Introduction: The Gothic in/and History

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SPOONER

History is a Romance that is believed; romance a history that is not
believed

(Horace Walpole)[1]

History in the Gothic

In the first Preface to *The Castle of Otranto* (published late 1764; dated 1765),
Horace Walpole's literary avatar, the editor and translator William Marshal,
tethers the story to follow to a precise year: 'It was printed at Naples, in the
black letter, in the year 1529.' In the very next sentence, however, Marshal
tempers this precision with the following cautious disclaimer: 'How much
sooner it was written does not appear.'[2] The transition from the precise dating
of the printed volume to the vagueness and ambiguity surrounding the original
work is immediately arresting: 1529, after all, was an important year in the
history of England, one in which Henry VIII's infamous Legatine Court,
established to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, finally took place
after extended delays by papal emissaries. It was a year in which a royal
marriage, and most particularly the virginity and fecundity of a Queen, was
opened up to intense scrutiny for the reading public, a year that saw the
rupture of the English throne from the Catholic Church. The break between
Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon is rehearsed on a literal level in *The Castle
of Otranto* when Manfred, Prince of Otranto, seeking to secure his family line,
makes an appeal to the Catholic Church in an attempt at abandoning his long-

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1 Horace Walpole, *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford*, 5 vols (London: Printed for
  G. G. and J. Robinson and J. Edwards, 1798), vol. 4, p. 368.
2 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, edited by Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford
  University Press, 2014), p. 5.

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time devoted spouse Hippolita in the hopes of coercing the younger Isabella, his would-be daughter-in-law, into marriage.

More figuratively, the opening page of *The Castle of Otranto's* first Preface alludes to the Protestant Reformation and subsequent counter-Reformation that took place in England in the wake of the annulment of Henry and Catherine's marriage. The manuscript, we are told, was 'found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England', an established, presumably landed family which cannot be named, since to do so would be to risk displaying too great an intimacy and familiarity with the reviled Catholic faith. For similar reasons, the manuscript's temporal and locational origins, moreover, must not and cannot be uncovered, since to do so would be to reveal too much knowledge on the part of William Marshal. This first Preface to one of the most foundational texts of the Gothic thus boldly yokes historical precision to obscurity, hesitation and uncertainty. There is an irresolution here between the historiographical impulses of the Enlightenment, and the darkness of earlier ages, a fascination with historical process, but a caution in exercising it. Thus, *The Castle of Otranto* reveals the blandishments and risks of history. While the risks are absorbed through the work's imbrication of history and romance, the blandishments are foregrounded in the antiquarian paratextual materials that frame the 'discovered' document. 'Within the Gothic', argues David Punter, 'we can find a very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems, the difficulty of negotiating those problems being precisely reflected in the Gothic's central stylistic conventions.'[3] The Gothic's 'stylistic conventions', one could further argue, also teach us much about the ways in which we apprehend, consume and narrativise history itself. For while the Gothic may critique the present moment through the figurations of the past, so too does it interrogate the modes through which we have learned about that past, the distancing historiographical devices that have given us access to, yet also alienated us from, the painful realities of Catherine of Aragon's marriage to King Henry, and from the attendant brutalities of the Protestant Reformation.

As these opening comments suggest, it would be remiss to introduce a three-volume history of the Gothic from antiquity to the present day without at least reflecting on the complex relationship that the Gothic mode has always had with the theory and practice of history itself. On the one hand,

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3 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the present day*, 2nd edition, 2 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1996), vol. 1, p. 54.

there is little doubt that the 'rise' in the latter part of the eighteenth century of what has subsequently come to be known as 'Gothic literature' was part of a broader epistemic and discursive shift, one in which notions of history, historicity and a sense of the historical past came to assume ever-increasing explanatory, conceptual and intellectual prominence. As Michel Foucault, the so-called 'father' of New Historicism, argued in *The Order of Things* (1966; translated 1970), the transition from the 'classical' to the 'modern' episteme that occurred across Western culture from the end of the eighteenth century onwards brought with it the dawning of a profound historical awareness, to the extent that it is to this period that we might look for the origins of modern notions of history itself.[4] The philosopher, historian and economist David Hume registered something of this burgeoning historical interest when, in a well-known letter to the publisher William Strahan in August 1770, he declared that 'I believe this is the historical Age and this the historical Nation', the observation as much a reflection on his own contribution to the field of historical enquiry in his influential *The History of England* (1754–62) as an acknowledgment of the work of William Robertson, Robert Henry, Adam Ferguson, Gilbert Stuart and other 'philosophical historians' of the Scottish Enlightenment.[5]

Hume's enthusiastic tribute in 1770 to the 'historical Age' of the present in the 'historical Nation' that was contemporary Scotland was occasioned by his reading of draft sections of, and a detailed plan for, what would eventually become *The History of Great Britain, from the First Invasion of It by the Romans Under Julius Cæsar* (1771–93). In its published form, this was a six-volume tome of an anticipated ten-volume series on British history, from Roman times up to the present day, written by the Church of Scotland minister and historian Robert Henry. 'I have perus'd all his Work', Hume's letter to Strahan continues, 'and have a very good Opinion of it. It conveys a great deal of Good Sense and Learning, convey'd in a perspicacious, natural, and correct Expression.'[6] Hume's sole reservation with Henry's study was its sheer capaciousness, the very concern that, in the end, would prevent Strahan from purchasing the copyright to it and necessitate the author financing its publication himself: 'his Specimen contains two Quartos', Hume writes, 'and yet gives us only the History of Great Britain from the Invasion of Julius

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4 See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2002).
5 David Hume, 'Letter XLII', in *Letters of David Hume to William Strahan*, edited by G. Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), pp. 155–7 (p. 155).
6 Hume, 'Letter XLII', p. 155.

