GOTHIC FOR GIRLS


There is only one...
MISTY
8p
EVERY MONDAY
5th August 1978
Australia 30c., New Zealand 30c., South Africa 30c., Malaysia $1.00.

GOTHIC FOR GIRLS

MISTY AND BRITISH COMICS

JULIA ROUND

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For Dana, our Child of the Mists

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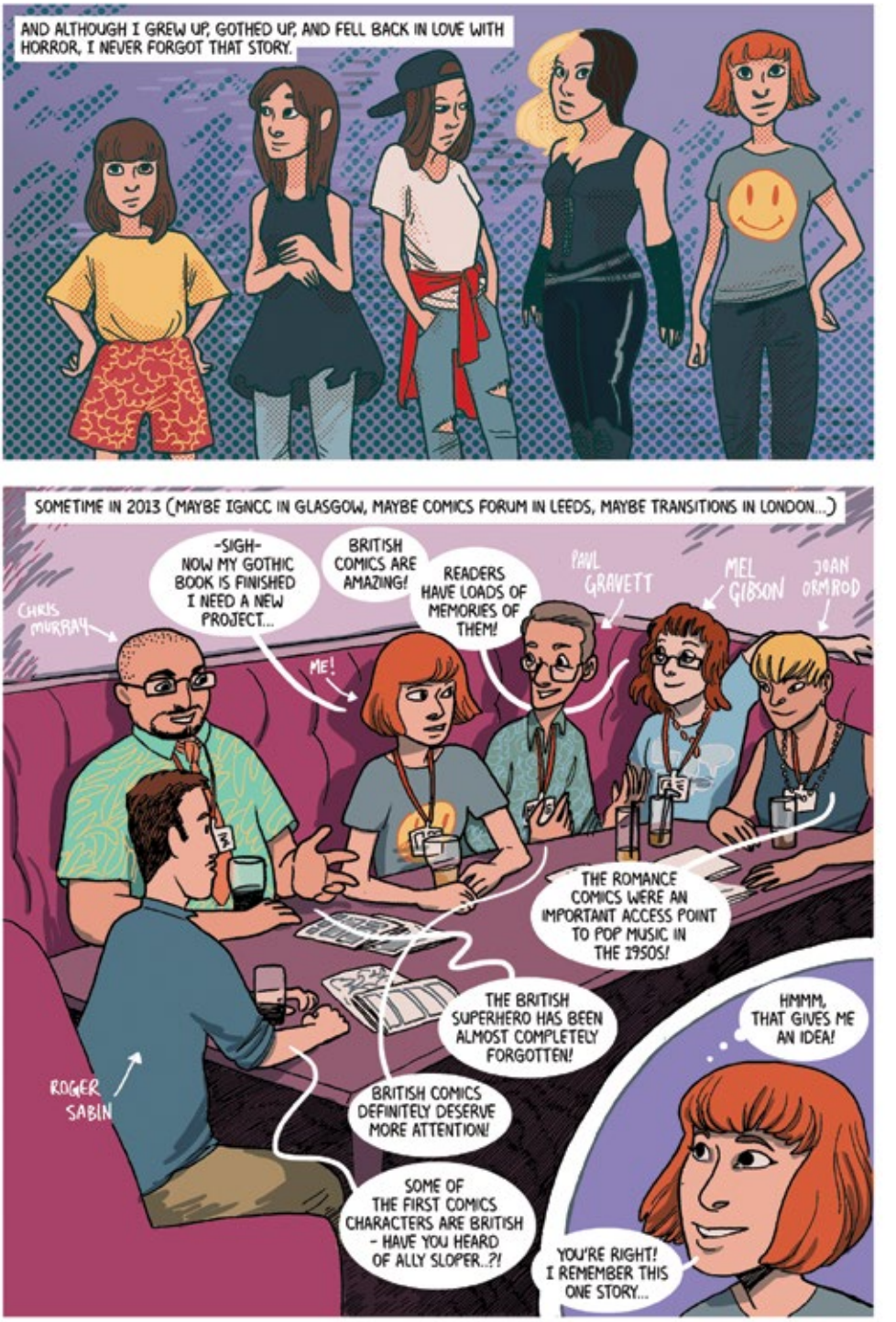
Figure 0.1. "The Haunting of Julia Round." Art by Letty Wilson, written by Julia Round. Produced by Inkpot Studios.


