

GOTHIC

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

Thames
& Hudson

ROGER
LUCKHURST

Advance Information

Frankfurt Book Fair 2020

Roger Luckhurst is the author of many books on the Gothic, horror and science fiction, writing on both literature and cinema; he 'mixes pop cultural connoisseurship with scholarly rigour to great effect' (*Daily Telegraph*). His previous books include *Zombies: A Cultural History*, *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* and *The Shining* (BFI Film Classics). He is Professor in Modern and Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London.

Specification

- 256 pages
- c. 250 illustrations
- 26.0 × 18.0 cm (10¼ × 7⅞ in.)
- Hardback

Thames & Hudson Ltd
181A High Holborn
London WC1V 7QX
+44 (0)20 7845 5000
www.thamesandhudson.com

Thames & Hudson Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10110
+1 212 354 3763
www.thamesandhudsonusa.com

Gothic

An Illustrated History

Roger Luckhurst

The story of the Gothic, from early architecture and literature to the modern horror genre, illustrated by the beautiful, the macabre and the strange.

Marketing points

- There is currently an immense general interest in an idea that has entered the mainstream in Hollywood, TV, music, literature and fashion.
- This book fills a clear gap in the market for an intelligent, up-to-date and authoritative book delineating the contours of what the Gothic means today. There are many introductions to Gothic architecture, literature or horror cinema, but none of these books connect the different parts of this multimedia story together in the way that *Gothic* does.
- Roger Luckhurst has the deftness of touch that makes tackling such an expansive topic an entertaining, accessible read.
- This is a beautiful book, a strikingly designed visual history illustrated in 4-colour throughout, celebrating the art, architecture and films that define the Gothic aesthetic.

Description

Over the centuries the Gothic has been revived and rewritten to reflect the anxieties of each era. It encompasses the weird, feared and uncanny; haunted places and people; and monsters that act as mirrors to ourselves and society. In this lavishly illustrated volume Roger Luckhurst explores how the Gothic began in the margins of history and seeped into mainstream global culture today.

The visceral visual history begins with the Gothic as an aesthetic and architectural practice – the revival of medieval arches across northern Europe – and the emergence of Gothic fiction, filled with haunted ruins and fainting heroines, before moving onto the many ways it has morphed, travelling across the globe and redrawing its boundaries over the centuries, changing to the shape of our fears and anxieties. Luckhurst delves into the shadows of Gothic settings all around the world, from the sublime Alps to the Australian outback, the Arctic waste and the Pacific Ocean, from the dark folkloric realm of the forest to the ruined post-industrial landscapes of abandoned hospitals and asylums, then beyond the bounds of the planet to unknowable cosmic horror.

We encounter the creatures that populate the Gothic imagination and the unsettling space between the living and the dead, from Frankenstein to the zombie of Haitian folklore. Drawing on a rich array of visual material, Luckhurst traces this history across all media from architecture to anime, from Victor Hugo and E. T. A. Hoffmann to the films of Dario Argento, Hideo Nakata and Park Chan-wook and new horror classics such as *Get Out*, *The Babadook* and *Raw*, as the Gothic confronts race, gender and sexuality.

All information on this sheet is provisional and may be altered without notice
© 2020 Thames & Hudson. Confidential. Not to be disclosed to any third party.

