THE ANNOTATED PROPP

1.1
GOTHIC FICTION AND PROPP'S
MORPHOLOGY OF THE FOLKTALE

Manuel Aguirre,
Independent scholar

According to the experience of modern linguistics, language patterns exhibit a consistent regularity. The languages of the whole world manifest a paucity and relative simplicity of structural types: and at the base of all these types lie universal laws. This schematic and recurrent character of linguistic patterns finds its explanation first of all in the fact that language is a typical collective property. Similar phenomena of schematism and recurrence in the structure of folktales throughout the world have long astonished and challenged investigators.

In folklore as well as in language, only a part of the similarities can be explained on the basis of common patrimony or of diffusion (migratory plots). And, since the fortuity of the other coincidences is impossible, there arises imperatively the question of structural laws that will explain all these striking coincidences, in particular, the repetitive tale plots of independent origins (Jakobson 1945).[1]

It is usually assumed that literature is free (or perhaps, prescriptively, *should* be free) from the repetitive, predictable forms that characterize folklore and instead displays (or ought to display) the richness, complexity and uniqueness which are deemed the natural appurtenances of individual creations. Because of this

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[1] Roman Jakobson, 'On Russian Fairy Tales', published as 'Commentary' to the 1945 edition of (a selection of) Aleksandr Afanás'ev's *Russian Fairy Tales*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York: Pantheon Books), 631-51, p. 640.

assumption, no research has yet been carried out on the schematic and repetitive in texts which purportedly belong in the literary field yet are—the case of popular fictions such as Gothic—endowed with a degree of formulaicity. Whenever the Gothic genre fails to exhibit uniqueness—whenever, that is, it vaunts predictability—it is apt to be ear-marked as 'poorly written'. However, the recognition of formulaic language in Gothic must lead us to questions such as, what are the *structural laws*—to use Jakobson's phrase—governing the construction of Gothic texts? Could it be that Gothic authors simply aspire to a lesser degree of 'uniqueness' than other literary practitioners do?[2] The project *The Annotated Propp* aims to explore the hypothesis that the Gothic occupies a 'third space' halfway between literature and folklore and constitutes a *liminal* phenomenon. For this, it offers a reappraisal of Propp's *Morphology* that may subsequently be applied to Gothic tales. Building on earlier investigations into the concept of liminality as well as on formal analyses of Gothic writing, it is part of a wider project aimed at outlining what can be called the 'grammar' of Gothic.[3]

I shall write of 'the Gothic genre', fully aware that since the 1990s this has become a misnomer. The current view in practice restricts literary Gothic to what is, after all, the dominant literary form in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries—the novel; and time and again we see 'Gothic' identified with an all-too-brief canon of novels by Radcliffe, Lewis and a dozen others. It is of course a matter of historical record that turn-of-the-eighteenth-century Gothic included much more, as Robert Miles reminds us:

> [W]e are dealing, not with the rise of a single genre, but with an area of concern, a broad subject matter, crossing the genres: drama and poetry, as well as novels.[4]

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[2] On the formulaic language of Gothic see my '"The Hollow Echo": Gothic Fiction and the Structure of a Formulaic Pattern,' *European Journal of English Studies* 20:1 (2016), 95-110.

[3] See my 'The Lure of the Limen', in *The TRELLIS Papers* 1 (2006) and 'Liminality' in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. Jeffrey R. di Leo (Bloomsbury Publishing: London/Oxford/New York 2018), 553-54. On the role of liminality in folktales see my *The Thresholds of the Tale: Liminality and the Structure of Fairytales* (Madrid: The Gateway Press 2007) and 'Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" and the Grammar of Gothic', in *Neophilologus* 98:2 (2014), 1-16. See also 'A Grammar of Gothic: Report on a Research Project on the Forms of the Gothic Genre,' in *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840*, 21, http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/romtext/files/2014/07/rt21_n07.pdf and 'Thick Description and the Poetics of the Liminal in Gothic Tales,' in *Orbis Litterarum Universarum* 72:4 (2017), 294–317.