AND WHEN SHE WOKE UP THE NEXT DAY AND LOOKED IN THE MIRROR HER BEAUTIFUL FACE WAS SHATTERED AND WARPED.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY... LIKE THIS?
I WAS STILL SCARED WHEN I WENT TO BED THAT NIGHT.
AND IT BOTHERED ME FOR MONTHS AFTER.
AND MONTHS TURNED INTO YEARS...
1990
1995
2000
2005
TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY... LIKE THIS? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY... LIKE THIS? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY... LIKE THIS? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WAKE UP


AND ALTHOUGH I GREW UP, GOTHED UP, AND FELL BACK IN LOVE WITH HORROR, I NEVER FORGOT THAT STORY.
SOMETIME IN 2013 (MAYBE IGNCC IN GLASGOW, MAYBE COMICS FORUM IN LEEDS, MAYBE TRANSITIONS IN LONDON...)
CHRIS MURRAY
-SIGH- NOW MY GOTHIC BOOK IS FINISHED I NEED A NEW PROJECT...
BRITISH COMICS ARE AMAZING!
READERS HAVE LOADS OF MEMORIES OF THEM!
ME!
PAUL GRAVETT
MEL GIBSON
JOAN ORMROD
ROGER SABIN
THE ROMANCE COMICS WERE AN IMPORTANT ACCESS POINT TO POP MUSIC IN THE 1950S!
THE BRITISH SUPERHERO HAS BEEN ALMOST COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN!
BRITISH COMICS DEFINITELY DESERVE MORE ATTENTION!
SOME OF THE FIRST COMICS CHARACTERS ARE BRITISH - HAVE YOU HEARD OF ALLY SLOPER...?!
HMMM, THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA!
YOU'RE RIGHT! I REMEMBER THIS ONE STORY...


SO MY QUEST BEGAN TO TRACK DOWN THE STORY THAT HAUNTED ME. I STARTED FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT BRITISH GIRLS' COMICS LIKE TAMMY, JINTY, SPELLBOUND AND MISTY.
AND I LOVED MISTY!
I MADE LOTS OF TRIPS TO THE BRITISH LIBRARY TO READ THE WHOLE COLLECTION...
2014
LOTS OF THESE STORIES HAVE GOTHIC THEMES!
SHHH!
2015
THE HOST CHARACTERS IN GIRLS' COMICS ARE REALLY INTERESTING!
SHHHH!
2016
FOUND IT! OMG OMG OMG!
SHHHH!
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY... LIKE THIS?
2017
THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO DISCOVER!
SHHHHH!
THE END
?

FOREWORD

The story of the British girls' comic was, for a long time, a lost history (or perhaps "herstory"). Often innovative, girls' comics were perceived as lesser fare by many, in part because they were aimed at girls, a group whose engagement with popular culture was something that was frequently spoken of disparagingly. All the same, beginning in the 1950s, these genuinely popular weekly anthology comics, some circulating more than 800,000 a week, engaged a number of generations of predominantly female readers before fading away completely in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

This book engages specifically with one of those comics, *Misty*, a title filled with narratives of mystery and terror. In exploring both the popularity of a specific comic and why it ended, Julia Round adds nuance to our understanding of the demise of the genre, which may have come about for a number of reasons—including problematic (one might say monstrous) management practices that failed to value both creators and child audiences, changing media landscapes, and shifting notions of childhood.

Further, and linking comic, genre, and history, one can argue that the disappearance of these comics was particularly horrific given that they were created by some of the most significant comics writers in Britain, working with talented artists from both Britain and Europe. This book is partly dedicated to exploring who created *Misty*, at times an act of detection as well as cooperation with others interested in the field, given that the publishers tended not to reveal the names of artists or writers. Julia has additionally managed to contact numerous people involved in creating the comic, particularly from the editorial team, adding another layer to the analysis through the inclusion of interview material.

Despite the negative views of girls' comics, they offered a huge range of stories, including complex and challenging ones alongside short and simple ones, across many genres. These texts offered various pleasures, including that of being scared, pleasures always enhanced by the wait for the next episode. As always with serial and other fictions, being able to engage with prediction and anticipation drew readers in, and talking about what they had read often

cemented their relationship with both peers and comics culture. In a sense, this book is an extension of such conversations, albeit in an adult and largely academic context.

Since the genre ended, both fans and academics have worked to increase awareness of these texts and their significance. The idea of celebrating popular culture for girls, and exploring what girls have done with the popular culture offered to them, has increasingly appeared in work across a range of academic disciplines and engaged with a number of approaches, from work on audiences and memory, like my own, to textual analysis of narratives on specific themes. This book adds another contribution in analyzing content, production, and audience, and it also aims to think through why comics for young people, especially girls, have been largely, as yet, neglected.

For many readers and researchers, the touchstones within this genre include *Bunty* from DC Thomson, the longest-lived of the titles, best known for the school story "The Four Marys"; *Girl* from Hulton Press, seen as significant, in part, because of its high production values; and *Jackie*, also from DC Thomson, which engaged with the world of popular culture, contributing to an aspirational girls' culture for both teens and younger readers. *Misty* was also one of these touchstone comics, to the extent that a long-running campaign has existed to get the comic back in print, a goal that has recently been realized in the form of several edited collections (including new work inspired by the original comic). Whilst comparatively short-lived, *Misty* has become a rallying point for readers interested in "spooky" stories and horror in comics, as well as innovation in terms of form and narrative.

