Gothic Scholars Don't Wear Black
Gothic Studies and Gothic Subcultures

Sara Martin   Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Gothic Studies and the diverse youth subcultures identifying themselves as Gothic are hardly in touch with each other. This is something that should ideally change in the near future, since Gothic Studies and Gothic youth subcultures greatly overlap, at least as regards their common interest in Gothic literature, the iconography and the non-literary texts (films, comics, and so on) derived from it. The multiplicity of texts generated by Gothic, understood here as a narrative mode stretching across two centuries, are both an object of research for Gothic scholars and a source of inspiration for the members of the Gothic youth subcultures. The Gothic roots of these subcultures are, clearly, most perceptible in the dark sounds and dark lyrics of their musical production, ranging from heavy metal to Goth passing through industrial music. Yet, Gothic as such extends its influence to other aspects of these subcultures. Their members often link the consumption of certain musical styles to the pursuit of an alternative lifestyle including characteristic fashions, clubs to socialise in, and underground or alternative media to keep the scene alive. No Gothic scholar has so far explored in depth the links between these diverse youth subcultures (especially heavy metal and Goth) and their Gothic background. Yet, if Gothic youth subcultures can be regarded as the practical result of a particular interpretation of the philosophy of Gothic texts, and Gothic texts are the field of research of Gothic Studies, Gothic youth subcultures – themselves producers of new Gothic texts – could (perhaps should) be also part of Gothic Studies. In this way this conspicuous gap in the contemporary fund of knowledge about Gothic would be filled.

Despite the desirability of a closer approach, there are, however, many difficulties to integrate the study of booming underground contemporary youth subcultures like these within an academic project which generates mostly official knowledge about the past. It cannot be argued that Gothic Studies frontally opposes the integration of Gothic youth subcultures in its field of research; indeed, this is not an issue. The issue is, rather, that important research methodological problems are turning Gothic youth subcultures into potent generators of unofficial

rather than official knowledge. The most important of these problems is that the methodology of Gothic Studies, based on approaching Gothic from the perspective of applying mostly psychoanalysis and a variety of post-modern critical discourses to Gothic texts, is valid mostly to study literary texts, especially those of the past. This methodology is much less valid, though, to deal with living youth subcultures whose analysis demands a Cultural Studies methodology. The study of Gothic subcultures requires inevitably the study of both the lifestyle and the textual production – literary and non-literary – of contemporary underground groups who, to cap these methodological difficulties, often resist being subjected to close scrutiny.

The absence of twentieth century Gothic youth subcultures as a relevant item within the agenda of Gothic Studies is not, in any case, a bone of contention for either Gothic scholars or the young members of these subcultures. Gothic Studies can very well survive and progress without ever looking into these subcultures' view of Gothic; yet, it is only common sense to claim that the field of knowledge studied by Gothic scholars will always benefit from including rather than excluding areas of research that show a manifest contiguity to Gothic literature. The neglect of the academia is, on the other hand, an anecdote for Gothic youths in comparison to the main threats under which they keep their subcultures alive: first, the neglect of the novelty-seeking musical press and, second, the menace posed by American moral pressure groups bent on censoring and even destroying any Gothic-related cultural manifestation. Given the lack of scholarly analysis and the media misinformation about Gothic youth subcultures, the latter a especially worrying phenomenon in the USA, these groups are beginning now to realise the importance of allowing the rest of the world to get a closer look at them. The Internet, mainly, is fulfilling the function of dispelling this great amount of misinformation through the spreading of unofficial knowledge about the diverse Gothic subcultures. This is mostly generated by their practitioners or former practitioners, who are often graduate or undergraduate students trying to combine their position as Gothic insiders with their training as budding Cultural Studies or sociology scholars, or, even, as Gothic Studies scholars.

The canon and the university syllabi have no doubt opened up towards Gothic fiction thanks to the work of Gothic scholars in English departments around the world, making popular classics such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* increasingly present in undergraduate reading lists and in post-graduate research. Interestingly, the academic legitimisation of Gothic Studies coincides chronologically with the rise of Gothic youth subcultures. Gothic Studies, or Gothic Criticism, were marginalised until relatively recently within the academic discourse, despite the constant production of quality scholarly work especially since the late 1970s. The progress of Gothic Studies into the realm of official knowledge can be chartered through the establishment of the International Gothic Association and the celebration of the first biannual IGA conference in 1991 and the launching of this journal, *Gothic Studies*, in 1999.

Although the influence of Gothic on youth music-related subcultures actually begins with the rise of the heavy metal subculture in the late 1960s, the label

'Gothic' only emerged as a music genre-related term in the early 1980s in reference to British post-punk bands such as The Cure or Siouxie and the Banshees, usually defined as 'Goth'.[1] Goth and metal are different youth subcultures with a common fund of Gothic elements; the awareness of these elements varies from subculture to subculture but was, in general, quite diffuse until about a decade ago. In the early 1990s, coinciding with the rise of a second generation of Gothic bands – and, incidentally, with the consolidation of Gothic Studies – the label 'Gothic' was fully accepted by Goth, heavy metal and other related subcultures, which led to the tentative exploration of their roots. This exploration was paralleled by Gothic Studies' extension of its field of research in an important direction: the redefinition of Gothic from a subgenre of the novel in the late eighteenth century to a potent narrative mode very much alive today in and outside literature. The seminal Gothic handbook by David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* – published in 1980, practically at the same time the Gothic subcultures were being born – drew the first complete map of the continuities and contiguities between the Gothic texts of the past and those of the present. As far as Gothic Studies are concerned, the latter include now also the literary and film Gothic texts admired by contemporary youth subcultures but still exclude the texts produced by these subcultures, mainly their music. Possibly, not for long.