[4] Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing, 1750-1820: A Genealogy.* London: Routledge 1993, p. 4. For Gothic poetry see Steve Eng, 'Supernatural Verse in English', in *Horror Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*, ed. Marshall B. Tymn (New York/London: R. R. Bowker Company 1981), 401-52; Joel Faflak, 'Gothic Poetry and First-Generation Romanticism', in *Romantic Gothic,* eds. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2015), 95-111.

But the claim Miles puts forward is that the term 'genre' could not possibly encompass such a multifarious variety, and the call is nowadays for a much more suitable label: Gothic is an 'aesthetic' (Miles 1993) or a 'mode'.[5] This of course invites an immediate abrogation of the term 'genre' in application to thriller, science-fiction, fantasy and many other manifestations of popular culture since these, too, straddle different *genres* and even *media* (film, television, comics, computer games). Taking the argument one notch further, is poetry a genre? Hard to defend, when we have epic, lyric and dramatic poetry, sonnets, dramatic monologues, prose poetry, poetic prose and so forth: poetry, we must conclude, is a mode since it 'crosses several genres'.[6] And what of epic? By the side of *Gilgamesh* and Dante's *Divina Commedia* we have Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Brecht's epic theatre, and the difficulty of conflating epic poetry, epic novel, and epic film: surely epic is a *mode*, too. So is drama, since it straddles a variety of genres (comedy, tragedy, etc.) and non-literary forms such as mime, masque or film. And can we speak of the novel genre in the age of the graphic novel?[7] Since none of the time-hallowed genres of literature resist the test, a *reductio ad absurdum* imposes itself: *nothing* can be called a 'genre'. Clearly, Gothic is not the problem, rather our notions of genre are.

This reasoning does certainly not clear things up, but it puts paid to arguments for a modal understanding of Gothic built on the criterion of variety; yet sidestepping the genre hurdle does not get us out of trouble, and we shall return to the question of how genre is to be defined. It is another brute fact of criticism that until relatively recently the *literary* status of Gothic was a shaky matter. To be sure, the earlier twentieth century produced ardent defenders of it—from Summers to Varma—[8] but there was also much doubt in the critical establishment as to whether Gothic did belong in the history of British

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For Gothic drama see Stephen Wischhusen (ed.) *The Hour of One: Six Gothic Melodramas* (London: Gordon Fraser 1975); Paul Ranger, *'Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast:' Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: The Bath Press/The Society for Theatre Research 1991); Jeffrey N. Cox (ed.) *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825* (Athens: Ohio University Press 1992); John Franceschina (ed.) *Sisters of Gore: Gothic Melodramas by British Women* (London: Routledge 2000). To this set one should add short prose narratives ('true relations', 'fragments', 'tales'), such as collected in occasional anthologies like Peter Haining's *Great British Tales of Terror: Gothic Stories of Horror and Romance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1972).

[5] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge 1995).

[6] A quick Google search will easily uncover horror poetry, science-fiction poetry, detective poetry.

[7] The term was given currency by Will Eisner's comic-book volume *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories: A Graphic Novel* (New York: Baronet Publishing 1978).

[8] Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (London: Fortune Press 1938); Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press 1957).

literature—and, in some respects, this situation has not changed much. For one example, the index for the third edition (a scant thirteen years ago) of *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*[9] does not carry the word 'Gothic'; two very brief fragments from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* are offered at pages 704-5 as part of a selection of excerpts headed '*Manfred* and Its Time' (pp. 695-710). There are no references to Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, William Beckford, M. G. Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, Charles Maturin or James Hogg. In short, according to this work the Gothic novel never existed, or else it does not merit inclusion in a historical anthology of British literature.