Cæsar to that of the Saxons: One is apt to think that the whole, spun out to the same Length, must contain at least a hundred Volumes'.[7] For the rest, Hume was unstinting in his praise, not only recommending the work to Strahan as a performance of 'very considerable merit', but deeming its author, too, to be 'a very good Character in the World, which renders it so far safe to have dealings with him'.[8]

While its length made publication by Strahan financially unfeasible, it is clear that Henry's *The History of Great Britain* volubly articulated the intellectual priorities and methodological principles of the late Enlightenment. Though based on Antoine-Yves Goguet's *De l'origine des loix, des arts, et des sciences et leurs progrès chez les anciens peuples* (1758), this was a study that was self-consciously 'written on a new plan', and in its proposed aims to provide exhaustive coverage of seven different topics, from civil and military history to the history of manners and customs, in each of the historical periods that it surveyed, it participated in the same impulses expressed in that other ambitious project of the European Enlightenment, the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–72) of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. 'This is all that falls within the province of general history', Henry would write in the General Preface to the first published volume of the *History*, and 'all that can be universally useful and agreeable, or reasonably desired and expected in a work of this kind'.[9] In the late eighteenth century, the category of 'historiography' was comprehensive to the point of being all-encompassing.

The legitimacy of Henry's entire historiographic endeavour, however, required that the disruptive, overly imaginative forces of romance be strenuously kept at bay, and so to vouch for the integrity of his study, the author, writing in the third person, duly records in the opening volume the authentic documentary and monumental sources that he has consulted in his searching account of the nation's past, explaining that 'If he does not write romance instead of history, he must have received his information from tradition—from authentic monuments—original records—or the memoirs of more ancient writers; and therefore it is but just to acquaint his readers from whence he actually received it.'[10] Henry was not alone in his cautious exclusion of romance from the annals of true history: Hume had maintained a similar distinction between history and romance throughout *The History of*

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7 Hume, 'Letter XLII', p. 156.   8 Hume, 'Letter XLII', p. 156.
9 Robert Henry, *The History of Great Britain, from the First Invasion of It by the Romans under Julius Cæsar*, 6 vols (London, 1771–93), vol. 1, p. xi.
10 Henry, *The History of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. xi.

England, as did most other historiographers of the period. Contemporary essayists, aestheticians and cultural commentators, for their part, continuously enumerated the differences between history and romance, while writers of fiction often pondered the relations between the two in Prefaces and other paratextual materials. As Hugh Blair explained in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), the 'primary end' of history was 'to record Truth, Impartiality, Fidelity, and Accuracy', all of these, in turn, said to be the 'fundamental qualities' of the historian himself.[11] In relation to such priorities, however, the fanciful and idealising tendencies of the romance mode could only ever be perceived as counter-historical. Substituting the excesses and vagaries of fiction for empirically verifiable historical fact, *The History of Great Britain* thus presented itself as an exercise in legitimate historical writing, participating, in this way, in what scholars such as Karen O'Brien, Mark Salber Phillips and others have shown to be the climate of extraordinary historiographic interest, variety and innovation in British culture of the eighteenth century.[12]

Even a cursory perusal of a selection of titles and subtitles alone is sufficient to indicate that, in its earliest forms, Gothic fiction was driven by similar historicist impulses, from the 'Gothic Story' added to the second edition of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1765, through the 'Gothic Story' that was Clara Reeve's *The Champion of Virtue* (1777) and the 'Tale of Other Times' of Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783–5), and into the 'Gothic Tale', 'Gothic Story' and 'Gothic Times' variously invoked in the subtitles of many other fictions. As Clara Reeve put it in the Preface to what she in 1778 now titled *The Old English Baron*, this story, like *The Champion of Virtue* before it, was 'distinguished by the appellation of a Gothic Story' primarily insofar as it purported to offer 'a picture of Gothic times and manners'.[13] For the late eighteenth-century writer of fiction, the term 'Gothic' signified, first and foremost, a sense of the distant, somewhat barbaric historical past, but also included the imaginative literary tradition – ghosts, goblins, fairies, wonders and enchantments – with which that past was most closely associated. In one sense, then, Gothic literature appears to have been the child of its cultural moment, for in its jettisoning of the contemporary and near-contemporary

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11 Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols (London, 1783), vol. 2, p. 260.
12 See, for example, Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
13 Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, edited by James Trainer, intro. by James Watt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1.

settings of the eighteenth-century realist novel, and through its self-conscious revival of the 'Gothic' forms and times of medieval and Renaissance romance, Gothic fiction, drama and poetry, as Markman Ellis has put it, itself constituted 'a theory of history' and a popular form through which history could be apprehended and consumed.[14]

