

## Exploring 'Gothic Tourism': A new form of urban tourism?

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The concept of 'Gothic tourism' has recently been proposed within the discipline of English Literature. Such tourism is claimed to be a distinct form of special interest tourism grounded in familiarity with the Gothic, distinctive aesthetics, and experiences of frights and scares. It is increasingly common in towns and cities around the world. This paper examines and critiques the concept of Gothic tourism, and considers its similarities with existing forms of urban tourism.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** This is a conceptual paper and no empirical data is presented.

**Findings:** Gothic tourism is not as clearly differentiated from other forms of tourism as has been claimed. In particular Gothic tourism can be conceptualised as a particular form of 'lighter' dark tourism, but it can also be considered as a form of literary tourism. A conceptual model is presented which places Gothic tourism as the nexus of dark and literary tourism.

**Research limitations:** This study is a conceptual exploration of Gothic tourism. Further empirical research is required to test the ideas presented in this paper at established Gothic tourism attractions.

**Originality:** This study examines the recently-proposed (but little-researched) concept of Gothic tourism and considers its relationships with other forms of special interest tourism. It also illustrates the broader issue of how typologies of special interest tourism do not necessarily correspond with the motives and experiences of tourists themselves, or of the providers of tourist experiences.

**Keywords:** Gothic tourism, dark tourism, heritage tourism, literary tourism

## Introduction

This paper examines 'Gothic tourism', a recently proposed form of special interest tourism. Gothic is a term with a range of meanings, but as used in this paper it refers to a particular form (or 'mode') of literature (Hughes, 2013) which developed in the 18th century. Gothic novels are characterised by a focus on horror and the supernatural (Townshend, 2014) and rely on settings, atmosphere, characters and events to stimulate emotions such as fear, terror, horror and disgust (Botting, 2017). More recently this form of Gothic has moved beyond literature to embrace cinema and many other forms of popular culture (Mandelartz, 2016; Botting, 2017; Spooner, 2017).

There has long been a link between the Gothic and tourism. Recently, however, Emma McEvoy (a scholar with a background in English Literature) has proposed that Gothic tourism represents a distinct but frequently unrecognised form of tourism in the UK and elsewhere (McEvoy, 2012, 2014, 2016). Such tourism involves a range of sites which allude to the Gothic aesthetic, or which offer experiences of fear, thrills and horror. Examples include ghost tours, haunted buildings, and visitor attractions centred on suffering and torture. Unlike earlier tourist interest in the Gothic, contemporary Gothic tourism is an increasingly urban phenomenon and it is becoming an important part of the tourism offer in cities around the world.

The aim of this paper is to examine and evaluate McEvoy's arguments about Gothic tourism, particularly the claim that Gothic tourism is a distinctive (if largely unrecognised) new form of urban tourism. The paper begins by briefly reviewing the broader relationship between the Gothic and tourism. It then moves on to consider McEvoy's presentation of contemporary Gothic tourism, and examines and critiques the distinctive characteristics of such tourism. It then considers in more detail the claim that Gothic tourism is clearly distinct from other forms of contemporary urban tourism by examining the overlaps between Gothic tourism, dark tourism, and literary tourism. The paper argues that McEvoy's conceptualisation is overly broad so that it is difficult to clearly distinguish Gothic tourism from other forms of contemporary tourism. The paper concludes by proposing an alternative conceptual model which situates Gothic tourism as a particular form of (urban) heritage tourism that stands as the nexus of dark tourism and literary tourism.

## The Gothic and Tourism

There has long been an association between the Gothic and tourism (Townshend, 2014). Since the earliest days of the Gothic novel, travel to and within unfamiliar places has been a recurring theme. For example, in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) the heroine travels – as a tourist - through southern France with her father, while in Radcliffe's other novels - such as *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Italian* (1797) - it is an English tourist who encounters the documents through which the main story is narrated (Mighall, 1999).

