Instructor: Matthew Lavin

Title: Bibliographers are Book Detectives!

Date: 11-8-16

Subject Areas or Affiliated Unit: Guest lecture on “Gothic and Horror Bibliography”

Crux or Essential Question of the Lesson: How does bibliographical work relate to studying Gothic and horror fiction, and why is bibliography fundamental to humanities research?

Learning Objectives:

• Deeper understanding of the Gothic and horror

• Experience some bibliographical inquiry and connect to humanities research

• Encounter bibliography in a way that acknowledges and responds to digitization

• Understand how much material or information isn’t digitally present or easy to find

Necessary Prior Knowledge and Student Work to Be Completed Before Class:

I. Read “The Yellow Sign” by Robert W. Chambers

II. Be prepared to discuss the following:

1. How would you summarize this short story?

2. True Detective season one is inspired by Chambers’s work? If you’ve seen the show, what similarities and differences do you notice?

3. H.P. Lovecraft was also inspired by Chambers. See if you can find any information on how he was influenced.

4. How does this short story relate to what you’ve learned so far about Gothic and horror?

Required Technological Setup and/or Equipment Required:

Locate five Gothic novels not found on Wikipedia or Google Books full view. Locate a harder-to-find pdf of each book online.

Slideshow: Background on Gothic and Horror Bibliography

Other In-class Materials:

I. Projector for slideshow

II. Print bibliography description for each novel (ideally more than one for each).

III. Novels: *Correlia, or the Mystic Tomb*; *The Mysterious Hand, or Subterranean Horrors; Vicissitudes Abroad: Or, The Ghost of My Father; The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey: A Romance; Ellen, the Countess of Castle Howell*

Assessment:

Follow-up with course instructor, solicit feedback from students two weeks after visit.

Summary, Methods, and Rationale (with time estimates, in chronological order):

1. **Background on Gothic and Horror Bibliography** (slideshow, 15 minutes)
2. **Discussion of Chambers’s “The Yellow Sign” Based on Preparation**
3. **Gothic and Horror Bibliography Activity**

The basic idea of this activity is to Count off by fives and break into five teams. spend about an hour looking closely at the bibliographical profile of a relatively obscure Gothic novel. At first, each team will receive a title only. I will then show a series of questions on the projector screen. Teams are encouraged to write down answers to each question or document what they tried if no answer is found. Teams will work on prompt 1 for 10 minutes.

**Prompt I—Metadata:**

1. Look at your assigned title. Does it sound gothic?
2. Find author, publisher, date first published, country of publication
3. Other editions
4. Find a digital version of the book
5. Look up on Wikipedia, try to find stub
6. Look up on Google Books
7. What other works did the author write? Do any of them sound Gothic from the titles?

Prompt 2 follows. Teams will work on these questions for ten minutes. At the five-minute mark, an optional clue can be provided. The clue in this case is to try searching the Pitt library catalogue for an eBook version, or search on Google for “[your title] pdf”. It is not assumed that students will be able to complete #4, but it will be interesting if anyone can.

**Prompt II—Digital Proxy**

1. Find a full digital version (ebook or pdf)
2. What is the first sentence of the book?
3. Does the opening sound Gothic? Why or why not?
4. Try to locate a plaintext or similar version of the book, meaning you would be able to copy/paste the whole book into a text file.

For prompt 3, teams will work for ten minutes, with another optional clue. In this case, the clue is to try Worldcat.org or abebooks.com (to get a first edition price).

**Prompt III—Physical copy**

1. Try to find a physical copy of the book in the world somewhere: what is the closest library that holds it?
2. If you had to have a copy of this book in your hand in 14 days, how would you do so? Be as specific as possible.
3. How much would it cost to buy a first edition of this book?

Prompt 4 might prove difficult. In case students cannot complete the task, I will have in hand descriptions of each novel from at least one (ideally two) Gothic and horror reference books.

**Prompt IV—Plot Summary and Final Determination**

1. What is the plot of the book? How did you find it?
2. Is this a Gothic novel?

**Share Results and Discuss the Gothic**

* How has your understanding of the Gothic and horror changed as a result of this exercise?
* How does this kind of bibliographical inquiry connect to your experience doing humanities research?
* How have book digitization and the digital information revolution changed how difficult or easy these tasks were? Has some information been lost in the process?
* Has this experienced changed your opinion of how much material or information is absent from the digital record, or difficult to find without knowing exactly where to look?