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Dracula's Gothic Ship

Emily Alder

The narrative of *Dracula* (1897) is extensively informed by Bram Stoker's research into travel, science, literature, and folklore.¹ However, one feature of the novel that has never been examined in any detail is its gothic ship, the *Demeter*, which transports the vampire to Whitby. The *Demeter* is a capstone to a long tradition of nautical and maritime gothic in literature and legend. Gothic representations of storms, shipwrecks, and traumatic journeys were shaped and inspired by the natural power of the sea and its weather, and by the reports and experiences of those who braved the dangers of ocean travel and witnessed its sublime marvels, or stood watching on the shore. The ships of Victorian fiction, more specifically, also belong to a maritime context that was distinct to the nineteenth century and that would soon change irrevocably as the Age of Sail finally drew to a close in the early 1900s.² The *Demeter* can be fruitfully examined against these backdrops, and against the construction and concerns of the narrative as a whole. Doing so helps to make visible the way that gothic literature is, like Stoker's research and writing practices, produced not autonomously but in conversation with other social and cultural activities, discourses, and representations.

The *Demeter*, like the Count himself, exists in an in-between state — undead, unreal, unnatural, Other. In Greek mythology, Demeter was the goddess of fertility and the harvest, who rescued her daughter Persephone from abduction to the underworld by Hades, and so the name alone of *Dracula's* ship suggests slippage between worlds. But there is much more than this to the *Demeter's* significance in the novel. The ship and what happens aboard her foreshadow many elements of the rest of the story, working to develop thematic and symbolic concerns connected with the vampire at a point at which *Dracula* himself is still occluded by the narrative; that a vampire might exist has not yet occurred to or been admitted by the characters in Britain. Readers, however, who have figured out the story's premise or know it already, are in a position to interpret the gothic metaphors of the *Demeter's* story, which rely for their effect on a pre-existing web of signification associated with the sea, ships,

¹ For accounts of Stoker's researches, see *The Origins of Dracula: The Background to Bram Stoker's Gothic Masterpiece*, ed. by Clive Leatherdale (London: William Kimber, 1987); and *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula*, ed. by Robert Eigheten-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

² See David Marcombe, *The Victorian Sailor* (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1985); and John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719-1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

storms, wrecks, and phantoms. The *Demeter* is also entangled in contemporary concerns about empire, law, gender, and science that underlie *Dracula*, and has a key role in the narrative's development. In this article, I argue that attending to the role of the *ship* in *Dracula* reveals a rewarding and hitherto neglected layer to the gothic strata from which this most famous of texts is compiled — while attending to the role of the ship in *this* novel in particular highlights a rich but little-told literary history of the gothic at sea and its place and roles in nineteenth-century culture more broadly.

That Stoker was fascinated with seascapes is apparent in other works, such as *The Watter's Mou* (1894).³ His interest in the maritime is also evident in his research notes for *Dracula*, which, as editors Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller point out, 'contain more material on Whitby than on any other topic'.⁴ Stoker collected information on coastal weather, nautical terminology, ship-wrecks, and local legends, from exploring Whitby, the Coast Guard and its documents, talking to locals, and from books such as *A Glossary of Words Used in the Neighbourhood of Whitby* (1876). A great deal of the detail and descriptions from these notes is visible in *Dracula*. 'Had Stoker not spent his summer vacation in Whitby in 1890', Eighteen-Bisang and Miller conclude, 'the book we know as *Dracula* would have taken a different form'.⁵ Although the novel's action spends more time in London and Transylvania, the location of Whitby has a significant part to play, and the prominence of its maritime culture in Stoker's notes suggest that the *Demeter* and her arrival merit further attention in the context of this culture than they have thus far received.

That said, lack of critical attention to *Dracula's* gothic ship is part of a more general neglect of the relationship between the gothic and the sea in literature, despite the many valuable studies that recognise the profound identification between the sea and British writing more widely, and despite creative engagement, in literature, art, music, and film, with the sea and the supernatural.⁶ As I argue here, examining the *Demeter* not only addresses this neglect, but also draws attention to what lies behind the vessel's depiction; the gothic ship does not spring into existence in the pages of *Dracula* but arises out of a long cultural development. The gothic qualities that shape the *Demeter's* particular representation and

³ For Stoker's fascination with seascapes and a discussion of *The Watter's Mou*, see Carol Senf, *Bram Stoker* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), pp. 40-42.

⁴ *Bram Stoker's Notes*, p. 288.

⁵ *Bram Stoker's Notes*, p. 289.

⁶ See, for example, Mariaconcetta Constantini, *Venturing into Unknown Waters: Wilkie Collins and the Challenge of Modernity* (Pescara: Edizioni Tracce, 2008); Samuel Baker, *Written on the Water: British Romanticism and the Maritime Culture of Empire* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2010); *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*, ed. by Bernhard Klein (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Peck; and Doug Lamoreux's recent novel, *Dracula's Demeter* (N.P.: Creativia, 2014).

narrative functions derive from a vast and polycultural marine imaginary in which ships and the sea serve a number of varied and powerful symbolic and metaphorical purposes. Visual art, music, writing, folklore, philosophy, and the historical realities of seafaring all contribute to this imaginary, which can be traced back through, for example, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the Bible, or Homer's *Odyssey*.

Here, though, I will mostly limit my discussions to the context of the nineteenth century and the ideas, images, and tropes most relevant to *Dracula*. I begin by outlining the liminal, undead capacities of ships in fiction and in the maritime culture of the Age of Sail, before exploring phantom-ship traditions and the subversion by gothic ships of some conventional nautical metaphors, such as those of departure and return. I then analyse how the representation of the *Demeter*, its journey, and its storm-driven arrival at Whitby relate to these literary and imaginative traditions. The gothic tropes prominent in *Dracula* as a whole — such as liminality, claustrophobia, persecution, revenants, control, transgression — are intensified in the microcosm of the ship, while the *Demeter*'s significance extends beyond the depiction of her last voyage, and into the wider cultural concerns and narrative trajectory of the novel.

In literature, ships can function as gothic spaces in a variety of ways. Shipwrecks, for example, conceal and preserve dark secrets that haunt the living — in Wilkie Collins' *Armada* (1866), Midwinter passes a night of terror on the wreck of the timbership, next to the cabin in which his father murdered Allan's father; a wreck conceals the body of the eponymous Rebecca in Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel, and its discovery exposes answers to the puzzles oppressing the second Mrs de Winter. Even viable ships can be claustrophobic spaces, or expose the extreme psychological effects of isolation, illness, or starvation, such as in Joseph Conrad's *Shadow Line* (1915), or in Prendick's near brush with cannibalism in the dinghy of the *Lady Vain* in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896). In more explicitly supernatural texts, gothic ships cross normally uncrossable boundaries between life and death, sea and air, as does the Flying Dutchman in Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839).

Ships make effective gothic spaces partly because of their broader conceptualisation, not limited to gothic modes, as liminal, in-between objects. Paul Gilroy calls the ship 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion'.⁷ A ship in transit is constantly

⁷ Quoted in Gretchen Woertendyke, 'John Howison's New Gothic Nationalism and Transatlantic Exchange', *Early American Literature*, 43.2 (2008), 309-35, (p. 317) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/242619>> [accessed 12 May 2009].

shifting on a shifting surface, self-contained and often out of communicative reach, functioning between lands, nations, or systems of governance, especially in times before modern telecommunications. For Michel Foucault, in 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), a ship is 'the heterotopia *par excellence*'; it has a unique existence as somewhere that is neither one place nor another.⁸ The ship's heterotopic existence depends on its being at sea, a state that releases it from the normal rules of the land. This is deftly illustrated by Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897). Having set sail,

[t]he ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same.⁹

The ship's fragility and isolation from the rest of the world is emphasised by the cosmic vastness of the ocean, on which she maintains a solitary position yet continually pursues an 'unattainable' horizon. In Foucault's words, the ship is 'a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.¹⁰ On a sea voyage, a ship is existentially unreliable; it is a space in which more than one (potentially conflicting) state or reality can hold true at the same time. In gothic narratives, ships, like castles, abbeys, cities, or prisons, can become self-contained, oppressive systems governed by their own internal rules, while their material existence as floating objects renders them isolated and unstable in unique ways.

The *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) is a good example. The novel is grounded in reality by plentiful details of whaling practices and an ending recalling the wreck of the *Essex*, rammed by a sperm whale in 1820, yet Captain Ahab's vengeful, obsessive quest for the white whale, the isolation of the voyage, and the precariousness of survival lend the narrative an uneasy, fantastic quality.¹¹ In *Dracula*, too, the *Demeter* has a material origin in the sense that it is based on a real ship. Stoker recorded in his notes the case of a Russian schooner, the *Dimitry*, which was wrecked (relatively gently) in Whitby harbour in 1885; this ship, '(cargo silver sand — from mouth of Danube) ran into harbour, by pure chance avoiding rocks', and 'put out two anchors in harbour [which] broke & she slewed round

⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres: hétérotopies', *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, 5 (October 1984), 46-49; 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (Spring 1986), 22-27 (p. 27).

⁹ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 18.

¹⁰ Foucault, p. 27.

¹¹ Owen Chase, *The Wreck of the Whaleship 'Essex'* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1821); and Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (London: Penguin, 2002).

against pier'.¹² In the novel, Stoker re-casts this unusual yet plausible incident in a gothic mode, laden with the significance of the vampire's arrival and his role in causing the wreck.

The capacity of ships to be gothic, and their significations in superstition, art, and literature more generally, are shaped by their materiality and cultural history, which need to be understood in terms of some of the precarious realities of being at sea in the Age of Sail. Even with modern marine technologies, ocean weather remains a powerful and dangerous force, but historically, seafaring posed far greater dangers to pre-twentieth-century sailors and sailing ships than they face now. Historian Marcus Rediker reports the following comments by two eighteenth-century clergymen:

‘Sea men are to be numbered neither with the living nor the dead’, explained a minister familiar with the dangers of life at sea [...]. ‘In their daily work, mused another cleric, seamen ‘border upon the Confines of Death and Eternity, every moment’.¹³

To be at sea, then, was to be both alive and dead, between states of existence. As John Peck notes, in sea-voyage narratives, ‘[d]eath is the constant shadow’.¹⁴ Until the ship reached its port, families or owners on land could not be sure of the present survival of the ship and crew, or of any individual on board; to go to sea during the Age of Sail was to run very high risks. ‘Ships foundered in heavy weather, collided in crowded estuaries, ran aground as a result of navigational errors or were burned to the waterline by the spontaneous ignition of dangerous cargoes’, and in the two decades ‘between 1879 and 1899’, calculates historian David Marcombe, ‘1153 British ships went missing and almost eleven thousand lives were lost’.¹⁵ Through shipwreck, war, fire, or even ships sunk for the insurance, there is a centuries-long association between seafaring and loss of life. Stoker's research notes include a list of names found on Whitby tombstones of sailors and passengers lost or drowned since 1777, which runs to ten typed pages.¹⁶ The serious and real tragedies of shipwreck are vividly expressed in accounts such as Henry Thoreau's description of the wreck of the *St John* off Massachusetts in 1849, in which 145 Irish emigrants lost their lives, and in the grim starvation and cannibalism experiences of the survivors of the *Essex* recounted by first mate

¹² *Bram Stoker's Notes*, pp. 139, 155.

¹³ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 3.

¹⁴ Peck, p.11.

¹⁵ Marcombe.

¹⁶ *Bram Stoker's Notes*, pp. 252-71.

Owen Chase.¹⁷ In 1872, the case of the *Mary Celeste*, a ship discovered intact but as peacefully abandoned as if its crew had simply stepped off the deck, generated another discomfiting mystery about the fates of sailors.¹⁸ At sea, gothic narratives could all too easily become lived experience; there could be little to choose between fiction and reality.

Ships and sailors alike can therefore be thought of as occupying an in-between existence, one that manifests in a variety of ways. *Dracula* literalises the metaphors of liminality associated with the sea: *Dracula* is an undead, liminal being existing at the midpoints of a number of different binaries; the fate of the crew is *not* certain to those on the land (although it is understood by readers); and the ship herself is half-viable, half-derelect by the time she reaches Whitby's harbour. The *Demeter* does not need to be spectral to resonate with ghost stories of the sea; derelicts formed an important part of stories involving ghost-ship sightings. Illusions created by mists, hot air, or nightfall, glimpses of mysterious lights, and vessels unresponsive to signals were all implicated in such accounts, but so too were wrecks or abandoned derelicts. Margaret Baker makes the point that some reported phantoms were, in fact, 'undoubtedly wooden derelicts, captives of wind and currents, which hung about the sea-lanes for years. Not until the 1930s when the last were destroyed did "ghost ships" fall sharply in number.'¹⁹ The persuasively real quality of some phantom sightings, then, had a literal basis that worked to reinforce the existing liminal conception of a ship at sea, and fed into legends and printed fiction.

Phantom-ship legends, which populate the folklore of maritime nations globally, are often legible in the context of the liminal existence of a voyaging ship whose fate cannot be known by those on land who are left to tell its tale.²⁰ Stories such as 'La Belle Rosalie' revolve around the vision of a ghost or ghost ship glimpsed from the land: the phantom has returned as a sign of a lost ship whose wreck and crew will never, can never be found.²¹ These phantom sightings bring resolution or closure, ending the story by symbolically bringing the ship home. In what Hans Blumenberg calls the 'nautical metaphors of existence', voyages, storms, doldrums, and harbours stand for the ups, downs, crises, and

¹⁷ Henry Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1908); and Chase.

¹⁸ Paul Begg, *Mary Celeste: The Greatest Mystery of the Sea* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

¹⁹ Margaret Baker, *Folklore of the Sea* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1979), p. 54.

²⁰ See, for example, Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology, Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands*, 3 vols (London: E. Lumley, 1851), II; Angelo Solomon Rappoport, *Superstitions of Sailors* (London, 1929); or Allan Cunningham, *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1887).

²¹ Emily Alder, 'The Dark Mythos of the Sea: William Hope Hodgson's Transformation of Maritime Legends', in *William Hope Hodgson: Voices from the Borderland*, ed. by Massimo Berruti, S. T. Joshi, and Sam Gafford (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2014), pp. 56-72.

resolutions of human lives that are prevalent in the imaginations of maritime cultures: crucially ‘often the representation of danger on the high seas serves only to underline the comfort and peace, the safety and serenity of the harbour in which a sea voyage reaches its end’.²² In the example of Conrad’s *Narcissus*, when the ship reaches Britain, she becomes part of the land again: ‘The *Narcissus* came gently into her berth; [...] a swarm of strange men, clambering up her sides, took possession of her in the name of the sordid earth. She had ceased to live.’²³ If being at sea is a heterotopic existence, then to rejoin the land is to return to safety and security but also to lose that distinct self-contained yet diffuse identity. Indeed, even in shipwreck narratives like those of Gulliver or Robinson Crusoe, the final ending is a return to home. The protagonist may not necessarily find comfort and peace there, but the return gives the narrative some structural closure and symmetry.²⁴

Gothic ship narratives, however, subvert or distort such metaphors. The Flying Dutchman, for example, which was one of many legends researched by Stoker, defies such resolution.²⁵ This cursed ship (given cultural prominence in numerous artefacts from Marryat’s novel and Wagner’s opera to Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series) haunts the Cape of Good Hope eternally in a way that pinpoints the liminal status of gothic ships: the blaspheming, defiant captain is ‘imprisoned forever on his flailing vessel [...] condemned neither to return home nor to reach his longed-for colonial destination’.²⁶ The *Dutchman* cannot rejoin the land, nor can it sink to its death, but, like a vampire, exists in perpetual liminality. In *Dracula*, the *Demeter* occupies, for a time, a similar undead state of existence. When at last she is reunited with the land, it is no serene return to safety, but a violent shipwreck that launches Dracula’s reign of terror.

There are several other ways, too, in which the story of the *Demeter* subverts conventional trajectories of nineteenth-century seafaring narratives. Even while at sea, as the captain’s log reveals, the *Demeter*’s voyage has hardly been the kind of heroic, romantic endeavour that would resonate with prevalent received images of sailing in the Victorian period, but a desperate struggle with madness and horror. Her voyage also has implications for British identity and foreign relations. For John Peck, a maritime story is ‘a story about

²² Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 7.

²³ Conrad, p. 102.

²⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London, Penguin, 2003); and Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (London: Penguin, 2003). Gulliver returns home four times, ultimately to dissatisfaction with English human society after his sojourn with the noble Houyhnhnms.

²⁵ See *Origins of Dracula*.

²⁶ J. Q. Davies, ‘Melodramatic Possessions: The Flying Dutchman, South Africa, and the Imperial Stage, ca. 1830’, *The Opera Quarterly*, 21 (2005), 496-514 (p. 496).

enterprise, about seeing an opportunity and seizing it. This energetic, and money-making, spirit then comes to be seen as an expression of the national temperament.²⁷ By using the *Demeter*, a foreign ship, to invade Britain, Dracula appropriates Victorian narratives of entrepreneurship and imperial power, and undermines assumptions about naval supremacy, domestic security, and manliness at a historical moment ‘when the maritime character of Britain is losing its significance, and when, as a consequence, the maritime tale seems to be losing its capacity to embrace and sustain a broader analysis of society’.²⁸ *Dracula*, as a whole, is a novel often concerned with Victorian debates and anxieties around empire, national identity, spirituality, gender roles, and other social norms that were coming under pressure in the 1890s, in which the story of the *Demeter* has its own role to play.

The *Demeter* is commissioned by Dracula to transport his boxes of earth — and, unknown to the crew, Dracula himself — to Whitby. She is an archetypal nineteenth-century gothic ship, economising many of the liminal qualities, narrative tropes, and symbolic associations of ships and seafaring in a single object. She conceals dark secrets in her hold. Each night, Dracula emerges to prey on the crew, who, by the tenth day of the voyage, start to disappear. As a result of the vampire’s predation, Margaret Carter notes, ‘by the time [the *Demeter*] touches Whitby, there is no crew, the ship is apparently uncontrolled, Dracula is still unknown but recognized. It has become a phantom ship.’²⁹ The *Demeter* is not, strictly speaking, a phantom; like the *Mary Celeste*, she is not an intangible spectre but a ship of wood and canvas — nearly derelict, certainly, but real enough to be violently wrecked on Whitby’s shore. The *Demeter* remains a solid ship but takes on supernatural characteristics in relation to the storm and its arrival in Whitby. Carter’s selection of the term ‘phantom ship’ points to the ambiguous position of the *Demeter* — in one sense, as set out above, all ships are phantoms, conceptually existing on the borders between life and death, here and elsewhere, even, again like the *Mary Celeste*, on the borders between rational and supernatural explanation. But some phantom ships are more ghostly than others. The more they transgress the boundary between ghost ship and real ship, the more disruptive they become.

Generally speaking, the life/death, and this-world/other-world boundaries become less stable and more porous as the nineteenth century progresses, a shift which is stimulated in part by the rise of spiritualism and the quest, amongst many theologians, physicists, writers,

²⁷ Peck, p. 5.

²⁸ Peck, p. 8.

²⁹ Margaret Louise Carter, *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press), p. 211.

and the wider public alike, to reconcile faith and science in explanations of human existence. Spiritualists, rather than being supernaturalists, posited the survival of human spirits after death on the basis of natural, scientific principles; determining the existence of an other world was simply beyond the current state of knowledge, but such a world would eventually be found to exist.³⁰ Challenges to secure boundaries between matter and spirit and between life and death therefore also belonged to the wider culture of the late Victorian period. Gothic and ghost stories were not slow to participate in the shaping of these new narratives. As Jenny Bann has shown in her study of hands in Victorian ghost stories, for instance, ghostly hands acquire more solidity and agency as the nineteenth century progresses, tracking the increasing agency being granted to spirit.³¹

To an extent, a similar trajectory can be identified with gothic ships. In S. T. Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798/1800), the ghost ship on which Death and Alive-in-Death play dice for the lives of the crew appears only at sunset, a 'spectre-bark' that vanishes into the dark as 'the sun's rim dips'.³² Spectral intangibility and distance across water keep the 'spectre-bark' at a safe remove, but a century later neither physical nor spiritual barriers are so secure. William Hope Hodgson's *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), for example, presents a real ship (tellingly named the *Mortzestus*) sailing across dimensions *into* the other world, where the 'ghost pirates' of the title overpower her by taking on dripping, physical bodies.³³ Such *fin-de-siècle* reconfigurations of the nature of spirit and matter provide new clothing for the kinds of gothic ships that had, however, long disturbed that boundary. Arguably the most gothic ship in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is not the ghost ship but the Mariner's own ship, trapped between realms, even as the crew themselves are trapped alive-in-death until the Mariner can be redeemed. Like the *Demeter*, the solid vessel simultaneously becomes a liminal, 'phantom' ship.

A direct connection between the *Demeter* and the earlier text is evident in the *Whitby Dailygraph*'s newspaper report which quotes from Coleridge's poem:

The wind fell away entirely during the evening, and at midnight there was a dead calm, [and] a sultry heat [...].

³⁰ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³¹ Jennifer Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (Summer 2009), 663-86.

³² S. T. Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by A. R. Jones and R. L. Brett (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 9-35 (ll. 195-199).

³³ William Hope Hodgson, 'The Ghost Pirates', in *The Ghost Pirates and Other Revenants of the Sea*, ed. by Jeremy Lassen (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2005).

The only sail noticeable was a foreign schooner with all sails set, which was seemingly going westwards. The foolhardiness or ignorance of her officers was a prolific theme for comment whilst she remained in sight, and efforts were made to signal her to reduce sail in face of her danger. Before the night shut down she was seen with sails idly flapping as she gently rolled on the undulating swell of the sea,

‘As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.’³⁴

In the poem, the ‘painted ship’ is, of course, the Mariner’s ship, not the deathly ghost ship. Both his ship and the *Demeter* are idle, becalmed in windless weather; without steerage way, they are no longer under the crew’s control. The description, meteorologically and nautically accurate, also produces a sense of uneasy anticipation, coloured by the supernatural associations that storms often garner in superstition, myth, and art.

The newspaper report mostly presents itself plausibly as a factual, straightforward account of the incident, but its descriptions of the breaking storm in particular indulge in lurid gothic imagery:

the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed. The waves rose in growing fury, each overtopping its fellow, till in a very few minutes the lately glassy sea was like a roaring and devouring monster. White-crested waves beat madly on the level sands and rushed up the shelving cliffs; others broke over the piers, and with their spume swept the lanthorns of the lighthouses which rise from the end of either pier of Whitby Harbour.

The wind roared like thunder, and blew with such force that it was with difficulty that even strong men kept their feet, or clung with grim clasp to the iron stanchions [...]. To add to the difficulties and dangers of the time, masses of sea-fog came drifting inland — white, wet clouds, which swept by in ghostly fashion, so dank and damp and cold that it needed but little effort of imagination to think that the spirits of those lost at sea were touching their living brethren with the clammy hands of death, and many a one shuddered as the wreaths of sea-mist swept by. (pp. 76-77)

The monstrousness of the stormy sea and of the uncanny wreaths of fog points to the real deadliness of storms, while invoking folkloric associations of sea mists and the ghosts of lost ships and sailors. The newspaper report locates the incident within well-established narratives and the imagery of seafaring with some relish. Indeed, the choice to present this section of the book as a newspaper article is in keeping with *Dracula*’s overall narrative strategy.

The narrative as a whole is compiled through a variety of letters, diaries, and other documents. The *Demeter*’s story is told through first-hand accounts, not by any of the novel’s

³⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 76. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

main characters but through the newspaper report and the addendum to the ship's log. Accumulating documents characterises the novel's general strategy for providing a sense of validation to an improbable story, but these documents are re-typed by Mina, and authenticity is ultimately undermined by Jonathan's closing observation that 'in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting' (p. 378). The veracity of the story is both upheld and cast into doubt; the entire narrative hovers on a boundary between the real and the unreal. The newspaper report of the *Demeter's* arrival is a case in point. Its very existence as an artefact pasted into Mina's diary, along with its matter-of-fact framing of the incident, constructs an authentic scene, but its transcription into typewriting, the inexplicability of some of the events, and the article's representational strategies work to the opposite effect.

The quotation from Coleridge's poem, for example, contributes to a sense of the newspaper article's authenticity by tying it to a literary history that really exists in the world outside the text, but the choice of *this* quotation from *this* poem is significant because it links the *Demeter* to a literary tradition of gothicised ships. The 'painted ship upon a painted ocean' is a well-known image and need not carry supernatural connotations, but its invocation in this context — since readers quickly understand this ship has something to do with Dracula — hints that the sorts of otherworldly forces associated with the Mariner's tale are at work on the *Demeter*, too. Uncertainty over how the final stages of the *Demeter's* journey should be interpreted is underlined in the above quotations by the way that matter-of-fact descriptions often yield to supernatural emphases.

The emphasis on the ghostliness of the sea-mist also signals the control that Dracula wields over the *Demeter* at this point; a shroud of fog concealing the ship since its departure from the Baltic, and the sudden shift of wind that drives the ship miraculously through the narrow Whitby harbour entrance instead of onto the rocks, are both implicitly attributed to his supernatural agency. The transcription of the ship's log, carefully placed directly after the newspaper article, intensifies the suspense and horror by shifting the narrative perspective from land-based observation to the stressful experiences of the crew's final days.

The captain's log, however, only offers partial explanations, hints requiring a knowledgeable reader or Mina's hindsight to make sense. The facts of the disappearing crew are hard for the captain to tally with the available explanations. The overall uncertainty of the narrative is reflected, and also caused, by the instability of Dracula himself, a figure constantly moving between states of existence. Despite his very corporeal predation on the crew, Dracula also haunts the ship like a ghost: 'On the watch last night', says the first mate,

‘I saw It, like a man, tall and thin, and ghastly pale. It was in the bows, and looking out. I crept behind It, and gave It my knife; but the knife went through It, empty as the air’ (p. 84). As elsewhere in the novel, Dracula shifts regularly in form; his transformations into animals, mist, and ‘elemental dust’ subvert conventional physical boundaries and also social ones, allowing him to enter, for example, the supposedly safe and otherwise inviolable domestic realms of Lucy’s and Mina’s bedrooms. He is what Christopher Craft has called ‘an easeful communicant of exclusive realms’.³⁵ Yet the sea is the one boundary he cannot cross: only when ship touches shore can he leap to land.

In these and other ways, Stoker’s narrative turns the *Demeter* into a gothic microcosm. The tight and inescapable spatial limits of a ship at sea, for instance, compound the claustrophobic horror of being trapped in the same space as a vampire. The shock of discovering Dracula’s body in the boxes in the *Demeter*’s hold drives the first mate to suicide:

‘Save me! save me!’ he cried, and then looked round on the blanket of fog. His horror turned to despair, and in a steady voice he said: ‘You had better come too, captain, before it is too late. *He* is there. I know the secret now. The sea will save me from Him, and it is all that is left!’ (p. 85)

Moments later, he casts himself overboard. For both vampire and sailors, there is no escape from the carceral ship except into the equally deadly arms of the sea. The blanketing fog, ‘which seems to move with us’, is Dracula’s creation, to conceal the ship from friendly eyes until it reaches the open North Sea; ‘only God can guide us in the fog’, the captain despairs, ‘and God seems to have deserted us’ (p. 84). On Dracula’s return voyage, he similarly has ‘the fog at his command’ (p. 318). Aboard the *Demeter*, therefore, the world shrinks to the size of the ship, pinning the crew between, aptly enough, the devil and the deep blue sea; to be alive is to occupy the increasingly shaky space between the vampire and drowning. The marginal existence of a voyaging ship therefore becomes literalised through the agency of the vampire.

Ultimately, that margin collapses entirely, until the ship becomes an undead space occupied only by the vampire and the animated corpse of the captain. To the onlookers, the *Demeter*’s final rush into the harbour, achieving the impossible by avoiding the notorious Whitby reef, appears miraculously unguided. The searchlight reveals that

³⁵ Christopher Craft, “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’”: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*’, *Representations*, 8 (Autumn 1984), 107-33.

lashed to the helm was a corpse, with drooping head, which swung horribly to and fro with each motion of the ship. [...] A great awe came on all as they realized that the ship, as if by a miracle, had found the harbour, unsteered save by the hand of a dead man! (p. 78)

The coastguard and doctor conclude that that captain had lashed himself to the wheel while still alive, having ‘tied up his own hands, fastening the knots with his teeth’ (p. 80). A crucifix is found between his hands and the spoke, presumably protecting him from the same fate as his crew. Even after death, the captain remains at his post, occupying the place of a living helmsman while ‘the flapping and buffeting of the sails had worked through the rudder of the wheel and dragged him to and fro, so that the cords with which he was tied had cut the flesh to the bone’ (p. 79). He is received by the Whitby townsfolk as a hero, yet by reducing him to an apparently reanimated corpse and the first mate to suicidal madness, the novel also undermines the masculine construction of the heroic sailor.³⁶ Dracula’s victims on the *Demeter* are aligned, like Jonathan, with the more explicitly vulnerable women, Lucy and Mina. The captain’s bonds, which include the rosary, mark his flesh in a manner that foreshadows the mark from the Holy Wafer that Mina will later bear on the forehead of her living body. The dead captain thus perpetuates the conventional image of the brave sailor, but also suggests its fragility.

The motion of the ship, driven by Dracula through the storm, reanimates the captain’s drooping and mutilated body into a hideous undead mockery of life. This sequence in the novel, along with Stoker’s notes on wrecks and storms, indicate the narrative’s concern with exploring ideas of natural as well as supernatural power.³⁷ Dracula’s relationship with natural forces and phenomena such as wind, mists, sunset, sunrise, tides, and garlic suggests that the roots of the supernatural lie in the natural.³⁸ Van Helsing later suggests that the existence of Dracula may be explained by physical (though as-yet mysterious) means, speculating on the ‘combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in a strange way’ (p. 320). Natural and supernatural accounts compete as explanations for the vampire; Dracula’s existence unsettles familiar distinctions between them, as is evident in the ambiguous state in which the *Demeter* and its helmsman are observed. Representing the dead captain, instead of directly representing Dracula, increases suspense by serving the vampire’s destabilising functions before he is fully acknowledged by the narrative and its lead characters: the steering

³⁶ See Marcombe for discussions of representations of sailors.

³⁷ For Stoker’s notes on stormy weather, see Eigheten-Bisang and Miller, pp. 133-37.

³⁸ Senf, p. 85.

corpse presents the onlookers with an illusion of the ship's being controlled by a 'dead hand' — which, in fact, it is.

The 'dead hand' image extends the doomed ship's intrusion into the world of the living through a legal nicety. It is not long after the wreck before

one young law student is loudly asserting that the rights of the owner are already completely sacrificed, his property being held in contravention of the statutes of mortmain, since the tiller, as emblemship, if not proof, of delegated possession, is held in a *dead hand*. (p. 80)

The statutes of mortmain stated that it was illegal for the dead to retain control of corporate property, with the 'dead hand' metonymising ownership in perpetuity. Thus the statutes are contravened, because the dead captain did not let go of the wheel. As Anne McGillivray explains, '[t]he analysis is a piece of legal casuistry. *Mortmain*, law's dead hand, applied only to corporately-held lands and tenements. As corporations, like vampires, are eternal and never die a natural death, this may be a coded Stoker joke.'³⁹ McGillivray's analysis of this legal allusion draws attention to an important symbolic point — that Dracula's hand can reach from beyond the grave to violate the established laws of the social and physical worlds alike. In this way, the gothic liminality encapsulated by the ship expands beyond the maritime realm with its uncertain states of existence, and into the social infrastructures that governed shore-based Victorian Britain.

This phantom ship does not fade away into the mist, but persists in entering the public world of Whitby's harbour, with most of the town as audience. The site of the wreck is authentically precise: she 'pitched herself on that accumulation of sand and gravel washed by many tides and many storms into the south-east corner of the pier jutting under the East Cliff, known locally as Tate Hill Pier' (p. 78). This ship's reunion with the land is not calculated to reassure, as other ship narratives might by bringing a character, or at least firm news of them, safely to shore. The *Demeter* has 'found the harbour', but instead of this 'miracle' signifying the closure generally provided by homecoming or arrival into safety from the dangerous, liminal ocean realm, the ship is violently wrecked and, moreover, brings the terror of Dracula with her. Indeed, the wreck is necessary to Dracula's arrival: '*the very instant the shore was touched*, an immense dog sprang up on deck from below, as if shot up by the concussion, and running forward, jumped from the bow on the sand' (p. 78, emphasis added). The ship's

³⁹ Anne McGillivray, "'He Would Have Made a Wonderful Solicitor": Law, Modernity, and Professionalism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in *Lawyers and Vampires: Cultural Histories of Legal Professions*, ed. by W. Wesley Pue and David Sugarman (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003), pp. 225-67 (p. 204).

contact with the land unleashes the vampire on an unsuspecting England. It is no coincidence that it is by ship that Dracula invades an Empire built on its maritime power. In such acts of reverse colonisation, Stephen Arata argues, '[i]n the marauding, invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms'.⁴⁰ Naval supremacy, the security of an island nation, and the transport of disease to colonised lands all become horrifying when used against Britons, as they are through Dracula's method of invasion.

Dracula's ship, then, destabilises a number of conventional narratives associated with the maritime — of national, imperial, and personal security and identity, of the separations normally maintained between land and sea, safety and danger, life and death, of the relative power of science and the natural versus the inexplicable and supernatural, of superstition and tradition versus modernity. The story of the *Demeter* exposes the fractures in these narratives and plays a significant role in establishing and developing the unease that shapes the rest of the novel. The concerns explored in the *Demeter*'s story are partly, but only partly, resolved in the later stages of the narrative when Dracula flees for home — again by sea.

Dracula's telepathic connection with Mina is used by Van Helsing to attempt to track the vampire's return journey by water. Here Dracula's powers over nature both aid and hinder him. Dracula again uses his supernatural powers to speed his return voyage with the wind and conceal the vessel with fog, while Van Helsing deploys the modern science of hypnotism to turn Dracula's telepathic connection with Mina against him. On this return voyage, the ship incarcerates Dracula rather than the crew — a further example of the reversal that has taken place between the Count and Van Helsing's band. The vampire has become the persecuted rather than the persecutor. In one trance, Mina reports: 'Nothing; all is dark', and, later, 'I can hear the waves lapping against the ship, and the water rushing by. Canvas and cordage strain and masts and yards creak. The wind is high' (p. 333). Conversely, Dracula, too, uses Van Helsing's technique against the vampire hunters to conceal the fact that he is arriving at Galtaz, not at Varna as they expect, but again the balance of power shifts as Mina uses what she learns to work out the river route by which he is being transported back to his castle.

Dracula's identification with *sailing* ships speaks to both the extent and limits of his power. In the nineteenth century, the wooden sailing warships and merchants of the Age of Sail were giving way to steel-hulled windjammers, steam ships, and iron-clads. Dracula can control the wind that fills the sails and the fog that impedes human navigation, but he cannot

⁴⁰ Stephen D. Arata, "'The Occidental Tourist': *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization", *Victorian Studies*, 33 (1990), 621-45 (p. 623).

affect the modern technologies of steel and steam. However, the advantages that modernity grants to his pursuers decrease the closer Dracula draws to home; they ‘gradually leave behind them all their modern technological trappings and ultimately defeat him with the weapons of his own time: knives and crucifixes’.⁴¹ The power of folklore is thus upheld, but it is also clear that Dracula belongs to a superstitious age that is on the way out. What is more, if the story of *Dracula* is in part a tale of modernity, science, and technology pitted against an obsolete social order and outdated superstition, this tale is told no less through Dracula’s sea voyages than it is through the struggle between the vampire and his hunters.

Dracula’s ship merits attention by readers and critics, because she highlights a neglected strand of gothic literary, imaginative, and cultural history, while also showing how closely embroiled gothic fiction is with its contemporary social values and practices, and because examining her crucial role in the story enriches our experience of Stoker’s novel. Ships, I have been suggesting, have unique liminal capacities that derive from their place in the imaginaries of maritime cultures, and from their literal function as transport vessels crossing the uncertain environment of the sea. The gothic, as a narrative mode, is often characterised by its transgression of boundaries, threatening to disrupt cultural norms or social orders normally kept in place by conventional lines of demarcation. As heterotopic spaces, however, ships not only transgress such boundaries but can also hover on or at them in troubling ways. Gothic ships disrupt familiar narratives, such as those that construct the perceived security of land versus the uncertainty of the sea, the distinctions between life and death, national and gender identities, or Victorian Britain’s position as unassailable empire, ruler of the seas, and explainer of scientific mysteries. In *Dracula*, the transgressive capacities of ships are aligned with those of the vampire, so that the *Demeter* becomes an undead space foreshadowing the deepest evils wrought by Dracula in the rest of the narrative.

⁴¹ Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde, and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 29.

Kipling's Early Gothic Tales: The Dialogical Consciousness of an Imperialist in India

Gustavo Generani

In his early literary production, Rudyard Kipling wrote a number of gothic tales the intricate ideology of which exceeds his monolithic image as an imperial writer. Founded on a dialogism that simultaneously promotes and defies imperial discourse, these stories, this article argues, can be read as positioning him among those late-Victorian writers, like Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) or George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), who cultivated a critical distance towards the Other and their own culture. T. S. Eliot read that critical distance as 'universal foreignness', 'detachment and remoteness', characteristics that make Kipling a writer 'impossible wholly to understand'.¹ In a similar interpretative line, contemporary critic Stephen Arata reads Strickland — a recurring character in Kipling's stories — as an alter ego of his author, one whose 'detachment' and 'perfect objectivity' allowed Britons to understand Indian culture.²

Both Eliot and Arata employ the word 'detachment' in relation to Kipling's critical distance. Amanda Anderson has described Victorian 'detachment' as a modern attitude associated with criticism, self-reflexive character, ambivalence, uncertainty, cosmopolitanism, disinterestedness, and aspirations toward universality and objectivity.³ Although aspiring to conform to universal values has been frequently considered as a part of hegemonic thinking, or of ethnocentric forms of domination over cultural minorities, Anderson argues that 'detachment' was also a position that encouraged analysis and questioning of traditional norms and conventions.⁴ Kipling's view of the British Empire in his early gothic tales contain a number of elements that can be seen as aligning with this ambivalent notion. His conscious support of the imperial project was corroded by tensions that arose, potentially from his unstable ideological position. This article is an analysis of that dialectical structure.

¹ Quoted in Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 151.

² Arata, p. 163.

³ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴ Anderson, 'Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity', in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 265-89.

The first section of this article focuses on the way that tales like ‘The Mark of the Beast’, ‘The Return of Imray’, ‘The Sending of Dana Da’, ‘In the House of Suddhoo’, and ‘Bubbling Well Road’ suggest an attitude that alternatively supports and undermines British imperialism within the framework of religious and supernatural fields. On the one hand, these tales try to explain Indian culture from a British perspective that serves colonial purposes, seeking to degrade and control that culture. However, they also show how Western rationality is defeated by an esoteric otherness. The Other in these stories keeps a mysterious secret, an inaccessible, supernatural, and menacing power that is wielded against British supremacy. In these tales, such a conception affects the imperial discourse in several ways. Firstly, spirituality functions as sort of a battlefield of cultural Indian resistance, where Britishness is vulnerable rather than omnipotent. Secondly, the stories’ attitude towards spirituality is framed in Social Darwinist terms, pitting religion against religion in a struggle for power, thereby insinuating that British religious missions, far from being humanitarian in nature, as imperial propaganda insists, are instead an instrument of politics. Finally, civilisation — often presented as a positive outcome of imperialism — is exposed as another form of barbarism involved in a struggle for power.

In the second section, the ideological tension analysed above is read as an ethical problem in ‘The Mark of the Beast’, ‘At the End of the Passage’, ‘The Broken Link Handicap’, ‘The Phantom Rickshaw’, and several journalistic articles. They are critical of what, from the British perspective of Kipling’s Protestant work ethic, is depicted as the general disorder of India. Nevertheless, such a position — which reinforces the necessity for imperial tasks — is imploded by a self-critical consciousness of the abusive excesses of that system of values, for both British pioneers and Anglo-Indians who live in adverse conditions. The last section of this article is centred in the inner Self and two dramatic psychological consequences of the previous problems: guilt and fear of revenge from Indians. Both feelings are intense in ‘At the End of the Passage’ and journalistic articles like ‘The House of Shadows’ and ‘Till the Day Break’, which imply that the British Self’s conscious commitment to imperial tasks is devoured by its own deep, tormented ideological ambiguities and uncertainties.

In contrast with the later reactionary position that Kipling developed during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and intensified during the Great War (1914-1918), these tales present a more critical perspective regarding the British intervention in India. Although there is no doubt about his support for the colonial endeavour, his criticism nonetheless also points

out its mistakes and imperfections. His early gothic creations therefore produce such a polyphonic effect within Kipling's early imperialism, and as such, demand analysis.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Supernatural: Between Indian and British Monstrosities

In two letters addressed to R. L. Stevenson in 1891, Henry James calls Kipling 'enfant monster' and 'little black demon'.⁵ Both gothic epithets, far from being derogatory and used to keep a safe distance from his otherness, exalt the talent of a new genius of British literature who came from abroad. However, his monstrosity is not only ironic in literary terms; it could be politically convenient for the establishment too. In an unsigned review attributed to Andrew Lang, a number of comments on Kipling's first short-story collection, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), highlight its productive use for the imperial task. The reviewer writes, '[i]t may safely be said that *Plain Tales from the Hills* will teach more of India, of our task there, of the various peoples whom we try to rule, than many Blue Books'.⁶ Similarly, in 1890, *The Times* celebrated the potential for using Kipling's stories 'to lift the veil from a state of society so immeasurably distant from our own'.⁷ For British readers, Kipling's stories offered a necessary knowledge of an Other who was nonetheless at a safe distance from the Self.

Although they were written from within Indian culture, they reproduced for British readers the problematically distant approach of those contemporary 'armchair anthropologists' like E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, who received information about native peoples from abroad and analysed it in the metropolis, developing their ethnocentric interpretations remotely. However, while these stories indicate a fervent wish to know Indian culture, judging it against British values and maintaining a hierarchical distinction, they also criticise British culture, suggesting a kind of internal critical distance. This ideological perspective evident in Kipling's fiction mirrored his own position in India. As an Anglo-Indian, his education, cultural background, and frame of mind were quintessentially British, but he was also immersed in Indian culture, and that experience had a strong influence on his critical view of the British Empire. In other words, he did not have the clear perspective of a cosmopolitan man, inheritor of the Enlightenment project's defence of universal values, acceptance of difference, and objectivity. Kipling, loyal to his Britishness, developed a

⁵ Reproduced in *Kipling: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Roger Green (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 68.

⁶ *Daily News*, 2 November 1889, in Green, pp. 47-48.

⁷ *The Times*, 25 March 1890, in Green, pp. 50-51.

monstrous image of the Other which was supportive of imperialism.⁸ However, in doing so, he also revealed imperial monstrosities.

The ideological tension produced by holding these conflicting positions, alternatively critiquing and defending imperialism, arises in the model of Anglo-Indianness offered by Kipling — his character Strickland. Strickland is a cultural hybrid whose knowledge of native customs, in combination with his stereotyped British analytical distance, drives him to solve problems, preserving colonial order. A good example of the use of this character as such an ideologue is ‘The Mark of the Beast’ (1885), a tale in which Fleete, a drunken Englishman who offends native devotees of the Monkey-god Hanuman by grinding the ashes of a cigar-butt into the forehead of the god’s image, is supernaturally punished for his behaviour.⁹ As a policeman who is an expert in Indian culture, Strickland knows in advance how the devotees of the Monkey-god will react; he knows who can cure Fleete when he is mysteriously punished; and he ‘knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man’.¹⁰

This study of the Other, the better that he might be dominated, is an elementary imperial practice. However, the recurring motif in several Kipling’s stories of recommending that colonial authorities and common readers should attain such knowledge demonstrates how far the agents of the British Empire were from the native culture. Two non-gothic tales illustrate how Kipling repeats the same idea with the persistence of an imperial mentor who sought both to reflect and fix this problem. In ‘Tod’s Amendment’, it is said that ‘no man can tell what natives think unless he mixes with them with the varnish off’;¹¹ and in ‘Miss Youghal’s Sais’, Strickland has the ‘extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves’.¹² Knowledge is power. That is the reason why ‘[n]atives hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much.’¹³ Through his works, Kipling strove to help readers avoid those mistakes made by people like Fleete or the missing agent of empire in ‘The Return of Imray’ (1888), who had mysteriously disappeared for several months and is finally found killed (by his servant, we

⁸ ‘In general, cosmopolitanism endorses reflexive distance from one’s cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity [...]. In the Enlightenment, it was defined against the constricting allegiances of religion, class, and the state’ (Anderson, ‘Cosmopolitanism’, p. 267).

⁹ An ideologue is a category defined as ‘the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes’, in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 76.

¹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, in *Life’s Handicap* (London: MacMillan, 1925), pp. 240-59 (p. 240).

¹¹ Kipling, ‘Tod’s Amendment’, in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 196-204 (p. 199).

¹² Kipling, ‘Miss Youghal’s Sais’, in *Plain Tales*, pp. 27-34 (p. 27).

¹³ Kipling, ‘Miss Youghal’s Sais’, p. 29.

eventually learn) in the roof space of his own bungalow, '[s]imply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental [...]'.¹⁴

Following the tendency of nineteenth-century anthropology, Kipling tried to explain India to his British readers, and in doing so, operated at the service of the ruling classes, offering knowledge that could be employed against native lepers with magic powers, uncanny priests, and conspiring servants who represented a menacing Otherness that threatened the imperial project.¹⁵ In the shadow of the 1857 Mutiny, British rule in India strongly emphasised duty to the Crown and distrust of the native inhabitants. Kipling's writing undeniably participated in the view of them as inscrutable and sinister, projecting an uncanny image of their country which accentuated the dominant jingoism of the age.

At the same time, it is possible to read his gothic tales as offering a view of India that works against rather than with such ideologies, deconstructing imperial values. In 'The Mark of the Beast', for instance, gothic conventions seem to work at the service of the conservative agenda. Nevertheless, its first paragraph hints at ideological ambiguities, suggesting a certain awareness of the religious and geopolitical complexities of the Indian situation, one that damages imperial propaganda:

East of Suez, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified supervision in the case of Englishmen.

