s art, the volume’s aim is rather to offer a space for concentration on some of the intersections of Blake with the Gothic, not to dictate the uniform subsumption of the one by the other. We do not deny – in fact, we hope – that this collection does not exhaust future readings of Blake and the Gothic.

**DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE**

Part I of this collection, ‘The bounding line of Blake’s Gothic: forms, genres, and contexts’, includes three chapters concerned with Blake’s relation to prevailing expressions of the Gothic – visual, literary, and conceptual – in the late eighteenth century. These chapters help us to recognise when Blake is adopting and when he is innovating on Gothic forms and contents. In ‘“Living Form”: William Blake’s Gothic relations’, David Baulch traces Blake’s treatment of the Gothic as an aesthetic form that encrypts a revolutionary potentiality in the radical difference it introduces through moments of artistic and historical repetition. Reading Blake’s art as less the product of a Gothic than of a ‘Gothicising’ imagination, Baulch argues that Blake’s conception of the Gothic as ‘Living Form’ interrupts logics of precedence, consequence, and causation more broadly, turning the sometimes conservative, regulative work of the Gothic inside out. Making this
case means reconsidering Benjamin Heath Malkin’s influential though misleading representation of Blake as a Gothic artist, a representation that understands the Gothic as rustic, simple, anti-classical, and reactionary. While the Gothic may be these things in certain instances, it does not capture Blake’s more idiosyncratic engagement with the genre, his stretching of its tropes beyond aesthetics and into political and ontological realms by warping the sense of history the Gothic always both evokes and complicates.

Recalling the contest for authority frequently staged in Gothic fiction, in ‘The horror of Rahab: towards an aesthetic context for Blake’s “Gothic” form’, Kiel Shaub traces Rahab through Blake’s oeuvre, focusing especially on Night the Eighth of The Four Zoas, in order to ‘reveal how Blake’s depiction of Rahab is at least in part a critique of … conservative aspirations of the gothic revival’. Echoing Baulch’s reading of ‘Living Form’, Shaub argues that Blake’s innovation – which is fundamentally a political innovation – has to do with his ‘understanding of “form” as a relational rather than an absolute distinction’. Indeed, it is Urizen, whose sense of order is ‘bondage’, who would impose absolute distinctions and in so doing transform the passionate Vala into the deadly Rahab: a figure – to recall Radcliffe’s terms mentioned above – of condensed horror born, reactively, from Urizen’s terror in the face of uncertainty. As Shaub argues, terror is the affective correlate of uncertainty and systemic, subjective, or ideological instability whereas horror is the affective form of paralysing determinateness. Rahab, he illustrates, physically embodies a process of ideological ratcheting-up that tends towards conservation in the name of safety, one that uses the threat of disorder as an alibi for total control. As we see in many of the contributions that follow, one of the most dangerous, nebulous, and Gothic threats to which Blake gives manifest shape concerns how fleeing from moral ambiguity leads society to invent, embrace, and then suffer the mind-forged manacles crafted by priesthood and other large codes of fraud and woe. In a move that resonates uncannily with our contemporary global-political situation, terror becomes the threat that Urizen wants to cultivate – to nurture and feed – because it creates the condition (the spectre of chaos) that becomes the raison d’être for horror: that is, for his tyrannical imposition of the one law that is oppression.

Just as Shaub and Baulch ask us to think about Blake’s Gothic as a technique or style that has profound political implications, in ‘The Gothic sublime’, Claire Colebrook identifies a mode of the sublime that, unlike the Kantian sublime, destroys the integrity of the rational subject and allows
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‘multiple voices and registers to generate what Deleuze (after Leibniz) refers to as “incompossible” worlds’. For her, Blake's work is ‘overwhelmingly committed to an intuition of the infinite’ and not simply just to thinking the idea of it. Carefully following the Gothic structure of Blake's worlds, and the nomadic Gothic line that is ever forming and deforming, Colebrook argues that Blake's Gothic structures are blended with their content, such as the ‘nightmarish multiplicity of voices’ that refuse ‘constitutive finitude’. Blake's Gothic sublime arrives not at the limits of experience (as in Kant), but with expanded perception, with the ‘invasion of reason from elsewhere’.