Unease concerning the status of Gothic in the literary field led criticism in several directions in the 1980s. One was the candid acknowledgment that the forms of Gothic seemed to fall short of consistent literary quality; the second—almost necessarily concomitant with the first—was the search for thematic and ideological traits that might justify, after all, the genre's inclusion in the history (if not in the canon) of British literature. On one hand, Napier bemoaned 'the failure of Gothic'; on the other, Punter deftly argued for Marxist and psychoanalytical readings of Gothic.[10]

Another development in the direction of 'legitimising' Gothic was the gradual extension of the semantics of 'Gothic' to cover not only two-and-a-half centuries of horror writings but also many other types of fiction. Already in 1960 one influential American critic had claimed that the whole of the prose narrative production in the USA (mark that neither poetry nor drama are meant) is Gothic or Gothic-inspired:

> of all the fiction of the West, our own is most deeply influenced by the gothic, is almost essentially a gothic one. [T]he American catalogue [of great novelists] includes only one writer, Hemingway, whose major works do not include a good many deeply influenced by the example of the gothic.[11]

The adjective 'Gothic' has since the nineteen-nineties become a blanket term for a variety of cultural phenomena including not just many kinds of literary fiction but also of film and television productions, video and computer games,

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[9] Eds. David Damrosch and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (New York: Pearson/Longman 2006), volume 2.

[10] Elizabeth Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987); David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman 1980, 2nd edn. 1996).

[11] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 124-5.

comics, music, fashion, and aesthetics.[12] The implicit reasoning seems to be that, if it can be argued that Gothic texts respond to the psychosexual or socio-political preoccupations of their age, or that the epithet 'Gothic' covers a substantial chunk of contemporary culture, the objects thus defined or tagged become respectable, acquire an aura. It works, but the price is high; when anything and everything can be labelled 'Gothic' we can hardly speak of a differentiated system anymore. At best we deal with a vague artistic *mode* which cuts across genres, periods, media and languages and whose origins, evolution, diffusion and definition are in consequence hopelessly blurred; at worst we face an amorphous cultural mass which threatens to obliterate all distinctions, all nuances, all historical periodisation. To the question, what is Gothic?, the current critical answer is, practically anything goes.

Part at least of the problem has to do with the way critics have of late conflated their concept of Gothic with one that was current in the realm of popular culture in the nineteen-eighties; yet there should be no difficulty in acknowledging a distinction between the critical and the popular usages of the term. To consider a related word, the popular mind feels no qualms about identifying Merchant-Ivory films, and the novels that inspired them, as 'romantic',[13] whereas no literary critic would use this term to describe, say, Henry James' novel *The Golden Bowl*.[14] Bringing out this difference in no way constitutes a critique of popular discourse, which after all is quite aware of the stubborn strain of Romanticism in our contemporary culture; but the literary critic cannot afford to lose sight of technical language, historical perspectives, movements, classifications. Surely the same reasoning goes for our subject: if we are to avoid endless confusions, what the word 'Gothic' (or 'goth') means to the man and woman in the street need not be (perhaps should not be) the same as what it means for the academic establishment. A critical demarcation of the semantics of this literary term is needed, and our first obstacle is the absence of frameworks.

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[12] See, e.g., Charles Alexander Moffat's 'The Neo-Gothic Art Manifesto' (2001, updated 2003), in *The Art History Archive*, http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/gothic/The-Neo-Gothic-Art-Manifesto.html, last accessed 28 November 2018. Interestingly, Moffat advocates a Neo-Gothic takeover of culture where 'we could even become so popular that we end up dominating society, in which goth would actually become a social norm'.

[13] Wikipedia, for instance, introduces the film version of E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice* as 'a British romantic drama film' (https://www.google.es/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=3XWcU5LnMYbT8gf0voG4Dw&gws_rd=ssl#q=%22Mauric e%22, last accessed 14/6/14). One has to bear in mind that 'romantic drama' is a genre category in film parlance but designates quite another thing for literary critics.

[14] Henry James 1904 *The Golden Bowl*; James Ivory and Ismail Merchant 2000 *The Golden Bowl* (Miramax).