Kipling creates an Eastern territory beyond Suez that is outside of *direct*, constant, and unmodified *control* on the part of English spiritual powers. British religious principles *cease* in India, while moral and cultural restrictions are *modified* there. Such a gothic construction of the Eastern world, less enlightened than Protestantism and more inclined to supernatural forms of belief, in many ways appears to conform perfectly to Said's concept of Orientalism as a Western representation of its repressed desires and imperial ambitions.¹⁶ However, I would argue that Kipling is in fact conscious of this process, alternating messages that establish this Orientalising impulse with others that criticise it from a Protestant ethical standpoint. Indeed, his stories frequently display a man-of-the-world cynicism which deconstructs both positions — British imperialism and Indianness — making it very difficult to determine their ideological status.

¹⁴ Kipling, 'The Return of Imray', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 240-59 (p. 276).

¹⁵ See George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan, 1987).

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Kipling's work also employs more direct means than this to undermine the imperial project. The previous quotation indicates that religions are mechanisms of control, in which Gods, Devils, and sacred principles operate as instruments of political power. It insinuates that Eastern and Western Gods are constructed as human creations, central to the struggle for territory. This view has two negative consequences for imperial discourse. Firstly, the implied similarity between Eastern and Western gods destroys the hierarchical relationship created by imperialism, a move which makes possible the colonisation of peoples in the name of an ostensibly superior religious order. Secondly, while imperialism masquerades as a civilising mission, the above quotation exposes Western political-religious power, spread by propaganda, as the real driving force, a point reinforced by the tale's epigraph: 'Your Gods and my Gods — do you or I know which are the stronger? — *Native Proverb*'.¹⁷ These words anticipate the extremely violent behaviour of the story's British characters against native people: in the beginning, Fleete desecrates the Monkey-god, is bitten by a native leper priest, and then behaves as if possessed; at the end, Strickland and the narrator force the priest by torture to remove the spell he has cast on Fleete and the demented man returns to sanity. There is no imperial civilising mission in those behaviours, but plain barbarism. In addition, the epigraph effectively subverts the idea of an omnipotent imperial god by giving the voice of the subjugated culture a position of authority, through using one of its proverbs as a motto and a central motif for the story as a whole. Arguably, the Indian side of Kipling's awareness emerges here, inverting the colonial hierarchical relationship, and his Social Darwinism shows religions struggling for existence, like Nietzschean truths, metaphorical creations which mask a desperate human's will to power.¹⁸ In contrast to the missionary discourse which positions Christian interventions as philanthropic, for the benefit of colonised people, both the epigraph and these tales effectively sabotage the sovereign and pacifying image of Christianity as a quasi-divine decision imposed by Great Britain to civilise those it has colonised.¹⁹

However, it would be a mistake to take an epigraph or even an individual tale as ultimate proof of Kipling's anti-hegemonic religious cosmopolitanism. In the struggle between cultural forces both in his stories and his own psyche, his declared loyalty to the

¹⁷ 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 240.

¹⁸ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968); and *Beyond Good and Evil* (London: Penguin, 2003). The bellicose conception of religions is reproduced in 'The Lost Legion' (1892), when a native officer asks Lieutenant Halley, 'how can the ghosts of unbelievers prevail against us who are of the Faith?' (Kipling, 'The Lost Legion', in *Many Inventions*, pp. 182-99 (p. 197)).

¹⁹ See Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Church of England undeniably establishes a strong conservative position against all powers of external spiritual resistance.²⁰ An example of this is 'The Sending of Dana Da' (1888), a parody of Theosophy whose tone of mockery is evident from the first sentence: 'Once upon a time, some people in India made a new Heaven and a new Earth out of the broken teacups, a missing brooch or two, and a hairbrush.'²¹ The narrator ridicules here the 'supernatural' materialisations allegedly manipulated by Madame Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, which was wildly fashionable in England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.²² In addition, Kipling's critique of non-Christian beliefs is also made clear in the extremely ecumenical character of the creed professed by Dana Da, its spiritual leader. Like Theosophy, '[t]his religion was too elastic for ordinary use'.²³ As the story indicates, it is depicted as a mix of chaotic, flippant, and unconvincing doctrines linked with the dissipated consumption of opium and whisky, tricks to get money, and practices to scare people. Kipling's narrative voice appeals again in this story to the authority of a native proverb, but this time to reinforce the imperial system and dismiss non-Christian religious practices, a strategy that positions the colonised Other in ideological agreement with the imperial Self to which s/he submits. The story's epigraph reads, '[w]hen the Devil rides on your chest, remember the low-caste man'.²⁴ The reactionary message of this epigraph, in which any evil is categorically attributed to a marginalised, endogamous, and hereditary low social class, is rendered even stronger when the story insinuates that that 'Devil' is Dana Da, called the 'Native', a false prophet who cheats an Englishman. The story, unlike others by Kipling, presents 'native' religion as false and exploitative.

The topic of treachery perpetrated by the natives is taken up again in 'In the House of Suddhoo' (1888), the epigraph of which ironically introduces India as 'the Oldest Land/ Wherein the Powers of Darkness range'.²⁵ Suddhoo is an old man very anxious about his son, who is gravely ill with pleurisy and lives far away from him. A seal-cutter undertakes to save his son by magic, on payment of many rupees, and Suddhoo accepts it. The story is narrated by his British friend, a potential Lieutenant-Governor who witnesses the clean *jadoo* practiced to remove the pleurisy that attacks Suddhoo's son, and describes this ritual of 'white' magic as oscillating between suspected fraud and credibility. Finally, however, most

²⁰ See Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 138.

²¹ Kipling, 'The Sending of Dana Da', in *Soldiers Three* (London: MacMillan, 1965), pp. 308-21 (p. 308).

²² See Mark Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62.3 (1994), 747-67.

²³ Kipling, 'The Sending of Dana Da', p. 308.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Kipling, 'In the House of Suddhoo', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 144-54 (p. 144).

of the tricks are dismantled and the powers of darkness (with which even this 'white' magic is associated) are illuminated by reason. Once again, Kipling has developed a story which clearly depicts the natives as Orientalised, malevolent tricksters, out to defraud everybody.

In both tales, the resolution of the tension between fraudulence and authenticity, supernatural experience and rational explanation, and believing in the Other and distrusting him/her is clear. Kipling dissolves the tension by giving a reasonable or empirical explanation for strange events. Formally, then, his ends are monologic and conservative, calming British anxieties and preserving the established colonial order. However, ambiguities transcend this apparent drive towards determination in his gothic fiction. Behind the sarcastic tone of his rhetoric decrying false supernatural displays, it is possible to detect a crouching fear of a genuine paranormal Indian culture, impenetrable to the Western analytical mind. It does not matter that he closes 'The Mark of the Beast' by stating that 'no one will believe a rather unpleasant story [...] it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned'.²⁶ The doubt previously developed in the story is itself subversive here; specifically, the representation of the imperial project in the story as a whole implies a cracked system, built on shaky convictions, which cannot be repaired by these final, conventional words. Fleete is supernaturally punished for his sacrilegious behaviour against the Monkey-god's image, and the story does not offer any convincing alternative, rational explanation. After the insulting transgression of the Englishman, a leper attacks him and leaves a mark on his breast that, it is intimated, is the cause of his gradual metamorphosis into a beast. 'The affair was beyond any human and rational experience. I tried to say "Hydrophobia", but the word wouldn't come, because I knew that I was lying', says the narrator, accepting that the historic medical name for rabies was a false diagnostic, incapable of explaining such an eerie case.²⁷ To emphasise further the strength of the supernatural in the text, the same leper who initially attacked him finally cures Fleete and expels the evil spirit from him. By contrast, Dr Dumoise fails in his diagnosis, a failure which underlines the story's insistence upon the impotence of Western rationality as paradigm of civilisation and progress, and the power of the native supernatural culture.

As announced in the tale's epigraph, the supernatural should be read here as standing in for a conflict between cultural forces, a political tension within which a latent indigenous power works in the shadows of British supremacy. Behind the obedient attitude of a leper

²⁶ Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 259.

²⁷ Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', p. 251.

priest who is obliged by torture to remove the evil spirit from a British man; a false prophet like Dana Da who pretends to place a curse to an enemy chosen by an Englishman; or the tricky white magic made by an apparently trustworthy seal-cutter before the eyes of an assumed Lieutenant-Governor, is a subversive esoteric force, a code unintelligible to British rationality, and the risk of an unpredictable uprising.²⁸ The supernatural, then, is a metaphorical representation of a colonised collective might which transcends the sphere of religion and menaces the imperial establishment; it is both epistemological and potentially political. To this end, Kipling's strategy is to animalise and demonise that power. The Monkey-god, the leper mewing before his attack to Fleete, and a group of horses that are frightened by the bestialised Englishman are testimonies of the colonised's animality; the Judeo-Christian figurations of the leper as impurity and the beast as the Devil indicate the colonised's diabolism. Animalised and demonised, the supernatural native force is the manifestation of the imperial fear of popular rebellion, a motif which re-appears persistently in a number of Kipling's tales.

In 'In the House of Suddhoo', for instance, the 'Powers of Darkness' mentioned in the epigraph are linked with a potential subversive act against the colonial system, for 'there was an order of the *Sirkar* against magic, because it was feared that magic might one day kill the Empress of India'.²⁹ In 'The Sending of Dana Da', the cheating of an Englishman by the Native, a low-caste spiritual leader, should be read as metonymically connoting a wider social scale. All these characters are ideologically built as social bodies. Beyond their individuality, some of their recurrent characteristics embody Indian culture, as is made evident by another outcast, in 'Bubbling Well Road' (1888), who represents a further inversion of power. We are told, '[h]e is a one-eyed man and carries, burnt between his brows, the impress of two copper coins. Some say he was tortured by a native prince in the old days.'³⁰ Although he is a priest, he is a man socially marked and discriminated against. The villagers stone him. Like the priest in 'The Mark of the Beast', whose body is tortured with red-hot iron gun-barrels by two British men and also has the disfiguring skin sores of leprosy, the priest in 'Bubbling Well Road' bears the mark of Otherness on his body. Both of

²⁸ Homi Bhabha explains that the 'incalculable native' was a problem in the discourses of the coloniser's literature and legality. The native represented a frustration of that nineteenth-century strategy of surveillance which tried to dominate the 'calculable' individual, but his indecipherability was also useful, allowing him to be depicted as an inverted Other justifying both the imposition of Western progress, and the coloniser's paranoia. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²⁹ Kipling, 'In the House of Suddhoo', in *Plain Tales*, p. 146.

³⁰ Kipling, 'Bubbling Well Road', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 365-70 (p. 364).

them have a kind of stigma, but they also exert an esoteric power from their humiliating positions as pariahs. The narrator states,

The villagers told me that the patch of grass was full of devils and ghosts, all in the service of the priest, and that men and women and children had entered it and have never returned. They said the priest used their livers for purposes of witch-craft.³¹

However, perhaps the best example of the relationship between paranormal experiences, native submission, and rebellion is ‘The Return of Imray’. The mystery of Imray — an employee of the Empire who has disappeared inexplicably — is solved when his loyal native servant, who it is revealed is responsible for his death, confesses the cause of the crime: Imray apparently cast an evil eye upon his child, who died as a result. The native servant’s revenge springs from a cultural clash that provokes the narrator to reflect on a similarity with his own situation. As soon as he discovers that the servant had been living for four years with Imray, the narrator remarks, ‘I shuddered. My own servant had been with me for exactly that length of time. When I went over to my own room I found my man waiting, impassive as the copper head of a penny, to pull off my boots.’³² The image of a servant pulling off the boots of the coloniser, after Imray’s unexpected murder at the hands of his own faithful servant, hints at a supposedly submissive, unintelligible culture in a germinal state of rebellion. This epiphanic moment suddenly reveals a foreign code in which the word ‘impassive’, denoting outward submissiveness, does not necessarily imply agreement, acceptance, or capitulation. The narrator recognises it here as a form of resistance and the prelude to an outbreak of violence. At this crucial moment, terror is projected onto British readers and the political significance of the image is experienced through their identification with the narrator and Imray.

However, the conservative construction of a frightening and menacing Other in these tales — which is useful to degrade Indian culture and maintain a hierarchical colonial order — is counterbalanced by constructions of the British Self that undermine the promulgated image of that Self. For instance, the way that the agents of the Empire control Otherness in ‘The Mark of the Beast’ is even more terrifying and barbarian than the picture of the Other. Fleete is the ‘civilised beast’ who embodies British arrogance, its abusive, insulting, and hegemonic attitude towards the Other, just as Strickland and the narrator, his friend, perform their own acts of brutality. They torture the leper and oblige him to cure a possessed Fleete:

³¹ Kipling, ‘Bubbling Well Road’, p. 370.

³² Kipling, ‘The Return of Imray’, in *Life’s Handicap*, p. 276.

Strickland wrapped a towel round his hand and took the gun-barrels out of the fire [...]. I understood then how men and women and little children can endure to see a witch burnt alive; for the beast was moaning on the floor, and though the Silver Man had no face, you could see horrible feelings passing through the slab that took its place, exactly as waves of the heat play across red-hot iron-gun-barrels for instance.³³

Later, although the narrator says that they ‘had [been] disgraced [...] as Englishmen for ever’, his negative moral reaction is immediately overcome by an atmosphere of joy, in which he ‘laughed and gasped and gurgled just as shamefully as Strickland’.³⁴ Suddenly, they respond frivolously to their own transgressions, and their use of a perverted violence to defend invasive conduct on the part of the coloniser is ultimately legitimised. The story’s ending, which expresses a self-critical consciousness, can also be read as echoing the cynical voice of the establishment: ‘Some years later, when Strickland had married and was a church-going member of society for his wife’s sake, we reviewed the incident dispassionately, and Strickland suggested that I should put it before the public.’³⁵ In these words, there is no shame at all. On the contrary, Strickland says that the facts can and indeed should be shown to the public. Although Fleete is the first aggressor, the narration shows him as a victim whose suffering vindicates the torture of the Other. It is a position founded on an implicit argument: that British barbarism is justified by the influence of a barbarian context. Consequently, in line with the precept uttered by Strickland, these ‘barbarians’ are attacked using ‘their own weapons’.³⁶ In addition, Strickland’s injunction that the narrator should view the ‘incident dispassionately’ avoids any moral responsibility on the part of the torturers, recasting an extremely violent situation as an interesting affair from which the narrator must maintain a rational distance. In this case, the use of distance is far from progressive. It operates at the service of the established hierarchy between colonisers and degraded colonised people. Kipling’s dialogical consciousness seems to have moved from a cosmopolitan view to a conservative position, in which terror operates as both a warning to protect the imperial status quo, and as a validation of its excesses.³⁷

³³ Kipling, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, in *Life’s Handicap*, pp. 255-56.

³⁴ Kipling, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, p. 258.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Kipling, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, p. 244.

³⁷ It is perhaps because of that strong message that the tale was initially rejected for publication in England. Andrew Lang and William Sharp read it in 1886. Lang returned the manuscript defining it as ‘poisonous stuff’ which had ‘left an extremely disagreeable impression’ on his mind; and Sharp claimed: ‘I would strongly recommend you instantly to burn this detestable piece of work.’ See Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Star Book, 1980).

Up to this point, it has been demonstrated how his stories reveal, firstly, a defence of the imperial project of gathering information about the Indian Other, conceived as a subservient, indecipherable, and menacing beast, and of developing a critical representation of its supernatural beliefs; secondly, an analytical approach to religions as instruments of power, which damages the construction of the imperial endeavour as a spiritual mission; and finally, a frank depiction of British abuses against the Indian Other, narrated in such an ambiguous, ironic tone that the stories could be denouncing or confirming a bestial imperial policy. All these aspects are, as the next section demonstrates, part of an ideological conflict.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Productive Order: Between the Indian Social Hell and the Hellish Imperial Work Ethic

Tensions between Kipling's self-critical consciousness and his defence of conservative values in political-religious questions are reproduced in the depiction of moral and economically productive issues in his gothic stories. Like 'The Mark of the Beast', 'At the End of the Passage' (1890) was published in England as Kipling suffered a nervous exhaustion caused by overwork.³⁸ In this tale, British imperialism in India is examined through the perspectives of a number of agents of the empire who are charged with a number of different tasks: Mottram works on the Indian Survey, Lowndes in the Civil Service, Dr Spurstow is a medical doctor, and Hummil is an assistant engineer. They live at some distance from each other, and meet once a week to enjoy themselves in Hummil's house.

Their rambling conversation alights on the native ineptitude for administration and the extreme social inequalities resulting from an Indian archaic system of taxation exerted on the poor for the benefit of a minority: 'The state of the people is enough to make you sick. I've known the taxmen wait by a milch-camel till the foal was born and then hurry off the mother for arrears.'³⁹ India, as these men depict it in their conversation, is a hell on earth. Its tremendous social inequality, human exploitation, and rampant illnesses 'don't incite a man to shoot anything except himself'; its excessive hot weather and resultant sleeplessness drive men mad; and its allegedly deceitful, unreliable natives multiply dangers everywhere.⁴⁰ No one wins in this situation, not even the coloniser. All these reasons work as implicit arguments to explain the possible suicide of Jevins, a sub-contractor mentioned during the conversation between the four men, which seems to anticipate Hummil's mysterious death at the end of the story. Both are victims of their context. Their alienating solitude is the result of

³⁸ Carrington, p. 164.

³⁹ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 183-212 (p. 187).

⁴⁰ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 188.

a complex, confusing, and indefinable natural and cultural environment summarised in another story, 'Thrown Away' (1888), in these words:

Now India is a place beyond all others where one must not take things too seriously [...]. Good work does not matter, because a man is judged by his worst output [...]. Bad work does not matter, because other men do worse, and incompetents hang on longer in India than anywhere else [...]. Sickness does not matter, because it's all in the day's work, and if you die, another man takes over your place and your office in the eight hours between death and burial.⁴¹

The narrator reinforces the image of India as a general chaos that affects Anglo-Indians educated in Great Britain if they take it too seriously. Here, critique centres on Indian inefficiency in a context of sickness and death which tacitly seems to contrast with the esteemed British work ethic. But furthermore, many of Kipling's gothic tales focus on what they see as the general moral corruption of India. In 'The Broken Link Handicap' (1888), we are told that 'all racing is rotten [...]. In India, in addition to its inherent rottenness, it has the merit of being two-thirds sham.'⁴² 'The Bisara of Poree' (1887) describes an amulet that has to be stolen to give good luck, otherwise it has the opposite effect. All these episodes are used to construct an Otherness whose hyperbolic disorder, inefficiency, illness, and immorality perturb most of Kipling's British narrators and characters. From their imperial conservatism, the Other appears as a sign of some kind of evil. And although that evil sometimes acquires the form of paradisiacal landscapes, these landscapes also harbour typhoid fever and cholera, sinister places for the agents of Empire.

The gothic sublime therefore operates in Kipling's work as a rhetorical figure of the rejection of Indian nature. In 'At the End of the Passage', the 'winds of Hell' in the Himalayan epigraph connote death.⁴³ 'In Error' (1887) shows the jungle as the cause of insanity. Through the image of a man lost in a jungle-grass inhabited by a menacing priest, 'Bubbling Well Road' condenses the paranoid fear of the British, self-immersed and disoriented in the indecipherable Indian universe. A similar feeling is confessed by Kipling in *Something to Myself* when he says, 'I have always felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventide, as I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or bananas leaves, and the song of the tree-frogs'.⁴⁴ Fear in these stories comes from his impression of India as a country

⁴¹ Kipling, 'Thrown Away', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 15-26 (pp. 16-17).

⁴² Kipling, 'The Broken Link Handicap', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 163-70 (pp. 163-64).

⁴³ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p.183.

⁴⁴ Carrington, pp. 13-14.

in which ‘the bounds of the Possible are put down’.⁴⁵ This theme is also explored in ‘The Phantom Rickshaw’ (1888), where a ghostly story of love and guilt is used to portray the country as saturated with death and unreasonableness. As depicted in all these stories, a lack of order and logic reaches deep into the culture, torturing the impotent British rationality, making the main characters yearn to escape back to the homeland.

As these examples indicate, Kipling’s early gothic fictions develop an image of India as a Dantesque nightmare, a chaotic, confusing, irrational, corrupted, unhealthy, and unjust milieu. In his work as a journalist, Kipling often enlarged the same hellish picture in more realistic — though no less intense — ways. Some sketches written for the *Civil and Military Gazette* exemplify this tendency. In ‘The City of the Evil Countenances’ (1885), he describes Peshawur in the following terms:

you shall see a scene worthy almost of a place in the Inferno, for the city is unlovely even beneath bright sunshine [...] everywhere repulsive to every sense [...]. Faces of dogs, swine, weazles [*sic*] and goats, all the more hideous for being set on human bodies, and lighted with human intelligence, gather in front of the ring of lamp-light where they may be studied for half an hour at a stretch. Pathans, Afreedees, Logas, Kohistanis, Turkomans, and a hundred other varieties of the turbulent Afghan race, are gathered in the vast human menagerie between the Gate and the Ghor Khutri. As an Englishman passes, they will turn to scowl upon him, and in many cases to spit fluently on the ground after he has passed [...]. The main road teems with magnificent scoundrels and handsome ruffians; all giving the on-looker the impression of wild beasts held back from murder and violence, and chafing against the restraint. The impression may be wrong [...] but not unless thin lips, scowling brows, deep set vulpine eyes and lineaments stamped with every brute passion known to man, go for nothing.⁴⁶

This passage is loaded with strong ideological assumptions. Peshawur is described here as a repulsive ‘Inferno’ in order to highlight the chronicler’s British good sense and subtly to associate Indian evil with another kind of Otherness: that one represented by hell in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In addition, the intertextual relationship between this journalistic sketch and the creation of an Italian Catholic of the Middle Ages is also useful to mark an ideological and temporal distance between two archaic cultures — the here-related Catholic and Indian ones — and modern, evolved, imperial values represented by a rational Protestant Englishman of the nineteenth century. Very quickly, his initial sensation of repugnance for the environment is emphasised by an awareness of social disorder and a derogatory view of

⁴⁵ Kipling, ‘By Word of Mouth’, in *Plain Tales*, pp. 318-24 (p. 318).

⁴⁶ Kipling, ‘The City of the Evil Countenances’, in *Kipling’s India: Uncollected Sketches 1884-88*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 81-85 (pp. 83-84).

the Other, articulated via animalistic descriptions. Afghans are not recognised here as complete human beings. Linked to animals associated with ‘darkness’ — which connotes immoral behaviour — they are studied under the light of a lamp, and revealed in all their supposed ill-mannered repulsiveness. The journalist’s light of reason teaches the reader that ‘the turbulent Afghan race’ is dangerous not only in its multiplicity, but also in its behaviour. In the clash between natives and an Englishman synthesised by the act of spiting, the journalist, with his civilised eyes, scrutinises and studies the resentment and ‘brute passion’ of the barbarian Other, the signs of which are evident on the latter’s body. The journalist’s physiognomic discourse thereby reduces natives to the category of ‘wild beasts’. They are part of a melting pot of races and cultures whose disordered plurality makes British management an ongoing difficulty. It is clear how this journalistic piece reproduces the same extremely conservative, derogatory view of Indian culture already analysed in his early gothic fictions.

Other sketches add further to the sense of repugnance evident in the picture of India built up across Kipling’s writings. ‘Typhoid at Home’ (1885), for example, is about the unhealthy conditions in which milk is collected.⁴⁷ ‘A Week in Lahore’ (1884) is a complaint about the incompetence of railway Indian workers, for ‘[n]ative passengers are stupid, troublesome — anything you like — but they ought to be treated more like human beings than they are’.⁴⁸ ‘The Epics of India’ (1886), another journalistic piece, is a furious attack against Hindu mythology, whose creations are ‘monstrous, painted in all the crude colours that a barbaric hand can apply; moved by machinery that would be colossal if were it not absurd, and placed in all their doings beyond the remotest pale of human sympathy’.⁴⁹ Finally, in ‘Anglo-Indian Society’ (1887), he asserts, ‘[t]here is not society in India as we understand the word. There are not books, no pictures, no conversations worth listening to for recreation’s sake.’⁵⁰ There is no doubt, therefore, that a Eurocentric perspective on Indian cultural manners is the dominant discourse both in Kipling’s fictions and non-fictions.

Coming from the position of authority that can be attributed to Kipling’s British background, his fictions and sketches attest that his approach to India is fervently critical, and imperialism, these writings suggest, is a necessary humanitarian action to secure its progress. On this point, Dr Spurtsow’s remark about the hopeless situation of people with black cholera in ‘At the End of the Passage’ is significant for its imperial connotations. He states, ‘the poor

⁴⁷ Kipling, ‘Typhoid at Home’, in Pinney, pp. 69-77 (p. 71).

⁴⁸ Kipling, ‘A Week in Lahore’, in Pinney, pp. 31-36 (p. 34).

⁴⁹ Kipling, ‘The Epics of India’, in Pinney, pp. 175-70 (p. 177).

⁵⁰ Kipling, ‘Anglo-Indian Society’, in Pinney, pp. 184-93 (p. 186).

devils look at you as though you ought to save them'.⁵¹ This implies an assumption of British superiority by the colonial subject, who sees the coloniser as a saviour, bringing salvation to suffering people, and establishes a mission for the coloniser (in this case a medical doctor) that transcends the limits of his specific duties — here, medicine. Pictured as a humanitarian cause, colonised people who trust its guidance and power demand that imperialism improve their lives, and those demands are, we are told, met by the colonisers, which means a hard moral duty for colonisers and a reinforcement of colonial hierarchical relationships. These writings imply a belief in a world separated and ranked, where Britons join Britons, and close (and therefore inappropriate) relationships between colonisers and subjects are punished by poetic justice. This ideological position is clearly evident in the first two lines of 'The Ballad of East and West' (1889), in which Kipling writes, '[o]h, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet/ Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat'.⁵²

Both 'The Mark of the Beast' and 'At the End of the Passage' exemplify this attitude. They focus on Britons who come together from remote places to share a small part of Western life in uncomfortable India, and represent the British Self isolated within a submitted foreign culture, where their relationships with natives are developed on the basis of irreducible conflicts. In 'At the End of the Passage', British citizens make nostalgic references to Great Britain and sing songs with ironic allusions to their distressing experiences far away from home, as a way of recovering the past and imposing it upon the present. Beyond the hint of parody of this kind of attitude in the narration, the characters represent the collective reaction of a minoritarian hegemonic social group surrounded by an overwhelming and intimidating Otherness. Other gothic tales present the British community as a circle of self-protection, which results in the imperial bureaucratic system. In 'The Return of Imray', for instance, the 'Indian Empire' is a network of information from which it is difficult to disappear without leaving tell-tale signs. This theme is taken up again in 'The Phantom Rickshaw', in which the narrator announces that '[o]ne of the few advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability'.⁵³ After twenty years, says the narrator, a man 'knows something about every Englishman in the Empire'.⁵⁴ Within the Dantesque Indian inferno of illness, ugliness, disorder, inefficiency, and mysterious and treacherous religious

⁵¹ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p.188.

⁵² Quoted in Carrington, p. xix.

⁵³ Kipling, 'The Phantom Rickshaw', in *Indian Tales* (New York: Dodge Publishing Company, 1899), pp. 609-47 (p. 609).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

practices, the British community has developed a system in which everyone is seen by everyone, and sees everyone in turn.

This social behaviour is much more than a mechanism of control produced by a bureaucratic system, however. Kipling also conceives it as *esprit de corps*, a collective moral attitude that allows the English in India to overcome adversity. That said, even such cultural and emotional support is not enough for Britons seeking to live in India. Individuals must develop a psychological strength without emotional sensitivity, and even lose their sense of human values, it seems, if they want to survive there. In 'At the End of the Passage', for instance, the context of spiritual and physical death represented by black cholera and suicides that arises from the chat between the four agents of Empire seems to have generated a state of indifference, a desire to ignore any emotional implication. After Dr Spurstow narrates what seems to be Jevin's suicide, Mottram says, '[y]ou're a queer chap [...]. If you'd killed the man yourself you couldn't have been more quiet about the business', to which Hummil calmly responds, '[g]ood Lord! What does it matter? [...] I've got to do a lot of his overseeing work in addition to my own. I'm the only person that suffers.'⁵⁵ Spurstow and Hummil's egotism in the face of their friend's death can be seen as a mechanism of self-defence, helping them shore up a moral fervour that encourages them to face harsh environments, difficult conditions, and extreme loneliness. We get a sense of this attitude towards living and working in India when Spurstow asks Mottram,

'What are you doing with yourself generally?' 'Sitting under a table in the tent and spitting on the sextant to keep it cool', said the man of the survey. 'Washing my eyes to avoid ophthalmia, which I shall certainly get, and trying to make a sub-surveyor understand that an error of five degrees in an angle isn't quite so small as it looks. I'm altogether alone, y' know [...].'⁵⁶

At the core of Mottram's words is an imperialist ethics founded on Darwinist rhetoric. The idea of the survival of the fittest is transplanted here into the moral domain, where barbarism is a positive challenge that strengthens civilisation, and life in the British dominions is a reinforcement of 'the moral fibre in little matters of life and death'.⁵⁷

An intense autobiographical experience mirrors the attitudes on display in Kipling's gothic fiction in this regard. Toughened by the cruelty of the Victorian public school he attended, Kipling sought to prove his 'moral fibre' by working as a journalist in India. There,

⁵⁵ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p.191.

⁵⁶ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 189.

⁵⁷ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 201.

surrounded by outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, suffering gastric pains, fever, and the effects of drugs compounded from opium, he worked seven hard years for the machinery of Empire, defending that most imperial of virtues — duty. Kipling recalls this time in *Something of Myself*, in which he writes,

the work was heavy. I represented fifty per cent of the ‘editorial staff’ of the one daily paper of the Punjab [...]. I never worked less than ten hours and seldom more than fifteen per diem; and as our paper came out in the evening did not see the midday sun except on Sundays. I had fever too, regular and persistent, to which I added for a while chronic dysentery.⁵⁸

Kipling transforms this account of hardship into a moral message by asserting that he was ‘spared the worst horrors, thanks to the pressure of work, a capacity for being able to read, and the pleasure of writing what my head was filled with’.⁵⁹ In his code of values, work is salvation, a form of action that he opposes to scepticism and nihilism. On this principle he establishes the other foundation of his ethics, which is *order*. By means of his actions, man should cooperate in the development of a moral order, which will then, ideally, lend support to the imperial project. If India is a mess, as the gothic tales imply, then the British Empire represents civilisation as a project defined by *order* and *progress*.

However, at the same time as fortifying the British Empire’s pristine image, Kipling also illuminates its disturbing side, especially in his fictions. The dialogic structure of ‘At the End of the Passage’ effectively critiques the imperial task, within the framework of the ‘approved’ ethics of work and order outlined above. The story levels disapproval, not only at the native feudal system, which is presented as a form of exploitation, but also at imperialism, which is depicted in a fictional English newspaper article as a sham operation designed purely for abusing Indians so that the English aristocracy might benefit. The article states,

I assert unhesitatingly that the Civil Service in India is the preserve — the pet preserve — of the aristocracy of England. What does the democracy — what do the masses — get from that country, which we have step by step fraudulently annexed? I answer, nothing whatever. It is farmed with a single eye to their own interests by the scions of the aristocracy [...] they themselves force the unhappy peasant to pay with the sweat of his brow for all the luxuries in which they are lapped.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Kipling, *Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 27.

⁵⁹ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Kipling, ‘At the End of the Passage’, p. 186.

This 'unhappy peasant', and the young prince who has 'been taught all the vices of the English' and irresponsibly wastes the money earned by his subjects, represent the imperial alliance between a native traditional feudal system and the British dominant classes.⁶¹ Specifically, Kipling's social concern focuses on the system of exploitation of British workers. When Hummil says that a 'man hasn't many privileges in this country', justifying the decision of a man to commit suicide, his generalisation denounces a system in which he is also a victim.⁶² The ghost who appears, significantly, before Hummil's mysterious death, is rationally explained, since the spectre behaves 'as is the use of all spectres that are born of overwork'.⁶³ Death by overworking is, we are being told, common in India. The case is echoed by 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw'. According to Doctor Heatherlegh, Pansay — a man who sees the phantom of a lover he has abandoned — is another victim of the system: 'Overwork started his illness, kept it alight, and killed him, poor devil. Write him off to the System — one man to take the work of two and a half men.'⁶⁴

It is unquestionable, then, that Kipling was aware of the terrible consequences of imperialism as a part of the machinery of capitalism. His stories demonstrate how human beings are used as instruments of control and production, as gears of a system of exploitation fuelled by a brutal work ethic that is buttressed by the very attitudes that Kipling himself espouses in his non-fiction. However, it is also important to consider Hummil's assertion in 'At the End of the Passage': 'It's an insult to the intelligence of the Deity to pretend we're anything but tortured rebels.'⁶⁵ He pronounces it at a crucial moment in the story, after saying he has not slept properly for days and has been afflicted by fearful dreams, just before his mysterious death. His self-critical consciousness here assumes his responsibility in the imperial task, and reveals the false heroic image reified by the colonisers, which ultimately leads to their own victimisation. Nonetheless, despite this critical approach to imperialism, the tale finishes by defending a system of exploitation based on constructing the work ethic as salvation. After Hummil's death, Dr Spurstow says, 'Go back to work. I've written my certificate. We can't do any more good here, and work'll keep our wits together.'⁶⁶ His words indicate a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of Kipling's writing, which consists in the defence of a work ethic that sustains the imperial endeavour, but which he also criticised because it negatively affects its workers.

⁶¹ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 188.

⁶² Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 191.

⁶³ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 206.

⁶⁴ Kipling, 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', in *Indian Tales*, p. 611.

⁶⁵ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 195.

⁶⁶ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 211.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Unconscious: Between Escapism and the Nightmare of a Sleepless Awareness

Despite the ideological commitment evident in some of his writings — in which the work ethic was fundamental for the development of imperialism — Kipling's work also offers corrosive critiques of mistakes committed by the British establishment. 'At the End of the Passage', for instance, can be read as containing some signs of the coloniser's guilty conscience, since he is aware of his role in a wider system which harms both him and the colonised Other. Apparently, Hummil's sleeplessness is a result of a personal conflict silenced by the story. However, significantly, the 'return of the repressed' is associated with a specific place, which emerges as the source of his torment:

'A place, — a place down there', said Hummil. '[...] Good God! I've been afraid of it for months past, Spurstow. It has made every night hell to me; and yet I'm not conscious of having done anything wrong.'⁶⁷

If people's hard lives in the story are considered, then that place 'down there' could be a representation of India, as it appears in Hummil's hallucination. The 'hell' suffered by him 'every night' is the guilt implied when he says he is 'not conscious of having done anything wrong'. Hummil's insomnia can therefore be read as a manifestation of an awareness of wrongdoings on the part of the colonisers in general, an awareness which makes him feel alert, culpable, and from which it is impossible to escape — except through death. He has, in effect, become a collective body. Jevin's suicide can thus be seen as anticipation of Hummil's death, and Spurstow's identification with the warnings signs observed in the latter make possible the projection of the two men's situations and sensations onto a broader social scale. When, after the first dose of morphia (*sic*) given to Hummil, he says that he can't get away from his nightmares, and Spurstow says to his patient, 'I've felt it myself. The symptoms are exactly as you describe', it becomes clear that Hummil's culpability transcends his individuality, and that this tragic situation, which always implies sufferings, is a collective feeling experienced by many the agents of the Empire in the story.⁶⁸ This idea is immediately reinforced when, in the same dialogue between Spurstow and Hummil, the doctor says,

⁶⁷ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 202.

⁶⁸ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 203.

‘The man has been rowelled like a horse! Ridden by the nightmare with a vengeance! And we all thought him sensible enough. Heaven send us understanding! You like to talk, don’t you?’

‘Yes, sometimes. Not when I’m frightened. *Then* I want to run. Don’t you?’

‘Always [...].’

‘Put me quite to sleep; for if I’m caught I die, — I die!’

‘Yes, yes; we all do that sooner or later, — thank Heaven who has set a term to our miseries’, said Spurstow [...].⁶⁹

Spurstow is identified with Hummil’s remorse in two instances here. Firstly, the doctor recognises that he himself always wants to run away when suffering similar nightmares, a recognition that is more than a simple strategic concession to please his patient and calm him down; it is a genuine point of agreement. Secondly, his reference to ‘our miseries’ suggests a shared life-experience. Thus, Hummil, ‘rowelled like a horse’ and ‘ridden by the nightmare with a vengeance’, is the social body of the agents of the Empire troubled by a guilt complex and a system of duties in a traumatic colonial context. His insomnia is, as suggested above, a state of awareness about his participation in an imperial failure; consequently, the ‘vengeance’ referred to can be read as a displacement of the fear of a potential Indian uprising. His wish to sleep is a way of escaping from that consciousness, an attitude remarkably consonant with that of the narrator of ‘By Word of Mouth’, who eloquently asserts (in a move that directly counters the imperial will-to-knowledge), ‘I have lived long enough in this India to know that it is best to know nothing’.⁷⁰

This topic of native vengeance, already observed in several of his early gothic tales, reappears as a psychological problem in ‘The House of Shadows’ (1887), where a house which is presented as a symbol of India is inhabited by a sole tenant, who symbolises the coloniser. As when Kipling criticises India profusely in his journalistic sketches, the narrator of this tale asserts that his ‘complaint is against the whole house’.⁷¹ However, the allegory initially draws a distinction between the house’s positive and negative sides. Within the house, there are two rooms where the feeling of life is never far from the feeling of death. In those rooms, a ‘woman has died and a child has been born [...]. I sleep in the room of the death and do my work in the room of the birth’, says the occupant.⁷² Metaphorically, the image refers to a coloniser divided in two, able to work despite his tortured awareness of the dramatic, deadly environment that surrounds him.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kipling, ‘By Word of Mouth’, in *Plain Tales*, p. 318.

⁷¹ Kipling, ‘The House of Shadows’, in Pinney, pp. 246-48 (p. 246).

⁷² Ibid.

Life and death are as adjacent here as they are in Freudian theory — where the impulse to embrace death implies a search for an incessant reinstatement of life as a form of symbolic rebirth.⁷³ The cycle insinuates a hidden wish to maintain life indefinitely; Kipling's story transmutes this into the desire to maintain imperial power. This desire, however, is subverted. The occupant feels observed and invaded by a crowd of ghosts, fictional constructions of Indian people trying to recuperate their places in society from beyond the grave. They are the invaders, performing a ghastly reverse colonisation: 'They take up no space and are almost noiseless [...] but they are there and they trouble me [...]. Quitting the house [...] it is at once taken possession of by the people who follow me about.'⁷⁴ Invisible and silenced, the Other is a ghost to British eyes, a rhetorical figure of the Indian people incomprehensible to colonisers. Although this Other is so close to the colonising Self — who feels intimidated by him — they do not commingle. They just coexist and avoid each other. As we are told,

he will never face me and tell me what he wants. He is always in the next room [...]. When I enter, I know that he has just gone out [...]. And when I go out I know that he is waiting, always waiting, to slip into the room I have vacated, and begin his aimless stroll among the knickknacks. If I go to the verandah [*sic*], I know that he is watching me from the drawing-room.⁷⁵

Between these lines, the tale plays with the terrified, paranoid British fantasy of a native insurrection similar to the Mutiny of 1857. Ghosts in 'The House of Shadows' are a manifestation of that fear, figuring as impenetrable, sinister, and mysterious natives constantly suspected of planning rebellion. However, a question asked by the occupant implies that the Other functions here as a displacement of the Self, as its double, and the mirror of its imperial policy: 'What pleasure can he find in prowling thus about another man's premises? I asked him the question last Sunday, but my voice came back to me from the high ceiling of the empty room next to my room, and that was all my answer.'⁷⁶ That question coming back to him, in solitude, can be seen as representing the coloniser's self-questioning — his guilty conscience — about his own pleasure when he invades other countries, perhaps providing a rationale for why, at the end of the story, the narrator does not offer any resistance to the ghosts' advance. Hummil's double in 'At the End of the Passage'

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology, and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955).

⁷⁴ Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', pp. 246-47.

⁷⁵ Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', pp. 247-48.

⁷⁶ Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', p. 248.

should be considered from the same analytical perspective. His state of alienation is an effect of his self-reproach displaced onto the figure of himself-as-Other:

Hummil turned on his heel to face the echoing desolation of his bungalow, and the first thing he saw standing in the verandah was the figure of himself [...]. When he came in to dinner he found himself sitting at the table. The vision rose and walked out hastily. Except that it cast no shadow it was in all respects real.⁷⁷

The doppelgänger is 'summoned' here by Hummil's awareness of the imperial nightmare, reinforced by the fact that he dies with his eyes open, as if to see Indian reality is to succumb to insanity. On this point, it is significant that Lowndes strongly demands to cover Hummil's face and close his eyes. They have seen what Lowndes does not want to see. It seems that, for the agents of the Empire who have not experienced this terrible awakening, the corpse on which a hum(m)iliating reality is written should be covered, its eyes concealed from those who do not wish to see.

This theme is also broached in an autobiographical sketch entitled 'Till the Day Break' (1888), where sleeplessness is caused by a torturing reality that, like Hummil's eyes, should be kept hidden:

the brain full of sick fancies. The outside world is worse than indoors [...]. Not to think of nothing means that the uncontrolled brain will tie itself up in a helpless knot of doubt, perplexity, argument, re-argument, wonder and pain [...]. The Brain-fever Bird is up and across the lawn, stammering the secret that he is forbidden to divulge.⁷⁸

The phrase, 'the secret that he is forbidden to divulge' brings to mind the never-revealed enigma of Hummil's death. Both the sketch and the tale hint at mysterious reasons behind the sleeplessness of the main characters, but the texts never disclose them. Perhaps exposure of the naked truth would reveal a level of responsibility in the imperial mess too high for social palatability and force the texts to confront the dominant ideology. Instead, Kipling's works play with the seductive art of implication and silence. Like the 'impassive' servant who silently removes Imray's boots every evening, Kipling as author 'impassively' presents these stories to the reading audience, tempering his complaints in accordance with his conservative view of history, in which deep changes are impossible.

⁷⁷ Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 206.

⁷⁸ Kipling, 'Till the Day Break', in Pinney, pp. 285-88 (pp. 287-88).

Conclusion: A Power ‘Eternal as the Seasons’

In *Something of Myself*, Kipling asserts that ‘[m]en and things come round again, eternal as the seasons’.⁷⁹ The same circular pattern — a covert ideological support for the established order — can be identified in ‘The Lost Legion’ (1892), where a rebel ‘Hindustani’ regiment at Peshawur, during the Indian Mutiny, seeks the support of some Afghan tribesmen in the insurrection against Englishmen. However, the Afghan tribesmen massacre the Hindustani regiment. More than thirty years later, troops of Ghurkas and English soldiers, whose mission is the capture the leader of a rebel Afghan tribe, receive the unexpected supernatural help of that old Hindustani regiment of ghosts. The legendary lost legion returns from the past to reinforce a system in which everything seems to be part of an immutable historic performance, repeated again and again: the Indian Government is incompetent; Afghans are unpredictable, indecipherable, materialistic, and sadistic; and British rule arises as the best alternative for India. The plot reveals Kipling’s conservative and pro-imperialistic ideology, a defence of the status quo based on the idea that everything is cyclical and order remains stable. Nevertheless, his analytical and questioning spirit undermines his own political position. Cynically or not, the organisation of ‘picnic-war[s]’ as parodies of the real ones on the part of the Government and ‘the British taxpayer at home, who insisted on regarding these exercises as brutal wars of annexation’ are denounced by the narrator.⁸⁰ Once again, then Kipling’s imperialism is exposed and weakened by his own critiques and ideological ambiguities.

In his early gothic tales, Kipling supported the imperial project, developing a monstrous image of the Other to justify imperialism as the right way to ensure order and progress; he inculcated an endogamic Britishness, an ethics of sacrifice and work that expedited the system of production; and finally, he employed all these elements to create an image of British superiority that supported and maintained a segregated order. Dialectically, the same fictions were used to show the tragic consequences of British ignorance regarding Indian culture; British complicity with the Indian feudal system of exploitation; abusive working conditions established by and for the agents of the Empire; and the guilt complex resulting from keen awareness of the dramatic Indian context.

In spite of his imperialistic intentions, therefore, Kipling’s professed critical distance can be seen as a dialogical, destabilising, and deconstructive instrument in breaking down the circular walls of history that he endorsed via the eternal return of imperialism.

⁷⁹ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 130.

⁸⁰ Kipling, ‘The Lost Legion’, in *Many Inventions* (London: MacMillan, 1923), pp. 182-99 (pp. 186, 185).

‘You Know Where I Am If You Want Me’: Authorial Control and Ontological Ambiguity in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James

Keith M. C. O’Sullivan

Reticence conduces to effect, blatancy ruins it, and there is a lot of blatancy in recent stories. They drag in sex too, which is a fatal mistake; sex is tiresome in the novels; in a ghost story, or as the backbone of a ghost story, I have no patience with it.

Montague Rhodes James¹

‘Those who are familiar with University life’, declares the narrator of ‘The Mezzotint’, one of M. R. James’s best-known ghost stories, ‘can picture for themselves the wide and delightful range of subjects’ with which College Fellows entertain each other at Sunday breakfast.² To read one of these narratives by the distinguished medievalist, antiquarian, and bibliophile is, on the face of it, to enter a world that is hermetically sealed, politically, socially, and aesthetically. James’s biographer, Richard William Pfaff, records that his subject ‘had little interest in politics’, and modelled his life on that of Henry Bradshaw, Cambridge University’s Librarian (1867-1886): that is, on an academic and confirmed bachelor living in the quads of Cambridge — and later, in James’s case, Eton College.³

The social milieu presented by James’s protagonists is certainly a narrow one. They are professional or amateur scholars, usually Oxbridge-based or educated, and exclusively male. By admitting that his interpretation of the ghost-story form is ‘somewhat old-fashioned’, a ‘nineteenth (and not a twentieth) century concept’, for which a ‘quasi-scientific plane’ is too elevated, the author is also being deliberately anachronistic.⁴ Moreover, James’s terse, deliberately anti-theoretical writings on his own art eschew overt cultural commentary in favour of technique. The compositions ‘do not make any exalted claims’, he states in the preface to the first anthology, *Ghost Stories of An Antiquary* (1904), ‘beyond causing their reader to feel pleasantly uncomfortable when walking alone at night’ (p. viii). Instead, James

¹ M. R. James, ‘Some Remarks on Ghost Stories’, *The Bookman* (December 1929), 169-72 (p. 171).

² James, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), p. 67. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

³ Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scolar Press, 1980), pp. 6, 57.