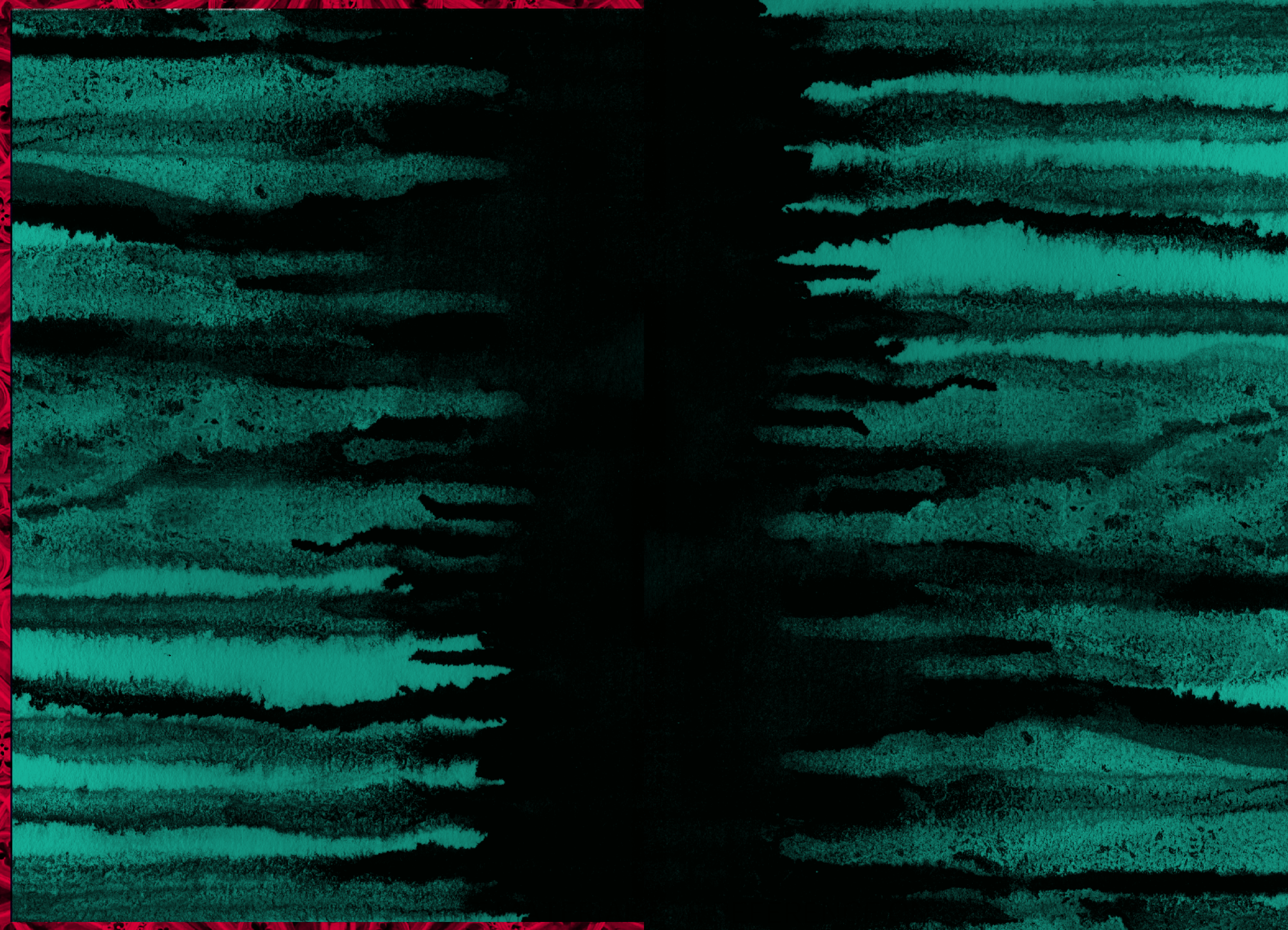


GOTHIC

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

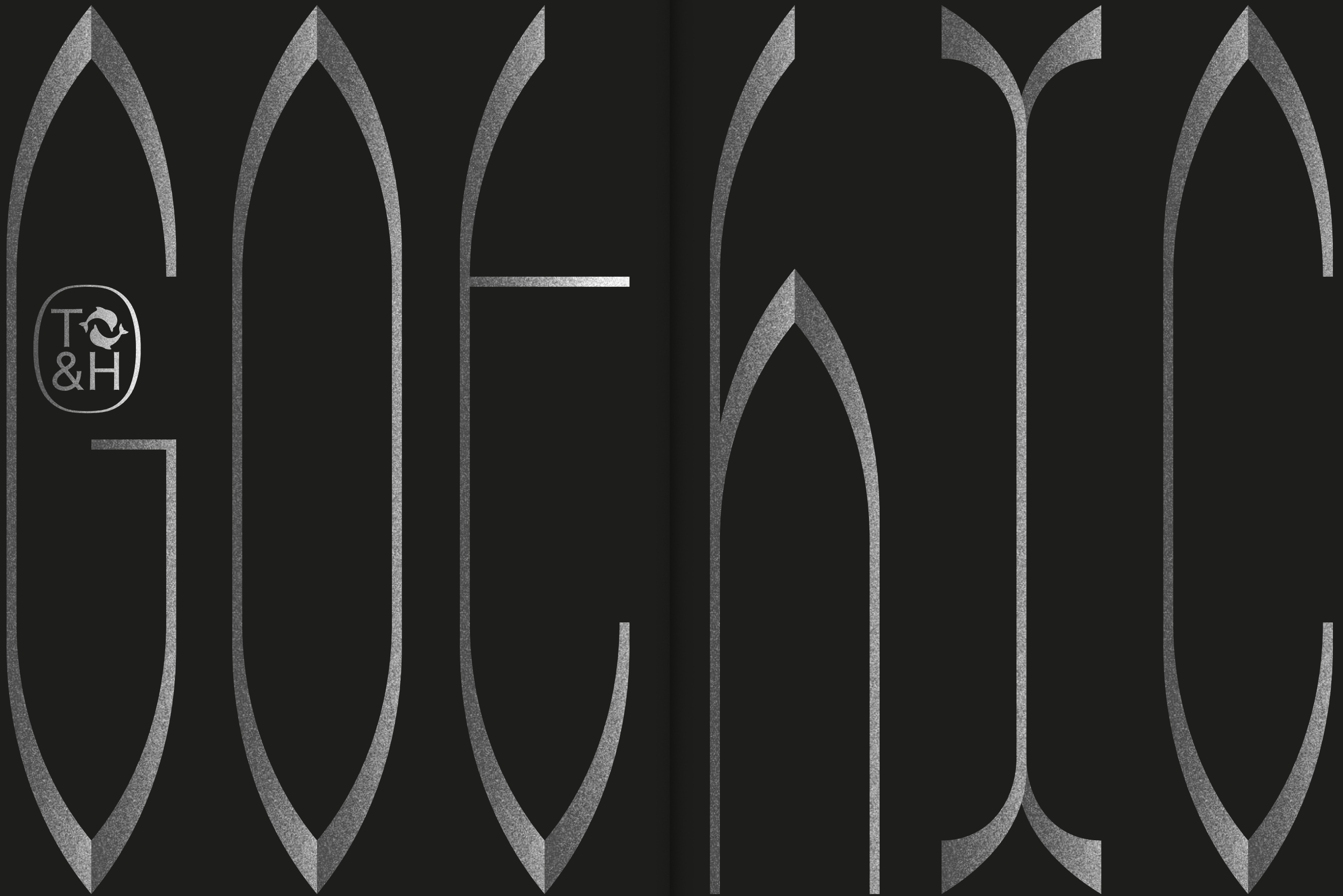
Thames
& Hudson

ROGER
LUCKHURST





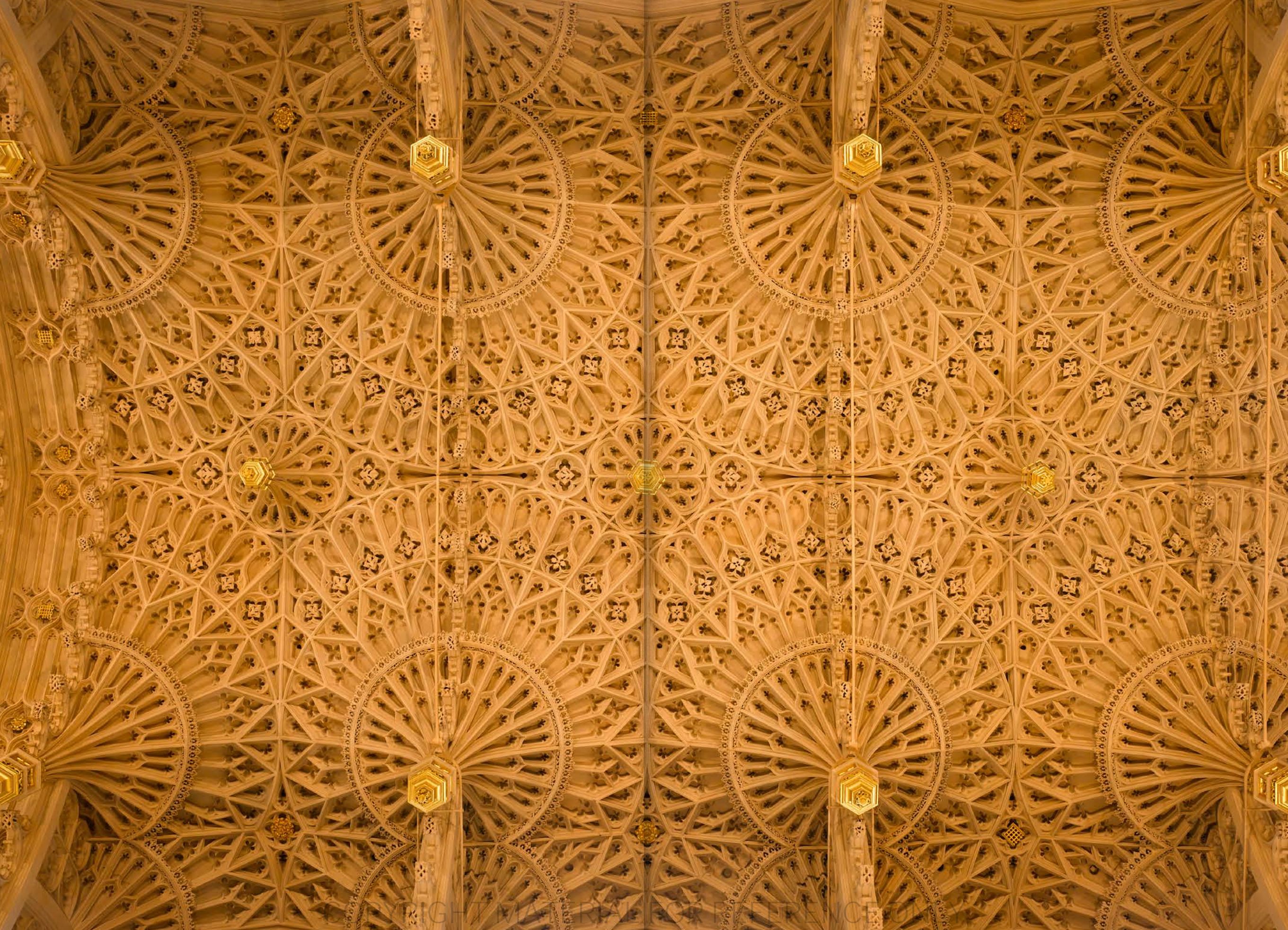
FOR REFERENCE ONLY



AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

ROGER
LUCKHURST

COPYRIGHT MATERIAL FOR REFERENCE ONLY





CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 10

ARCHITECTURE AND FORM 16

THE POINTED ARCH 20
RUINS 30
FRAGMENT 40
LABYRINTH 52
THE HOUSE 62



THE LIE OF THE LAND 72

THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY 74
VILLAGE 86
FOREST 96
WILDERNESS 108
EDGELANDS 118



