

Institution: University of Exeter		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Reconnecting contemporary audiences to the intangible cultural heritage of seasonal traditions and the gothic through new creative works, educational initiatives and improved public understanding.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Jan 2012- 31 Dec 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Nick Groom	Role(s) (e.g., job title): Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 May 2007 – 31 Dec 2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 — 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Seasonal traditions and the gothic are two of the major ways we – as individuals and societies – connect to, imagine and contest the past. Groom’s research has deepened and shaped national debate around these key forms of intangible cultural heritage, and also led to an uptake in participation. In recontextualising seasonal traditions and the gothic by linking them with contemporary concerns, it has achieved the following impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing awareness and understanding of intangible cultural heritage through contributing to the Christmas advertising campaign of a major national supermarket. • Transformed the teaching of gothic literature in schools across the UK and North America with new online educational resources. • Promoted public health initiatives through gothic literature, improving awareness of blood disorders and encouraging blood donation. • Inspired exhibitions and performances that innovatively reinterpret classic gothic texts for contemporary audiences, and renewed public debate around seasonal traditions and rural life. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Groom’s research on different aspects of intangible cultural heritage, is framed by an overarching aim to excavate its rich lives and contested histories and explore its reinvention in contemporary culture. Thus, his research on the gothic demonstrates the literary, social, and political shaping of its many manifestations, and is distinct in linking 18th and 19th-century gothic novels to the vast cultural industry of contemporary gothic; similarly, his research on seasonal traditions investigates what they mean to contemporary societies living increasingly atomised and urban and with ever more unpredictable and extreme weather.</p> <p>His extensive programme of research on the gothic emphasises its significance in politics, science, medicine, theology, philosophy, social sciences and debates about national identity – as well as in literature and architecture – and has challenged the popular myths that surround novels such as <i>Frankenstein</i> and <i>Dracula</i>. This breadth is reflected in Groom’s innovative study <i>The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction</i> (OUP, 2012, [3.5]), and in his production of four new editions of key gothic novels for Oxford University Press: Horace Walpole’s <i>The Castle of Otranto</i> (2014), Matthew Lewis’s <i>The Monk</i> (2016), Ann Radcliffe’s <i>The Italian</i> (2017), and Mary Shelley’s <i>Frankenstein</i> (2018) [3.6]. Groom’s expertise led to a commission from Yale University Press for <i>The Vampire: A New History</i> (2018), published to celebrate with the bicentenary of John Polidori’s <i>The Vampyre</i> [3.4]. This book presents a new understanding of the ways in which the vampire has been used since the</p>		

Enlightenment as a ‘thought experiment’ to define the human in medicine and science, theology and philosophy, and politics and economics. It redefines the figure of the vampire away from popular perceptions of monstrous Eastern European bloodsuckers and/or undead aristocrats, and has led to collaboration with epidemiologists, patient groups and theatre makers, linking gothic literature to contemporary medical research on blood disorders and using it to promote public health initiatives. In 2019, he was part of the Doctor Dracula project, in collaboration with Dr Luke Pilling (University of Exeter Medical School), which received Wellcome Trust Public Engagement funding.

Groom has used a similar pioneering approach to seasonal traditions and cultural environmentalism. For millennia, the passing seasons and their rhythms have marked our progress throughout the year, and Groom’s research both celebrates and details the English seasons and their trove of folklore and festive customs. His research is notably distinct from how calendrical customs and festivities are usually researched by folklorists, cultural historians and contemporary almanacking in that he explains in detail the literary, social and political shaping of traditions around periods such as Christmas [3.2, 3.3]. He demonstrates the close historical interrelationships between what are today distinct seasonal customs, such as Hallowe’en and Valentine’s Day. *The Seasons: An Elegy for the Passing of the Year* (2014) argues that tradition and our links with nature still have a vital role to play in all our lives. [3.1]. Its ground-breaking significance was recognised in extensive reviews in the national media and in its shortlisting for the Katharine Briggs Folklore Prize 2014. It was runner-up in the BBC Countryfile Book of the Year 2014 as well as being *Guardian* Book of the Week, *Reader’s Digest* Book of the Month and one of the *Observer’s* Books of the Year.