⁴ James, Prologue to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl’s Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1923), pp. vii-viii (p. vii); and Author’s Preface, in *More Ghost Stories of An Antiquary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1911), pp. v-vi (p. v).

places a high premium upon evocation of time and place; plain diction, or ‘plenty of clear-cut and matter-of-fact detail’; a gradual incursion of the supernatural ‘ominous thing’ into the ‘placid’, quotidian lives of what he calls his ‘actors’, and upon ‘atmosphere and the nicely-managed crescendo’.⁵

Critics have been divided about the aesthetic value of this highly schematic approach, in particular its preoccupation with form at the apparent expense of ideological content or psychological depth. For H. P. Lovecraft, James has ‘an almost diabolical power of calling horrors by gentle steps from the midst of prosaic daily life’.⁶ Conversely, for David Punter, the writer’s tone is ‘shockingly bland’, and the stories represent a ‘falling away of originality’ within the gothic mode — indeed, its ‘final decay into formalism’.⁷ James has ‘no interest’ in characters’ thought processes, Punter asserts, only in producing a repetitious narrative ‘model’ that induces ‘fear in the mind of the *reader*’.⁸ Julia Briggs goes even further, claiming that ‘psychology is totally and defiantly excluded from his writings’.⁹

In this article, however, I will argue that James’s narratives, although not consistent in quality, ultimately present a more substantial achievement than his detractors allow for, and afford rather more complex readings than his own meta-critical writings might suggest. Analysing his stories, primarily two works from James’s first collection, “‘O Whistle, And I’ll Come To You, My Lad’” and ‘The Ash-tree’, discloses not ‘blandness’, but rather what Andrew Smith, for example, recognises as a ‘critique’ of it, a sophisticated use of the prosaic, to which urbanity and understatement are central.¹⁰ As I argue here, James’s stories display a careful, conscious mediation of gothic and folkloric tropes, a mediation infused not by insularity but by an awareness of, and engagement with, a diverse range of discourses drawn from folklore and other sources. Further, despite James’s own stated distaste, as indicated above, for the explicit and for the depiction of sex, his stories present a distinctively *unpleasant* interpretation of the supernatural, and it is notable how many of them end in the most private spaces occupied by the hero, usually the bedroom. This article suggests that the stratagems used for evoking fear actually serve to disclose a degree of unconscious ambiguity

⁵ James, ‘Some Remarks’, p. 169; and Introduction, M. R. James and others, *Ghosts and Marvels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924) <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/james/mr/collect/complete.html>> [accessed 8 April 2013].

⁶ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, in *The H. P. Lovecraft Omnibus 2: Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (London: Grafton Books, 1985), pp. 421-512 (p. 508).

⁷ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: Volume 2: The Modern Gothic*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1996), pp. 67, 90.

⁸ Punter, *Literature of Terror*, p. 86, emphasis in original.

⁹ Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 135.

¹⁰ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 124.

and anxiety about the textual strategies deployed. There is, thus, both an accomplished metatextuality and a complex sense of confessional autobiography at work in these texts.

“Whistle” and ‘The Ash-tree’ are among the most frequently anthologised, and also adapted, of all James’s works. The narrative of “Whistle” concerns an academic who happens upon a strange whistle while exploring a Knights Templar site on the East Anglian coast, and who unwittingly summons a malevolent spirit upon blowing it. ‘The Ash Tree’ relates the effects of a curse upon several generations of a family of landed gentry, following their condemnation of a local woman for witchcraft. The continuing popularity of these and other tales suggests a comfort in familiarity with the fictional world created by their author, especially that wrought by re-reading. This process has some affinity with the idea of the ‘uncanny’ as described by Sigmund Freud, which he describes as occurring ‘when primitive belief systems which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed’, and as characterised by a ‘compulsion to repeat’.¹¹ The ‘uncanny’ is, of course, a complex term, and a full analysis would be outside the scope of the present article; the point here is to note the carefully crafted irruption of Otherness into depicted routines that are quotidian and apparently prosaic. Indeed, professedly anachronistic as he is, James is nonetheless praised by Lovecraft for his grasp of ‘psychology’ and ‘an intelligent and scientific knowledge of human nerves and feelings’.¹²

Criticism that finds fault in James’s work for an alleged lack of originality underrates the propensity of the gothic mode for innovation — that is, its amenability to add to and present new versions of tropes and imagery already known. Punter is correct to cite an audience’s prior acquaintance with gothic motifs like country houses, churches, and manuscripts as central to their reading and understanding of James, but here they are joined by new uncanny objects, such as a whistle or an ash tree.¹³ Earlier, recognisable tropes from the mode do certainly reappear here. To give one example, in “Whistle”, the anti-Catholic stance of works like Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is echoed in the bluff Colonel Wilson’s prejudiced ‘views of a pronouncedly Protestant type’ (p. 90) — a belief system the contradictions of which are addressed later in this article. The trope of anti-Catholicism is manifested more prevalently in ‘The Ash-tree’, with its equation of aesthetic taste for the Italianate with ‘infection’, and references to ‘Popish plots’ and ‘emissaries’ as

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), XVII (1917-1919), pp. 219-52 (pp. 249, 230).

¹² Lovecraft, ‘Supernatural Horror’, pp. 493, 508.

¹³ Punter, p. 89.

possible scapegoats for the deaths (pp. 98, 94, 108). Incidentally, but ingeniously, the late eighteenth-century timeframe and setting (1754) of much of 'The Ash-tree' pre-dates the official 'birth' of gothic literature in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* by a decade. James's story can thus be interpreted as a clever dramatisation, or encapsulation in short-story form, of the very usurpation or denial of eighteenth-century neo-classical sensibilities that gothic itself represented and arguably sought to effect.

Indeed, in an extension of this treatment of Catholicism, both "'Whistle'" and 'The Ash-tree' present the archaic past and pre-Christian belief systems more generally as threats, as is evident in the additional gothic themes in 'The Ash-tree' of decayed ancestry and thwarted inheritance. James's use of the surname 'Fell' echoes both the Biblical 'Fall' and title of Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839). As in Poe's tale, the doomed protagonist is the last of the line. Equally notable is the challenge to both patriarchy and Christianity represented by Mothersole, the witch — a rare significant female presence, or 'actor', to use the author's own term, in James's fictions. Furthermore, the central characters in these two stories commit two traditional gothic transgressions: engaging in what Briggs describes vividly as 'the dreadful itch of curiosity' in "'Whistle'"; and, in the case of the Fells, committing injustices over two generations against a supernaturally empowered Other.¹⁴ Omens are also incorporated, and well signposted for the reader, though not for the protagonists. In "'Whistle'", Professor Parkins fails to recognise the warnings signified by repeated gusts of wind and his being followed by the mysterious 'belated wanderer' (p. 198). Similarly, in 'The Ash-tree', both generations of the Fell family misinterpret, in their cases fatally, a barely-glimpsed 'creature' and a 'scratching noise' on the bedroom windowsill (pp. 90, 108).

In addition to these familiar gothic conventions, James' stories also display a particular degree of literary self-consciousness, exemplifying gothic's status as an explicitly intertextual mode. There is, for example, a playful allusiveness at work in the ill-fated professor's walk home from the beach in "'Whistle'":

'What should I do now', he [Parkins] thought, 'if I looked back and caught sight of a black figure sharply defined against the yellow sky, and saw that it had horns and wings? I wonder whether I should stand or run for it. Luckily, the gentleman behind is not of that sort, and he seems to be about as far off now as when I saw him first.' (pp. 196-97)

¹⁴ Briggs, *Night Visitors*, p. 136.

Parkins's speculation is, of course, an instance of dramatic irony. It combines foreboding and a final diffusion into an urbane self-comfort, a refuge which James's reader knows, with hindsight, is ironically misplaced. James is, however, also being densely allusive. The professor's 'last look behind' clearly echoes the famous passage in Part Six of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798):

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, that close behind
A frightful fiend doth tread¹⁵

There is another indirect allusion here, to Christian's espying of the 'foul Fiend coming over the field to meet him' in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).¹⁶ This is, again, typical of both the style and the sense of *knowingness* that characterise this author's work. In a similarly sophisticated manner, James's other story, 'The Ash-tree', contains the device of an interpolated document, in the form of the transcription of the coroner's report. Featuring Biblical quotation and vivid, stylised references to 'Pope Borgia and other known Specimens of the Horrid Art of the Italian Poysoners of the last Age' (p. 94), the text displays James's talent for gothic, particularly anti-Catholic gothic, literary pastiche. This is combined with a gift for conveying gruesome events economically and elliptically: Sir Matthew, we are informed, 'expir'd in great Pain and Agony' (p. 92). Such concision is indicative of what appears to be, at one level, an absolute control by the author over his narrative.

The stories are in fact prescriptively narrated — that is, designed with a particular effect or control over the reader in mind, and with the reader's 'auditory imagination', to appropriate T. S. Eliot's term, very much to the fore.¹⁷ If this is not achieved through an omniscient authorial persona, then it is done through protagonists who, like Parkins in "Whistle", have a habit of voicing their thoughts aloud, and thus to us. 'Since he merely appears in this prologue', the narrator of "Whistle" states, dismissively and casually, 'there is no need to give his entitlements' (p. 184). From the outset, these texts foreground the

¹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Complete Authoritative Texts of the 1798 and 1817 Versions with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Paul. H. Fry (Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford, St. Martin's, 1999), p. 62, ll. 461-66.

¹⁶ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. by N. H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 46.

¹⁷ T. S. Eliot, 'Matthew Arnold', in *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), pp. 103-119 (p. 118).

action of the plot, with the imagined listener, positioned as an attendee at one of James's readings, prioritised over the characters themselves. For example, compared to Lovecraft's elaborate description of Exham Priory's 'composite architecture' of 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Romanesque', 'Druidic or native Cymric' origins in his story, 'The Rats in the Walls' (1924), the gothic site of the Templars' preceptory in "'Whistle'" is simply sketched, as a mundane 'patch of somewhat broken ground covered with small depressions and mounds' (p. 192), which the hero literally stumbles upon. James here, as elsewhere, wears his immense degree of antiquarian expertise seemingly casually. This economy is in keeping with his stated desire merely to entertain, and to replicate the distinctly oral tradition of the Christmas fireside 'tale'.¹⁸

In the telling of such 'tales', these narratives display an awareness of their own artificiality, an intense self-reflexivity. In "'Whistle'", the ghost-story tradition itself is prefigured in the early teasing from Parkins's colleague that some company 'would do nicely to keep the ghosts off' (p. 187). The singularly sardonic narrator of 'The Ash-tree' first credits the reader well acquainted with ghost stories for anticipating Sir Matthew Fell's grisly fate: 'next morning they found their master dead and black. So much you have guessed' (p. 91). Then, startlingly, Sir Richard Fell, in examining the 'Chronicles', objectifies the whole text as a 'tale' and ironises both its use of portent as a motif and, indeed, its 'retribution' or 'revenge' plot:

H'm! What have we here? 'Thou shalt see me in the morning and I shall not be.' Well, well! Your grandfather would have made a fine omen of that, hey? No more prophets for me! They are all in a tale. (p. 104)

There is tonal and ideological dissonance in 'The Ash-tree' between such an acknowledgement by a character, drawing attention to the purely fictional status of the text, and an earlier insistence by the tale's narrator that 'the present narrative gives me pause. I cannot altogether sweep it away as mere invention. The reader must judge for himself' (p. 85). Furthermore, the description of and reflection on the witch trials, like the citation of the real-life *Gentleman's Magazine* as the source of a 1792 letter presenting a 'statistical account' of livestock fatalities, 'drawn from the Baronet's own papers' (p. 96), exemplify textual self-validation, achieved through a skilled and careful mimesis. James's text seems to

¹⁸ For further discussion of oral storytelling traditions in general, see, for example, *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context*, ed. by John Miles Foley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986). The practice became both fashionable and commercialised in the Victorian era during which James, of course, grew up. Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), provides an astute study.

be having it both ways, presenting the tale as mere entertainment demonstrating ‘no exalted claims’, while exhibiting a concern with plausibility and thus offering an attempted valediction of the supernatural events it describes.

This imitative form and concern with authenticity extends to the incorporation of historical (including contemporary) discourses, as much as of historical events. James’s texts blend and transmute English, Irish, and Scandinavian folklore. The author, being an antiquarian, always prioritised a fidelity to the ‘rules of folklore’ in his stories.¹⁹ As Jacqueline Simpson shows, James was clearly much influenced by Scandinavian lore, the consequences of whistling, for example, being a mainstay in Jutland legends.²⁰ In “‘Whistle’”, the Colonel articulates both domestic terms of reference — ‘[i]n my old home, we would have said someone had been whistling for it’ — and a broader, panoramic perspective:

They believe in it all over Denmark and Norway as well as on the Yorkshire coast; and my experience is, mind you, that there’s generally something at the bottom of what these country-folk hold to, and have held to for generations.
(pp. 208-09)

This consensus-building, the creation of wisdom, is an instance of the text’s justification of its own fictional mythological landscape. The reality of the supernatural is asserted through citation of the breadth and persistence of belief in it. It enacts in literary form what Stacy McDowell describes as the ‘uncanny familiarity’ of folklore — its capacity to imbue ‘the sense of having been here before, without the listener’s ever knowing quite when’.²¹

Implicit in James’s depiction of ‘folklore’ is a somewhat double-edged belief in the wisdom of the common ‘folk’. As a contemporary reviewer pointed out, the author displays ‘an eye for rather than a preoccupation with character’, particularly in his ‘representation of dialect’.²² Dialect in James’ stories is consistently identified with the lower social strata. Equally consistently, and in stark contrast to that of the educated protagonists, the perceptions of the populace are shown to be accurate: ‘it warn’t a right thing’ (p. 214), as the traumatised youth in “‘Whistle’” puts it. The superstition shared by the common ‘folk’ is generally

¹⁹ James, Author’s Preface, in *The Penguin Complete Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 5-7 (p. 5). This is essentially a reprinting of *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: Edward Arnold, 1931).

²⁰ Jacqueline Simpson, “‘The Rules of Folklore’ in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James”, *Folklore*, 108 (1997), 9-18 (p. 13).

²¹ Stacy McDowell, “‘Folklore’”, in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), I, pp. 252-54 (p. 253).

²² Peter Fleming, ‘Review of *The Collected Ghost Stories*’, *The Spectator*, 18 April 1931, p. 633, quoted in Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p. 413.

validated, as with Bishop Kilmore's all-too-prophetic caution to Sir Richard in 'The Ash-tree' that 'our Irish peasantry will always have it that it brings the worst of luck to sleep near an ash tree' (pp. 105-06). Yet for all James's dexterity in reproducing dialects and the stories' apparent championing of folk wisdom, there is a deeply non-democratic ambivalence here — signified in the patronising use of 'our'. Colonel Wilson's reference to 'these country-folk' in "Whistle" further exemplifies a dialectic of class-consciousness which permeates James's stories. The 'folk' remain 'these': undifferentiated and objectified. To adopt James's own idiom, they remain supporting players in the stories, never chief 'actors'. This tension — the simultaneous validation and repudiation of lower-class beliefs and perceptions — is indicative of the troubled relationship that these texts have with their own cultural context.

The contradictions identified here as central to James's ghost stories, which rely for their effects on both the pleasure of antiquarian pursuit and the presentation of historic forces as mortal threat, reflect the anxieties of the period, between Victorianism and the modern age, in which these texts were produced. As Samuel Hynes comments, later nineteenth-century scientific developments had brought 'a new conception of the nature of change' and 'the promise of human progress'.²³ Yet, paradoxically, they had also wrought, spiritually, 'a growing feeling of restriction and loss'.²⁴ It is significant for understanding James's stories that emergent sciences such as psychology, and their attendant investigations into sexuality, multiple personality disorder, and hysteria, co-existed with a plethora of pseudo-sciences like spiritualism, incarnated in the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882). Here was a body governed by people of the author's own education and social class, and with a similar interest in scholarly methodology. Scientific enquiry thus flourished alongside a desire to recover, post-Darwin, a sense of 'meaning' in the universe, and to 'restore the consolation of religion that Victorian science had denied'.²⁵

Whilst James himself had no time for the Society of Psychical Research, rejecting any 'scheme of "psychical" theory' as elevating the 'mere ghost story' to a 'quasi-scientific plane' to which he felt it unsuited, his own stories strongly reflect the uneasy dichotomy represented by the Society's work.²⁶ Professor Parkins in "Whistle" is one of the author's most fully developed rationalists, a sceptical 'disbeliever in what is called the supernatural', who takes an aggressive position against anything 'appearing to sanction the current belief in

²³ Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 132-33.

²⁴ Hynes, p. 133.

²⁵ Hynes, pp. 139, 145.

²⁶ James, Author's Preface, *More Ghost Stories*, pp. v-vi (p. v).

such subjects' (pp. 209, 188). Such 'belief' is voiced by his friend, the Colonel. Subsequent events, in which the professor learns the limits of rationality through chastening experience, endorse Wilson's warning that 'I expect that with you it's a case of live and learn' (p. 209). For Briggs, these narratives repeatedly 'assert a total acceptance of the supernatural which scepticism apparently denies'.²⁷ However, Helen Conrad-O'Briain is more accurate in referring to a conflict, a wider malaise of 'spiritual blindness', which she sees as displayed in James's stories.²⁸ In "'Whistle'", the Colonel's position on the reality of supernaturalism may be endorsed, but his final, bigoted attribution of the phenomena to 'the Church of Rome' (p. 225) shows that neither he nor the rationalist Parkins has understood its inassimilable nature as Other. Indeed, Parkins's 'views on certain points are less clear cut than they used to be' (p. 225) at the story's end, while the Colonel, despite his belief in the whistle's deleterious qualities, liberates the uncanny object by casting it into the sea, thereby facilitating its possible return to haunt another victim. What is therefore significant in the narrative of "'Whistle'" is not acceptance of the supernatural, but the story's depiction of conflict between two interpretations of reality: that is, between the values of Enlightenment rationality with the attendant comfort of ideological closure, and a belief in supernaturalism, marked by the absence of any such assurance. "'Whistle'", with its hapless rationalist protagonist and representative of blinkered religiosity, exemplifies a crisis of belief that is being played out in these ghost stories. James's characters elsewhere in his first collection may variously 'grasp blindly' at silver crucifixes ('Canon Alberic's Scrap-book', p. 25) or lock their doors and 'pray to God' ('Count Magnus', p. 177), but there is no privileging of consolatory Christian ideology — and no guarantee of deliverance. Coming from a clergyman's son, this is a strikingly grim prognosis.

Nowhere are these crises of confidence and of faith expressed more overtly than in the depictions of the ghosts themselves. James's supernatural irruptions are not a comforting 'demonstration of the existence of the human soul', as Mackenzie Bartlett describes apparitions, but, deliberately on James's part, 'malevolent or odious'.²⁹ As Clive Bloom notes, rather than being just 'the returned dead', they are 'demonic hobgoblins'.³⁰ The entities are protean representations of contemporary societal and metaphysical anxieties. These

²⁷ Briggs, *Night Visitors*, p. 125.

²⁸ Helen Conrad O'Briain, "'The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against It': Laudian Ecclesia and Victorian Culture Wars in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James', in *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), ed. by Conrad O'Briain and Julie Anne Stevens, pp. 47-60 (p. 48).

²⁹ James, Preface, *More Ghost Stories*, p. v; and Mackenzie Bartlett, 'Apparition', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 35-38 (p. 35).

³⁰ Clive Bloom, 'M. R. James and his Fiction', in *Creepers: British Horror and Fantasy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 64-71 (pp. 66, 67).

‘ghosts’ are not merely a physical threat but an ontological one, with the disturbing implication of a lack of differentiation between human and other species, and what Smith describes as ‘an existence characterised by moral emptiness’.³¹ The bodiless spirit in “‘Whistle’” appears to represent such an ‘emptiness’. ‘There seemed to be absolutely nothing material about it’, records the narrator, ‘save the bedclothes of which it had made itself a body’ (p. 225).

Amongst the numerous aggressively violent, bestial, and skeletally thin visions that haunt his narratives, the spiders in ‘The Ash-tree’ exemplify James’s use of a well-known gothicised image in order to create this sense of existential dread. The spider had already suffered negative depictions in later Victorian texts. Phillip Henry Goss’s *Life in its Lower, Intermediate, and Higher Forms* (1857) describes the arachnid as ‘vindictive’ and ‘highly venomous’.³² Even J. G. Woods’s more sympathetic *Petland Revisited* (1884) concedes that it had become an antithesis of domesticity: ‘repulsive’, and, quaintly, ‘out of place in our rooms’.³³ James’s story continues the tendency in texts like Bertram Mitford’s *The Sign of The Spider* (1896) to demonise this familiar creature. In ‘The Ash-tree’, spiders have become monstrous: ‘terrible bodies’, ‘brutes’, ‘covered with greyish hair’, and ‘enormous’ — the ‘size of a man’s head’ (p. 111). The references to ‘hair’ and ‘a man’s head’ suggest an unsettling anthropomorphism. It is not just the fact that the witch Mothersole’s ‘poisonous Rage’ (p. 88) takes the form of unnaturally large spiders that renders the animals uncanny. James’s decision to keep them only half glimpsed until the climax heightens a sense of the grotesque, which is particularly evident in the mischievous and disorientating comparison to a ‘squirrel’ and a ‘kitten’ — the latter an epitome of cuddly domesticity — and in the ‘horrible illusion’ of Sir Richard having ‘several heads’ (pp. 90, 108). Indeed, if one accepts a definition of horror fiction as containing ‘violence, terror and bodily harm’, as Gina Wisker, for example, defines it, then this text is certainly more of a horror narrative than a ghost story.³⁴

In any case, it is a reaction from the character and the reader, one of ‘pleasant discomfort’, but ‘discomfort’ all the same, and *not* the creation of particularly authentic or original spectral figures, that is most important for James. The gardener who spies the

³¹ Smith, *Gothic Literature*, p. 125.

³² Phillip Henry Goss, *Life in its Lower, Intermediate, and Higher Forms* (London: James Nisbet, 1857), pp. 184-85, quoted in Claire Charlotte McKechnie, ‘Spiders, Horror, and Animal Others in Late Victorian Empire Fiction’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17:4 (December 2012), 505-16 (p. 507).

³³ J. G. Wood, *Petland Revisited* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1884), p. 287, quoted in McKechnie, ‘Spiders’, p. 505.

³⁴ Gina Wisker, ‘Horror Fiction’, in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 328-33 (p. 329).

monsters in the ash tree is struck with ‘incredulous terror and loathing’ (p. 110). Instinctive responses of fear, revulsion, and recoil unite all James’s characters when confronted with the incarnations of the Other. Parkins in “‘Whistle’” utters ‘a cry of disgust’ (p. 223) at a touch of the creature’s adopted draperies. Such repetition and the strength of characters’ reactions highlight these stories’ investment in evoking a particular kind of response from the reader.

However, in the construction of overall meaning, the texts disclose as well as affect. Arguably, a scholarly engagement with his writing cannot avoid James’s emotional autobiography altogether, especially when examining moments of confrontation with the feared and ‘loathed’ object. Nick Freeman, amongst others, has alluded to the ‘queer atmosphere’ and sense of ‘homosexual transgression’ in these narratives.³⁵ James’s protagonists, as indicated above, move largely in homosocial environments. This is a world where men meet in college rooms, play golf, and engage in solitary travel, as opposed to being incorporated in heterosexual family units. The sense of a ‘queer atmosphere’ and of sexual transgression is strongest in *Ghost Stories of An Antiquary* with ‘Number 13’, ‘Count Magnus’, and, especially, “‘Whistle’”, with its prissy, feminised hero, ‘something of an old woman — rather henlike, perhaps, in his little ways’ (p. 189). Lovecraft writes of James’s ghosts typically being ‘*touched* before they are *seen* [sic]’.³⁶ In “‘Whistle’”, though, it is actually first the entity’s movement, then its proximity and, above all, the fear of physical contact with it, that so disturbs Parkins:

Somehow, the idea of getting past it and escaping through the door was intolerable to him; he could not have borne — he didn’t know why — to touch it, and as for its touching him, he would sooner dash himself through the window than have that happen. (p. 222)

The creature feeling the pillows of his bed then makes Parkins ‘shudder as he had never in his life thought it possible’ (p. 222). This is clearly meant to convey revulsion at the invasion of personal space. However, it is difficult to avoid considering a different interpretation — that of a repressed virginal frisson, if not of orgasm, then certainly of desire.

In discussing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), James Holt McGavran considers the concept of ‘homosexual panic’, or ‘the fear and loathing that sets in whenever a man suspects either himself or another man of feeling homosexual desire’.³⁷ This description is

³⁵ Nick Freeman, ‘Ghost Stories’, in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 277-81 (p. 270).

³⁶ Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, p. 508, emphasis in original.

³⁷ James Holt McGavran, “‘Insurmountable Barriers to our Union’: Homosocial Male Bonding, Homosexual Panic, and Death on the Ice in *Frankenstein*’, *European Romantic Review*, 11.1 (Winter 2000), 46-67 (p. 48) <

also applicable to Parkins's descent into hysteria, and the story itself can be interpreted accordingly. From its very title, taken from a 1793 poem by a man (the male author Robert Burns) impersonating a woman wooing another man in a story of an illicit relationship, James's "Whistle" is a flirtatious, self-reflexive text. It propounds what it recoils from. "Whistle" is, on one level, a story about masculine loneliness and an interrogation of sexual identity. Although fiercely independent, the professor does not 'quite fancy having an empty bed' and would 'welcome' a companion, provided it is one of his choice (pp. 185, 196). When he blows the fateful whistle to summon a companion, it is notable that he wishes for this companion to be male: noting that the whistle's Latin legend seems to suggest that an unspecified someone is coming, he assumes that blowing into the whistle is the best way to call 'for him' (p. 200). The Colonel's assurance, '[y]ou know where I am if you want me during the night' (p. 218), is both an affirmation of homosocial bonding and a double entendre which echoes the title. This double meaning is also significant because, like *Frankenstein* and other gothic works, "Whistle" is concerned with 'doubles' and thus with the construction of self. James's story goes further than Shelley's text does in *Frankenstein's* bedroom encounter with his creation. Victor recalls that 'one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs'.³⁸ As Mair Rigby argues, *Frankenstein* cannot help but read the monster's gaze and reach as 'a sexual threat', which turns the bedchamber into what she calls 'a potentially sodomitical space'.³⁹ By contrast, in James's tale, Parkins finds his personal, corporeal space invaded, the linen face 'thrust close into his own' (p. 223).

This can clearly be read as sexual metaphor, at least at the level of foreplay if not penetration. However, there is possible duality in play, in that the homosexual image can *itself* be read as metaphor. If the bedclothes-creature is seen as a double of Parkins, its 'lonely figure' (p. 200) a manifestation of his own restlessness and isolation, then there is the implication that he has been confronted, face to face as it were, not just with desire, but with his own lack of 'materiality' or spiritual emptiness. In other words, the 'intensely horrible face' which 'went nigh to maddening him' (p. 222-23) is so disturbing for the professor because it functions, arguably, as a mirror of his own. Thus, as with George E. Haggerty's

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10509580008570098?journalCode=gerr20>> [accessed 23 September 2016].

³⁸ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 39-40.

³⁹ Mair Rigby, "'Do You Share My Madness?': *Frankenstein's* Queer Gothic", in *Queering the Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), ed. by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, pp. 36-54 (p. 44).

reading of Frankenstein and his monster, the confrontation that Parkins has with the spirit in his bedroom can be interpreted as being ‘with the horror that is oneself’.⁴⁰

Not all of James’s stories are as fully formed as to afford such multi-layered readings as this. Judging from the attention of biographers and critics, his first collection is the ‘strongest’ and most accomplished in terms of ‘ingenuity and artistic accomplishment’.⁴¹ Of the later works, only a few pieces, especially ‘Casting the Runes’ from James’s second collection, *More Ghost Stories* (1911), have attained anything like a similar level of attention and adaptation into other media. Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept Michael Cox’s assessment that it is a mistake to judge the ghost stories as ‘examples of the highest artistic and literary endeavour’, and to ‘impose on them a weight of critical analysis and speculation that they can hardly bear’.⁴² Such a reading rather underestimates the skill of economy and the subtle intellectual and thematic complexities presented by the short story as both a discipline and as a literary genre.⁴³ Nor is it possible to accept Bloom’s argument that James’s texts present an aesthetic based on ‘the pleasure’ of an avoidance of deeper symbolic meaning through ‘a refusal to be read as sexual, psychological or social allegories’ — an advance on the view that that they are fundamentally arid and ‘meaningless’ though this is.⁴⁴ The most successful stories are far more complex, and more haunted, than just conscious exercises in technique written by what Bloom calls a ‘psychic entertainer’.⁴⁵ James is accomplished in mediating historical and other discourses, deftly, slyly, and with the lightest of touches. Nevertheless, his choices are themselves revealing — and laden with meanings beyond what the author seems consciously to have intended.

⁴⁰ George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 53.

⁴¹ Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p. 152; and Michael Cox, *M. R. James: An Informal Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 142.

⁴² Cox, *M. R. James*, p. 149.

⁴³ Although this article has focused on James’s fictions, see, for example, Florence Goyet, *The Classic Short Story, 1870-1925: Theory of a Genre* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014) amongst the many studies according critical weight to the form.

⁴⁴ Bloom, ‘M. R. James’, pp. 67, 70.

⁴⁵ Bloom, p. 70.

When Good Mothers Go Bad: Genre and Gender in *The Babadook*

Paula Quigley

David Ehrlich: *There are a number of films about grief, but part of what makes *The Babadook* so interesting is that the horror genre allows it to have this element of audience interaction. I wonder if you're attracted to the horror genre because of how palpable it encourages you to make a story?*

Jennifer Kent: *I think so. Can you imagine this story as a domestic drama? It would be so melodramatic and stupid. I like films where I'm forced to feel something.*

—Interview with Jennifer Kent, December 2014¹

For a film that has been described as ‘startlingly original’ and widely celebrated for its ‘emotional realism’, Jennifer Kent’s *The Babadook* (2014) is in many ways very generic.² While this might seem like a shortcoming, on the contrary, the film’s restaging of familiar generic tropes facilitates a highly effective cinematic experience. This article considers the ways in which *The Babadook* repurposes the horror film to produce a moving exploration of maternal ambivalence, mobilising elements of the maternal melodrama and female gothic in the process. In so doing, the film foregrounds issues of genre and gender that inhere and overlap in these categories. In particular, the film’s focus on the protagonist’s conflicted experience of motherhood explores what Molly Haskell identifies as the great unspoken of the ‘woman’s film’, namely, women’s guilt for their ‘inadmissible feelings’ about motherhood.³ Considering the film in this light draws on Sue Thornham’s reading of *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (dir. by Lynne Ramsay, 2011), in relation to both feminist counter-cinema and maternal melodrama, as a critique of the postfeminist model of over-invested motherhood currently idealised in popular culture.⁴ Similarly, I argue that the ways

¹ David Ehrlich, ‘*The Babadook* Director Jennifer Kent Talks about Drawing Horror from Life’, *The Dissolve*, 1 December 2014 <<https://thedissolve.com/features/emerging/834-the-babadook-director-jennifer-kent-talks-about-dr/>> [accessed 1 February 2016].

² Virginie Sélavy, ‘*The Babadook*: Interview with Jennifer Kent’, *Electric Sheep*, 24 October 2014 <<http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2014/10/24/the-babadook-interview-with-jennifer-kent/>> [accessed 1 February 2016]; and Nicolas Rapold, ‘Short Takes: *The Babadook*’, *Film Comment*, November/December 2014 <<http://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-the-babadook-jennifer-kent/>> [accessed 1 February 2016].

³ Molly Haskell, *From Reverance to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 170.

⁴ Sue Thornham, “‘A Hatred So Intense ...’: *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Postfeminism, and Women’s Cinema’, *Sequence: Serial Studies in Media, Film, and Music*, 2.1 (2013), 3-36.

in which *The Babadook* recalibrates existing generic conventions challenges deeply embedded social and cinematic expectations around the maternal relationship.

The film tells the story of Amelia (Essie Davis), a widow who is still grief stricken seven years after the death of her husband, and her young son, Samuel (Noah Wiseman), who is very troubled. After reading a storybook called *Mister Babadook* together, strange things start to happen in their house. Events escalate and the Babadook, the monster of the storybook, appears and begins to terrorise Amelia, who in turn becomes increasingly violent towards her son. Finally, Amelia is able to confront the Babadook, and a kind of peace is restored. The film invites an association between the emergence of the Babadook and Amelia's grief at the death of her husband and rage towards her son. As such, virtually all of the critics and reviewers of the film have read the Babadook as embodying the 'return of the repressed' — that is, as the uncanny manifestation of Amelia's repressed emotions.

However, while Kent herself has stated that she's 'quite bemused [...] by the need to place it in a box', there has been some disagreement about how best to position *The Babadook* in a generic context.⁵ Peter Bradshaw, for instance, promotes the film as 'a superbly acted, chilling Freudian thriller' and compares it to Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) or *The Tenant* (1976).⁶ Briony Kidd, on the other hand, imagines that '[a]ficionados [of the horror film] may be unimpressed [...] with the efforts of the domestic distributor, Umbrella Entertainment, to market the film as a "psychological thriller"'. According to Kidd, '[m]inimising *The Babadook*'s place within the context of horror is odd', given its explicit references to key examples of the genre, such as *Le Cake-Walk Infernal* (dir. by Georges Méliès, 1903) and *Black Sabbath* (dir. by Mario Bava, 1963).⁷

Trying to identify the film solely with one of these categories is not particularly productive, however. As has been well established in film studies, the delineation of these genres is more often based on popular perception and/or critical bias than on any clearly defined generic boundaries. For instance, through an analysis of film reviews published during the 1930s and 1940s, Mark Jancovich argues that the psychological thrillers he calls 'Gothic (or paranoid) woman's films' were clearly understood as 'women's horror films' at the time of their release.⁸ Jancovich locates these films within a cycle that departs from the

⁵ Kent, quoted in Sélavy.

⁶ Peter Bradshaw, 'The Babadook Review — A Superbly Acted, Chilling, Freudian Thriller', *Guardian*, 23 October 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/23/the-babadook-review-chilling-freudian-thriller>> [accessed 1 February 2016].

⁷ Briony Kidd, 'Umbilical Fears: Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook*', *Metro Magazine*, 180 (2014), 8-12 (p. 11).

⁸ Jancovich coins the composite term 'Gothic (or paranoid) woman's films' to embrace that group of films variously described as the Gothic film, the Gothic woman's film, the paranoid woman's film, the female Gothic,

monsters of the Universal Studios and instead focuses on unsettling both protagonists and viewers psychologically.⁹ However, despite the contemporaneous evidence establishing the horror credentials of such films, accounts of the horror film since the 1960s have tended to exclude them.¹⁰ This, Jancovich argues, is often based on a distinction being made between the horror film as ‘masculine’ and the ‘Gothic (or paranoid) woman’s film’ as ‘feminine’. He sees a similar tendency as operating in feminist film criticism, which, he contends, has rarely properly acknowledged these films’ relationship to the horror genre.¹¹

If Jancovich identifies the horror in women’s films, David Greven finds the woman’s film ‘concealed’ in the horror genre.¹² Greven returns to Jeanine Basinger’s definition of the woman’s film as ‘a movie that places at the center of its universe a female who is trying to deal with emotional, social, and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman’.¹³ Consequently, according to Basinger, it is a mistake to limit the woman’s film to the melodrama, as the category is elastic enough to encompass comedies, biographies, westerns, and so on. Following Mary Ann Doane, who argues that ‘the woman’s film is frequently combined with other genres — the film noir and the gothic or horror film, even the musical’, Greven stresses the ‘cross-fertilization’ of the woman’s film with the horror film.¹⁴ Like Robin Wood, he situates the birth of modern horror in 1960 with Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, and the concomitant transition from an externalised threat or clearly identifiable monster, as occurs in classical horror, to a focus on ‘the family and its attendant terrors’.¹⁵ Greven further refines this model, however, to argue that ‘the woman’s film, a classical Hollywood genre seemingly defunct by the 1960s, takes on a new, albeit hidden, life in the modern horror film, insofar as it concerns anxieties within gender, sexuality, and the family and focuses on female desire’.¹⁶ Many significant horror films from *Psycho* on, he

etc. Mark Jancovich, ‘Bluebeard’s Wives: Horror, Quality and the Gothic (or Paranoid) Woman’s Film in the 1940s’, *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 12 (2013), 20-43.

⁹ Jancovich, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰ Jancovich, p. 21.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman’s Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

¹³ Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. 20. Quoted in Greven, p. 37.

¹⁴ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 4. Quoted in Greven, p. 38.

¹⁵ In Wood’s frequently quoted formulation, ‘since *Psycho*, the Hollywood cinema has recognised Horror as both American and familial’. See Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 78; and Greven, p. 88.

¹⁶ Greven, p. 36.

contends, should thus be read as ‘concealed women’s films’, insofar as they place ‘female desire at the center of the narrative’.¹⁷

Sarah Arnold, for her part, more precisely identifies the key point of intersection between the horror and melodrama in representations of the mother.¹⁸ Drawing on psychoanalytic film theory, she posits that what she calls ‘maternal horror cinema’ ‘perpetuates an [unstable] ideology of idealised motherhood’ drawn from cinema history, most notably the maternal melodrama.¹⁹ Arnold argues that, following *Psycho* and the focus on family horror in Western cinema, the mother has become a prominent feature of horror cinema.²⁰ All horror mothers are not the same, however, and Arnold differentiates between the ‘Good Mother’ and the ‘Bad Mother’. The ‘Good Mother’ refers to ‘a particular and popular discourse of motherhood that valorises self-sacrifice, selflessness and nurturance’.²¹ The ‘Bad Mother’, on the other hand, is ‘a multifaceted and contradictory construct’, manifesting as either a rejection of the traditional expectation of self-sacrifice and devotion to her children, or its inverse, ‘the mother’s fanatical conformity to the institution of motherhood’.²² According to Arnold, both models of motherhood are evident throughout the horror genre and the melodrama, although the level of complicity and/or resistance to these models within individual texts is a complex field of interrogation.²³

Thus, the boundaries between the woman’s film, the psychological thriller, and horror could be said to be especially permeable, more like membranes if you will, permitting certain elements to pass through while restricting others, depending on the particular permutation of the film’s articulation, production, and reception. Mining *The Babadook*’s generic makeup means attending to the ways in which aspects of the woman’s film — ambivalence around motherhood and the Oedipal model in which it participates, in particular — are exposed in all their ‘horror’. Broadly speaking, the first half of the film draws on key tropes of the maternal melodrama, articulated in terms of the female gothic, inverting and intensifying these tropes in the process. The second half segues into more overt horror territory, bringing those elements that are repressed in the first half of the film, and in the categories it draws on, violently to the surface.

¹⁷ Ibid. Greven considers Brian de Palma’s *Carrie* (1976) and the *Alien* films (1979-97) in this context.

¹⁸ Sarah Arnold, *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

¹⁹ Arnold, p. 4.

²⁰ Arnold, p. 37.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Arnold, p. 68.

²³ Arnold, p. 26.

If self-sacrifice is the privileged theme of the woman's film (Haskell describes it as 'the mainstay and oceanic force, high tide and low ebb of the woman's film'), in the maternal variant, the woman must sacrifice her own welfare for that of her children.²⁴ When we first meet Amelia, just before Samuel's seventh birthday, she is in precisely this position, having to sacrifice her own needs for those of her son. Samuel is troubled, suffering from nightmares and seeing monsters. His relationship with other children is problematic and he is prone to aggressive outbursts. He is demanding, seeking constant attention and reassurance. As a result, apart from working in a care home for elderly people, Amelia's life is limited to looking after him. Her only other significant relationships are with her elderly neighbour, to whom she is kind and caring (taking out her refuse, and so on), and with her sister, Claire (Hayley McElhinney), who is critical of Amelia and hostile to Samuel.

While the maternal melodrama typically struggles with reconciling the woman's maternal and sexual identities — the good mother will reject romantic relationships for the sake of her child — in this instance, it seems that Amelia has had literally to sacrifice her husband Oskar (Benjamin Winspear) for her son, as Oskar was killed in a car accident while driving Amelia to the hospital to give birth to Samuel.²⁵ Despite her apparent longing for a relationship (watching romantic films on TV, wistfully observing a couple kissing, and so on), Amelia is so exhausted caring for others, and for Samuel in particular, that she seems oblivious to her colleague's (Daniel Henshall) gentle overtures. Thus, Samuel seems to have supplanted the father's place in his mother's life, with all the Oedipal associations that implies, as discussed below. Rather than surrender herself to this situation, however, Amelia's repressed grief and anger at the loss of her husband is the source of her 'monstrous' rage and resentment towards Samuel. Thus, the tradition of female self-abnegation within the woman's film in general, and the maternal melodrama in particular, is undercut by the 'horror' it conceals from the outset.

The film begins by bringing us straight into Amelia's nightmare. We see a close-up of Amelia's face, her breathing laboured, illuminated by the intermittent flash of a bright, white light. Shards of broken glass spray across her cheek and she is thrown from side to side, all in slow motion. We hear discordant sounds like muffled roars and metal scraping, at the edges

²⁴ Haskell, p. 157. In feminist film theory, King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1939) has been cast in the role of exemplum. See for instance, Linda Williams (1984), 'Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama', *Cinema Journal*, 24.1 (1984), 2-27; Ann Kaplan, 'Ann Kaplan Replies to Linda Williams's "Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama"', *Cinema Journal*, 24.2 (1985), 40-43; and Christine Gledhill, '*Stella Dallas* and Feminist Film Theory', *Cinema Journal*, 25.4 (1986), 44-48.

²⁵ For instance, in *Stella Dallas*, Stella (Barbara Stanwyck) gives up her interest in a romantic or social life to focus exclusively on her daughter, Laurel (Anne Shirley).

of which a child's voice can be heard, calling 'Mum!, Mum!'. What we now assume to be a car stops suddenly and we cut to a side view of Amelia who looks in our direction. A point-of-view shot from Amelia's perspective shows us a man slumped in the driving seat. We cut back to a close-up of Amelia, in the glare of a bright, white light. We hear what sounds like the rush of an oncoming car in slow-motion as the child's voice grows more insistent: 'Mum! Mum!' Amelia turns her head sharply and a bright, white light explodes on the screen.

This scene, achieved in-camera, is disorientating — temporally, spatially, and emotionally. Samuel's voice, increasing in volume, brings Amelia (and us) back to her current context: lonely, widowed, grieving, and caring for an emotionally damaged little boy in a dark, foreboding house. Soon after, a series of close shots shows parts of a sleeping Samuel, his leg flung over his mother, his hand kneading her neck, the abrasive sound of his grinding teeth heightened on the soundtrack. Amelia's sense of physical and emotional entrapment is palpable. She disentangles herself from him and a symmetrically composed overhead shot shows them lying on opposite sides of the bed, Amelia's back to her son, the distance she has put between them foreshadowing her increasingly violent desire to escape her child as the film progresses.

It is clear that Amelia is struggling not only with other people's reactions to Samuel, but also with her own ambivalence towards her son. It takes her sister, Claire, to express the feelings about Samuel that Amelia cannot bring herself to articulate, saying, 'I can't stand being around your son. You can't stand being around him yourself.' Initially, Amelia's ambivalence towards Samuel manifests as actual suspicion of his behaviour (suspecting him of defacing a photograph of herself and Oskar, for instance, or of putting shards of glass in her soup), but even as events escalate and her suspicion shifts from Samuel to the possibility of an unknown stalker, Amelia's ambivalence towards Samuel remains and indeed gains force, transforming from barely suppressed irritation to a violent rage towards her child, embracing the full 'horror' of this taboo in the process. Thus, Amelia's ambivalence towards her son circles back to the 'horror' of maternal ambivalence that, as Haskell argues, is repressed in mainstream maternal melodrama.²⁶

Kent is explicit in her desire to foreground this issue, which she believes is under-represented, both cinematically and socio-culturally. She states,

Apart from *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, I can't easily think of other examples [that address maternal ambivalence] and it's the great unspoken

²⁶ Haskell, pp. 168-72.

thing. We're all, as women, educated and conditioned to think that motherhood is an easy thing that just happens. But it's not always the case.²⁷

Referencing *We Need To Talk About Kevin* links *The Babadook* not only to the maternal melodrama but to its inverse — films that unpick the pervasive idealisation of maternal self-sacrifice in popular culture. Thornham situates Ramsay's film within the twin histories of feminist counter-cinema and maternal melodrama, and reads it as a critique of so-called 'new momism', the idealisation of motherhood that gathered momentum in the 1990s as part of a backlash against the gains of second-wave feminism. The crucial difference between 'new momism' and the idealised representations of domesticated femininity that dominated 1950s American culture is that intensive mothering is now positioned within a postfeminist framework as a liberated choice. Thornham quotes Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels as they articulate the supporting logic:

Feminism won; you can have it all; of course you want children; mothers are better at raising children than fathers; of course your children come first; ... today's children need constant attention and cultivation, or they'll become failures and hate you forever ...; and whoops — here we are in 1954.²⁸

As Thornham outlines, the consequence of this is to replace subservience to a husband with subservience to a child, and the key strategy is to depict that subservience to the child as the woman's often challenging but freely made (albeit inevitable) choice.²⁹ Thornham cites as evidence of this the recent explosion of so-called 'mommy memoirs' — 'first person narratives cataloguing the difficulties and disappointments but ultimately the redemptive power of motherhood'.³⁰

In other words, Thornham argues that 'new momism' is the postfeminist version of overinvested mothering that, according to Haskell, conceals the hatred lurking beneath the surface of classical women's films:

Children are an obsession in American movies ... The sacrifice of and for children — two sides of the same coin — is a disease passing for a national virtue ... Both of these transactions represent beautifully masked wish fulfillments, suggesting that the myth of obsession — the love lavished, the

²⁷ Kent, quoted in Paul McInnes, 'The Babadook: "I Wanted to Talk about the Need to Face Darkness in Ourselves"', *Guardian*, 18 October 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/18/the-babadook-jennifer-kent>> [accessed 1 February 2016].

²⁸ Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth* (New York and London: Free Press, 2004), pp. 5, 25, ellipses in original. Quoted in Thornham, p. 8.

²⁹ Thornham, p. 3.

