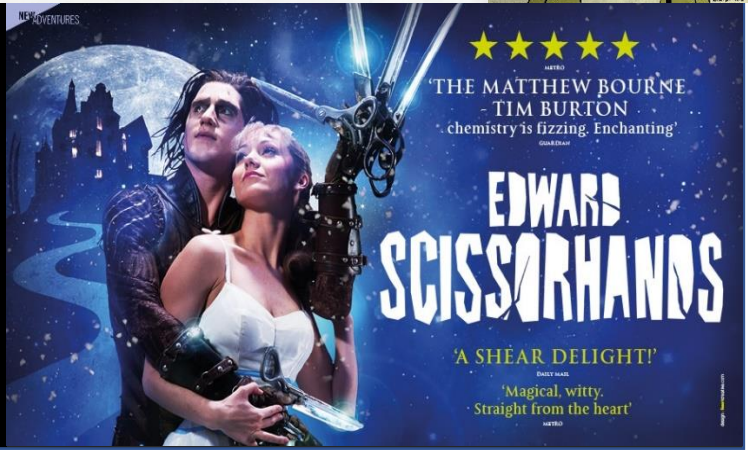
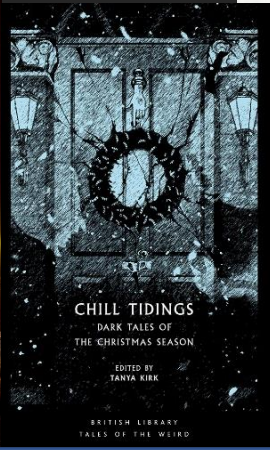
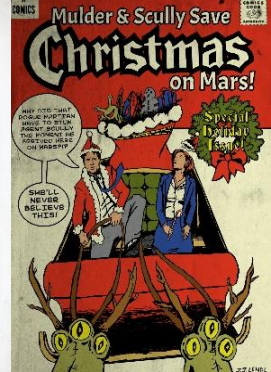


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Ghost Tales by the Fireside - True Ghost Stories Podcast
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FIRESIDE TALES OF TERROR:

The Gothic and Winter

“Horrors belong as naturally to the fireside, as fireside belongs to Christmas” declares the narrator of the piece “Fireside Horrors for Christmas” in the December 1847 issue of *Dublin University Magazine*. This image of “popular fireside stories or winter’s tales” exchanged in communal settings had, as the late Catherine Belsey explained, a “long vernacular tradition” (2010). Furthermore, it was, she argues, a practice that often-challenged orthodox institutional discourse about, for example, the “true meaning” of Christmas or the origins of ghosts and tapped into secular and “pagan” rituals and practices. The later transference of this hearth-side image into textual and visual print, not only as content, but as collective reading activities has helped immortalise Winter and/or Christmas and the Gothic as ideal bedfellows, not only in Western cultures but in the wider global imagination. Periodicals of the nineteenth-century such as *Household Words*, *Belgravia*, and *The Strand* capitalised on the wider Christmas market and the desire for ghost stories in their specific Christmas Numbers including accompanying illustrations, while an increasing number of collections and anthologies began to emerge and have remained extremely popular gifts, from collections of Dickens’s Christmas ghost stories, to Edward Wagenknecht’s 1947 anthology *The Fireside Book of Ghost Stories*, to the recent British Library Tales of the Weird anthologies *Chill Tidings: Dark Tales of the Christmas Season* and *Spirits of the Season: Christmas Hauntings*. Televisual/cinematic and radio adaptations of traditional tales have transformed the communal experience of terror at Christmas and utilise the oral and the visual in different ways: such as the BBC’s televisual series “Ghost Stories for Christmas”, TV Christmas specials such as *Inside No. 9: The Devil of Christmas* and podcasts such as “Ghost Tales by the Fireside – True Ghost Stories Podcast”. The Gothic-Horror film has twisted and co-opted the form of the fireside tale of terror and its seasonal trappings to bring us horrifying delights such as *Black Christmas* (1974); *Krampus* (2015) and its sequels; apocalyptic Christmas comedy *Silent Night* (2021), and many more. Even the seemingly twee Christmas film can send chills and invite horror – *Home Alone*, anyone?

