

THE MADRID GOTHIC SEMINAR (MGS)

MEMOIR JUNE 2011

The Madrid Gothic Seminar began in January 2010 and became an ongoing concern in the academic year 2010-11. Sessions were scheduled for the last Monday of every month (though occasional adjustments were necessary). Five meetings were held between January and June 2011. The Seminar is linked to *The Northanger Library Project*, the LIMEN Research Group, and the work of The Gateway Press. It is, so far as we know, the first forum for the study of the Gothic genre in Spain.

For the purposes of the Seminar, Gothic is understood as a historical genre (consisting of novels, short prose fictions, poetry and drama) that emerged in the latter part of the eighteenth century and evolved into other genres (the historical novel, Victorian horror fiction, mystery, adventure and science-fiction among others) in the course of the 1820s and 30s. There can be no question that horror literature exhibits continuity over two and a half centuries (the year 2014 will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the publication of the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*); on the other hand, keeping the semantics of 'Gothic' to the historical period ranging roughly from 1764 to 1824—and this, in accordance with international critical practice down to the 1990s—helps tighten our focus and allows us to concentrate on the far from clear origins of the genre.

The Madrid Gothic Seminar is free and welcomes students and scholars interested in Gothic literature, its history and its role in eighteenth-century culture. Our general goal is to provide students and staff interested in the Gothic genre with an opportunity for research and debate. It will recommence in October 2011, and it is envisaged that future runs of the Seminar will include talks and papers by scholars from both home and abroad.

CONTENTS

1. PARTICIPANTS
2. *THE NORTHANGER LIBRARY PROJECT*
3. THE *LIMEN* GROUP
4. THE GATEWAY PRESS
5. RESEARCH AREAS
6. RATIONALE
7. TOOLS
8. EARLY HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS
9. PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

1. PARTICIPANTS

Seminar coordinators:

Manuel Aguirre. Author of *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism* (Manchester UP 1990).

Beatriz Sánchez. Her MA thesis (2009) was an edition and in-depth study of a forgotten classic, Eliza Parsons' 1793 novel *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (see below).

Regular Seminar members:

Ina Böttger	Yevgeniy Pavlovskyy
Lidia Creus	Belén Piqueras
Irene Díaz	Paloma Taheri
Celia Marqués	Maria Anna Zazzarino

Contact: Manuel Aguirre m.aguirre@uam.es

2. THE NORTHANGER LIBRARY PROJECT

The *Northanger Library Project* (HUM2006-03404) was initiated in 2006 as a State-funded project which expanded the then on-going "Gothic Library Project". The goals of the *NLP* were threefold: to study the culture of the eighteenth century in the light of the concept of Liminality; to focus on Gothic literature as the core of the project; within this field, to edit and study forgotten Gothic texts. For details see www.northangerlibrary.com and section 8 below.

3. THE LIMEN GROUP

The *LIMEN* Group (F-051) was registered as a UAM research group in the Autumn of 2007. Arising from two prior research projects ("Systemic Analysis of 'Marginal' Literatures", "Threshold and Text"), its central concern is the study of thresholds and the development of a theory of liminality. For details about the group's work see <http://www.northangerlibrary.com/limen.asp#2>.

The *LIMEN* Group sponsors *The International Seminar on Liminality and Text*. The sixth ISLT, to be held at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, is scheduled for the Spring of 2012, with the participation of a dozen specialists from the UK, Norway, South-Africa, Israel, France, Central Europe. Details will be forthcoming soon at http://www.northangerlibrary.com/home_NoticeBoard.asp

4. THE GATEWAY PRESS

Though a small outfit, The Gateway Press (Madrid) is proud to be the first and only independent academic publisher in English in Spain. It currently edits three different series:

- *Studies in Liminality and Literature* (since 1999)
- *The TRELIS Papers* (since 2006)
- *The Northanger Library* (since 2008)