Misty was not the only comic to create weird narratives, of course. *Spellbound*, *Jinty*, and *Diana*, among others, also engaged with ghost stories, tales of retribution, dreadful twists of fate, magical objects, dark fairy tales, and horrible and mysterious happenings. What *Misty* did that made it distinctive is something that Julia Round explores here by analyzing the comic. The way that the team engaged with readers, both through letter pages and by responding to direct feedback on stories, is given attention, too. Further, the author has developed a complementary set of materials, including a searchable database, which covers stories, themes, and creators. This database acts not only as a companion to this book but also as a stimulus, it is to be hoped, to further research.

In addition to contextualizing *Misty* in the world of comics, the author offers some thoughts that place it in the wider context of horror across film, books and television in the 1970s. The links between this comic and fairy tales and children's books are also considered. Further, this book explores how *Misty* relates to issues within both cultural and literary studies, including, perhaps most significantly, Gothic scholarship and the concept of Gothic for Girls.

Finally, the author also adds a highly personal aspect to this book in the introduction, through her memory of one particular story in the comic, the impact that it had on her as a child, and the way that memory continued into adulthood. One might consider it a story suitable for inclusion in a new *Misty* anthology, perhaps titled "The Haunting of Julia Round."[1] Tracking down this persistent childhood memory provided the impetus for this major piece of research, and in discussing the emotional impact of her rediscovery of this narrative, Julia Round also shows the power of texts from childhood.

—Mel Gibson

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This book has been a labor of love, and I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to many people: Ted Andrews, David Baillie, María Barrera Castell, the Comics UK forum members, Jack Cunningham, Paul Fisher Davies, Anne Digby, Brenda Ellis, Helen Fay, Blas Gallego, David Gesalí, the "Get MISTY Back in Print!" group members, Mel Gibson, Kelvin Gosnell, Lee Grice, John Harnett, Frances Hawkhead, Hans Holm, Shaun Kimber, Catriona Laird, Chris Lillyman, Chris Lloyd, Terry Magee, Daniel McGachey, Jean-Matthieu Méon, Pat Mills, Isidre Monés, Chris Murray, Greg O'Neill, Joan Ormrod, John Packard, Wilf Prigmore, Rebellion Publishing, Keith Richardson, David Roach, Mark "Spreadsheet" Round, my parents Alan and Val Round, Roger Sabin, John Sanders, Jenni Scott, Basil and Sue Sellwood, Ben Smith, Bronwen Thomas and the Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community at Bournemouth University, and Letty Wilson.

GOTHIC FOR GIRLS

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time there was a girl who was not very pretty. She was given a magic mirror and told it would make her beautiful if she followed its instructions correctly. And it worked! But as she got more lovely, she also became mean and vain, and one day she did something wrong with the instructions, and when she woke up the next day and looked in her mirror, her beautiful face was shattered and warped.

How would you like to wake up every day . . . like this?

This was my memory of a story in a comic that I read as a child and have never, ever forgotten. I think I found it at a church hall jumble sale. I would have been eight or nine, as I also remember reading a magazine article the same day about a horror film called *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984, released in the United Kingdom on July 12, 1985).

I read this story and was transfixed by its final panel, with its threatening narration and close-up image of the girl's ruined face—like bad plastic surgery or a melted candle. I didn't sleep that night. I told my parents it was because of the Freddy Krueger article (I don't know why; perhaps I was already learning to think of comics as something childish). But it wasn't. The final image and sentence of that story stayed with me.

Although I threw the comic away and (temporarily) banned myself from anything horror based, I never forgot that story. Years later, I would periodically find myself searching for it online, using phrases such as "mirror girls horror comic story wake up like this" that produced lots of possibilities from multiple titles (*Jinty*, *Girl*, *Spellbound*, *Misty*, and *June* were all contenders) but no results. Then one day a chance conversation about girls' comics and horror reminded me of it again. I still didn't know the title of the comic, but somehow I felt sure it was *Misty*, which I had other memories of from doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms and jumble sales. I was looking for a new direction for my research into Gothic after my first book, so I decided this would be my next project, and made numerous trips to the British Library to read the entire series.

It seemed uncanny but serendipitous that the story was in the last binder I read (which had been unavailable on my first visit). I'd had a few false alarms before, as a surprising number of *Misty* stories dealt with mirrors, and my summary was pretty vague, but as soon as the tale began, I knew this was The One. I felt physically sick and excited as I turned the pages, and it was all there, exactly as I remembered it, even the final narrated line, which I had carried with me almost verbatim for over thirty years. To say this was an emotional moment would be pretty insufficient.