³⁰ Thornham, p. 8.

attention paid to children ... — is compensation for women's guilt, for the deep inadmissible feelings of not wanting children, or not wanting them unreservedly, in the first place.³¹

According to Thornham, 'such hatred is also the subject of [...] *We Need to Talk about Kevin*'.³² Eva (Tilda Swinton) struggles to love her son Kevin and to relinquish control of her body and her life in the ways that are expected of her, first as a pregnant woman and then as a mother.³³ Her relationship with her son is fraught from infancy and as he grows older his disturbing behavior becomes increasingly violent, culminating in his murder of his father and sister, and massacre of his fellow high-school students.

From a generic perspective, Thornham identifies Kevin, 'with his violence, mockery of parental authority and unreadable self-possession', as the obvious 'successor to both the monstrous children of 1970s horror and, in an ironic gesture, to the wise innocents that succeeded them'.³⁴ Thornham traces Vivian Sobchack's history of the male child in horror and family melodrama since the 1970s in terms of his role in shoring up patriarchal power structures against the pressures exerted by second-wave feminism. According to Sobchack, the political and socio-cultural upheavals of the 1970s produced, in popular horror films such as *The Other* (dir. by Robert Mulligan, 1972), *The Exorcist* (dir. by William Friedkin, 1973), and *The Omen* (dir. by Richard Donner, 1976), portrayals of children as 'uncivilized, hostile, and powerful Others' who threatened the family and social institutions.³⁵ By the end of the decade, however, this picture has changed. The impact of feminism is such that the former conflation of patriarchy (understood as a political and economic power structure) and paternity (understood as a personal and subjective relation) has been undermined. Consequently, in mainstream cinema, the 'terror and rage of *patriarchy in decline*' dramatised by the 1970s horror film morphs into the family melodrama's 'sweetly problematic *paternity in ascendance*'.³⁶ Sobchack identifies *Kramer vs. Kramer* (dir. by Robert Benton, 1979) as a key film in this transition. As the father cedes to the loss of

³¹ Haskell, pp. 168-70. Quoted in Thornham, p. 3, ellipses in original. Haskell cites *That Certain Woman* (dir. by Edmund Goulding, 1937), *The Old Maid* (dir. by Edmund Goulding, 1939), *Penny Serenade* (dir. by George Stevens, 1941), *Mildred Pierce* (dir. by Michael Curtiz, 1945), and all three versions of *Madame X* (dir. by Lionel Barrymore, 1929; Sam Wood, 1937; and David Lowell Rich, 1966), as examples of films that disguise the taboo of maternal hatred as maternal love. See Haskell, p. 169.

³² Thornham, p. 3.

³³ Infant Kevin played by Rocky Duer; young Kevin played by Jasper Newell; teenage Kevin played by Ezra Miller.

³⁴ Thornham, p. 7.

³⁵ Vivian Sobchack, 'Bringing it all Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange', in *The Dread of Difference*, ed. by B. K. Grant, 2nd edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), pp. 171-91 (p. 178). Quoted in Thornham, p. 6.

³⁶ Sobchack, p. 183, emphasis in original.

patriarchal authority and comes to accept the paternal role (albeit with a charming ineptitude), the previously destructive power of the horror-film child transforms into a kind of special insight, and the child of the family melodrama becomes both markedly precocious and particularly vulnerable to the threat that is posed to the family unit by the cold, selfish (in other words, feminist) mother.³⁷ As Thornham emphasises, it is now ‘the (male) child who “has the power to authorize the family, [...] who denies or legitimates the particular family’s existence as a viable structure”’.³⁸

As Thornham argues, the shift from second-wave feminism to postfeminism has altered the terms of reference once again. While motherhood is now framed as a choice, the caveat is that the woman must choose to give herself over to the child entirely if the child is to succeed. For Thornham, therefore, an essential aspect of *We Need to Talk About Kevin*’s critique of this model is its emphasis on the mother’s, rather than the child’s, subjectivity. Thornham notes that, while the films that Sobchack discusses are primarily concerned with repairing the father-son relationship and the patriarchal structure that this represents, ‘[t]hirty years later, the elements that Sobchack sees as expressions of bourgeois America’s “political unconscious” have become the subject matter of Ramsay’s film, but it is the mother’s subjectivity through which they are explored’.³⁹

Thus, Thornham argues, Ramsay’s restaging of the (bad) mother-child relationship from Eva’s point of view reflects on the difficulty of reconciling the concept of a mobile, fluid, female selfhood (the ‘girl’ of postfeminist discourse) with the fixed, selfless, socio-cultural ideal of motherhood, framed as the woman’s natural and inevitable choice.⁴⁰ Similarly, Arnold suggests that ‘the [horror] genre is increasingly being used to explore maternal desires and conflicts rather than infantile ones’.⁴¹ Arnold considers horror films such as Alejandro Amenábar’s *The Others* (2001), which increase our access to the ‘Bad Mother’s’ perspective and, in so doing, question the subordination of the mother within patriarchy.⁴² In short, according to Arnold, rather than simply presenting her as the most significant threat to the successful patriarchal family unit, exploring the subjectivity of ‘the Bad Mother can point to dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the psychosocial structures of the family’.⁴³

³⁷ Thornham, p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid., quoting from Sobchack, p. 183.

³⁹ Thornham, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Thornham, p. 10.

⁴¹ Arnold, p. 70.

⁴² Arnold, pp. 70-71.

⁴³ Arnold, p. 69.

Likewise, for Kent, aligning the spectator with Amelia's perspective was pivotal to the film's effect. She says,

Even when she goes to some really dark places, I still tried to keep it within her point of view as much as possible, so that people would not sit back with their arms folded and judge her, but they'd actually travel through that experience with her.⁴⁴

In other words, to borrow Thornham's description of Eva in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, in *The Babadook*, 'it is [Amelia's] fractured subjectivity, hate, and sense of guilt that we inhabit'.⁴⁵ Privileging Amelia's 'fractured subjectivity' via the framing, composition, and temporal articulation of the film allows us to witness the 'horror' of a mother's hatred of her own child break through the mask of maternal self-sacrifice, while avoiding her vilification.

As outlined above, the film opens with a close-up of Amelia's face and it continues to make frequent use of similar tight framings throughout the film. From the close-ups of Amelia's shocked and frightened face during what is revealed to be the car crash that killed her husband, through close-ups revealing her increasing panic and anxiety as the Babadook makes its presence felt in her home, to close-ups of her radically transformed face as she tries to strangle her son, this visual strategy creates a kind of facial topography of Amelia's psychic dissolution. Additionally, scenes rarely include establishing shots and often begin with de-contextualised close-ups. For instance, when Amelia visits Samuel's school following reports of his disruptive behaviour, we cut directly from a shot of Amelia walking with an elderly resident in the care home to a close-up of Samuel's homemade trebuchet being placed on a table. Dispensing with conventional spatial and temporal cues exacerbates our sense of Amelia's psychological dislocation, as does the film's tendency towards a fixed, frontal framing in dialogue scenes.

This is reinforced by the fact that we are often restricted to Amelia's perspective. For instance, when she comes to, having been tied down in the basement, the scene begins with a blurred shot of a bright, white light against a black background, which slowly comes into focus. This recalls the bright, white light of the opening scene and reinforces our sense of Amelia being stuck in that nightmare scenario. These tight framings are alternated with long shots of Amelia that create a sense of her being cut adrift from her surroundings and from 'normal life'. For example, when Amelia visits a shopping mall, instead of rushing home to care for Samuel, we see her sitting alone on a sofa eating ice cream, surrounded by empty

⁴⁴ Kent, quoted in Sélavy.

⁴⁵ Thornham, p. 27.

space, as people pass in front of her. The lack of ambient noise on the soundtrack, replaced by non-diegetic music, increases our sense of her isolation.

As Amelia unravels, the sense of time, too, becomes more disordered, drawn out or compressed around Amelia's intensified experience. An obvious instance of this is the way in which the film eschews the horror convention of limiting the terror to the night-time. At the beginning, night is a particularly frightening time, but as the film progresses, the horror invades the daylight hours until there are no clear temporal markers to separate night from day. More specifically, certain scenes are condensed or extended in order to produce a temporally disorientating affect. As already discussed, time is extended in slow motion in the opening nightmare scene. Later in the film, by contrast, when Amelia finds the *Mister Babadook* storybook on her doorstep after she had torn it up and burnt it, accelerated footage speeds up her walk back into the house, as if the horror of its return concentrates her experience of time.

In terms of the film's composition, as Kent puts it, '[i]t starts very centered [...] and as the film goes on, people's heads start to drift to other sides of the frames, and things start to become more discordant visually'.⁴⁶ Most of the shots in the early part of film are symmetrical, with Amelia's and Samuel's position in the frame organised around central points (often furniture or doorways), or occupying opposite sides of the frame (for instance, at either end of the kitchen table). As their encounters grow more violent, however, the composition is frequently off-kilter. For instance, when Amelia clambers up the door to Samuel's bedroom, the angle is slightly tilted, as Amelia has lost her bearings and has, it seems, descended into the full 'horror' of her repressed grief and rage towards her child.

Privileging Amelia's 'fractured subjectivity' in these ways aligns us with her as she transitions from what we might call 'basically good but seriously struggling mother' to what Arnold describes as the 'Bad Mother' in her guise as the 'monster or the villain'.⁴⁷ Like Sobchack's model, which positions mainstream cinema as responding to second-wave feminism by denigrating the mother and idealising the (male) child, Amelia's ambivalence towards her son seems to turn her into a 'monster', while Samuel plays a pivotal role in the family's survival. He begins to prepare weapons to defend himself and his mother well in advance of the Babadook's first appearance to Amelia and, as Amelia herself becomes more 'horrific', he manages to withstand her violence, apparently tying her down at one point in order to protect them both. It is Samuel who assures Amelia, 'I just want you to be happy',

⁴⁶ Kent, quoted in Ehrlich.

⁴⁷ Arnold, p. 68.

when she articulates her murderous feelings towards him, and Samuel who intuits her possession as repression and tells her, '[y]ou have to get it out'. Thus, while Samuel begins the film suggesting the generically familiar possibility of the monstrous or possessed child of 1970s horror cinema (screaming fits, seeing things, an apparent propensity for violence, and so on), he corresponds more closely to the subsequent iteration of the child as 'wise innocent' the more Amelia turns into a 'monster'.⁴⁸

At one level, therefore, Samuel's transformation seems to resonate with Sobchack's model as described above. However, the film privileges Amelia's, rather than Samuel's, perspective and does not resolve by aligning Samuel with a viable father figure and eliminating or punishing Amelia. As such, the film refuses the condemnation of the mother and affirmation of the son characteristic of the films Sobchack discusses. Instead, the film focuses on Amelia's ultimate acknowledgement and integration of her own 'monstrous' feelings about motherhood, allowing us to sympathise with Amelia as an exhausted, grieving widow struggling with the demands of motherhood, as well as with Samuel as a vulnerable little boy. This process is facilitated by having Amelia inhabit in turn the role of mother-as-victim, mother-as-monster, and, finally, mother-as-saviour. In so doing, the film subverts the dichotomous representation of the mother as either good or bad that, as Arnold argues, has sustained earlier iterations of both the maternal melodrama and the horror genre.

Initially, Amelia is a wan, worn-out but essentially 'good' mother who, though suffering terrible grief, acts in the interests of her son. She is suspicious, even scared, of Samuel but defends him to her sister and to the authorities. At this stage, Amelia's suspicion of Samuel — as she effectively asks herself 'is he good or is he bad? Do I love him or do I hate him?' — increasingly played out within the confines of their dark, oppressive house, is articulated in terms of the female gothic. In *The Babadook*, as in the gothic tradition generally, the house itself is crucial to this dynamic. The palette is mainly limited to cool colours, notably black, white, and deep blue, creating a dark, intense space. As Kent puts it '[i]t felt right for the world to feel quite cold. It was deliberate, and it creates [...] a fugue state, a dream state.'⁴⁹ The set built for the interiors, fashioned after a Victorian terrace-style house, reinforces the atemporal quality that intensifies over the course of Amelia's

⁴⁸ See Robin Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film', in *Movies and Methods*, ed. by Bill Nichols, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), II, pp. 195-220; and Thornham, p. 7. For a discussion of the child villain in horror film since the 1950s, see Dominic Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

⁴⁹ Kent, quoted in Sélavy.

deterioration, in that its design is ‘grounded in reality but [it does] not look modern’.⁵⁰

The heroine’s relationship to the house is of course a crucial aspect of the gothic scenario. The house maps her fears and anxieties; her relationship to its forbidden spaces arguably literalises her own relationship to those aspects of herself that are similarly hidden from consciousness. As Steven Jacobs puts it,

In Gothic romance films, the forbidden room is a metaphor for the repressed experience. The heroine attempts to disclose and visualize the secrets and mysteries, just like the psychoanalyst opens up the mysterious depths of the soul. Opening up the forbidden room is [...] the cathartic moment in the story.⁵¹

This idea is echoed by Kent when she says, ‘[g]radually the film becomes just the house. But the house is alive, it’s a reflection, an extension of what’s going on for Amelia — and for Sam, but mostly for Amelia.’⁵² For instance, at one point, Amelia sees cockroaches pour out of a hole in the kitchen wall. In the next scene, however, the hole has disappeared, suggesting the image of an invasion of insects is an eruption of Amelia’s anxiety. Thus, Amelia’s relationship to the house and, particularly (as is the convention if not the cliché), to the basement, dramatises her relationship to those aspects of herself and her history that she cannot articulate. Her most violent confrontations — with Samuel, with her dead husband, and with the Babadook — take place there, and ultimately the basement becomes ‘home’ to the uncanny manifestation of those fears and anxieties that she must confront in order to save herself and Samuel.

If the house, and particularly the basement, constitutes a spatialisation of Amelia’s fears and anxieties in particular, as in the gothic tradition, it also has a specific relationship to time. The basement is where Amelia stores her memories of Oskar, in the form of his clothes and belongings, and thus it speaks to what John Fletcher calls ‘the Gothic realm of a past preserved and suspended and awaiting reanimation’.⁵³ When the Babadook emerges from the basement, he does so, as many critics have noted, as an uncanny embodiment of the arrangement of Oskar’s clothes that Amelia keeps there.⁵⁴ Thus, the basement is a place

⁵⁰ Kent, quoted in Sélavy.

⁵¹ Steven Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Netherlands: 010 Publishers, 2007), p. 39.

⁵² Kent, quoted in Sélavy.

⁵³ John Fletcher, ‘Primal Scenes and the Female Gothic: *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*’, *Screen*, 36.4 (Winter 1995), 341-70 (p. 355).

⁵⁴ In Freud’s famous formulation, ‘the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed’, and an uncanny effect is ‘often easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality’. Sigmund Freud,

where time is suspended in space, a frozen past that Amelia must incorporate into her personal narrative if she is to ‘move on’.

As such, the psychic mapping of the house in *The Babadook* corresponds closely to that of its gothic predecessors. Although the cycle of Hollywood films from the 1940s frequently referred to as ‘female gothic’ is quite diverse, most of these films ‘involve a woman who feels threatened or tortured by a seemingly sadistic male authority figure, who is usually her husband’.⁵⁵ Replacing the wife’s suspicion of her husband with the mother’s suspicion of her son reorganises the relationship around an implicitly Oedipal model. Like *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, which, in Thornham’s words, ‘replays the Oedipal story — the son’s usurpation and murder of the father, the disturbingly sexual overtones in the relationship between son and mother, [...] from the mother’s perspective’, *The Babadook* stages the Oedipal overtones of Samuel’s relationship with his mother from Amelia’s point of view.⁵⁶ According to Bradshaw,

Kent shows that as Samuel gets older, he starts to intuit ever more clearly his father’s absence and his own quasi-conjugal relationship with his mother. He is always clambering over her and heedlessly touching her in ways he doesn’t understand.⁵⁷

From Amelia’s perspective, however, their physical intimacy is shown to be deeply intrusive, eroding her sense of herself as a separate subject with her own needs and desires. These Oedipal overtones are unmissable in the scene where Samuel disturbs his mother masturbating, a scene that ironically recalls the maternal melodrama’s insistence that the good mother surrender her sexual identity for the sake of her child.

As the film progresses, these gothic elements gain momentum and erupt in ‘monstrous’ form. As Amelia’s mask of maternal self-sacrifice begins to slip, the conventions of the horror genre provide a vocabulary capable of articulating the ‘real’ feelings beneath Amelia’s façade. Amelia becomes wildly abusive and violent. She kills the family dog and is driven by a desire to kill Samuel, who is forced to defend himself against her. She is

‘The “Uncanny”’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Vintage and the Hogarth Press, (1919, repr. 2001)), XVII, pp. 217-56 (pp. 247, 244). As such, the Babadook is a classic embodiment of Freud’s uncanny, as has been noted by nearly all critics and reviewers of the film. See for instance Jim Barker, ‘*The Babadook*: When Allegory Meets Expressionism in a Therapeutic Horror Classic’, <<http://thebarkbitesback.wordpress.com/2014/11/05/560/>> [accessed 1 February 2016].

⁵⁵ Jancovich, p. 21. Key examples include Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940) and *Suspicion* (1941), and George Cukor’s *Gaslight* (1944).

⁵⁶ Thornham, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Bradshaw, ‘*The Babadook* Review’.

dramatically altered physically, acquiring a deep voice and an agility that is markedly at odds with her earlier incarnation. When she clambers quickly up the door to Samuel's bedroom, the action is speeded up so as to make her seem non-human and thus somehow repulsive. Her pale, fragile features framed by wispy blond hair twist into a hard mask of horror and she becomes virtually unrecognisable.

Hazel Cills notes that usually, when a child is in danger in the horror film, it is incumbent upon the child's family, and specifically the mother, to save the child.⁵⁸ She argues that whether it is against a supernatural force (like Diane Freeling in *Poltergeist* (1982)), or against a demonic husband (like Wendy Torrance in *The Shining* (1980)), the mother's role is as protector.⁵⁹ As Cills puts it, '[j]ust as slashers have their sainted final girls, home invasion and possession films have their final mothers'.⁶⁰ The key difference, as Cills sees it, between a film like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Babadook*, both films featuring hard-working single mothers with children threatened by evil forces, 'is that in the latter film, Amelia is the one who becomes possessed'.⁶¹ Thus, Amelia's possession seems to turn her into the 'Bad Mother', who must be eliminated in order for the child to survive. However, as Cills argues, while the horror genre has more than its fair share of evil mothers (Mrs Bates in *Psycho*, Margaret White in *Carrie* (1976), Mrs Voorhees in *Friday the 13th* (1980), and so on), 'what makes Amelia compelling is how she literally embodies both roles — the unstable villain and the resilient child-saver'.⁶²

Thus, over the course of the film, Amelia transforms from gothic victim, to 'monstrous mother', to 'final mother', in Cills's terms. As Amelia descends into 'madness', Samuel is forced to defend himself against her. As mentioned above, he recognises that his mother is at the mercy of the Babadook, saying '[y]ou have to get it out'. Following this, Amelia does indeed 'get it out', vomiting a black, viscous substance and shaking violently after Samuel strokes her face while she tries to strangle him. From this point on, Amelia's fury is turned upon its proper object — the Babadook — and she confronts it, screaming, '[i]f you touch my son again I'll fucking kill you!' The Babadook falls to the ground, light and insubstantial. When she touches it, it roars at her but she withstands its rage, her terrified face in tight close-up, lit once again by a bright, white light. Visually, this recalls the opening

⁵⁸ Hazel Cills, 'Mother Dearest: How *The Babadook* Inverts the Horror Movie Mom', *Grantland*, 18 December 2014 <<http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/mother-dearest-how-the-babadook-inverts-the-horror-movie-mom/>> [accessed 11 January 2016].

⁵⁹ *Poltergeist* (dir. by Tobe Hooper, 1982); and *The Shining* (dir. by Stanley Kubrick, 1980).

⁶⁰ Cills, para. 2 of 10.

⁶¹ *The Exorcist* (dir. by William Friedkin, 1973); Cills, para. 4 of 10.

⁶² *Carrie* (dir. by Brian de Palma, 1976); *Friday the 13th* (dir. by Sean S. Cunningham, 1980); and Cills, para. 6 of 10.

nightmare scene; however, as Amelia can now confront this horror, the Babadook retreats to its generic home — the basement.

At this stage, in resisting the Babadook and saving her son, Amelia appears to conform to the ‘Good Mother’ model of both horror film and maternal melodrama, putting her child’s welfare before her own at considerable risk to herself. As Arnold puts it, ‘[i]n maternal melodrama, maternal sacrifice enables the social or personal promotion of the child. In the horror film, it enables the survival of the child.’⁶³ This, however, is complicated by the question of the ‘Good Mother’s’ relationship to the paternal function in the horror genre. Arnold argues that, in the post-classical maternal horror film,

the Good Mother is more often than not over-shadowed by a more powerful agent: the father, who either threatens or secures the family. The Good Mother retains certain core elements such as selflessness and sacrifice, yet she is always determined in relation to a paternal figure. Her ability to nurture is dependent upon the third term of the father. The Good Mother is rarely, therefore, a powerful agent within the patriarchal family and the maternal horror film struggles to find an alternative position from which she can speak.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, while Amelia is haunted by the loss of her husband, the emphasis is not on reinstating a patriarchal family structure, but on giving full, ‘monstrous’ articulation to Amelia’s inadmissible feelings about motherhood. In fact, though she longs to be reunited with her dead husband, the patriarchal imperative to reconcile father and son that would bring this about is figured as deadly — when Oskar appears to Amelia in the basement, he tells her, ‘[w]e can be together, you just need to bring me the boy’ — and, importantly, no alternative father figure is mooted. Amelia finally comes to terms with the loss of her husband, literally putting it into language, stating, ‘[m]y husband died the day that Sam was born’, and a healthier mother-son relationship is signalled in the final scene. As such, when Samuel says, ‘[i]t’s getting much better Mum’, this can be understood as an allusion both to the bruise on his neck where Amelia tried to strangle him and to their relationship.

Thus, Amelia reconciles with her son and with herself as a mother by recognising and accommodating, rather than repudiating, the ‘horror’ of her unexpressed grief and rage towards her child. In this sense, the Babadook practically begs to be read as ‘the return of the repressed’, the Freudian scenario (which Wood argues is central to the horror genre) whereby material that has been ‘sunk into’ the id manifests in conscious formations, often in greatly

⁶³ Arnold, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Arnold, p. 37.

distorted or disguised form.⁶⁵ Indeed, the possibility that Amelia may be the author of *The Babadook* storybook — and thus the origin of the Babadook itself — is suggested by the fact that Amelia says she used to write ‘kids’ stuff’ in a conversation with her sister and her sister’s friends. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen elaborates on the idea of the monster as originating in the self in his thesis that ‘the fear of the monster is also a kind of desire’.⁶⁶ In other words, the figure of the monster permits forbidden fantasies of aggression and domination to be safely expressed in a clearly defined, liminal space. As Cohen argues, ‘[w]hen contained by geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization, the monster can function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (an Other) self’.⁶⁷ In this case, then, shifting generic registers from gothic terror (that is, from a threat that is figured as primarily psychological), to the conventions of classical horror (whereby the threat posed emanates from an externalised, recognisable monster), allows the Babadook, understood as the projection of Amelia’s ‘Other’ self, to take shape, as it were, and become an acknowledged part of Amelia’s and Samuel’s shared reality.

Indeed, the monster that Samuel fears is given a palpable presence well before it appears as the Babadook and well before we have rationalised its existence as emerging from Amelia’s unconscious. One way in which this is achieved is by assigning it a point of view. For instance, when Amelia and Samuel look for monsters in Samuel’s bedroom in a series of quick shots following the opening nightmare scene, it is the imagined monster’s point of view that is privileged, looking back at Amelia and Samuel as they peer beneath the bed and open the wardrobe. Thus, *there is something there*. Likewise, the Babadook’s voice is possibly one of the most effective and/or affective aspects of the film. For instance, when Amelia answers the telephone and hears the Babadook’s voice, it is as if it is breathing into our ear, producing, in this viewer at least, the cold shiver one expects from a successful horror film. The voice itself has an eerie aspect, sounding simultaneously human and non-human, its delivery protracted, with an incantatory quality to its insistent repetition of certain sounds or phrases (‘baba-dook-dook-DOOK!’).

Cohen suggests that the answer to the question ‘[d]o monsters really exist?’ can only be ‘[s]urely they must, for if they did not, how could we?’⁶⁸ In other words, monsters exist insofar as their creation constitutes a crucial component of how we map our social and

⁶⁵ Robin Wood, ‘The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’, in *Hollywood*, ed. by Wood, pp. 63-84.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Monster Culture (Seven Theses)’, in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25 (p. 16).

⁶⁷ Cohen, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Cohen, p. 20.

psychic universe and, however much we might try to exclude them, their inevitable return brings with it a fuller knowledge of our selves. Similarly, the return of the Babadook as the ‘monstrous’ manifestation of Amelia’s repressed feelings about motherhood brings with it the opportunity to reconsider the maternal role in ways that can accommodate ambivalence. According to Thornham, the ending of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* ‘points us beyond the twin fantasies of postfeminist maternal masochism and unproblematic feminist agency’.⁶⁹ *The Babadook* similarly avoids a simple reversal or straightforward endorsement of maternal sacrifice. While at one level the ending can be seen as conforming to the discourse of ‘essential motherhood’ as defined by Patrice DiQuinzio and discussed by Arnold (motherhood as nurturing, caring, and natural), this is undermined by the *mise-en-scène*.⁷⁰ The bare tree outside their house has flowered, but its green leaves and pink flowers seem hyper-real, saturated. While the final scene takes place in the garden, we arrive there by coming up through the earth, accompanied by a distant, roaring sound. Spatially and temporally disorientated, it feels like we have returned to the earlier horror, until we emerge in the garden, in daylight, to witness a happier scene between mother and son. The normality presented in this scene is nevertheless infused with an uncanny quality that undermines any easy reading of the mother-child relationship as fully resolved in terms of the reconciliation of the ‘Good Mother’ with her ‘wise innocent’ son. Samuel’s earlier ‘strangeness’ has not disappeared, but has been embraced in a more joyful spirit as part of their new reality. As such, unlike his unsuccessful attempts to impress Amelia with magic tricks at the beginning of the film, in the final scene Samuel really can do magic, producing a dove out of a serving dish to the delight of his mother.

Crucially, the Babadook has not been eliminated, but is still with them, if somewhat subdued. One of the final close-ups in the film is of a bowl of worms that Amelia and Samuel collect in order to feed the Babadook. In its revelation of the ugly underside of superficial, suburban normality, this image evokes a Lynchian sensibility that speaks to a subtly revised model of motherhood.⁷¹ Amelia’s acknowledgement and acceptance of the Babadook (that is, as the ‘monstrous’ manifestation of her inadmissible feelings about motherhood as a result of their repression, and (thus) as a very real threat to her and Samuel’s survival as a family) is integral to her revised relationship not only to her son, but also to herself as a mother.

⁶⁹ Thornham, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Arnold, p. 39, cites Patrice DiQuinzio on ‘the naturalisation of motherhood in the term “essential motherhood”’. See Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. xiii.

⁷¹ This shot is reminiscent of the famous image of writhing insects that ends the first scene of David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986).

According to Cohen, '[m]onsters are our children'.⁷² Amelia's recovery implies a recognition of this as, ultimately, she assumes a quasi-maternal role towards the Babadook itself, giving it a home (in the basement), soothing it during its (epic) tantrums, and feeding it (worms). Amelia's process of repression, return and, finally, recognition can be read as analogous to the process of generic incorporation at work in the film, whereby the 'horror' of maternal ambivalence, barely concealed beneath a veneer of maternal self-sacrifice, erupts in 'monstrous' form and is finally assimilated into the body of the text. In short, *The Babadook* intensifies and inverts aspects of the woman's film from Amelia's 'fractured perspective', via the affective potential of the horror genre whereby we are 'forced to feel something'. In so doing, the film reflects on the maternal melodrama's investment in 'the spectacle of a mother owned by her children' in ways that illuminate what is normally hidden from view.⁷³

⁷² Cohen, p. 20.

⁷³ Kent, quoted in Ehrlich; Haskell, p. 169.

Preparing for Monsters: Governance by Popular Culture

Lina Rahm and Jörgen Skågeby

Introduction

How and why is the zombie metaphor applied in efforts that seek to alert citizens to and prepare them for potential threats and disasters? And what are the consequences of applying this specific metaphor in attempts to govern populations? This article examines the real-world political implications that come from the recurring adoption of a particular pop-cultural figuration as a guiding, and sometimes even governing, metaphor. More specifically, it looks at how the zombie has been used to promote the necessity for ‘preparing’ for the future in specific ways. While much has already been said about the zombie, this article adds to the current body of knowledge on the subject by looking at how the zombie metaphor has been applied for governing purposes. As such, the article provides analytical tools for studying how pop-cultural metaphors are used as ‘premediations’ — that is, as tools for practical governance in relation to both current and future threats — and for studying the potential implications that comes from such premediations, a term discussed below.¹

Over the last decade or so, the academic interest in the zombie has increased exponentially, producing a vast body of scholarly and popular discussion. Since the zombie is a fictitious creature, it is also inevitable that its modern incarnation has become a highly mediated figuration (in that it practically always uses a medium for its cultural distribution).² This article explores how the zombie is now also premediated as a very practical and political metaphor in, for example, civil-defence courses, government information campaigns, and popular-science TV shows. These applications of the zombie metaphor differ from more fiction-oriented pop-cultural depictions, as their underlying and express purpose is to govern — to make people more aware of societal contingencies and to generate a corresponding behavioural change, and, on a more fundamental level, to promote a particular view regarding who deserves to live and who must die. This article therefore takes specific interest in how the zombie metaphor is used to govern and promote certain practical and emotional preparations for future catastrophes. As such, this article examines how the deliberate practical and political application of the pop-cultural zombie metaphor comes to legitimise a

¹ Richard Grusin, ‘Premediation’, *Criticism*, 46 (2004), 17-39.

² Allan Cameron, ‘Zombie Media: Transmission, Reproduction, and the Digital Dead’, *Cinema Journal*, 52 (2012), 66-89.

profoundly regularising view of the future, one that excludes all but ‘properly prepared’ individuals.

Before exploring how the zombie metaphor is used to govern the future, we need to establish what the zombie ‘is’, how it was originally depicted in pop-cultural narratives and how has it been studied in academic analyses. After establishing these preconditions, the article analyses three cases where the zombie metaphor is used to promote contingency awareness and thereby also to promote a specific view of how to prepare practically for the future: first, a zombie-survival course; second, a number of governmental emergency-information campaigns; and third, a popular-science TV show on ‘how to survive the end of the world’. In doing so, the article asserts that the adoption of the zombie metaphor for political and governing purposes brings about a treacherous binary opposition, which conflates a range of potential agendas and obscures both power differentials and alternative futures.

The Pop-Cultural Zombie

The zombie has a rich history consisting of variations on the theme of a living being that returns from the dead.³ One of the primary and most important recurring themes is what we may refer to as the ‘rules of the zombie’, rules which determine what they are and what they are capable of doing. As this article demonstrates, such rules are very important both in pop-cultural adaptations in general, and in the case studies this article examines. A specific piece of fictional work that highlights the rules of the zombie is *The Zombie Survival Guide*, where author Max Brooks provides very precise instructions and rules for how to survive the zombie apocalypse.⁴ The reason for starting with this particular book, apart from its huge popularity and cultural attraction, is that the very concept of a ‘zombie rulebook’, we argue, has come to colour not only many pop-cultural narratives (perhaps most notably the movie *Zombieland*), but also to frame how the zombie metaphor has subsequently been adopted in crisis-awareness politics (it is, for example, used as course literature in the zombie-survival course examined below).⁵

³ Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, ‘Infection, Media, and Capitalism: From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 10 (2010), 126-47.

⁴ Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003).

⁵ Jon C. Ogg, ‘Zombies Worth over \$5 Billion to Economy: The Walking Undead Reflect Our Anxieties over Scary Times’, *NBC News*, 31 October 2011 <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/45079546/ns/business-stocks_and_economy/t/zombies-worth-over-billion-economy/#.U14c9cfai5s> [accessed 28 April 2014].

The Zombie Survival Guide was published in 2003, but it was not until 2010 that sales started to increase rapidly. A sequel entitled *World War Z* was published in 2006 and was made into a movie starring Brad Pitt in 2013. Recent internet rumours suggest that *The Zombie Survival Guide* will also be adapted for the cinema, emphasising the sustained fascination with the zombie figuration.⁶ *The Zombie Survival Guide* begins with a chapter entitled 'The Undead: Myths and Realities', in which Brooks debunks 'myths' about the zombie by answering questions such as '[w]hat is a zombie? How are they created? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their needs, their desires? Why are they hostile to humanity?'⁷ According to Brooks, the underlying cause of the existence of zombies is the fictional *Solanum* virus. This virus, in Brooks' formulation, effectively transforms an infected living human being into a member of the living dead over the course of twenty-four hours. Under the two headings 'Physicality' and 'Behavioural Patterns', we learn that a zombie is essentially a dead, reanimated human without cognitive faculties; it is incurable; it wants to eat (and thereby infect) living humans; and the only way to kill one (which is the only way to deal with one, basically) is to destroy his or her brain. We also learn that the ultimate goal of a living human being who encounters zombies is to survive and 'not to be a hero' (that is, try to help others before themselves). A particularly noteworthy rule is that the zombie state cannot be changed or cured: 'It will exist as is, or it will not exist at all.'⁸ This last phrase is significant; it essentially states that one principal rule of the zombie is that the rules cannot be changed. This is also the case more widely in cultural adaptations of the zombie. While both fans and academics certainly discuss interpretations of and details relating to the zombie, it is also very much the case that the elementary rules presented by Brooks often persist unchallenged.

Interestingly, Brooks constantly calls on a somewhat vague notion of 'science' as evidence of his claims. We are not so much questioning the rather liberal citation techniques used here (we are fully aware that the guide is a work of fiction), as calling attention to the repeated use of 'scientific' explanations and alleged studies as support. As an extension of the 'scientifically proven' zombie at the centre of his work, Brooks also highlights how 'fake' zombies, such as the voodoo zombie (a zombie created through drugs and/or asphyxia-caused brain damage) and the Hollywood zombie (a trendy cinematic depiction, which, he insists,

⁶ Jared Pacheco, 'Max Brooks Confirms *Zombie Survival Guide* Films & *World War Z* Starring Brad Pitt!', *Arrow in the Head*, 22 July 2010 <<http://www.joblo.com/horror-movies/news/max-brooks-confirms-zombie-survival-guide-films-world-war-z-starring-brad-pitt>> [accessed 19 August 2016].

⁷ Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 1.

⁸ Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 19.

has little in common with the scientifically corroborated zombie) can be separated from what he positions as the real thing. Brooks asserts that the voodoo zombie is not genuine since it is more human than the viral zombie (in that it can communicate, feel pain, think, and show emotion). Meanwhile, the Hollywood zombie is merely a popularised version of the ‘real thing’, and, he states, films featuring them can only ever be ‘a source of temporary, light-hearted entertainment and not a visual aid to your survival’.⁹ This latter statement is, however, only partly true as the pop-cultural zombie, as this article argues, has become vital source material for more serious and practical preparations for actual disasters.

Indeed, today, the so-called viral zombie, as exemplified in Brooks’ survival guide (and movies such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and the *Resident Evil* films (2002-present)), has become a specific metaphor for a complex cocktail of future threats. When asked about why the zombie has become so popular, Brooks himself concludes that

they reflect our very real anxieties of these crazy scary times. A zombie story gives people a fictional lens to see the real problems of the world. You can deal with societal breakdown, famine, disease, chaos in the streets, but as long as the catalyst for all of them is zombies, you can still sleep.¹⁰

The zombie is constructed here as a very specific and pre-determined metaphor, a metaphor which can then be applied to many other (more real) worries that future outlooks may generate. That is, while zombies in pop culture are not all as inflexible as Brooks’ account, most of them comply with the rulebook (in itself a sign of the authority of the rules). Rule-adhering movies such as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Re-animator* (1985), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *The Zombie Diaries* (2006), *The Dead* (2010), *Eaters* (2011), *The Resident Evil* series, *Zombieland* (2009), *World War Z* (2013), and many more, make up the bulk of conventional zombie films. Of course, there are a few that challenge or subvert the basic structure, such as *Fido* (2006), *Wasting Away* (2007), *Pontypool* (2008), *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (2008), and *Warm Bodies* (2013), which offer potentially more empathic and hopeful interpretations of zombies. However, even these alternative routes follow many of the fundamental directions of the original pop-cultural zombie (such as Othering and cherry-picked pseudo-science). This further supports the argument that the zombie *is* a fairly bolted-down model for what we call premediating the

⁹ Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Brooks, ‘A Conversation with Max Brooks’, 2014 <<http://www.maxbrooks-zombieworld.com/>> [accessed 15 February 2016].

future. The question is, then, whether the rules continue to apply when the zombie moves from pop-cultural accounts to attempts at political governance.

Academic Analyses of the Zombie

Before we attempt to answer this question ourselves, we need to survey previous attempts to respond to similar queries. From an academic point of view, the zombie can be seen as a specific subcategory of monsters, and monstrosity is a theme that has received much scholarly attention.¹¹ Monstrosity has been described as a subversive position from which a theorisation of resistance and a challenge to anthropocentrism can emerge — ‘a transhistorical site of challenge to the rational, autonomous, masculine subject and to the category of the human itself’.¹² As a subcategory of the monstrous, the zombie integrates the destabilising qualities of monstrosity more generally. For example, Jillian Burcar shows how the zombie can work to dissolve commonly dichotomised categories such as gender or sexuality.¹³ Contrasted against the cyborgian Other, the representation of the zombified other ‘calls for the destruction of the old order by rethinking the ways post-industrial economies conceive of gender and sexuality today’; in other words, the zombie functions as a more positive alternative to the rational chilliness and hyper-artificiality of the cyborg.¹⁴ Dan Hassler-Forest offers similar arguments, claiming that the zombie is commonly associated with the destabilisation of patriarchal or colonial imperialist power.¹⁵ Gary A. Mullen presents an interesting reading of the zombie as a cultural metaphor through the lenses of Theodor Adorno and Slavoj Žižek.¹⁶ Illustrating two opposing perspectives, Žižek is presented as arguing for the right to use defensive, or even revolutionary, violence (against zombies and their cultural representation), and Adorno as arguing for a more alienating

¹¹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993); Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’, in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295-337; and Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, ‘Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots’, *Social Text*, 20 (2002), 117-48.

¹² Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 121.

¹³ Jillian Burcar, ‘Living Appendages of the Machine: Reproducing Sex and Gender in Cyborg and Zombie Narratives, from Battlestar Galactica to the Walking Dead’, in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 403-12.

¹⁴ Burcar, p. 403.

¹⁵ Dan Hassler-Forest, ‘Cowboys and Zombies: Destabilizing Patriarchal Discourse in the Walking Dead’, *Studies in Comics*, 2 (2011), 339-55.

¹⁶ Gary A. Mullen, ‘Adorno, Žižek, and the Zombie: The Representation of Death in an Age of Mass Killing’, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Studies*, 13 (2014), 48-57.

perspective, where citizens are now suffering under the inhumanity of post-industrial institutions and practices, and treated as zombies, even in the afterlife.

The zombie's subversive potential has, however, also been interrogated. In a number of close readings of zombie texts, several scholars raise issues concerning the zombie's recent positioning as a subversive monster. Gordon Coonfield evokes the idea of the *zombie imaginary* as an umbrella term for the representations generated by the very idea of the zombie.¹⁷ He further proposes that the zombie is a 'perfect stranger', putting forward the notion that zombies are the polar opposite of the human in many ways (through, for instance, the dichotomies of dead-alive and us-them). However, Coonfield also acknowledges the human history of the zombie (as *someone* turned into *something*) and proposes an ethical consideration of how the zombie engenders a view of difference that is essentially unjust (that is, of the zombie as a thing that must be killed by people who are still 'real' people). Jessica Murray examines two literary cases (Lily Herne's *Deadlands* (2011) and *Death of a Saint* (2012)) and states that, while the zombie metaphor opens up to some alternative constructions/readings of gender and sexuality, it also maintains traditional patriarchal and heteronormative dichotomies (such as the vulnerability of women, homophobia, and prescribed gender roles).¹⁸ Steve Jones presents a similar case, highlighting how patriarchy seems to linger in zombie narratives.¹⁹

However, unlike Jones's assertion that 'when gendered female, the undead fittingly symbolize this discursive history of femininity under patriarchy', this article argues that the gendering of the zombie in itself is not necessary for patriarchal structures to emerge as a result of the application of the zombie metaphor.²⁰ Instead, the most problematic binary is created through the Othering of the zombie itself, as 'it' is *specified, estranged, and stamped* for clear separation in the discourses discussed here. Kevan A. Feshami draws attention to this desire to clarify what the zombie is and does. He states,

Its lack of identity ensures its easy dissolution into the faceless mass of a zombie horde while nevertheless inviting, even demanding, fans, critics, and

¹⁷ Gordon Coonfield, 'Perfect Strangers: The Zombie Imaginary and the Logic of Representation', in *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, ed. by Murali Balaji (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 3-16.

¹⁸ Jessica Murray, 'A Zombie Apocalypse: Opening Representational Spaces for Alternative Constructions of Gender and Sexuality', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 29 (2013), 1-19.

¹⁹ Steve Jones, 'Gender Monstrosity: Deadgirl and the Sexual Politics of Zombie-Rape', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), 525-39.

²⁰ Jones, p. 530.

filmmakers to provide it with identity, with purpose, to manage the horror its lack of identity entails.²¹

When publically disseminated and consumed, the separation of the zombie as Other engenders both discursive and material power differentials. The theoretical nuances and potentially disruptive capacities of zombies-as-monsters are thus lost due to a fundamental rupture and subsequent hostility between humanity and what is now something else. This separation, we argue here, is maintained by the arbitrary, but specific, ‘rules of zombies’. Indeed, the edited volume *Zombies are Us* begins by clarifying how the rules relating to the zombie comprise a recurrent necessity for practically all zombie narratives and, although some nuances are debated, the general thrust of the rules remain the same throughout the genre (zombies are brought back from the dead; they consume the living, thereby turning them into zombies as well; and they can only be killed by destroying their brains).²²

So, while there is a large body of work identifying and positioning the zombie as a troubling and ambiguous in-between representation that can fruitfully be mined for subversive purposes, there is also a consistent return of more-or-less precise rules that need to be followed — rules that, when read through a cultural political lens, are profoundly problematic. For example, Lina Rahm has examined the rules of ‘prepping’ (practically preparing for the apocalypse), where the zombie is a recurring metaphorical threat, and has identified a predominant view that the physical body best predicted to survive an apocalyptic scenario is one that resorts to military skills, military tactics, military outfits, and military arms.²³ In other words, this means that independent, resourceful, sceptical *men* loaded with ‘proper’ gear and ‘proper’ skills are often seen as the ones best equipped to outlast ‘the rest’. Following Rahm, one could therefore argue that one important reason why zombies have become so popular as a practical metaphor is because they *do not* challenge or upset many current power differentials — the zombie metaphor corresponds well to the normative model of the ‘best prepared body’, and reinforces the development of skills and mindsets that are fundamentally sexist, ageist, and ableist.

²¹ Kevan A. Feshami, ‘Death Is Only the Beginning: George A. Romero’s Model of the Zombie and Its Threat to Identity’, in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 395-402 (p. 400).

²² See *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*, ed. by Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011).

²³ Lina Rahm, ‘Who Will Survive? On Bodies and Boundaries after the Apocalypse’, *Gender Forum*, 45 (2013) <<http://www.genderforum.org/issues/special-issue-early-career-researchers-i/who-will-survive-on-bodies-and-boundaries-after-the-apocalypse/>> [accessed 1 September 2016].

Premediation and Folk Models

How can we understand this preoccupation with monsters in general and zombies in particular? Premediation theory offers one possible way in. Premediation can be defined as the way we, as media-consuming citizens, increasingly desire media representations of potential futures. This desire works through a double media logic consisting of both a longing for security and safety (by preparing us for as many future scenarios as possible) and a concurrent limitation of the possible options in the future (as a way to deal with the overwhelming prospect of *all* potential futures). That is, there is an emotional element to premediation in that it seeks to foresee likely events in order to reduce anxiety. However, there is also a political element at play, as the delimitations of potential scenarios obscure other ways to think about the future. This mutually reinforcing combination of emotional comfort and the limitation of options is at the heart of premediation.

In light of the discussion above, it would seem that the current attraction of the zombie as an all-purpose model for envisioning future threats can fruitfully be analysed via the premediation concept. Under this framework, the underlying logic of the zombie is to induce comfort in the face the overwhelming and potentially demoralising complexity of the future, allowing us to imagine that we know more precisely what we are dealing with, in order to develop the ‘correct’ corresponding coping plans and thus reduce anxiety. However, this strategy is by no means neutral or disinterested. Rather, this article argues that the zombie, in its practical application, is a deeply unjust and limiting metaphor that too often perpetuates power differentials. As outlined above, the zombie comes with a very clear set of rules as to how it should ‘work’. As such, the zombie is depicted and conveyed as a specific cultural figuration, one that is employed in order to induce a very particular kind of response. These premediations also have more fundamental political consequences in that they effectively also determine who deserves to live and who must die (what Mbembe calls necropolitics).²⁴ The zombie therefore occupies a cultural nexus of meanings. Taken together, the prevalent use of the zombie to premeditate the future; the specific rules it follows; the specific kind of responses it induces; and its necropolitical underpinnings combine to produce what we may call a *folk model* of the zombie.

Put simply, a folk model is a culturally shared cognitive model — an everyday explanatory framework that is commonplace. As such, folk models are clearly related to the notion of the conceptual metaphor (that is, the understanding of one idea, or conceptual

²⁴ Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11-40.

domain, in terms of another); indeed, the two notions are arguably interchangeable.²⁵ However, for the purposes of this article, the folk model is the more useful of the two, since it highlights the significant difference between the academic interpretations of the (pop-cultural) zombie metaphor and the practical public application of the metaphor in hands-on disaster preparation. The conceptualisation of what constitutes a folk model has its roots in early cultural anthropology, where it includes dimensions of perception, thought, feeling, desire, intention, and even action.²⁶ A folk model is not necessarily ‘accurate in the real world’, but the fact that it recurs in a specific culture means that the phenomenon lends itself to study. This article investigates the mechanisms through which the zombie folk model operates in society (rather than meticulously describing the multitude of representations and variations on the theme in popular culture). Another way of putting it is to say that this article explores the connection between premediation (as a cultural media logic) and preparation (as the material practices that premediation encourages), using the folk model of the zombie as a significant example. To this end, it is useful to examine three cases of how the zombie folk model is applied in practically oriented contexts.