3. References to the research

- 3.1. Nick Groom, *The Seasons: An Elegy for the Passing of the Year* (London: Atlantic, 2013), 400pp.
- 3.2. Nick Groom, ‘“Let’s discuss over country supper soon”: Rural Realities and Rustic Representations’, in *Creating the Countryside: The Rural Idyll Past and Present*, ed. Verity Elson and Rosemary Shirley (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2017), 49-60. Revised and updated from first published version in *The Clearing* www.theclearingonline.org, August 22, 2013.
- 3.3. Nick Groom, ‘Hallowe’en and Valentine: The Culture of Saints’ Days in the English-Speaking World. The 37th Katharine Briggs Memorial Lecture, Nov 2017.’ *Folklore* 129 (2018), 331-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2018.1510651>
- 3.4. Nick Groom, *The Vampire: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), xix + 288pp. Translated as *El Vampiro: Una Nueva Historia* (Madrid: Desperta Ferro Ediciones, 2020), and *Vampiri: Una Nuova Storia* (Milan: Il Saggiatori, 2019).
- 3.5. Nick Groom, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).
- 3.6. Nick Groom (ed.), Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818 Text)* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

Outputs 3.1, 3.2, 3.4-3.6 available on request.

Related Grants:

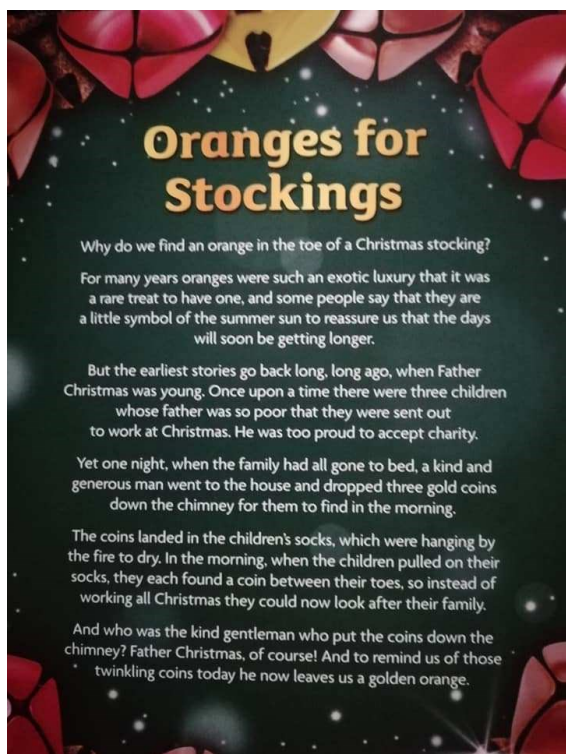
Nick Groom, Leverhulme Fellowship *A History of the Gothic, 1688-1774* (2016-17), £49,118.

Nick Groom, ‘Fear and the Gothic’ strand, CI: AHRC *Being Human* (2016) (PI: Sanja Derasmovic, Humanities, UoE), £5,000 of £11,130 bid.

Nick Groom, ‘Doctor Dracula’, Wellcome Trust Public Engagement Award (2019), £103,000.

4. Details of the impact

Enhancing awareness and understanding of intangible cultural heritage



Groom's research has enhanced cultural understanding of Christmas traditions through, among other means, commercial consultation with a major supermarket chain. The collaboration with Morrisons – the UK's fourth-largest supermarket – enabled significant national reach in explaining and reviving neglected Christmas traditions. Groom was commissioned in 2017 to provide a unique context for their national Christmas marketing campaign, based on the custom of placing an orange in a Christmas stocking. He researched and wrote a 200-word story for children on this forgotten seasonal tradition, which promotes charitable acts. This was given away – along with a free orange – to 200,000 customers, and the campaign reached 16 million people through print and broadcast media coverage while an accompanying video was viewed over 50,000 times. The PR agency responsible, The Academy, reported that it was one of Morrisons' 'big marketing tactics' of 2017 –

prompting them to repeat it in 2019. [5.1] Feedback from parents praised the initiative as reconnecting families with seasonal traditions and educating children regarding its origins: '*Christmas can be lost in material things and this story really brings it back to the real meaning and also educates them about some of the history behind Christmas.*' [5.1]