I consider first here how and where Gothic Studies (the official field of knowledge) and Gothic youth subcultures (both the unofficial field of knowledge and the practice of diverse Gothic subcultures focused on music) may overlap by looking at four texts on Gothic: two academic, two extra-academic.

The first academic text is Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall's article 'Gothic Criticism', included in the Blackwell *Companion to the Gothic* (2000) edited by David Punter. Baldick and Mighall attack in depth the failure of Gothic scholars to actually understand the historical context in which eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic texts were produced. They attribute this alleged failure to Gothic scholars' excessively complacent use of the post-modern critical apparatus. Baldick and Mighall's support of history-based research indirectly stresses an important point: the need to grasp the historical reality of the context in which our own research is carried out today; this context is today marked by the very presence of Gothic youth subcultures unlike any other period of the past. The second academic text is the article by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'The Devil Sings the Blues: Heavy Metal, Gothic Fiction and "Postmodern" Discourse' (1992), published in the American *Journal of Popular Culture*. Hinds's article is one of the only three publications on music and Gothic included in the extensive MLA database.[2] This remarkable article proves that the academic discourse may be perfectly suitable to discuss Gothic youth subcultures from the point of view of official knowledge. Hinds's article also highlights, though, the inadequacy of this discourse to integrate official and unofficial knowledge about these subcultures.

The third text, the article 'Bela Lugosi's Dead and I don't Feel so Good Either: Goth and the Glorification of Suffering in Rock Music' by music critic and

journalist James Hanahann was included in *Stars don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth,* published by the academic press Routledge in 1999 within its Cultural Studies series. This volume of selected papers from a conference held at the Dia Center for the Arts of New York proves most peremptorily the need to bring together the scholar, the critic and the practitioner (both performer and consumer) to discuss contemporary youth subcultures. Hanahann's contribution also proves that the task of gathering knowledge about present-day cultural manifestations such as popular music is not always best carried out from within the academic environment. Finally, I consider Alicia Porter's *A Study of Gothic Subculture: an Inside Look for Outsiders,* a hypertext within the website *Utah Gothics Page,* run by Goth fans. Porter, an American college student majoring in Philosophy at the time she wrote her hypertext, addresses non-Goths looking for unofficial knowledge about this subculture. She clearly aims at using unofficial knowledge for socially relevant purposes deriving from a complex situation in America that demands urgent analysis. Her avowed aim is contributing to dispelling the negative image of Gothic subcultures constructed by the media in the USA.

Gothic scholars are still quite shy when it comes to stepping outside the domain of canonical Gothic literature. Film has gained an undeniable visibility within Gothic Studies, thanks to the new adaptations of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* and the neo-Gothic work of directors such as Tim Burton or David Lynch. Yet, Gothic Studies aims basically at vindicating the importance of particular texts that have been so far overlooked on the grounds that these texts are significant for the history of literature beyond their literary merit or their lack of it. Reviewing the evolution of Gothic criticism in the last 80 years – the post-antiquarian, properly scholarly phase[3] – Baldick and Mighall stress how this academic project has been conditioned by the

> discomfort of most scholars of Gothic Studies, who have been obliged either to accept the scornful verdict of criticism upon the deficiencies of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, Maturin and their followers, or to devise special strategies to annul its malediction.[4]

If defending the literary merits of canonical Gothic writers is embarrassing enough, it is easy to imagine why studying the Gothic youth subcultures placed within the hazy academic field of Popular Culture – a subdivision in itself of Cultural Studies – is not a priority within Gothic Studies.

The 'special strategies to annul the malediction' of Gothic literature involve turning 'psychological depth and political subversion' into the 'projected intellectual goals' of Gothic scholars instead of the illumination of a certain body of fiction.[5] Beyond the obedience to questionable critical orthodoxy, the evolution of Gothic Criticism is marred, according to Baldick and Mighall, by the abandonment of 'the difficulties of literary-historical research – the dominant mode of literary study until the 1930s [replaced] with the simpler convictions of psychic intuition' (212). This results in 'the collapse of history into universal psychology' (218), which makes the grasping of the historical background impossible. Baldick and Mighall explain that this faulty scholarship has resulted, above all, in the

rewriting of the Victorian era as a 'dark age of Gothic delusion and tyranny' (224) from which progressive twentieth century Gothic criticism is wholly liberated. 'In this respect', they write, 'Gothic Criticism is not an eccentric current in modern literary debate. In fact it stands as a central, if more colourfully flagrant, instance of the mainstream modernist, postmodernist, and left-formalist campaign against nineteenth-century literary realism and its alleged ideological backwardness' (209), including its antiquated methods of textual research.