Hughes (2003) uses the term "tourist Gothic" to refer to travel to unfamiliar places within Gothic novels. This involves leaving behind the safety of the familiar, and entering a place where the tourist "finds themselves disoriented by the environment" and in a destination which "provides little comfort: customs are outdated or unfamiliar, moralities different, religious practices seemingly arcane or alien" (Hughes, 2003, p.242). Perhaps the best example is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which travel and tourism are central (if sometimes overlooked) themes of the novel (Light, 2017a). In the 20th century tourist Gothic took a new direction in which the unfamiliar and uncanny are encountered closer to home (Hughes 2003), including in urban areas (Ridenhour, 2013). A new genre of 'urban Gothic' literature developed, firstly in America (Luck, 2013), but also in Victorian England (Mighall, 2013). The Gothic moved from the rural to the city, focusing on slum settings, which evoked the same anxieties for readers (Mighall, 2013), portraying crime, disease and depravity (Luck, 2013).

The popularity of the Gothic novel also stimulated distinct practices of travel (Townsend, 2014; Carr, 2016), thereby establishing particular places as tourist 'sights'. For example, ruins – particularly ruined castles – featured prominently in early Gothic literature: indeed ruins were “foundational’ to the establishment of the Gothic imagination as a distinctive and recognisable literary mode” (Townsend, 2014, p.377-8). Ruins were already established places to visit among enthusiasts of the Sublime, but they gained a wider popularity with the rise of the Gothic novel. Furthermore, some of the most popular Gothic novels have stimulated distinct forms of travel, one example of a broader phenomenon known as literary tourism. For example, since the 19th century Haworth has attracted visitors in search of the places and settings which inspired *Wuthering Heights* (Barnard, 2002). Similarly, from the 1960s onwards tourists have been drawn to Transylvania in search of the landscapes and buildings – especially Castle Dracula – portrayed in *Dracula* (Light, 2012).

### **A New Conceptualisation of Gothic Tourism**

In recent years Emma McEvoy has focused on the contemporary relationship between the Gothic and tourism in a series of publications (McEvoy 2012, 2014, 2016). She argues that ‘Gothic tourism’ can be identified as a distinct form (or subset) of contemporary tourism (McEvoy, 2014, 2016): indeed she argues that “England is awash with Gothic tourism” (2016, p.5). She defines Gothic tourism as “the act of visiting, for the purposes of leisure, a location that is presented in terms of the Gothic” (*ibid*, p.3). Such tourism includes visiting places associated with iconic Gothic novels such as Dracula tourism which unfolds in both Transylvania and Whitby (Light, 2012; Spooner, 2017). However, McEvoy’s definition of Gothic tourism extends beyond places associated with fiction to embrace sites which evoke the Gothic aesthetic in their presentation, or which are more broadly centred on experiences said to be ‘Gothic’ (such as scares, thrills and frights). Such tourism includes ghost/paranormal tourism (see also Inglis and Holmes, 2003; Hanks 2015; Pharino et al., 2018); haunted houses and castles; former prisons; attractions which present visitors with displays of suffering and torture (such as Madame Tussauds, the ‘Dungeon’ attractions, or the London Bridge Experience); scare attractions (see Hoedt, 2009); and festivals such as the twice-yearly Whitby Gothic weekends in the UK (see Mandelartz, 2016; Spooner, 2017).

Furthermore, Gothic tourism in McEvoy’s formulation is an increasingly urban phenomenon and she argues that it is grounded in the horrors and nightmares of the city (McEvoy, 2012, 2014). Consequently, the Gothic is a growing component of the contemporary urban tourism offer: Townsend (2014) claims that few towns or cities in Britain lack Gothic tourism sites. For example, 38 towns and cities in the UK offer ghost walks (Hanks, 2015). In some cases (such as the Dungeon attractions) Gothic tourism is centred upon particular types of urban visitor attractions which offer distinct experiences for their visitors. In other cases (such as walking tours), it involves the appropriation of urban landscapes and their reinscription through the lens of the Gothic. Furthermore, Gothic tourism is not confined to the UK, but is an increasingly international phenomenon. For example, many towns and cities in the English-speaking world (such as Dublin, Venice, Prague, New York, New Orleans and San Francisco) offer ghost walks. Similarly, haunted houses and horror-themed waxwork exhibits can be found in many cities (see Bristow and Keenan, 2018). While the ‘Dungeon’ attractions have their origins in the UK (where there are now six), they are an increasingly international phenomenon with examples in Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, San Francisco and Shanghai. It is apparent that some towns and cities are increasingly highlighting experiences identified by McEvoy (2016) as Gothic tourism in their place promotion, although rarely using the term ‘Gothic’ to do so (see Inglis and Holmes, 2003; Garcia, 2012; Mia et al. 2013; Heidelberg, 2015). More broadly, literary connections have long been used in the creation of (urban) place identities (Prentice 1994; Hoppen et al. 2014; Agarwal, 2017).