So too, the collective-experience, not in the home but amongst strangers in public forums are offered with watching the aforementioned in the cinema, or attending theatre shows such a Robert Lloyd Parry’s “The M.R. James Project” which use the allure of a one-man show set by a fireside as a story-teller in a wing-backed armchair recites some old favourites, or *The Theatre of Dark Encounters* who incorporate ghost walks as well as shows in-theatre to seasonal delights. The horror of the life-sized Mouse King in the traditional Nutcracker ballet based on E.T.A Hoffman’s story or the Cute Gothic of Matthew Bourne’s ballet adaptation of *Edward Scissorhands* also offer interesting perspectives on what Gothic is and how it is expressed. The mash-up of Winter/Christmas and Gothic can be further enjoyed in media and ephemera such as board games – a staple component of the Christmas season – like *Christmas Murder Mystery* and *Clue: Nightmare Before Christmas Edition*, while vintage postcards of children being terrorised by the Krampus blend nostalgia and dark humour, and gothic-Christmas decorations (such as the lights Will Byers communicates with from the Upside Down), all revel, like Jack Skellington, in the fusion of Halloween and Christmas.

Julia Briggs writes that “The telling of tales around the fireside makes explicit a particular aspect of the ghost story which depends upon a tension between the cosy familiar world of life (associated with *Heim* and *heimisch* – home and the domestic) and the mysterious and unknowable world of death (*unheimlich*, or uncanny)” (180-1), inviting us to think about the spaces and places of Winter Gothic; often juxtaposed

against the chilling and deadly atmosphere and dark nights of the “outside” which the narrator of the “Fireside Horrors” piece insists make the conjunction of tale of terror and the winter period so ideal. In fact, many other Gothic works use that setting of snow, ice, and long shadowy nights outside of the Christmas period as they explore the horrors hidden in isolated arctic landscapes from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Dan Simmons’ 2007 novel *The Terror* which was adapted to television and released in 2018 and based on a real failed expedition, Michelle Paver’s speculative ghost fiction *Dark Matter* (2010), and the various stories collected in the forthcoming British Library Tales of the Weird anthology, *Polar Horrors*. So too, do works such as vampire horror film *30 Days of Night* (2007) which play on meteorological phenomena such as Polar Night. Yet, what happens to, and what does Winter/Christmas Gothic *mean*, in a global context and in regions where that season is hot and dry? And so, we also invite pieces that challenge the traditional connections.

This **two-day conference at the University of Warwick, UK, 15-16th December 2022**, will explore the connection between the Gothic and Winter in its various guises and topics that may include (but are certainly not limited to):

- ❖ Oral tales, folklore, travel writing.
- ❖ The “Ghost Story” and Christmas – tradition and new innovations.
- ❖ The space of the fireside or the campfire, or the use of candlelight (blackouts etc) in Winter Gothic representation etc.
- ❖ Arctic/polar regions and terror.
- ❖ Specific authors, rediscovered authors as pioneers, frequenters, or unusual contributors.
- ❖ Anthologies, Periodicals, Magazines and other print cultures.
- ❖ Illustrated Winter Gothic/Christmas Gothic stories.
- ❖ Collaborations, serials, short-story cycles and collections.
- ❖ The Gothic and Religious festivals; Paganism and Winter.
- ❖ In global regions and nations where it falls in with hot, dry seasons.
- ❖ Horror/Gothic films or Television shows set at/about Christmas; Christmas specials.
- ❖ Adaptations of or original works of Winter / Christmas Gothic across graphic novels, radio plays, film, television, theatre, ballet etc.
- ❖ Gothic Tourism such as ghost walks.
- ❖ Board games, video games, RPG, postcards and ephemera.
- ❖ Global literatures, translations, de-canonisation.
- ❖ Children’s literature and media.
- ❖ Papers which blend the creative and the critical are welcomed.
- ❖ Pre-formed panels are also invited.

Please send the following information to Jen Baker and Sandie Mills at talesofterrorconference@gmail.com no later than **Monday 17th October 2022**:

- **Email subject:** “Fireside Tales of Terror Abstract”;
- **Abstracts** of no more than 250 words;
- **Brief biography** (c.150 words) of the speaker(s);
- **5-8 key words.**
- Whilst we hope this will predominantly be an in-person conference, we intend to offer hybrid options for a more inclusive environment and so **please indicate** if you would most likely attend in-person or would prefer/need to present remotely.

Further details will be made available at

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/conferences/talesofterror/>

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