The writings covered by the umbrella term “Gothic” are so varied in style, thematic interests, and narrative effects that an overarching definition becomes problematic and even undesirable. The contemporary Gothic, drawing on an already fragmented and heterogenic artistic tradition, is less a genre than a vestigial type of writing that resuscitates older horrors and formulas and filters them through the echo chambers of a modern preoccupation with the social value of transgressive literature. In a century when the Gothic has once again exploded in popularity, and following a period of strong institutionalization of its study in the 1990s and 2000s, establishing some of its key modern manifestations and core concerns becomes a pressing issue. The Gothic may be fruitfully separated from horror, a genre premised on the emotional impact it seeks to have on readers, as a type of literature concerned with the legacy of the past on the present—and, more importantly, with the retrojecting of contemporary anxieties into times considered more barbaric. These have increasingly manifested in neo-Victorian fictions and in stories where settings are haunted by forgotten or repressed events but also by weird fiction, where encounters with beings and substances from unplumbed cosmic depths lead to a comparable temporal discombobulation. The intertextual mosaics of the contemporary Gothic also borrow from and recycle well-known myths and figures such as Dracula or Frankenstein’s monster in order to show their continued relevance or else to adapt their recognizable narratives to the early 21st century. Finally, the Gothic, as a type of literature that is quickly becoming defined by the cultural work it carries out and by its transnational reach, has found in monstrosity, especially in its mediation of alterity, of traumatic national pasts and of the viral nature of the digital age, a fertile ground for the proliferation of new nightmares.

Keywords: Gothic, contemporary literature, post-millennial literature, genre, neo-Victorianism, horror, intertextuality, monstrosity and monsters, the weird

Xavier Aldana Reyes
Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University
My first two books, Fashioning Gothic Bodies (2004) and Contemporary Gothic (2006), explore these themes - ranging from the emphasis on decolletage in late eighteenth-century Gothic novels to how vampires are dressed in the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. My most recent publication is the Routledge Companion to Gothic (2007), which I co-edited with Emma McEvoy of the University of Westminster. I am currently working on THE GOTHIC NOVEL occupies a contradictory place in our culture. It is a pleasure both low and high: its cheap thrills have merited significant scholarly consideration. While subject to a persistent misremembering (Frankenstein was the doctor), the genre has also provided some of the most enduring moments and characters in literary history. These books show how our contemporary moment may be just as “Gothic” as the 19th century of their predecessors. A tendency that coalesced with the 1997 exhibition “Gothic” at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Characterized by an engagement with darkness and horror, contemporary Gothic works take as their starting points gothic music, such as heavy, black, and death metal, gothic novels, and horror movies.