On the other hand, however, it is clear that, as our opening comments suggest, the Gothic adopted a sceptical and at times critical stance in relation to history and antiquarianism, the very historiographic modes of enquiry with which its genesis and cultural consolidation towards the end of the eighteenth century was contemporary. It is instructive in this regard to consider Horace Walpole's responses to Henry's *The History of Great Britain*, the same study that had provoked such enthusiastic responses from Hume in his letter to Strahan in 1770. As Walpole, having read a volume of Henry's published work, wrote to the author in March 1783, 'In one word, Sir, I have often said that *History in general is a Romance that is believed, and that Romance is a History that is not believed;* and that I do not see much other difference between them.'[15] Whereas Hume had celebrated Henry and his work as the epitome of the 'historical Age', Walpole insouciantly dismisses the historian's entire enterprise as little more than an exercise in imaginative fiction. The audaciousness of Walpole's comment here cannot be overstated: relegating the soaring, overarching stadial narratives of the conjectural historian to the realm of literary fiction in the same gesture that he elevates the imaginative musings of a romancer to the level of authentic history, Walpole strikes at the heart of the Enlightenment historiographer's attempts to separate out truth from falsehood. History and romance, he irreverently argues, derive their differences not from any absolute or inherent qualities so much as from the levels of credibility that their readers invest in each. That these were sentiments that Walpole 'often' expressed is easily corroborated, for variations on the claim worked their way into several of Walpole's letters and throughout his published and unpublished works, to the extent that they became a Walpolean refrain of sorts.[16] But what is particularly striking about its iteration in the letter to Robert Henry in 1783 is the observation that follows the assertion, one that complicates and undoes the very equivalences

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14 Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 11.
15 Horace Walpole to Robert Henry, 15 March 1783, in W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 48 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–83), vol. 15, p. 173.
16 See Dale Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity: History, Romance, and the Architectural Imagination, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 29–30.

between history and romance that Walpole has only just set in place: 'nay, I am persuaded that if the dead of any age were to revive and read their own histories, they would not believe that they were reading the history of their own time'.[17] Ghosts or the reanimated spirits of the dead, in other words, can only ever prove the conclusions of the historian wrong. Though romance and history, for Walpole, might, in essence, be indistinguishable, spectres, the stuff of Gothic romance from *Otranto* onwards, always exceed the historian's scrupulous gaze. Situated in a realm well beyond historiography's reach and remit, the ghosts conjured up by the Gothic romancer look down in contempt and disbelief at any attempt at rational, historical reasoning.

Of course, the fractious relationship between history and romance that Walpole would articulate here was already in place in *The Castle of Otranto* from nearly two decades before. The Preface to the first edition, as we have already observed, framed it as an exciting antiquarian discovery: a translated and edited text that, though printed in 1529, was, in all likelihood, written in Italian between 1095 and 1243, and, as such, a relic of 'the darkest ages of christianity'.[18] If this framing technique courted the stultifying 'dryness' of the antiquarian method that Walpole bemoaned elsewhere, he was determined to thwart these expectations in the narrative that followed with a tale of magic, wonder and enchantment. Indeed, during the eighteenth century, the distinction between romance and history often superimposed itself upon the distinction between romance and the realist novel, to the extent that Walpole's self-professed aim, as the second Preface to *Otranto* put it, to rejuvenate contemporary prose fiction with the fanciful resources of romance was thus as much a statement of literary intent as it was a riposte to what he took to be an unimaginative and moribund historical and antiquarian tradition.

Subsequent Gothic fictions articulated as powerful a challenge to the work of the eighteenth-century antiquary and historiographer through the pointed modifications that they made to the Walpolean trope of the recently discovered document. Although Walpole's 'Gothic Story', for all its professed antiquity, had remained remarkably intact, these historical documents were reduced in the hands of subsequent writers to a pile of incomplete and inconclusive fragments, to manuscripts that frustratingly disintegrate into illegible traces at precisely that crucial moment in the narrative in which they are expected to yield their burning secrets. In the 'Advertisement' to *The Recess*, for instance, Lee observed that 'The depredations of time have left

17 Walpole, *Correspondence*, vol. 15, p. 173.   18 Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 4.

chasms in the story, which sometimes only heightens the pathetic.'[19] Though Lee's editorial persona subsequently claims that what she calls an 'inviolable respect for truth' would not would not permit her to 'connect' these disparate fragments in the story 'even where they appeared faulty', it is quite clear that *The Recess* depends wholly upon the powers of romance to synthesise and make sense of otherwise unfathomable historical material, as if the latter, without such interventions, were fundamentally lacking in significance, meaning and narrative potential.[20] Though taking her historical bearings from William Robertson's *The History of Scotland During the Reigns of Queen Mary and James VI* (1759) and Hume's *The History of England*, Lee in *The Recess* supplements formal historiography with a Gothic tale of anxiety, suffering and female incarceration, boldly inventing twin daughters for Mary, Queen of Scots, as a means of amplifying her text's feminist politics. Faced with such a feminised, romantic assault upon the largely (but by no means exclusively) masculine historiographic tradition, it is perhaps unsurprising that a critic in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1786 complained that 'we cannot entirely approve the custom of interweaving fictitious incident with historic truth; and, as the events related approach nearer the aera we live in, the impropriety increases; for the mind, preoccupied with real facts, rejects, not without disgust, the embellishments of fable'.[21]