The Zombie Folk Model in Practice

In this section we describe how the zombie metaphor is applied in three practical cases of crisis preparedness. As mentioned previously, these cases are viewed here as exceptional since they are underpinned by a very clear purpose — to change people’s behaviour, or at least to make them think of the *real* implications of an actual zombie outbreak. All three examples can thus be regarded as cases of premediating folk models.

Learning to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse

ABF is Sweden’s largest adult liberal-education association. The abbreviation stands for the Workers’ Educational Association (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund* in Swedish). ABF is one of Sweden’s ten liberal-education associations; it organises courses for approximately 1.7 million students each year. As part of our data collection on the proliferation of the zombie folk model, we have taken part in a course entitled ‘Surviving the Zombie Apocalypse’, which was provided by ABF in 2014 and in two different Swedish cities. Each course consists of six seminars or lectures, complemented by suggested readings. Brooks’ *Zombie*

²⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁶ Roy G. D’Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Survival Guide is a fundamental part of these readings and of the definition of the zombie underpinning the course. We want to emphasise that we are not interested in critiquing ABF or the courses themselves — we find them very inspiring and well organised. Rather, we are using the courses, and our participation in them, as examples of the circulation of the zombie folk model.

We deployed an autobiographical method when reporting our findings from these courses. This brand of reflexive writing tries to make the connections between biography and social structure more explicit.²⁷ Combining the autobiographical approach with participatory observation generates what we may call an autoethnographic approach. As Tami Spry puts it, autoethnography is ‘the convergence of the “autobiographic impulse” and the “ethnographic moment” represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity’.²⁸ As such, we aim to connect *ourselves* more clearly to the cultural politics and taken-for-granted rules of the zombie folk model. For reasons relating to space, we focus here on certain key moments in the application of the zombie metaphor. The first example occurred during a practical fire-crafting exercise, where the course leader reflected on how there are rules and laws about where and how to build a fire. In response,

One participant quickly remarks, ‘once the zombies arrive, we don’t give a shit what you say’. The entire group bursts into laughter. Cheerful from the comment, all of us jointly walk back to the classroom.

This statement indicates an expectation that civilised procedures will effectively be ignored in a real crisis situation. The zombie is arguably used here as an inclusive metaphor for many types of crises; nonetheless, it is also a metaphor with very specific connotations, one with the capacity to generate a rather drastic response (a disregard of more civilised rules regulating behaviour).

Another interesting moment occurred when participants discussed how the zombie metaphor has been applied by (Swedish) public agencies:

We sit a circle formation in a classroom. The topic of the day is crisis preparedness on a societal level. A teacher asks us if we have studied the

²⁷ Jeff Hearn, ‘Autobiography, Nation, Postcolonialism and Gender Relations: Reflecting on Men in England, Finland, and Ireland’, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14 (2005), 66-93.

²⁸ Tami Spry, ‘Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7 (2001), 706-32 (p. 706).

governmental homepages he suggested last week. He starts reading from the homepage of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency:

We often receive questions about our preparedness concerning zombies. So, how prepared are we? Do we have an action plan for the zombie apocalypse? The answer is no. We do not have a plan for fighting zombies. We have no flyers on how to avoid the zombie virus. We also do not have a stock of chainsaws, sawed-off shotguns, or Molotov cocktails ready for distribution in the case of an outbreak. Nevertheless, we are prepared. Swedish crisis preparation builds on a collective responsibility for our land, our own security, and the safety of our loved ones. This means there are measures you can take to be better prepared for both blackouts and zombies. Thus, we are ready — but are you?

The teacher tells us that the Public Health Agency of Sweden lists 27 risks, where a pandemic is the most serious one. ‘Pandemic is the word they are using for the zombie apocalypse’, he says, and the group laughs. ‘How do you think the governmental agencies would act in the case of a zombie outbreak?’ One participant says that the authorities would probably not tell the truth, but soften their information. ‘Maybe even misinform us’, someone says. Assenting murmuring and nodding follows. ‘Nobody would dare to take THE decision’, someone says. ‘I mean, who would face up to the decision of bombing an entire suburb if it’s infected? Or an infected hospital?’ ‘Nah, authorities will maybe try to isolate the infected, but they will devote more time to thinking of a non-offensive term for the undead.’ Everyone laughs again. The group then starts discussing how the level of preparedness was much higher during the Cold War and how things have only gotten worse since. Public state-managed food storages and weapons storages are discussed. ‘Everyone should be a little more paranoid. Then we would be better prepared as a society.’ The teacher adds, ‘I think we have to take on the mission of creating paranoia’. More laughter (possibly in recognition that paranoia is a lingering accusation from people who are not survivalists, and thereby seen as not as informed).

Our final example moment comes from the very end of one of the courses:

At the end of the course everyone is presented with a diploma and a free copy of the first issue of the graphic novel *The Walking Dead* in Swedish. On my way out, a co-participant joins me. I ask what she thought of the course. ‘Superfun’, she says. ‘But it is always the same — no one dares to speak up in the group. Only a few were actually contributing to the discussion.’ ‘Maybe that’s why there were so many couples there? Because it is hard to speak up on your own?’ I add. ‘No’, she replies, ‘I think the woman in the relationship just wanted to do something together, and this is the only thing the guy would come along to’.

Our abridged autoethnographic account of these courses illustrates not only practical applications of the zombie metaphor, but also the proliferation of a specific skill-set and

mind-set, which is justified, valorised, and legitimised through the completely arbitrary, yet specific rules that have become attached to the figure of the zombie. For example, the courses become an outlet for people's desire to return in both time and place, either to go back to a time that was better prepared, or to return to nature and survive in the wilderness in harmony with it. This desire to return to 'the good old times' or to a 'natural' state of things also relates to the way in which the zombie is regarded as something profoundly unnatural and disconnected from nature. The very idea that a zombie virus could spread through contaminated water, toxic downfall, infested animal meat, the air, or another integral part of nature is considered as 'breaking the zombie rules' and would ruin much of the preferred solutions to the zombie (such as acquiring survival gear and skills). In other words, adding too much complexity (and thereby changing the rules) to the metaphor kills what is referred to as the 'natural joy of skilled and gear-driven life in the great outdoors'.

As the above quotations also indicate, the courses nurture a paradoxical relation to public information and authorities. While survivalists are generally distrusting towards governments and authorities, they also maintain a certain sense of the benevolence of these institutions, one grounded in the increasing governmental recognition and propagation of the zombie as a universal metaphor. It is therefore important to examine further the application of the zombie metaphor as employed by governments and public agencies.

Government Information and the Zombie Folk Model

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention admits that their zombie-preparedness campaign started out as a jocular satire.²⁹ Nevertheless, they now also acknowledge that it provides a great platform for communication. The director of the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, Dr Ali Khan, has gone so far as to say, '[i]f you are generally well equipped to deal with a zombie apocalypse you will be prepared for a hurricane, pandemic, earthquake, or terrorist attack'.³⁰ While we are not critical of the use of the zombie metaphor as a marketing tool that is employed in order to reach new audiences, as we argue here, the fact that government authorities also choose to use the *zombie* so uncritically, and in such a generalising manner, may have unintended consequences.

²⁹ Center for Disease Control, 'Zombie Preparedness', 2014 <<http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm>> [accessed 10 April 2015].

³⁰ 'CDC Director Thomas Frieden Plays "Not My Job"', *Wait Wait ... Don't Tell Me!*, NPR, 21 September 2012 <<http://www.npr.org/2012/09/22/161566065/cdc-director-thomas-frieden-plays-not-my-job>> [accessed 23 September 2016].

Recently, a news story surfaced revealing that the US military keeps unclassified documents containing plans for ‘counter zombie dominance’. In a familiar move, ‘military planners [...] looked for a creative way to devise a planning document to protect citizens in the event of *an attack of any kind*. The officers used zombies as their muse.’³¹ Naturally, officials emphasised that this was a document intended for training purposes only and not a real contingency plan. Nevertheless, the way in which the zombie is generalised here, allowing it to encompass any conceivable hazard, is salient.

In essence, what this information is telling citizens is that, in the case of a catastrophe, the thing one should be most worried about can be boiled down to Other(ed) people. The message is that if you prepare to defend yourself against people who *were* like you, but that have now turned into *something else*, you will be safe against anything. However, the zombie is easy to spot, and its monstrosity ensures that you do not have to feel guilty for defending yourself against it (by killing it). As such, the required skill-set for dealing with the zombie is unsurprisingly identical to military weapons techniques and combat survival skills. The seamless match between the strongly masculinised ways of preparing for disruption (in effect, training for battle) and the war-like future of the zombie apocalypse is, of course, no coincidence. These phenomena seem to co-develop and feed off of each other, almost to the degree that one could regard them as attempts to make citizens more akin to the military.

American authorities are, of course, not the only ones to apply the zombie-apocalypse metaphor. As already mentioned, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency has also addressed its preparedness for the zombie apocalypse.³² The agency’s reasoning employs an identical rationale, asserting that being prepared for a zombie apocalypse makes one prepared for *any* other disaster or contingency, again using the popular zombie as a conflating metaphor. The adoption of the zombie metaphor in governmental campaigns indicates an opportunistic approach, as they piggyback on pop-culture hype. A similar trend can be seen in popular science, as the following section demonstrates.

³¹ Gordon Lubold, ‘Exclusive: The Pentagon Has a Plan to Stop the Zombie Apocalypse. Seriously’, *Foreign Policy*, 13 May 2014
<http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/13/exclusive_the_pentagon_has_a_plan_to_stop_the_zombie_apocalypse> [accessed 21 May 2015].

³² Krisinformation.se, ‘Vi Är Redo För Zombieapokalypsen’ (Stockholm: Krisinformation.se, 2013).
<<https://krisinformation.wordpress.com/2013/08/08/vi-ar-redo-for-zombieapokalypsen/>> [accessed 17 September 2016]

How to Survive the End of the World: Zombie Earth

Is a 'zombie apocalypse' simply a concept of fiction or could an infectious disease REALLY turn humanity into a race of vicious, seething monsters? The truth just might shock you!

*—from the synopsis to the 'Zombie Earth' episode of *How to Survive the End of the World**

How to Survive the End of the World is a National Geographic television series that deals with a variety of apocalyptic scenarios. This particular episode is interesting in that it emphasises a jump from fiction to (potential) reality by presenting (or premediating) a narrative chain of proposed problems and continuously discarded solutions (including vaccines, isolation, quarantines), effectively leading up to what is presented as an inevitable conclusion (that we would simply have to rely on natural immunity in a limited part of the Earth's population).

Significantly, the links of the chain are composed of seemingly arbitrary oscillations between 'us' and various 'Others' (mammals, viruses, insects, careless foreign nations, infected people, hazardous waste, bioweapons research). In this regard, this episode does take a more holistic approach towards a pandemic disease than many other instances of the use of the zombie metaphor, in that here, 'nature' is actually part of the context of the problem. Nevertheless, the programme also makes clear that a sharp distinction operates between them ('infected careless Others') and us ('uninfected militarised western humans'). The narrated chain of events is also constantly backed up by 'science' in the sense that anecdotal medical, political, and scientific issues (including details relating to anything from disease transmission and politics to waste disposal and fauna) are linked to proposed problems and (discarded) solutions.

Interestingly, the inevitable solution predicted by the programme, which is also framed as our last hope, is natural immunity. That is, people who are naturally immune to the virus in question are presented as the only viable remedy to the complete extinction of humankind (as it envisages that those who are immune would set up a society of their own after the rest of us die off). In this case, a number of potential options for the future are efficiently ruled out by scientific evidence — an attempt at making the preconditions (or rules) of the episode's narrative appear rigid and unquestionable. This elimination of alternatives presents a future in which human struggle is largely futile, and where luck is presented as our best chance at survival. As such, the episode does not underline any

particular agenda for preparation. So, while the programme's conclusion may leave audiences with a sense of helplessness, the logic of the zombie folk model is still largely in effect. The use of the zombie metaphor operates according to specific rules (supported by science and the elimination of alternatives); it is still presented as something that can 'help us prepare for *whatever* the future may bring' (a quotation from the programme); and it emphasises a return (a 'restart' even) to simpler conditions for humankind.³³

A Folk Model of Familiar Monsters and How the Zombie Became a Metaphor We Prepare By

As the zombie has become the metaphor we prepare by, it has also come to conflate and oversimplify many possible (complex) threats. The zombie has become a folk model aimed at producing a specific brand of fear and offering subsequent comfortable transparency in overcoming the source of the fear. Emerging out of the cinema screen, synthesised by scholarly analyses of its disruptive and/or stabilising potential, the zombie is now employed in governance, such as civil-defence courses, edutainment, and governmental information. At the same time, the zombie is but one case of a larger, more theoretically grounded, category of monsters. Leaning on premediation theory, we have argued that the zombie is part of a folk model that limits future scenarios severely. This limitation occurs by a specification of rules relying on pseudo-science. Such specification aims at moving an unknown monster (which is genuinely disconcerting) into the realm of the familiar, while still retaining a distinct Otherness.

Through civil-defence courses and governmental information campaigns, we are also witnessing a dissemination of the folk model of familiar monsters, of which the zombie folk model is one case. To summarise this development, we argue that folk models of familiar monsters emphasise a worldview where complexity has become too overwhelming to handle, implying that we therefore need to go back to a simpler model of the world. It also proposes a solution to complexity in the application of an anthropocentric metaphor that makes specific what was previously unknown through arbitrary ruling and Othering. Following this, once complexity is reduced, the metaphor is easily over-generalised to contexts far beyond its initial reach. However, as such rules and generalisations are applied, the metaphor comes to legitimise certain agencies and limit others in what is basically an attempt to maintain power

³³ Bill McLane, 'Zombie Earth', *How to Survive the End of the World*, National Geographic Channel, 21 December 2013.

differentials in the future. Finally, the folk model is also being protected from being debunked by relying on pseudo-scientific explanations.

We have presented clear indications of the pervasiveness of the zombie in popular culture today. Movies, games, books, television shows, graphic novels, and zombie walks (essentially protest marches in zombie costumes) are all expressions of the metaphor and genres that have reached new levels of popularity. Within academic discourse, the zombie is also gaining recognition as a metaphor for various aspects of work cultures in academic institutions.³⁴ While the zombie metaphor in academia may show some subtlety and nuance in terms of its definition and analytical applicability, the folk model of the familiar monster and the zombie is simpler, more rigidly defined and narrow in scope. Importantly, this simplicity and reduction of complexity in future scenarios comes with political consequences.

As previously stated, zombies are essentially reanimated dead humans without cognitive faculties; they are incurable; they want to eat (and thereby contaminate) living humans; and the only way to kill them (which, we are repeatedly assured, is the only way to deal with them) is to destroy their brains. Because the zombie is so clearly Othered and objectified (they experience no pain, no reason, no empathy, and so on), it is legitimate to kill them. In fact, it is the only solution — in the texts we have been discussing in this article, no cure exists, and the rules cannot be changed. Consequently, the war on zombies is a war without refinement, compassion, or diversity. The reduction and specification of the zombie enemy concurrently reduces and specifies the ideal human subject to a killing machine based on instinct.

The logic of such a catastrophe envisages society relapsing by (somewhat paradoxically) stepping back in time to an imaginary future characterised by primitive instincts and survival rather than multiplicity and deliberation. Zombies have no potential to change and thereby nor do we — we just persist by exterminating them. The metaphor of the zombie apocalypse is therefore clear-cut and apparently dispassionate. Of course, it would, if it actually occurred, disrupt everyday life, but, as a way of thinking about the future, it hardly unsettles the current distribution of power. Thus, the zombie is a dangerous metaphor since it suggests that the potential threat is, in fact, other people (or people turned into ‘Others’) and the only solution is to annihilate them completely (or give up). There is little or no room for discussion, cures, or alternative solutions. In many ways, the zombie is immune to external falsification, since it is a simplification that leaves a diversity of assertions (such as biological

³⁴ *Zombies in the Academy: Living Death in Higher Education*, ed. by Andrew Whelan, Ruth Walker, and Christopher Moore (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

variations, gender-related norms, power distribution, socio-economical factors) about socio-material reality in relation to the zombie underspecified. The zombie apocalypse legitimises a response to the monstrous hordes of ‘Others’ by relying on ‘logical’ selfishness and violence. Such tendencies to assert politically who can be saved and who must die can be observed in, for example, how news media has reported on the Ebola virus outbreak and on refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea. These characteristics are summarised in Table 1, below.

The Zombie	Dimension	The Unknown
Visible; transparent; exhausted	Visuality	Hidden; opaque; entangled
Comfort in knowing; certainty; reassurance	Confidence	Discomfort in not knowing; uncertainty; disorientation
Familiar and Othered	Socio-emotional relationship	Strange and uncharted
Stabilises delimitation; supports identification	Delineation	Destabilises delimitation; supports anonymity
Reactive	Initiative	Proactive
Reinforces the desire to go back — ‘things have gone too far’; conservative; old guard	Temporality	Reinforces the desire to go forward, towards the ‘not-yet’; unfixed in time/space
A clear threat to humanity; horror; apocalypse	Anticipation	A potential good; hopefulness; a different future is possible
Simple; reductionist	Materiality	Complex; holistic

Table 1. A structural comparison of the zombie (a familiar monster) and the unknown

Theoretically and practically, we should therefore aim at retaining conceptual fogginess rather than trying to condense the existing nexus of signification surrounding the zombie into the shape of a familiar monster. As soon as the monster emerges from the fog, a false sense of relief and security enters. This relief can be problematic since it is also a reduction of complexity, which erases nuances in favour of a more rigid norm. In this sense, the zombie is reactive (not proactive) — it does not allow for an imagined future where anything else is

possible. Rather, the zombie is an example of how we could imagine anything (the choice of metaphors being infinite), but fail (as the choice lands on a very limited metaphor). Everything that does not fit the zombie metaphor is tidied away (as too complex, as obstructing desires, as impeding individual agency, and so on). A telling example of this would be the tension between the desire for outdoor activities (camping, hunting) as a solution to the zombie threat, and the possibility of nature itself being a threat (since the rules stipulate that the virus can only ever be spread through contact with zombies themselves and not through other 'natural' paths). In this example, nature posing a threat would render impossible the implied necessity of preparing to go out in the wild, and is therefore seen as an infraction of the rules. The specification of the zombie supports the present hegemony of the monster. That is, if we reduce the semantic and figurative potential of the zombie to nothing more than a metaphor for specific power structures and attitudes towards Otherness, we will only perpetuate power differentials in the future. A truly subversive monster, then, must be a not-yet and an unknown.

As such, this article extends the idea that the zombie can be recuperated, that this familiar threat can be rendered unfamiliar; doing so would mean that it would represent 'the ultimate uncanny'.³⁵ In the courses and guidelines discussed in this article, the zombie becomes knowable and killable, more a comfort than a threat. However, our model proposes that the previously estranged zombie (the zombie as something mystical and unknown) has taken a turn towards the familiar again by being a thoroughly exhausted metaphor which we, through pop culture, know more and more about. The ultimate uncanny is now instead the unknown, broadly conceived, and the transparent and simple rules that have been attached to zombies exist in culture primarily in order to obscure complex substructures. Both the monster and the unknown spring from a lack of knowledge, but the zombie has been recovered from the unsettling unknown and brought into a realm of ubiquitous comfortable transparency, where its rules are being codified. Furthermore, as this article illustrates, by bringing something out of the unknown and into the realm of the familiar, the comfort of transparency initiates Othering processes. Therefore, we argue that the unknown is a better metaphor for the unsettling, destabilising, and unknown/obscure aspects of the future.

³⁵ Angela M. Cirucci, 'The Social Dead: How Our Zombie Baggage Threatens to Drag Us into the Crypts of Our Past', in *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, ed. by Murali Balaji (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 17-28.

Conclusion: Embracing the Unknown?

The monster as presented in the zombie folk model cements rules that support individual competition. In fact, we could argue that the continued interest in including inequality in figurations used for preparing for the apocalypse is a question of organising the future so that it supports the already-successful segments of society even after total disruption occurs. As Joan Acker asserts,

In a culture that glorifies individual material success and applauds extreme competitive behavior in pursuit of success, inequality becomes a sign of success for those who win.³⁶

This passage expresses much of the spirit in the texts we have examined in this article. We are witnessing a consistent return of the comfortable transparency of the zombie, which, once identified, legitimises Othering and violence, as Acker's assertion implies. The arbitrary yet specific rules of the zombie lures us into thinking that the apocalypse will be easy to spot (and its foot-soldiers distinguishable from ourselves); and curable only by killing every Othered individual that exists (by violence or passive isolation). Even though reconfigurations of the zombie and its attendant rules have been displayed in a number of recent films and television programmes, these examples only represent a need to *re-introduce* the already Other(ed) as an (almost) equal — 'look, the zombie *can* be our friend' (although still essentially Othered). The zombie apocalypse is therefore a fictitious future limited by its main source of figuration. The comfortable transparency of the zombie cannot be a disruptive figuration because it does not 'resist representation, resist literal figuration [or] erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility'.³⁷ In short, zombies do not deliver on the promise of monsters (to unsettle discourses). Instead, they legitimise and conserve the current unequal regime (and even dictate who deserves to survive and who does not). Moving towards the in-between space of monstrosity and the unknown not-yet will open the zombie metaphor up to truly 'troubling' ways of becoming and 'reset the stage for possible pasts and futures' — preferably in much more cooperative and creative ways than those engendered by the threat of the zombie at present.³⁸ Ideally, the entangled mess of the unknown, the insecure, the anywhere, is the future that we should prepare for.

³⁶ Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations', *Gender & Society*, 20 (2006), 441-64 (p. 459).

³⁷ Haraway, 'Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape', in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by J. Butler and J. W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 86-100 (p. 86).

³⁸ Haraway, p. 86.

Such an attitude towards monstrosity would also acknowledge the possibility that every monster is on a journey towards comfortable transparency. By beginning to map out monstrosity's capacities, strengths, and weaknesses, we create illusions of a reality where we are in control, where nature and its strange creatures, from viruses to zombies, are transparent and meticulously specifiable for humans. Consequently, new unknowns must be imagined, as more and more elements of the unknown are driven towards the realm of the familiar. It is only when the monster lurks in the dark (as it has always lurked) that it has the potential to destabilise and challenge the current normativity. So, instead of putting our trust in a metaphor that can make us sleep at night (as Brooks phrases it), maybe we should try to take comfort in the unknown.

The Aesthetics of the Tangible: Haptic Motifs and Sensory Contagion in Gothic Terror Films

Joana Rita Ramalho

I want to hold you in my arms. My hands will glide over your hair and I will feel your body trembling beneath my hands.

—from *The Hands of Orlac* (dir. by Robert Wiene, 1924)

The cinematic gothic experience is intricately cross-modal and multisensory. With their highly sensorial images, by which I mean images that appeal vividly to the senses, gothic films facilitate and promote experiential engagement in their viewers. Touch, in particular, holds a privileged place in the gothic imagination, with the image of the hand featuring as a recurring iconographic motif. Elizabeth D. Harvey observes that touch ‘occupies a complex, shifting, and sometimes contradictory position in the representation of the five senses in Western culture’.¹ Throughout history, Harvey explains, touch has been depicted in myriad ways, either hailed as the most invaluable sense or, conversely, as the basest.² In scholarly criticism on gothic cinema, the sense of touch has so far remained understudied, with priority usually being given to sight and the eye, along with the co-related notions of ‘voyeurism’ and ‘the gaze’. Nonetheless, there is much to learn from the careful exploration of other related sensory modalities, namely the haptic.³ Luís Rocha Antunes claims that ‘*the medium [of film] is audiovisual, yet our experience is multisensory*’.⁴ In agreement with Antunes, I suggest that by switching the focus from sight and hearing to touch, we can better understand how certain films use the senses as a central strategy to create gothic spaces. Specifically, this essay employs Georges Braque’s concept of ‘tactile’ or ‘manual space’, and Fredric Jameson’s understanding of the senses, as purveyors of memory, as useful lenses through which to

¹ Elizabeth D. Harvey, ‘Introduction: The “Sense of All Senses”’, in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

² Ibid.

³ Recent work by Isabella van Elferen, particularly *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), explores in detail the multi-layered dimensions of the auditory in the gothic imagination, while elsewhere, there has been some discussion of the gothic and Victorian olfactory states. See, for instance, Silvana Colella, ‘Olfactory Ghosts: Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*’, in *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, ed. by R. Arias and P. Pulham (London: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 85-110.

⁴ Luís Rocha Antunes, ‘Neural Correlates of the Multisensory Film Experience’, in *Neuroscience and Media: New Understandings and Representations*, ed. by Michael Grabowski (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 46-61 (p. 48, emphasis in original).

understand the space of the haptic in gothic films.⁵ ‘Touch’ is understood here in a broad sense, and includes what might be called the ‘hapticity’ of certain filmic sequences — that is, ‘the way vision itself can be tactile’, as Laura Marks defines it.⁶ In particular, in this context, this essay asserts that such tactile motifs and spaces have acquired singular contours in the gothic cinematic tradition, where they build on the terrifying and horrifying potential of touch.

Since the 1990s, many scholars have researched the experience of watching film as an embodied act of perception, often in connection to the audience’s visceral responses to horror.⁷ The image intensity of body horror, however, moves beyond the kind of evocative cinema that concerns me here. Instead, this essay focuses on mapping the sensorial routes of the characters in gothic spaces, and examining the ways in which touch is used to convey a sense of terror in a number of mid-twentieth-century films that should be categorised specifically as gothic, rather than as horror films. Paul Rodaway employs the expression ‘sensuous geographies’ to convey the idea that the senses constitute a privileged lens through which to address the physical rapport between the human body and its surroundings.⁸ The gothic, I argue, can be read in terms of a sensuous geography, whereby the senses guide both the actions of the characters and our experience of the story. Moreover, underlying the gothic’s sensuous geographies, this essay argues, is a resilient process of sensory contagion between bodies, places, and objects. As Mark Paterson reminds us, touch ‘is a sense of communication’.⁹ Gothic films often treat this ‘communication’ in frightening terms — as a matter of contamination, of the self being infected by the other via sensory contact — so that to explore the vast sensorium of the gothic is also to engage with questions surrounding the construction of identity in the films examined here.

This article is structured around five case studies, examining three well-known productions — William Wyler’s *Wuthering Heights* (1939), Jean Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* (1946), and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940) — and two relatively unknown films that have largely eluded critical study — Marcel Carné’s gothic fantasy *Juliette, or Key of Dreams* (1951) and John Harlow’s bizarre possession story, *While I Live* (1947). *Wuthering*

⁵ Alex Danchev, *Georges Braque: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. cxxxiv; and Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

⁶ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xi.

⁷ For recent examples, see Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁸ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

⁹ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects, and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 1.

Heights, *Rebecca*, and *While I Live* are more straightforwardly gothic in their use of specific tropes and subject matter; *Juliette, or Key of Dreams* and *La Belle et la Bête* mix gothic themes and motifs with dark fairy-tale storylines. My chosen works echo each other in their treatment of tactility as an element that is essential both to our experience of the filmic material and to the way the characters experience narrative events. In each case, the viewer navigates the space of the films through the onscreen depiction of haptic imagery and sensory landscapes. My investigation begins by proposing an analysis of haptic motifs and tactile spaces in their relation to memory and identity, before moving on to examine the perils surrounding the sensory contagion of memories. The essay combines well-known and little-known black-and-white films that rely most markedly on terror (rather than horror), in order more fully to understand the terrifying aesthetics of touch in gothic film. The focus on works shot in monochrome that lack the shock value of many contemporary horror films helps demonstrate how effectively we can connect with the sensorial field even in the absence of gore or a powerful colour palette, which would normally appeal more immediately to the eye. These choices have limited the discussion that follows to a specific time period; importantly, however, the arguments outlined below can usefully also be applied to classic, modern, and postmodern reinterpretations of the gothic mode.

Tactile Spaces and the Duality of Gothic Hands

In gothic cinema, the characters are often seen manipulating objects. Their hands (usually shot in close-up) open coffins, autopsy bodies, turn door handles, and hold weapons. From the frightening long nails of Nosferatu in F. W. Murnau's 1922 film, through the helpless tragic hero of Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), to more recent examples, such as the creepy shadow of the creature's claws in Jennifer Kent's *Babadook* (2014), gothic films are replete with imagery of hands, and position tactile space as central to their gothic effects. In cinematic narratives, the role of hands has been pivotal from the earliest examples of the horror genre, such as George Méliès' *Le Manoir du diable* (1896), where the plot unravels to the rhythm of the protagonist's hand gestures. One reason that hands abound in silent films is 'because they speak', as Jean-Louis Leutrat claims, pointing to the proximity that the onscreen depiction of hands establishes between the perceptual body of the viewer and the moving images.¹⁰ Perhaps the most extreme use of hand imagery in early film is accomplished in Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* (1924), a gothic horror story in which a

¹⁰ Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Vie des fantômes: le fantastique au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile/Cahiers du Cinéma, 1995), p. 85.

famous pianist loses both hands in a train crash, and his doctor replaces them with those of a recently executed robber and murderer. As the plot develops, the pianist gradually starts to lose control over his mind and body, sure that those damned, transplanted hands will, eventually, kill again. The skin, blood, and viscera become the site of contagion through which the protagonist is contaminated with the identity of the murderer. In this process, the hand of the artist, the pianist, is at first gruesomely opposed to the hand of the convicted criminal, until the two become one at the cost of the former's identity. In doing so, the film posits a fundamental duality within the image of gothic hands more generally, one that reveals the unstable borders of identity. In Wiene's film, the disintegration of the protagonist's mind comes about as a result of his physical disintegration (the loss of both hands). Furthermore, the disconcerting strangeness of experiencing touch via sensory receptors that are not wholly his own delineates an existential dilemma (raising the question, 'am I still myself when I am also partly Other?') and foregrounds the not-uncommon idea of the hand as autonomous — as an entity independent from the body to which it is physically attached. Rose Marie San Juan has written, *à propos* wax models of hands, that they 'appear not only as three-dimensional entities in space, but also as part of a body elsewhere'.¹¹ In most cases, she argues, there is an implicit but unavoidable presumption that the hand is always represented as part of the body to which it belongs, which in turn implies that one cannot exist without the Other. Consequently, and conversely, the fragmented experience of the body appears to empty the hand of humanity, by presenting it as independently capable of agency. San Juan explains the uncanny ambiguity of the hand as follows:

When a hand moves, there is always something of the stranger in it. Perhaps it is because the hand rarely seems to be in sync with the rest of the body, [...] always casting doubt on the unifying power of consciousness. The hand has a tendency to stray, one moment disregarding the resolve of the body to which it is connected, the next directing it as if it knows better.¹²

The Otherness that San Juan detects in the hand suits the gothic worldview, in that it stresses the idea of uncanniness or defamiliarisation — that is, the transformation of a habitual perception (of body parts, in this case) into something strange or foreign. The hand creates a terrifying threshold space that exposes the presence of the unfamiliar — the Other — within the self. Barry Sonnenfeld transposes this notion of the hand's 'tendency to stray' literally to

¹¹ Rose Marie San Juan, 'The Horror of Touch: Anna Morandi's Wax Models of Hands', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34 (2011), 433-47 (p. 435).

¹² *Ibid.*

the screen in the figure of ‘Thing’, the disembodied wandering (and often inappropriate) hand of *The Addams Family* (1991), and in fact, the use of severed hands runs through multiple subsets of the gothic mode, from horror to comedy.

The continuous display of dismembered corporeal imagery throughout Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête*, for instance, is almost violent in its bluntness, and stresses the importance given to tactile and multisensory perception. In particular, the slow-motion sequence in which Belle enters the Beast’s castle directly links the body of the character with the uncanny haptic. In a darkened, half-lit corridor, an orderly row of what appear to be human hands, each holding a candelabra, adorns the otherwise empty walls. As Belle rushes through, the hands turn steadily in her direction, one by one, as if vigilantly following her every step while also pointing the way forward. Hands, in this film, are not just about touch — they continually perform sensory functions, surveying the heroine and sensing her body; they therefore function as a form of spatial mapping and guide Belle’s movements. The pervasive feeling of gothic eeriness derives, in part, from the ambiguity of these bodiless hands, which are simultaneously welcoming and repulsive. While in *The Hands of Orlac*, hands convey horror because the Other has become an integral part of the self’s body (the Other in/as me), eventually leading to madness due to loss of identity, in *La Belle et la Bête*, they accentuate disintegration and instil awe because they are separate from, yet gesture dangerously towards, Belle’s body. Both examples diagnose a tendency towards bodily corruption and identity breakdown by introducing from the outset a binary opposition between self and Other.

This effect is heightened after Belle leaves the strange corridor and moves towards a long staircase, her cape sweeping the floor as she goes. In the foreground, we notice a table laid for a meal and an empty chair. When she reaches the top, she stops before an imposing passageway, guarded by two disembodied hands firmly wielding swords that cross and touch — tactile space thus becomes more menacing as Belle continues her journey. Moreover, contrary to what would be expected, after the hands lift up the swords and allow Belle to pass, the camera does not immediately follow her — it stands still just long enough to show us both hands resuming their initial position, effectively enclosing the heroine in the unknown place she has just entered, so that she is momentarily out of our sight. This conveys a sense of imprisonment, a trope recurrently analysed in connection to gothic houses.¹³ Hands therefore appear as guardians of the castle, offering a sense of security, but also as obstacles

¹³ See, for instance, Manuel Aguirre, *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); and Eugenia C. DeLaMotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

that might make it difficult for the heroine to escape, should she want to. The Beast's castle, in particular, and gothic architectural structures more generally, such as Blaze Creek in Fritz Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948), Hill House in Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963), or the Overlook Hotel in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), are thus constructed as seductive and perilous entities that effectively entrap the bodies and minds of the characters.

The sense of enclosure that the descending movement of hands imparts to the as-yet-invisible place that lies beyond them is quickly contrasted with the startling openness of the corridor that the camera cuts to next. This contributes to a sense of the gothic nature of the house, where the secret, the fantastic, and the unexpected meet, and sensory exchange takes place. On one side of the corridor, there is a series of doors, each paired with a window on the opposite side, fully demarcating the limits between the interior of the house (beyond the doors) and the exterior (beyond the windows). There is a very ethereal look to this sequence, achieved by having the actress placed in a trolley with castors as the wind blows full-length white curtains against her. Belle appears almost ghost-like — intangible and immaterial — while gently gliding by. The sensorial field reaches a more complex level at this point by layering different sensory registers: tactile properties are attributed to inanimate objects (the curtains that touch her), and the sense of sight is sharpened when the intermittent strokes of light and shadow from the world outside bring the unlit bare walls to life, creating a singularly haptic space for the viewers. Adding to the hapticity of this scene is the spellbinding soundtrack that fills the sonic space. The use of a trolley provides aesthetic continuity with the previous slow-motion shots, and further accentuates the idea that the heroine has stepped into a magical realm where she is being led to a specific pre-determined place inside the house.

Animism (along with anthropomorphism, one of its subspecies) figures widely in the gothic and here, it is employed in order to stress the idea of the house as a breathing organism, with the many hands, candelabra, and swords that emerge from its interstices, again invoking the borderless communion of building and body.¹⁴ There is a strong sensorial co-dependency between the castle and the percipient self, whereby the hands and walls that shelter Belle also desire to keep her within their confines. An edifice, arguably, becomes gothic because of its dwellers, as a result of the symbiotic relationship between its spaces and

¹⁴ David Punter and Glennis Byron identify animism as a subset of the uncanny in *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 284-85. In gothic cinema, inanimate things, such as portraits, puppets, and houses, often become (or appear to become) active, alive, or human-like. This is the case of the ventriloquist's dummy in *Dead of Night* (dir. by Alberto Cavalcanti et al., 1945), the harpsichord in *Dragonwyck* (dir. by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946), the portrait in *Whirlpool* (dir. by Otto Preminger, 1949), and, more recently, the doll in *Annabelle* (dir. by John R. Leonetti, 2014).

the perceptual human body. The destruction of the house in several gothic films, namely Jean Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) and Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934), is indicative of the close bond between dweller and dwelling space. In Cocteau's film, the ubiquitous hands, which are external to Belle but internal to the house, establish a connection between two different planes of sensorial interaction: that of the edifice, which acquires agency and interacts with the self through its extensions (candelabra, curtains, and so on), and that of the self, who willingly engages in a sensory dialogue with the house. One outcome of this interdependence is the fact that, through her physical contact with the body of the house, Belle appears as the creator of an almost endless succession of spaces. In other words, Belle's forward motion deeper into the house gives the illusion that the area in front of the camera's recording field derives from the self's multisensory exploration of space. Both are linked on a number of levels and develop a web-like relationship over the course of which Belle alternately appropriates and is appropriated by her material surroundings. Objects seem to awake when they 'sense' her presence, from the candelabra-holding and sword-wielding hands to the waving curtains, which, like disembodied hands, caress Belle's skin. Significantly, Belle does not try to avoid contact with the curtains that touch her, but rather touches them back. This interaction visually replicates Belle's earlier caressing of the house with her billowing cape: the house is getting to know her, just as she is getting to know the house. By reciprocating each other's actions, the house and the self engage in a sensuous game where fear of and fascination for the forbidden and the unknown mesh and blend.

The unexpected, but harmonious, reciprocity of such a process also prevents the film from becoming truly terrifying. We, as viewers familiar with the language of the gothic, are conditioned to expect that Belle will be fearful, so her unforeseen response is disconcerting. In the confined, yet seemingly endless, space of the castle, where there should be apathy and inertia, we find liveliness and movement; where there should be distance and silence, we find proximity and sensorial interchange; and where gory imagery of amputated limbs should dissuade the character from exploring the unknown, she instead chooses to coalesce with it. Gothic houses and castles are made uncanny 'in that the fantastic, the magical and the unheard-of insinuate themselves into everyday reality', so that 'the familiar becomes strange and the strange familiar. Things here are not what they seem', as Rosemarie Buikema and Elisabeth Wesseling write.¹⁵ The fairy-tale overtones in Cocteau's film heighten this sense of

¹⁵ Rosemarie Buikema and Elisabeth Wesseling, 'Gothic Engineerings in Childrearing Manuals and Feminist Novels: Benjamin Spock Meets Renate Dorrestein', in *Nostalgia or Perversion? Gothic Rewriting from the*

enthraling unease and diminish the gothic monstrosity of the mutilated hands (and, later on, of the Beast's physiognomy), effectively containing and taming the gothic potential which threatens to irrupt from the images. From this perspective, it is the complementary union of self, dwelling space, and the senses that both creates and constrains the gothic in *La Belle et la Bête*.

Moreover, the gothic experience in this film is synesthetic at its core. We are not dealing here with a simple (con)fusion of the senses; rather, each disembodied limb invokes, as San Juan suggests, something that is conspicuously missing (the rest of the body).¹⁶ The ambiguous status of the hands highlights a crucial aspect of the sequence: the idea of unexpected absence. For the duration of the film, none of the hands is shown as belonging to a corresponding body. They belong to no one, and, moreover, we are not sure if they ever did. Observed closely, the sequence seems to be characterised by an absence where one would expect a presence: the absence of a servant opening the massive doors of the castle, the absence of a host greeting the incoming guest, the absence of eyes in the hands that nonetheless somehow seem to spy on Belle, the absence of fingers in the curtains that touch her, and the absence of a person sitting at the table laid for a meal that Belle runs past. In effect, amidst all these absences, the house becomes itself 'a way of looking, a surveillance device monitoring the possessions that occupy it', including its inhabitants.¹⁷ Mark Wigley equates this kind of generalised surveillance within the house with the patriarchal gaze, ceaselessly controlling the female guest-prisoner. The fact that this gaze belongs to the inanimate objects and body parts that actively survey the heroine adds an even more uncanny atmosphere to a film where the female character seems to be literally manipulated by the house-(as)-master. Here we have a space thoroughly contaminated by the Beast's presence/gaze, so that Belle first becomes acquainted with him through sensory contact with his house and its belongings. The fantastic space of the castle has become an integral part of the Beast's identity, further supporting a reading of the house as an extension of its owner.

More generally, the feeling of absence imbues the castle with a distinct sensate quality that consistently frustrates our sensorial expectations of seeing, touching, and being touched. In the space of the castle, the world is experienced in a complex matrix of sensations where one sense immediately calls up another; as outlined above, seeing and touching are all but

Eighteenth Century until the Present Day, ed. by Isabella van Elferen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp. 152-67 (p. 156).

¹⁶ After the slow-motion sequence ends, the film depicts another uncanny sensory experience concerning the use of acousmatic voices, which I will not explore here.

¹⁷ Mark Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', in *Sexuality & Space*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 327-89 (p. 341).

inextricable here. All of those scattered hands, for instance, which watch Belle's progress through the house, are hands that do not, and cannot, touch — no more than Burton's boy with scissors for hands can touch his beloved Kim. The impossibility of touch is metaphorically emphasised by their holding candelabra with lit candles: fire will burn the hand that tries to touch them. This creates proximity and distance simultaneously — proximity between Belle and the place she is in, for the light from the candle allows her to inspect her surroundings, and distance between her and that same place, because the fire creates a barrier that prevents her from ever coming too close. The presence of fire therefore stresses the inability of the hand to perform its primary function: to engage in tactile contact. We realise at this point that the classic five senses alone cannot account for our perception of all these sensory elements. Antunes notes that, in watching a film, our perception 'overlaps with other senses, modalities and functions'.¹⁸ Our experience of those strange hands that keep Belle in equal parts mesmerised and mortified encompasses two of the senses that the author discusses, thermoception and nociception, broadly understood as the ability of organisms to perceive temperature and to detect potentially harmful stimuli, respectively. The impending threat that the candle flames and swords pose entail an understanding (from texts such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)) of gothic spaces as built around an intricate network of stimuli where the fear of pain — of sudden attacks to bodily integrity — prevails.

Similarly, the opening sequences of Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* also trade in multisensory images, counterposing interior and outside spaces. At the beginning of the film, a man seeking shelter from a raging blizzard walks into Heathcliff's eponymous estate. When he opens the door, the outside world suddenly invades the interior space of the house, as wind and snow enter the fire-lit room. The light emanating from the fireplace contrasts sharply with the darkness outside and the freezing night air. Both fire and the violent snowstorm, in this context, signal danger and immediately oppose Heathcliff and his guest. These natural elements (fire, water, and air) potentially elicit specific sensory reactions in the viewers with their distinctly pleasant and unpleasant connotations. Much like the duality associated with hands, other sensorial imagery also vacillates between diametrically opposed effects; in this case, the comfort of fire, the coolness of the breeze, or the sublime beauty of snow become gothic through the depiction of their inherently disruptive (and destructive) power. The viewer's abrupt encounter with the natural elements, along with the menacing sound of a

¹⁸ Antunes, p. 48.

barking dog and the sight of the sad, sunken faces of the house's inhabitants, heightens the affective power of these sensory images, and introduces a mournful feeling from the very beginning of the narrative.

The multisensory experience turns synesthetic in a subsequent sequence. 'You see, I had a dream', recounts Mr Lockwood, the unannounced guest. 'I thought I heard a voice calling. I reached out to close the shutter and something touched me. Something cold and clingy like an icy hand. And then I saw her, a woman.'¹⁹ The man is describing an incident that we as viewers have witnessed only moments earlier, shortly after Lockwood's arrival. Disturbed by the noise of the shutter beating against the window (hearing) and the bitterly cold air (thermoception), Lockwood rises from his bed. As he attempts to close the shutter, he is surprised by the faint sound of a voice calling (hearing) and feels a gelid hand grasping his (thermoception, touch, and nociception). Looking out of the window, he distinguishes the shape of a woman (sight). As he narrates these events, Lockwood concludes, significantly, 'my senses must have been disordered because the falling snow shaped itself into what looked like a phantom'.²⁰ What we are presented with, then, is an unusual instance of a character remarking upon his synesthetic experience of an uncanny event. Touch stands out as the more powerful and terrifying sense here, for an apparition — a ghost — should not be able to cross that ultimate dividing line between the dead and the living; it should never be able to touch. Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015) provides viewers with another rare example of tactile contact between human and ghost, when the black hands of a female spectre touch the heroine's shoulder at the beginning of the film. Nevertheless, the tangibility of ghosts is challenged in a scene towards the end of the film, in which the protagonist tries to touch her dead husband's cheek only to find her hand going through his face. If a ghostly formation eludes intangibility, it becomes too human; in other words, it becomes susceptible to the reciprocal nature of touch, whereby that which can touch can also be touched. Lafcadio Hearn writes that 'the imagined Supernatural is dreaded mainly because of its imagined power to touch'.²¹ Borderline horror lies in the idea that to bridge this fundamental gap between human and supernatural, or self and Other, is to endow the dead with inalienable properties of living beings.

In *Wuthering Heights*, then, the touch of a hand threatens to dissolve the boundary between life and death. Wyler's film opens this door, but has Lockwood blame imagination

¹⁹ *Wuthering Heights*, dir. by William Wyler (The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1939) [on DVD].

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Lafcadio Hearn, 'Nightmare Touch', in *Shadowings* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), pp. 235-47 (p. 237).

(‘I had a dream’, ‘I thought I heard’) and synaesthesia, or faulty stimuli (‘my senses must have been disordered’), for his supposed auditory, tactile, thermal, and visual perceptions. The guest’s rationalisation of events, which establishes the feeling of indecisiveness as to what is real or imagined (Todorov’s ‘hesitation’), constrains the more horrific possibilities of the narrative.²² Lockwood’s incredulity — his unwillingness to believe that a ghost might have touched him — does not allow horror to erupt and firmly positions the film in the realm of suspenseful gothic terror. Synaesthesia furthermore adds to the eeriness while reducing any sense of physical disgust: it is impossible to determine whether there was really a ghost and whether it touched Lockwood’s hand.

The threat of the tactile (the untouchable hand of the ghost) is here closely attached to memory — to Heathcliff’s memories of Cathy and to Cathy herself as a present-absent memory (a ghost). In fact, Heathcliff’s memories become so powerful that they escape the boundaries of his own psyche and invade Lockwood’s, again disturbing the self/Other boundary. Heathcliff’s refusal to let go of Cathy’s memory gradually develops into bitterness, frustration, and forlornness, which will eventually lead to his death. The contagion of memories thus taints the narrative and represents a source of misery and death for the protagonists.