The story is "Mirror . . . Mirror" (art by Isidre Monés, writer unknown), published in *Misty* #37 on October 14, 1978.[1] It marks the starting point for all my research and has been in my head for so long I'm sure I've overemphasized its impact on the average reader. But once I started researching *Misty*, I discovered many other stories that also hit and haunted me. I found so much to explore here: the comic's alluring host with her poetic words, its dramatic tales of horrifying fates and karmic justice, and its incredible artwork and striking layouts. I wanted to tell everybody about this comic that continued to surprise me more than thirty years later, and found myself summarizing *Misty*'s most shudder-making stories to anyone who would listen—a surprising number of people.[2] I discovered an online community of people who felt exactly the same way about our beloved *Misty*, but also realized that, like many girls' comics, it had been almost completely forgotten by the world at large (at least until interest began to rise again with Rebellion's purchase of the copyright). I talked girls' comics with Joan Ormrod and Mel Gibson (to whom I am indebted for her kind foreword to this book) and became certain that *Misty* was an important part of this forgotten genre's history. Thanks to Paul Gravett, I was introduced to the British comics legend Pat Mills and was inspired by his generosity and enthusiasm. Paul also invited me to interview *Misty*'s legendary cover artist Shirley Bellwood, though sadly, owing to her health, I was unable to do so. Pat put me in touch with the artist David Roach, who shared his encyclopedic knowledge of Spanish comics artists with me, and through them both I managed to track down the surviving *Misty* editorial team: Wilf Prigmore, Jack Cunningham, and Ted Andrews, and even some of the Spanish artists who contributed to the comic. Before I knew it, nearly four years had passed, and I had become completely immersed in archival, cultural, and critical research based on *Misty*. Thus what started out as a personal mission to revisit some childhood memories and perhaps write an article or two developing my previous research around Gothic and comics became a fully fledged book project that has easily been the most rewarding and entertaining I have undertaken to date. It has also enabled me to share much more of my supporting research than ever before, as many of my notes are published on my website at www.juliaround.com/misty, which also now includes a searchable database of all

the *Misty* stories, summaries, creators, and origins, along with some of the interviews that I conducted for this project.

This book is the first full-length critical study of any individual British girls' comic. It contains a wealth of primary research taken from archival visits, creator interviews, and online discussions with past readers and reveals a great deal about the hidden history and production practices of the comics industry in this country. Many of the writers, artists, editors, and associates interviewed here have never previously spoken about their work for British comics. Their recollections give a fascinating picture of how the industry operated—one that is in danger of being entirely lost owing to a lack of records and the ephemeral nature of these publications. It has been a joy to be able to identify and name the creators of these stories and to finally credit them for their work. Alongside this, the book offers extensive close analysis of the content and themes of *Misty*. Having a corpus of manageable size has allowed me to perform quantitative and qualitative analysis of the comic's entire content, accurately reflecting and preserving this information for future generations, as for many years the comics themselves were not considered collectible or worth storing. The statistical analysis and close reading I have done also explores *Misty*'s use and manipulation of Gothic themes, and so this book also develops an existing body of Gothic critical theory. By synthesizing and reflecting on this, I offer suggestions for a new and undertheorized subgenre: Gothic for Girls.

Over the last few decades, Gothic themes have gained in prominence within children's literature, forming more than a "publishing trend." Writing in 2001, Reynolds et al. (2001, 1) claim that horror has "spectacularly dominated children's publishing" for the preceding two decades, aimed at readers as young as six or seven. Critics now acknowledge that "the children's Gothic no longer seems marginal" (A. Jackson 2017, 1), and children's literature appears as "a particularly dark tradition" in some texts (Spooner 2017, 184). Alongside this sits a highly popular subgenre of young adult literature dealing with supernatural and Gothic themes. James (2009, 116) points out that "young adult readers, poised between childhood and adulthood, have proven especially receptive to the Gothic's themes of liminality, monstrosity, transgression, romance, and sexuality" (see also M. Smith and Moruzi 2018). Crawford (2014) also traces a historical lineage from early Romance and Gothic to the rise of the paranormal romance in the 1970s and its movement into young adult fiction in the 1990s. As such, my arguments have great potential impact on how we might better understand and create literature and periodicals for children and young adults, particularly when these draw on genres such as horror, mystery, and Gothic.

Before diving into the dark and approaching *Misty* as a Gothic text, it seems important to define some of these terms and offer a working definition of Gothic itself. But straightaway we find difficulties here, as Gothic is constantly

changing to suit its time. Even if we leave aside its origins and focus only on the literary tradition of the past 250 years, how can novels as far apart as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Tom Baker's *The Boy Who Kicked Pigs* (1999) be reconciled under a single label? One is a supernatural melodrama in a medieval vein, whose hyperbolic dialogue and hysterical characters uncover an ancient curse; the other is a blackly humorous parody of a children's tale that ends in mass death and visceral violence. In historical, philosophical, formal, generic, and cultural terms, they are far apart, but both nonetheless fall under the label of "Gothic."