For a full catalogue see <http://www.northangerlibrary.com/gateway.asp>

5. RESEARCH AREAS

- 5.1 Editing Gothic and Gothic-related fiction, poetry, drama, essay. A set of editorial and analytical protocols cover (where relevant) scanning, transcription, translation into English, annotation, editing and formal study. As they reach completion, materials will be loaded onto the *NLP* website. To reach a wide readership we are considering the possibility of publishing under a Creative Commons Attribution for copyright safeguard.
- 5.2 Construction of a cultural and historical ‘map’ of the Romantic Age. This long-term project seeks to identify contacts among areas which tend to be studied in isolation: Romanticism, Gothic, Graveyard Poetry, folklore, the German *Sturm-und-Drang* and the popular culture of the eighteenth century among others. This project presupposes a field theory of text and invites research into the following:
 - 5.3 The Gothic-folklore link. Major similarities have been detected between Gothic and the folk genre of fairytales. Analysis touches on such issues as motifs, plots, formulaic language or narrative structures. Searches are to test the proposition that Gothic both continues and modifies traditional narrative structures and concerns. One initial premise is that Gothic constitutes some kind of ‘third space’ in between the literary and the folkloric—a liminal area (on liminality see 3, 9.2).
 - 5.4 The ‘grammar’ of Gothic. On the above premise, Gothic appears to approximate folklore because of, among other reasons, its relatively intense conventionalization of forms. It is hypothesized that a set of structural and semantic conventions or ‘rules’ go into the composition of all Gothic narrative, provide a thematic basis for the genre, account for the techniques it resorts to, and constitute part of what may be called a ‘grammar’ of Gothic. In many ways the Rules are variations on compositional rules of folk narrative. They are not to be identified with techniques but with the ground that elicits techniques. For one instance: Rule 7 states that Gothic plots revolve around a contradiction—a dangerously drawn-out sojourn in a supposedly transitional stage; this rule invites the use of such writing techniques as anisotropy—the design of spaces of variable, viewpoint-ruled geometry—or several types of spatial, temporal and narrative delay which transform ordinary into liminal space. Sixteen rules of Gothic have been identified so far and have been tested in the Seminar on selected short fiction. A preliminary draft of the Rules will soon be appearing under http://www.northangerlibrary.com/nlproject_reaches.asp.
- 5.5 Search, translation and study of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German literary texts for their impact on British Gothic. Analysis may be extended to the contents of such German folk materials as may have exerted an influence on both German and British horror fiction. Other linguistic areas are being considered (French, Spanish).
- 5.6 Construction of an annotated anthology of the so-called ‘Graveyard School’ of poetry for its relevance as a ‘forerunner’ of Gothic and Romanticism.
- 5.7 The ‘pre-history’ of Gothic. Work is underway on editing various texts which predate the ‘official’ inception of Gothic by several decades. These right now include short fiction, an early fantasy adventure, pamphlets, and one play, all going back to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (see 7 below).

6. RATIONALE

Seminar participants are invited to take over one text (short story, poem, play) and, singly or in small teams, produce a transcription, translation, edition and study thereof (as relevant). Details of this proposal and materials to work with will be made available after the summer.

The idea is to generate specific, feasible projects (that is, projects lasting a few months only). All participants in the Seminar will be welcome to read and comment on all materials either completed or underway for feedback, but each team or researcher will be responsible for the final edition of their text and will appear as authors. Results will then be submitted to referees and, if accepted, published in the *NLP* website.

The logic of this, as of the entire Seminar, is to build up a corpus of analyzed texts which will subsequently serve as a basis for further studies. From this corpus, general conclusions regarding, e.g., formulas, the Rules, motifs, semantic fields, narrative structures and so forth can be distilled until a theoretical framework of a strictly empirical nature—a veritable ‘grammar’ of Gothic—can be obtained.

7. TOOLS

The tools initially resorted to in the MGS were mainly of three kinds: anthropological, folkloristic, and materials relating to the theory of liminality:

- Arnold Van Gennep’s *Les rites de passage* and Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process*, with their classic formulation of rites of passage.
- Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*.
- Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and his concept of the ‘monomyth’.
- It is foreseen that Axel Olrik’s ‘Epic Laws of Folk Narrative’ will be of much practical use.

In the course of the seminar, two new tools were brought to bear upon Gothic texts:

- The Rules of Gothic Grammar (see 5.4 above).
- Variations on the concept of the formula as defined in the Parry-Lord hypothesis.

Abbreviated or schematized versions of these and other materials will be published in the *NLP* site, usually under “Tools and Frames” (http://www.northangerlibrary.com/nlproject_tool.asp), so they can serve as so many tools for further work.

8. HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS

8.1 The importance of form. The following observations emerged from a debate in the course of our first session.

- a) A literary canon was being shaped in Britain in the eighteenth century.
- b) Gothic fiction therefore emerged (in 1764, with the publication of Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*) against a background of conventions, expectations and queries as to the nature of literature, fiction and the novel.

- c) Because from its inception Gothic proclaimed itself at variance with the then-current definitions of novel and romance (see Walpole's preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*), Gothic fiction presented itself from the start as an Other of the Canon.
- d) Owing to this concern, Gothic makes its own formal aspects *visible* precisely in order to differentiate itself from 'canonical' writings.
- e) It follows that particular attention must be paid to the forms of Gothic, and hence models and analytical strategies are required that will bring out this peculiarity of the genre.