If we accept Baldick and Mighall's critique, we must conclude that today Gothic Studies lack suitable research tools either for the exploration of the changes undergone by the very concept of Gothic throughout the last two centuries or to understand its own relationship with contemporary Gothic-related subcultures. In fact, Gothic Criticism coincides with Gothic subcultures, especially Goth, in their paradoxical demonisation *and* glamorisation of the Gothic past, especially the Victorian era. Baldick and Mighall complain that Gothic criticism misreads the main Victorian Gothic texts – especially Stoker's *Dracula* – as products of a barbarian Gothic era. Thus, the vampire is celebrated by Gothic Studies as a subversive Victorian anti-hero, when Stoker meant it to be a bogeyman vanquished by technified modernity. Vampirism is also the central myth of the Gothic youth subcultures – specifically of Goth[6] – for which it represents both subversion understood as adolescent rebellion and the promise of eternal youth. Gothic criticism and 1980s-derived Goths have thus transferred a figure that was meant to stand for the horror of the irrational to the centre of a project of liberation from the pettiness and constraints of bourgeois life, whether 1890s Victorian or 1980s Thatcherite (or Reaganite).

Twentieth century post-modernity, which no doubt includes both Gothic Criticism (or Studies) and Gothic subcultures, is trapped by the need to celebrate irrational subversion, which makes academic thinking about cultural phenomena embedded in particular timespots quite difficult. While Gothic subcultures seem an appropriate site to vent these irrational impulses, for Goths are not afraid to incorporate their post-modern fantasies of the past into their everyday lifestyles, Gothic Criticism is stranded between the need to fully establish itself as an accepted academic discourse and its resistance to embed its psychoanalytical foundation into a historically accurate exploration of the evolution of Gothic. Without this exploration there is hardly any visible barrier between demonisation and glamorisation, between actual knowledge and fantasy – the point Baldick and Mighall make in relation to nineteenth century Gothic.

Baldick and Mighall claim, in short, that the Gothic scholar must ground the use of the post-modern method of literary analysis, if this is to be used, on historical analysis. Even though the twentieth century is excluded from their perspective in the sense that they discuss eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic, what follows from their analysis is that the same historical sensitivity must be applied to twentieth century Gothic. This means, to begin with, that the Gothic scholar – and by extension the academic literary critic – is no longer justified in isolating Gothic literature from other related cultural manifestations. Our understanding of

eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic literary texts becomes certainly far richer and far more productive not only if we take their historical background into account but also if we integrate Gothic literature, drama, architecture, painting, decoration and other Gothic cultural phenomena into the sum total of eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic Studies. Likewise, twentieth century Gothic Studies demand that the scholar's attention be directed not only towards the literature of the past and towards the twentieth century academic methods but also towards the manifestations of the Gothic that are happening right now in most of the Western world. These, as I am arguing here, go far beyond literature, and indeed film or other texts such as comics or even music, to form lifestyles and youth subcultures. In the late twentieth century many consumers of Gothic texts have chosen to *incorporate Gothic into their everyday life* as a way of living in today's contradictory, complex world. The novelty of the phenomenon itself, its importance and the redefinition this implies of the very concept of 'Gothic' are surely worth researching within a historically-minded Gothic Studies framework.

Like most branches of contemporary literary theory and textual analysis Gothic Criticism tends to rely on research methods that give preference to the library and its extension, the computer, over field research among contemporary creators and consumers of Gothic texts. Gothic scholars needn't play the role of cultural anthropologists and much less face the generational embarrassment of doing research on youth subcultures developing next door. The post-modern method of literary analysis, as manifest in the essentially literary discourse of Gothic Criticism, is resilient enough to be successfully applied to the study of non-literary Gothic texts, such as popular music, without leaving the confines of the library. Gothic scholars may not be seen in Goth clubs or metal concerts, but the study of Gothic texts has clearly begun to incorporate their own preferences as consumers of other Gothic texts such as, for instance, music. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds's article is an example of this trend.

Hinds's article on heavy metal and Gothic proposes a bold interdisciplinary, comparative cultural approach that is not habitual in Gothic Studies – yet – but that is more common in the study of contemporary popular culture within Cultural Studies. Her thesis is that heavy metal, inaugurated by the album *Led Zeppelin I* (1968), transformed rock music in the same way that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) transformed the novel.[7] *The Castle of Otranto* destabilised the then quite new genre of the novel by introducing fantastic, subversive, satanic elements into the essentially sentimental plot. According to Hinds, the novel was shocked out of its bourgeois complacency by this development. Likewise, Led Zeppelin shocked complacent rock and pop 1960s audiences by introducing openly sexual elements in their lyrics. In Hinds's view, the new subgenres of the Gothic novel and heavy metal attack the hegemonic, mainstream, capitalist smugness of the parent genre that begets them, respectively the novel and rock.[8] They are valuable, precisely, by virtue of their moral subversiveness.