Groom has shaped and informed public attitudes to the gothic through the cumulative effect of new editions, public talks and appearances on broadcast media. This has enabled new understandings of how contemporary gothic is indebted to its long history. For the BBC, his work includes a programme on the history of vampires for Radio 3's Art and Ideas (October 2018) and a commissioned podcast on 'A brief (and ghoulish) history of vampires' (16,700 downloads October 2018–December 2019), while an interview on vampires was a Radio 4 'Best of Today' and broadcast on the World Service [5.2]. Through regular presentations and workshops, including at major literary festivals, participant feedback repeatedly highlighted how Groom had changed the way they understood the Gothic. [5.3] The Jane Austen Society of North America chose *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* to be read and discussed by Groom with their online reading group (5,000 members). Society chairman Margarita Levin, described it as 'expansive and informative', adding: 'Everyone came away with a greater understanding of how the [Gothic] has been used.' [5.4]

Groom's new editions of gothic novels – *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Italian*, *The Monk* and *Frankenstein* – have been important in recontextualising and promoting discussion of the gothic. Cumulatively, they have sold 63,500 copies, including 35,500 of international sales [5.5]. The new edition of *Frankenstein* and Groom's monograph *The Vampire* were released to celebrate the bicentenary of original publication, and were used as springboards to generate debate, reaching people who would not usually engage with gothic literature. For example, *Frankenstein* led to interviews (*Observer*, *Times*) and a feature in *The Sun* with the headline: "'Flakensteins': Snowflake students claim Frankenstein's monster was 'misunderstood' – and is in fact a VICTIM'" which provoked national debate (BBC,

Guardian, Spectator, Radio 4, and many others) and a public discourse on social media on its meaning for contemporary readers. [5.6]

Improving the teaching of gothic literature with new educational resources

Groom has influenced the design and delivery of gothic literature in colleges and secondary schools through an extensively viewed online lecture series and in-person masterclasses. The latter, on the continuing relevance of historical and contemporary contexts of politics and science in the gothic, have provided unique learning opportunities. A teacher testimonial from Langley School stated that *'The idea of Frankenstein as a novel for the 21st century was one that the students had struggled to consider effectively beforehand, but afterwards they came away feeling that the text has much more social, political and personal relevance today.'* [5.7]

Building on these face-to-face sessions, Groom developed online educational resources to stimulate and influence the teaching of gothic literature through partnership with MASSOLIT, an online teaching resource platform for UK and North American schools. He created a series of highly popular lecture series on key novels such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Supernatural: A Complete History* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Groom contributed 37 lectures in total, and these have been utilised by 350 schools, cumulatively receiving 222,622 international viewings and downloads from March 2017 to December 2019. Most of his lecture series are in the 30 most-watched:

'[Groom] is the second or third most-watched academic in the collection.'
– Chris Tudor, founder of MASSOLIT [5.8]

One teacher commented that his lectures 'really improved the depth of my knowledge on the contextual influences and moved my thinking away from simpler stereotypes'. [5.8]

Promoting public health initiatives and raising awareness of blood disorders

Groom's research has raised awareness of blood disorders through an innovative performance which combined contemporary medicine and the early history of the vampire. In 2019, he was part of the Wellcome Trust-funded 'Doctor Dracula', which combined his vampirology with Dr Luke Pilling's research in haemochromatosis, a genetic condition caused by an overload of iron in the blood, to produce an immersive performance with theatre company Four of Swords. The production ran in Devon in February and March 2020, with 638 attendees (further planned performances were cancelled due to Covid-19).