THE GOTHIC COMPASS 130

NORTH 132
SOUTH 144
EAST 154
WEST 166
COSMIC HORROR 178



MONSTERS 186

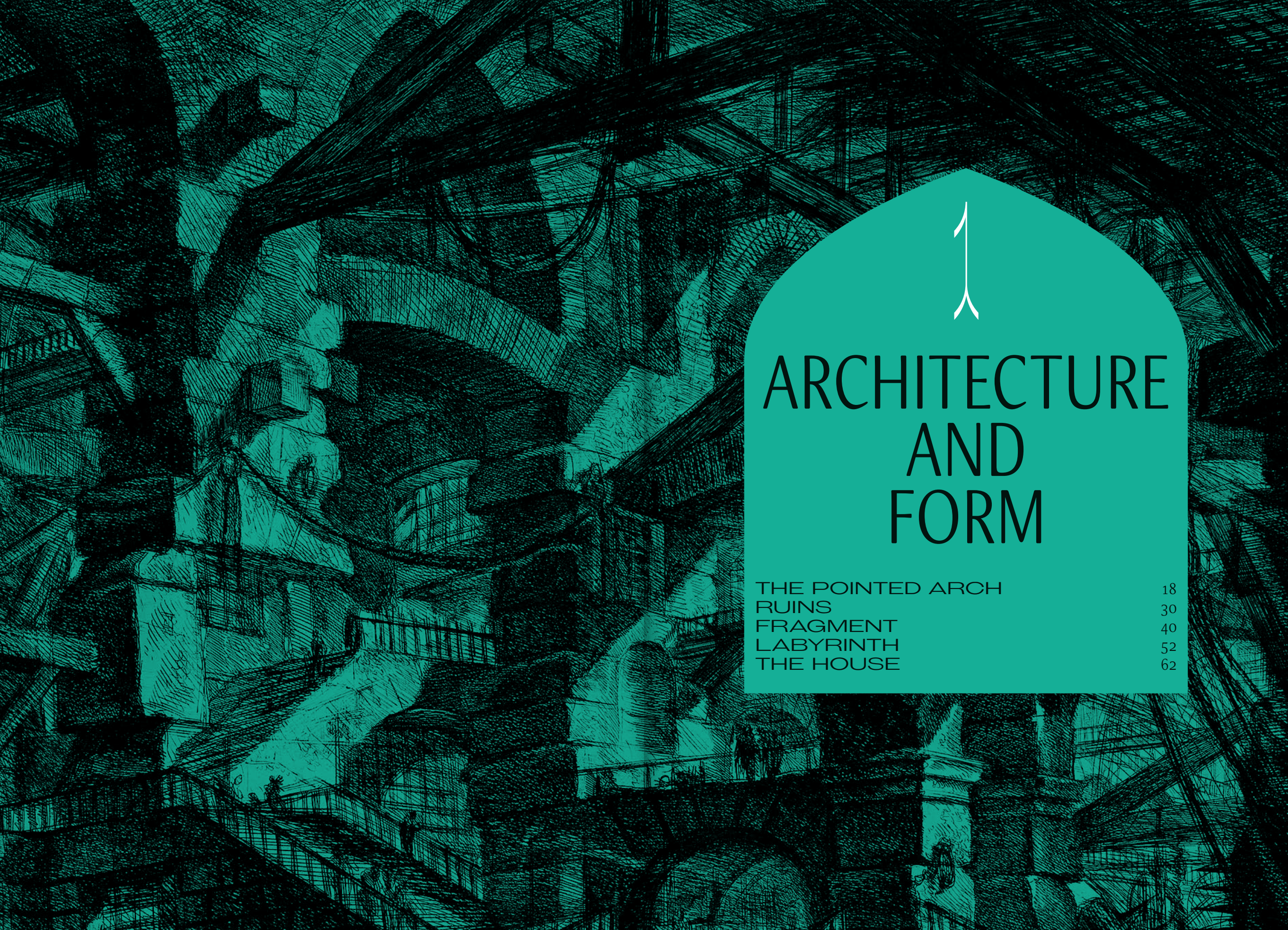
SCALE 190
SPICE 200
THE TENTACLE 222
FORMLESS 232
THE MONSTER WITHIN 242



FURTHER READING 252

INDEX 254



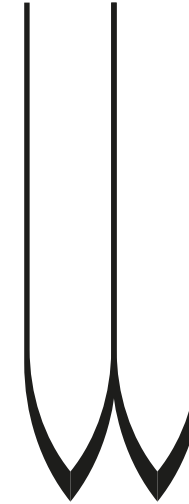
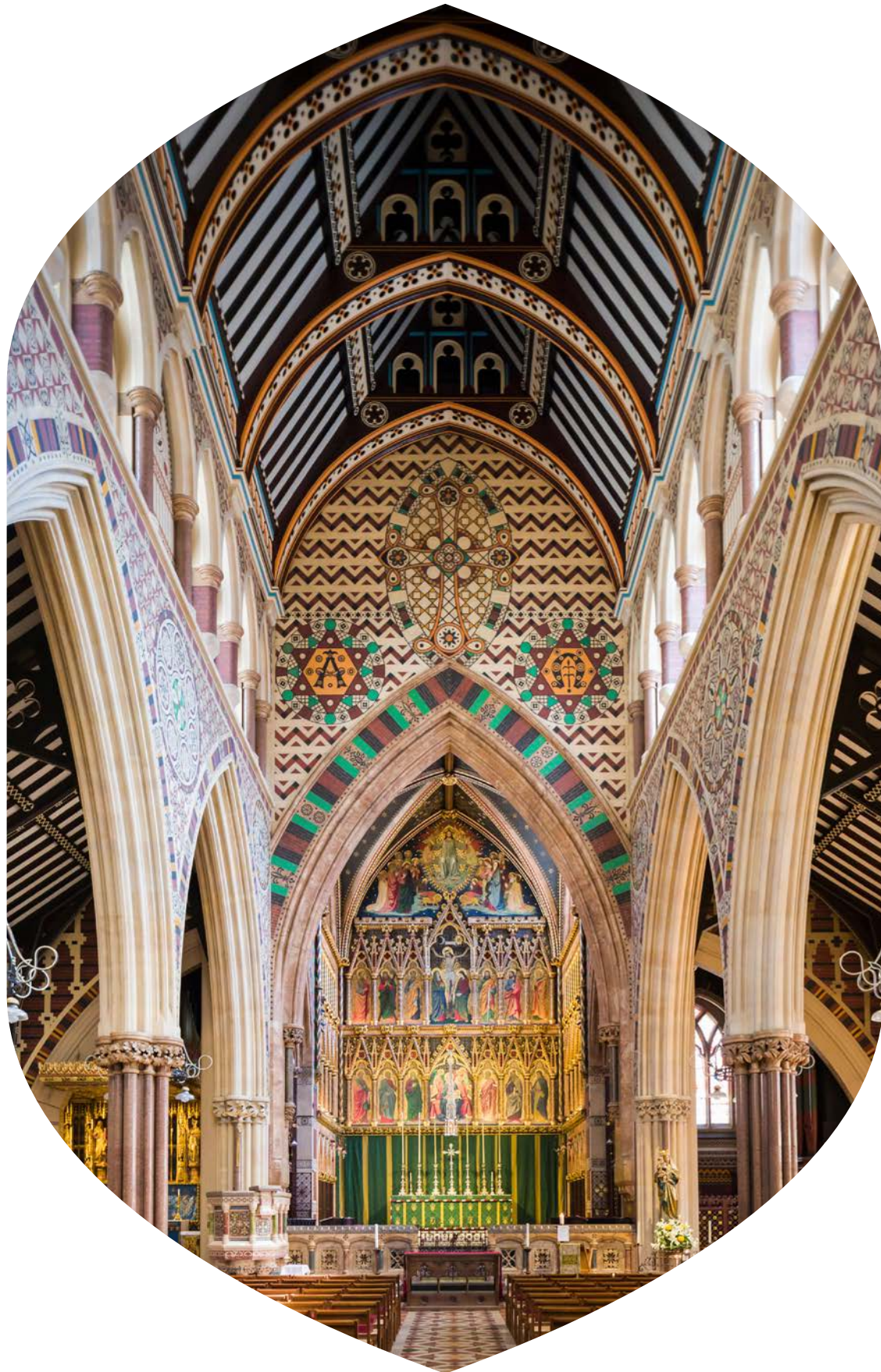


ARCHITECTURE AND FORM

THE POINTED ARCH
RUINS
FRAGMENT
LABYRINTH
THE HOUSE

18
30
40
52
62

THE POINTED ARCH



HAT DOES THE POINTED ARCH DO? There is a spiritual answer and a more prosaic, technical answer. Pointed arches stretch up towards the light, towards God, inspiring a solemn awe, a feeling of the religious sublime. The vast, receding arcades and patterns of windows create what one commentator called 'an artificial infinite'. Even the most cynical of tourists might still experience this feeling as they enter cathedral naves in Salisbury, Rouen or Milan. In 1760, the English writer and cleric William Warburton speculated that the columns that rose and branched into vaulted ceilings were echoes of a deeper spiritual past:

For this northern people, having been accustomed, during the gloom of paganism, to worship the Deity in groves (a practice common to all nations), when their new religion required covered edifices, they ingeniously projected to make them resemble groves as nearly as the distance of architecture would permit.

Sadly, the theory that Gothic vaulting repeated the interlocking branches of avenues of trees was completely wrong, but the notion of Gothic style embodying natural patterns and inherent numinous feelings remained influential. This architecture instantiated God. It could inspire devotion; unless you were a Protestant or Puritan in sixteenth-century England, in which case elaborate ornamentation, closely associated with the Catholic church, was prideful and corrupt. Choirs, stained glass, statuary and rood screens got in the way of a direct relation to God, and so fell to the hammers and chisels of Dissolution. Elsewhere in Europe, the Gothic style was simply falling out of fashion in favour of the Italian Renaissance style – a transition that plays out on the roof of Florence Cathedral, with its Classical dome supported by twenty-four Gothic ribs.

1. William Butterfield, All Saints Church, Margaret Street, London, 1850

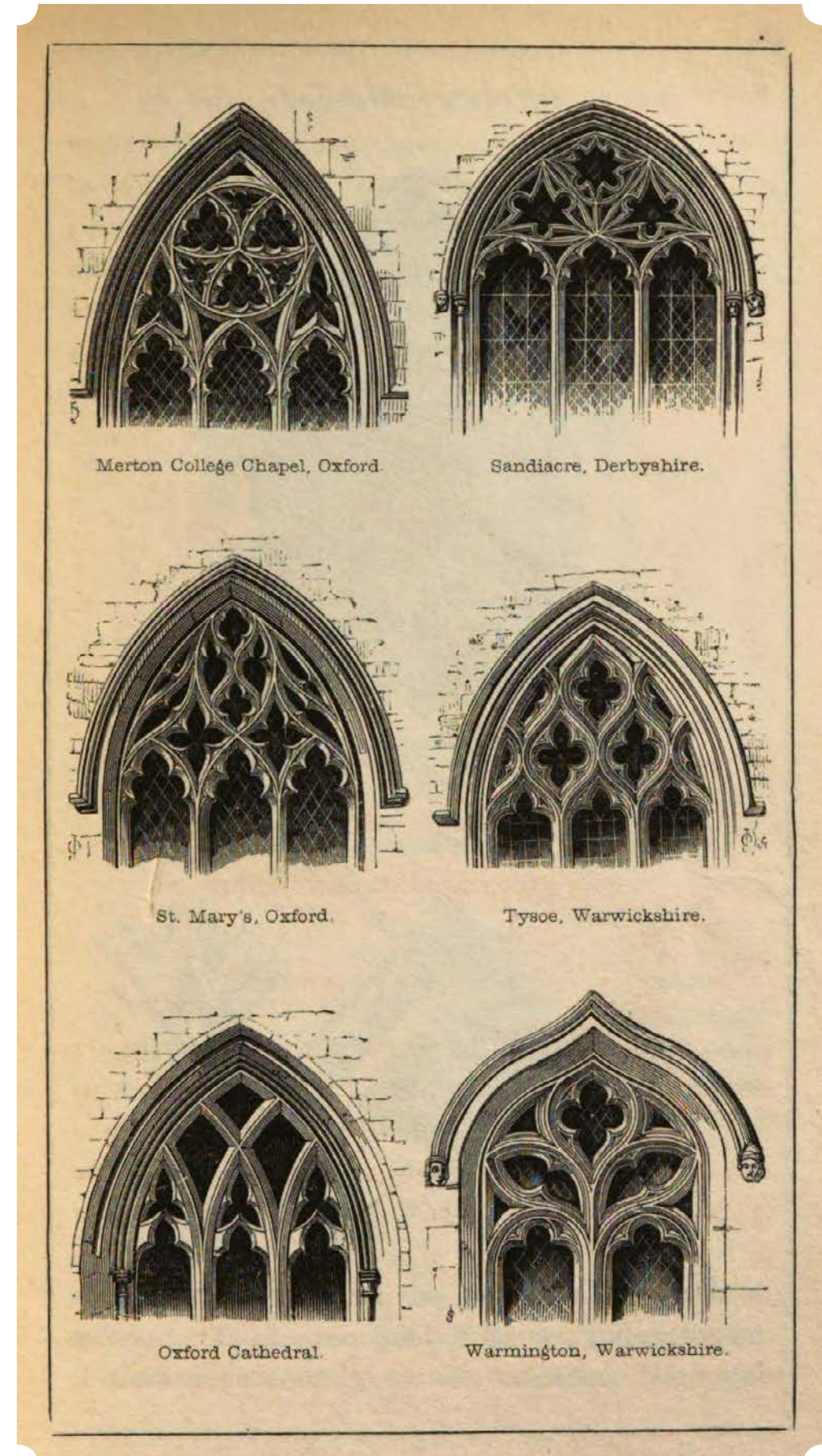
1. The Grand Staircase, St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel, London, England
2. Interior of Gloucester Cathedral, England
3. M. H. Bloxam, *The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 1882