Baulch, Shaub, and Colebrook situate Blake within the larger Gothic revival and invite us to reinterpret Blake's language, images, and thought in light of recognisably Gothic iterations in architecture, the novel, and visual art. In Part II, ‘The misbegotten’, we turn to three chapters focused more specifically on Blake's uneasy relation to the physical body. Of all the anxieties explored through the Gothic, organic life – vitality itself – is one of the most potent. This is the genre wherein the dead are always likely to rise. The problem staged in the Gothic, then, is not, ‘what if we die?’ but rather, ‘what if we continue to live?’ Descending into the charnel house, like the familiar descent in Gothic art into dungeons and crypts, frequently reveals a world seething and writhing with life; just where we expect death, eternal life springs. This is nowhere more true than in Blake. In the Four Zoas, for instance, we come face to face with ‘horrid shapes & sights of torment in burning dungeons & in / Fetters of red hot iron’ and those ‘lying on beds of sulphur / On racks & wheels’ (FZ 70:18–21; E 347). Such pains offer vivid confirmation of life – you pinch yourself to be sure it is not a dream. Similarly, in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Visions of the Daughters of Albion, and The [First] Book of Urizen, we enter designs that bring the eye and imagination to life in the very effort to escape their tortuous, mazy, Satanic traps. Why, the chapters in this part ask, is life so mortifying in Blake and in the Gothic more generally? Why does bodily generation mirror so closely degeneration? What, they enquire, ‘Could twist the sinews of thy heart?’ Who could possibly ‘grasp’ life’s ‘deadly terrors’? How are we to survive our corporeal existence?

In ‘Dark angels: Blake, Milton, and Lovecraft in Ridley Scott’s Prometheus’, Jason Whittaker argues that Scott’s Engineers, a species of ‘dark angels’ who seem to have created human life accidentally, have their origin in Blake’s Zoas, thus locating the film's action in a metaphysically distressing universe devoid of any fundamental benevolence or omniscience. Hence,
‘[t]he horror of Prometheus’, for Whittaker, ‘lies not so much in our disgust with the operations of the human body and in abjection as in the realisation that the secret history of the cosmos is utterly alien to us’. Human life is the product neither of a divine, infallible creator nor a natural, evolutionary process, but rather of ‘an aberrant series of alien experiments’, an idea at the root of ‘the cosmic horror of Prometheus’. Yet, horror operates at two levels here: on the first, horror is our response to an acute awareness of the mutability of metaphysical reality, which leads to existential vertigo. This vertigo is only exacerbated by Blake’s expansion of the category of ‘the human’ to include ‘Rivers Mountains Cities Villages’ (J 71:15; E 225) – in effect ‘every thing’ – and Scott’s development of the android David into the most imaginative, perceptive, and ironically human character in Prometheus.

On the next level, however, what is more subtly horrifying is the ostensible solution to this problem. That is, more problematic than the absence of a central, unified rationale – the absence of a sort of grand unifying theory of Scott’s Alien franchise or of Blake’s systems in creation, respectively – is the sudden imposition of just such an explanation. Without forgiving the film entirely for its flaws, Whittaker suggests that the complication rather than clarification of the genetic relationships between humans and various alien species productively resists a totalising logic that, for Blake, represents a sort of Urizenic nightmare in its very orderliness. Readers and viewers must create their own systems with narrative materials that appear designed for synthesis and yet fail entirely to cohere, leaving us with a Frankenstein’s creature – a post-‘modern Prometheus’.