Adeline, the heroine of Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), similarly bears witness to the limits of historical sense-making and interpretation when she discovers a manuscript that purportedly relates the truthful history of her late father: 'She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated, that she found this difficult, though what few words were legible impressed her with curiosity and terror, and induced her to return with it immediately to her chamber.'[22] Perusing the document later, Adeline encounters in it no clear, concise and linear narrative but a near-illegible historical record that is plagued by impenetrability, decay and the elision of crucial information. The typography of the text in volume II represents these gaps in historical evidence and documentation through a preponderance of asterisks – * * * * – the same lacunae that facilitate in the

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19 Sophia Lee, *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*, edited by April Allison (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), p. 5.
20 Lee, *The Recess*, p. 5.
21 Review of *The Recess* from *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1786, quoted in E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (eds), *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700–1820* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 181.
22 Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, edited by Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 116.

heroine the florid imaginings of Gothic romance, what Radcliffe refers to as 'the mystic and turbulent promptings of imagination'.[23] Intense and often incapacitating romantic conjecture steps in to fill those gaps in the narrative for which historical records alone cannot account. As Jonathan Dent has shown, the relationship between eighteenth-century Gothic and contemporary historical writing remained throughout the period one of antagonism and conflict, subversion and critique, with fictional narratives from Walpole, through Reeve and Lee and into Radcliffe, often exposing and foregrounding that about which formal historiography in the period had little or nothing to say.[24] Consequently, to read historical documents in the Gothic is always to open oneself up to the possibility of egregious misinterpretation, most embarrassingly so in the case of Catherine Morland's misreading of the laundry list in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (written 1798–9; published late 1817; dated 1818). When Charles Robert Maturin utilised the well-worn convention of the discovered document in his meta-textual commentary on the then somewhat belated Gothic tradition in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), he returned to Radcliffe's earlier treatment of the trope, signifying the 'blotted and illegible' pages of the 'discoloured, obliterated, and mutilated' manuscript that John Melmoth reads early on in the story through a characteristic preponderance of asterisks * * * * *.[25] Like the mental reveries of Radcliffe's heroines, the numerous fictional narratives and narratives-within-narratives in Maturin's text arise as if as a means of compensating for these gaps and silences within the official records of historiography. Stories gives rise to more stories in an interminable process that, while attempting to fix the ever-shifting historical ground, only generates further textuality.

Early Gothic writing, in this respect, is the writing of Jacques Derrida's 'archive fever', the mode that anxiously sets about the recording, arrangement and narrativisation of history even as it tirelessly confronts the deathly *pulsion* towards archival incompletion, obliteration and lack.[26] The simultaneity of historical retrieval *and* erasure, recovery *and* loss is central to the form, a doubleness to which the Gothic responds with the further engendering of romance. Political theorist, philosopher and Gothic novelist William Godwin articulated the grounds for what we might describe as a distinctly 'Gothic'

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23 Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, pp. 132–44.
24 Jonathan Dent, *Sinister Histories: Gothic Novels and Representations of the Past, From Horace Walpole to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
25 Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, edited by Douglas Grant, intro. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 39, 28.
26 See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

conceptualisation of historiography in his essay 'Of History and Romance' in 1797, in which he countered the 'general' histories of such eighteenth-century conjectural or philosophical historians as Hume, Robertson, Edmund Burke and Edward Gibbon with the 'particular' histories told by the modern 'historical romancer'. While the former traded in abstraction, and subordinated an interest in the particular to the greater aims of narrating the teleological progress of the nation from civilisation to barbarism, the historical romancer dealt always with the individual, with the human subject as located tightly within history and with the historical narratives that recounted his or her experiences accordingly demonstrating a penchant for the conditional, the detailed and the particular. As Godwin sees it, formal Enlightenment history, the historiography of the contrasting variety, is as plagued by difficulties remarkably similar to those explored in contemporary Gothic fictions:

> He who would study the history of nations abstracted from individuals whose passions and peculiarities are interesting to our minds, will find it a dry and frigid science. It will supply him with no clear ideas. The mass, as fast as he endeavours to cement and unite it, crumbles from his grasp, like a lump of sand. Those who study revenue or almost any other of the complex subjects above enumerated are ordinarily found, with immense pains to have compiled a species of knowledge which is no sooner accumulated than it perishes, and rather to have confounded themselves with a labyrinth of particulars, than to have risen to the dignity of principles.[27]

Historical evidence turns to fragments in the historian's hands, and, like a character in Gothic fiction, he is left to flounder in a labyrinth of unsynthesised conjectures. A history of the particular is thus Godwin's favoured historical mode, but if this is an approach to narrating the past that is best wielded by what he terms the 'historical romancer', it is because Godwin, like Walpole before him, remained convinced of the formal, thematic and methodological equivalences between romance and history. 'It must be admitted indeed that all history bears too near a resemblance to fable', he writes, for 'Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts'; 'If then history be little better than romance under a graver name', he boldly continues, 'it may not be foreign to the subject here treated, to enquire into the credit due to that species of literature, which bears the express stamp of invention, and calls itself romance or novel.'[28] Like the

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27 William Godwin, 'Of History and Romance' <www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/
    Etexts/godwin.history.html> (last accessed 17 June 2019).
28 Godwin, 'Of History and Romance'.