Hinds's approach is daring, but problematic in many senses. She focuses on the lyrics of heavy metal, looking for literary affinities between this musical style and

Gothic fiction which are habitually overlooked and certainly deserve more attention. She does not explain, however, why a *literary* subgenre and a *musical* subgenre would fulfil a similar function across a too neat 200 year gap. She does not explain, either, the role played by the vibrant sounds of heavy metal music in this connection. The exact links are not described because Hinds relies on the productive, intuitive post-modern critical method and considers neither the historical background nor a more pragmatic approach – for instance, interviewing Led Zeppelin's members to check their awareness of the revolutionary mechanisms of literary Gothic. She uses tenets held dear by Gothic scholars, especially the idea that Gothic is morally subversive and aims at liberating audiences specifically from sexual repression, and applies them generically to heavy metal without reasoning where the connection between fiction and music lies. Despite their many differences,

> both Gothic fiction and Heavy Metal represent a return of the repressed – a once-again, newly repressed freedom of form and sexuality – emerging in the wake of supposedly revolutionary genres whose radicalism had become hegemonic manifestations of the larger culture and which, as a result, had lost their power to move.[9]

Reading Gothic fiction and listening to heavy metal music transforms the consumer into a moral, sexual rebel, which, of course, explains the important role of the factor youth in today's Gothic music.

Hinds's implicit admiration for the power to shock of both heavy metal and Gothic fiction is substantially different from the Gothic scholars' glamorisation of Victorian Gothic characters such as Count Dracula. Gothic Criticism glamorises the alleged subversiveness of texts it reads from a purely critical point of view – or so it claims. The pleasure scholars may feel in reading these texts is irrelevant to their critical project, though this project is also 'subversive', since it seeks to subvert, at least, the traditional marginalisation of Gothic within literary studies. There are, in contrast, strong hints of personal pleasure in Hinds's celebration of the creative impulse behind heavy metal. She uses in her article the post-modern theoretical apparatus habitual in academic research to argue that heavy metal is worth studying as a manifestation of post-modernism itself. Yet, although she never openly states this, her thesis actually springs from a mixture of her interest as a scholar in vindicating a certain view of the continuities of Gothic and her own interest as a consumer, which is what has led her to the discovery of these affinities outside the boundaries of classroom and library.

She can use her unofficial knowledge of heavy metal within the more eclectic research field of Cultural Studies because this field is certainly receptive towards the important role of pleasure in cultural consumption. The paradox of the academic method to research culture in general, as Simon Frith suggests, is that it does not exclude the possibility of developing personal consumer preferences into academic discourse, provided the treatment given to these preferences obeys the rules of academic research.[10] This means that the moment younger scholars with a Gothic culture background enter Gothic Studies these will surely make room for Gothic youth subcultures. Right now, we are possibly at the beginning of this

process. The problem as regards Hinds's approach is that while she fills in a gap within academic discourse, she is less successful in bridging the gap between official and unofficial knowledge. In her work the creators and consumers of heavy metal are as dead as the proverbial dead authors of Foucaldian criticism; only her own position as a consumer surfaces and that might well be an illusion raised by the text's unusual topic. Her thesis is interesting, her argumentation remarkably sound, but no actual item of knowledge is proved by her article: it is, rather, a hypothesis for further research.

The gap between official and unofficial knowledge can be only effectively bridged by the researcher ready to carry out embarrassing, unpleasant field research among the actual creators of music (or other popular texts) and its consumers. The young scholar with a Gothic background is ideal for this task, though s/he may also encounter many difficulties. For an illuminating insight into these difficulties, one may turn to '*Fin de Siècle* Too: Identification and Gothic Subculture', an article by Joshua Gunn published in the website *Gothstudia*.[11] This is an on-line archive of 'loosely scholarly work', in Gunn's words, on some Gothic subcultures (Goth and industrial) opened in 1997 and run by Gunn himself.[12] The website is actually placed within the official website of the University of Minnesota, but it is classified there as an 'unofficial website.' *Gothstudia* aims, Gunn claims, at 'building a shared understanding of Gothic and industrial music and subculture among fans, scholars, and artists' from a position right on the edge between unofficial and official knowledge. So far, it has published only work by fans training to become scholars.

Gunn notes the difficulties that beset, in Dick Hebdige's term, the 'interested straight', that is to say, as Gunn explains, the 'fascinated yet reserved scholar interrogating spectacular spaces in which she neither enters nor participates.' Complaining against the excessive distance between the theory and the practice of a culture he writes that:

> My point here is not that subcultural theorising should be dismissed, but rather, that such theorising often suffers from a sort of post-modern disciplinisation where the so-called 'death of the subject' has been internalised much too deeply, such that scholars, speaking what Fredric Jameson terms 'a curious private language' of their own, implicitly justify an isolated institutional space so far removed from other social spaces that interaction with fleshy, embodied agencies is often avoided lest one be thought naive.

In an attempt to correct this situation, Gunn tries to merge 'both internal (participatory) and external (critical and academic) viewpoints'. He only succeeds moderately. Audience research, he claims, is 'crucial for making sound claims about subcultural communities'. Thus, Gunn distributed a questionnaire through the Internet and interviewed people he came across in clubs; the latter, a field of research practically closed to researchers over 30 years of age and wearing non-Gothic clothing. His own audience research discloses, however, an embarrassing truth: not all Gothic culture practitioners are happy to collaborate in the pursuit of knowledge; much less if this involves becoming themselves objects of research.