Gothic motifs and themes have also changed as the literary genre developed: Botting (1996) identifies a historical turn from external to internal, where the object of terror is no longer cast out or banished but instead identified within ourselves. While haunted landscapes remain, the urban and suburban now sit in counterpoint to the ancient castle: Count Dracula is at his most terrifying in London, not Transylvania, and suburban madness replaces the archaic setting in American Gothic. Characters and archetypes have also changed: monsters become sympathetic heroes, and Auerbach (1995) traces the many ways in which our vampires have increasingly come to reflect our social concerns and ourselves. Similarly, over the past century, we have seen the zombie change from a living slave to a cannibalistic corpse, and then back again to an infected living person.

Gothic also invites a wide range of different critical approaches from different times and disciplines. Early historical studies and surveys (Summers, Birkhead, Varma) initially gave way to psychoanalytic readings, leading on to textual, aesthetic, structural, cultural, ideological, gendered, (and many more!) models. In the main, rather than considering Gothic as a historically limited genre, many critics today view it as an overarching mode of cultural production, of the type identified in Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Conceiving Gothic in this way places it alongside Frye's other categories of the mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic: as a mode of creation that produces different genres at different times. Punter famously states that "Gothic is the paradigm of all fiction, all textuality" (1998, 1). He also describes Gothic as an "ur form," claiming that, rather than predicting fears and anxieties, it is an adaptable and "capacious vessel into which all kinds of content can be poured" (Punter 2013a, 692). Mighall (1999, xxv) also claims that "Gothic is a process, not an essence; a rhetoric rather than a store of universal symbols," and that established institutions, texts, and ideas have Gothic "thrust upon them." Anne Williams (1995) too sees Gothic as something larger than a literary genre: describing it as a poetic tradition or way of writing. Miles (2002, 4) calls it a "discursive site," and Khair (2014, 223) names it similarly "as a literary discourse . . . defined against discourses of order, reason, balance and moderation." Other

critics go still further: Jones (2009, 2010) argues that Gothic is much more than a genre or mode, instead defining it as a "habitus." The habitus is Bourdieu's concept of a "system of internalised structures [and] schemes of perception" (1984, 86) that categorizes existence and structures the behavior of different social groups. In Jones's parsing, Gothic shapes the way we understand and respond to reality (and literature) through its resonances with our everyday lives and cultural groups.

These elevations of Gothic connect it with Romance, validating critical interest and placing Gothic within a familiar cultural history of revolt against the Enlightenment (Baldick and Mighall 2012). Cultural materialist perspectives also situate Gothic in this manner: as a type of writing or thought that comes in response to social trauma (Punter 1980, 14) or maybe even expresses desires for cataclysm and upheaval (Warwick 2007). Gothic thus takes on different forms at different times (from, say, the Enlightenment to the millennium and Y2K panic). While Baldick and Mighall (2012) attack these definitions as simplistic and tautological, they do serve as a description (if not an analysis) of what Gothic does. It articulates fears and Others and enables responses to them—although the assumption that Gothic reflects rather than creates such demons is problematic.

Baldick and Mighall continue to expose the contradictions in a view of Gothic as subversive or reactionary, pointing out that the same texts can be read as "tamely humanitarian: they credibly encourage respect for women's property rights, and they imply that rape, arbitrary imprisonment, and torture are, on the whole, a bad thing" (2012, 285). Subsequent critics such as Crawford (2014) have exposed the divergence possible in interpretations of Gothic texts. So it seems that Gothic can be read as both rebellious and conservative and can thus also be claimed as ambivalent. *Misty*'s combination of transgressive characters and aspirational heroines, together with magical rewards and extreme punishments, offers a good example of this tension.

Alongside Gothics that are traumatic, sublime, and Romantic, Spooner (2017) also draws attention to popular contemporary forms of Gothic that seem celebratory or playful, arguing that these examples of "happy Gothic" may draw on aesthetic over affect but also carry political weight. In contrast to Jameson's (2000, 289) description of Gothic as a "boring and exhausted paradigm," Spooner (2017, 6) claims its new forms as "Post-Millennial Gothic"—taking in lighthearted and celebratory aspects and positioning Gothic, like postmodernism, as both a continuation and break with the previous century. She argues that Gothic aesthetics (rather than thematics) dominate in contemporary versions, while recognizing that the borders between these categories can be blurred. Buckley (2018, 57) also validates Gothic aesthetic, suggesting that "critics should not so readily dismiss the "trappings" of Gothic fiction in order to plunge into

its psychic depths." Baddeley (2002) similarly privileges the superficial and stylized elements of Gothic by merging these with action, arguing that the contemporary Goth lifestyle is an "aesthetic" that simultaneously constitutes a "lived commentary" on social, political and cultural issues (Martin 2002; Carrington 2011). These numerous Gothics are acknowledged in Sowerby's (2012, 35) statement that "'Gothic' has proved to be a truly protean term."