Gothic reader of an incomplete and partially illegible manuscript, the histor-ical romancer must take what evidence they can from the traces which remain, including 'the broken fragments, and the scattered ruins of evidence'. 'From these considerations', Godwin reasons, 'it follows that the noblest and most excellent species of history, may be decided to be a composition in which, with a scanty substratum of facts and dates, the writer interweaves a number of happy, ingenious and instructive inventions, blending them into one continuous and indiscernible mass.'[29] A Gothic romance such as *The Recess* comes to mind here, as does the work of Antoine François Prévost, whom Godwin in the essay approvingly cites. Historical romance for Godwin is the mode that remains infinitely superior to the Enlightenment's noble and sanctioned historiographic tradition. As Robert Miles has argued, Godwin's 'Gothic' conceptualisation of history in this essay would be worked out in similar terms in his own political Gothic fiction *Caleb Williams* (1794), as well as in Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852).[30] Taken together, Gothic writers in this vein, for Miles, preempt the genealogical turn of Michel Foucault and New Historicism, since both fictions turn out to be remarkably modern histories of the 'present' and the play of power in which that present is inscribed. Even though Walter Scott, too, would theorise the mutual imbrication of history and romance in 'An Essay on Romance' (1824), his own historical novels adopt a far more confident and considerably less self-conscious approach to the task of narrating the past than that found in the Gothic. Instead, Scott's historical fictions seem to take their cue from the teleological narratives of Enlightenment historiography, often resolving or repressing their Gothic elements in the interests of forging national and historical unity, coherence and closure. To write a history of the Gothic is thus to engage with a literary mode that resists the tidy, linear and teleological compulsions of history itself, compulsions all too often associated with the Gothic through the numerous 'Whiggish' critical accounts of its 'rise' and 'development' across time.

This early Gothic's deep distrust of traditional historiography would con-tinue throughout later periods. Through its mutating forms, nineteenth-century Gothic continues to interrogate the ethics of representing history, the modes of assimilating the past. The very form of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), hailed simultaneously as Gothic, Romantic and as a

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29 Godwin, 'Of History and Romance'.
30 Robert Miles, 'History/Genealogy/Gothic: Godwin, Scott and Their Progeny', in Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (eds), *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 33–52.

work of science fiction, dissects our urges to represent the past as it occurs to us in the present. Its epistolary form seems at once immediate, but, upon closer inspection, it points us to letters apparently composed during the 1790s. This, combined with the novel's repeated invocations of reported dialogue, retrospective narrative and editorial alterations, finds its embodiment in the fractured and hastily assembled parts of the creature's monstrous form. The novel's vexed and distanced relationship with history is there, too, in the ways in which the creature interrogates his own readings of history and fiction, the two modes or genres existing side by side as though they were entirely interchangeable with one another: self-educated, his reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667; 1674) as a 'true history' sits uncomfortably alongside his anatomisation of good and bad historical figures.

Mary Shelley's fascination with the limitations of history persisted throughout her later writing. It is no coincidence that as she completed *Frankenstein*, she had already begun research for a major historical novel subsequently entitled *Valperga: or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (1823). Here, in examining the life of the Italian warlord Castruccio del Antelminelli of Lucca, Shelley problematises our modes of assimilating and knowing the past through the mouthpiece of her second heroine Euthanasia. When faced with the loss of her beloved castle Valperga at the hands of Castruccio, Euthanasia utters the following remarkable words:

> We look back to times past, and we mass them together, and say in such a year such and such events took place, such wars occupied that year, and during the next there was peace. Yet each year was then divided into weeks, days, minutes, and slow-moving seconds, during which there were human minds to note and distinguish them, as now. We think of a small motion of the dial as of an eternity; yet ages have past, and they are but hours; the present moment will soon be only a memory, an unseen atom in the night of by-gone time.[31]

Shelley's heroine here ventriloquises one of the Gothic mode's key problematisations of historical representation; that is, how 'we mass together' 'times past' rather than separate out the 'unseen atoms' that comprise it. Euthanasia's observations also serve as Shelley's self-conscious reflection on the process of her own writing. As she suggests, the miniscule moments that make up a sense of linear time – the time of the historiographer and historical novelist – might only be synthesised through an act of narrative violence, a

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31 Mary Shelley, *Valperga: or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, edited by Tilottama Rajan (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1998), p. 305.

forcing together of the individual moments that comprise 'history' and 'historical fiction' that is as unethical as it is unreliable. Despite these reservations, Shelley forges in *Valperga* precisely those 'connections' between disparate events and temporal fragments that Sophia Lee had been reluctant to make. Artificial though the end-product might be, such a recourse to the power of fiction is both necessary and inevitable, the only possible approach to a historical field that is forever collapsing into weeks, days, minutes and slow-moving seconds.