Central to McEvoy’s argument is that Gothic tourism is a clearly-defined niche that is distinct from other forms of tourism. She argues that Gothic tourism is “inherently different from other modes of tourism in a number of ways...it is characterized by very particular different attitudes to place, to affect, to the question of genre, and to the phenomenon of performance” (McEvoy 2016, p.6). She identifies a number of defining characteristics of Gothic tourism. First, it goes without saying that Gothic tourism is “intimately connected with Gothic narrative, its associated tropes, discourses and conventions” (*ibid*, p.5). This underpins the

theming for Gothic attractions, providing the setting, characters, actions, and a story to link these elements (Frochot and Batat, 2013). The setting provides the atmosphere of gloom and mystery (Botting, 2017), and ranges from old ruinous buildings, such as castles and monasteries, to purpose-built attractions which share this aesthetic, such as Madame Tussauds in London with its Chamber of Horrors, described as a “mocked-up Gothic space, small, dark, enclosed and crypt-like” (McEvoy, 2016, p.54).

Second, Gothic tourism is characterised by particular types of experiences for visitors. McEvoy (2016, p.203) argues that “for more than 200 years, visitors have gone to Gothic tourist attractions in order to experience a gamut of sensations and emotions associated with the Gothic aesthetic – from curiosity, fear and wonder to horror, disgust, and decentredness”. The Gothic aesthetic is used to provoke “violent emotions” as people encounter the ‘other’ (Khair, 2009, p.86). As such Gothic tourism is about stimulating affect and emotion (McEvoy, 2016) rather than learning and understanding; furthermore, these experiences are grounded in ‘negative’ emotions such as fear, terror, horror and disgust (Botting, 2017). Gothic tourism therefore offers experiences of the uncanny, the ineffable, the spooky and the terrifying. To induce these emotional responses, an important element is the setting which is characterised by uncertainty and obscurity and heightened ambiguity (Botting, 2017). The visitor must be transported to the ‘other’ world, away from safety and security where darkness pervades (ibid).

Third, performance is central to Gothic tourism (McEvoy, 2014): it is “immersive and theatricalized” (McEvoy, 2016, p.201), with a strong emphasis on live performances which are carefully stage-managed by employees and interpreters. These provide opportunities for tourists to suspend disbelief and immerse themselves in a particular imaginative world. For example, the presentations in the London Dungeon – which McEvoy (2014, 2016) identifies as an exemplar of Gothic tourism - features live shows which recreate scenes from London’s history in which the actor’s narration is intensified by additional visual effects, sounds, smells and moving furniture. For example, the show about the Great Fire of London includes computer-generated images (as seen through the windows) of London burning; the sounds of a fire crackling; smoke effects; and heat (with flickering red lights) underneath the floorboards. Furthermore, these are multi-sensory embodied experiences: indeed McEvoy (2014, 2016) argues that the focus on the tourist’s body is an important characteristic of Gothic tourism. Again, the London Dungeon illustrates this well: the attraction uses a range of techniques such as strobe lights; thunder crashes, knocking doors and a range of other noises; smells; air sprays and water jets; heat; moving floors; and tipping chairs. Visitors not only immerse themselves in a themed environment, but also in a ‘story world’ (Brooks, 2003). For this reason, Gothic tourism makes no claims to authenticity: instead, the only thing that is authentic is the “audience/spectator contract” (McEvoy, 2014, p.484).

Fourth, Gothic tourism is a social and communal experience (McEvoy, 2014), centred on ludic experiences of thrills and frights that are shared with other people. Consequently, McEvoy (2016, p.203) contends that “fun and partying” are also core components of the Gothic tourism experience. In this sense, Gothic tourism overlaps with the ‘happy Gothic’ identified by Spooner (2017) but can also be identified as an illustration of “playful consumption” (Kolar, 2017, p.1325). In this context, sites of Gothic tourism (and indeed other forms of tourism) create the possibility for moments of *communitas*: strong but short-lived bonds between strangers who are sharing the same experience (Turner, 1969). In Gothic tourism such bonds are based on shared enjoyment of being scared (see Hoedt, 2009; Bristow, 2020).