Haptic Journeys, Dangerous Memories

As this suggests, gothic films often construct memory as an oppressive, suffocating force. In Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*, for instance, the tactile space of the film is filled with Rebecca’s memories and with the second Mrs de Winter’s persistence in physically taking possession of Rebecca’s things. At each step of her journey while resident in Manderley mansion, the new Mrs de Winter is repeatedly depicted as touching — with her eyes and hands — all that had once belonged to her husband’s first wife, Rebecca, as if by doing so she could be brought closer to unravelling the buried secrets of the past. Essentially, it is through the senses, specifically touch, that the gothic situation is set up here, as in the other films I have been discussing. Specifically, the contagious quality of memory becomes increasingly obvious as the narrative develops. As Helen Hanson explains, ‘there is a play around the revealing and

²² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 24-25.

concealing of the woman in the past — Rebecca — that is perpetuated through a tantalising trail of visual clues'.²³

Indeed, Rebecca is, visually, everywhere in the house: from the hand-sewn monograms on the handkerchiefs at the dining table to the faithful dog whose presence disturbs the heroine. While Wigley's argument about the house's devices of surveillance is relevant here, I argue that, rather than representing the watchful eye of the husband, in this film, they stand for Rebecca's eyes, an alteration which shifts the power dynamics of the film away from the conventional Bluebeard-type narrative discussed by Wigley.²⁴ In a space contaminated with Rebecca's memories, the camera positions the heroine as an outsider from the start: when she first steps into the monumental entrance hall, just as she is meeting the servants, a close-up frames her hands clumsily dropping her gloves on the floor. Over the course of the film, Mrs de Winter behaves as a frightened spectator of Rebecca's life, a poor surrogate for her husband's dead wife. The way that she keeps touching and staring at Rebecca's things highlights her outsider status, so that she always appears to be out of place, never knowing where to go or how to behave within the walls of the house. Surrounded by Rebecca's absent-presence, she feels and acts like a trespasser who has no business being in Manderley.

Her hands therefore remain both clumsy and curious throughout, as depicted in the 'morning room' sequence. Still trying to learn how to be the proper mistress of the house, Mrs de Winter enters the room where Rebecca used to write her correspondence. As she does, the dog that had been resting in front of the fireplace senses the presence of an intruder and leaves the room. The camera focuses on the animal leaving, cutting next to a shot of Mrs de Winter's face, visibly troubled by the creature's hostility. Here, as in the other films, the importance of the senses is highlighted by sensory experience being attributed, not just to the heroine, but to other elements within the diegetic frame. Rebecca's things and her dog are, in this sense, functionally similar to the castle and the hands in *La Belle et la Bête*, or the estate and Cathy's ghost in *Wuthering Heights*. As Mrs de Winter walks towards the desk near the window, a short subjective shot reveals the layout of the objects on top of it. She approaches the objects, first with her eyes, then with her hands, and picks up an address book marked with a capital 'R'. The slow camera movements and the close-ups invite the viewers to

²³ Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 77.

²⁴ On the positioning of patriarchy in the text, see, for example, Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

explore the room meticulously, providing an example of the haptic visuality that Marks theorises. There is a certain fearful reverence in the way she explores Rebecca's belongings. While Belle effectively creates the space in front of her as she explores, the second Mrs de Winter seems to have no power at all, and can only fumble at things that clearly still belong to someone else.

The situation that follows, in which she fails to recognise herself as 'Mrs de Winter' when answering the phone, is again indicative of her inadequacy in her new role. Moments later, a particular notebook catches her eye. When she reaches for it with both hands, however, she inadvertently knocks down a small white porcelain figurine that breaks and shatters as soon as it hits the floor. The camera focuses on her hands as she hastily tries to hide the broken pieces. This episode once again evokes the idea of the contrasting facets of gothic hands: the same questing hands that are trying to seize Rebecca's memory are also destroying its indexical traces. The overpowering omnipresence of Rebecca's memories poses a threat to the psychological integrity of the heroine, and it is as though her (clumsy) hands are in a way trying to salvage her from being completely infected by a hostile Other. Memory (and the lack thereof) is also portrayed in negative terms in Carné's *Juliette, or Key of Dreams*, in which the inhabitants of a dream world called the Land of Oblivion must learn to cope with collective amnesia. In the film, a young man, Michel, steals some money from his employer to be able to take Juliette, the colleague with whom he has fallen in love, on a romantic weekend. However, things do not go according to plan: he is caught and subsequently arrested. While in prison, he dreams of a strange village, whose no-less-strange inhabitants have all lost their memories. Each day, they awake with no recollection of who they are or of their life up to that moment. Pointlessly, Michel asks passers-by about Juliette. When he eventually finds her, the peculiar dream quickly turns into a nightmare, for Juliette does not remember him and he has to compete with another man for her love. Only Michel remains immune to the contagious outbreak of memory loss, yet it is his ability to remember that prevents him from fully partaking in Juliette's life in the Land of Oblivion. This foreshadows the tragic events that occur back in narrative 'reality' after Michel's release from prison, as, towards the end of the film, his inability to forget leads to his and Juliette's untimely deaths.

The characters in the film do not know who they are because they have lost their declarative (or explicit) memory; that is, they are unable to inspect memories of past events

consciously or to express them verbally.²⁵ A damaged declarative memory means that the characters cannot remember any autobiographical details, episodes, people, or places: they have no sense of identity. This is illustrated in an early scene where an old man travelling around the village with a packed cart keeps asking, ‘Who wants souvenirs? Who wants memory?’ These memories are postcards, photographs, and a series of other objects. Juliette finds a photo album and a shawl particularly appealing and, through visual and tactile engagement with the objects (flipping through the pages of the album and caressing the shawl), she imagines her never-lived life with Michel. The interrelationship between memories and the senses introduces the recurring gothic thematic of mistaken, secret, double, or lost identities, familiar from texts such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), or Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). This thematic acquires singular contours in the Land of Oblivion where the absence of identity is unintentional, generalised, and irreversible. As she peruses the photo album, Juliette naively makes up stories about her and Michel’s non-existent life together, using one photograph after another as inspiration. Speaking softly, she recounts everything she ‘remembers’: the places they have been to, the vacations they took, the hotels where they stayed, the parks where they walked, the museums they visited. Michel, who at first indulges in Juliette’s fantasies, becomes increasingly disturbed by the amount of information she adds to her reverie and by the sheer joy she seems to be experiencing from it. He has finally realised that this is no game, that Juliette wholeheartedly believes her own delusional words. There is one serious implication here: admitting that anyone can take possession of what are, in fact, someone else’s memories — memories that one can see and touch — means that memory can be pursued beyond the limits of the individual mind. The understanding of memory as transmissible and susceptible to re-appropriation by an Other via objects also makes it possible to speak of a contagion of memory from the original host to a secondary one. This contagion is propagated through the senses, and specifically through the exploration of tangible objects, as Juliette does with the old man’s wares.

Temporarily assimilating second-hand memories into one’s consciousness, however, does not repair one’s sense of identity; although Juliette (re)creates memories for herself, she still has no idea who she is. Jameson argues that ‘memories are first and foremost memories

²⁵ On declarative memory, see N. J. Cohen and L. R. Squire, ‘Preserved Learning and Retention of Pattern Analyzing Skill in Amnesia: Dissociation of Knowing How and Knowing That’, *Science*, 210 (1980), 207-10; and Larry R. Squire, ‘Declarative and Nondeclarative Memory: Multiple Brain Systems Supporting Learning and Memory’, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 4 (1992), 232-43.

of the senses, and that it is the senses that remember, not the “person” or personal identity’.²⁶ Following on from this idea, we can argue that the senses might be able to remember even when the person cannot consciously do so — or, in other words, that (via the senses) memories might be accessible even to people who have lost their identity. In fact, although (or perhaps because) declarative memory, memory of which characters are consciously aware, is impaired and inaccessible, there are instances of remembering in the film when the retrieval of memory depends solely on the senses. A strange accordion player in the Land of Oblivion tells Michel that, for him, unlike for everyone else in the village, all has not been forgotten or lost; memories come to him naturally when he plays. Perception through touch and hearing provokes recollection here. As Craig H. Bailey and Eric R. Kandel outline, procedural (or implicit) memory is a type of long-term memory (like declarative memory) that relies upon ‘motor skills [...] and is expressed through performance, without conscious recall of past experience’.²⁷ These sensory memories recollect movements of the body that have been previously acquired through repetition and practice, such as the playing of a musical instrument. The character’s physical contact with the object, the accordion, is so powerful that it establishes a bridge between the self in the present and the self in the past, making the (re)collection of his own memories possible. This means that, when memory fails, it can be triggered by the senses in order to be (at least partially) recovered. It is possible to go even further and claim that his memory becomes the accordion itself, so that tactile, audible, and visual perception may already be, in certain cases, an act of recollection, of remembering and, thus, of reclaiming a sense of identity. Approaching sensation in connection to memory makes it possible to claim that memory can exist without identity, or that memory might prevail even in the eventuality of a loss of other components of identity, as with the accordionist.

Harlow’s *While I Live* also uses a musical instrument as a catalyst for memory and provides another example of the endurance of procedural memory over declarative memory. The film tells the story of two sisters, the oldest of whom, Julia, exerts a dominating control over the other, a young pianist called Olwen. Julia is envious of her younger sibling’s musical talent and systematically pushes her to finish a piano piece that Olwen is composing. Nevertheless, much to Julia’s dismay, her sister cannot seem to get the ending right. That

²⁶ Jameson, p. 2.

²⁷ Craig H. Bailey and Eric R. Kandel, ‘Synaptic Growth and the Persistence of Long-Term Memory: A Molecular Perspective’, in *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, ed. by Michael S. Gazzaniga (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 647-64 (p. 647). For more on amnesia and implicit memory, see Alan J. Parkin, *Memory: Phenomena, Experiment, and Theory* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1999), p. 48-55.

night, a sleepwalking Olwen jumps off a cliff, to her death. Twenty-five years later, Julia sits by the radio, anxiously waiting to hear Olwen's piece, which some composer has taken up and finished in the meantime. In the room with her are her nephew, Peter, and his wife. Suddenly, through the garden door, we see a spectral female figure emerge quietly from the mist and advance towards the house. When the broadcast begins, a frantic knocking on the door unsettles everyone in the room. Peter answers the inopportune knocking and lets the woman in. Without a word, the young (and, we soon learn, amnesiac) woman enters the living room in a trance and runs towards the piano. Realising that it is locked, she tries to force it open as if her life depended on it. As she hurriedly sits down, her fingers somehow find their way across the keys and start playing Olwen's piece.

This sequence is highly evocative of the power of the sensorial, namely touch and hearing. On the one hand, the auditory (listening to the music on the radio) appears to have summoned this woman and, on the other, it is through the playing of music (touch and hearing) that she is able to express herself. The way she plays leads Julia and her trusty manservant, Nehemiah, to believe that she is the reincarnation of Olwen, even though she does not resemble her physically. In a form of gothic possession, the memory of the dead (Olwen) takes complete control over the body of this other, living woman, who is, it transpires, a reporter who has been investigating the young pianist's life. Mnemonic contagion is rather violent here, for the memory of Olwen fully contaminates and replaces the memory of the reporter. Unable to remember her own, original identity, the woman has become an Other to herself, and her body a mere recipient of someone else's identity. This is therefore an extreme example of a film where the identity of the Other annihilates the self. Touch and sound (the piano keys and the music they produce) become the vehicle for recapturing the memory of the dead, acting as the gateway to the past and the identity of the Other. Terror, in this film, stems from the representation of the senses as a dangerous way for the dead to invade and possess the spaces and, more frighteningly, the bodies and personal identities of the living.

This article has investigated the pervasiveness of the sense of touch in selected gothic productions where haptic motifs problematise notions of memory and identity. As we have seen, touch and a whole wealth of sensorial imagery underpin the gothic imagination and articulate pivotal gothic themes: lost identities and nightmarish dreams (*Juliette, or Key of Dreams*); trespassing and displacement (*Rebecca*); possession (*While I Live*); monstrosity and dismemberment (*La Belle et la Bête*); and hauntings (*Wuthering Heights*). Although this essay is limited in terms of the number of films and time period it covers, the vast world of

cinematic gothic is rich in its inventive use of complex spaces where the senses meet, and where to see is often to touch, and to touch often implicates sight, pain, and hearing.

The films I have discussed indicate a framing of gothic spaces as singularly haptic. Just looking or listening is not enough in mid-twentieth-century gothic cinema: there is a need for the audience and the characters to engage their whole body in the process of spatial discovery. In these gothic tactile spaces, myriad hands perform different functions and channel alterity, as is depicted in the severed limbs of *La Belle et la Bête*, the ghostly hand of *Wuthering Heights*, and in *While I Live*, where the Other possesses the hand of the self. The act of dwelling in gothic places, from ancient ruined castles to deserted Yorkshire moors, is, I argue, a process of (re)collection, whereby the characters seize and are seized by the memories that have contaminated their surroundings. These memories can be their own, as with the accordionist from *Juliette, or Key of Dreams*, or an Other's, as with *Rebecca's* Mrs de Winter. Gothic films from this era beg for sensorial awareness and engagement; they invite the viewers to participate actively in a multisensory cinematic experience — to feel the films by focusing on a wide range of imagery that directly engages the sensorial field, such as the musical instruments, photographs, gloves, fire, snow, and other elements that come into contact with the skin of the onscreen bodies. The gothic in these films emerges in the exploration of these sensuous geographies — that is, the ways in which the characters and the viewers perceive places, people, nature, and objects as intimately connected to their sensate bodies.

BOOK REVIEWS

Literary and Cultural Criticism

Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*
(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014)

Meals have long been seen as a means of uniting family and friends. As the adage insists, ‘the family that eats together, stays together.’ Conventional, optimistic images of a family sitting down at the table tend to picture the family members sharing particular events that occurred during the day, asking and giving advice, and laughing. Norman Rockwell’s 1943 classic painting ‘Thanksgiving Dinner’, part of his ‘Freedom from Want’ series, is a case in point. Rockwell’s painting is a quintessential depiction of the American family happily celebrating an abundance of food and love together. This glossy depiction, however, is frequently inverted in horror film. One need only think of the parodic depiction of the Sawyer family sitting down to dinner with their ‘guest’ Sally in Tobe Hooper’s *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). For the Sawyers, it seems, ‘the family that *slays* together, stays together.’ Their world is one that celebrates violence and highlights the underside of the American Dream, one where consumer capitalism has forced people to live on the margins and eek out a meager living literally on the flesh of others.

Within the horror-film genre, the Sawyer family is not unusual. We see similar scenes of family violence and discord throughout the history of the horror in film and television. Season One of FX’s *American Horror Story* (2011) features not one but three dysfunctional families: the Harmons, the Langdons and the Montgomerys. The focus on the depiction of the family in horror in Tony Williams’ book *Hearths of Darkness* (2014) (an updated edition of the original 1996 release) is therefore a welcome one. Much like critic Robin Wood, Williams’ focuses in this book on horror as an internal rather than an external threat to the family.¹

Hearths is an interdisciplinary work that draws on, and combines, Freudian-Marxist theory with feminist critique. This criticism examines the ways in which patriarchal social structures construct repressive gender and societal roles, which by extension foster deviant behaviour in individuals. Williams grounds his argument by situating the films within their cultural and historical milieu. This provides a valuable context that highlights how the films

¹ See Robin Wood ‘An Introduction to the American Horror Film’, in *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. by Robin Wood and Richard Lippe (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), pp. 7-28.

reflect the socio-political period in which they were produced. He divides his work into twelve chapters plus an 'Introduction to the New Edition' and a 'Postscript'.

Examining approximately 300 films, from the 1930s to the present day, Williams begins with Universal's classic *Frankenstein* films from the 1930s and Val Lewton's productions with RKO Pictures in the 1940s. However, he glosses over 1950s horror films for no apparent reason and moves straight to a discussion of 1960s horror, positing Hitchcock as a seminal influence on the overall genre of family horror. In other words, Williams situates the 1960s as the moment when the 'material factors behind horror become prominent' (p. 71). It is only with his discussion of 1970s horror films, such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *The Omen* (1976), and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), that Williams's real passion becomes evident. Williams states that '[t]he family horror films of the 1970s represented an important movement within a genre that then had the potential of operating as a powerful cultural counterforce influence to suggest the necessity for fundamental change in human society' (p. 4). He continues by contending that, from the end of the 1970s onward, horror becomes mostly a display of 'self-indulgent exercises in gore and special effects' (p. 5). His tendency to dismiss later films is unfortunate, given the many examples of distorted and deformed families represented in horror over the last thirty years, such as *The Shining* (1980), *Poltergeist* (1982), *The Fly* (1986), *Near Dark* (1987), *The People Under the Stairs* (1991), *Vampires* (1998), *Insidious* (2010), *Sinister* (2012), and *House at the End of the Street* (2012), to name but a few.

Nonetheless, Williams offers an excellent reading of Larry Cohen's neglected *It's Alive* series (1973, 1978, and 1986). In this chapter, 'Sacrificial Victims', Williams concludes that the films rest on the parents' ability to accept their children's deformities, an acceptance which results in a cohesive, loving family. Williams contends that 'Cohen's films reveal social perversion. Contaminated by capitalist structures, the family is a manipulated unit. It produces everyday monsters [...] [yet] is capable of redemption if it accepts the monstrous and moves toward new forms' (p. 184). Williams's analysis of Cohen's work therefore asserts that the horror genre subverts patriarchal hegemonic ideology through offering counter-narratives. Unfortunately, however, Williams does not provide enough of this type of close analysis throughout the text.

Overall, Williams criteria for what constitutes a good horror film is somewhat narrow. He argues that good horror films are those that suggest a break from confining social patterns and that depict what he sees as an enlightened and progressive message about society. As a result, he disregards films such as *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984),

Scream (1996), and many more. Indeed, in his ‘Introduction to the New Edition’, Williams laments the current ‘ahistorical trends’ in academic criticism, which he sees as ‘justifying “torture porn,”’, and, as noted above, he argues that since ‘the late 1970s onwards, the horror film mostly became self-indulgent exercises in gore and special effects’ (p. 5). Yet his criticism of torture porn, and those who argue for its importance, overlooks and ignores the extent to which these films have been under attack by patriarchal conservatism for what is seen as their excessive violence and troubling subject matter — not so unlike the films he defines as representing ‘good’ horror. What is more, these films can be interpreted as reflections on and critiques of the decade’s socio-political ideology, characteristics which Williams praises in earlier films. For instance, in *Hostel II* (2007), Stuart is introduced as a belittled husband. While his wife and children are sitting down to their morning breakfast, Stuart is seen standing in the kitchen with an apron on cooking breakfast for his family. Stuart’s subsequent violent actions arguably stem from tensions relating to economic and gender roles that have, the film asserts, been repressed and inverted, only to return in the form of violence against other women. An analysis of this inversion can lead to discussions of how traditional gender roles are being redefined and how new meanings need to be ascribed to the concepts of femininity and masculinity.

Williams has added very little to this new edition of *Hearths of Darkness*, aside from his condemnation of the horror genre in recent years. Moreover, Williams’s scope of examination is too general to provide any original insight. While he does introduce some lesser-known works, his overall examination of the genre tends to gloss over the majority of horror films identified in the text, stopping to focus only on a few select films. One new addition is Williams’s use of the *The Sopranos* to draw some interesting parallels between the show and the horror genre. However, Williams’s overall argument would have been stronger had he discussed the first season of *American Horror Story*. Not only would this have been better suited to his subject matter, but it would have also provided a stronger conclusion to his argument. A discussion of *American Horror Story* would have furthered his analysis of dysfunctional families and the influence of American patriarchal and consumer ideology on horror more generally, while a comparison with families in the 1970s could have allowed for a deeper analysis of societal changes. That said, *Hearths of Darkness* is, as it stands, an impressive survey of the horror genre that offers a strong resource for those newly interested in horror studies.

Lee Baxter

***The Victorian Book of the Dead*, ed. by Chris Woodyard**
(Dayton, OH: Kestrel Publications, 2014)

In Chris Woodyard's introduction to *The Victorian Book of the Dead*, she states that she had a threefold purpose for writing the book: 'it is an historical look at the ephemera and material culture of mourning, a reflection of some popular Victorian attitudes towards death and the bereaved, and a macabre scrapbook of ghoulish anecdotes reported by the press' (p. x). She further clarifies her purpose by stating that she had not intended to write a scholarly book covering every aspect of Victorian death and mourning practices, but instead to put together an 'idiosyncratic collection of the morbid and the mournful' from the United States and Britain from 1840 to 1920 (p. x). Woodyard succeeds admirably in accomplishing all of these aims, producing a fascinating glimpse into now-obsolete mourning practices.

The table of contents lists an introduction, seventeen chapters, a bibliography, a general index, a list of websites and blogs, and an index by location. It's a well-rounded survey of primary source material that is well organised. Woodyard claims the book is an 'idiosyncratic collection', but the indexes and bibliography may make it useful to scholars and history aficionados as well as casual readers. The collection is, moreover, divided thematically into numbered and titled chapters. Each chapter begins with a short introduction that puts the material into context. What then follows is a collection of newspaper articles, excerpts from books, and magazine snippets from various publications for the years 1840-1920 that address various aspects of death and dying in Victorian and Edwardian culture. The illustrations that accompany many of the selections add authenticity, as they are reproductions of actual Victorian photographs or antique book and newspaper illustrations.

The first two chapters are illustrative of how the book as a whole is structured. Chapter 1, 'I Am the Death Angel: Victorian Personifications of Death', covers newspaper accounts, magazine articles, and morsels from books that engage with the various personifications of death popular during the Victorian era. Stories in this chapter deal with ghostly visitors who search for souls ready to depart this world; the more well-known figure of the scythe-carrying skeleton (which leads to an interesting explanation of the origin of the figure of the Grim Reaper); the Angel of Death referred to by the chapter's title; and other angelic manifestations. Also included in this chapter is a sidebar cataloguing various descriptors of death and providing representative dates for each one. Some of these descriptors include personifications of death not mentioned in the stories, as well as death as

sleep imagery, Heaven as another country, and even the various less-mournful figurative means of referring to death, such as ‘pushing up daisies’ or being ‘six feet under’.

Chapter 2, ‘A Baby’s Coffin in the Air: Banshees, Black Dogs, and Other Harbingers of Death’, deals with a range of omens of impending death. Included with the more traditional omens listed in the title are some that are somewhat more obscure. One story tells of a white dove that flew into a stable one day causing an old man to say he didn’t like to see it there. According to the story, he died in the stable a few minutes later. There is also a story about a successful doctor who was visited by a small white butterfly every time one of his patients died. This chapter includes strange stories of interior voices foretelling the deaths of children, and the unexplained breaking of phonograph records indicating an imminent death. Having grown up in an area of the United States from which some of these stories came, I found these particularly fascinating because I have never previously heard of them. More generally, I found that as a whole they offered an intriguing array of sometimes bizarre, sometimes creepy glimpses into Victorian-era society in Britain and around the world. Indeed, despite the fact that Woodyard claims that the collection of materials is primarily from the UK and the US, the book does contain material from numerous other countries, making the book especially useful for research, as well as more entertaining for the casual reader.

The only practical suggestion that I would make that might render the book more accessible would be to differentiate between the chapter introduction and the actual beginning of the material. They are both printed in the same font with very little space between. It would be helpful for the reader if there were some differentiation between the two parts. However, this is a relatively minor point.

Overall, Woodyard’s collection is wide ranging, giving the reader a broad understanding of just how prevalent the topic of death was at that time. It’s also informative, and just plain fun. The book will be of use to anyone looking to enjoy some slightly creepy reading, and to those who seek more in-depth knowledge of the cult of death and mourning that was such a large part of society in the long nineteenth century.

Dana Bengé

M. Jess Peacock, *Such a Dark Thing: Theology of the Vampire Narrative in Popular Culture*

(Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2015)

In *Such a Dark Thing*, M. Jess Peacock, recipient of the 2013 Ronald L. Williams Book Prize in Theology and Ethics, provides an engaging exploration of the vampire's representation in popular culture, focusing mainly on horror films and novels, while developing an original theological reading. This book sets itself the ambitious aim of analysing the vampire, not merely as the epitome of evil that is invariably vanquished by the supreme power of good, but also as a creature endowed with both divine and malicious characteristics. Well-researched and easy to follow, this is a must-read for any student interested in the complicated relationship between vampires and religious symbols.

The book consists of five chapters, an epilogue, and an extensive sequence of appendices which review the novels, films, and series that Peacock refers to throughout his work. By approaching the vampire through the lens of a theological framework, *Such a Dark Thing* offers an original analysis that contrasts with the general shift towards technological developments and secularisation that have dominated vampire fiction and films such as Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) and Anne Rice's *Prince Lestat* (2014). Rice's latest novel explores the opportunities that medical advancements might offer to vampires; while Jarmusch accentuates on the artistic qualities of vampires in a self-destructive world, devoid of any trace of divinity.

In emphasising, by contrast, the association of the vampire with evil and the demonic, as well as with human uncertainty regarding the afterlife, the author also discusses what he terms the 'Monstrous Divine'. He argues that 'God represents the most diabolical, violent and bloodthirsty monster of all, an otherworldly ancient deity that takes no issue with the detached murder of countless innocent lives in order to punish those deemed as irretrievably wicked' (p. xxiii). The duality of the divine is obvious in the Hebrew Bible: Yahweh is both Creator and Destroyer. What is more surprising is the way in which Peacock interprets Communion, as both a symbolic and literal consumption of Jesus's flesh and blood in remembrance of his sacrifice, as a practice destined to appease the presumed wrath of God. Within this theological context, the author reads the vampire as the embodiment of not only theological but also societal issues, as an antagonist that questions divinity, while nonetheless confirming its existence.

The first chapter, entitled 'OMG! The Vampire as "Mysterium Tremendum"', is probably the most compelling. Here, Peacock transfers and attaches to the vampire the

theological concept of ‘*mysterium tremendum*’, which Rudolf Otto describes as a ‘combination of fascination and terror, wonder and dread’ (qtd p. 2). This is said to arise when one is confronted with the ‘numinous’ — defined as the sense of the ineffable that characterises an encounter with the divine. This process of reassigning these two religious concepts to the vampire is particularly thought provoking, especially since the author raises two important questions, the first regarding the vampire’s possible divine essence, and the second, conversely, concerning the potential status of the horrific as part of an inherently benevolent divinity. This discussion leads to the assertion of striking similarities between the horror genre and Christianity, since both consist of ‘unfathomable *numinous* entities’ (p. 4), which do not hesitate to take innocent lives. Peacock further argues that the angel, as a representation of religion, and the vampire, who stands for the horror, are not that different: both possess a human-like appearance and are agents of destruction: ‘[t]he typical response of the corporeal cast of characters to the *mysterium tremendum* of the vampire is indistinguishable from the typical response of the mortal to angels in Scripture: fear, awe, horror and foreboding’ (p. 6). Admittedly, the analogy between Christ and the vampire drawn by Peacock is also to be found in Nina Auerbach’s *Our Vampires Ourselves* or in Susan Clements’ *The Vampire Defanged*. Nevertheless, Peacock accentuates the common aspects that these seemingly antagonistic figures share, since they are neither dead nor alive and both promise eternal life, although the implications of the vampiric afterlife are obviously very different.

The second chapter, entitled ‘The Vampire as Agent of Theodicy’, focuses on the problematic existence of evil and sin that the undead represent. Peacock addresses here the aforementioned controversial questions regarding the relation between God and evil, or more precisely why God permits the existence of evil. Intriguingly, he suggests by way of an answer that ‘the vampire may serve as a window into the nature of God [...]. The mortal individual, when faced with evil, demands to know where God is amidst the evil’ (pp. 17-18). Regardless of the social and cultural changes that each new age triggers, for Peacock, the vampire therefore remains a religious symbol that both challenges and reestablishes the existence of the divine. The undead thus reiterates perennial questions, such as why God would allow the existence of evil, how one can protect oneself from evil, and what one might find in the afterlife.

Drawing on numerous references to Stephen King’s *Salem’s Lot* (1975), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and cinematic vampires from horror films, Peacock’s work provides an impressive exploration of religious tropes, including Communion, different levels of sin,

temptation, and the power of the cross in relation to the vampire. Nevertheless, the limited amount of space he allocates to such a considerable selection of films and novels is regrettable, as the discussion bounces back and forth haphazardly between cinematic and literary vampires. Some readers might be disappointed that certain vampires like Marius, Saint-Germain, or Akasha were overlooked, but fans of the horror genre will surely be pleased to find that Peacock includes in his book numerous vampire horror movies such as Stephen Norrington's *Blade* (1998), David Slade's *30 Days of Night* (2007), and Jim Mickle's *Stake Land* (2010).

While the first half of the book consists of original and persuasive arguments regarding the theological and monstrous aspects of the vampire, the enterprise of drawing up a 'best of' list of what the author considers the most representative films and novels is in itself risky. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see what Peacock extracts from each of them in order to trace the various aspects that make the vampire 'such a dark thing'. In spite of its shortcomings, this is a book that scholars of both horror and theology will surely appreciate.

Laura Davidel

***Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik
(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016)**

One of the many strengths of *Women and the Gothic* is its timing. Edited by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, the book has emerged as 2016 unfolds as a period of tremendous change, particularly in respect to politics and women. Women have recently gained significant political power, and the chance to alter the course of Western history dramatically. *Women and the Gothic* therefore appears at a crucial time, and is an excellent contribution to the ongoing conversations concerning women, feminism, and gender.

The above events may appear unrelated to gothic literature but, as Horner and Zlosnik outline in the book's introduction, the analysis presented here is contextualised within wider political discourses. The editors muse upon the changing face of feminism, with recent online activities such as the Everyday Sexism Project reflecting a general movement to 'revive feminism' (p. 2). The events listed above very much contribute to this, as discussions about feminism are evident within mainstream debate. It is against this backdrop that the book re-engages with the gothic and seeks to analyse women's place within it. The central argument in Horner's and Zlosnik's introduction — which is reinforced by every chapter — is simple:

the gothic provides a highly effective mode through which writers can interrogate women's (dis)enfranchisement within patriarchal systems of power.

Horner and Zlosnik invite us to explore the gothic from a woman's perspective on all levels: the book focuses on gothic texts written by women, about women, and for women. This fact is one of the reasons the book is a pleasure to read; the collection is very much a celebration of literature's gothic women in all their guises. Inevitably, this focus begins by engaging again with the term 'Female Gothic', as coined by Ellen Moers and, indeed, Moers's work is influential for much of the analysis in the book, including Lucie Armitt's essay 'The Gothic Girl Child' and Gina Wisker's 'Female Vampirism'.¹ However, along with the notion of feminism itself, the essays move beyond any simple definition of the 'Female Gothic' in order to interrogate and, in the end, complicate the ideas associated with it. This movement is indicated by the book's structure, which organises the chapters into three sections. The first, 'Family Matters', examines collectively the conventional identities afforded to the gothic heroine, identities which reflect her status within a family structure, such as 'orphan' or 'mother', and how this enables her literal or psychological confinement. 'Trangressions', the second section, focuses on gothic or monstrous women, such as the vampire or witch, who push against such rigid identity and behavioural boundaries. The final part of *Women and the Gothic*, entitled 'New Directions', then posits fresh ways for analysing the gothic heroine — through an engagement with 'queer Gothic', and by analysing representations of age — or alternative forms through which she may experience the gothic, such as the virtual spaces created by new technologies, including computer games.

Several trends emerge across the chapters which, together, highlight the book's key strengths. First, the importance of historically and politically contextualising the gothic text is underlined regularly within the collection: for example, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas outlines the medical thinking behind locking up women in the nineteenth century, and Sue Chaplin reflects upon women's changing legal status from the eighteenth century onwards. Across the book's various sections, a particular emphasis on new readings is also evident, whether this takes the form of revisiting classic texts from new perspectives (such as Ann Radcliffe's works or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)) or analysing less famous stories (like Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) and the figure of the *soucouyant*, a transformative figure from Caribbean and African folklore often compared to Western ideas of the witch or vampire). Additionally, the chapters regularly draw on a central body of

¹ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1976).

research, including Barbara Creed and Julia Kristeva, although Freud's essay on 'The "Uncanny"' is referenced the most frequently here.²

It is for this reason that, as one progresses through the book, it becomes increasingly difficult to continue to see the boundaries between each section — and, at times, between each essay — as separate and distinct. This, however, is not a criticism; rather, the richness of each contribution stems from its full engagement in the broader dialogue concerning gothic women, an engagement that allows one to see links between topics and texts which would otherwise remain hidden. For example, the theme of age punctuates the book's narrative, with notable contributions including Armitz discussing the representation of youth, while Horner and Zlosnik reflect upon the portrayal of old age. Wisker picks up on these ideas again by historically situating the figure of the immortal vampire. Although these chapters belong to different sections, it is clear how these works complement and mutually reinforce the thorough analysis performed by each writer. It is, then, rather apt that 'The "Uncanny"' should be a theory central to this discussion; Freud's idea of the return of the repressed emerging from the blurring of boundaries — whether this is between fantasy and reality or the living and the dead — becomes a meta-commentary for the book's topics, where feminism and the 'Female Gothic' are shown to be increasingly *unheimlich*. As Wisker pertinently notes in Freudian language, '[t]he Gothic revisits, replays and returns [...] an exciting return of the familiar and the repressed' (p. 151).

If there is one question which remains (deliberately) unanswered by the collection it is how we should *judge* the women in gothic texts. Moreover, the problem of whether these gothic texts participate in or criticise the continued oppression of women is one which haunts the book. This controversy is particularly marked in those chapters which analyse contemporary works or explore the gothic in different media. The latter is a particularly stimulating addition to the debate but, out of fourteen chapters, only two of them focus on this exclusively — Ginette Carpenter's film analysis and Tanya Krzywinska's essay on gothic games. It will be interesting to see how the arguments outlined here extend to include other media texts such as film, TV, games, and music.

Horner and Zlosnik comment at the beginning of *Women and the Gothic* that they see the book as part of the current feminist 'revival', although the comment does not stress enough this collection's importance to feminist discourse and gothic studies, as well as to

² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); and Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' (1919) in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003), pp.121-162.

literature scholarship more broadly. As remarked above, the central argument in the book is simple, but its application across the chapters is anything but straightforward. With lively contributions extending the discussion to include ideas around race, queer identity, and age, the book presents timely, crucial, and complex views on women in the gothic.

Frances A. Kamm

**Dara Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories in the Gilded Age*
(Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014)**

The common reading of American gothic, particularly the ghost story, is that its lack of history and its focus on the future force the external threats typical of European gothic inward: horror stems not from supernatural ghosts or tyrannical villains but from the ghosts of the psyche. However, Dara Downey offers a convincing alternative reading of the American ghost story that complicates this straightforward psychoanalytical interpretation. She demonstrates in *American Women's Ghost Stories in the Gilded Age* that American ghost stories by female authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are all about physical *things*.

In her introduction, Downey explains, 'a remarkably large number of ghost stories by American women writers [...] engaged directly with the material and visual culture that played a prominent, even constitutive, role in the social and cultural life of the United States' (p. 9). Throughout the book, she examines the haunting relationships between women and the home, representation and objectification, commodity and morality, objects and memory, frontier and history, and economics and death. As Downey herself points out, there has been an increased interest in the ghost story as well as in women's position within domestic spaces at the turn of the century, but this is the first extensive study of both, and her integration of sexuality and the body adds another layer to a typically simplified sub-genre. She writes, 'such tales dramatize both the intimate bond and the vicious struggle between the overwhelming plethora of commodities that crowded the nineteenth-century home, and the woman enjoined by social structures to keep them in check' (p. 4). This book therefore poses new and important readings of a wide range of examples within an old and popular form of literature.

As such, each of the six chapters covers several works, predominantly short stories, offering easy-to-follow plot synopses and an analysis that is both deep and wide: a mixture of detailed close readings and confident arguments about wider trends and their implications, as

well as a rich historical context. The first two chapters introduce the woman's function in the home, particularly her decorative responsibilities, and the tension within those responsibilities between an economic environment that encouraged the ownership of excessive commodities and moral/social judgment. In the chapter entitled "Fitted to a Frame": Picturing the Gothic Female Body', Downey considers texts in which male artists and viewers attempt to control and own female sexuality through visual representation, victimising the woman of the house by making her an *object* within her own home. On the other hand, the emphasis on objects, decoration, and dress all but makes the woman invisible amongst such material goods. It is also in this chapter that Downey observes a possible solution for such women: the power of invisibility. Supernatural tropes expose the dangers of visibility in the context of objectification, ownership, and containment. She suggests, therefore, that women who embrace their role amongst such commodities have the potential to subvert the control exerted over them by men and by poisonous, repetitive pasts. In subsequent chapters, she returns to this lesson regarding invisibility and to the stories discussed in these opening chapters — Edna Underwood's 'The Painter of Dead Women', Elia Peattie's 'The Story of an Obstinate Corpse', Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', and Emma Frances Dawson's 'An Itinerant House', to name just a few — contributing to the coherence of the book as a whole.

Chapter Two, 'Handled with a Chain': Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' and the Dangers of the Arabesque,' extends the problematics of seeing and being seen while examining the complex tyranny of the home. Chapter Three, "Dancing Like a Bomb Abroad": Dawson's "An Itinerant House" and the Haunting Cityscape', extends the idea of home into the city streets to explore the relationship between the female corpse and women's increasing mobility and independence. Chapter Four, "Solemnest of Industries": Wilkins' "The Southwest Chamber" and Memorial Culture', places the ghost story in the context of women's roles within the mourning and Spiritualist markets that blurred the lines between public and private, providing an extensive history of both. I found Chapter Five, "Space Stares All Around": Peattie's "The House That Was Not" and the (Un)Haunted Landscape', to be one of the most original sections for its reading of Western frontier stories, haunted because of a lack of landmarks and denial of history in a land that has seen trauma and death. Again, the invisibility of the ghosts in such spaces makes them impossible to confront yet also impossible to escape. Chapter Six, "My Labor and My Leisure Too": Wynne's "The Little Room" and Commodity Culture', expands on earlier ideas within the historical context of the increased display of commodities, women's power, and bonds with personal

belongings around the end of the nineteenth century. Downey ends the book with a brief afterward, which I found to be somewhat anticlimactic, about the direction taken by ghost stories into the twentieth century and some of the aspects — such as race — not included in her study.

Overall, this book establishes that homes can be haunted not just by ghosts but also by the objects intended to make the house a home and by the women charged with obtaining and maintaining them. Objects can be dangerous or powerful allies, but they are always agents of control. As this text claims,

rather than bringing the reader out of ‘normal reality’, Gilded-Age American short stories in the female gothic mode assert, through the medium of the supernatural, that the everyday is itself problematic, even dangerous — that it is more than possible to be oppressed, even deformed by social structures that have been naturalized by familiarity and ubiquity. (p. 11)

Downey’s readings would be valuable for any instructor or student studying the ghost story, American gothic, or gender in the Gilded Age. Her clear discussions of literary and historical context make the book accessible and engaging for advanced and undergraduate scholars alike, and her productive use of repetition and a reflective format make it useful as a whole or in teachable excerpts. Particularly in lieu of recent interests in media and technology in relation to ghost stories, hauntings, and mourning practices, such as the 2015 collection edited by Xavier Aldana Reyes and Linnie Blake entitled *Digital Horror*, Downey’s text makes arguments that would expand the conversation into historical and gendered spheres, and change the way American gothic is discussed, from a sub-tradition of the haunted mind to one of the haunted home, and all the expectations and material objects that oppress it.

Laura R. Kremmel

Derek Johnston, *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween*

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

Derek Johnston’s *Haunted Seasons*, which comes as a welcome, if narrowly focused, addition to the literature on the gothic, the supernatural, and our media landscape, starts by posing a question about the venerable annual UK series *A Ghost Story for Christmas*: namely, why? Why ghosts at Christmas? Of course, Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is a major part of that answer, but that novella was far from the original Yuletide ghost story. Johnston’s work excavates a fascinating history of these seasonal hauntings, locating them

within the role that seasonal days like Christmas and Halloween play in the lived experience of communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

While the central focus here is on television, the book begins by exploring historical connections between ghost stories and the holidays of Christmas and Halloween. Johnston's inquiries begin back in the Middle Ages and indeed earlier, and then move on to the Victorian revival of Christmas, and to the immediate context of Dickens's famous Christmas stories and the legacy of such tales. More briefly, Johnston also chronicles the largely North American rise of Halloween as a major cultural event and its increasing affiliation with horror themes, over the course of the twentieth century.

The second chapter is called 'A Broadcast Tradition' and explores how these holiday spooks have taken up residence on radio and television. It hits high points like the 1938 broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater on the Air and *Ghostwatch* (1992), but locates them within a much more elaborate history of such programming. It is a welcome and informative chapter. Johnston goes on to offer some critical frameworks for understanding these seasonal traditions. The third chapter, entitled 'Irruptions of the Abnormal', concerns the intrusion of the abnormal into the normal as 'central to the conceptions of the weird tale in general and the Gothic in particular' (p. 94) and, by extension, to the seasonal horror story. Johnston also notes here that both Christmas and Halloween offer opportunities for television programmes to feature episodes that go against the shows' usual formats, such as the 1967 *Star Trek* episode 'Catspaw'. The 1973 Halloween episode of *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, 'The Magicks of Megas-tu', would also have fit Johnston's formulation nicely, staging as it does a surprising 'irruption of the abnormal'. It takes the *Enterprise* to a universe where magic works and science doesn't, and even has Spock drawing pentagrams, in a break from the usual routine of the show that would have contributed significantly to the argument of *Haunted Seasons*.

The fourth chapter, 'Seasonality, Nostalgia, Heritage and History', takes on a set of issues about the temporality of the gothic and its denaturalising of the relationship between past and present. Television is a liminal form, Johnston notes, and its status as simultaneously a part of everyday life and removed from it, 'allow[s] for the presentation of and engagement with ritualized narratives, which come with a sense of being heightened and significant, urging us to connect them with our lives' (p. 119). Many seasonal ghost stories consequently adopt a Victorian or Edwardian setting, which remain stock eras for British 'heritage' entertainment; Johnson argues that the presence of ghosts and hauntings can work to deflate

and expose the nostalgia for tradition and empire upon which these seasonal settings often rely.

The final chapter of *Haunted Seasons* takes on two, rather oddly matched case studies: *A Ghost Story for Christmas* (both its initial run from 1971 to 1978, and the revival starting in 2005); and *The Simpsons*'s annual 'Treehouse of Horror' Halloween episodes, starting in 1990. The treatment of *A Ghost Story for Christmas* is very thorough and often fascinating, even for a reader who has seen only a few examples of the series, which was largely composed of adaptations of that quintessentially English author of ghostly short stories, M. R. James. It is clear that Johnston has established himself as a key writer on this series. The same cannot quite be said of *The Simpsons* and its Halloween episodes, which only gets about three pages, and these contain disappointingly few specific actual examples from the series. Johnston builds on a claim by Steve Jones that, '[i]n breaking from the comparatively realistic social-satire that characterizes the series as a whole, the Halloween specials cast a reflexive gaze back onto "The Simpsons" itself' (qtd. p. 174). This much is true, but *The Simpsons* is a highly reflexive (and continuity-light) series to begin with, and more could have been done to demonstrate specifically how Halloween enables the show to do something special and different. Johnston mentions that the segment 'Life's a Glitch, Then You Die' from 1999's 'Treehouse of Horror' episode shows Homer's usual incompetence leading to a global apocalypse, something no 'standard' *Simpsons* episode could depict. The off-format seasonal nature of the episode allows it to pursue a long-standing character trait to its logically disastrous conclusion. This is good point; however, it is confined to a single sentence — rather amazingly, the only specific reference to any 'Treehouse of Horror' segment that Johnston provides. Stations syndicating *The Simpsons* often show old Halloween episodes (some of them now more than twenty-five years old) in October, and it would be interested to explore the role that this seasonal tradition plays in the lives of the viewing public. Overall, and in addition to these omissions, the connections drawn between *A Ghost Story for Christmas* and *The Simpsons* are slight enough that separate chapters might have better served these two case studies.

The frustratingly vague treatment of *The Simpsons* spotlights a weakness running throughout the book: Johnston seems more interested in and knowledgeable about UK phenomena of seasonal horror than its North American equivalents. Perhaps *Haunted Seasons* should have been solely about British broadcasting and jettisoned any broader international claims; it could have done so, in fact, without losing too much material. It seems odd to ask that a book so narrowly focused be narrower still, but Johnston's own strong

interventions might have been more in the foreground had the book maintained an exclusively British focus. Also, *Haunted Seasons* is arguably somewhat heavy on literature review throughout, especially of the scholarship on the gothic. This material is welcome in its own way, especially for an uninitiated reader, but the sheer volume of it often works to obscure Johnston's original contributions.

'The Abominable Bride', the 2015 Christmas special of *Sherlock* (2010-present), is introduced in a postscript to Johnston's *Haunted Seasons*. The programme consciously places itself within the lengthy British tradition of UK ghost stories at Christmas, especially on television, and its neo-Victorian recasting (inverting the updated format of the rest of the series) takes that tradition back to its nineteenth-century roots. The propinquity of the book's release and that of 'The Abominable Bride' serves as a kind of retroactive endorsement of the value of the issues Johnston has raised, yet raises questions of its own as to the currency of the seasonal ghost story. Johnston's postscript also discusses the relative failure of the revived version of *A Ghost Story for Christmas*, which he connects to the American-influenced migration of ghost stories to Halloween (p. 173). So one wonders, what remains of the British tradition of Christmas ghosts? On the evidence of 'The Abominable Bride', it may be doomed to clever but empty pastiche.

Murray Leeder

***Reading in the Dark: Horror in Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. by Jessica R. McCort**

(Mississippi, USA: University of Mississippi Press, 2016)

The term 'horror in children's literature' might initially seem like a cultural misnomer. One surely has nothing to do with the other — in fact, many would say that one *should not* have anything to do with the other. Certainly, it was not until the early 1990s, with the rise of series like *Point Horror* and *Goosebumps*, that horror was recognised as a distinct and even mainstream strand in children's literature, and the category of horror stories for children (as opposed to young adults) did not exist, as Katherine Shryock-Hood has noted in her wonderfully named thesis *On Beyond Boo!: Horror Literature for Children from 2008*. Texts were simply not quantified as horror stories when it came to children's reading.