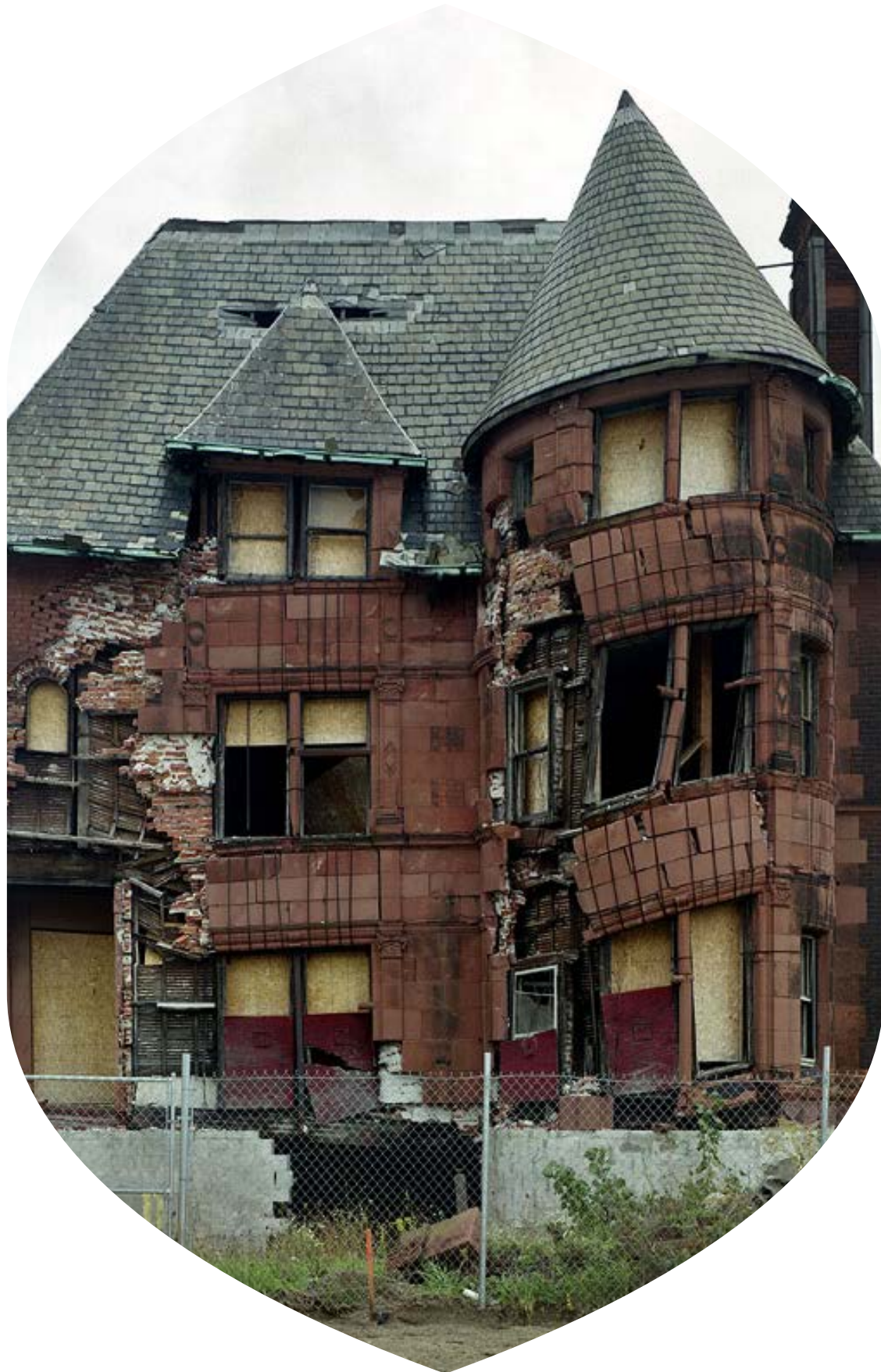
Almost three hundred years later, in London, Sir Christopher Wren resurrected the medieval St Paul's Cathedral, replacing its old plan with another triumphant dome. He speculated that, far from drawing on Northern groves, the Gothic was introduced from the 'Saracenic' East 'after the fall of the Greek Empire, by the prodigious success of those people who adhered to Mohamet's doctrine'. He noted 'the sharp-heeled arch', which would be further elaborated into rows and tiers of arches, trceries, spires and pinnacles, 'unbounded fancies' that, he said in damning tones, 'induced much mincing of the stone'. Wren's observations have proven perceptive. Diana Darke called upon the architect for her own investigation of the Gothic's relationship with Islamic architecture, which traces the pointed arch from the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, through north Africa and Italy to northern Europe, where it made its way into Gothic buildings like the Basilica of Saint-Denis, France, and Gloucester Cathedral, England (1).

To its nineteenth-century advocates, buildings like Gloucester Cathedral, built in the Perpendicular Gothic style, were the epitome of Christian feeling realised in stone. Augustus Welby Pugin was the key spokesman for the Victorian Gothic Revival in the 1840s, and helped design the interiors for the Palace of Westminster, the British Houses of Parliament, which were rebuilt in Perpendicular style. In *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), Pugin suggested that 'Height, or the vertical principle, emblematic of the resurrection, is the very essence of Christian architecture'. Classicists who objected to pointed arches or the irrational ornament of Gothic buildings misunderstood their simultaneously *natural* and *mystical* functions, Pugin explained. An elaborate pinnacle, for instance, at once pulled the eye upwards, continuing the perpendicular line directed upwards, but also mundanely channelled rain off the roof and served as support for the stone parapet. God was also to be found in the engineering, in the hands of the artisans who sculpted the stone.

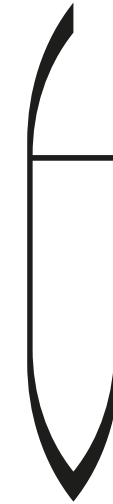
The pointed arch is made possible by such engineering. It is the result of a mundane but brilliant technical breakthrough. Flat stone lintels or beams can only carry so much weight before they collapse under their own mass; the later, semi-circular arches above windows and doors have a large keystone that pushes the weight either side of the opening, down through the arch, which sits on an impost atop a column. If you build an arcade of arches, all springing from imposts resting on the top of columns, the weight is taken by the end columns or walls, which can be further buttressed outside. Hence the buttresses



THE HOUSE



Condemned house in Detroit, America



URRETS, BASEMENTS, HUNGRY GHOSTS: the house is where the Gothic comes home, but only to undermine the very foundations of the concept of 'home.' All the elements converge here: domestic Gothic architecture, with its pointed roofs and arched windows, can create dream-like spaces, fragmentary or labyrinthine. The Gothic home can feature as abandoned ruins full of unresolved trauma, or a perfectly bland modern house nevertheless stuffed with awful secrets or filled with hidden annexes, basements or attics.

Thirty years after the Gothic Revival in architecture, the rise of Gothic romance was powered by hundreds of 'terror novels' that began to pour from the presses in the 1790s. They are interwoven in the lives of two very strange, scandalous gentlemen, each of whom used their fortune to build a famous Gothic house and write a defining Gothic novel. Both used the shape of the Gothic in language and built form to express a fugitive, transgressive identity.

TWO QUEER HOUSES

In 1764, the English historian, politician and writer Horace Walpole (1717–1797) published *The Castle of Otranto*, first as a fake manuscript and then under his own name. He wrote to a friend, the antiquary William Cole, of its origins in a dream:

Of which, all I remember was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story), and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In that evening, I sat down, and began to write.

Walpole had his dream in the bedchamber of his house in Strawberry Hill, London, which he had spent the last



1

seventeen capricious years turning into a miniature Gothic castle. By the 1780s it was so famous that he wrote a guidebook, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole*, for visitors who came from far and wide to view the elegant state rooms and his extensive collection of paintings and artefacts. The guide pointed to objects, such as one portrait in the long Gallery, which had featured in *Otranto*: house and text were inextricably linked.

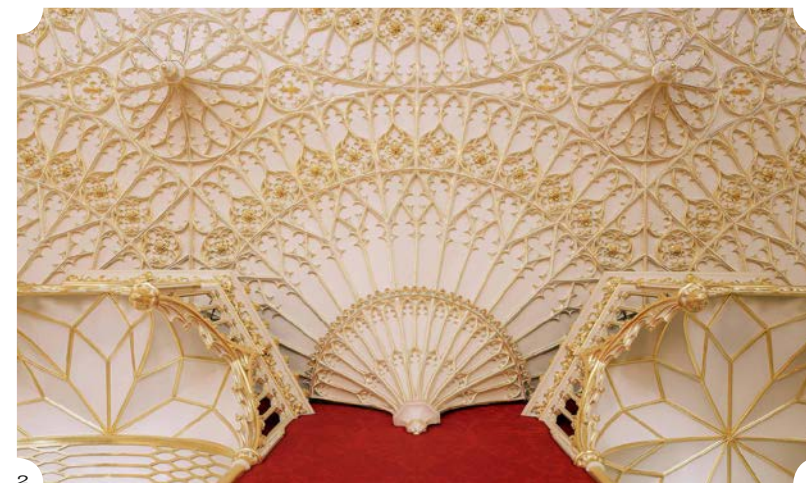
Walpole had bought the small villa as a pastoral retreat from London, with a picturesque view of the Thames (now entirely obscured by subsequent buildings). It eventually became a full-time retreat from politics, and he almost completely abandoned public life. The youngest son of the Britain's first Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, Horace had been targeted by his political opponents after defending a cousin and ally from the King's whims. He was accused of harbouring an 'unsuccessful passion' for this young man, and memorably denounced as a 'hermaphroditic horse'. This accusation veered close to sodomy, a crime then punishable by death. No wonder *The Castle of Otranto* was a fevered nightmare centred on the tyranny and violence of a murderous lord; no wonder its author built battlements and towers and lancet windows.

Standing on the lawn below Strawberry Hill, the visitor looks up at a range of Gothic styles that stretch from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. It is a clump of battlements, round and hexagonal towers, pointed finials, lancet and ogee windows, and ancient, German stained glass, quantities of which shattered when a nearby gunpowder factory blew up, breaking windows for miles around. The accumulation of various styles is designed to appear organic, built up over the centuries, but all is in fact a Georgian confection; a fake, like the framing of the trick preface in *The Castle of Otranto*.

The house was also a structure of psychic and public defence. Walpole would not have recognized himself as a homosexual man (a term not yet current), but he surrounded himself with the male advisors who made up his 'Committee of Taste' and had several intense attachments to men, often safely expressed through the passionate letters that he sent in their thousands. His house and his transgressive texts – *Otranto* was followed in 1768 by the controversial *The Mysterious Mother* – begin to hint that the disorderly Gothic could become the perfect place to hide sexual dissidence in plain sight.

The house was full of strange, dream-like transpositions. Two suits of armour, one with a bullet hole, were housed under the pointed arches of the Armoury, while John Dee's scrying mirror, through which

1. Horace Walpole, from *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole*, 1780s
2. Ceiling of the Long Gallery, Strawberry Hill House
3. Staircase at Strawberry Hill House
4. Doorway in Horace Walpole's bedchamber, Strawberry Hill House