So Gothic is multiple and mutable, ranging from parody to pain, and can appear as affect, aesthetic, or practice. Identifying it becomes difficult without resorting to a "tiresome catalogue of motifs" (G. Williams 2014, 413) or "Gothic shopping list" (Spooner 2017, 53). The best definitions are those that are flexible enough to be applied across centuries and media, such as Hogle's (2002) "Gothic matrix" (an antiquated space, a hidden secret, a physical or psychological haunting, and an oscillation between reality and the supernatural), or Baldick's combination of "a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (1992, xix). However, in their flexibility, such definitions can also tend toward vagueness. As Baldick and Mighall (2012, 273) also note: "Gothic criticism has done little to define the nature of Gothic except by the broadest kind of negation: the Gothic is cast as the opposite of Enlightenment reason, as it is the opposite of bourgeois literary realism." Piatti-Farnell and Beville (2014, 1) concur that although Gothic has found embodiment in various media and activities, it "has yet to find a coherent definition." Sedgwick (1986, 3) points out that "'Gothic' has not been the most supple or useful of critical adjectives"; Germanà (2013, 13) claims that it "typically resist[s] definition"; and Moers also suggests that the meaning of Gothic "is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear" ([1976] 1978, 90).

Critics who name Gothic a literature of fear are in good company; H. P. Lovecraft opens his discussion in "Supernatural Horror in Literature" by claiming that "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (1927, 41) and that this fear forms the basis for "the weirdly horrible tale" as a literary form. Gross defines Gothic literature as a "literature where fear is the motivating and sustaining emotion" (1989, 1). Punter's landmark critical study of "Gothic fictions" is titled "The Literature of Terror" (1980). But fear is subjective (what scares one may not scare another) and thus vague. My students assure me that *The Castle of Otranto* no longer inspires fear—but it is certainly still a Gothic novel. For this reason, many scholars try to draw divisions between the different forms that fear can take, and the opposing qualities of their definitions often echo the paradoxes already noted within Gothic. James Beattie (1783, 615) first distinguishes horror by its physical effects, as it "make[s] the blood seem to run cold." Ann Radcliffe then famously separates terror and horror, claiming that "terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and

awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (1826, 5). Lovecraft too breaks down fear, dividing it into archaic, pre-psychoanalytic fear and "mere" physical fear or repulsion (1927). Subsequent critics and creators from Devendra Varma (1957) to Stephen King (1981) have continued to explore this famous distinction between terror (the obscure, unseen) and horror (the shown atrocity). Wheatley (2006) looks at literature, television, and radio to suggest that Gothic anthologies are built around two distinct types of tale: the understated ghost story (Radcliffe's "terror") and the effects-driven supernatural horror. Hume (1969) points out that the two types work in opposing ways: terror-Gothic uses the sublime feeling of fear to attract the reader and thus avoids repulsion, whereas horror-Gothic relies on psychological realism to compel the reader, even into repugnance. In general, scholars agree on these categories, although some critics diverge (Twitchell 1985). Townshend (2016, 37) asserts that "terror is the writing of sublimity, horror the literature of sensation," and Wisker (2005, 149) points out that "horror [in contrast to Gothic] is more likely to be or to threaten to be violent and evoke disgust and/or terror." However, both critics also note that the two types cross and blur at points. Wisker (2005, 8) claims that "horror uses many [Gothic] formulae," and Townshend (2016, 25) also notes that both "horror and terror are subsumed under the broader category of the 'Gothic'" in *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).

These definitions of Gothic, horror, and terror all refer primarily to a fearful reaction, but to analyze literature without surveying reader response requires textual criteria. To this end, Heiland (2004) suggests that we should not look for fear exclusively in the reading experience but instead hunt for signs of its textual presence, for example, in the scenarios or characters offered. Both horror and terror seem well suited to the comics medium. Stylized art and staccato panels lend themselves well to the grotesque image or a horrifying reveal. The medium also exploits terror's imaginative potential, as pivotal moments can be obscured or omitted between panels, and the reader is required to recognize, interpret, or even create the story events. *Misty*'s covers and stories exploit both of these types of fear in lexis and image, as I will show.