Despite being Goth himself, Gunn elicited a particularly angry response from one of his Goth respondents. You, she wrote,

> a) don't ask them why they are 'Goths', b) they don't like invasions of their privacy. (It's probably the most offensive thing you can do to a Goth, actually.) c) Goths are not museum displays to be studied. We are not freaks or weirdoes who need to be analysed.

Considering this outburst, Gunn meekly writes that 'these kinds of censuring responses are important in the final analysis' and agrees with another Goth respondent who regards some of his colleagues as 'so beyond pretentious they wouldn't ever consider answering a survey like this'; not the kind of attitude that would endear researchers to their subjects. Since Gunn felt that his research methods were legitimised mainly by his own belonging to the culture – his wearing the suitable black Goth fashions – a very Gothic chasm opens at the feet of the Gothic scholar who does not wear black at all, making this kind of research practically the sole domain of unofficial knowledge or of very young Goth/ic scholars.

Reading James Hannahan's article on the glorification – or glamorisation – of suffering in rock it is quite evident that a significant amount of this unofficial knowledge is researched by music journalists and critics. Journalists have established the genealogies of rock. Thanks to them we know that the rise of white-dominated rock music is due to white people's appropriation of the African-Americans' blues, a music essentially Gothic in its celebration of the dark side of life. When it comes to providing precise historical background to the analysis of the popular music shaped by Gothic influences journalists are better equipped than scholars, too, for they are not embarrassed by the consideration of whether their unofficial knowledge is trivial or not. A Gothic scholar may remain in blissful ignorance of the fact that one of the earliest examples of crossover between blues and Gothic is Screamin' Jay Hawkins's 1957 hit 'I Put a Spell on You'. But this is a basic item of information for a music critic and journalist with a minimum credibility. Hanahann explains that Hawkins (1929–2000), an African-American artist, developed for his controversial shows an undeniable Gothic sense of theatricality. This was later imitated by white rock icons such as Alice Cooper, a heavy metal pioneer whose long-lasting career is based, according to Hannahan, on 'the hypocrisy of packaging grandiosity and teenage rebellion for mass consumption'.[13] Today Marilyn Manson – famous thanks to his popular version of Hawkins' old hit – follows in Alice Cooper's steps, benefiting from this transformation of Gothic subversiveness into a mass-market product, and signalling with his power to shock those who want to be shocked where the boundaries of subversion actually lie.

Apart from dating with precision facts and events that bypass the Gothic scholar, journalists who are, like Hannahan, mainly critics are also advancing theories that deserve further consideration. Gothic music is, according to him, radically split between two branches: heavy metal on one side, Goth on the other. 'Heavy metal was aggressive, sexist, and therefore "masculine"', Hannahan

theorises, 'while Goth had a softer, more accepting, "feminine" cast'.[14] This mirrors Gothic scholars' theory as regards eighteenth century Gothic's split into the 'feminine' version by Anne Radcliffe and the 'masculine' version by Matthew Lewis.[15] It might even be the foundation of a most relevant interdisciplinary research line; this would explore the elasticity of Gothic, understood as a cultural concept cutting across the boundaries between arts as diverse as literature and music, yet following gender-based patterns.

Alicia Porter's hypertext falls wholly on the side of unofficial knowledge. In the 1980s her hypertext would have been probably published in a small circulation fanzine, but in the 1990s the Internet has granted minority subcultures the possibility to reach a greater readership. Availability does not mean effectiveness, though. Porter's frustration is evident when she writes despite the many responses from Goths, she's 'only had a handful of responses by the people this site was made for – people who are not Gothic who want more information about what it is'. Porter's contribution to (unofficial) knowledge has an attractive selflessness, for she has not written this hypertext to promote her own interests either as a professional or prospective researcher (she's 'just' a college student), or as a Gothic subculture practitioner. Porter may be just a bit too naive when she claims that her own Gothic background is not relevant (she describes herself as an ex-Goth in terms of lifestyle though she still consumes Goth music), but, in her view, she offers plain well-researched information nobody else is offering. As she notes, 'I have done a lot of research and interviewed many people … I've brought together a huge information resource comprised of several different viewpoints, many different related subjects as well as my own interpretation of things'. In her acknowledged idealistic vision, texts like hers will help dispel the dangerous ignorance about a subculture that is being unfairly demonised. 'In an ideal world', she writes, 'people would not judge others based only on appearance or deride anything that's different'.

Porter's hypertext is not the only attempt at explaining the basic realities of Gothic – specifically Goth – subcultures. Pages such as *alt.Gothic FAQ* and *UK.people.Gothic FAQ* also offer a good deal of information, though they aim mainly at the person interested in joining the Goth scene, which is why they even include beauty tips on which the best black hair dye is. Porter's merit is that she considers the 'outsider' motivated by a wish to learn. This elusive, ideally inquisitive person will find in her didactic web pages information about the different musical trends within Goth (she does not consider metal), neologisms coined by Goths to define themselves and their culture, a typology of Goth people including fashions and cultural interests, and a history of Goth. Her thorough research, which she labels 'sociological', points actually in many different directions, including textual analysis, Cultural Studies and even philology.[16] The actual usage of the word Gothic in the context of the twentieth century is problematic enough; nobody knows with certainty why and how exactly Gothic came to be applied to a particular type of music.[17] According to Porter, the 'term Gothic [was] used to describe this new angst-filled, mysterious, introspective music … because this

music created a mood reminiscent of the Victorian era Gothic writers.' The links of music and literature surface here again with clarity, calling for further research.

