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Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern

**Desire, Eroticism and Literary Visibilities
from Byron to Bram Stoker**

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For Lesley and my family

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Preface

This is the first study of the multifarious erotic themes associated with the popular magic lantern shows, which proved one of the most dominant visual media of the West for 250 years, and how these influenced portrayals of sexuality in major works of Gothic fiction. It consequently offers new readings of a range of works which draw on these visual technologies. It is widely acknowledged that cinema has influenced literary evocations of sexuality, a set of intermedial relations so well known that it has been parodied in works such as Christopher Fowler's Hammer Horror-inspired novel *Hell Train* (2012). Yet when Laura states that her first quasi-erotic encounter with the vampire in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) has cast her past life into a lantern-of-fear show or the uncannily transparent Dracula slips like a lantern slide through an inch-wide aperture to inflict unspeakable Sadean horrors on Renfield in Bram Stoker's novel, these associations have been passed over by critics and readers alike. I argue that an appreciation of such associations helps the reader to discover a forgotten intermedial world of allusion, clarifies our understanding of Gothic erotic themes and even helps us to decipher the meaning of the amorous entanglement evoked in the last extant stanzas of Byron's *Don Juan*. Additionally, this groundbreaking exploration of Gothic sexuality reveals how, for example, the expression of lesbianism in *Carmilla*, incestuous passion in Byron's poetry and homosexual tensions in *Dracula* were all conveyed with visual cues inherited from the lantern shows. The book's Introduction provides a detailed overview of ways in which the erotic and macabre associations of magic lantern shows converged with Gothic literature. As well as considering the work of later neo-Gothic artists, I reinstate the lanterns' overwhelming importance for past generations in their visualisation and expression of diverse sexualities and argue that an understanding of these influences serves fundamentally to change our reading of Gothic literature.

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