In my book *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels* (2014a), I argued for a critical approach to comics that drew on three main Gothic themes: haunting, encryption, and excess, at both an aesthetic and affective level. I carry these ideas forward into this book, in which I use the term "Gothic" in its widest sense. Gothic is a mode of creation (both literary and cultural) that draws on fear and is both disturbing and appealing. It is an affective and structural paradox: simultaneously giving us too much information (the *super*natural, the unreal) and too little (the hidden, unseen, unknown). It is built on confrontations between opposing ideas and contains an inner conflict characterized by

ambivalence and uncertainty. It inverts, distorts, and obscures. It is transgressive and seductive. Its common tropes (which are both aesthetic and affective) include temporal or spatial haunting, a reliance on hidden meaning (the crypt), and a sense of excess beyond control. Within Gothic I recognize the distinctions that Radcliffe et al. have drawn between terror (the threatening, obscured, and unknown) and horror (the shocking, grotesque, and obscene). Alongside these terms, I also recognize horror as a cinematic and literary genre that privileges this second type of fear: a genre that shocks, disturbs, and confronts.

I also use associated terms such as "mystery" and "uncanny" in the following discussion. Mystery appears frequently, as this was how comics like *Misty* and *Spellbound* identified themselves. Etymologically from the Latin *mysterium* (a secret thing), mystery refers to literature that centers on a puzzling scenario or has an outcome that is impossible to explain or rationalize. As such it strongly connotes the supernatural and Gothic. Alongside this, I also use the term "uncanny," as mystery often arises from everyday objects or scenarios with weird or offbeat elements. I draw this Gothic notion from the work of Sigmund Freud: *das unheimlich*, the familiar made strange. Ambivalence is another key idea that informs both of these terms: in common usage, ambivalence is the state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something, and has been described as "central to the Gothic" (Edwards 2013, 4).

By exploring the construction and reception of Gothic tropes, themes, and terms in girls' comics like *Misty*, I want to demonstrate the power and impact of Gothic in all its forms and cast some light on its continued presence and appeal. I hope this book gives some sense of the import and value that can be found in girls' stories, and that it conveys some of the intensity and mystery of *Misty*. I've tried to give the uninitiated a sense of what this comic was about, as well as illuminate its themes and ideas for readers already familiar with it, and to use this analysis to reflect on bigger issues within literary and cultural studies, particularly relating to gender and Gothic.

Chapter 1, "The Rise and Fall of British Girls' Comics," provides context and background to the study. It tells the story of *Misty*'s creation and situates it within the wider picture of British girls' comics in the late twentieth century. It draws on archival research and analysis of predecessor titles and also reviews and summarizes the critical work published on the genre to date. Chapter 2, "Anonymous Authors," continues to reveal *Misty*'s hidden history. It explains the weekly process of putting the comic together, giving detailed information on its editorial team and its script fees and practices and identifying a number of the *Misty* writers. In particular, it reflects on the comic's framing and marketing as a "mystery paper" rather than "horror comic" and responds to gendered claims about its creators and contributors. This chapter also includes the previously unseen script for "The Banana King," a Pat Mills story that would become "Red

Knee—White Terror!" (*Misty* #1, with art by John Richardson), and analyzes the script alongside the published version to demonstrate how the *Misty* tales were shaped around mystery and terror rather than outright horror. Chapter 3, "Astonishing Artists," then offers a complementary analysis of *Misty*'s artistic production. It explores the process of designing and printing the comic and identifies the artists who worked on it. In particular, it explains the background to the extensive use of Spanish artists in British comics and the links between the two countries and their comics publishing.

The next two chapters discuss *Misty* more closely. Chapter 4, "Visceral Visuals," explores the comic's artistry and layout in more detail, using close analysis of a randomized sample of ten issues to discuss the dynamic "big visuals" used in its pages. It concludes that *Misty*'s stories consistently play with aesthetic and medium by using dramatic layouts and nonstandard paneling. This is seldom linked to specific narratological moments and so is perhaps best read as reflecting the overall sense that the stories carry: playing with reality and conveying uncontainedness and transgression. Chapter 5, "Shocking Stories," identifies the various types of story included in the comic, noting that there are clear differences between its serials, single stories, and comedy series, and exploring their use of Gothic heroines, cautionary tales, and the whimsical macabre.

Themes of transgression are the subject of chapter 6, "Horror and Gothic in the 1970s," which considers some of the possible influences on *Misty*, drawing links with other comics as well as a wider tradition of horror across multiple media in 1970s Britain. This exploration of the surrounding atmosphere of cultural horror then leads into a discussion of Misty herself in chapter 7, "Our Friend of the Mists." This summarizes the appearance of host characters in British and American comics, contextualizing Misty's role as host and guide. It proceeds to analyze the Gothic language and imagery used in her inside-cover welcomes to each issue and draws attention to key tropes that emerge, including mystery, nature, history, and the body. Gothic themes such as these are then carried forward into chapter 8, which sets out a typology of the different *Misty* stories. This "Taxonomy of Terror" discusses the typical themes of the *Misty* tales, using qualitative and quantitative research into the entire corpus of 443 stories.[3] This chapter reflects on various claims about *Misty*'s content and applies Pat Mills's girls' comics formulas to its stories. It then suggests an alternative approach developed from my analysis of plot summaries to produce an inductive list of common plot tropes (such as external magical, internal power, backfiring actions, and more). It relates these tropes to established Gothic themes and concludes that although the fare of Misty was not as consistently negative as readers might remember, it was perhaps more shocking due to inconsistency with moral "rules."