Raising an awareness among Gothic scholars of the existence of these youth subcultures, as I am trying to do here, has diverse implications for the practice of Gothic Studies. I propose here, basically, that Gothic scholars enlarge the field of research of Gothic Studies far beyond literature and reconsider their methodology by incorporating research tools and methods derived mainly from Cultural Studies. The other main issue I discuss here is whether Gothic scholars can simply ignore the singular process by which the concept of Gothic has shaped in the twentieth century certain youth-related sociological phenomena that demand a complex multidisciplinary approach if they are to be understood at all. My contention is that we *can* indeed ignore this phenomena but we *should* not, if only to gain further (official) knowledge about how Gothic texts and the societies that generate them interact.

In the late twentieth century Gothic seems to have taken the place of the cultural paradigm usually associated to rebelliousness and youth, namely, Romanticism. As can be seen, in recent decades some young people have started expressing their discomfort with the realities of the late capitalist, post-modern Western world – their angst – by reinventing the very idea of Gothic and by assuming a Gothic (i.e. subversive) lifestyle. Unfortunately, this angst has been connected with the important social disturbances caused by diverse teenage mass murderers in the USA in recent years. The anti-social psychopathology of these seriously disturbed youths has been wrongly identified as Gothic angst, which has led to an unfair persecution of Gothic youth subcultures. These have been stigmatised as intolerable producers of anti-social attitudes, which they are not despite misguiding appearances. Gothic scholars may make important contributions to the understanding of these social phenomena, for we have been exploring for several decades the metaphorical use of Gothic as an expression of social and political anxieties, especially in the past.

Goths – and I mean here specifically the post-punk subculture and not heavy metal – can be divided today into three 'generations' or age groups, present in most Western countries but, above all, in Britain and the USA. Their presence in public life, gauged here mainly through their presence in the media, has varied in the course of the years. The first generation of Goth subcultures emerged in a 1980s pre-Internet context and, so, depended on the specialised musical press and its own fanzines for publicity. By the mid 1980s the still much alive Goth scene started being ignored if not downright ridiculed by the musical press, under pressure by commercial interests. This neglect pushed Goths out of the specialised media and into the underground, where different varieties of metal and industrial music also thrive. The transfer to the underground reinforced the Goth subculture by creating a strong sense of community, which enabled a second Goth generation to appear in the early 1990s.

Early 1990s Goth subculture vindicated the use of the adjective 'Gothic', far above the metal or industrial subcultures. This adjective was also popularised and

given a new visibility in the media by a number of very popular Hollywood films narrating old and new Gothic stories: *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* renewed the interpretation of the nineteenth century classics by Stoker and Shelley; *The Crow*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Interview with the Vampire* and even *Nightmare Before Christmas* proved beyond any doubt that Gothic thrived in the twentieth century. The generalised availability and popularisation of reasonably cheap technology allowed, in addition, for the production of both 'desktop publishing and home recording, [which] kept the scene alive with hundreds of fanzines and demo tapes of varying quality'.[18] The Goth scene also embraced the Internet, to the point that the neologism 'net.Goth' was created to define, according to Alicia Porter, 'those Goths who frequently post to the alt.Gothic newsgroup and have a fairly well known presence among the Internet Goth community'.[19] The Internet, she points out, 'seems to have a [Goth] culture all its own'.

The rise of the Internet came to the aid of those technology-oriented Goths dissatisfied with the practical erasure of their culture from the media. In the Internet,

> there are no editors to decide what's 'cool' and what's not. You don't need the approval of a record company boss to advertise your album. No-one can censor the letters page. A thousand fellow fans can be contacted for less than the price of one stamp. The Internet represents media democracy; Goth is popular in the real world and this is reflected on the Internet.[20]

The real-life popularity of Goth is indeed reflected by the many Gothic websites. Despite the potential of the Internet to create true media democracy and to offer a home for stigmatised subcultures, it is still far from clear whether the Internet is contributing to further ghettoising Goth or to actually dispelling its negative image. The media select news items on behalf of their consumers, whereas the Internet demands that net surfers select what interests them. The media has, thus, an obvious advantage over the Internet, which depends on the net surfer's previous awareness of the possible items on offer. As regards Goth, this means that few people will enter a Goth website unless their attention is previously caught by some news item in the general-interest or the specialised media; or unless they already belong in some way to the Gothic scene.

In Britain and in the rest of European countries, third-generation late 1990s Goth culture has 'more to do with style, attitude and the social scene – the style is black, the attitude is dark and the social scene is buzzing'.[21] In the USA, which imported Goth culture from Britain in the late 1980s, the rise of the third-generation Goth culture has opened an important debate in and outside the Goth scene. First and second-generation Goths regard the newcomers as teenage dupes in the hands of consumerism and deny they have any understanding of the genuine Goth lifestyle. 'Many of the younger generation have learned about Gothic culture because of the present widespread commercial availability', Alicia Porter writes. 'For example, national chain stores like Hot Topic have made Goth accessible for kids at a younger age than ever before'.