2



3



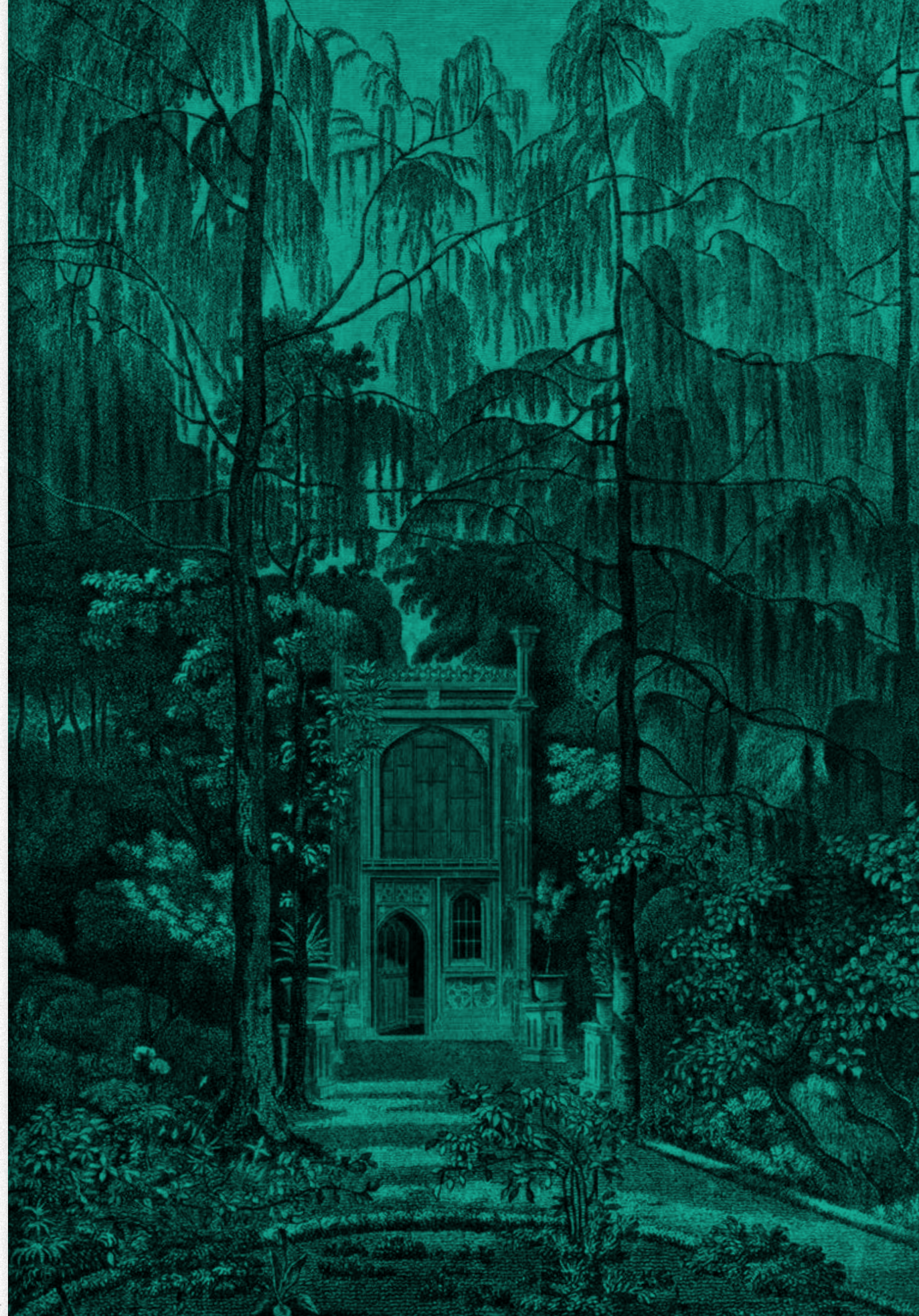
4



A Gothic Chair.

A Gothic Chair, from *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole*, 1780s

View of the Chapel in the Garden at Strawberry Hill, from *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole*, 1780s



COPYRIGHT MATERIAL

THE DEEP SOUTH

The Gothic offers a language of guilt, dread, horror by which to communicate the inescapable nightmare of history that clings to the American South – a land that, as Rosa Coldfield pronounces in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), is 'primed for fatality and already cursed with it.'

The writing of the 'Horrible South', as one early reviewer of Faulkner called it, developed through the work of Tennessee Williams, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, through the 'Rough South' school that included Cormac McCarthy in the 1960s, and into the present with books such as Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied Sing* (2017). In her 1960 essay 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction', Flannery O'Connor wrote of stories told with 'strange skips and gaps', sudden conjunctions of the 'violent and comic', and odd exaggerations or deliberate use of 'distortion'. She also called the literature of the South 'Christ-haunted', remarking that in the Southern states 'ghosts can be very fierce and instructive.'

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the keening ghosts of the South's slave history are routine, innumerable, and everywhere: 'Not a house in the country ain't packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief.' Jesmyn Ward's characters are latched on to by ghosts needy for acknowledgement, unable to pass on until their story is told. The landscapes of the South, its bayous and swamps, its moss-choked plantation houses fallen into ruin and its all-too-recently segregated cities, are haunted by the unsettled dead.

The Southern Gothic also has a distinct presence in American cinema, which is again divided between mainstream studio productions and their counterpoint, low-budget shock horror. William Faulkner was lured to Hollywood in the 1930s – largely to drink himself into stupor – but the adaptation of his novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) was part of a line of liberal protest films about the South that perhaps most famously included *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and Roger Corman's daring *The Intruder* (1962), whose film crew and actors were nearly lynched during the location shoot in Missouri and Charleston. At the same time, low-budget horrors from entirely outside the studio system, such as *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964), the overt racial politics of George Romero's inaugural mass zombie film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) or the backwoods lunacy of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), were able to speak even more openly about what remained of America's genocidal legacies. Southern Gothic need not be the murderous, in-bred hillbillies of *Deliverance*, where the tangled backwoods of the South swallow northern



Elegy for Moss Land: 1940

Clarence John Laughlin

1. 'Ghost Dance,' Plateau City, Colorado, late 1880s or early 1890s
2. George Catlin, *The Scalp Dance*, 1844
3. Neck-ring used in the Ghost Dance



'How the West Was Won' is a phrase closely associated with the relentless expansion of the American frontier westwards by settlers. The ideology of 'Manifest Destiny' was first expressed by John O'Sullivan in 1845, in an essay called 'Annexation' in which he wrote of 'our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.' O'Sullivan ascribed this divine writ to the vigour of the 'Anglo-Saxon' races of Northern Europe; in his poem 'Westward Ho!' the frontier writer Joachin Miller praised instead 'O bearded stalwart, westmost man, / So tower-like, so Gothic built!'

The concerted push westwards was driven by greater numbers of migrants, pulled by cheap land, mining jobs or the gold and silver rushes that promised instant wealth. The frontier was steadily forced beyond daunting physical boundaries: the Mississippi River, the Alleghany Mountains, the Great Plains and the Rockies, violently displacing the landscapes' indigenous people as it went. The movement West had bloody footprints, and white American masculinity, as Dana Nelson has it, has ever since been 'haunted within...by its own violences towards its others.' In the southwest, the border between the new American states and Mexico had yet to determine its final lines in the sand. The frontier had always been a place of violent dispossession and war, and just as the new republic refused citizenship for slaves it also severely circumscribed the rights of Native Americans.

Most accounts of the American western frontier begin, curiously, with a lecture that announced that it had finally come to an end. At the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner, a young lecturer at the University of Wisconsin, delivered a talk called 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History'. The frontier had been for three centuries, Turner argued, a constantly self-renewing sharp edge where the American had carved out a distinctive identity. He ended his lecture with a paean: 'to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics' – its 'restless, nervous energy', its 'dominant individualism'; yet he had opened in a very different tone, announcing that the 1890 Census had declared the Western frontier formally closed: the journey westward had demonstrably run its course. 1890 was also the last major irruption of Native American resistance through the Ghost Dance movement, an apocalyptic theology meant to reunite the living and the dead, and sweep away the horrors of white settler colonialism.

Turner fixed the mythology of the frontier at exactly the moment it died, and the Westerns that dominated twentieth century popular culture in America were always in





4. Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, c. 1901

a fundamental sense *undead*. Indeed, the American historian Richard White pairs Turner's lecture with the performances of Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' Show at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, where twice a day Bill Cody staged a spectacular fabulation of the West. The show included Indian attacks on prairie emigrants, the Battle of Little Big Horn, Custer's Last Stand and the ceaseless repetition of Cody's own killing and scalping of the Cheyenne warrior Hay-o-Wei, or Yellow Hand. This evocation of the West emphasized the rugged individualism of archetypes like the Rough Rider, the Gunslinger and the Cowboy, as well as the intrinsic violence at the sharp edge of the frontier, using 'real' Cowboys and Indians who had become circus performers. In 1885, the Lakota chief Sitting Bull joined the performance for a few months. In these shows, the West was already a simulation of itself, anticipating the immersive, 'hyper-real' three-dimensional dioramas of American history that so bewildered the European intellectuals Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard when they travelled across America a century later. The Wild West is always already a theme park, as Michael Crichton's film *Westworld* (1973) and the reimagined television series *Westworld* (2016–present) dramatize.

It is a curious element of the ethos of the West that even as it celebrates its status at the apex of every hierarchy it invents, it also broods anxiously on its own collapse. Standing on the beach at Santa Monica in 1976, Baudrillard proclaimed: 'The Western World ends on a shore devoid of all signification, like a journey that loses all meaning when it reaches its end.' That the logic of Western expansion might secretly carry this intrinsic deathliness coiled inside it is something the Frontier Gothic has always been unafraid to speak. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler argued that 'of all the fiction of the West, our own is most deeply influenced by the Gothic.' Violence and the double guilt of slavery and genocide was foundational for the United States, but only the 'cheapjack machinery of the gothic' could articulate this.