8.2 The Rules of Gothic grammar. The following are hypotheses in need of further testing:

- a) Gothic is codifiable to a greater extent than canonical literatures, and builds on relatively rigid *conventions* (see 5.3-4 above); these are to be reckoned among the forms of Gothic.
- b) Gothic is *self-consciously* conventional. It establishes the rules it subverts, and deliberately plays (though often in deadly earnest) with the very notion of rules. Among marks of self-consciousness we may count repetition and formulaic language.
- c) Using formulas and repetition is one way of playing with boundaries. If the boundary is a convention, there is perhaps no better way to show the boundary and play with it than to make the conventions visible.
- d) The genre's need to point up its own forms evinces an effort to differentiate itself from the Canon. If this is correct, then the formulaic nature of Gothic is not the result of middling-to-bad writing but a direct entailment of its goals.

8.3 Editing. The following works are already available on the *NLP* website:

- a) Anna Laetitia Barbauld (née Aikin) 'Sir Bertrand: A Fragment' (1773)
'Narrative Morphology in Barbauld's "Sir Bertrand: A Fragment"' (edition and study by Manuel Aguirre & Eva Ardoy, 2009).
- b) Elizabeth Parsons *The Castle of Wolfenbach: A German Story* (1793)
A Case of Complexity in the Gothic Novel: Elizabeth Parsons' The Castle of Wolfenbach. (Edition and study by Beatriz Sánchez Santos, 2009).

The following awaits loading onto the website:

- c) Gottfried August Bürger *Lenore* (1773)
A bilingual edition of Bürger's ballad (edited and translated by Júlia Földenyi).

Two further items are nearing completion:

- d) Friedrich August Schulze 'Die Braut im Sarge' (1813)
A bilingual edition of Schulze's short story 'Die Braut im Sarge' / 'The Bride in the Coffin' (edition, translation and critical commentary by Ina Böttger and Manuel Aguirre).
- e) Joseph Addison *The Drummer, or: The Haunted House* (1715)
An early 'horror' comedy (edition and critical commentary by Lidia Creus and Paloma Taheri).

9. PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

Problems can be of great use in the development of insight, and the *NLP* website section ‘Reaches and Frontiers’ was conceived to accommodate them. Often a problem is no more than a hypothesis that refuses to fit in. The type of problem faced by research in Gothic may be illustrated by three instances, some of which came up in the course of the Seminar:

9.1 The function of form. The remarks on Gothic form (see 8.1 above) need modification and improvement, but the following questions seem to be elicited by them:

- 1) More often than not, the Canon is defined in terms of quality, originality or uniqueness; do these terms actually imply that canonical texts do *not* resort to conventions?
- 2) How, for instance, is quality to be defined? Might ‘quality’ be but another name for the strategy of *defamiliarizing* conventions so as to make each and every textual element appear unique?
- 3) If this is the case, canonical works ‘hide’ their own conventions; could Gothic (setting itself up as the Other of the Canon—see 8.1 above) be said to *vaunt* its own?
- 4) In this, Gothic resembles the genre of folktale, where form has an explicit thematic value. Is the relationship merely analogical, or should we detect here an additional argument to conclude that Gothic takes its inspiration from the folktale (see 5.3-5 above)?

9.2 Embedding. A large number of techniques and themes employed by Gothic writers seem to be accounted for by the simple proposition that Gothic is a *liminal* genre and thresholds are its central concept; and the purpose of the Rules was to formulate this observation. However, one technique, though intuitively seeming to belong in the domain of things liminal, does yet not admit of an easy formulation under the concept of liminality. This is the technique of embedding (which creates tales within tales within tales) and the corresponding technique of framing (which multiplies narrative voices). Is it possible to construct a not *ad hoc* proposition and argument that will account for embedding and framing within a *liminalist* explanation of Gothic narrative? If we need a new ‘rule’ (see 5.4, 8.2) to do this, what form should it take?

9.3 The treatment of motifs. It is possible to list and analyze all motifs found in a text, and to show whether they exist (like the narrative strategies used) in response to the Rules. But is there a rationale for their presence—can we speak of a *system* (or *systems*) of motifs in a given text? Would an intertextual approach—comparing motif-lists from different texts—be possible? What corpus would be sufficient to provide a reliable overview, and should the corpus not be vitiated by an excessive reliance on the usual twelve-to-fifteen major Gothic novels?

The Madrid Gothic Seminar invites participants to reflect on these problems and to provide possible solutions for them.