This teenage consumerism is very far indeed from the subversive stance of original 1980s British Goth and early 1990s international underground Gothic. The commodification of Gothic subversion in the late 1990s has resulted, in addition, in great confusion about the Goth passion for angst originally awakened in Britain, possibly as an adaptation of punk to the Thatcherite atmosphere – an issue that deserves indeed further research. British and, in general, European Goth, was and is a lifestyle geared to surviving in the midst of life seen as dismal chaos – it is *not*, though, about raising chaos in the lives of others. Even though Goths are typically reserved individuals, they find in their mutual support a solution to the problem of how to cope with the problem of feeling isolated in a conventional society that rejects unconventional lifestyles – a paradox since Goths externalise through their singular physical appearance their isolating narcissism. The cohesion of the diverse Gothic scenes proves that the Goth subculture is not aggressively anti-social, though Goths may strongly oppose some tenets of contemporary society. Goth is, above all, about living one's own life within a self-made fantasy Gothic world whose main referents are shared with others but where asocial rather than anti-social behaviour is the rule.

In the USA, British-inspired self-centred Goth groups coexist with this wider, shallower consumerist third-generation, which mixes indiscriminately Goth with metal and industrial subcultures with no real understanding of what they originally meant. The media visibility of the main icons of this consumerist version of Gothic – the films, the music, the fashions – has inspired a constant persecution. Allegations by moral pressure groups that Gothic-based texts and cultural practices corrupt young people have led to strange attacks against freedom of expression. In the 1990s several rock artists were brought to trial under the bizarre accusation of backmasking, that is to say, of including satanic messages in their records, supposedly audible only if the record was played backwards. Gothic rock icons like Marilyn Manson have been sued by the desperate parents of suicidal teenagers under the accusation of having induced their children's suicide.[22] The anti-Gothic campaign reached unprecedented heights with the Columbine High School massacre of April 1999 in which two high-school boys – Dylan Klebold, 17, and Eric Harris, 18 – killed 13 people and themselves at this school, near Denver. When CDs by Manson, Rammstein, KMFDM and other Gothic metal bands were seized by the police from the boys' homes, the whole Gothic youth culture was blamed for their criminal attack.

The murderous rage of misguided youths like Klebold and Harris does not spring from the influence of Gothic texts, whether music, films, comics or horror fiction. It originates, rather, in the parents' inability to communicate with the last generation of twentieth-century teenagers, an inability for which they compensate by offering to their children both plenty of consumer goods and enough money to choose their own purchases. These may include Goth clothing or music as supplied by chain stores just as they may include Coca-Cola or chewing gum – or guns. The tragic expression of the teenage dissatisfaction with the inanities of a consumerist lifestyle – their plain boredom – claims not only the lives of other teenagers but

also the right of more peaceful individuals to choose a particular lifestyle, whether Goth or not. Goth, metal or industrial youths who choose a certain identity as a way of exteriorising their inner conflicts with society in an essentially non-aggressive way find now that their subcultures and their own personal pose have been stigmatised by the aggressive behaviour of misinformed teenagers who have as little understanding of these subcultures as those who persecute them.

The linkage of Gothic youth subcultures to tragic events like the Denver massacre calls for a badly needed approximation between official and unofficial knowledge about Gothic. The gap between these twin fields must be bridged because, as Alicia Porter writes, 'ignorance and intolerance should be everyone's enemy, not Gothic.' The misconstruction of today's Gothic youth subcultures by the media and the hysterical moral minority reactions against them, together with their absence from Gothic scholarship, highlights our glaring ignorance of the dynamics of exchange between the literary subcultures of the past and the popular subcultures of the present. It also shows our feeble grasp of the processes by which fantasies about the past and the present shape the unconventional lifestyles of minority subcultures in the Western world.

In case this is not enough to justify taking a closer look at social phenomena like certain youth subcultures from a Gothic Studies point of view, it must be noted that both Goth youth subcultures and Gothic Studies are complex manifestations of the same post-modern resistance against the excessive rationalism of the first half of the twentieth century. Baldick and Mighall may be right in arguing that Gothic Studies are misreading and wrongly glamorising aspects of classic Gothic fiction, originally intended to work as denounces against irrationalism, because they are too immersed in their own celebration of the irrational. If this is the case a close inspection of the reinvention of Gothic by Gothic youth subcultures in the late twentieth century may also help Gothic scholars evaluate the fairness of Baldick and Mighall's accusation. If we understand why and how a contemporary Gothic-related cultural manifestation has chosen to glamorise rather than reject the irrational, we may gain a deeper insight into our own academic practices, generated in the same years, in the same countries, by a similar post-modern appreciation of Gothic and also in the name of the liberation from repression. Explaining the genesis of these youth subcultures can indeed contribute to dispelling intolerance and ignorance, as Porter claims, which should be the ultimate goal of the scholar of the humanities, in or outside Gothic Studies.

Notes

1   For a complete overview of the history of the diverse Gothic subcultures see Alicia Porter, *A Study of Gothic Subculture: An Inside Look for Outsiders.* In *Utah Gothics Page,* URL (accessed January 2000): http://www.gothics.org/subculture/index.html. Goth is characterised by its use of the wide concept of atmosphere in its music, and by its neo-Victorian black fashions, ghostly make-up and flowing, spidery hairstyles.