It is fair to say that there is at present no generally accepted model for the analysis of literary Gothic, rather the term devours.[15] The colonization process takes in single works and whole movements, with important strands of German, Russian or Spanish Romanticism currently being co-opted under the umbrella of Gothic.[16] One is reminded of the way the label 'Metaphysical poetry', initially ushered in by Samuel Johnson to designate what he felt to be a peculiarly British style of composition,[17] in the nineteen-sixties came to be applied to major kinds of seventeenth-century poetry published all over Europe and the Americas.[18] In the process, not only individual works but even entire brands and movements are apt to be redefined as Gothic. Drawing the argument to a point of absurdity, we might ask whether it is possible *not* to define George Eliot's *Middlemarch* or Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* as respectively 'realist Gothic' and 'French Gothic'. In a provocatively titled article, 'Gothic Shakespeare', Dale Townshend discusses appropriations of Shakespeare by horror authors, from Walpole's *Otranto* to the *Twilight* series; but while rightly noting the Bard's influence upon the genre, she ends up acknowledging that Shakespeare has come to function as 'both a borrower and a lender' vis-à-vis Gothic.[19] Once again extending this reasoning *ad absurdum*, what is to stop us from writing of *Richard III* as 'Elizabethan Gothic'? Nothing, because no demarcation criteria currently exist.

This is obviously a perverse way of overstating my case. The modal approach does have its benefits: because it cuts across genres, media or periods it often provides insight into specific aspects of the woods which too much attention to the trees might otherwise miss or misinterpret. But it seems to me that we lose more than we gain by such extensions of the semantics of 'Gothic', since in the end we simply have to start relabelling areas all over again: it has lately become needful, for example, to write of 'the earlier' or 'original Gothic genre', or of 'the

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[15] For a spirited defence of the old concept of Gothic – the one that prevailed before the nineteen-nineties – see Maurice Lévy's article '"Gothic" and the Critical Idiom', in Allan Lloyd Smith and Victor Sage, (eds.), *Gothic Origins and Innovations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1994), 1–15.

[16] See for instance Neil Cornwell, 'European Gothic', in David Punter (ed.) *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000), 27-38; Avril Horner (ed.) *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange 1760-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

[17] Though he believed it to be 'borrowed from Marino and his followers'. See Samuel Johnson, 'The Life of Cowley', in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81), http://cowley.lib.virginia.edu/small/johnsoncowley.htm (last accessed 5 February 2019).

[18] See Frank J. Warnke, *European Metaphysical Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961). For a sober corrective see Harold B. Segel, *The Baroque Poem: A Comparative Survey* (New York: E. P. Dutton 1974).

[19] In David Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2015), 38-63, p. 61.

first Gothic wave', in order to distinguish it from later 'waves'.[20] Quite in contrast to this outlook, before the nineteen-nineties the critical establishment was largely agreed on viewing Gothic as a genre which emerged in Britain in the seventeen-sixties, flourished in the seventeen-nineties and evolved into other genres around the eighteen-twenties and thirties. One only has to compare the telling terminus dates chosen by many critics: for Varma (1957), Gothic came to an 'end' in the first quarter of the nineteenth century; the key date is 1820 for Frank (1981),[21] Napier (1987), Ranger (1991), and Miles (1993); 1824 for Lévy (1968);[22] 1825 for Cox (1992); 1830 for Tracy (1981);[23] 1840 for Thompson (1979)[24] and Norton (2000); a recent PhD thesis covering 519 titles proposes 1835,[25] while in a yet more recent MA dissertation analysing a 174-strong corpus of Gothic texts the last title is dated 1837.[26] The consensus still is that something that used to be called 'Gothic' faded from view between the eighteen-twenties and the eighteen-thirties. What this 'fading off' consisted in remains to be clarified.

Just as it views Gothic as a historical genre with blurry temporal boundaries, so this perspective deems it a British genre with, nevertheless, similarly fluid geographical borders. It can countenance that certain North-American texts of the period might be thought Gothic in some sense, coming as they did from a literature commonly thought to be British-derived; and it discerns meaningful links between the Gothic genre and other literatures and periods without feeling the need to mash these in the crucible of Gothic. Contrary to some misreadings,[27] this position entails no claim as to the 'death' of the genre; what took place was not a demise but a surfeit.