Like Whittaker, Lucy Cogan in ‘William Blake’s monstrous progeny: anatomy and the birth of horror in The [First] Book of Urizen’ suggests that, for Blake, Gothic horror has more to do with putting together than it does taking apart the body. That is, if the experiences of terror and horror central to different forms of the Gothic often involve descriptions of physical torture – in the Gothic we always expect the Spanish Inquisition – in Blake the representation of corporeal distress extends to the process of bodily formation, composition, and birth. Cogan thus reads the physical (de)formation of Urizen in light of William Hunter’s gruesome ‘anatomical obstetrics’, transforming the former into an allegory for Enlightenment scientific methodologies that are more than content to limit sensibility to a ratio of the senses, to murder and then dissect the imagination under the guise of birthing new light. ‘Like a distorted mirror-image of the Enlightenment scientists’ – perhaps recalling also the overweening and largely incompetent scientists in Prometheus – ‘who
used the tools of compass, telescope and microscope to chart the wonders of the universe, Cogan argues that 'Urizen by dividing and defining the material universe is also slicing into it, tearing and mutilating the fabric of existence.' While that mutilation itself is morally distressing, so too is the 'body' of knowledge composed from the dissected data.

Touching on similar issues as Cogan and reading medical 'demonstration' across a wider range of texts including The [First] Book of Urizen, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and An Island in the Moon, Stephanie Codsi's 'Blake's Gothic humour: the spectacle of dissection' looks more closely at a Gothic constellation wherein Blake's gruesome representations of dissection and critique of mathematical, disinterested calculation intersect with irony and self-parody. Finding a productive analogy between Gothic theatricality and spectacles of torture centring on figures such as Los and Jack Tearguts, Codsi traces the effects elicited by Blake's art in the reader or viewer, effects that range from revulsion to laughter. In this context, a certain version of the Gothic becomes useful to Blake precisely for its regressiveness: by reading medical science as the field populated by so many absurd, blinkered Victor Frankensteins, Blake would cast rational demonstration and scientific surgery as philosophically and morally retrograde, as frighteningly primitive in their treatment of life as merely physical, appetitive, or – if we can pun on the horrible apes in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell – primate-ive.

In several ways the chapters in Part II are concerned with how bodies in Blake are deformed, dismembered, and reformed. The contributions in Part III, 'Female space and the image', pursue this concern with the body's anatomisation but with special focus on how Blake's visual and topographical spaces do more than illustrate text, but rather mutate to form meaningful if subtextual arrangements that evolve according to their own immanent vitality. Peter Otto's 'The horrors of creation: globes, englobing powers, and Blake's archaeologies of the present' is quilted together by his reading of a series of creation scenes in Blake's oeuvre that all feature a familiar image: a red disk. This image – variously, but also potentially simultaneously, a womb, head, pool, globe, and mirror – provides a point around which to organise the perspectival multiplicity that comprises Blake's Bible of Hell. Using the trope of archaeology as a way to think about how the past remains uncannily present in Blake's moment and our own, Otto invites us to approach Blake spatially and graphically, in terms of constellations and arrangements, rather than sequentially and linearly. Blake's images themselves ask us to consider phenomena along spatial axes.
to traverse a field divided into quadrants, regions, and organs, and to take account of layers, superimpositions, and multiple ‘grounds’: foregrounds, middle-grounds, and backgrounds, as well as over- and undergrounds. Otto argues that for Blake the Gothic provided ‘a lexicon and iconography of elemental conflict and of powerful affect’. Sensitive attention to the visuality of this Gothic iconography is at the heart of Otto’s reorientation of plate 17 of The [First] Book of Urizen, an image that proves to be doubled: it is at once male and female, creative (is it a womb?) and deadly (or, a severed head?), healthfully conglobing and imperialistically englobing. Through this and other images, we see Blake oscillate between the dream and the nightmare of history. Indeed, if it seems that the latter begins to dominate given the preponderance of ‘Gothic images of catastrophic ruin, suffering bodies, horrific cruelty, “perverse” passion, and elemental conflict,’ Otto reminds us that the massive overdetermination of Blake’s images – what Judith Halberstam calls the ‘vertiginous excess of meaning’ of the Gothic – stresses how repetition encrypts a difference that eludes binary regulation and might break from the past in the very moment of the past’s putative dominance.