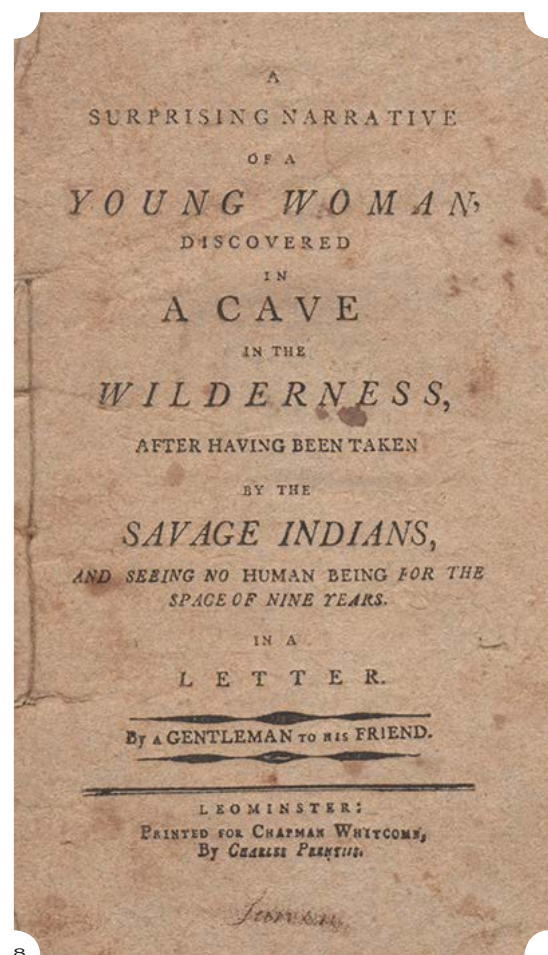
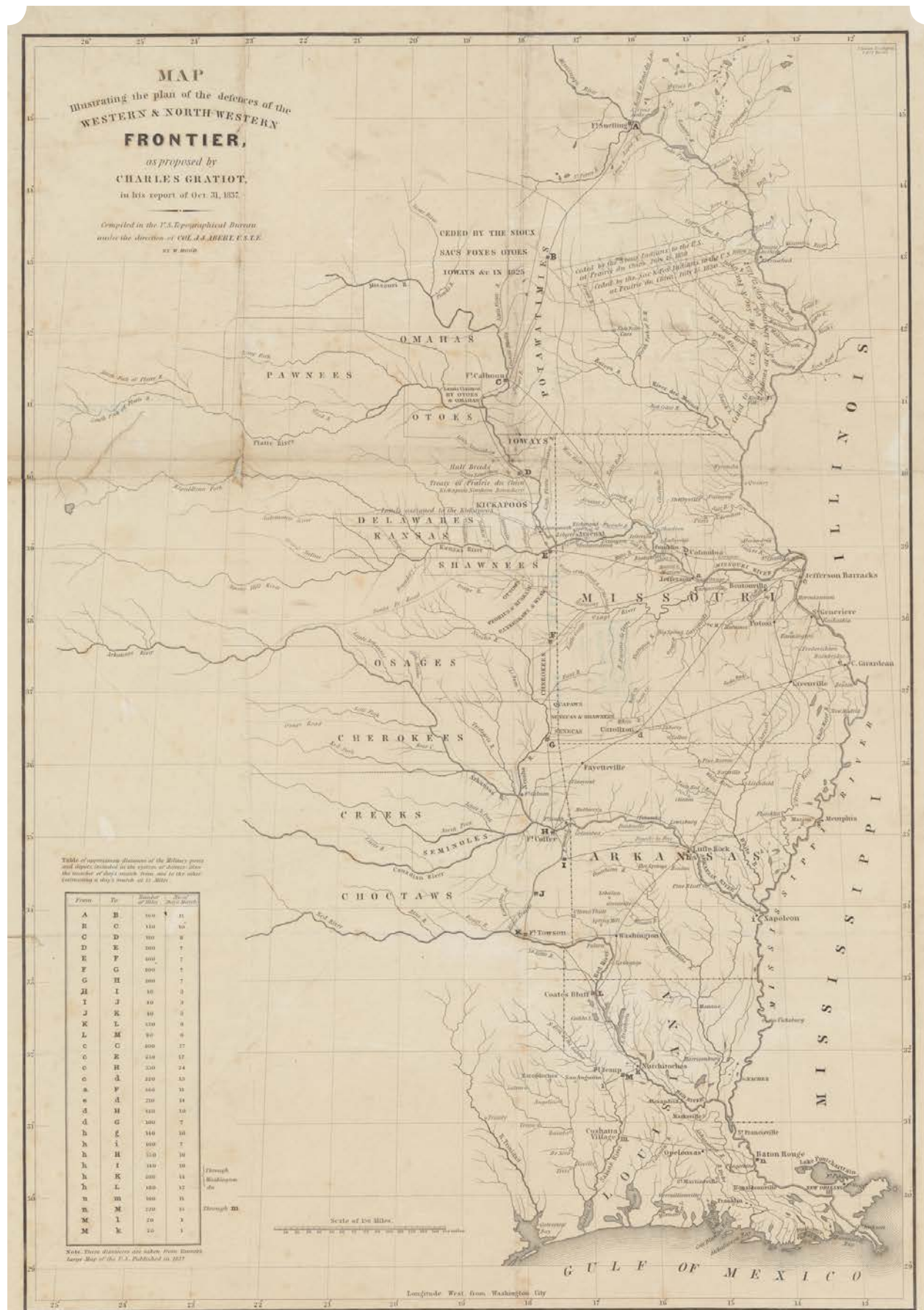
The Frontier Gothic is a distinct strand of this national literature. Its origins lie in the genre of 'Indian Captivity' narratives, which reshape the tropes of the European Gothic to speak to the distinct conditions encountered at the bleeding edge of colonization. If the Gothic has often been deployed to affirm the Manifest Destiny of the movement West by monsterring all others that lie in the way, it has also been a mode in which those who shaped the mythology of the West can find themselves hopelessly and terrifyingly undone. An early Spanish account, *The Florida of the Inca*, published in 1605, told of the capture



...where robot men and women are programmed to serve you for
...ROMANCE
...VIOLENCE
...ANYTHING

MGM Presents "WESTWORLD" Starring YUL BRYNNER RICHARD BENJAMIN
JAMES BROLIN Music by FRED KARLIN Written and Directed by MICHAEL CRICHTON Produced by PAUL N. LAZARUS III
PANAVISION® METROCOLOR

5. *Westworld*, 1973 poster



and prolonged torture of the Spaniard Juan Ortiz. Mary Rowlandson's kidnap in 1676 by Narragansett Indians was published in 1682 as *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. These works set the tone for capture as a movement beyond the settlement into a godless wilderness of extreme violence, torture and menace, survived only by those who understand it as a test of faith in a world comprehended by the Puritans as the 'Devil's Territories'. The trial of faith in Rowlandson's three months of capture was to enter into the condition of the 'heathen', coded by the eating of raw meat simply to survive.

Possibly the first American Gothic bestseller was a narrative – likely fictional – told by 'Abraham Panther' in 1787, with the title *A Surprising Narrative of a Young Woman Discovered in a Cave, after having been taken by the Savage Indians, and Seeing no Human Being for the Space of Nine Years*. This account (8) rehearsed her traumatic capture and her witness to the torture and burning of her husband's body at the stake. The woman escaped and was recaptured; overnight, she took up a hatchet and killed the man, recounting: 'I then cut off his head, and next day having cut him into quarters drew him out of the cave.' The pamphlet was reissued many times, becoming part of the founding mythology of the frontier.

In these latter narratives, the frontier becomes a contact zone: not an exterior encounter between self and other, good and evil, but a confusing, hybrid place where to survive the Westerner must incorporate elements of the other, and in a crucial sense become the 'savage'. 'Going native' is the risk of lighting out just ahead of wherever the frontier falls. What waits there, out West, as it did for the Donner Party (7), who were reduced to starvation cannibalism in the Sierra Nevadas in 1846, is the terror of losing all markers of civility and being subsumed into the savage Other.

- 6. Charles Gratiot, Frontier map, 1837
- 7. 'Starvation Camp.' Stumps of trees cut by the Donner Party in Summit Valley, Placer Co., 1846
- 8. *A Surprising Narrative of a Young Woman Discovered in a Cave, after having been taken by the Savage Indians, and Seeing no Human Being for the Space of Nine Years*, 1787



MONSTERS

SCALE	190
SPLICE	200
THE TENTACLE	222
FORMLESS	232
THE MONSTER WITHIN	242

INTRODUCTION

MONSTERS REAR UP at every edge or limit of the Gothic. They appear in varied and protean forms; they are defined by their ability to shape-shift ceaselessly. Ever since Augustine's *The City of God Against the Pagans* (AD 426), critics have built on his pun that the meaning of *monstrum*, the divine portent or 'monster', brings together *monstrare*, meaning to display or demonstrate, and *monere*, meaning to warn or portend:

And to us the monsters, signs, portents, prodigies, as they are named, ought to demonstrate, ought to signify and portend and prophesy that God is going to do with the bodies of men what he foretold he was able to do, with no difficulty to impede him, with no laws of nature dictating to him.

Monsters show and tell, then, of an awesome power. But they are never just themselves; rather, they are a way of 'writing otherwise' that demands the constant work of interpretation. Even when read against a relatively stable moral or religious universe, monsters might still be contradictory or resistant to single, authoritative interpretation. Since the emergence of the Gothic during eighteenth-century Enlightenment, their range of possible meanings has only multiplied; but however we end up reading them, monsters are always teachable moments about the cultures from which they emerge.

The monster theorist Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has proposed that monsters mark a 'crisis of category'—cultural forms that slide and slither across every boundary that meaningfully organises bodies and societies. They proliferate at the edges of the known world, and dwell ambiguously at what Cohen calls the 'gates of difference', potentially punishing transgression but also, sometimes, rewarding it or provoking it. We might loathe the monster, but (perhaps secretly) desire it at the same time: think of the dashing reprobates from Lucifer and Mephistopheles and the charming Satan himself, all the way to Lord Byron or Count Dracula, or the alien with whom Ripley develops such an oddly loving, maternal relationship over the long sequence of *Alien* films. The shape-shifting monster will always and forever escape our physical and interpretive clutches, like Frankenstein's creature in the Arctic wastes, or Mr Hyde turning that corner up ahead in a dingy London quarter. The vampire, the zombie, the ghost: what best defines them but their revenance, their ability to come

back again and again, always ready to throw new shapes in the inevitable sequel?

The Gothic text is, for the writer and queer theorist Jack Halberstam, a kind of machine that generates endless, proliferating possible interpretations of the monster, so that a monster becomes 'a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body'. This might explain the enduring survival of particular categories of monster or individual monsters: they work not because they mean only one thing, but because they never stop generating new meanings in new contexts. An aristocratic vampire in the salons of Europe in Polidori's 1819 story means something different from the one encountered in Transylvania in 1897, or in New York at the height of the AIDS epidemic, in Puerto Rico and Mexico in the 1990s, or in South Korea or Iran in the twenty-first century. Perhaps, Halberstam suggests, we shouldn't be working to fix down the singular allegorical meaning of every Gothic monster we encounter, but instead understand that 'the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning *itself* runs riot' when it comes to Gothic fictions.

This approach gives us important agency as consumers of the Gothic: the monster compels us to do some interpretive work. At the same time, it can risk falling into a kind of weak, happy-go-lucky pluralism, as when William Tsutsui, for instance, reassures us that the monster of *Godzilla* might be defined by his 'frustrating elusiveness', but that's okay because he 'means everything and nothing, he means what you want him to.' The where and the when, the geography, history and politics of the monster's irruption, really do matter if we want to make meaningful statements about what a creature might demonstrate or portend. Don't monster the monster. Their specific shape is surely crucial for us to grasp.

In the chapters that follow I want to think first about how monsters are defined by their disturbance of scale, and then their freaky ability to splice together impossibly different elements into one signifying body, taking us from Medieval chimerae to modern-day cryptoids. In the last three chapters, I want to track the shape of the Other to which the monster gives shape: the meaning of the tentacle in monstrous imaginary; the horror that comes precisely from the shapelessness of formless mists, fogs and oozes; and finally the monster that takes on exactly our shape – the more to intensify the inherent wrongness or terror of the double, the spitting image of ourselves.



Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster
in *Frankenstein*, 1931



Hanns Lautensack,
David and Goliath, 1551



1

GIGANTISM

Gigantism really returned to popular culture with the out-sized spectacle promised by cinema. The monster movie was turbo-charged not just by Boris Karloff's performance in *Frankenstein* (1931), as his monster towers over the little girl he inadvertently kills, but by the truly gargantuan monster who stalks into view in *King Kong* (1933). Monster movies tend to be a derided form of popular culture. Science fiction critics lament that the BEM (Bug-Eyed Monster) film dragged the genre down in the 1950s, infantilizing it to an empty aesthetics of spectacular destruction. Gigantism was everywhere in this cycle, from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) to *The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958) or the eerie giant ants of *Them!* (1954). In her essay 'The Imagination of the Disaster', Susan Sontag declared that these B-movies offered only 'primitive gratifications', with 'absolutely no social criticism' in sight and, most damningly, that they were 'in complicity with the abhorrent' – the impulse to destroy, an abandonment to the death drive. The Gothic is not entirely comfortable with them either, and indeed, *King Kong* was not at first marketed as a horror film.

King Kong used stop-motion animation for its monster, matte painting its scenes to mix them with live action. The brand new technology of sound was employed to create another Gothic monster from the jungle adventure film, the exotic animal film, the primitive culture documentary and the romance. It was a heady new brew. The giant gorilla Kong is tracked down off the maritime maps to Skull Island, a riot of prehistoric survivals and primitive fetish worship that has its roots in Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World*, which was made into a successful silent film in 1925. *King Kong* becomes enamoured of the sacrificial victim left for him, the scream queen Fay Wray – who in fact screamed so much because the script and plot remained unfinished long into shooting.

Some of the film's perverse scenes openly elide the menace of the gorilla with the racist trope of the sexual appetites of the black man for the white woman – Edgar Wallace's first draft, called *The Beast*, was even more open about this, although the last writer involved, Ruth Rose, toned this down and made the question of where sympathies lie more ambiguous. The memorable finale takes place amid the brash modernity of New York, juxtaposed against the primitive violence of Kong. The monster is first put on humiliating display in slave stocks at Radio City Hall (where the film premiered, adding another layer of thrill for the first audience), and then, once he breaks his bonds, clambers atop the Empire State Building.

King Kong carries all the deep associations of the



2



3

1. Louis Huard, *Giant Skrymir and Thor*, c. 1891
2. *King Kong* film poster, 1933
3. Illustration from Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, 1912
overleaf. *King Kong*, 1933, film still



PYRIGHT MATERIAL FOR REFERENCE ONLY



1



3

1. Gorgo film poster, 1960
2. Gojira film poster, 1954
3. Godzilla film poster, 1956
4. The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms film poster, 1953



2



4

giant with uncontained violence and appetite; but in the end, the curiously stilted movements of the stop-motion Kong, as he is cornered and fatally wounded by the buzzing bi-planes, make the giant an oddly sympathetic monster, hounded to death by a world of hucksters and sensation-seekers. Already, the audience might identify more with the monster than expected, secretly delighting as he chomps down on New York's vacuous high society. Some of these ambiguities were enhanced when Peter Jackson remade the film in 2005, this time with Naomi Watts as a more contemplative scream queen.

King Kong was re-released in 1952, and it was to have a huge influence on the film-makers at Toho Studio in Japan, then in the last year of American occupation after the Second World War. The director of *Gojira* (1954), reframed with new footage and released in America as *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* in 1956, was Ishiro Honda. On repatriation at the end of the war, Honda had passed through the remains of the city of Hiroshima, and had seen the results of the firebombing that had devastated Tokyo. Another crucial context was the American H-bomb testing taking place at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. Notoriously, in March 1954, a test had irradiated the entire crew of the Japanese fishing trawler *Lucky Dragon No. 5*. All of these elements fed directly into the plot of *Gojira*, which is a fusion of 'gorira' and 'kujira', or gorilla and whale, suggesting an impossible, monstrous chimera.

Gojira is a prehistoric sleeping giant awakened from slumber by nuclear testing from under the ocean – a being that can be slotted into a parade of Japanese monsters and water spirits. The giant beast is only glimpsed in the first part of the film, but then spends fifteen uninterrupted minutes stamping on a perfect scale model of central Tokyo, in scenes of destruction apparently cheered on by the first Japanese audiences.

It is common to read *Gojira* as an 'irruptive conscience' into post-war Japan. As Yoshikuni Igarashi argues: 'Monstrous bodies that defy human comprehension were burdened with the mission to represent memories of war.' The conflicting impulses of war guilt and war shame, as both active aggressors and a traumatically defeated and punished nation, flow into *Gojira* – as does a subtle re-assertion of Japanese power. Most of these political resonances were thoroughly excised from the reframed and re-edited American *Godzilla* release, which redirected the action through the eyes of an American protagonist. *Gojira* became a less ambiguous figure in the subsequent Japanese sequels (of which there are well over twenty-five), as the creature becomes a defender of Japan against the persistent

obtrusions of other gigantic creatures – including, in literal translation, Giant Monster of the Sky (Rodan), Giant Space Monster (Dragan), Giant Flying Squirrel Monster (Varan) and the three-headed Winged Membrane Dragon (Ghidora). This breathless sequence makes up the genre of *kaiju eiga*: Japanese monster movies.

There have also been several cycles of *Godzilla* revivals, each of which suggest their own allegorical resonances. *Shin Godzilla* (2016), for instance, contains the required spectacle of the destruction of Tokyo, but the film is really about the sclerotic political and inter-agency bureaucracy that tangles up the government response to the immediate crisis. When it looks like the United States will step in and nuke Tokyo, it is left to a rogue group of Japanese experts who discard hierarchy to save the city from another American nuclear bomb. Reviewers were not slow to read into *Shin Godzilla* a version of the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant, where a tsunami caused by an undersea earthquake overwhelmed its safety systems and caused widespread radiation. This is a context also evoked by the 2014 American remake of *Godzilla* by Gareth Edwards. Perhaps a renewed sense of planetary horror, rather than just the escalating logic of sequels, produces ever more outsize versions: *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019) features nearly every rival giant monster in the back catalogue, and *Godzilla vs. Kong* (2020) brings us neatly full circle.

In cinema, the distinctive heightened emotion of abjection – that horror of the goo that overflows and slimes over the boundaries between what should be inside and outside of the body – commonly exploits this cultural disgust. The gigantic scale of the kraken in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955), one of the classic monster movies animated by Ray Harryhausen, puts it into competition with Godzilla for destroying signature buildings. In this case, the tentacles wrap around the Golden Gate Bridge and pull it into the water. This tentacular sublime can equally be switched with intimate bodily invasion, there the squiddy sex scenes of Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981), in the predatory hunt of a rapidly evolving tentacular alien for a reproductive human partner in the *Species* films (1995–2007), or in the monstrous creatures that overcome their biological engineers in Ridley Scott's *Alien* prequel, *Prometheus* (2012). To take this horror of engulfment to its logical end, in Elliott Goldner's found-footage horror film *The Borderlands* (2013), the investigators of a dark tunnel notice that the walls begin to convulse, ooze acid and constrict, and we are left to realise that they are inside the intestine of a giant unseen monster that has entirely swallowed them.

Why does this kind of monster evoke horror? Freud and his followers had a pretty standard and unsurprising answer: sexual anxiety. In 'Medusa's Head' (1922), he argued that the meaning of the myth of Perseus cutting off the head of the Ancient Greek gorgon, her hair a wriggle of snakes or tentacles, was simple to decode:

To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of the Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something.... It occurs when a boy who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration catches sight of the female genitals.

In compensation for the absence of the penis, the image of the writhing hair multiplies the reassuring presence of the male organ. If the Medusa 'makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone', this is oddly reassuring. Some feminist thinkers, objecting to Freud's construction of woman as lack, have mocked this interpretation. Hélène Cixous wrote in 1976: 'You have only to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.'

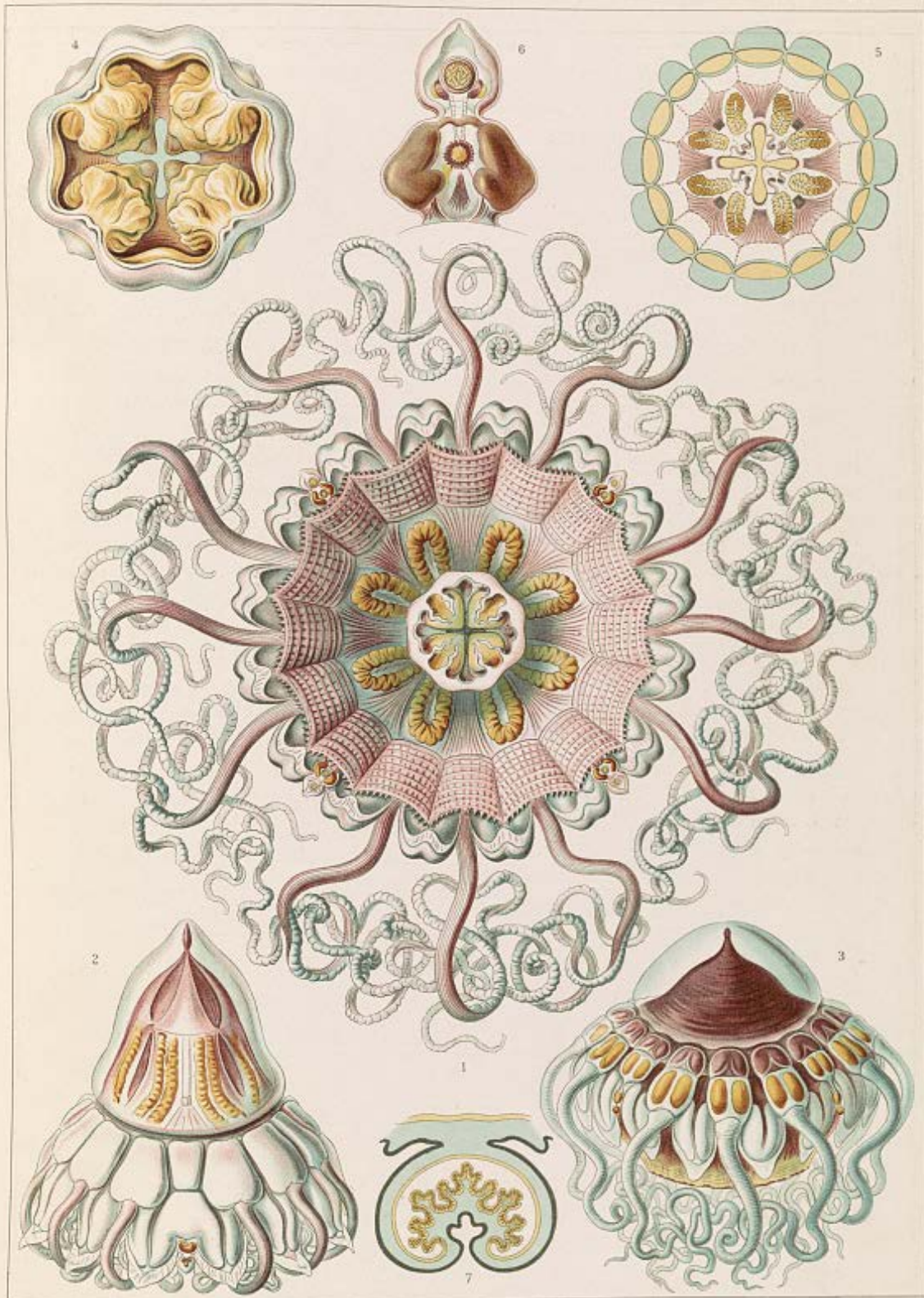
The critic Donna Haraway notes that *tentaculum* means to feel, to try, and that what she calls 'tentacular thinking' might mean to see and feel very differently; to overflow rigid categories and 'spin out loopy tendrils' of

Still from *It Came From Beneath The Sea*, 1955



Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur*.