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[20] See Rictor Norton (ed.), *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764-1840* (London: Leicester University Press 2000).

[21] Frederick S. Frank, 'The Gothic Romance: 1762-1820', in Tymn, ed. (1981), 3-175.

[22] Maurice Lévy, *Le roman 'gothique' anglais, 1764-1824*. Toulouse: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines 1968.

[23] Ann B. Tracy, *The Gothic Novel, 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky 1981).

[24] G. Richard Thompson (ed.), *Romantic Gothic Tales, 1790-1840* (New York: Harper and Row 1979).

[25] F. Perazzini, *Il Gotico "a distanza": nuove prospettive per lo studio dell'evoluzione dei generi letterari* (Rome: Pubblicazioni aperte digitali della Sapienza, 2012), http://padis.uniroma1.it/bitstream/10805/1708/1/IlGoticoaDistanza.pdf.

[26] Maartje Weenink, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad? A Computational Approach to the Representation of Nationality in 'British' Gothic Fiction 1750-1840.* Unpublished MA dissertation (Radbout University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 2018), https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/6657/Weenink%2C_M._1.pdf?sequence=1.

[27] See, e.g., Ann Williams 1995 *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1995), pp. 2, 14.

To substantiate this statement I follow Elena Bermejo in adopting Attebery's application of the mathematical concept of the *fuzzy set* to the description of a related genre, fantasy:

> Under the fuzzy set categorization, the fantasy genre would be regarded as a cluster of works that share certain specific tropes or characteristics. Texts that display a great amount of these particular features would be considered to represent the quintessence of fantasy; while low employment of them would make unlikelier the association of the texts to the fantasy genre.[28]

I would add to this two further specifications: the *fuzziness* of the set inheres both on the synchronic and on the historical planes, while its applicability transcends the genre of fantasy, as Attebery himself makes clear in his discussion of genres:

> Genres may be approached as 'fuzzy sets,' meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center. […] The category has a clear center but boundaries that shade off imperceptibly, so that a book on the fringes may be considered as belonging or not, depending on one's interests.[29]

Whereas the cinematic Western ran its course as a genre well into the nineteen-seventies, its generic status gradually turned mercurial and (without dying out, at least for the foreseeable future) became partly a set of highly formulaic films and partly a rarified group of intensely individual works, notably by the likes of Clint Eastwood. Much the same could be said for the musical genre of opera, which from the early twentieth century has been developing into a set of individual, mostly experimental productions which appeal to narrower kinds of audience and which have often been replaced by the genre of the musical in popular estimation.[30] Like these, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century Gothic came to consist of, on the one hand, impoverished

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[28] Elena Bermejo, *'The Castle Was Breathing': A Study of the Fantastic in Mervyn Peake's* Gormenghast *Trilogy* (unpublished MA dissertation, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid 2018), p. 9.

[29] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992), p. 12.

[30] According to Daniel J. Wakin, '[t]he Metropolitan Opera in the US reports that the average age of its audience is now 60' ('Met Backtracks on Drop in Average Audience Age', in *The New York Times* 17 February 2011, 4.37 pm, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opera, last accessed 12 January 2019). Three years later, Stephen Moss comments in *The Guardian* that 'Opera houses and concert halls […] fret about their greying audiences. Peter Gelb, general manager of the Metropolitan Opera house in New York, has even declared opera to be dying, so ancient is its audience' (Stephen Moss, 'You've Got to Find It for Yourself', in *The Guardian* Mon 9 June 2014, 15.31 BST, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/09/arts-audiences-white-metropolitan-middle-class-harriet-harman, last accessed 12 January 2019).

popularisations of earlier Gothic texts and tropes, and, on the other hand, a scattering of isolated, high-quality experimental works by Mary Shelley, Jan Potocki, Charles Maturin, James Hogg.