‘Female spaces and the Gothic imagination in The Book of Thel and Visions of the Daughters of Albion’ by Ana Elena González-Treviño also encourages us to think about Blake’s art graphically and, more specifically, topographically – though, to be clear, Blake’s topography is always multi-layered such that place, gender, body, and history intertwine. González-Treviño reads Blake’s Thel as ‘probing … into the body of nature in order to acquire some sort of knowledge about nature and about herself’, a knowledge from which Thel recoils but that Oothoon seems prepared to engage. Inspired by folktales and mythical precursors to read how femininity is literally and figuratively entombed in the landscapes of both Thel and Visions, González-Treviño explores how both works stage ‘female desire and the legitimacy of intuitive knowledge, especially regarding the natural world’. And yet, for González-Treviño it is not simply that female characters in Blake are more ‘natural’; rather, if femininity does open up conduits to an encounter with radical materiality, these characters react with understandable anxiety after gazing upon the unveiled face of nature. In Thel for instance, going underground is an invitation to experience a primordial organicism that is both sensuous and grotesque – something like Milton’s ‘wilde Abyss’ of Chaos, ‘The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave’. Thel flees from the body’s porosity, from its very receptivity to a nature that is in equal parts creative and destructive, prolific and
devouring. Yet the voice from the grave reflects on the impossibility of shutting experience out, the futility of resisting impressions and sensations, or the impossibility of evading embodied existence. Indeed, Oothoon’s sexual violation in *Visions* figures in more explicitly violent terms how ‘experience’ in a broader sense ignores human will and proves often damaging to the self. Through a series of rhetorical questions in *Thel*, the voice from the grave suggests a blunt inevitability: Thel can flee as far as she likes, but the fact is that her ear and eye and tongue cannot be completely shut against experience. Like Oothoon, Thel is stalked by a mysterious, violent power she seems fated to embrace. Blake thus appropriates the sense of inevitability from the voice of death to cast life as similarly intractable, though in so doing organic life is revealed, uncannily, as death’s mirror: an agent of horror that is given its clearest shape in *Orc*.

While implicit in Part III, the chapters in the volume’s final part, ‘Sex, desire, perversion’, turn deliberately towards Blake’s representations of sexual desire. From Ambrosio’s incestuous rape of Antonia in *The Monk* to the violent pornography of Sade’s *Justine* and, later, *Juliette*, the Gothic has long served as a forum to explore sexual perversion and the subterranean sympathies between pleasure and pain, sex and death.81 In what Ellen Moers calls the ‘female gothic’, it is women’s sexuality in particular that finds, through the genre, an opportunity for expression in the midst of a generally repressive culture.82 Yet to what extent is the ostensible liberation of female desire reabsorbed by the masculine fantasies that drive so many Gothic plots? To what extent does momentary indulgence in macabre titillation serve as an alibi for reaffirming the patriarchal, heteronormative nuclear family? And what happens when strange appetites – once they are exposed in the lurid light of torch and candle, once they are roused by the caress of our own alter egos – refuse to be re-domesticated? Again, the Gothic provides a forum in which to explore questions, like these, that remain difficult explicitly to pose. Hence, if both Otto and González-Treviño stress Blake’s experimentation with visual fields and three-dimensional space, Mark Lussier, in ‘The horrors of subjectivity/the *Jouissance* of immanence’, explores the field of subject formation from both Deleuzean and Lacanian perspectives. ‘Shaped more than most by the erotic, esoteric, and exotic elements of Gothic symbolic’, Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* explore how the unconscious ‘confront[s] the phallic order that animates patriarchy’, casting subject formation as a Gothic drama. For Lussier, both texts explore how subject formation involves a sort of wounding that the action of symbolisation – especially
when that symbolisation is comprised of Gothic forms – can never entirely suture: what the eye sees and what the heart knows will remain always slightly askew, just as the Lacanian ‘I’ will never perfectly coincide with itself. Stressing the specific psychoanalytic terrain of female subjectivity, Lussier focuses most of his attention on *Visions*, a work in which Oothoon ‘endure[s] dual forms of objectification: her embodiment as an object of use (for the rapist Bromion) and as an object of exchange (for her ‘beloved’ Theotormon). Oothoon’s fate seems grim, though Lussier permits a moment of possible recognition: ‘Bound and battered in the mouth of Fingal’s Cave, Oothoon is indeed ignored, but the anger expressed in the background eye implies that the political unconscious has registered her complaint.’