2   The others are Richard Hardack's 'From Southern Gothic to Postmodern Anonymity: R.E.M. and the Globalization of American Popular Music', *Journal X: A Journal in*

Culture and Criticism, 3:1 (1998), 79–110 and Teresa Goddu's 'Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards: The Gothic and Country Music', in Cecelia Tichi, ed., *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). MLA database accessed January 2000.

3   This begins in the 1920s with the publication of Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* (1921) and Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927), the first scholarly articles on Gothic in *PMLA*, and diverse monographs on Radcliffe and Maturin. The 1930s follow either the conservative romanticism of Montague Summers's *The Gothic Quest* (1938) or the solid work of J. M. S. Tomkins' *The Popular Novel in England 1770–1800* (1932). Devendra P. Varma continues Summer in *The Gothic Flame* (1957). Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980) inaugurates the modern wave of Gothic Criticism after Elizabeth MacAndrew's *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979).

4   Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism', in David Punter, ed., *A Companion to the Gothic*, (London: Blackwell, 2000), p. 209. All subsequent references are to this edition. Page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

5   *Ibid.*, p. 209.

6   Satanism seems to be, in contrast, the central myth of heavy metal.

7   The exact date when heavy metal appeared is uncertain. The term 'heavy metal' derives apparently from a song by Steppenwolf describing the sound of a motorbike engine as a 'heavy metal thunder.' Others attribute it to American writer William Burroughs. Heavy metal is hard rock dominated by guitar riffs, howling vocals and apocalyptic lyrics.

8   Hinds distinguishes between movements, which magnify one feature of the parenting genre (e.g. Imagism in relation to Modernism) and subgenres, which use a set of features of the parenting genre to stage an adolescent rebellion, e.g. heavy metal and the Gothic novel.

9   Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'The Devil Sings the Blues: Heavy Metal, Gothic Fiction and "Postmodern" Discourse', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26:3 (Winter 1992), 151–64 at p. 159.

10 In personal conversation (May 1999). Frith's *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (1981) pioneered the use of academic discourse in the exploration of rock.

11 Joshua Gresham Gunn, 'Fin de Siècle Too: Identification and Gothic Subculture', *Gothstudia*, URL: http://www.tc.umn.edu/nlhome/m094/gunn0025/studiadex.html (accessed January 2000).

12 Joshua Gresham Gunn, *Gothstudia: An Online Archive of Scholarly Articles (Research and Critical Papers) Written about Gothic and Industrial Music and Culture by its Fans* (accessed January 2000), URL: http://www.tc.umn.edu/nlhome/m094/gunn0025/studiadex.html

13 James Hannahan, 'Bela Lugosi's Dead and I Don't Feel so Good Either: Goth and the Glorification of Suffering in Rock Music', in Karen Kelly and Evelyn McDonnell, eds, *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth*, (London: Routledge 1999), p. 80.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 81. Alicia Porter argues that industrial music (an electronic offspring of punk born in 1976 and fully established in the 1990s) and goth are actually 'two sides t the same coin … Gothic expresses the emotional, beautiful, supernatural, feminine, poetic, theatrical side and Industrial embodies the masculine, angry, aggressive, noisy, scientific, technological, political side', Porter, *A Study of Gothic Subculture* (accessed 2000).

15 See, for instance, Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

16 Gothic subcultures are constantly expanding their semantic field. Porter herself is trying to popularise the term 'darkwaver' as a label for fans of darkwave 1990s Gothic music who do not wear goth fashions.

17 See *alt. Gothic FAQ page alt.Gothic FAQ page* (accessed January 2000), URL: http://www.vamp.org/Gothic/Text/Gothic-faq.html, for an overview of the usage of the word 'Gothic' in music. The authors claim that '"goth" was used by Ian Astbury who described Andi [of the band] Sex Gang as a "Gothic pixie" and popularised by the UK music magazines *New Musical Express* (*NME*) and *Sounds*'. 'Gothic', though, may have been first used by Siouxsie Sioux (of the Banshees) 'to describe the new direction for her band' or by Anthony H. Wilson in reference to a record by Joy Division released by Wilson's Factory Records. He described the band's music as 'Gothic' as early as 1978, though they do not fit the Gothic look.

18 *UK.people.Gothic FAQ*, (accessed January 2000), URL: http://www.darkwave.org.uk/faq/ukpg/index.txt

19 *UK.people.gothic* includes itself and aus.culture.Gothic as net.goth newsgroups. They inform that net.goth get-togethers (Convergences) started in 1995 in the USA. In Britain these goth concerts provide the venue for net.goth gatherings.

20 *UK.people.gothic FAQ*, accessed January 2000.

21 *Ibid.*

22 For an analysis of Manson's controversial role in the late 1990s Gothic scene, see Sara Martin, 'Marilyn Manson: The Limits of Challenge', María José Coperías, ed., in *Culture & Power V: Challenging Discourses*, (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2000).

Address for correspondence

Sara Martin, Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Edifici B, 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona), Spain. E-mail: smartin@seneca.uab.es