Matters are, however, by no means so straightforward. Take the more violent of the classic fairytales, written by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, where the horrific elements of the narratives are central to their success: Snow White's stepmother wants to consume her stepdaughter's heart; Little Red Riding Hood is physically eaten by a wolf, and

then cut from its stomach; Bluebeard's murdered wives hang from the walls of his secret chamber. Critics such as Marina Warner and Maria Tatar have written extensively on the symbolism of violence in fairy tales — what are these tales if not horror stories? So much a part of cultural landscapes around the world as they are, it seems that we are no longer sensitive to or even aware of the visceral nature of these tales, yet question the integrity of books that set out to scare their young readers. Books perceived as scary or horrific, such as R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series (1994-present) feature prominently on the American Library Association's list of most frequently challenged children's books, as do Alvin Schwartz's *Scary Stories* series (1981-1991), Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1983), and Harry Allard's *Bumps in the Night* (1996).

Nonetheless, perceptions of horror and the ways in which it functions in children's literature and culture have changed significantly in the past three decades, and those changes have revealed gaps in literary debate, as texts that employ horror themes, tropes, and archetypes to engage children through narrative have often been ignored by critics. Jessica R. McCort's edited collection aims to address that gap by focusing on the functions of horror in children's literature, and on the intersections between horror, popular culture, and children's cultural productions. In investigating both the positive and the more troubling aspects of books, films, and television shows that set out specifically to scare their child readers and viewers, the academics whose work is collected here interrogate the mechanisms by which horror narratives communicate their explicit messages and their implicit agendas.

As McCort quips in her introduction to the collection, horror has been lurking in the canon of children's literature for centuries. Horror, for McCort, functions as a kind of literary play area, a discursive space within which child readers can engage with the concept of the Other, monstrous or not, and explore their own place in the world. This view would seem to promote the horror genre in children's literature as a series of positive developmental narrative experiences. Yet McCort is not simply attempting to cheerlead a beleaguered genre by constructing a kind of critical underdog story. She acknowledges the tensions surrounding the perception, production, and consumption of horror stories for children, citing specifically the unease with which adults contemplate the actual content of these stories, which they often deem to be inappropriate. Yet is it on this kind of 'inappropriate' content that horror stories are built. Fundamentally, the subject matter of horror in general is outside the confines of what children, as perceived by contemporary Western, middle-class culture, should have access to, or be able to experience — and restricting such access is often perceived as a laudably protective or even pre-emptive gesture. There is an urge to prevent any

psychological or emotional damage, from which children are seen as being at risk when engaging with horror stories. It is this tension between the possibilities held out by the horror genre — which provides what Robert Hood terms safe forums for examining and lightening the darker sides of the human experience — and the urge simultaneously to suppress it, and shield children from it, that McCort finds so fascinating.¹

As a collection, the essays brought together here are as diverse as the texts they interrogate, yet this is the book's greatest strength. From an exploration of body horror in Hoffman's *Struwwelpeter* by Justine Gieni, to A. Robin Hoffman's aesthetic treatment of childhood death in the work of Edward Gorey and Charles Dickens; from a focus on performativity, monstrosity, and masculinity in narrative picture-books by Rebecca A. Brown, to a take on horror in contemporary revisionist fairy-tales by McCort herself, the collection engages wholeheartedly with the breadth and depth of the horror genre. Other essays by Peter C. Kunze, and by Nicky Levey and Holly Harper, examine postmodern revisionism in contemporary children's films, and collective responsibility in YA horror novels respectively, while Janai Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey tackle issues of race and gender in horror-based television shows. Emily Hiltz's essay on *The Hunger Games* series (2008-2010) explores the concept of body horror in terms of hybridity and physical agency, and the book concludes with Kirsten Kowalewski's discussion of the place of horror titles in children's libraries. This diversity of subject matter is what makes the collection so compelling.

'Reading in the dark' — as well as being the title of Seamus Deane's seminal 1996 novel — may well refer to the impossible art of attempting to read a scary book in the darkness under the covers, or the act of reading the darkness within stories, as these collected critics attempt to do here, with enlightening and insightful results. As a series of explorations of what McCort calls 'the dark aesthetic', the collection not only succeeds, but manages to break new critical ground.

Rebecca Long

¹ Robert Hood, 'A Playground for Fear: Horror Fiction for Children', 1997
<<http://www.roberthood.net/scribbles/children.htm>> [accessed 26 September 2016].

Emma McEvoy, *Gothic Tourism*
(London: Palgrave, 2016)

Emma McEvoy's *Gothic Tourism* centres, as its title would suggest, on the intriguing and increasingly dominant subject of gothic tourism. Closely related to 'dark tourism' — which is limited primarily to the recreational exploration of death and disaster sites — 'gothic tourism' is a much broader term, which encompasses *all* tourism that may be read as in any sense 'gothic'. This includes everything from ghost tours and scare attractions to haunted heritage sites and even Madame Tussaud's. The author argues that there are several elements inherent to gothic tourism: it is immersive, theatrical, intermedial, and it is inextricably bound up with gothic fictions. With the growing number of ghoulish tourist attractions and the increasingly common use of the term 'gothic tourism', this book is certainly a timely publication. A dozen examples of the trend immediately spring to mind, from the gruesome hospital-themed bar in Singapore (in which one sits in either a wheelchair or gurney and drinks red cocktails, or 'blood', through 'drips' overhead), through the 'honeymoon terror tour' in the opening of *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012), to the recent conversion of the site used in the filming of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) into a cannibal-themed restaurant, complete with the invitation to 'survive the night' by taking advantage of its accommodation out back. The mounting phenomenon that is gothic tourism is therefore undoubtedly due academic attention and commentary — and most obviously in the context of gothic studies.

This book focuses exclusively on gothic tourism within England. The Introduction sets the scene through a vivid description of The Sanctuary, a current 'scare attraction' in the theme park Alton Towers, which emulates a 1960s mental asylum. This account immediately leads the reader to consider some of the essential elements at play within gothic tourism: the dualistic themes of terror and excitement, and the inescapable fact about simulated terror today — *it sells*. Thereafter, the main body of the work is divided into seven sections. In Chapter One, McEvoy focuses on Strawberry Hill, the infamous abode of Horace Walpole, author of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This seminal fiction is generally regarded as *the* first gothic novel — and here McEvoy makes the stimulating argument that its origin is bound, too, to *the* first example of gothic tourism. She highlights the fact that Strawberry Hill — an ornate and decadent example of gothic architecture — served as the conscious inspiration for the fictional Castle of Otranto, while *The Castle of Otranto* served (and serves) as the inspiration for many of its readers to journey to see Strawberry Hill for themselves. Consequently, McEvoy underlines the intriguing symbiosis between sites of gothic tourism

and gothic fictions, a symbiosis which she contends has existed since the genre's very beginnings.

In Chapter Two, the author addresses the grotesque and fascinating history of the waxwork museum Madame Tussaud's. She acknowledges the universally uncanny nature of waxworks, but emphasises the fact that it is only in the original Madam Tussaud's in London that the gothic is so obviously celebrated. Furthermore, McEvoy outlines the institution's own somewhat gothic beginnings: Tussaud worked originally on waxworks of the dead, reputedly modelling likenesses of victims of the guillotine from severed and decapitated bodies. McEvoy highlights the fact that, while there is now a chain of Madame Tussauds' all over the world, it is only in the London branch that we find such elements as The Chamber of Horrors and the self-created wax figure of the witch-like Tussaud herself. It is therefore only in London that Madame Tussaud's functions as a specifically gothic attraction — a fact seemingly well known by those now behind it, who have recently incorporated a scare attraction named 'Scream', in which tourists are 'endangered' by disturbed prisoners on the loose.

Chapter Three centres on further examples of contemporary gothic tourism in London. It begins with a discussion of the home of Dennis Severs, an American who came to London in the 1960s and gradually turned his dwelling into a gothic sensation. McEvoy describes its various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic artefacts, the house's transition into a site of gothic tourism, and Severs' immersive role as artist in residence. The book then moves through various sites of gothic tourism in London, from Jack the Ripper-themed tours and The Clink (a notorious Southwark prison), to the Necrobus (a 'haunted tour bus' that focuses on the city's 'dark and sinister past') and the London Dungeon. She draws connections between each of these examples, arguing that they are all performance-based attractions, which sit liminally somewhere between history and fiction, and that each relies on a shared awareness of gothic tropes and connotations.

Chapter Four addresses the now internationally thriving business of 'Ghost Walking' — guided walks through allegedly haunted areas — and discusses the sheer variety of these which are presently available. Chapter Five is concerned with the lure of haunted castles and focuses primarily on 'one of the most haunted castles in England', Berry Pomeroy in Devon. It studies how this castle *became* haunted in the popular cultural imagination, with the aid of folklore and literature, recording the transition from accounts of this castle as charming and idyllic, to those which tell of its terrorisation by a multitude of spectres. Chapter Six continues with the subject of haunted castles, but is concerned with the mutual support but

also the potential tensions between the gothic and heritage management. Chapter Seven addresses examples of gothic tourism in the cultural arena at large in the last few years, looking in particular at the place of the gothic in recent festivals. Citing such examples as Glastonbury Festival, McEvoy argues that we can see at these events that the gothic is both very much alive and very much desired, and consequently widely *funded*. It is clear, she argues, that ‘we are all happy to bed down with the Gothic’ (p. 199). Finally, the author concludes by highlighting the discrepancy between the fact that gothic tourism is now wildly flourishing, and that it has received comparatively little academic attention. She touches on our motivations as tourists of the gothic: we wish, she argues, to experience a Bakhtinian release, to entertain the *possibility* of the supernatural, as we seek — and now pay — to be frightened. Overall, then, the book invites further research in this area and a wider examination of this cultural tradition.

The style throughout is both informative and interesting, and the narrative tone that appears intermittently throughout the discussion is not unwelcome, as this creates the effect that we, the readers, are immersed in the various tourist attractions being described. Another nice touch is the fact that the author has personally visited many of the sites discussed, and so is able to give first-hand accounts in addition to her academic and cultural commentary. There were, however, two questions which could, to this reader, have been fruitfully explored, but were left unexamined. The first of these is the issue of taste, or ‘political correctness’, when it comes to these attractions. Marketing, for example, prisons and psychiatric institutions as gothic sites of mass entertainment is surely not unproblematic, and should warrant careful consideration. Secondly, though touched on lightly in the conclusion, the question of *why* gothic tourism, as a phenomenon, is such a recent trend remains for the most part unanswered. Some discussion, for example, of its relation to a world that is conceived of by many as increasingly secularised, would have been provocative. On the whole, however, this is an entertaining, educational read, which serves as an enlightening introduction to the fascinating and expanding realm of gothic tourism.

Elizabeth Parker

Diane Long Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology, Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780–1880*
(Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014)

Note: This review was written prior to Diane Hoeveler's untimely death. The editors of *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* wish to pass on their sincere condolences to her family and friends.

It is the author's style of writing that immediately strikes the reader of Diane Long Hoeveler's *The Gothic Ideology*. The text is clearly written, and the reader gets a strong, and indeed refreshing, sense of Hoeveler's personality throughout. The style is breezily conversational as the author instructs the reader to 'bear with me' and elsewhere prefaces an admission with 'to be honest'. Such phrases as these are scattered throughout the introduction. This conversational style is underlined by a sense of ongoing research and up-to-date development, reminding the reader more of a blog post, for example, than a traditional academic tract. This would, one feels, appeal greatly to an undergraduate audience in particular. We can almost hear Hoeveler whispering from the pages as secrets are confessed to the reader, such as when she confides, 'but now I am forced to make a confession: I love to scour old libraries for forgotten tomes as much as I fancy wandering around old cathedrals, and, in particular, ruined abbeys' (p. 11). Hoeveler also admits that her current position does not strictly adhere to her own prior arguments, and may in fact contradict past assertions (pp. 9-10), and any limitations or obstacles are constantly recognised and acknowledged. There is a sense that such admissions and interjections, such shared knowledge, allow the reader to form a relationship with the writer, who appears as warm and inviting.

The writer's main aims, unsurprisingly, are very clearly outlined, and kept to the fore throughout. The primary question at the heart of this work is 'why does Catholicism assume such a prominent role in Gothic texts intended for the lower and middling classes [...]?' Hoeveler's argument is that what she terms the 'Gothic ideology' ('an intense religious anxiety caused by the aftershocks of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and the dynastic upheavals produced by both events in England, Germany, and France') is deeply historically relevant and is in fact a species of propaganda going right back to the Reformation, one that produced, and also exploited, this intense anxiety (p. 5). In addition to situating a variety of British Reformation and propagandistic texts as source material, Hoeveler argues that gothic writing also owes much to anti-clerical French texts.

This anti-Catholic sentiment was encouraged in order to create a strong sense of the ‘Other’, so as to concomitantly establish a concrete awareness of the British Protestant self. By extension, both anti-Catholicism and related prejudices held by members of the lower classes were carefully reinforced by popular gothic texts. Ruined abbeys, chapbook nuns, autos-da-fé, and tribunals are all highlighted for particular attention, and their centrality in constructing the gothic ideology is explicitly highlighted in the individual chapter titles themselves.

Hoeverler’s study gives attention to both novels and chapbooks — for example, Isaac Crookenden’s *The Vindictive Monk; or, The Fatal Ring* (1802) — as well as mentioning films from the United States, Europe, and Japan, such as *The Devils* (1971) and *Goya’s Ghosts* (2006). Each chapter is divided into subsections, where different texts are summarised and then analysed in relation to the gothic ideology and its historical context. The summaries can run quite long. However, there are very few surviving copies of many of these texts, with only three copies of the anonymously published *The Inquisition* (1797) in existence, for example, and often no other critical reading, an absence that somewhat justifies this tendency. These more obscure texts — including *The Horrors of Oakendale Valley* (1797), which is experiencing a resurgence due to a new edition in 2006, published by Zittaw Press — are usefully considered alongside the stalwart gothic authors familiar to students, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Most of the texts chosen for summary and analysis, until the end of Chapter Four, focus on the period 1780 to 1830, rather than the later nineteenth century signalled in the work’s title.

Overall, the text would appear to be aimed distinctly at an undergraduate audience. The introduction recites the basics of the Protestant Reformation and explains the essentials of dissolution and the Gordon Riots (pp. 18, 29). The possibility of religion’s links with politics and political allegiances is suggested towards the start (pp. 21, 22) with mention of Henry VIII and the Glorious Revolution, while another section begins by asking, ‘why are monks and nuns in gothic novels?’ There are also a number of minor errors regarding Ireland and Irish history, which are of course more noticeable to those of us living in Ireland. Maynooth College is mentioned briefly as being in Dublin rather than Co. Kildare, while a slip of the pen causes Wolfe Tone’s name to be misspelt. These are unequivocally only very trifling faults, however, and perhaps the main quibble this reviewer has with the text would be the many instances of repetition. The chapters can be read independently, as each comes with a set of explanations and interpretation that can be understood autonomously, without the need to read each preceding chapter, another feature that would render the book appealing to an undergraduate audience, one feels. However, those who read the book as a whole may

become frustrated with these repeated explanations. The *Compendium Compertorum*, a text that the author focuses on in her central argument about the influence of Reformation texts on the gothic, is one in particular that is continually explained. On p. 89, for example, it is described as ‘the report commissioned by Henry VIII that justified his seizure of Church property’, and again on p. 195 the explanation occurs almost word for word, although with a different emphasis (see also pp. 6, 99).

Repetition aside, much of this book is very interesting, with individual autonomous chapters that are enjoyable, clearly written, accessible, and well paced. There is also a useful appendix of Anti-Catholic/gothic titles, based on Hoeveler’s own research in Special Collections. Finally, this book deserves much praise for addressing its audience in an accessible fashion and not assuming too much prior knowledge, while all the time making stimulating points and observations. Its arguments are made lightly and further research is encouraged. Overall, this work is certainly an informative addition to core reading for all good gothic undergraduate modules.

Amy Prendergast

Catherine Wynne, *Bram Stoker, Dracula and the Victorian Gothic Stage*
(Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

A book which considers Bram Stoker’s immersion in late nineteenth-century theatre both on the Dublin and London stages, and how this may have contributed to his gothic fiction, is long overdue. Catherine Wynne is ideally placed to write such a study. Born and raised in Ireland, where she took a BA and MA in English at University College Dublin, she moved to England to pursue a PhD at Oxford with Irish poet-academic Bernard O’Donoghue. Currently, she is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Hull. Her career, in other words, follows the same Anglo-Irish trajectory as that of Stoker himself, and her study is particularly nuanced with regard to that cultural background. Wynne has previously researched Stoker’s theatre reviews, and published in 2012 *Bram Stoker and the Stage: Reviews, Reminiscences, Essays, and Fiction*, all of which provides a rich seed-bed for this current study. She cites Irish novelist Colm Tóibín who, on the eve of Stoker’s centenary in 2012, suggested that the gothic novelist occupies a space ‘in between’ Dublin and London and, like Oscar Wilde, that he found his ‘space’ in the theatre (p. 3).

Born in Dublin in 1847 (during the Irish Famine), Bram Stoker attended Trinity College Dublin, and became a civil servant. In his twenties, his nights were spent at the

theatre, reviewing plays for the *Dublin Evening Mail*. In November 1876, Sir Henry Irving, the most celebrated stage actor of the late Victorian period, came to Dublin with his production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The event was to prove transformative in Stoker's life and career. Not only did he see and review Irving's *Hamlet*, but attended and reviewed separately all three performances. Interestingly, the first two, though extremely positive, also contained some criticisms. Irving was attracted by the second review in particular and asked to meet the author. The outcome was an offer for Stoker to relocate to London and to become the manager of Irving's Lyceum Theatre. He did so later that year and as manager, was intimately bound up in the staging of the melodramas that were the lifeblood of Irving's theatre and that were to feed directly into Stoker's imaginative writings.

Wynne's book provides a close intertextual reading of Stoker's gothic fiction and the blood-boltered, spectacular melodramas he saw performed on the Lyceum stage. Her book is an invaluable and revealing index of just how often stage plays are explicitly invoked in Stoker's novels. In *Dracula*, for instance, Jonathan Harker reaches for a quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (the play Irving performed in Dublin) when deciding to write down what he has just seen — the Count climbing lizard-like up the walls of the castle:

Up to now I never quite knew what Shakespeare meant when he had Hamlet say: 'My tablets! Quick, my tablets!/'Tis meet that I put it down, etc.' for now, feeling as though my own brain were unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end its undoing, I turn to my diary for repose. The habit of entering accurately must help to soothe me.¹

Hamlet, when he speaks these lines, has just had his own encounter with the supernatural in the shape of his father's ghost. The submitting and hence subduing of a supernatural encounter to the rational act of recording is an obsessive concern throughout *Dracula*.

Given the explicit invocation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Jonathan Harker and hence by Bram Stoker, it might be expected that a study such as Wynne's would explore in more detail the connections that have been made between the mesmeric onstage presence of Henry Irving and the uncanny figure of Count Dracula. The author, however, resolutely sets her face against following this line, declaring early on her opposition to 'the biographical over-reliance on the notion that Irving is the model for the vampire' (p. 3). In her closing pages, she reiterates even more emphatically that her study 'contests the prevailing reading that sees Irving as the model for the vampire' (p. 165). Indeed, Wynne examines the relationship

¹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), pp. 41-42.

between Stoker and Irving primarily in theatrical rather than psychological terms. In his 1906 *Personal Reminiscences* of the actor, Stoker cast off the theatre reviewer's professional reserve and wrote how he was enthralled by 'the magnetism of [Irving's] genius' and 'burst out into something like a violent fit of hysterics'. He wrote, '[s]oul had looked into soul! From that hour began a friendship as profound, as close, as lasting as can be between two men' (cited p. 6). Where I would see and say 'homoeroticism', Wynne reads this passage as evidence of how 'Stoker interpreted his relationship with Irving in melodramatic terms'. That close collaborative relationship is explored through her readings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, *Faust* which the two men worked to make more "'eerie'" (p. 52), and Irving's breakthrough performance of Mathias in *The Bells*, in which he most successfully internalised and psychologised the operations of melodrama. Wynne's study, therefore, delivers exactly what it promises in the title: a wonderfully researched and comprehensive analysis of the Victorian gothic stage as seen through the eyes of the Lyceum Theatre's manager, with his red hair, Irish accent, and eyes which a journalist from the *Pall Mall Gazette* describes as having 'a strange and uncanny look' (cited p. 143).

In fact, Wynne's book is a study not of one Victorian actor but of three: Henry Irving, the actress Ellen Terry who most frequently shared the stage with him, and the American actress-manager Genevieve Ward, with whom Stoker became fascinated when he first saw her perform in Dublin in 1873 (providing an intriguing parallel with Irving three years later) and whom he continued to advise throughout her career. Wynne is particularly astute on how the offstage personae of the three actors intersect with their onstage performances. Henry Irving, rather like Wilde's Dorian Gray, had a portrait which he consigned to the attic and later repeatedly stabbed with a dagger because he did not like how it represented him. Terry had what Wynne describes as a 'rather notorious' (p. 79) and rackets personal life which she offset by portraying such virtuous, suffering heroines as Shakespeare's Ophelia. With Genevieve Ward, there was a direct line of continuity between the gothic marriage she arranged with the man who sought to escape his marital obligation to her and the parts she played, a situation of which Stoker was aware and which he transposed into his 1909 novel, *The Lady of the Shroud*. The interplay between moral rectitude and erotic titillation that these actresses performed onstage is carefully linked by Wynne to the fate of Lucy in *Dracula*, the innocent young woman transformed into a bloody predator. Her fate is decapitation and dismemberment, and this in turn leads Wynne to go beyond an examination of the conventional stage play, and into a fascinating account of the stage practices of magicians as they made women's bodies disappear in whole or in part. This includes a vivid description of

the ‘vampire trap(door)’, which Stoker presses into violent and bloody ends in several of his fictions. Wynne is particularly good at demonstrating how women are central to the erotic and emotional spectacle of Victorian theatre but are placed there and manipulated by the men. Her argument persuasively sees this gendered narrative replicated repeatedly in Stoker’s novel.

The huge irony underpinning any discussion of Stoker’s relationship with the Victorian gothic theatre is that when Stoker wrote a stage version of *Dracula* and put on a copyrighted, staged reading at the Lyceum in 1897, Irving is alleged to have described it as ‘dreadful’. Wynne dismisses this as fanciful and a simplification of the two men’s complex theatrical collaboration. But she also cites Ellen Terry’s observation (from up close) that Irving ‘failed to appreciate the abilities of others’. Irving may well have been taken aback and none too appreciative of the Irishman who occupied a subordinate role in his theatrical domain moving centre stage with this act of authorship. In the theatrical and fictional gothic worlds which this book so expertly examines and interweaves, myths are particularly difficult to dispel.

Anthony Roche

Fiction

Nick Cutter, *The Troop*
(London: Headline, 2014)

“That’s what made it so scary. This wasn’t a bear or a shark or a psycho axe murderer; those things were bad, sure, but you could get away from them. Hide.

“How could you hide from a murderer who lived under your skin?”
–*The Troop*, p. 232

American gothic fiction has always been concerned with bridging the gap between perpetrator and victim. From its conception, with the troubling relationship between protagonist Huntly and his doppelgänger nemesis Clithero in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1899), to modern slasher movies like John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1980) in which Laurie Strode must identify with teen-killer Michael Meyers in order to destroy him, that gap has continued to close.¹ So too goes the practice in American gothic’s close relation, Canadian gothic literature, in which the harshness of the landscape often means that humanity becomes its own nemesis. As Margaret Atwood observes, ‘when life becomes a threat to life, you have a moderately vicious circle. If a man feels he can survive only by amputating himself, turning himself into a cripple or a eunuch, what price survival?’² Nick Cutter, the pen name of Canadian novel and short-story writer Craig Davidson, may not be breaking any new ground in his 2014 novel *The Troop*, but he explores this enduring trope by revelling in the abject and the disgusting to an almost unbearable degree, with impressive results. Taking up themes previously explored in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Stephen King’s *The Body* (1982), Cutter brings these books’ ideas regarding youth, death, and survival to their logical, bloody, and merciless conclusion, via the fear of contagion found in Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982). The murderer is very much under our skin in *The Troop*; indeed, the murderer might just *be* us. And the murderer might also be about to explode out of us in a violent mess of blood, pus, and internal organs.

The Troop follows a group of five boy-scouts (Kent, Max, Newton, Ephraim, and Shelley) and their scout leader as they embark on their annual excursion to Falstaff Island, a

¹ Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992), pp. 48-49.

² Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: A List, 1972), p. 28.

secluded spot off the east coast of Canada. Their camping trip is soon derailed when a sick and starving man arrives on the doorstep of their cabin. The scout master, physician Tim Riggs, suspects that the man is dying from some type of parasitic worm and, unable to make contact with the mainland, decides to operate on him himself. The reader, who is privy to newspaper stories and top-secret government reports which are interspersed between the main chapters (Cutter's nod to the narrative structure of King's *Carrie* (1974)), soon learns that this man has escaped from a laboratory in which he was a test subject for a supposedly revolutionary new diet pill. There he was infected with a strain of genetically engineered tape worm which has been consuming him from the inside out, turning him into a horrifying incubator for its eggs.

Tim's adherence to the Hippocratic Oath proves to be his downfall as, during his ad-hoc procedure, he himself becomes infected when he accidentally ingests some tape-worm eggs. He soon becomes dangerously ravenous, eating anything and everything available, while losing weight at an alarming rate. Unsure of what to do, the five boys lock Tim up in a wardrobe and wait for the boat to arrive the next morning from the mainland. When the boat doesn't arrive, the boys soon fall to infighting. While Newton (nicknamed 'Newt'), the most resourceful and knowledgeable (in other words, the nerd) of the group, tries to keep them together, Kent soon becomes infected, leading him to brawl with Ephraim over whether he should be locked up with their scout master. Shelley, meanwhile, whose favourite sports include pulling the legs off beetles and drowning kittens, unsurprisingly becomes a threat to the rest of the scouts once out from under the supervision of the scout master. The inter-chapter material informs the reader early on that only one of the boys survives their island ordeal, without specifying which one, adding to the already excruciating tone of dread and despair.

Although what initially stands out about *The Troop* is undeniably its focus on gore and body horror, what lingers is its almost unbending dedication to the conventions of the classic American-gothic narrative, including the strong influence of the environment, the cabin in the woods, the cave scene at the heart of the story that is reminiscent of Poe's fiction, and of course the discovery that what is monstrous and what is human cannot finally be distinguished from one another. The novel also contains specifically Canadian resonances, as the characters become Wendigo-like. As Atwood writes in *Survival*, 'the character sees too much of the wilderness, and in a sense becomes it, leaving his humanity behind'.³ Cutter's

³ Atwood, p. 53.

vivid, gruesome imagery, which is often difficult to read, emphasises in particular the experience of horror itself via the senses, particularly that of smell. In typical gothic fashion, in the absence of authority or certain guidance, the boys have only their senses to rely on. And even one's senses are not always enough, as our de-facto protagonist Max's ordeal soon teaches him: 'All bodies fail, he realized. They fall to pieces in pieces, bit by tortuous bit, and a man had to watch it fall apart around him' (p. 91). *The Troop*, true to its gothic roots, strips its characters to the bone (in this case quite literally) to see what comes out.

Although the boys occasionally sound less like boys and more like what a middle-aged author would imagine a fourteen-year-old boy sounds like — particularly in Newt's inter-chapter diaries in which he ends up sounding more like posh swot Martin Prince from *The Simpsons* than an intelligent teenager — he remarks, for example, '[w]ho doesn't like opening the mailbox and finding a letter from a friend, even one you've never met in person?' (p. 78) — the characters are sufficiently distinguished from one another for each of them to render them believable as individuals. Cutter's prose is more than adequate for the job, allowing him to make some devastating observations about life and death, and the depths to which people will sink in the name of survival. In one of the novel's most memorable scenes (perhaps an allusion to *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980)), in which the boys attempt to butcher a turtle for its meat, Max makes a horrific discovery about the nature of violence itself:

Suddenly Max understood those awful stories he'd seen on the national news, the ones where a reporter grimly intoned some poor person had been stabbed forty times or whatever. Maybe the stabber would have stopped after a single stab if that was all it took. But most living things don't *want* to die. It took a lot to kill them. Events take on a vicious momentum. All of a sudden you're stabbing as a matter of necessity. You're hoping that if you just put enough holes into a body, the life will drain out and death will rapidly flow in ... (p. 256)

Here Cutter demonstrates his ability to relate the specific to the general, the animal to the human, instinctual acts to those of premeditation. Cutter deftly universalises a single act of desperation on an isolated island, to demonstrate how an act of violence in every-day society, no matter how reasoned, can give away to madness at any moment.

Concerning itself with the enduring tropes of gothic horror as well as more contemporary issues regarding 'Big Pharma' and weapons of mass destruction, Davidson's first novel under the Nick Cutter pseudonym is a grim but satisfying read. One of the most terrifying and perhaps most admirable aspects of *The Troop* is that no one is off-limits. The

boys here are all fourteen, just young enough to come across as children rather than their older, more horror-friendly cousin, the far less likable, promiscuous, unruly teenager. Forty years on and there is still something of a taboo about a text such as *Jaws* (1975), which insists on feeding a boy to a giant shark. It's perhaps for this reason that Cutter's child-butcher tale comes with a warning from Stephen King himself, one of horror's most renowned child killers, who cautions that Cutter's book is '[n]ot for the faint-hearted'. Indeed *The Troop* will probably give your heart something of a workout. It may also leave you feeling itchy all over and worrying that every cough is the signal of your demise. But then again, that's all par the course for a good gothic novel.

Sarah Cullen

Lafcadio Hearn, *Insect Literature*
(Dublin: Swan River Press, 2015)

Greek-Irish author Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) is mostly known to Western readers as the writer of *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, a collection of uncanny Japanese tales published in 1903. His course in life was an unusual one: after he was abandoned by both his parents, he led a nomadic existence, encountering adventure and hardship in Ireland, Great Britain, and the US (where he worked as a journalist), and eventually settled in Japan. Here he was enabled by his exceptional talent to produce various essays, fiction, and poetry about the Land of the Rising Sun. Hearn's engagement with the Japanese popular imagination is evident in *Insect Literature*, a collection of reprinted essays and stories all of which centre on the subject of insects, and are further united by the pervasive use of various gothic images and themes.

Through this imaginative and elegantly written work — contained in a sumptuous hardback volume — Hearn skilfully guides the reader around the strange and enchanting world of insects. Following Anne-Sylvie Homassel's introduction and Masanobu Otani's (one of Hearn's former pupils) short note, the majority of the essays are each dedicated to one specific type of insect, discussing its interesting and unique qualities, while the author makes his own personal, imaginative, and often humorous observations on the subject. Moreover, the essays explore each of these tiny creatures' reputation in the Japanese cultural tradition, focusing predominantly on insects' associations with death and spectrality. There are also three essays that focus on the representation of insects in Eastern and Western poetry: 'Some Poems about Insects', 'Some French Poetry about Insects', and 'Insects and Greek Poetry', in

all of which Hearn also touches on insect poetry's alertness to ideas about life's ephemerality, mourning, and death.

Homassel's introduction is a delightful and informative prelude to the main text. She introduces both Hearn's personal love of insects and the significance that these minute beings have in the Buddhist cosmogony, and stresses the author's interest in the affiliation between insects and the world of the dead in both the Ancient Greek and Japanese imagination. For Hearn, the uncanny connection between insects and the dead is integral to the representation of insects in the Japanese tradition: most of the pieces of this volume draw attention to the recurrent notions of death and ghostliness in popular tales, and the ways in which, in Japanese folklore, insects and the world of spirits and phantoms are often intermingled with one another. Thus, the essays are interspersed with traditional otherworldly tales and folk narratives — retold by Hearn — which highlight the extent to which there is very little difference between phantoms, spirits, goblins, and insects in the Eastern imagination. In this respect, the uncanny representation of insects in these fables and legends may be seen as a significant element of Asian gothic, in which spectrality is linked with the Buddhist notion of reincarnation.

According to Japanese folklore, insects are very often considered to be spirits or the roaming souls of dead people; correspondingly, Hearn attributes a degree of ghostliness to most of the insects discussed in this collection. The author's wonderful essay 'Butterflies', for example, tells us that these marvellous creatures are endowed in Japanese folklore with unusually uncanny qualities, as they can be the spirits of either dead or living humans. There are many Upper-East popular tales that reproduce this idea, argues Hearn, as for example with the case of a Chinese scholar who experienced astral projection, during which his soul wandered in the shape of a butterfly while he was sleeping. Similarly, Hearn tells us the story of Akiko, a girl who, having died young, returned from the grave fifty years later as a butterfly in order to claim the soul of her beloved, bringing to mind traditional Western gothic ballads revolving around a resurrection motif, such as 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William' (which dates to the seventeenth century). In the essay 'Some Poems about Insects', Hearn claims that, although there is Western poetry that presents butterflies as symbols of the soul, there is almost no such poetry that would actually present a butterfly (or any other insect) as the spirit of the dead, because, he argues, phantoms in the Western tradition are rarely related to non-human life. By contrast, the Eastern tradition has often identified human souls and spirits with butterflies and with other types of insects.

In the essay ‘Dragon-flies’, Hearn discusses how dragonflies are also closely associated with the supernatural realm in Japanese folklore. Indeed, there is a great variety of dragon-flies with magnificent colours and fittingly unearthly names: ‘the demon’, ‘the goblin’, ‘the ancestral spirits’, ‘the ghost’, ‘the lady of the weeping willow’, and so on, all strongly reminiscent of iconic demonic and spooky presences we come across repeatedly in ghost stories. In Japan, certain dragon-flies, the author informs us, are believed to be ‘ridden by the dead’, and old Japanese poetry written in the *hokku* form frequently refers to the dragonfly’s ‘ghostly stillness’, the ‘goblin oddity’ of its eyes, while such poetry has also pictured this creature ‘flitting above the graves’. Moreover, during the Japanese Festival of the Bon, dragonflies are said to carry the August Spirits of the Ancestors who revisit their former homes.

In the essay ‘Fireflies’, Hearn examines how the ethereal insect of the title is frequently depicted in Japan as an apparition. Due to their extraordinary sparkling bodies that give them a somewhat spectral appearance, fireflies, whose favourite tree is the willow — which is ‘the tree of the dead’ and also ‘the favorite of human ghosts’, according to the author — are strongly connected with the invisible world of spirits. In the popular Japanese imagination, fireflies are sometimes believed to be ghosts, goblin fires, or even malevolent spirits. Hearn also discusses here a selection of old Japanese poems in which these peculiar creatures are described as ‘ghostly’ and able to produce ‘uncanny’ effects due to their dreamlike appearance. Thus, as Hearn claims, people in Japan tended to believe that children’s hunting of fireflies at night can be extremely dangerous.

There are many other types of insects that exhibit unearthly qualities in the Japanese imagination. One of these is the particularly haunting sound that some insects produce. In the essay ‘Insect-Musicians’, for example, Hearn speaks of various insects that participate in their own way in the traditional Japanese Festivals for the Dead, singing ethereal and melancholy tunes to eerie effect. There are also several uncanny tales about such tiny beings, like the story of two female weavers who died and took the form of the *hataori*, a strange minute insect. It is not only the way they look, states Hearn, but also the peculiar fairy-like sound that they make which renders these ‘insect musicians’ bizarre and otherworldly. A further example is the *kusa-hibari*, an insect that is similar to a tiny cricket, and sings a mysterious song about ‘the unseen and the unknown’, coming from the depths of time and its own ancestral past. Such ideas echo Hearn’s essay ‘Gothic Horror’ — included in *Shadowings* (1900), a collection of strange stories and essays — in which he claims that the

uncanny remembrance of the ancestral past can invoke a sense of ‘terrible beauty’, verging on gothic wonder.

In the essay ‘Semi’, which is about different types of Japanese cicadae, we learn about the *higurashi* (meaning ‘day-darkening’), which makes its melancholy bell-like music only in the hour of twilight. The same essay details a ghostly legend which tells of a man who fell sick and died away from his home, and then became an autumn cicada whose cry never ceases. *Insect Literature* also refers to Japanese ghost stories and strange beliefs about the fly, and the uncanny significance of the peculiar sound that this insect produces. In the tale ‘Story of a Fly’, for example, the author tells us of a maid-servant who died and returned to life in the form of a buzzing fly, demanding a Buddhist service so as to secure her next rebirth, while in the short humorous essay ‘The Festive’, Hearn refers to this insect’s ‘ghostly noises in the dead waste and middle of the night’ as he ‘haunteth’ kitchens and printing-offices, but also to its suicidal tendencies as ‘it drowns in bowls of creams’.

While the aforementioned insects are portrayed by Hearn as delicate and eerie, other types of insects are depicted as monstrous and repulsive, plunging us into a gothic nightmare. In the essay ‘Mosquitoes’, for example, these insects are paralleled with vampires: they are often the reincarnations of wicked dead people, who, while being in the state of *preta* (an intermediate state between hell and earth in Japanese religion), return as horrific blood-sucking creatures, condemned to prey on the living. Moreover, the beautiful tiny creature in the tale ‘The Jewel Insect’ is perfectly evil as it sends other insects, like butterflies and moths, to a ghastly death. The lives of insects, writes Hearn, are full of ‘atrocious, horrible facts’. This is seen in the essay ‘Dr Hava’s Tarantula’, in which Hearn fills the reader’s imagination with illustrative and gruesome images, describing the violent fights between wasps and spiders, which end in appalling massacres, thoroughly grotesque and disturbing. The culmination of the frightful and demonic side of insects is the essay ‘Gaki’, positioned towards the end of the book. *Gaki* are the shadowy spirits which, according to the Japanese Buddhist system, wander in the cycle of torment called ‘The World of Hungry Ghosts’, and, in the Japanese popular imagination, are often identified with insects. Lastly, in ‘The Dream of Akinosuké’ (a supernatural story originally included in *Kwaidan* along with ‘Butterflies’ and ‘Mosquitoes’) a colony of ants exerts strange powers over the soul of the protagonist (which takes the form of a butterfly), in a weird tale in which ants are paralleled with humans.

With this remarkably unusual work, Hearn sheds light on the strange universe of insects as well as their connections to the spectral world in the Japanese tradition; by merging

myth, philosophy, poetry, and popular fancy, he has created a bewitching mixture of the elaborate and the bizarre. We are privy to a charming narration interlaced with fanciful tales and poetry, in which not all is gothic, but the gothic elements are the ones most likely to dominate and then linger in the reader's mind.

Maria Giakaniki

BOOKS RECEIVED

Stacey Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse: Vampires and Zombies in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes (eds), *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic, and the Found-Footage Phenomenon* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

Jen Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality in Victorian Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).

Ian Copper, *Frightmares: A History of British Horror Cinema* (Leighton: Auteur, 2016).

Wickham Clayton (ed.), *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2015).

Jez Connolly and David Owain Bates, *Dead of Night* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2015).

Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Monika Mueller (eds), *Vampires and Zombies: Transcultural Migrations and Transnational Interpretations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

T. S. Ford, *Little Horrors: How Cinema's Evil Children Play on our Guilt* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016).

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Suspiria* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2015).

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Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

Catherine Wynne (ed.), *Bram Stoker and the Gothic: Formations to Transformations* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

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FILM REVIEWS

(Please note that reviews may contain spoilers)

He Never Died (Dir. by Jason Krawczyk) USA/Canada 2015
Alternate Ending Studios

And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'

—Genesis 4. 10-12

When it comes to entertainment, the only thing more commercial than sex is violence. And in the thousands of years since the Bible documented its first slaying, this seemingly insatiable desire to watch or read about homicide seems to remain unquenched. From *Midsommer Murders* (1997-present) to *Memento* (2000), and from *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) to *Silent Witness* (1996), there's nothing more commercially profitable, it seems, than depicting a good murder. Tapping into primal and animalistic instincts, the representation of murder draws upon a sense that the human condition is to be fundamentally flawed, and suggests that such universal emotions as greed, jealousy, lust, and pride motivate a significant number of murders.

The Old Testament figure of Cain, supposedly the first murderer (of his brother Abel), was forever cursed to 'be a fugitive and a wanderer of the earth' for all eternity.¹ Cain's story of fraternal betrayal and antagonism is one commonly represented in films such as *Bloodline* (2005), *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007), *We Own the Night* (2007), and the Broadway musical *Blood Brothers* (1983-present). Jason Krawczyk's latest offering, *He Never Died* (2015), however, tells a very different tale. Cain is depicted here as a fallen angel, and as strangely devoid of remorse or a desire to do penance for the murder he has committed. Instead, trapped in the body of an ex-mafia henchman struggling with dependency issues, which later turn out to be quite a nasty addiction to human flesh, the immortal Cain is consumed with a nihilistic indifference to both his past and present deeds. Neither fully embracing the potentiality of his inhuman power nor atoning for his murderous actions committed over two millennia ago, Cain (Henry Rollins) — or Jack, as he refers to

¹ Genesis 4. 10-12.

himself — occupies a liminal space between life and death. Castigated and anathematised, Jack's millennia-long existence on earth is bereft of meaning; life is an endless pattern of boredom and angst, while death is what happens to other people. However, following an unsolicited visit from the product of a misbegotten liaison years before the film's action begins, Jack is forced to confront both his own humanity and morality via his estranged daughter, Andrea (Jordan Todosey).

Compounded by his nihilistic and apathetic view of humanity as nothing more than a meat by-product, Jack, the 'fugitive and wanderer of the earth', we see him literally rise from his nightmarish slumber, revealing his scarred back where wings once grew. While the trope of the fallen angel is one which has claimed a dominant place within the horror genre (see, for example, *The Prophecy* (1995), *Dogma* (1999), *Constantine* (2005), *Gabriel* (2007), and *Legion* (2010)), what is striking about *He Never Died* is its sheer nihilism. Invoking a number of horror tropes such as vampirism and zombiism, without actually developing or investing in generic conventions, it documents a period in the life of a damned individual whose demons both literal and figurative seek to torment and fragment him, as his nightmares reveal a soul in the throes of hellish battle. Though rich in theological references, *He Never Dies* is decidedly lacking in faith. Zombie narratives such as *28 Days Later* (2002), *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), and *Fido* (2006) frequently integrate religious conventions and paraphernalia such as last rites and biblical quotations, and here they proliferate, yet signify nothing in terms of Jack's faith. They are simply the trappings of past lives lived on earth. An ancient bible, a golden chalice, and a trunk full of relics festoon Jack's modest apartment, but they mean nothing to him, as God's absence is more pronounced than his existence. And while this film is laden throughout with biblical references, what is striking is just how Krawczyk's dark comedy seeks to downplay Jack's divine origin, and prefers instead to present a character in the throes of a crippling existential crisis, exacerbated not only by depression and ennui, but by his lack of faith in a God who has long forgotten him.

Having led a series of lives as a soldier, carpenter, and thief, to name but a few, Jack has finally forgone any attempt to integrate or assimilate into society. He now spends his time sleeping, playing bingo, and resisting the urge to tear the limbs from mortal beings and devour their flesh, a desire he keeps at bay with small measures of human blood 'dealt' to him by unscrupulous medical students. Neither zombie nor vampire, the reason for Jack's dependency on human flesh is never quite made explicit, nor are we told what kind of monster he is exactly; rather it is implied that his cravings are more a symptom of his

immortality than a means of sustaining it — an interesting move which seems to emphasise his liminality through lack of categorisation.

Set in the present day, *He Never Died* tells the tale of a man struggling with life, caught in a miserable cycle of addiction, dependency, withdrawal, and crippling boredom. Existence is painful and immortality inevitable. As the audience is teased with momentary insights into who (or rather what) Jack is, for the first twenty minutes of the film, his life resembles that of a Woody Allen character. Mundane details of his daily routine, such as playing bingo by himself in a rundown community hall, or rising unsteadily from his demonic slumber to pay his rent to his eccentric land lady, accentuate the banal, prosaic monotony of his existence.

However, things take a decidedly abrupt turn when his stridently modern teenage daughter Andrea seeks to disrupt this monotony, forcing him to interact with mankind, as he is cast into the uncomfortable role of ‘dad’. Yet behind the traditional estranged-father plot, replete with cringe-worthy exchanges about sex, there lie several other narratives, through which Jack’s true character is revealed as his demons, terrestrial and celestial alike, seek to do battle. Although the admittedly wayward plot is primarily driven by a search to find his daughter after she is kidnapped — which, in turn, is principally motivated by his slightly shoehorned, would-be love-interest Cara (Kate Greenhose) — the larger and more interesting battle is with his own sins, as he is endlessly tormented by visions of what appears to be the devil, and as his addiction to human flesh slowly begins to consume him.

Positioning hell as an eternity on earth, *He Never Died* is nihilism at its finest, punctuated with great moments of dark humour, emanating primarily from Cain’s stony responses to humanity, which he finds infinitely boring. Yet he is not overtly despondent, but rather apathetic, as he indifferently observes the plight of those around him, as if they are nothing but flies caught in a web. This sentiment is underscored in the final sequence of the film, when an exasperated Cara asks ‘what could possibly be more important’ than the life of his daughter. And while it seems that his murderous rampage to find the kidnapped Andrea is at odds with this nihilism, the fact that, once he finds her, he must be begged by Cara to save her life, rather than take that of her captor, signifies a certain ambivalence within Jack towards his daughter.

That said, as a brooding and sombre tale of a man equally at odds with his immediate mortality, in the guise of his daughter, and within his ongoing immortality, the film never gives in to its own asperity, as gallows wit haunts each frame, softening the blow of Cain’s apathy towards mankind. *He Never Dies* is a film which even seems to defy its own internal

narrative and generic conventions, repeatedly thwarting the expectations (regarding brooding heroes, fallen angels, the undead, and reluctant fathers alike) it has built up for the audience. In one exchange with Cara, she asks John what the Civil War was like, and he answers, with more than a hint of chagrin, ‘I don’t know, I was in China ...’.

Sarah Cleary

***The Hallow* (Dir. by Corin Hardy) Ireland/United Kingdom 2015**
Fantastic Films/Occupant Entertainment

The Hallow is Corin Hardy’s first full-length feature. Hardy comes from a background in short films and music videos and, as a first major work, *The Hallow* makes a promising debut. With the economy in recession, the last ancient woodland in Ireland is, the film tells us, under threat. A reluctant specialist is sent in to survey and evaluate the forest for development. He and his family are met with resentment and anger when they move into an isolated farmhouse to complete the work, but things go from bad to worse when they encounter a primordial, legendary evil.