Fifth, Gothic tourism is founded on prior knowledge of the Gothic. McEvoy argues that it “relies on a community of taste...It plays to those already in the know, those who are possessed of knowledge – of a specific body of texts, their conventions, narratives and tropes” (McEvoy, 2016, p.201). In other words, visitors need to be familiar with the Gothic genre in order to understand the interplay between the attraction and Gothic texts and aesthetics. Consequently, Gothic tourism “demands of its visitors a complex intertextual literacy” (McEvoy 2016, p.201-2). This prior knowledge and familiarity with the Gothic provides “textual lenses through which to perceive and respond” (Townshend, 2014, p.378) but, without this knowledge, visitors may not be drawn into the other world and experience the gamut of sensations offered.

## Gothic Tourism Considered

Gothic tourism is an intriguing concept. There is little doubt that places associated with iconic Gothic novels (and those which use presentation aesthetics derived from the Gothic) are popular with visitors. More broadly, it is clear that tourism experiences based on thrills and scares are increasingly popular and commonplace (Hoedt, 2009; Bristow, 2020). However, McEvoy's conceptualisation of Gothic tourism raises a number of questions, both about how such tourism is defined, and the ways in which it differs from other forms of tourism.

First, it is not clear if Gothic tourism is a conceptualisation of a particular approach to the supply (or provision) of tourism experiences or a distinct type of tourism demand or motivation. McEvoy defines it as "the act of visiting" which suggests that Gothic tourism is about the motivations and experiences of visitors. However, her main focus is to identify and interpret particular approaches to the supply of tourist experiences. She identifies some of the characteristics of these experiences (they are immersive, theatricalised, embodied, and communal) but says little about visitor motivations, specifically *why* visitors want experiences that are derived from the Gothic.

Second, McEvoy's formulation of Gothic tourism focuses on locations that are "presented in terms of the Gothic" (2016, p.3). Gothic tourism appears to be underpinned by the assumption that any tourist place which offers scares or frights is somehow associated with (or derived from) the tropes of the Gothic. In some cases (such as Whitby's 'Dracula Experience') this is clearly the case. However, in other cases attributing the label of Gothic tourism to a site or attraction may be an act of interpretation which bears little relation to the intentions of providers or the expectations of visitors. In particular, Gothic tourism as a form of special interest tourism may not directly map onto the realities of the tourism industry. For example, the organisations and individuals responsible for providing what is identified as Gothic tourism may have little understanding or awareness of the Gothic (and in most cases do not use the term in their publicity or promotion). As such, they are unlikely to consider what they are 'doing' as being Gothic tourism. Like dark tourism, Gothic tourism is a label which has been applied to parts of the tourism industry but without the engagement of the industry itself (see Wight, 2009).

Third, there is a need for caution in assuming that visitors to sites of Gothic tourism have the necessary prior knowledge and understanding of the genre to be able to understand references to the Gothic. They may recognise particular aesthetics and theming in an attraction's displays but without knowing that these are derived from the Gothic. In other words, if Gothic tourism "plays to those already in the know" and "demands of its visitors a complex intertextual literacy" (McEvoy 2016, p.201-2) it may be something confined to a small group of visitors who are familiar with the Gothic genre. What, then, can be said about those tourists who do not have the necessary cultural capital to understand references to the Gothic? This raises the question of whether it is appropriate to describe the activities they are engaging in as Gothic tourism, still less to identify them as Gothic tourists. Put another way, the people who visit places and attractions that have been identified as Gothic tourism may not be Gothic tourists. Scares and frights certainly sell in the context of tourism (Hoedt, 2009; Bristow, 2020), but a tourist does not need to be familiar with the Gothic in order to enjoy them.