Shelley would confront the same problems of historical interpretation and representation in *The Last Man* (1826), framing her post-apocalyptic vision of the extermination of human life in the twenty-first century with an Introduction that self-consciously alluded to the paratextual devices of earlier Gothic fictions. It was during a visit to Naples in 1818, she writes, that she and her unnamed companion discovered in the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl 'piles of leaves, fragments of bark, and a white filmy substance, resembling the inner part of the green hood which shelters the grain of the unripe Indian corn'.[32] Though these are subsequently identified by Mary's companion as Sibylline Leaves, those prophesies of the future that the Cumaean Sibyl writes on leaves of oak in Virgil's *Aeneid*, they fulfil the same functions as the crumbling, partially illegible manuscripts of earlier Gothic writing. Seemingly unconnected with each other, and written in scripts and languages that neither Mary nor her companion can fully decipher, these 'thin scant pages' pose somewhat of a hermeneutic challenge.[33] Having returned to the cave on several subsequent visits so as to amass more of these inscrutable fragments, Shelley later sets about the task of decipherment. Though we are told that their 'meaning, wondrous and eloquent, has often repaid [her] toil, soothing [her] in sorrow, and exciting [her] imagination to daring flights', it is clear that, as this very invocation of the imagination suggests, the aggregation of seemingly unrelated historical materials cannot be achieved without the synthesising functions of romance: 'I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form.'[34] William Godwin had argued much the same point in 'Of History and Romance', and Shelley had interrogated both the ethics and efficacy of such acts of historigraphic 'connection' in *Valperga*. What distinguishes her endeavour in *The Last Man*, however, is the way in which it turns the problematics

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32 Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, edited by Morton D. Paley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 5.
33 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 5.   34 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 6.

of history in the Gothic into a careful meditation on thinking and conceiving, writing and representing the future.

Between June and November 1826, the same year in which *The Last Man* was published, the periodical press in France and Britain was preoccupied with the strange case of Roger Dodsworth, apparently the son of the seventeenth-century Yorkshire antiquarian of the same name who, having fallen into a coma in the Swiss Alps in the late seventeenth century, had been miraculously revived and reanimated in the modern present. The most famous version of this hoax came from the pen of Mary Shelley, who in her short story 'The History of Roger Dodsworth: The Reanimated Englishman' (published posthumously in 1863), voiced a playful yet pointed critique of antiquarians, poets and historians, including her own father Godwin, for their overweening preoccupations with this curious 'relic' from the distant past:

> The antiquarian society had eaten their way to several votes for medals, and had already begun, in idea, to consider what prices it could afford to offer for Mr Dodsworth's old clothes, and to conjecture what treasures in the way of pamphlet, old song, or autographic letter his pockets might contain. Poems from all quarters, of all kinds, elegiac, congratulatory, burlesque and allegoric, were half written. Mr Godwin had suspended for the sake of such authentic information the history of the Commonwealth he had just begun. It is hard not only that the world should be baulked of these destined gifts from the talents of the country, but also that it should be promised and then deprived of a new subject of romantic wonder and scientific interest.[35]

The 'reanimated Englishman', in Shelley's witty retelling of events, becomes an object for antiquarian, biographical and historiographical scavengers, scholars who are interested less in the stupendous fact of his reanimation than in his value as an historical artefact. Shelley's rendition of the often-rehearsed hoax in 1826 uncannily echoes the observations of Horace Walpole of so many years before: 'nay, I am persuaded that if the dead of any age were to revive and read their own histories, they would not believe that they were reading the history of their own time'.[36] When, at last, we hear from the character himself, Roger Dodsworth finds it hard to believe that England once more has a king, just as his interlocutor finds it impossible to understand Dodsworth's royalist sensibilities from the age of the Commonwealth. As

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35 Mary Shelley, 'Roger Dodsworth: The Reanimated Englishman', in Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson (eds), *The Mary Shelley Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 274–82 (p. 274).
36 Walpole, *Correspondence*, vol. 15, p. 173.

Shelley's fiction repeatedly tells us, the past has always disappeared and evaporated into the atoms of miniscule moments that constitute it, leaving the returning ghosts of the dead somewhat bewildered as to how the official narratives of history have been forged.

Those authorised versions of the past increasingly come under interrogation in modern and contemporary Gothic, as new ideas generated by Marxism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism and post-structuralism begin to shape historical thinking. At the turn of the twentieth century, Jonathan Harker in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) records of the vampire Count that 'I asked him a few questions on Transylvanian history, and he warmed up to the subject wonderfully. In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all.'[37] Anticipating the imminent ascendancy of Sigmund Freud, history in *Dracula* is personal history; it is history experienced and recounted in the first person. Freud's influence on Gothic would be far-reaching precisely because it conceived of personal history in terms of narrative, a story told on the analyst's couch, in which crucial information would necessarily be obscured, forgotten or misunderstood but could be revealed and become malleable through the process of retelling and interpretation. If Dracula's personal history does not quite have this resonance (in the way that other characters' histories in the novel do), it is because Dracula's voice is filtered through Harker; Dracula's self-authored account of his own history, we might say, is the figurative line of asterisks in Stoker's multi-voiced novel.

Dracula's exclusion from the assemblage of narratives that make up the novel points to another crucial twentieth-century development, one that is expressed most forcibly in Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973). This is the shift towards understanding history as, precisely, *historiography*, as a form of writing, subject to literary devices and therefore, like fiction, unreliable in its claim to truth. A statement at the beginning of *Dracula*, attributed to the figure of the author himself, outlines the methodology undertaken in communicating his story:

> All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.[38]

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37 Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, edited by Glennis Byron (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1998), p. 59.
38 Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 29.

