



INTRODUCTION

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In the spring of 2021, when academic work was still mostly virtual due to COVID-19 pandemic measures, we celebrated the foundation of PopMeC—an academic association dedicated to US popular culture studies—organizing a virtual conference on the Gothic and its widespread presence in contemporary popular culture. With the idea of bringing a fresh approach to online events and the traditional keynote format, the *50+ Shades of Gothic: The Gothic Across Genre and Media in US Popular Culture* conference involved a series of interviews with renowned scholars working in the field of Gothic studies, who discussed various aspects of contemporary expressions and functions of the Gothic in popular culture texts. The interviews were carried out between February and April 2021, and the original recordings can be found on YouTube.¹ Given the kind availability of our keynotes, we decided to compile the transcripts—edited by the interviewees and interviewers themselves in order to give them a publishing shape—in this special issue. This collection follows the publication of *REDEN* vol. 3, no. 1 (2021), which contained a special dossier exploring the presence and different expressions of gothic modes in contemporary US popular culture.

The fifteen interviews included in this special issue *Conversations on the Gothic in Popular Culture* cover various archetypes, paradigms, and expressions of the genre, including zombies, vampires, nature, and haunted house tropes. Furthermore, they consider the importance of horror and gothic modes in tackling specific contemporary sociopolitical concerns, such as racial and ethnic issues, family and domestic spaces, and gender representation, all mediated by processes of Othering and different portrayals of monstrosity. And, finally, they showcase contemporary scholarship on the Gothic, concerned with understanding the evolution of the genre and its presence in different mediums including films, TV shows, comics, and video-games. Above all, these discussions highlight how the Gothic continues to be alive and well

¹ PopMeC Research “50+ Shades of Gothic | Keynotes.” *YouTube*, playlist.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUpjS5dcmuVkvFWf_Mj-gwK0S4BH0wnWl.

in popular culture texts, as well as in the realm of academic research. Each of the interviews includes a Q&A session that was carried out with the audience members attending the interview virtual sessions. We have deemed important to include the public's interventions as they elicit new lines of thought that undoubtedly add to the discussion. Furthermore, the edited interviews are also accompanied by individual bibliography, which includes texts mentioned throughout each session.

This special issue opens with an introductory interview with Jeffrey A. Weinstock, focusing on the Gothic, as well as the relevance of popular culture and its suitability as a worthy object of academic inquiry. The following interviews are coupled according to macro themes they referred to: cyber gothic and posthumanism (Xavier Aldana Reyes and Anya Heise-von der Lippe), haunted houses and domestic spaces (Evert Jan van Leeuwen and Kevin Corstorphine), the Gothic in children's literature and comics (Michael Howarth and Julia Round), nature, science fiction, and the ecoGothic (Christy Tidwell and Michelle Poland & Elizabeth Parker), zombie and vampire narratives (Kyle William Bishop and Sorcha Ní Fhlainn), ethnic bodies and boundaries (Maisha Wester and Enrique Ajuria Ibarra), and the relation between the Gothic and the Anthropocene (Justin Edwards). As a conclusion, Gothic scholar David Punter discusses the nature of the Gothic, the workings of horror, and the particularities of the American Gothic tradition.