Fourth, while McEvoy identifies a number of distinctive characteristics of Gothic tourism these are not, with the exception of the association with the conventions of Gothic literature, exclusive to Gothic tourism. For example, there are many other types of tourism which have a strong performance/theatrical dimension. These include many forms of heritage tourism, particularly those that rely on "living history" (such as open-air museums) or which offer visitors immersive multisensory experiences (such as Jorvik Viking Centre). Furthermore, the supposedly inauthentic nature of the experience is not exclusive to Gothic tourism but is shared by forms of literary and film-induced tourism which also have a strong element of imagination and suspension of disbelief. While Gothic tourism has a strongly affective dimension, this is also something found in other types of tourism, particularly adventure tourism (Cater, 2006). Here it should be noted that there is increasing attention to both affect and emotion within many forms of tourism experience (Picard and

Robinson, 2012). McEvoy argues that the body is central to Gothic tourism, but it is not unique in this respect: indeed there is growing attention to embodiment within all forms of tourism experience (Franklin, 2003; Hannam and Knox, 2010). Furthermore, an experience of being scared within leisure time is not unique to Gothic tourism but is also offered by theme parks and rollercoaster rides. Similarly, the elements of fun and partying that underpin Gothic tourism are also found in many other forms of tourism (such as festivals). Experiences of 'communitas' within tourism are not confined to Gothic tourism but have also been identified in other, unrelated forms of tourism such as heritage events, sports tourism and volunteer tourism (Kim and Jamal, 2007; Lamont, 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). In short, Gothic tourism may not be as clearly differentiated from other forms of tourism as McEvoy proposes.

### **The Relationship between Gothic Tourism and Other Forms of Tourism**

The proposal that Gothic tourism represents a distinct form of tourism mirrors a long-standing trend within tourism studies of delineating new forms of niche (or special interest) tourism (see Uriely, 2005). Yet, identifying distinct and discrete tourism niches has long been problematic. As Ashworth and Isaac (2015, p.318) have argued, multiple "overlapping taxonomies can be conceived and imposed upon the diverse realities of tourism sites". Therefore, the activities and experiences which constitute 'Gothic tourism' can also be conceptualised as other forms of special interest tourism.

There are obvious parallels between Gothic tourism and tourism centred on places of death, disaster or suffering, usually termed dark tourism or thanatourism (see Light 2017b on the similarities and differences between these concepts). Early definitions of both dark tourism (Lennon and Foley, 2000) and thanatourism (Seaton, 1996) centred on tourist practices that were, in some way, connected to death and disaster. However, later conceptualisations of dark tourism have broadened the scope considerably and now embrace the 'macabre' (Stone, 2006; Johnston, 2015) defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "grim, horrific, repulsive". Similarly, some models of both dark tourism (Dann, 1998) and thanatourism (Dunkley et al. 2007) embrace horror.

Attempts to conceptualise both dark tourism (Sharpley, 2005; Stone, 2006) and thanatourism (Dunkley et al. 2007) have recognised that such tourism is highly differentiated. In particular, Stone (2006) argued that dark sites can be placed on a spectrum from "darkest" to "lightest". At the "darkest" end of the spectrum are places at which mass death occurred (such as concentration camps and other genocide sites). Such sites are centred on memorialisation and education, and involve limited commercialisation. At the opposite – "lightest" - end of the spectrum are those attractions which Stone terms "dark fun factories" (p.152) which offer experiences centred on the macabre. They are characterised by a broad association with death or suffering; a commercial focus with a strong emphasis on retailing (McKenzie, 2018); extensive provision of visitor services; and overt inauthenticity (in terms of both location and interpretation). Such sites are predominantly organised around entertainment, something that Dale and Robinson (2011, p.213) term "dertainment".

There appears to be a clear overlap between lightest dark tourism and Gothic tourism. Examples of lightest dark tourism identified by Stone (2006, 2009) include the Dungeon attractions and Dracula tourism (see Light, 2012), both of which are also identified by McEvoy (2016) as forms of Gothic tourism. Furthermore, lighter dark tourism also embraces ghost tours (Garcia, 2012; Heidelberg, 2015; Powell and Iankova, 2016; Krisjanous and Carruthers, 2018) which again McEvoy identifies as forms of Gothic tourism. Therefore, Gothic tourism could be conceptualised as a particular form of lightest dark tourism. Certainly, some authors see little difficulty with including places associated with the Gothic under the umbrella of dark tourism (Passey, 2018; Seaton, 2018) or thanatourism (Seaton and Lennon, 2005; Mandelartz, 2016; Walchester, 2018).