What is striking about this comment is that it explicitly acknowledges the novel's textuality even as it frames it as history. Its truth claim, however, is thrown into relief by Jonathan Harker's discovery at the end of the novel that among the papers recording its events 'there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting'.[39] This is a moment of radical textual instability that suggests the fundamental unreliability of historical narrative and its status as *writing*. As such, *Dracula* anticipates a wide array of twentieth-century Gothic texts that increasingly foreground their own inauthenticity and explicitly question the ways in which history is constructed, positioning themselves as what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction', or self-conscious fiction about history.[40] 'It is a black art, the writing of a history, is it not?' enquires the opening line of Patrick McGrath's novel of the American Revolution, *Martha Peake* (2000), casting into doubt the narrator's veracity and asking the reader to contemplate the infernal processes by which he conjures up historical figures for their amusement.[41]

In the twentieth century, those gaps and silences foregrounded by the Gothic text become increasingly politicised, drawing attention to *who* writes history and speaking back to the often-quoted line (attributed to numerous historical figures), 'History is written by the victors.' Thus modern writers have read Dracula's comparative silence as an open invitation to provide the vampire's own diverging account of events, as in Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975), or to attempt to reconcile Stoker's narrative with broader histories of Eastern Europe, as in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* (2014), or to locate Dracula's power in his own skill as an archivist who controls the flows of knowledge around him, as in Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* (2005). Further afield, feminist and postcolonial writers have drawn on Gothic techniques to question whose stories are told and the moral responsibility of the author in channelling the voices of the dead. 'Is history to be considered the property of the participants solely?' asks the narrator of Salman Rushdie's most overtly Gothic novel, *Shame* (1984), a reimagining of the events following the founding of Pakistan: 'Can only the dead speak?'[42]

39 Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 419.
40 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).
41 Patrick McGrath, *Martha Peake: A Novel of the Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001).
42 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador 1984), p. 28.

The inauthenticity of the typewritten manuscript at the end of *Dracula* anticipates one of the most fundamental ways in which twentieth- and twenty-first-century Gothic has problematised history. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's description of the past within postmodernity as a depthless repository of images, Allan Lloyd Smith compares the Gothic's 'ransacking of an imaginary museum of pastness' to 'the post-modern cannibalisation of images from the detritus of global history'.[43] For Lloyd Smith, this results in a sort of vagueness or imprecision about meaning within many late twentieth-century texts: '*Something* is evidently at stake, but it is difficult to say what that something is.'[44] That bold yoking of historical precision to obscurity, hesitation and uncertainty that we identified in Walpole, however, still remains at play in contemporary texts, and apparently 'empty' Gothic aesthetics may in themselves pro-duce historical meaning. On screen, the self-conscious, gleeful embrace of inauthenticity, anachronism, stylistic excess and horror imagery in films like Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015), or television shows like *Penny Dreadful* (Showtime, 2014–16), troubles the verisimilitude, cosy nostalgia and covert nation-building of what Andrew Higson designates the 'heritage film'.[45] Similarly, in visual arts and fashion, the juxtaposition of historically dissonant images may allow new meanings to emerge. A sumptuous, blood-red ball gown by John Galliano for Dior's Spring 2006 collection, for example, brings together ostentatious eighteenth-century panniers with an exaggerated high collar strategically drawing attention to the neck, provocatively equating couture with the *ancien régime* while also revelling in the imagery of its destruction. On its skirts, a sumptuously embroidered image of the Marquis de Sade, accompanied by the words, 'Is it not by murder that France is free today?', invites reflection on the horrors that underlie nation- building and specifically France's history as the leader of international fashion.[46] Across numerous media, then, contemporary Gothic draws attention to the telling of the story, and encourages its consumers to ask questions of history, to refuse to accept acknowledged truths and to beware unwanted returns.

43 Allan Lloyd Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York and London: Continuum 2004), p. 126.
44 Allan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction*, p. 126.
45 Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
46 Quoted in 'Gothic: Dark Glamour', *The Museum at FIT*, <http://sites.fitnyc.edu/dep ts/museum/Gothic/Dior.html> (last accessed 26 July 2019).

A History of the Gothic / The Gothic in History

Of course, the discussion above is not to detract from what remains our primary editorial objective in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic* – the compilation of a comprehensive cultural history of the Gothic that runs from antiquity to the present day, and which spans across three chronologically ordered and thematically arranged volumes: the long eighteenth century, 1680–1800 (with an important opening chapter on the Goths in ancient history); the nineteenth century, 1800–1900; and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, 1896–present. Both within and across all three volumes, *The Cambridge History of the Gothic* charts key moments of change, development, innovation and transition in and of the Gothic mode, for the most part jettisoning the more familiar 'generic' or 'formal' approaches to the field to be found in a host of available 'Companions' to the Gothic.[47] Moreover, while such volumes have been largely (though not exclusively) focused on the Gothic in its manifold literary, filmic and televisual forms, the chapters assembled here collectively demonstrate that the history of the Gothic, the account of its manifestation and persistence through historical time, is necessarily interdisciplinary by nature, encompassing as it does considerations of the Gothic tribes of antiquity, the appropriation of 'Gothic' politics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British thought, Gothic architecture (both 'survivalist' and 'revivalist') and the Gothic in art history as well as the more familiar Gothic literature and film. In its interdisciplinary dimensions, *The Cambridge History of the Gothic* seeks to recover the particular ways in which 'Gothic', as a complex cultural signifier of literary, political, architectural, subjective, subcultural and filmic import, was, and continues to be, read and appropriated. Combining sustained textual analysis with an attention to key historical moments, the chapters across all three volumes chart

47 See, for example, Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007); Andrew Smith and William Hughes (eds), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); David Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2011); Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (eds), *The Gothic World* (London and New York, 2014); Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (eds), *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Jason Haslam and Joel Faflak (eds), *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); and Xavier Aldana Reyes and Maisha Wester (eds), *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

the 'rise' of the Gothic in Anglo-American, European and, eventually, global culture in relation to time, place, discipline and event, providing a novel and engaging historical account of the Gothic mode and its mutations across time and cultural space.