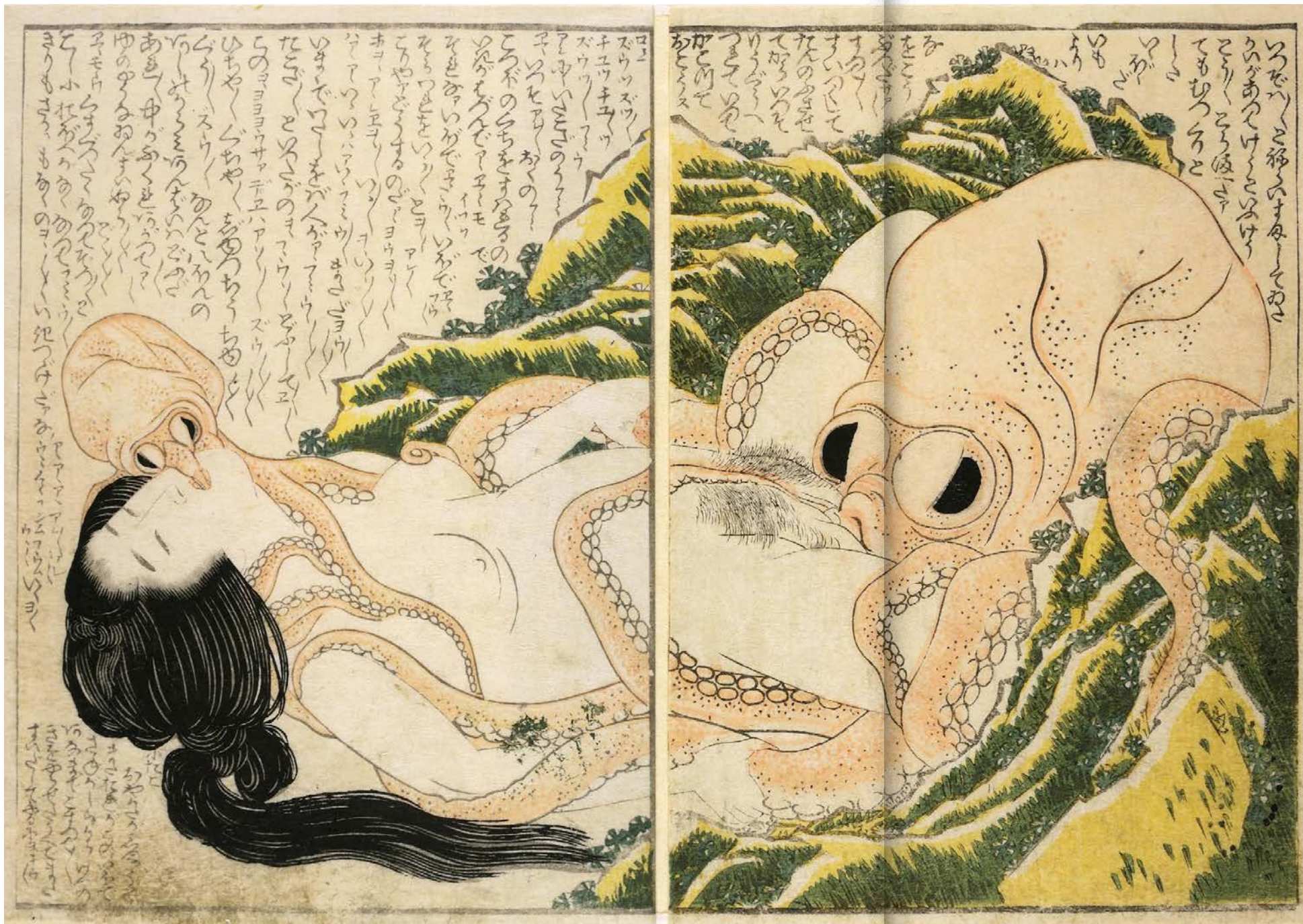
Tafel 38 — *Periphylla*.



Peromedusae. — Taschenquallen.



1. Adolf Giltsch, after Ernst Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur*, Peromedusae., 1907
 2. Taiso Yoshitoshi, *A female abalone diver wrestling with an octopus*, 1870s



Katsushika Hokusai, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, 1814

new ideas. She inverts this monster from threat to promise, and welcomes Medusas, Gorgons, Harpies, and Sirens to a 'bumptious queer family.' The tentacle can signal a dissident identity and sexuality, and this is why it is essential to recent fantasy fictions by women of colour, whether Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-9), Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (2015), or Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (2018).

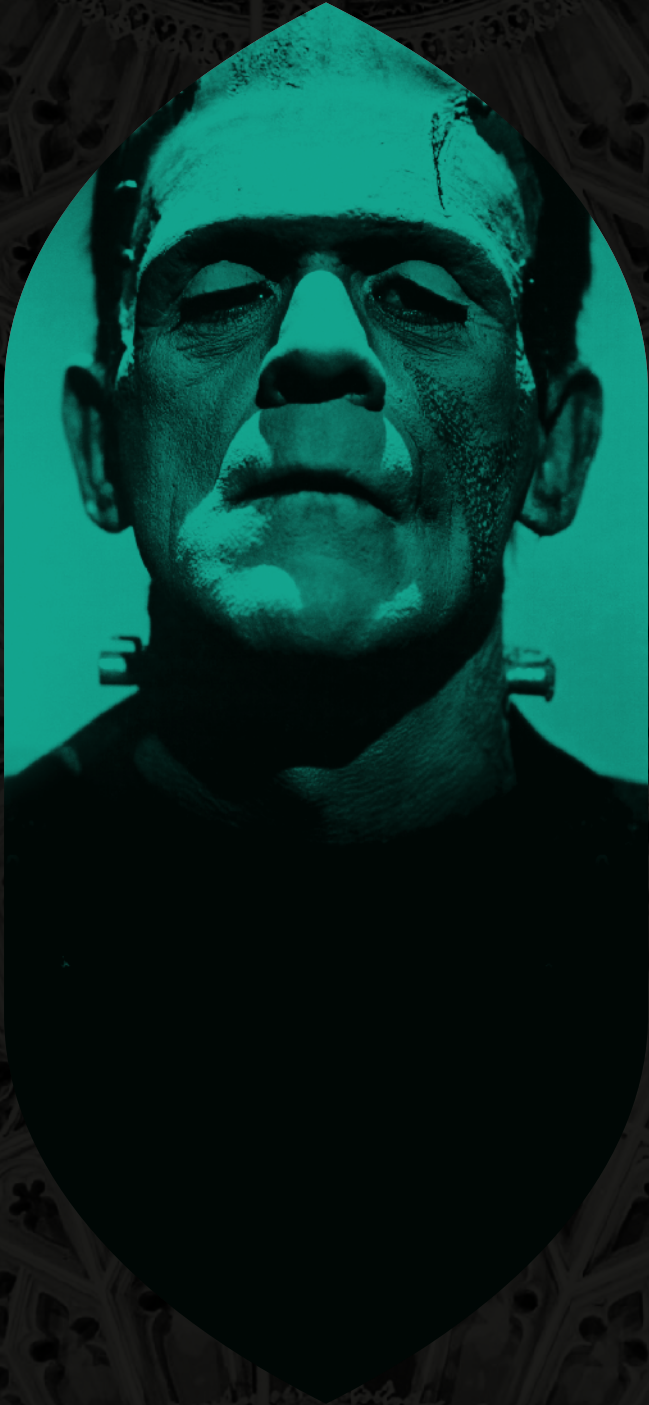
Clearly, there is a strong cross-cultural link between cephalopods and sexual fantasy. A notorious wood-block print by the Japanese artist Hokusai, 'The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife' (1814), shows a woman being pleased by an octopus, head thrown back in ecstatic abandon. The genre of erotic prints in Japan (known as *shunga*) began to filter into Europe through decadent collectors in the nineteenth century, titillated by this previously unknown form. In Japan, it led into a whole subculture of 'tentacle porn' in the 1960s, with its creators citing the mode as a way of circumventing strict censorship laws. In the same decade, the French Surrealist Jean Painlevé released his short film, *The Love Life of the Octopus* (1965), a quirky and distinctly unfrighting investigation of the weird and strange reproductive cycle of the cephalopod. Sex is quite melancholy for the octopus – the female dies soon after tending the eggs to their hatching, and the male rapidly becomes senescent. Still, the sexual imagery associated with octopi is plainly not about castration, and perhaps Freud's ideas about the confused fantasies of sex that children project is a better model to understand this pull of attraction and repulsion. The tentacle sex depicted in *Possession* or in the queer Mexican film *The Untamed* (2016), where sex with an alien is so good it dissolves you, is more likely connected to the use of the octopus in Mycenaean and Greek culture, where it was a symbol of plenitude and good fortune.

China Miéville's tongue-in-cheek (or perhaps that should be radula-in-cheek, the name for the toothy octopus tongue) fantasy novel *Kraken* (2010), like Haraway, refuses the abjection of cephalopods, making the *architeuthis dux*, the giant squid, 'the perfect God': 'It's bugger all like us. Alien.' In *Kraken*, the worshippers of the tentacled god that they liberate from the Natural History Museum in London are only one of a number of competing subcultures who offer rival ends of the world. There is a clue in Miéville's off-the-cuff demotic 'bugger all like us' that might offer a final clue about the prevalence of the tentacular in Gothic horror. The tentacle has become the short-hand emblem for the absolute other, the very limit of human thought. The cephalopod is the very opposite of us, as the philosopher Vilém Flusser proposes in his eccentric study



GOODSCYLD

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



Thames
& Hudson

