

Much Ado About Vampires: Goths, Zombies, Club Kids and Other Assorted Subcultures in Kyle Marffin's *Gothique*

By Amy Montz

Marffin, Kyle. *Gothique: A Vampire Novel*. Dairen, IL: The Design Image Group, 2000. 431p.

As a former self proclaimed seven year member of the Goth scene, I find myself approaching anything with the four letters "G-O-T-H" in the title, especially when accompanied by such phrases as "A Vampire Novel" with fear and trepidation. Kyle Marffin's *Gothique*, however, gives no cause for alarm. A fun romp through the Chicago night-life and Goth scene, as well as a modern retelling of classic vampire folklore, *Gothique* is nothing less than a good old "vampires are coming to take over the world" tale. And truly, that's more than anyone can ask for. While holding on to traditional myths regarding vampires, including blood drinking, sunlight slaying, and decadence, Marffin also spins a tapestry of post-modern fears and fun. The older vampires are stronger, intelligent, and more refined, while the younger, freshly turned vampires are little more than zombies, thugs, and hooligans intent on mischief, murder, and mayhem. Marffin's vampires thrive on Goth scene worship, and while any self-respecting Goth will tell you that she does not want to be a vampire nor does she believe in them, the scene does have an underlying obsession with the dark and morbidly depressed that the classic vampire embodies. *Gothique* uses several story lines to show how the vampire myth (and in this story, reality) affects people on all levels, including, but not limited to, the Chicago Police Department.

Beginning with the death of the fictional *Charade* Magazine's editor, the novel switches from storyline to storyline, examining the lives of those who work at the magazine, of the sister of the editor and her gay gamer roommate, and of the vampires themselves. At first the novel seems schizophrenic, and the reader begins to question all the extraneous information. But as Marffin's novel continues, Hannibal Lecter's advice to young Clarisse Starling rings true: "All good things to those who wait." Soon the reader realizes that no character or plot detour is an accident or filler, but rather a carefully crafted spider's web waiting to pull him or her in.

Among the more interesting characters is Gabriella, a Goth sinister with a decidedly homicidal edge, looking to aid the vampire invaders in any way possible, if only to becoming a blood drinking killer herself. After *Charade* magazine let her go (due to two hour lunch breaks and lack of a work ethic) she begins a crusade to bring down her

successor, who just happens to be the dead editor's sister, Colleen. Colleen stumbles into both the Goth scene (through her roommate) and her job (through her sister's funeral) and is characterized by a sense of doomed failure comparable to that of Goethe's Young Werther, throughout the novel. Jeff, another editor at *Charade*, simply wants custody of his daughter, Jacks, and he tries to keep her away from the Goth scene, knowing the allure can and will turn deadly as soon as GOTHIQUE, the new Goth club, opens.

GOTHIQUE itself is perhaps the most interesting character in the entire book. Once an old palace theater, it stood decrepit and empty in one of the worse neighborhoods in Chicago until the vampires decide there can be no better way to recruit new blood (pun intended) than through running a posh Goth club, where they can seduce and kill their way to the top. Kids from all over the city await the grand opening with anticipation, and pay outrageous cover charges just to see the inside. The club serves as a feeding ground for hundreds of new vampires, and the underbelly of GOTHIQUE doubles as a torture chamber and holding bin for the unlucky, the un-chosen. The nightclub is the center of the GOOD vs. EVIL fight to the finish, with vampires aiding humans and humans aiding vampires. Marffin lures the reader into a false sense of security regarding the good and the bad, leaving the audience a bit unsure of who to cheer for and who to mourn.

Despite its interesting characters and realistic portrayal of trends and fads of modern day America, *Gothique* suffers from the most prevalent gothic sin of all—pretension. Marffin attempts a Stoker-esque stab at credibility by "citing" newspaper headlines, personal ads, and flyers at the beginning of every section. While the nod to *Dracula* is commendable, it only leaves the reader with a curiosity that is never fulfilled. Not all "citations" are explained within the text, which weakens the story because they tend to force expectations from the audience. Perhaps the worst "dark literature" nod comes in the form of the postscript, in which Marffin defends his stance on the Goth subculture. The novel is so heavily laden with stereotypes intermingled with the cold realities about the disaffected Goth scene, it almost wants to blame the vampire invasion on the nihilistic black-clad children themselves. Marffin writes that he has no prejudices against the scene, and applauds "the 'delightfully disenchanting, disaffected and disenfranchised' Goth subculture as a very rich and diverse fin de siecle update of good old fashioned beatnik bohemia—albeit with a decidedly darker, kinky edge," claiming that any "jab or two at vampire enthusiasts and the Goth community" is "merely in the interest of telling a good story." It makes the reader wonder how much opposition the vampire enthusiasts and the Goth community put up against their portrayals in this book.

While quite capable of writing a fun read and an intriguing story, Marffin seems to have a chip on his shoulder regarding the Goth scene, and the "Author's Note" is its most damning evidence. But then no one likes a reality mirror held up before him, even a subculture prone to wild speculation and the creation of vast stereotypes... ahem... make that ESPECIALLY not a subculture prone to wild speculation and the creation of vast stereotypes.

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