In this and other respects, our editorial decisions have been guided by a strongly revisionist impulse. In the first volume, for instance, the opening chapters sketch out a 'pre-history' of the Gothic in literature, politics and architectural aesthetics that counters the inveterate tendency to trace the literary Gothic back to a spontaneous and somewhat unprecedented 'event': the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in London in late 1764. In the second volume, a reading of key historical moments in Gothic cultural production of nineteenth-century Britain, Europe and America, the chapters collectively challenge the once-prevalent critical argument that held that, following Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* of 1820, the Gothic went 'underground' for much of the period, prior to enjoying a concerted 'renaissance' in popular fiction of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. Instead, the chapters in this volume focus upon significant moments and cultural events that drove the generation of Gothic textuality across the nineteenth century, while also exploring how the mode in America, Britain and Europe interacted with other cultural forms. The same could be said for the twentieth century, the chapters on which in the third volume reject the commonplace idea that Gothic faded out after the Edwardian period only to be revived by postmodernism, emphasising instead that the mode continued to play a dynamic role within Modernism, and tracing forms of Gothic cultural production in diverse media throughout the century. In those places where the volumes return to consider some relatively familiar critical territory – such as the Gothic on the eighteenth-century stage or the German influences on early Gothic in the first volume; the Victorian ghost story or Gothic sensation fiction in the second; or the relationship between the Gothic and feminism or psychoanalysis in the third – our aim has been to commission chapters by both established and emerging scholars that provide fresh and original accounts, invariably situating these among essays on topics that have remained, to date, critically unexplored. While each of the three volumes is intended as a discrete, stand-alone entity, they have nonetheless been conceived with certain echoes, parallels and continuities between them in mind: themes of war and revolution, for instance, feature across all three, as do notions of gender, sexuality, empire and the national Gothic traditions of Britain, Europe and America. If the Gothic has taught us one thing, however, it is that no history, however comprehensive, may ever presume to be

complete; as our discussion above has shown, the Gothic continuously interrogates the reliability and legitimacy of sanctioned versions of the past, if not of the very practice of historiography itself. Comprehensive though they are, the volumes inevitably contain certain elisions, gaps and silences – those *** of early Gothic romance. And if the histories of the national Gothic traditions assembled here exclude direct or sustained considerations of, say, Australian, African, Central and South American Gothic, this is because our focus is more historical than geographical.[48] While this has inevitably amounted to certain geographical oversights – exclusions no doubt determined by our own partial perspectives as editors working within the Western, Anglophone academy – we nonetheless warmly invite scholars of other Gothic traditions worldwide to engage with the various perspectives that we have brought together here.

There remains one final sense in which this project comprises a 'history' of the Gothic, and that is in the ways in which several of the chapters in all three volumes explore the inscription or implication of the Gothic within some of the most significant events in Western history, from the Goths' sacking of Rome, through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and into the modern and contemporary period. Each volume, that is, includes essays that situate the Gothic in relation to key historical moments and processes, such as the French and American Revolutions in the first; the Summer of 1816, the coming of the railways and the publication of evolutionary theory in the second; and the Great War, the rise of feminism and the global environmental crisis in the third. As critics have long acknowledged, and as many of the chapters here further attest, the Gothic is, and has always been, extraordinarily sensitive to historical events, sometimes simply reflecting them, at other times registering their magnitude, but always providing some manner of response to them through the mode's characteristic tendency to shape-shift, mutate and change. To read Gothic is to look through a glass darkly at the events, crises and traumas that constitute a sense of history. Alternatively, to write a history of the Gothic is also to produce a particularly Gothic version of history. But the Gothic also frequently has to exceed and move beyond history in order to maintain its distinctive purchase upon wonder, horror and terror. When, in the wake of the cataclysmic events in

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48 For recent critical accounts of some of these national traditions, see Justin D. Edwards and Sandra Guardini Vasconcelos, *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture: The Americas* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016) and Rebecca Duncan, *South African Gothic: Anxiety and Creative Dissent in the Post-Apartheid Imagination and Beyond* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018).

France from 1789 onwards, the Marquis de Sade in 1800 described the Gothic as 'the necessary fruit of the revolutionary tremors felt by the whole of Europe', he went on to say that, in order to confer some interest on their productions, writers of this school were forced to 'appeal to hell for aid and to find chimeras in the landscape: a thing which one perceived at the time by a mere glance through the history of mankind in this age of iron'.[49] History had become Gothic, and the Gothic was forced to make further recourse to supernatural, infernal aid so as to define, constitute and sustain itself.

49 Quoted in Victor Sage (ed.), *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 49.