

PD Dr. Katharina Boehm, University of Regensburg
Prof. Dr. Stephan Karschay, University of Hamburg

Call for Papers

Special Issue of the *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* (2/2020)

Gothic Ecologies in British Culture: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present

The Gothic has long provided a key mode in which the uncanny, hazardous, and sometimes fatal interactions between humans and the environment can be articulated and explored. Gothic figurations of such interactions have found expression in a variety of different texts and media: in fiction, Gothic representations range from Mary Shelley's bleak arctic in *Frankenstein* (1818; 1831) to the anti-pastoral world of Jim Crace's award-winning novel *Harvest* (2013); in visual culture, they extend from the spectacular landscape vistas that lured Romantic-era audiences into London's visual entertainments to Steampunk web comics like Warren Ellis's *FreakAngels* (2008-11); but they also include eco-horror films such as Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and performances such as the shows of iconic Gothic rock bands such as the Cocteau Twins (1979-97). In these and many other examples of the Gothic, nature and the environment are constructed in peculiarly imposing ways so that spatial settings (the sublime mountainscapes of the Pyrenees or the labyrinthine forests of Transylvania) are turned into critical sites on which contemporary anxieties and forbidden desires can be played out. This projected special issue of *JSBC* examines the nexus between Gothic forms of cultural expression, representations of the natural world, and ecological concerns from the eighteenth century to the present with a particular focus on British culture.

The Gothic aesthetic in its many guises has always resisted and productively challenged the dichotomies between nature and culture that were erected in other fields of discourse such as the realms of politics and the natural sciences. For this reason, Gothic media, texts, and artefacts are particularly apt at throwing into relief the networked relations between humans and the non-human (or more-than-human) sphere. Gothic figurations of the natural world as an unpredictable force can remind us that 'nature' plays an active role in the shaping of human culture – a role that critics ignore at their own peril. Furthermore, the Gothic has always engaged with subjects which embody unruly, transgressive, and politically subversive energies (from a British perspective, for instance, the looming spectres of Catholicism, revolutionary Radicalism, or the aristocratic excesses depicted in the original Gothic). Ecocriticism, in turn, frequently foregrounds the political dimension in representations of the natural world (highlighting, for instance, national culpabilities with regard to global warming and other ethical questions), thus offering a common ground with the Gothic as well as shared aims with the field of cultural studies.

Even though it is undoubtedly important to pay attention to the transnational forces driving globalisation, we believe that the significance of the local and national must not be forgotten – in particular when considering Gothic representations of nature. In this respect, critical debate has so far been clearly slanted towards North American literature and culture

where Gothic tropes of a threatening wilderness and dangerous frontier adventures have a particularly strong presence. With our projected *JSBC* issue, we suggest to address this imbalance in explorations of ‘Gothic nature’ by reorienting critical conversations in two distinct and mutually complementary ways. First, we would like to shift the geographical centre of current scholarship on “dark ecologies” (Morton 2016) by paying fresh attention to British traditions of cultural production that mobilise the Gothic in their representations of the natural world. Even though the Anthropocene is still a contested term used to denote our current geological era of human intervention in the biosphere, some critics date its beginning precisely to the historical moment that also saw the birth of the Gothic in the late eighteenth century – namely the advent of the industrial revolution in Britain. Of course, our focus on specifically *British* culture does not preclude considerations of Britain’s role in a globalised world – a question that may also be addressed by some of our contributions. Second, we invite our contributors to build on recent interventions by theorists and philosophers (such as Jane Bennett, Timothy Clark, Philippe Descola, Timothy Morton, Jedediah Purdy and Kate Rigby) to enhance and complement the arsenal of critical approaches regularly employed in cultural studies. We hope that the insights of new critical directions such as object-oriented ontology and the new materialism can help us to review the relationships between humans, the natural world and non-human others in British Gothic culture, connecting them with cultural studies’ established interest in intersectional questions of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Possible topics might include (but are by no means limited to) the following:

- climate change and Gothic representations of nature
- Gothic others in representations of nature
- Gothic tropes in ecocriticism
- Gothic nature and dystopia/apocalypse
- environmental and posthuman perspectives in Steampunk art
- monstrosities and the grotesque in nature
- the Gothic and the Anthropocene
- the Gothic and/as anti-pastoral
- eco-horror/eco-Gothic
- uncanny returns of the natural non-human in human ‘civilisation’
- Gothic technology and the environment

Please submit **abstracts** (400-500 words) and a short bio note by **1 June 2019** to both guest editors for this issue: Katharina Boehm (katharina.boehm@ur.de) and Stephan Karschay (stephan.karschay@uni-hamburg.de)

Finished articles (5,000 words) will be due by 1 November 2019.