In a somewhat contrasting treatment of female desire in *Visions*, Tristanne Connolly notes in ‘“Terrible Thunders” and “Enormous Joys”: potency and degeneracy in Blake’s *Visions* and James Graham’s celestial bed’, that Oothoon’s complaint ‘descends into a denunciation of masturbation, reflecting her hostility towards forms of ‘unproductive’ sexuality’.\(^{83}\)

Drawing parallels between Oothoon and James Graham, a sex therapist contemporary with Blake, Connolly re-imagines the sexual dynamics in *Visions*: Bromion’s violence does less to blunt than to sharpen Oothoon’s own sexual desire, which she proceeds to impose upon Theotormon, whom it is possible to read as not only another victim of Bromion’s ‘thunders’ but as an emasculated onanist perceived by Oothoon – in an echo of Graham – as sexually deviant and self-polluting for his rejection of all alloerotic stimulation. Oothoon is a hybrid of Sade’s Justine and Juliette: she is a victim of sexualised violence but also sexually aggressive in her own way. Connolly’s chapter productively complicates what has too often been a simplistic understanding of Oothoon as a mere victim, a reading that founders when we attempt to square it with her Grahamian promotion of sexual union and notorious offer to procure women for Theotormon. In this way, Oothoon moves past the typical categories available to women in the Gothic – either angel or monster, either virginal victim or wicked whore. This is not quite to suggest that Oothoon is free and liberated – she remains chained to Bromion, after all – but that her victimisation does not preclude her perpetuation of a sexual ideology of which Theotormon is perhaps the most obvious casualty. ‘While for Graham it is excess and for Oothoon it is restraint that destroys wholesome sexual joys’, Connolly argues that ‘both paint terrifying pictures of the degeneracy resulting from these evils [that is, masturbation], to contrast their visions of sexual transcendence’. While each promotes a different method for achieving
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sexual health (Oothoon: use it or lose it; Graham, like General Ripper in Dr. Strangelove: best hoard your ‘precious bodily fluids’), the Gothic provides the key tropes in each case. Ultimately, Connolly argues that it is not Theotormon but Oothoon who ‘is the sexual binarist’ for ‘idealising free love and abominating restraint’, suggesting that male and female sexual desire in Visions does not conform to social or readerly expectations.

NOTES

1 Bindman, ‘Blake’s “Gothicised Imagination”’, pp. 29–49.  
2 Ibid., p. 30, p. 48.  
3 Moore, ‘Interview’.  
4 Punter, Literature of Terror, vol. 2, p. 147. For an excellent analysis of Moore’s collusion with the Gothic, see Green (ed.), Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition.  
5 Whitson, ‘Blakean Trees’.  
6 For a more detailed account of Blake’s influence on contemporary literature and culture, see Whitson and Ault, William Blake and Visual Culture; Clark and Whittaker, William Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture; Clark, Connolly and Whittaker, Blake 2.0; and Whitson and Whittaker, William Blake and the Digital Humanities.  
8 Hoeveler, Gothic Riffs, p. 6.  
9 As part of Dark Blushing, a poetry evening at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Manson’s performance included music by Timmy Straw, and on-screen images of Blake’s watercolour ‘Satan Exulting over Eve’; see Manson, ‘Marilyn Manson Reads’.  
12 See Kandola, Gothic Britain; and Smith, The Gothic Bequest.  
14 Ibid., p. 5.  
15 Ibid., pp. 7–8.  
16 Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire; Blake, The Complete Poetry and Prose. All citations of Blake’s poetry and prose correspond to this edition. We follow standard abbreviations of Blake’s works. We follow the scholarly convention in providing the page number in Erdman following plate and line numbers.  
17 Punter, ‘Ossian, Blake and the Questionable Source’, p. 31.  
18 Ibid., p. 32.  
19 Reynolds, ‘Gothic and the architectural imagination’, p. 86.  
20 Ibid.  
21 Bruhm, Gothic Bodies, p. xvii.