However, McEvoy is emphatic that Gothic tourism is different from dark tourism. First, she contends that the concerns of Gothic tourism "cannot be contained within a spectrum concerned with death and disaster"

(2016, p. 201). Second, she argues (using a range of examples) that Gothic tourism is about much more than 'dark fun factories' (that is, sites with a focus on entertainment and the macabre). Examples might include places with a clear link to Gothic literature (or cinema) or places associated with the authors of Gothic fiction. Third, she argues that Gothic tourism - with its focus on the "stuff of nightmares" (2014, p.477) - is about experiences grounded in imaginary worlds (derived from fiction or cinema) rather than the physical reality of places of death or disaster. Spooner (2017) also differentiates Gothic tourism from dark tourism (although her conceptualisation of Gothic tourism is narrower than McEvoy's, being confined to places associated with Gothic literature). She argues that the term 'dark' does not adequately reflect the complexities of the term 'Gothic', and that dark tourism fails to engage with the literary (and cinematic) models which shape the experiences of tourists who visit such places.

Yet seeking to differentiate Gothic tourism from dark tourism is not entirely convincing. McEvoy argues that Gothic tourism differs from dark tourism on the basis that the latter is primarily about death and disaster. Notwithstanding that death is an ever-present theme in the Gothic (Davison, 2017), contemporary conceptualisations of dark tourism are not confined to death/disaster but, as noted above, also include the macabre (Stone, 2006, 2009). The macabre is itself an enduring feature of the Gothic: McEvoy (2016, p.161) argues that Gothic "has famously concerned itself with feudal tyranny, imprisonment, suffering bodies, blood, torture". There are certainly some forms of Gothic tourism which are not associated with the macabre. Examples might include visiting buildings such as the Bronte Parsonage in Haworth, associated with the authors of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* (which would constitute a form of literary tourism). However, most forms of Gothic tourism can be embraced by the 'lightest' end of the dark tourism spectrum. Furthermore, the claim that Gothic tourism is distinctive through being grounded in imaginary worlds of nightmares only partially holds: some forms of lighter dark tourism have a similar imaginative component (such as ghost walks). Indeed Stone (2013, p.308) argues that dark tourism includes a range of "sites of the imaginary and the imagined"

Therefore, Gothic tourism can be considered as a particular form of lightest dark tourism, since both involve "commercial visitor sites and attractions which recreate and commodify death, suffering and the macabre, and which are entertainment-centric" (Stone, 2009, p.168). Both Gothic tourism and lighter dark tourism are commercial activities intended to generate revenue through providing particular types of experiences. Both share a focus on entertainment grounded in thrills, scares, and horror. Both involve immersive, affective and ludic experiences with a strong element of participation and sociality. Finally, both are characterised by a strong element of inauthenticity, either in terms of location or the nature of the stories presented to visitors. Gothic tourism can, therefore, be conceptualised as a form of lighter dark tourism, characterised either by a presentational approach which can be interpreted as embracing the tropes and conventions or the Gothic; or where visitors have the prior knowledge and understanding to make a conscious connection with the Gothic genre.

However, while dark tourism and thanatourism are ways of conceptualising the relationship between tourism and death, both are contested concepts that do not enjoy universal acceptance within tourism studies (Ashworth and Isaac, 2017; Light, 2017b). Therefore, it is also possible to situate Gothic tourism within other forms of tourism. An obvious candidate is heritage tourism since most sites of Gothic tourism are in some way about the past. Again, McEvoy (2010, 2014) seeks to distinguish Gothic tourism from heritage tourism, arguing that the two are frequently at odds. She points out that Gothic tourism frequently lacks any association with a particular site or a tangible historic building. Instead, it relies on use of more nebulous stories, myths, legends and fantasies, meaning that the tourist has to make use of their imagination to create places and characters (McEvoy, 2014). In other words, Gothic tourism is characterised by "an absence of valuable heritage" but also a focus on "cultural, rather than architectural, heritage" (2014, p.477 and p.484).