On the one hand, the very success of Gothic encouraged a concentration on proven features, which heightened the automatism of formula writing in *redactions* of standard Gothic novels (bluebooks and six-penny shockers),[31] while a contrary move was a gradual refusal to read and produce such repetitive matter and diction. The result was an increasingly rigid core and a rarefied, if innovative, periphery. From the 1820s (if not earlier) onwards, authors from Poe to M. R. James tried to distance their writings from the old source in ways that went far beyond what might be expected from the natural generation gap. Walter Scott, William Harrison Ainsworth, G. W. M. Reynolds or G. P. R. James (author of the 'last' of the mammoth Gothic novels, the triple-decker *The Castle of Ehrenstein*, 1847), while treading closely in the steps of Gothic predecessors, doggedly sought to twist, out-do or by-pass them; Poe's often-quoted claim that 'terror is not of Germany, but of the soul'[32] is illustrative of this general need to disengage from discredited models; and the novels of the Brontë sisters resort to Gothic tropes but steer a decided course towards a different genre, that of the English social novel. This, the placing of Gothic tropes in the service of non-Gothic concerns, is a reliable index of divarication. B. F. Fisher has appropriately labeled the 1824-1873 period the age of 'residual Gothic'.[33] Nor is it of course merely a matter of writers turning to other genres and modes—it is equally, as in the case of opera, a question of dwindling patronage, which discourages many writers from pursuing unpopular paths.

On the other hand, there was no genre 'death' but only an evolutionary truism to the effect that by the 1830s Gothic fiction had 'fuzzed out' to *transform*

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[31] See Angela Koch, '"The Absolute Horror of Horrors" Revised: A Bibliographical Checklist of Early-Nineteenth-Century Gothic Bluebooks', in *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 9 (Dec 2002), www.romtext.org.uk/reports/cc09_n03/, last accessed 22 Dec 2013; Alison Milbanks, 'Gothic Satires, Histories and Chap-Books', in *Gothic Fiction: Rare Printed Works from the Sadleir-Black Collection of Gothic Fiction at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia* (Marlborough, Wilts.: Adam Matthew Publications 2010), https://web.archive.org/web/20090413141211/http://www.adam-matthew-publications.co.uk/digital_guides/gothic_fiction/AlisonMilbank3.aspx, last accessed 14 February 2019; Franz J. Potter, 'Bluebooks', *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, eds. William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2013), pp. 75-78.
[32] Preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard 1840), https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Tales_of_the_Grotesque_and_Arabesque (last accessed 12 January 2019).
[33] Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, 'The Residual Gothic Impulse: 1824-1873', in Tymn (ed.) 1981, 176-220.

into other genres—most prominently the historical novel, Science-Fiction, fantasy, mystery and detective fiction, the adventure novel, as well as new brands of horror fiction for which the label 'Gothic' no longer seemed appropriate. This admittedly restrictive understanding of the genre, while allowing for fuzzy borders both historical and geographical, identifies a specific period in the history of a multifarious phenomenon and makes it possible both to analyse it as a recognisable system and to study it in an evolutionary and comparative perspective. This—a genre demarcated (but not closed) in time and space—affords the basis for the kind of approach that can be productive on both the synchronic and the diachronic levels. With all due respect to current critical convention, the *historical* (as opposed to the *modal*) is the sense in which the term 'Gothic' will be used in this project.

Historical demarcation can surely be but one prong of the approach; a second criterion for demarcating Gothic must be its *forms*. As the brunt of the project at present will be borne by both novel and short prose and verse fiction, we must first of all enquire into what narrative forms may be specific of this genre. For this we need some theory of narrative, and the acknowledged fountainhead of the discipline of Narratology is Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*.[34] This is not the place to explore the history of its reception in the fields of folklore,[35] mythography,[36] popular fiction studies,[37] or literature

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[34] Vladimir Propp (1928) *Morphology of the Folktale,* tr. L.Scott, 2nd rev. edn. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press 1968, 1994; henceforward *Morphology*). Early acknowledgments of the significance of this work can be found in Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1971); Claude Brémond, 'Le message narratif', in *Communications* 4 (1964), 4-32, 'Morphology of the French Folktale', in *Semiotica* 2:3 (1970), 247-76, and *Logique du récit* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1973); Gerald Prince, 'Narratology and Narratological Analysis', in *Oral Versions of Personal Experience: Three Decades of Narrative Analysis*, special issue of *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7:1-4 (1977) (ed. Michael G. W. Bamberg), 39-44. Propp meant to write of *wondertales* (*Zaubermärchen, contes merveilleux*), but his editor thought 'folktales' would look better in the title. The standard term for these has for so long been 'fairytales' that I shall retain it in these pages.