Chapter 9, "Terror, Horror, and Female Gothic," draws on the previous chapter and the earlier discussion to explore how terror and horror are used in *Misty*, focusing on its covers, visuals, and story content. These theoretical ideas are then developed further with reference to the Female Gothic, a contested term with variable meaning. The chapter summarizes the evolution of Female Gothic scholarship and arrives at a working definition. It notes the Female Gothic's focus on the problems of female experience and use of feminine or domestic symbols, and its simultaneous mobilization of rebellion/transgression and morality/conservatism. Chapter 10, "Deep Cuts," then examines the presence of Female Gothic concepts and identity positions in *Misty*. It focuses on the abject, the grotesque, and the uncanny and discusses the ways in which they are informed by transgression and transformation. It argues that *Misty*'s use of the supernatural often twists these themes into metaphors for the experiences of a female teenage audience: for example, through grotesque bodies, uncontrolled growth, and the exclusion of male characters. It demonstrates that the *Misty* serials in particular are often set in an uncanny atmosphere of mystery and provide a space for uncertainties about family figures and patriarchal authority to be explored. Outcomes are uncertain, and the options available to the protagonists frequently comment on the limitations placed on women. Chapter 11, "Surface Reflections," then examines the use of Gothic symbols, settings, and archetypes in the context of gender. It pays particular attention to the use of the double, the Other, and associated symbols such as mirrors and masks, arguing that these devices are used to explore the limits of female identity and to interrogate issues of control and change. It also analyzes the settings of the *Misty* stories, demonstrating that they often contain an intrusion of the past into the present, creating the "Gothic cusp," which manifests as an uncanny feeling of dislocation. The chapter concludes by exploring the treatment of Gothic archetypes (focusing particularly on witches, vampires, and ghosts) and reveals that such characters appear less than might be expected, and are frequently handled subversively or sympathetically.

Chapter 12, "Gothic for Girls," then uses these analyses to construct the conventions of this subgenre and reflect on its development and position within children's literature. It surveys existing work on childhood and Gothic, with a particular focus on the fairy tale and the cautionary tale as subgenres of children's literature. It argues that *Misty* combines Female Gothic tropes with fairy-tale markers to create stories that bring together adult and child concerns. The chapter concludes by relating *Misty* to some contemporary examples of dark fairy tales and offering a working definition of Gothic for Girls. Elements of this definition include an isolated or trapped female protagonist in an abstract world that juxtaposes the mundane and supernatural, a narrative awakening to magical potential that is often driven by fear and particularly terror, the use

of feminine symbols and fairy-tale sins as catalysts, and the weight placed on personal responsibility and self-control or self-acceptance.

The book concludes by extending these ideas to readers, as chapter 13 then explores the cry of "Make *Misty* for Me" by examining the comic's letters page, which reveals an active, empowered, and diverse audience. Few critics have analyzed comics letters pages in any depth, and this chapter discusses what self-image the "Write to Misty" page constructs for the comic and its readers. It frames its findings with scholarship on female audiences and their periodical publications and uses this work to reflect on their consistency with the dominant discourses of Gothic and horror, the reputation and readership of British girls' comics, and the uses made of comics letters pages more generally. Finally, the comic's demise and Misty's dwindling appearances in *Tammy* are the focus of chapter 14, "Leaving These Misty Isles," which considers the material produced after the comic's original run ended and the memories of its readers. It discusses the possible reasons for the comic's termination and looks more closely at the process of merging *Misty* into *Tammy*, demonstrating how Misty's role was significantly altered and weakened. It examines the material included in the annuals and reprints and summarizes the postmillennial reemergence of *Misty* in fan websites, tribute publications, and reprinted and new material from Egmont and Rebellion. My concluding remarks ("Reflections") then expand on the significance of my definition of Gothic for Girls and consider what *Misty* can tell us about current approaches to critical theory, gender studies, and comics studies.

Researching and writing this book have been a peculiarly Gothic process of exploring, uncovering, and decrypting. I can't imagine that anyone else will ever enjoy it as much as I have, but if (in traditional fairy-tale style) I had three wishes, I know what they would be. First, that the book provides useful new material for readers already interested in the lost history of British girls' comics. Second, that it might introduce some new readers to this disregarded genre—and maybe even to the joys of comics more generally. And third, that it helps to increase the visibility of an often-marginalized audience and develop our understanding of the range and complexity of Gothic literature.

Now settle down to read with me, and I hope that these shudder-making speculations will touch you with the terror that can come from the turn of a page.

Your friend,

Julia