Representatives attended from Haemochromatosis UK and the 'Exeter 10,000' research project (which recruits individuals to help study common diseases), who engaged with audience members and signed up 30 people to join the Exeter 10,000 project. The performance raised the profile of little-known yet treatable blood disorders such as haemochromatosis and anaemia and promoted NHS blood donations:

"The play itself was fabulous, linking past myths to our current medical understanding, combining art and entertainment as well as education about blood disorders." – Exeter 10,000 testimony [5.9]

The project evaluation evidenced that over 80% of attendees had a better understanding of myth and medicine, ~70% said that they had an improved knowledge of blood disorders and over 60% said they were more likely to give blood. [5.9] The collaboration was also significant for the artistic and commercial development of Four of Swords:

"[Groom] pushed us to experiment with increasingly inventive ways of storytelling; to cross boundaries and merge worlds which wouldn't normally mix:

folklore, historic characters, medical research, real-world patients' experiences ... We have definitely grown as a company through the collaboration, and have expanded our audience base hugely." – founder Phil Kingsplan John [5.9]

Inspiring the production of new performances and exhibitions

In addition to the above, Groom's work has inspired innovative theatrical productions that have re-interpreted classic gothic texts, utilising his research to update them for contemporary audiences. In 2018, his reputation as a world-renowned vampirologist resulted in an invitation to verify 26 books believed by the London Library to be the ones that Bram Stoker used to research *Dracula*. This internationally reported discovery led to a site-specific dramatisation of *Dracula* by Creation Theatre in the London Library in February and March of 2019, in a run of 18 performances. The play directly uses lines from Groom's *The Vampire* [5.10]. In 2018, he acted as the anchor/performer for 'Living Literature – Frankenstein', an immersive performance combining storytelling, workshops, music, science and theatre performed at Bath Literature Festival and the University of London School of Advanced Study.

Groom's work on seasonal traditions similarly generated new creative works and increased public interest and engagement with calendrical traditions. A collaboration with folk band Woodwoose created 'A Hollantide Phantasmagoria' – a mixed-media, spoken word and music show. Three sell-out performances were given in regional venues to coincide with Hollantide, once part of the Celtic New Year but subsequently known as All Saint's Day and used to commemorate the forgotten dead, on November 1, 2013, 2014 and 2015. The project was subsequently featured as part of Exeter's 2016 Being Human festival.

Groom's research has also provoked reflection on the artistic, social and political forces that have played an important role in forming successive generations' perceptions of the countryside. His 2013 essay *Country Supper*, which explored the history and meaning of the phrase after it appeared in text messages between Rebekah Brooks and David Cameron, inspired the 2017 art exhibition 'Creating the Countryside: Thomas Gainsborough to Today' at Compton Verney Art Gallery near Stratford-upon-Avon. Dr Rosemary Shirley, exhibition curator, stated that '*The essay really acted as an inspiration point for the exhibition, particularly in terms of the assumptions made about contemporary rurality.*' During its three-month duration, the exhibition was seen by 15,000 visitors. [5.11]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial from PR Company, The Academy, regarding Morrisons Christmas campaigns; coverage of customer feedback, video, and materials for public distribution.
- 5.2 Media coverage and appearances.
- 5.3 Participant feedback from Cheltenham, Brinks, and Boscastle Festivals.
- 5.4 Jane Austen Society, feedback letter and participant testimonials.
- 5.5 Sales figures from Oxford University Press for new editions of gothic novels.
- 5.6 Evidence of national debate upon the gothic including *The Sun* article.
- 5.7 Schools' Masterclasses – feedback from teachers.
- 5.8 Massolit testimonials, including comments from teachers.
- 5.9 Evaluation Report, Doctor Dracula; *Four of Swords* testimonial.
- 5.10 London Library / Bram Stoker annotations media coverage.
- 5.11 *Creating the Countryside* exhibition, testimonial from Dr Rosemary Shirley plus review and online review.