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22 Ibid., p. xviii. Bruhm’s emphasis.
23 Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 82.
24 For a detailed examination of Blake’s influence on Thomas Harris see Gompf, Thomas Harris and William Blake.
25 Connolly, William Blake and the Body; Sklar, Blake’s Jerusalem.
26 Barker opens each volume of his Books of Blood with this epigraph.
27 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry.
28 Wright, Gothic Fiction, p. 58.
29 Ibid.
30 Punter, ‘Gothic Poetry, 1700–1900’, p. 211.
32 Ibid., p. 148. Radcliffe is reflecting here on the image of Satan in Book Four of Paradise Lost as he squares off with the “Angelick Squadron” (4.977) that has spotted him skulking around the walls of Paradise.
33 Bruhm, Gothic Bodies, p. 37.
34 Morgan, The Biology of Horror, p. 3.
35 Reyes, Body Gothic, p. 2.
36 Engelstein, Anxious Anatomy, p. 11.
37 On monstrosity as excessive vitality, see Gigante, Life: Organic Form and Romanticism.
39 Ibid., p. 19.
41 Ibid., p. 325.
42 On Blake’s close relationship to Henry Fuseli see Paley, William Blake; and Hall, Blake and Fuseli.
48 Canuel, Religion, Toleration and British Writing, p. 62.
52 Gothic architecture appears most notably in Jerusalem, plates 1, 32, 57, 84.
53 See Ferguson-Wagstaffe, ‘“Points of Contact”’. 

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54 Miles, Gothic Writing, p. 124.
55 For instance, in spite of its wide-ranging and excellent selections, Franklin, The Longman Anthology of Gothic Verse affords space to all major Romantic writers except Blake. Similarly, Blake appears only as a footnote in Davison, Gothic Literature 1764–1824, p. 274, fn. 95.
58 Richey, Blake's Altering Aesthetic, p. 7.
59 Ibid., p. 10.
60 Ibid., p. 179.
61 Mellor, Blake's Human Form Divine, p. 131.
62 Ibid., p. 132.
64 Deuchar, 'Foreword', p. 6.
65 Myrone, 'Fuseli to Frankenstein', p. 35.
66 Ibid., p. 35.
68 Ibid., p. 72.
70 See Andeweg and Zlosnik, Gothic Kinship.
72 Gilchrist, The Life of William Blake, p. 129.
73 Ibid., p. 130.
75 Bataille, Literature and Evil, p. 79.
76 'Like the carnivalesque, the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicenced desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation' (Kilgour, The Rise of the Gothic Novel, p. 8).
77 In an effort to make sense of the later prophecies' resistances to narrative structure, Denise Gigante encourages us to understand 'Blake's living form as what I would call an epigenesist poetics,' one that parallels the 'natural philosophical shift from anatomical structure to the “mode of generation”' that takes place in Blake's own time (Gigante, 'Blake's Living Form', pp. 463, 470). 'Living Form,' as Baulch also argues in his chapter of this book, might be best thought of as a process rather than finished product.
78 We refer to the Gothic as a 'genre' here with the caveat that '[a]t root [the Gothic is] an ethnic and historical delimiter that became a generic term only
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retrospectively’ (Gamer, Romanticism and the Gothic, p. 4). It is important, in
other words, to note that what we recognise as the Gothic has its origins in
semi-articulate political, social, and psychological anxieties of the sort touched
on above, disturbances the depths of which may prove impossible entirely to
plumb.

79 Halberstam, Skin Shows, p. 2.
80 Milton, Paradise Lost, pp. 910, 911.
81 See for instance Aikin and Aikin, On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of
Terror (1773).
82 Moers, Literary Women.
83 See Sha, Perverse Romanticism, for a discussion of how sexuality becomes
‘perverse’ once decoupled from reproduction and cast in terms of Kantian
aesthetics as a ‘purposiveness without purpose’.