However, this conceptualisation relies on an understanding of heritage as both material (such as a historic building) and valuable. Certainly, heritage tourism has traditionally focused on architecturally significant historic buildings (Smith, 2006) but in recent decades its scope has broadened considerably to embrace buildings and sites associated with industry, rural life, the seaside, transport, everyday life, and popular

culture (to name just a few). Furthermore, heritage tourism frequently encompasses forms of heritage that are not tangible (as indeed the rise of intangible heritage illustrates). For example, the stories, myths and fantasies associated with Robin Hood or King Arthur have a powerful allure for heritage tourists and enable visitors to mobilise their imaginations to create meaningful personal experiences (Shackley, 2001; Digance and Cusack, 2002). Contemporary heritage tourism also has little difficulty embracing “inauthenticity”. Overall, then, it is entirely possible to consider Gothic tourism as a particular form of heritage tourism, albeit one that is largely centred on ‘inauthentic’ places and experiences.

Some forms of Gothic tourism could also be conceptualised as examples of literary tourism, itself widely considered to be a specific form of heritage or cultural tourism (Timothy, 2011; Hoppen et al., 2014; MacLeod et al., 2018). Tourism “associated with places celebrated for literary depictions and/or connections with literary figures” (Squire 1996, p.119) has a long history that can be traced back to the rise of the popular novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (MacLeod et al., 2018). In the case of the Gothic this would include visits to Whitby or Transylvania in search of the origins of *Dracula*, or visits to Haworth in search of the Bronte sisters. However, forms of Gothic tourism which draw more broadly on the aesthetics of the Gothic or experiences based on thrills and scares do not obviously overlap with literary tourism.

Finally, it is important to recognise the parallels between Gothic tourism and other conceptualisations of the relationship between tourism, scares and thrills. Bristow and Keenan (2018) propose the concept of “fright tourism” (see also Bristow 2020) defined as “when a tourist seeks a scary opportunity for pleasure at a destination that may have a sinister history or may be promoted to have one” (Bristow and Keenan, 2018, p.65). Fright tourism includes visits to haunted attractions, ghost tours, and Halloween experiences. It is underpinned by an expectation of thrills, scares and fear but in an environment that is ultimately safe and known to be so (Bristow and Keenan, 2018). It is also characterised by escapist encounters, characterised by inauthenticity (Bristow, 2020). There are clear similarities between Gothic tourism and fright tourism (although some forms of the latter may have no obvious relationship with the Gothic). Here it should be noted that fright tourism is explicitly conceptualised as a form of lighter dark tourism (Stone, 2013; Bristow and Keenan, 2018).

Another related concept is that of the “haunted attraction” (Hoedt, 2009), defined as “a venue, designed to frighten its audience” (p.2). Hoedt focuses on a particular type of visitor attraction rather than a sub-set of tourism. Haunted attractions are sites based on “fiction or horrible history” which use a range of effects including “live actors, animatronics, theatrical sets and sound-and-light effects” (p.2). Examples include the Dungeon franchise, the London Bridge Experience, Nightmare Haunted Houses (New York) and Terror Test (Mississippi). Such sites (which tourism researchers would identify as forms of lightest dark tourism) offer fun and entertainment to their visitors, based on experiences of fear and uncertainty. Hoedt’s concern is not to categorise this type of tourism but to seek to understand and theorise why visitors are attracted to experiences based on fear and horror. She evaluates in detail both cognitive and psychoanalytical theories which explain the attraction of scares and horror, and identifies a range of issues that tourism researchers could explore in more detail in the context of lightest dark tourism. What is significant for the current discussion is that haunted attractions illustrate how tourist experiences based on thrills and scares can be understood without requiring the Gothic.

## **Conclusion**

Gothic tourism has recently been proposed as a distinct form of special interest tourism that is increasingly common in towns and cities, particularly in the English-speaking world (McEvoy 2016). This paper has examined and critiqued the concept of Gothic tourism. It argues that Gothic tourism is an interesting concept in highlighting the relationship between tourism and experiences based on scares, thrills and Gothic aesthetics, experiences that are increasingly offered by towns and cities around the world. However, the concept of Gothic tourism is problematic for tourism researchers for a number of reasons. Attributing the label of Gothic to a tourism site is an interpretation grounded in extensive familiarity with the Gothic genre.