[35] See, for instance, Melville Jacobs, 'Review of Propp', in *Journal of American Folklore* 72 (1959), 195-96; Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications n° 195, 1964); Algirdas J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale: recherche de méthode* (Paris: Librairie Larousse 1966); Paul Delarue and Marie-Louise Tenèze, *Le conte populaire français: catalogue raisonné des versions de France* (1957-85) (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1997), vol. 3, 259.

[36] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'La structure et la forme. Réflexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp', in *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique Apliquée* 7 (1960); trans. by M. Layton as 'Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp', in Anatoly Liberman (ed.) *Vladimir Propp: Theory and History of Folklore,* trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984, 1993), 167-88.

[37] See Umberto Eco, 'The Narrative Structure in Fleming', in *Il caso Bond* (eds. O. Del Buono and U.Eco) (Milano: Bompiani 1965). For a track of early studies and applications see Eleazar M.

studies;[38] Propp's model has become, in the words of Franco Moretti, 'the founding work of modern narrative theory.'[39] There is historical irony in the fact that, in seeking to expand or improve Propp's insight, many researchers in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies took their inspiration from a linguistic school—Structuralist and Chomskyan linguistics—that was fast becoming obsolete.[40] With the hindsight afforded by current linguistic theory as well as by the labours of mythographers, folklorists and Oral Theory scholars who—all too often unbeknownst to literary critics and linguists—have for decades been dealing with *oral* narratives,[41] we may return to the source with the confidence that it provides a serious model for the study of certain narrative forms. As folklorist Alan Dundes aptly puts it,

> Propp's analysis should be useful in analysing the structure of literary forms (such as novels and plays), comic strips, motion-picture and television plots, and the like. In understanding the interrelationship between folklore and literature, and between folklore and the mass media, the emphasis has hitherto been principally upon content. Propp's *Morphology* suggests that there can be structural borrowings as well as content borrowings (Dundes 1968).[42]

Having said this, relevance must be our guiding criterion. Why apply to Gothic narrative a model designed for the study of oral tales? Leaving aside the observation that the link between Gothic and the fairytale has already been established,[43] and that direct applications of Propp's *Morphology* to Gothic go back to as early as the nineteen-seventies,[44] the following hypothesis may be

Meletinsky, 'Problèmes de la morphologie historique du conte populaire', in *Semiotica* 2:2 (1970), 128-34; and his 'L'étude structurale et typologique du conte' (tr. Claude Kahn), third part of *Vladimir Propp: Morphologie du conte* (various translators) (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1970), 201-54 (the name is given as 'Evguéni Mélétinski' at p. 201).

[38] See, among many others, Michael Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th edn) (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1999); Chris Baldick, *A Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990); Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2nd edn.) (Harlow, Essex: Longman/York Press 1992), s.v. 'Narratology'.

[39] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso 1998), p. 107.

[40] See David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge 2005), p. 574.

[41] See Mark C. Amodio (ed.), *New Directions in Oral Theory* (Tempe, Ar.: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2005); John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

[42] Alan Dundes, Introduction to the 1968 translation of Propp *Morphology,* xi-xvii, pp. xiv-xv.

[43] See Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka: Gothic and Fairy Tale* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2003), pp. 184-5; Aguirre, 'Gothic Fiction and Folk-Narrative Structure: The Case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*', in *Gothic Studies* 15:2 (2013), 1-18; and Aguirre, 'A Gothic-Folktale Interface', to appear in *Gothic Studies* (2019).

