

Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels

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Round's Preface identifies the specific audience for her study as 'any scholar with an interest in comics or Gothic who wants to find their way into the other' (5), an observation that reveals her awareness that her book will appeal to a niche audience. It also reveals that she wrote this elegant little book – 232 pages of discussion and black and white illustrations from comics, plus a 14-page bibliography of primary documents as well as theoretical and historical commentary – for scholars rather than for people with a casual interest in comics, Gothic, or a combination of the two. While *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels* could be assigned to advanced undergraduates, it is more appropriate for graduate students who already have the critical and historical apparatus to appreciate Round's discussion. For advanced students of either comics or the Gothic, Round's book should be – as David Punter's Foreword promises – 'a most exciting read' (4). Perhaps more important for some, it is also most informative as well.

Recipient of the 2015 Inge Award for Comics Scholarship (presented to the best paper in the Comics and Comic Art Area of the PCA), Round has published and presented internationally on the Gothic and graphic novels during the past ten years. In addition to teaching in the Media School at Bournemouth University, she co-edits the academic journal *Studies in Comics* and co-organizes the Annual International Conference of Graphic Novels and Comics. She is thus a well-respected expert in the field, and she writes commandingly about them.

Depending on what readers expect in a book like this one, I can say truthfully that Round is more insightful writing about comics. While the chapters on the Gothic demonstrate her understanding of the field and her ability to integrate theory with primary examples, the book reveals that her heart belongs to graphic novels.

Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels is laid out to introduce readers who are familiar with only one field to the other (I've worked with the Gothic for 50 years, but the scholarly and systematic study of graphic novels is new to me, and Round provides an excellent

introduction to the field). She divides her book into three parts, the first part focusing one chapter on the historical development of the Gothic and another on the history of British and American comics. Each chapter is replete with specific examples. ‘A Brief History of Gothic’ discusses familiar examples like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) but also introduces readers to less familiar examples including Count Jan Potocki’s *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1966) and Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000) while ‘A Brief History of British and American Comics and Criticism’ points to nineteenth-century comics, such as *Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday* (1884) and ‘Yellow Kid’ (1895-8) as well as contemporary comics like *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and *Hellblazer* (1993-2003). Round also provides an overview of the criticism that ‘developed alongside the texts themselves’ (50). Featuring works such as Ian Gordon’s *Comics Strips and Consumer Culture 1890 – 1946* (1998), Martin Barker’s *Comics, Ideology, Power and the Critics* (1989), and Richard Reynolds’s *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (1994), she thus introduces readers to a variety of critical approaches, including cultural, historical and ideological readings; genre studies, and narratology. Round’s inclusion of numerous illustrations from the comics and graphic novels she discusses reveals her thorough knowledge of both theory and criticism.

The second part hones in on comics and applies critical theory to create a rhetoric by which readers can understand Gothic comics. The discussion is followed by five case studies of Gothic comics: ‘The Game’ (1969), ‘House of Secrets Promo’ (1969), the Prequel to *iZombie #1* (2010), ‘Sleep of the Just’ (1988), and *The New Deadwardians* (2010). Round’s discussion of ‘The Game’ introduces readers to the way Neal Adams uses page design to focus on Gothic mystery while her examination of ‘House of Secrets Promo’ features Joe Orland’s use of circular panels and direct address of the reader. The final three case studies go into more detail. Round’s discussion of the Prequel to *iZombie #1* analyses narration, visual components, and shifts in perspective to enhance suspense and mystery while her examination of the justifiably respected ‘Sleep of the Just’ (Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg) looks at narration, panel design, character development, and reader response. Finally, her exploration of all eight issues of *The New Deadwardians* by Dan Abnett and I.N.J. Culbard takes into account page layout, point of view, and characterization. Having just taught *The New Deadwardians* during Spring 2016, I was impressed by her intelligent discussion of this series though a bit disappointed that McFarland did not include any coloured illustrations.

The third part focuses on culture and content and includes chapters that compare Goth and comics' culture, as well as a chapter on the vampire and another on the zombie. Readers interested in other Gothic figures may be disappointed, but Round obviously tried to keep her study to a manageable length. Her concluding reflections observe accurately that 'further research into the intersections of gothic and comics will be forthcoming' (229). Mentioning several subjects, including 'the apocalypse, the double, the Other' as well as 'archetypes such as the heroine, witches and warlocks' reveals her awareness that her book is not complete. It is, however, an awfully good beginning.