But it cannot be assumed that the various actors within the tourism industry will share this prior knowledge and understanding, so that they may approach places of Gothic tourism in a completely different way. In particular, many visitors will lack the necessary familiarity to interpret places of Gothic tourism through the lens of the Gothic: as such, they cannot be identified as Gothic tourists. Furthermore, the term is rarely used by the tourism industry to describe what is offered to visitors. In short, a definition of Gothic tourism which embraces places and attractions which reference (however tangentially) the tropes, aesthetics or experiences associated with the Gothic may not correspond to the motivations and experiences of visitors, or the intentions of providers.

It is also clear that that Gothic tourism is not as distinct from other forms of contemporary urban tourism as has been claimed. For a start, many of the characteristics that define Gothic tourism are shared by other tourism practices, the one exception being an association with the conventions and tropes of the Gothic genre. Furthermore, there appears to be evident overlap with other forms of niche or special interest tourism that take place in towns and cities. Figure 1 seeks to conceptualise these relationships. Gothic tourism can be understood as the nexus of lightest dark tourism and literary tourism (both of which are broadly forms of heritage tourism). Most forms of Gothic tourism overlap with forms of lightest dark tourism which offer experiences of the macabre. There are also some similarities with fright tourism (a particular form of lightest dark tourism based on experiences of scares and horror) although not all fright tourism is associated with the Gothic. Some forms of Gothic tourism (such as Dracula tourism) also lie at the intersection of lightest dark tourism and literary tourism. However, there are forms of Gothic tourism (such as visiting buildings associated with Gothic authors) that intersect with literary tourism but not dark tourism.

FIGURE 1 HERE

The difficulties in identifying what is distinctive about Gothic tourism leads to an alternative way of understanding the phenomenon. This paper proposes that Gothic tourism can be more usefully understood in two different ways. First, Gothic tourism involves visiting places that have a specific association with Gothic literature (and its authors). This understanding recognises that there are sites and places where visitor motivations and experiences are clearly informed by some degree of prior knowledge of particular Gothic novels. Such places would include Whitby, Haworth, Cornwall and Transylvania. However, such an understanding of Gothic tourism is not exclusive to urban areas. Second, Gothic tourism can be situated as a particular form of lightest dark tourism that is characterised by theming which references the Gothic aesthetic and which offers experiences based on scares, thrills and sometimes horror. These forms of Gothic tourism are increasingly part of the urban tourism offer. As such, rather than being a unique form of contemporary tourism, Gothic tourism can be understood as a particular approach to presenting historic places (or attractions with a historic theme) which draws on the tropes or aesthetics of the Gothic to create a particular attraction “imagescape” (Wanhill, 2008). This makes it an approach to the supply of tourist experiences, which creates opportunities and possibilities for (some) visitors to appropriate the attraction’s stories through the lens of the Gothic if they have the necessary prior understanding and knowledge to do so. However, it does not assume any prior familiarity of the Gothic on the part of visitors. This conceptualisation of Gothic tourism clarifies its relationship with dark tourism, and adds nuance to the concept of lightest dark tourism in a more substantive way than the notion of fright tourism.

Future research could focus on exploring the relationship between the Gothic and tourism in more detail. First, it could focus on the experiences of visitors to places identified as examples of Gothic tourism to determine the importance of the Gothic (whether consciously or unconsciously) within decisions and motivations to visit. This could also establish whether those visitors with a prior interest in the Gothic appropriate and experience such places in a distinctive manner that is derived from their prior knowledge and familiarity with the genre. It could also consider the differences in experience among visitors who do not have such prior knowledge. This, in turn, would enable the current conceptualisation of Gothic tourism to be clarified and refined. Second, future research might focus specifically on those places that have a direct connection to Gothic fiction (and cinema) in order to identify if the motivations and experiences of visitors are different from those at other types of heritage or lightest dark tourism attractions. Third, research into

the Gothic/lightest dark tourism nexus can elucidate the ways in which these sorts of tourist experience are a distinctly urban phenomenon and the extent to which they depend on the towns and cities in which they are located. Finally, future research could examine the ways in which experiences of thrills and frights are being used in urban place promotion for tourism.

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Figure 1: An Alternative Conceptualisation of Gothic Tourism