[44] See Hannelotte Dorner-Bachmann, *Erzählstruktur und Texttheorie: Zu den Grundlagen einer*

advanced: if the literary status of Gothic has for so long seemed dubious, it might pay to consider the genre in the light of models designed for the study of *non-literary* genres. In this regard, there is now empirical evidence that an application of the Proppian model to Gothic not only reveals important aspects of Gothic form but also casts light on the nature and significance of the genre.

Some years ago Eva Ardoy and myself undertook an experimental study of Anna Laetitia Barbauld's short Gothic tale 'Sir Bertrand: A Fragment' (1773).[45] We observed that three basic features stood out: first, the story follows a narrative convention that values action over other considerations (such as characterization or description); second, it makes unfettered use of the marvellous; third, it displays with gusto just the kind of regularities that canonical fiction seeks to 'hide'. It seemed to us that the tale must profitably respond to analysis in terms of models centred on these three traits; and that the prose narrative genre which most clearly exhibits them is the fairytale. We therefore undertook an analysis of 'Sir Bertrand' based on Propp's approach to fairytales. The results led us to the conviction that the Proppian model was a powerful tool in the investigation of Gothic. Various other enquiries have since cast light on both the telling similarities *and* significant differences which an application of the model reveals between fairytales and Gothic tales,[46] so that at this point in time what seems to be called for is no longer preliminary evidence so much as a systematisation of the hypothesis. That is the aim of this project.

My first concern is with the absence of consensus on the Proppian method: both printed literature and the Internet teem with inaccurate accounts or faulty applications of the model. The primary aim of these pages must then be to place at the disposal of scholars a tool which has so far proven fruitful in the analysis of certain Gothic texts. Since the system is often not fully understood, and in view of the heterodox application proposed here, my overall purpose is to offer some guidance regarding the practical use of the model. Three stages are envisaged in this project:

Erzähltheorie unter besonderer analytischer Berücksichtigung des Märchens und der 'Gothic Novel' (Hildesheim-Zurich: Georg Olms Verlag 1979).

[45] Manuel Aguirre & Eva Ardoy, "Narrative Morphology in Barbauld's 'Sir Bertrand: A Fragment'". *The Northanger Library Project* (Madrid: The Gateway Press, 2009), http://www.northangerlibrary.com/nlproject.html. We followed convention in attributing the tale to Anna L. Barbauld (née Aikin); recent criticism suggests that it was the work of her brother, John Aikin; see Norton (ed.) 2000, p. 7.

[46] See my 'Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach"' and 'A Gothic-Folktale Interface'.

THE ANNOTATED PROPP

STAGE 1. Description
    1.1 Gothic fiction and Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*
    1.2 Outline of Propp's model
    1.3 The grammar of functions
    1.4 The semantics of the Proppian model
    1.5 The Proppian model applied

STAGE 2. An application of the model to the analysis of a corpus of Gothic tales and poems.

STAGE 3. On the basis of the results of Stage 2, a reformulation of aspects of the Proppian system will in all probability be called for.

What the present pages have sought to cover is the first section of Stage 1: an introduction to the project and its rationale. Stage 1.2, providing a working outline of the Proppian model, has already appeared in this site.[47] Stage 1.3 will be concerned with detailing a number of peculiarities of Proppian functions which, it is hoped, will clarify the model. Stage 1.4 will tackle the overall semantics of the model and offer a rationale for it, de facto simplifying it.[48] Stage 1.5 will show the model at work on a number of fairytales and discuss its implications. Subsequent stages of the project will explore how an application of Propp's system to Gothic texts may be productive. A parallel project (*The Grammar of Gothic*) will seek to systematise the genre's formal elements.

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[47] See 'An Outline of Propp's Model for the Study of Fairytales'. *The Northanger Library Project*, http://www.northangerlibrary.com/nlproject_tool.asp. A slightly revised version is to appear in *The Bloomsbury Reader in the Study of Myth*, eds. Vivian M. Asimos & Jonathan Miles-Watson (London/Oxford/New York: Bloomsbury 2019).
[48] Some steps in these directions were taken in my *The Thresholds of the Tale.*