Joseph Mawle plays Adam Hitchens, the troubled environmental scientist who reluctantly finds himself surveying the wood. Bojana Novakovic is his long-suffering wife Clare, who is struggling to support her husband, make habitable their lonely and dilapidated new home, and care for their newborn child. The small cast is rounded out by Michael McElhatton as Colm, an agitated local farmer who repeatedly pressures Hitchens to stay away from the wood, and Michael Smiley as a sceptical Belfast-born *garda* (police officer), trying to keep the peace. Unlike many movies referencing Irish myth, which often rely on leprechaun or banshee figures, such as the *Leprechaun* franchise (1993-2014), *Scream of the Banshee* (dir. by Steven C. Miller, 2011), or *Red Clover* (dir. by Drew Daywalt, 2012), this film was actually made on location in Ireland with the support of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, adding to its authenticity as it presents Ireland, not as a stereotyped commodity, but as a place with an all-too-real heritage.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Hitchens’s inability to recognise anything in the landscape that doesn’t fall within the realm of the objectively scientific has dire consequences, resulting in his falling victim to malign influences, leaving the viewer to judge whether he is responsible for his own actions or not. His increasingly febrile activity exacerbates pre-existing tensions provoked by the small family’s physical and cultural isolation, and quickly condemns them to peril and flight. Hardy and Felipe Marino, the

screenwriters, show great originality in creating the film's imaginative combination of myth and popular science. They evoke folklore surrounding the Irish *Sídhe* or faery folk, while simultaneously employing the infectious *Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis* fungi as an ingenious biological vector for spiritual, mental, and physical change, as dark liquids and tendrils invade and infect, subverting the body and overpowering the mind. The design work by Ivan Manzella and the Nolan Studio therefore utilises varied motifs and visual references from vegetation, moulds, and fungal sources, resulting in what Noël Carroll calls '[c]reatures with combinatory natures', anomalous figures that violate cognitive categorisation, mixing decaying plant and animal, human and fungi.¹ These evocative prosthetic visual cues are reinforced through the use of other agents such as deliquescent slimes and unnaturally invasive roots, which spread infection and damage, wrecking home and technology.

These representations suggest that what the family confronts is something which, given the chance, will relentlessly claim the entire human world for itself, spreading decay and decomposition — a force that's ancient, driven, and much more active than we can fully perceive in our short lives. In spite of the best efforts of the cast and crew, however, there are some issues with the narrative which probably derive from the staging of the plot progression or running-time constraints. At times, characters lose authenticity due to their apparent lack of cognisance regarding their situation. They act as if unaware of information and experience gained with difficulty in earlier scenes, and then make poor decisions and perform actions which make little sense, and serve no purpose other than to create situations of peril to propel the plot. This plotting makes frightened characters into little more than puppets, who counter-intuitively take needless risks, such as fleeing the relative safety of their home into the night. Some sequences are, moreover, edited together to convey urgency and action, yet lack clear intent and structure, making them frenetic set-pieces that could be from almost any film, such as a chase that takes place almost entirely in the dark, a scene where the family are forced to defend their home, and an all-too-predictable sequence in which they inadvertently wreck their only transportation. This tendency toward cliché can, at times, make the story and characters difficult to invest in emotionally.

Specifically, the film is told from Hitchens's point of view, and though Mawles does his very best with it, the protagonist is often distant, a preoccupied environmentalist who doesn't always seem to engage with other characters or comprehend the dangers gathering around him. In contrast, Novakovic's Clare is immediate, vibrant, and proactive, a devoted

¹ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Human Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 43.

mother who goes further than she thinks she can in defence of her family, producing an engaging character who simply doesn't get enough screen time and who might have been a better channel into the narrative for the audience. The Hallow itself, a fungus that preys on humans, threatens the protagonists on two levels; it attacks the core of the family both by abducting their baby and by destabilising their identity as a family unit via infection and theft. It assimilates and takes individuality away, and Hitchens is left fighting himself as much as the Hallow. This dual menace is symbolically potent, yet only the child-focused dynamic really gathers momentum in the narrative, as the remoteness of some of the characters curtails the amount of empathy they can realistically elicit.

Equally disappointing is the fact that the screenplay makes very little use of actual folklore, which means that, as supernatural agents, the Hallow appear to rely on animalistic instinct and reaction rather than on any overt intelligence. This effectively makes them variants of the zombie archetype, and therefore a physical rather than intellectual threat, a decision which limits them significantly, since no great guile or craftiness can really be attributed to them. While they are cunning, they lack deviousness. The script misses a real chance to reflect the malicious and articulate psychologies so often seen in the *Sídhe's* dealings with humans in Irish folklore, and consequently narrative opportunities to demonstrate how such ancient creatures could be overwhelmingly manipulative and breathtakingly evil are missed. The Hallow are frightening, but in an infectious, assimilative way rather than as capricious, malevolent beings. This is a real pity and is compounded by the fact that such menacing characters are at their most powerful when only glimpsed; unfortunately, simply too much becomes visible during the climax, further reducing the potency of any horror they can evoke.

Nonetheless, the cast delivers finely tuned performances, especially Novakovic. The screenplay, by director Hardy and co-writer Marino, is supported by excellent and effective music from James Gosling. The design elements of the production are split between the family's convincingly mundane everyday domesticity and the more fantastical aspects of the narrative, providing a strong visual counterpoint. Creature design by Manzella (*Prometheus*, 2010; *Byzantium*, 2011) shows considerable imagination and resourcefulness, and is skilfully realised in prosthetics by the John Nolan Studio, brought to startling life through the creature choreography of Peter Elliot and performers Conor Craig Stephens, Joss Wyre, Sean Tyrell, and James Meryck.

The Hallow owes much to legendary special-effects artists Ray Harryhausen, Dick Smith, and Stan Winston (indeed, these icons receive a dedication in the film's end credits),

and as a ‘creature feature’ it fares well enough. Nonetheless, while it has some great performances, original ideas, wonderful design, and does have moments of tension, overall the unrefined handling of the story means that *The Hallow* has missed a significant opportunity to breathe new and imaginative life into ancient myths.

Gerard Gibson

***The Witch* (Dir. by Robert Eggers) USA 2016**
Parts and Labour/RT Features/Rooks Nest Entertainment

The Witch is the directorial and script-writing debut of Robert Eggers, previously production designer on *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (dir. by Tommy Wirkola, 2007). Having been told New-England folk tales as a child, Eggers used historic documents, witness statements, and trial transcripts from the era of the Salem witch trials to capture the mood, strangeness, and otherworldliness of folk stories, evoking the horror fiction of Arthur Machen or Algernon Blackwood. The film is a tale of rural horror in the vein of such titles as *The Witches* (dir. by Cyril Frankel, 1966), *Blood on Satan’s Claw* (dir. by Piers Haggard, 1971), or *Black Death* (dir. by Christopher Smith, 2010). Expelled from a Puritan colony in the wilds of New World America in the 1600s, William — a devout and unyielding man — and his family are ostracised from their brethren. Forced to start anew in the wilderness, they have no idea of the evil that waits for them in the deep woods.

Anya Taylor-Joy plays Thomasin, the intelligent and faithful eldest daughter of William (Ralph Ineson) and Katherine (Kate Dickie). Her younger brother Caleb (Harvey Scrimshaw) focuses his affections on her for lack of other company. Their younger twin siblings, Mercy and Jonas (Ellie Grainger and Lucas Dawson, respectively), run wild, playing in the forbidden woods and talking to the farmyard animals, ominously declaring the goat, Black Phillip, their ‘King’. While Taylor-Joy and Ineson are the actors most frequently exposed to the camera’s prolonged scrutiny, the cast as a whole deliver natural, realistic, convincing performances of great skill and subtlety, as the characters struggle with each other, their situation, and forces beyond their control.

Undefined events in the Puritan colony have made the tight religious community reject William and family, and the film suggests that the family’s preoccupation with sin may be too extreme even for their notoriously pious brethren. Their intolerance has made William, Katherine, and their children exiles in the New World, reduced to eking out an existence from a wild and hostile landscape. When things go awry, in a series of events that strongly recall

the Salem witch trials themselves, chaotic accusations and dire tragedies are triggered by a complex combination of theological, psychological, economic, agrarian factors, all of which appear to be catalysed by the interference of the supernatural.

Eggers's screenplay therefore implies that faith, when focused only on sin and wretchedness, quickly becomes just another form of idolatry. With its scarves and bonnets, its binding corsets and heavy floor-length dresses, the film makes visual and symbolic links to other contemporary forms of religious stricture and intolerance. The garments and headcloths bind the wearers, burdening them, insulating them from their own senses and from nature.

In contrast, the Witch herself is, from what we see of her, completely unbound, unfettered by any inhibition. This antagonist is seen more in effect than on screen, and is all the more potent for that. We are presented here with a traditional, unapologetic archetype, most commonly depicted in literature from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The Witch portrayed here is stereotypically parasitic, embodying chimerical, powerful forces that prey on others, particularly the vulnerable members of society like children, using them brutally as resources and utilities to achieve her own occult ends, and thriving on division, hysteria and fear. Symbolically, in works by writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Shirley Jackson to Roald Dahl, the Witch has long metonymised a volatile, dissonant set of political and social forces, representing the control and exploitation of the populace by the select few, privileged with secret knowledge, yet also denoting the demonisation of individuals considered outside the accepted social order. Eggers's narrative introduces wider philosophical and political resonance through choices in visual design and casting, making clear that the titular character is as much a part of the colonial expansion as the family she preys on. The threat to the family isn't an unknown shamanistic threat, native to the land they've colonised or taken. The glimpses of the antagonist reveal someone who might easily have shared passage from Europe with them, subtly gesturing towards the colonists' own problematic history and indiscriminately predatory nature.

While the film evidently strives in many respects for historical accuracy, Eggers has allowed himself some effective artistic licence in depicting the animals that are central to the action. Accounts of the time most commonly associate witches' familiars with cats, dogs, and toads, but *The Witch* moves in other, visually menacing directions, referencing figures derived from the Celtic, Nordic, and Latin traditions, all visually linked by blood.¹ While the

¹ Michael D. Bailey, *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), pp. 48-49.

goat, represented here by the threatening figure of Black Philip, was apparently seldom seen as satanic in American or English folklore in the seventeenth-century, it was a common pan-European symbol of power, sexuality, and occult evil. According to Charles Thompson, it appeared most vigorously in France, though W. C. Hazlitt's *Dictionary of Faiths and Folklore* does mention undated English satanic associations, which arguably could have occurred after ideas had been assimilated from other countries.² In addition to Black Phillip's frightening performance, *The Witch* also features a notably unnerving hare, a bold and visually potent filmic image which may or may not be the Witch herself. In Europe, the hare, from antiquity, had been a sacred animal, facilitating divination, as well as functioning as a symbol of fertility and a creature linking present and future. While it had positive associations in medieval Christianity, by the 1600s the hare had taken on a singularly sinister aspect, and was considered a terrible omen, most notably featuring in the curious 1662 confessions of Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie.³

The hare and goat are therefore potent representations of an animalistic otherworld, agents of the spiritual hinterland to which the family have exiled themselves — a realm where things cannot be taken at face value, where words and ideas can take on a powerful life of their own and can become dangerously real. Much use is also made of the bleak forest landscape, once a rich, verdant setting, but for the family, all vitality has been withdrawn. Instead of enjoying New-World fruitfulness, they must battle through tangled thicket and sodden copse, the portrayal of their trial made all the more effective by editing which articulates a Freudian symbolism linking hair and branch. The long, intertwined hair of the Witch twists and forks like roots and branches; her untrained tresses reference vigorous, uncontrolled growth and the willingness to objectify and exploit others in pursuit of a personal agenda. At the same time, rotting crops and decaying corn make sly visual allusions to Linnda Caporael's theories citing hallucinogenic ergot contaminating food supplies as a possible contributory factor to the Salem hysteria.⁴

Throughout the film, cinematographer Jarin Blaschke makes remarkable use of limited natural light, with scenes lit by flat, overcast daylight or by candlelight, adding to the sense that we are watching something genuine unfolding on screen. Craig Lathrop's highly realistic production design provides a believable setting, and is complimented by Linda Muir's authentic-looking costumes, with the hand-sewn heavy corseted dresses, bonnets,

² C. J. S. Thompson, *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic* (London: Studio Editions, 1995), pp. 140-41; and W. C. Hazlitt, *Dictionary of Faiths and Folklore* (London: Bracken Books, 1995), p. 278.

³ Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), p. 43.

⁴ Linnda R. Caporael, 'Ergotism: The Satan Loose in Salem', *Science*, 192:4234 (April 1976), 21-26.

jackets, and hose all visually contributing to the psychological accretion binding the protagonists to their fate, as mentioned above. Editing by Louise Ford is precise, skilful, and transparent, heightening the tension, and helping to create the supernaturally permeable world the family have entered, each cut making us wish we'd seen both more and less. Mark Korven's music is haunting and melodic, full of tension and dread, with period instruments giving it an effective voice, both beautiful and terrible. Together, these elements present a powerful, convincing evocation of time and place, with dialogue, costumes, lighting, and acting persuasively adding to the sense of reality and dread.

Overall, *The Witch* is an unconventional, original, conceptual horror, focusing more on spiritual and psychological chills than on violence and gore. While blood and splatter are sparse (though occasionally very effectively employed), this is more than made up for by the pervasive fear, and high levels of tension and shock conveyed in the film. The ideas and powerful images will stay with the viewer, some of which, though simple, are highly original, even unique, a quality which is rare indeed. Eggers's film raises central questions about the fear of the Witch, the history of which long predates Christianity, and implies that its most likely sources were psychological and anthropological rather than religious, born from societal unease and anxiety.⁵ As always, the Witch raises her head in times of trial, and, with the current economic situation and terrorism casting a long shadow, this film has great timing and potency.

Gerard Gibson

⁵ Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts* (Malden: Polity, 2004), p. 48.

***Crimson Peak* (Dir: Guillermo del Toro) Canada 2015**
Legendary Pictures

Crimson Peak was in danger of confounding audiences before it even reached cinema screens. Alarmed by reports that potential viewers were expecting a horror film (a concern not eased by the fact that early trailers marketed it as a haunted-house movie), director and co-writer Guillermo Del Toro felt it necessary to manage expectations, tweeting in October 2015, '[o]ne last time before release. *Crimson Peak*: Not a horror film. A Gothic Romance. Creepy, tense, but full of emotion ...' He was right to be concerned. *Crimson Peak* did not resonate with the public at large. Indeed, as *Variety* reports, it 'fell flat' at the box office, 'proving too niche for mainstream crowds', and disappointing viewers 'looking for a traditional horror film'.¹ As *Crimson Peak*'s heroine, aspiring author Edith Cushing (Mia Wasikowska) notes of one of her own creative efforts, '[i]t's more a love story with a ghost in it. The ghost is just a metaphor.' Yet at the same time, expectations in this regard are also subverted by the fact that the most intriguing romantic relationship in the film is that between Edith's mysterious new husband and his *sister*, rather than him and his new bride. *Crimson Peak* is, therefore, actually the tale of two very different love stories, both laden with gothic overtones.

Crimson Peak positions itself firmly within a familiar gothic tradition from the outset, and proudly displays its allusions to the classical gothic's greatest literary and cinematic hits, paying visual, narrative, and thematic homage to the likes of the Bluebeard story, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and to films such as Peter Medak's *The Changeling* (1980) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946), to name just the most obvious influences. The basic premise is also a familiar one. Edith is an earnest and imaginative American heiress, the only child of widower Carter Cushing (Jim Beavers) a no-nonsense construction magnate based in Buffalo, New York. As noted above, Edith, whose first name evokes American turn-of-the-century novelist and ghost-story writer Edith Wharton (her last name is presumably an allusion to Hammer-Horror stalwart Peter Cushing), has serious ambitions to be a writer. However, her life is upended by the arrival of English Baronet Sir Thomas Sharp (Tom Hiddleston) who initially tries (but fails) to convince Carter to invest in

¹ Brent Lang, 'Box Office: *Goosebumps* Tops *The Martian*, *Crimson Peak* Falls Flat', *Variety*, 18 October 2015 <<http://variety.com/2015/film/box-office/box-office-goosebumps-the-martian-crimson-peak-1201620792/>> [accessed 7 October 2016].

the mining machine he believes will resurrect his family fortune, and then turns his attentions to wooing Edith. Despite her initial reluctance to be swayed by Sir Thomas's considerable charms, and the fact that her father distrusts the aristocrat so much that he hires a private detective to dig up incriminating documents (thereby causing a romantic impasse conveniently resolved when Carter's head is gruesomely smashed in by an Giallo-style black-gloved assailant), Edith quickly finds herself wedded to a man she loves but barely knows.

Edith leaves American modernity behind for her new husband's ancestral home in Cumberland, officially known as Allardyce Hall (the name is yet another genre reference, this time to the malign summer home featured in Robert Marasco's 1973 novel *Burnt Offerings*), but unofficially dubbed 'Crimson Peak' due to the rich red clay that the house is, literally and metaphorically, built upon. The hall is a once-splendid ruin with a massive hole in the roof. There are no servants save for a rickety old retainer, and thanks to subsidence and lack of money for the estate's upkeep, it is sinking into the ground. There's also another (very literal) red flag for the new bride: when it snows, the land around Crimson Peak appears to *bleed*.

As has briefly been noted elsewhere, the narrative structure of *Crimson Peak* closely resembles Joanna Russ's checklist of the plot points found in the then-popular 'Modern Gothic' romance paperbacks, outlined in her classic 1973 essay, 'Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband'.² We have here, for example, a 'large, lonely, brooding house' (generally, as here, with a name, like Thornfield or Manderley) in an isolated location; a young, orphaned, and inexperienced heroine; and of course, a brooding, older 'Super-male' to whom she is 'vehemently attracted' and, usually, 'just as vehemently repelled' (Edith's first, accurate, impression of Sir Thomas is that he is 'a parasite with a title').³ Then there is also the inevitable presence of what Russ describes as the '*buried ominous secret*' (italics in original), which in this instance is also intimately connected to the Super-male's relationship to another staple character type, the '*The Other Woman*', the heroine's double and her opposite, who is often, amongst other things, beautiful, worldly, glamorous, and openly sexual, as well as 'immoral, promiscuous, criminal or even insane'.⁴

The 'other woman' here is Sir Thomas's older sister Lucille, played with scenery-gnawing relish by Jessica Chastain. Lucille is essentially a mash-up of Mrs Danvers, the first Mrs de Winter (both from du Maurier's novel), and Poe's Madeline Usher, simultaneously

² See Maria J. Pervez Cuevo, 'The Return of Gothic Romance', 26 March 2016 <<https://mjpcuervo.com/2016/03/26/the-return-of-gothic-romance/>> [accessed 6 October 2016]; and Joanna Russ, 'Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic', in *To Write Like A Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 94-120.

³ Russ, p. 96.

⁴ Ibid.

family member and housekeeper, sister and lover, accomplice, and protector. Eased into Buffalo high society by Sir Thomas's good looks and obvious social graces, the siblings seem charismatic but intriguingly austere when attending a ball or other evening function, but del Toro, revealingly, presents them as looking downright vampiric in natural daylight. This is particularly evident when Sir Thomas and Lucille meet with Edith in a park shortly after their first encounter. Sir Thomas wears dark glasses, while, in one of the film's most striking visual conceits, his unnerving sister is explicitly framed — by both the vividly contrasting dresses worn by the two women and some typically on-the-nose dialogue — as the elegant but sinister 'black moth' destined to prey upon Edith's beautiful but possibly doomed 'butterfly'. Indeed, the Sharp siblings *are* vampires of a sort — 'Honeymoon Killer'-style financial leeches who travel the world targeting vulnerable but wealthy young women.

More generally, the film foregrounds from the outset a preoccupation with ideas related to the importance of *seeing* and *not seeing*. Edith wears glasses, but only some of the time, and although she prides herself on 'keeping her eyes open' — a quality which enables her to see ghosts — she is initially blind, having been so thoroughly hoodwinked by her new family. The predictably heroic role played by Edith's former love interest (and eventual would-be rescuer) Dr Alan McMichael (Charlie Hunnam — the weak link in an otherwise excellent cast), is not-so-subtly foreshadowed by the fact that he is both an ophthalmologist *and* a fan of the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Equally tellingly, early on, Sir Thomas ruefully admits to Edith that that 'I've always closed my eyes to things that make me uncomfortable. It makes everything easier.' It's a statement that ultimately tells us much about how he came to be such a self-deluding, murderous, and yet tragic figure. At this point, he truly *cannot* see how monstrous the behaviour he and his sister engage in actually is. By way of contrast, Edith's ability to 'see' beyond the everyday means that she can actively engage with the ghosts who aid her from beyond the grave. It is for this reason that she survives her horrific ordeal at Crimson Peak, despite sustaining all manner of dire physical and emotional damage. Edith can benefit from the warnings provided by the ghosts of the past — both her late mother and the doomed brides who preceded her across the crumbling threshold of Crimson Peak. It is clear, however, that Sir Thomas and Lucille will forever be haunted by their familial and ancestral history, trapped in the incestuous relationship they established in response to the childhood abuse they sustained at the hands of their brutal father and cold-hearted mother. Although Sir Thomas can briefly envision (albeit in characteristically unrealistic and typically self-serving terms) a life beyond Crimson Peak for all three of them, fatally for him, the same is not true of his obsessive sister.

Interestingly, all of Sir Thomas and Lucille's previous victims were associated with cities in Europe. Their mistake this time, it would seem, is to select for liquidation a young American who embodies the qualities of resourcefulness and reinvention associated with her home country. In addition, as a writer, Edith has the ability to control her own story. It is entirely appropriate then that, when she and Lucille finally engage in a brutal death match, Edith first fights back by stabbing her more-powerful assailant with a gold pen gifted to her by Carter, and later finishes the job off with a shovel, a symbol of the hard graft that made her lowborn father a wealthy man. Although Lucille lashes out at her sister-in-law with a bread knife (her choice of weapon arguably providing further evidence of her liminal status as both a scion *and* a servant of the house), she never really has a chance against her pure-hearted, *nouveau riche* rival: New-World purity and grit triumphs over Old-World insanity and moral corruption.

Ultimately, *Crimson Peak* is simultaneously enthralling and maddening. The film is often in danger of becoming more of a master class in outstanding set-design, visual composition, and costuming than a truly engaging emotional and intellectual experience. What just about saves del Toro from falling into the trap that has long since consumed Tim Burton — whose films for years have been empty, cynical exercises in stylistic excess and cartoonish characterisation — is the narrative's thematic consistency, and the winning performances of the central cast. Wasikowska — an actor born to play these kinds of roles — has an air of unforced intelligence and sensitivity that means she can carry off the part of the candelabra-carrying gothic heroine with genuine aplomb (having also played both Jane Eyre and Alice in Wonderland, she's certainly served her time as an onscreen exemplar of Victorian femininity). Hiddleston is perfect as the dangerously malleable and ultimately tragic anti-hero. And although hers is the most obviously over-the-top performance, Chastain's Lucille, with her hidden history of matricide, institutionalisation, and incest, is, by my reckoning at least, the most fascinating character in the entire film.

By letting us know in the closing moments that Edith is the author of the book entitled 'Crimson Peak', which we saw opened at the very beginning of the film (thereby ultimately presenting the events of the rest of the film as a dramatisation of her version of the story), del Toro neatly establishes that Edith has at last gained the real-life experience necessary to write an authentic tale of love and obsession. As well as emphasising the film's obvious desire to emulate classic works of gothic literature and film, this meta framing device therefore reinforces for us the fact that *Crimson Peak* is, in more ways than one, intended to be Edith's tale: a harrowing but empowering *Bildungsroman* from which the imperilled gothic heroine

has emerged a stronger and wiser woman. Nevertheless, for all of the emphasis placed on Edith's control of her own story in this sequence, it is still del Toro's final, eerily composed shot of the now-ghostly Lucille, left behind in the silent, rotting halls of her ancestral home, that, for me at least, lingered longest: after all, for her, as she puts it herself, 'the horror ... the horror was for love'.

Bernice M. Murphy

Krampus (Dir. Michael Dougherty) USA 2015
Universal Pictures

Christmas comes but once a year, which in the world of cinema signals an onslaught of family-friendly schmaltz, containing a heavy helping of good-natured hijinks and saccharine sentimentality, most likely with Tim Allen leading the charge in a scheme to save, or indeed, avoid the festive season (as in *The Santa Clause* trilogy (1994-2006), and *Christmas with the Kranks* (2004)). Never missing an opportunity to illuminate the dark side of the most wonderful time of the year, however, the horror genre has served up its own cornucopia of holiday-centred offerings; from early slasher *Black Christmas* (1974) and the extreme childhood trauma of the *Silent Night, Deadly Night* franchise (1984-1991), to killer snowmen in the *Jack Frost* series (1997, 2000), and more recently the offbeat *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* (2010). With plenty of precedents, then, it comes as no surprise that a big-budget version of a traditional Noël nightmare has at last found its way into theatres.

Following a mammoth year at the box office, with domestic returns in excess of \$2.4 billion — thanks to blockbusters *Jurassic World*, *Furious 7* and *Minions* — Universal Pictures rounded off 2015 with *Krampus*, a horror-comedy from Michael Dougherty, who has most notably directed the now cult-favourite Halloween anthology *Trick 'r Treat* (2007). Based on a German folk tale, the 'Krampus' is the Christmas demon whose mission it is to snatch naughty children rather than spoil them, a premise which has as of late inspired several similarly themed film adaptations. Various incarnations range from the ecclesiastical and Eurocentric *Sint* (2010), to low-budget affairs *Krampus: The Christmas Devil* (2013) and *Krampus: The Reckoning* (2015). Indeed, for such an ostensibly niche sub-genre, Dougherty's film also finds itself emerging alongside *A Christmas Horror Story* (2015), starring William Shatner. This picture takes the form of an omnibus of chilling tales, one of which cleverly depicts a department store Santa, who, while suffering a psychotic breakdown, becomes involved in an imaginary battle with the 'vile enemy of Christmas'.

Dougherty's *Krampus* tells the story of the Engel family, comprised of father Tom (Adam Scott), and mother Sarah (played by the highly talented Toni Collette), who, along with their two kids, prepare to endure the yuletide season with their insufferable extended relations; these include the couple's uncouth, gun-loving brother-in-law Howard (David Koechner), and abrasive, inebriated aunt, Dorothy, played by *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2015) regular Conchata Ferrell. Tensions simmer between the mismatched clans as they attempt to uphold the delicate equilibrium of social etiquette, which contributes moments of only serviceable humour, for example when portly Howie Jr (Maverick Flack) obnoxiously belches at the dinner table, much to the delight of his father. When the Engels' young son Max (Emjay Anthony) loses hope in Christmas, he tears up his letter to Santa Claus, at which point a storm rolls in, enveloping the town just days before 25 December, leaving the group housebound.

It is this whiteout which heralds the arrival of the film's titular baddie, accompanied by his posse of sinister snowmen and wicked elves, who have come to assist their master in collecting his dues. This introduction is weak, as *Krampus* (Luke Hawker) lands to little fanfare and screen-time, remaining markedly absent until the story approaches its resolution. Following his touchdown, the film proceeds by exploiting typical narrative mechanics, such as when daughter Beth (Stefania LaVie Owen) goes missing in the midst of a power outage. The atmosphere of intimidating encroachment and surveillance taps into the ever-present cultural anxiety regarding domestic intrusion, dramatised in the home-invasion genre, which has undergone a resurgence in the last decade with *The Strangers* (2008), *You're Next* (2013), and *The Purge* franchise (2013, 2014, and 2016). This engagement with familiar motifs only carries the film so far, however, and, as the family find themselves under siege, *Krampus* exposes one of its glaring flaws: its pacing. In particular, the sequences where the household is under attack feel protracted and repetitive. Confrontations, such as Tom and Sarah's battle against a wicked angel and a hungry jack-in-the-box in the attic, overstay their welcome just enough to force the plot to lurch forward, ultimately producing a hurried third act.

Sadly, by the time *Krampus* himself eventually materialises, he has been relegated to a supporting role in his own feature. Rather than capitalising on the chance to explore the fairy-tale mythos and give the festive devil any dialogue — perhaps in the vein of a cunning, Rumpelstiltskin-type rogue — *Krampus* is simply reduced to a lumbering, non-verbal, growling beast. This, alas, blunts his effectiveness, and forestalls the possibility of endowing his character with any complexity. The antagonist's persona is not the only aspect of his identity to be diminished; so too is his menacing physical presence, which is diluted though

its under-representation. In fact, the jarring editing of shots featuring the Christmas fiend and his underlings is reminiscent of the treatment of the king of the monsters in Gareth Edwards's *Godzilla* (2014), in which, on numerous occasions, the film's focus suddenly cuts away from the behemoth's unveiling one too many times. Such a strategy leaves the viewer frustrated, a dynamic which also grates during violent scenes, generating as it does indecipherable skirmishes. While concealing a monster's final reveal can efficiently engender suspense (successfully achieved by Ridley Scott's 1979 masterpiece, *Alien*), *Krampus* frequently crosses the fine line between teasing the threat enticingly and marginalising it entirely, thus alienating the spectator.

Visually, *Krampus* displays nostalgic throwbacks to the practical effects of the 1980s, a flourish that served Dougherty exceptionally well in *Trick 'r Treat*, and this approach to character realisation is utilised for the 'shadow of St Nicholas', as he is also dubbed. This tangible imagining of Krampus largely relies upon a single open-mouthed facial expression, with the creature's design as a cloven-hoofed, ram-horned, towering prowler, evoking pseudo-satanic imagery. The impish minions, in contrast, are rendered using a hybrid of both CGI — as in the case of the mischievous gingerbread-men — and elaborate puppets, the latter tactic acting as a playful nod to fellow madcap Christmas caper *Gremlins* (1984, 1990). Although digitally engineered models may permit extensive artistic possibilities in contemporary film-making, one wonders if electing to eschew such techniques altogether would have maintained greater tonal consistency and enhanced the film's potential to charm an audience.

Formally, *Krampus*' second act incorporates a flashback segment, which mimics the style of stop-motion animation, providing a refreshing diversion from the film's hoary visual register. Max's German-speaking grandmother, Omi (Krista Stadler), recounts an experience from her youth when she accidentally summoned Krampus, who abducts her parents, leaving her behind to warn others against calling such a fate down upon themselves. The decision to deliver exposition in this manner is a rewarding one, as it speaks to the enchanted and magical quality associated with Christmas, but is also richly communicative despite its seeming simplicity. The climate of poverty surrounding young Omi is portrayed in her acquisition of a loaf of bread from the back of an emergency supply van, only to have it stolen from her by the desperate greed of the townspeople. The coding of the vehicle as a ration truck fortifies a link with wartime conditions, suggesting that Krampus can be read as an analogy for fascist authority and leadership, 'disappearing' those on his list who have been 'Othered' for their beliefs — or lack thereof. Thematically, the Engel family's predicament,

as they are forced to hide from this marauding abductor, reinforces a subtext of Nazi persecution and ethnic cleansing. The interpretation of the villain's *modus operandi* in this fashion is positively provocative in politicising an ideologically oppressive ghost from the past; yet the motif is developed almost no further beyond this point, and the film abandons this curious narrative surplus which breeds more questions than answers.

To conclude, Michael Dougherty's *Krampus* is a passable horror-comedy, which, despite being somewhat editorially imbalanced, represents far more in the way of missed opportunities in terms of characterisation and cinematography than outright failings. Nonetheless, I would refer prospective viewers to *Trick 'r Treat* as a vastly more entertaining movie by the same director. That said, one element for which *Krampus* does deserve special praise is its unnerving dénouement. It is here, in the closing minutes of the film, that Max attempts to sacrifice himself, in order to procure the safe return of his family, declaring, 'I just wanted Christmas to be like it used to be'. Unfortunately, the young boy soon learns a harsh lesson — *caveat emptor* — for he is granted his wish in the shape of a cruel punishment, as he and his loved ones find themselves imprisoned inside a snow globe, destined to spend eternity together in an endless holiday gathering. The feeling of déjà vu is palpable, and a sense of uncomfortable familiarity descends upon each individual as they gaze uneasily into each other's eyes. Here, the symbolism of incarceration within an artefact rife with connotations of empty and frivolous consumerism neatly resonates with and bookends the hysterical shopping rush exhibited during the film's opening credits.

While *Krampus*' employment of this trinket as a plot device may not elevate the film to the lofty ranks of cinematic history, it still offers an unsettling twist in a genre known for embracing the security of formulaic story-telling. *Frohe Weihnachten!*

Gavin Wilkinson

TELEVISION AND PODCAST REVIEWS

(Please note that reviews may contain spoilers)

Lore: Season 1 (www.lorepodcast.com, 2015-present)

Since it began broadcasting in early 2015, *Lore*, which is still in its first season, has rapidly become a successful podcast, based on gripping and eerie tales of folklore. In each episode, writer and producer Aaron Mahnke recounts myths and urban legends, in addition to tragic true stories. Episodes come out every other Monday and are available wherever podcasts are released. Usually, each episode is an intermingling of first-hand accounts of suspicious and mysterious events with hard facts that have been researched by Mahnke. The result is a constant questioning of what is and is not real, leaving the listener with a creeping sense that poltergeists and changelings might very well exist.

Each episode of *Lore* begins with a different piece of instrumental music that runs throughout the majority of that particular episode. This invariably eerie yet beautiful music sets the mood for the podcast from the outset. This, in addition to Aaron Mahnke's calm and comforting voice, creates the perfect setting for a scary story. This is essentially what the podcast is — a scary story — but it is also so much more than this, as elements of history, mystery, and horror flow through each episode.

The structure of the podcasts, for the most part, is consistent. Each week, we begin with a preliminary story, taken either from recent history or from folklore, which introduces the theme of the episode. These stories range from mystical tales of spirits and strange creatures, to horrific true stories about unsolved murders and the evils of mankind. This use of introductory narrative is highly effective in setting the scene and enticing the listener to excitedly await the intriguing — and often terrifying — details to come. The varying topics make for a diverse and pleasantly sinister experience, ensuring that the show's structure never feels repetitive.

Considering the title of the podcast, it is no surprise that folklore is the main focus. From internationally recognised tales to obscure local myths, Mahnke has researched and produced episodes on disturbing and engaging lore. Some of these tales are inspired by true events that have since been shaped into fantasy. Often the events that have happened were terrible murders or historical events solidified by evidence, while others are pure fantasy

passed down through generations. In Episode 19, which may be one of the most frightening, Mahnke describes the brutal actions of a poltergeist in Edinburgh, a spectre which is said to terrorise the living to this day. A staggering number of witnesses have provided first-hand accounts in which they report the various injuries inflicted by the ghost: it has, allegedly, left bite marks, scratches, and burns on its victims. While the arousal of fear is the podcast's central aim, the tales of older folklore are, by turns, entertaining, creepy, and sometimes even whimsical. Mahnke revisits the classic vampire, witches, and poltergeists but keeps the stories fresh by incorporating historical accounts that claim to provide proof of human contact with these creatures.

In Episode 24, Mahnke begins the podcast with the folktale on the Pied Piper of Hamelin. However, after the well-known tale has been explained, the story takes a dark turn. As the Pied Piper is scorned by the people of Hamelin, the man lures the town's children away to never return. The story is familiar; however, *Lore* assures us, this cautionary tale, that is used to warn against trusting strangers, is really inspired by even more disturbing true events that happened in Germany around the late thirteenth century. As the German Empire at this time needed people to populate new lands, 'locators' would visit towns looking for prospective inhabitants. Townspeople would often sell their children to these locators in order to solve their financial problems. The people of Hamelin were quick to repackage this grim reality as fantasy, Mahnke tells us, and soon the story of the Pied Piper was passed down to cover their actions.

Many of the episodes that leave a lasting impression are the stories that are entirely true. Episode 11, the story of an Irish family in the late nineteenth century, is a disturbing one and shows how dangerous folklore can be when combined with fear and irrationality. Mahnke opens the episode with a short description of Irish fairy culture. Some believed that if a child was born disfigured, this meant that a fairy had taken the child and replaced it with a sort of supernatural place holder, who wasn't fully human. Additionally, if someone became sick and never fully recovered, their loved ones would often believe that the same thing had occurred. The belief can therefore be seen as a kind of coping mechanism, used to explain unwelcome events. However, the opposite could also happen; the episode continues with the story of a man who goes mad, and eventually kills his own wife for the fear that she had been replaced by the fairies.

A similar effect is produced by Episode 27, which centres on the Gruber family and the Hinterkaifeck murders, a series of infamous and terrifying unsolved murders in modern history, filtered here through Mahnke's narrative talents, which only enhance the sense of

horror. It is episodes like these that leave the reader especially disturbed, to a far greater extent than is the case with those that are more clearly mythological in origin. The show suggests, again and again, that while ‘home is where the heart is’, the place where, traditionally, we feel most safe, we are not, in fact, always safe there at all. This destabilising idea remains with the listener long after the episode in question has ended.

While these are the most effective episodes, *Lore* has something for everyone; it is satisfyingly frightening while also appealing to history buffs and life-long learners, as it touches on historical events and mysterious tales from the past (whether these are true or untrue is left to the listeners to decide). The relaxing tone and eerie stories are a welcome addition to any horror fan’s arsenal of entertainment, while also presenting thoughtful analyses of the societal functions of folklore and myth.

Anne Carey

Flowers (Channel 4, 2016)

The opening scene of *Flowers* details a failed suicide attempt by Maurice Flowers (Julian Barratt), the father of the titular family. After a gloomy montage in which Maurice sets up a rope to hang himself from a tree branch, the branch buckles under his weight, sending him sprawling to the ground, where his frustrated expletives diffuse the tension of the situation. In other words, Channel 4’s six-part drama *Flowers* begins exactly as it means to go on: as the purest form of gallows humour possible. Indeed, *Flowers* demonstrates wonderfully how humour and depression are inexorably linked, with one being a response to the other rather than its opposite. It’s difficult to watch, and often deeply affecting, but more than worth viewer investment, not least because of the cathartic release that the show delivers.

Flowers has a classic gothic feel, largely due to the Flowers’ huge family house with its low-hanging ceilings and oddly angled rooms, located in a corner of the English countryside called Heathen’s Wood. The show’s palette of earthen reds, browns, and greens reflects their country living. The family is also very much influenced by English mythology, with the stories and local myths that the family tell about goblins and pagans intersecting with their own. Maurice is an author of children’s books that centre on a goblin-like family called the Grubbs, written in a style reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s poem ‘The Jabberwocky’ from *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Maurice’s voiceover, in which he reads his own work aloud as he writes and rewrites the stories of the Grubbs, is one of the show’s running

motifs, and one which adds to the gothic atmosphere. His gloomy poetry frequently addresses the anguish and despair of his own life. One memorable example runs,

As Nana Grubb gasped her terminal breath,
Mr Grubb paled at the cause of her death.
He gathered her bones and felt his heart wilt,
Too weak to endure the sheer weight of his guilt.

Such offerings certainly make the audience wonder exactly how he became a children's author in the first place. Maurice's daughter Amy (Sophia Di Martino) similarly uses her own creativity to deal with her frustrations by exploring the story of a fabled local pagan, who was burned as a witch for the crime of falling in love with a disabled boy. Her final act of defiance was to run away from her village by escaping over a nearby bridge to spend a night with her beloved. This bridge features heavily in Amy's own experience of coming to terms with her sexuality. The eerie atmosphere established by these various plot devices is heightened by both the soundtrack of violins and piano composed by Arthur Sharpe, and by the unfashionable tweed that the family wear, a detail which suggests that the Flowers may be somewhat out of step with their contemporary surroundings. Indeed, the family seems to exist in a pastoral wilderness and only make contact with the rest of the world when required. Driving and even phone calls are oddities in their lives, reserved for emergencies (of which there are several throughout the six episodes). This sense of isolation effectively dislocates the family in both space and time, allowing the viewers to appreciate the detached nature of the Flowers family, even as they desperately try to cling on.

More generally, dealing as it does with modern issues in post-crash England, *Flowers* is also an updating of the gothic family drama. Although revolving around broadly applicable themes relating to creativity and expression, family ties and resentments, *Flowers* explores these issues specifically in regard to twentieth-century life. For instance, there is an oppressive (though never outwardly acknowledged) sense that artistic expression is continually being threatened by the demands of modern consumerism. Maurice's contract with his publishing company, Carols (perhaps so named in a nod to Lewis Carroll, much in the same way the Grubbs are reminiscent of Carroll's work), is in jeopardy, and the pressure to provide for his family in such difficult times exacerbates Maurice's depression. Adding to the financial worries are his grown-up twins, Donald (Daniel Rigby) and Amy, who are in their mid-twenties and still live at home. In post-crash Britain, their creative aspirations (to be an inventor and a musician respectively) may never be realised.

Maurice's profession and person disaffection has also bled over into his marriage. His wife, musician Deborah (Olivia Coleman), is desperate to reconnect with him, as he has chosen to sleep out in his studio rather than with her. Deborah's isolation seems to be exacerbated by her lack of contact with the outside; in a world increasingly reliant on electronic communication, she counts the postman among her closest friends. Although British TV is, arguably, somewhat over-saturated by Coleman at the moment, it is clear from her turn here that she more than deserves all the accolades she gets for her portrayal of a desperately unhappy woman, determined to maintain a brave face for her family. Their children, too, find it difficult to deal with their isolation. Amy struggles with her sexuality, and particularly with the prospect of coming out to her family, when she falls in love with her neighbour Abigail (Georgina Campbell). Finally, much of Donald's frustration at his inability to find what he terms a 'strong wife', and his constant sense of competition with his sister, stems from his lack of direction as a young man without any prospects. *Flowers* therefore functions as a post-recession family gothic in which the typical trials and tribulations of gothic family life are reflected in a modern context.

Indeed, if *Flowers* is to be admired solely for one achievement, it is how it addresses the issue of the inability to speak openly about one's fears — fears of inadequacy, loneliness, or depression— and the negative effects this can have. This inability manifests itself differently in each character, with Deborah desperately trying to establish a sexual relationship with other men against her better judgement, simply to get Maurice's attention; Maurice distancing himself from his family to shield them from the truth regarding his suicidal tendencies; Donald framing his life as a competition with his sister in order to ignore his own lack of ambition; and Amy rejecting her mother out of fear that she will judge or condemn her sexuality. *Flowers* explores how detrimental the unsaid can become and how difficult it is to weather one's personal storm alone.

All this drama is supported effectively by an excellent ensemble cast, comprising the Flowers family, their friends, and relatives. Julian Barratt, whose occasional appearance in British Indie productions (such as *Nathan Barley* (2005) and *The Mighty Boosh* (2004-2007)) is always a joy, shows once again that he is more than capable of being the emotional core of a drama whilst simultaneously acknowledging its absurdities. When a fan of his book series observes '[y]ou're taller than I imagined', Maurice's response is '[y]es, I am'. It's the kind of line that only Barratt could deliver with the mixture of nonchalance and confusion that we see here. Meanwhile, Angus Wright plays a neighbour who works as a plastic surgeon, and clearly relishes some of his more outrageous lines, such as when he announces that '[g]rief is

a very sexual emotion'. The most amusing character is arguably Shun (Will Sharpe), who is also the series' writer and director. Shun is Maurice's resident book illustrator and confidant, whose main interest is gay erotic manga: his favourite manga character is Mr Gay, a superhero whose one weakness is his constant erection. While he delivers some of the most entertaining moments in the show, it seems Sharpe himself recognised that his character is somewhat out of place within the tone of this family drama, as Shun conveniently bows out before the emotional climax of the show. However, even he has his moment of pathos, coming to terms with his own homesickness for his family in Japan.

Flowers is also, ultimately, surprisingly uplifting, following the characters as it does from the nadir of their despair through to the possibility of better days. Family, the series dares to hint, could in fact pave the way for healing and greater understanding. A problem shared might just be a problem halved, as the sixth episode leaves the characters on the edge of a tentative reunion, each character realising that they have been strengthened by trusting in others. Although nothing is certain, they are starting to connect once again, and the world is starting to look a little bit more manageable. It's refreshing to see an original series prepared to address issues of mental health and everyday struggles in such an engaging and heartfelt way, using both humour and drama to explore how they can affect us. Chances are *Flowers* will resonate with its audience for a long time to come.

Sarah Cullen

Stranger Things, Season 1 (Netflix, 2016-present)

On 15 July 2016, Netflix released all eight episodes of *Stranger Things*, the latest in the online-streaming site's in-house productions. Written and directed by the Duffer Brothers, Matt and Ross, touted as something of a comeback for Winona Ryder, and a nostalgia-fest for people of a certain vintage, the series would establish a cult following with remarkable speed, as the hashtag #StrangerThings trended on Twitter for most of the weekend following its release. Although originally teased by Netflix as being about the disappearance of a young boy, Will Byers, from the small town of Hawkins, Indiana, the eight episodes expand to encompass childhood friendships, teen angst and peer pressure, stolen children, shady scientific experiments, government conspiracies, alternate universes (known here as the 'Upside Down'), scary monsters, frightening forests, and one girl's real, undying love for Eggos.

The opening eight minutes of the first episode are a contender for the most striking of any television series this year, beginning with the attack on a scientist by an unseen creature at a US Department of Energy lab in Hawkins. At the same time, across town, four friends, Dustin, Mike, Will, and Lucas — the youngest, and ultimately most central, group of characters in the show — conclude a ten-hour game of *Dungeons & Dragons*. The action follows Will on his way home and details his tense encounter with the monster from the lab, which snatches him away to the Upside Down and goes on to terrorise the small town. Playing directly to the power of the viewer's imagination, there is no direct sighting of what stalks Will, with the camera instead focusing on his fear as he attempts to run, and then hide. Indeed, the monster is only gradually revealed as the series progresses. Beginning with brief glimpses in the shadows, or blurry images caught on characters' cameras, each episode provides a more substantial visual picture of the monster, leading to the last episode's dramatic final encounter in a brightly lit classroom.

There are three distinct groupings within the narrative — the adults, the teenagers, and the kids. Winona Ryder makes a welcome return to a screen of any description, playing the permanently frazzled Joyce, mother of the missing Will, to perfection. The cast of adult characters also includes Matthew Modine as Dr Brenner. Although he has little in the way of dialogue or screen-time, Modine convincingly conveys Brenner's sinister nature as the scientist in charge of operations at the lab where El, a mysterious girl with paranormal abilities, is held and experimented on, and where the monster is unleashed after the accident that begins the whole series. David Harbour stands out as Jim Hopper, the world-weary alcoholic sheriff with a heart of gold and a troubled past. The notable teenage characters include Charlie Heaton as Will's older brother Jonathan, and Natalia Dyer as Nancy, Mike's older sister, who team up as unlikely monster hunters after Nancy's best friend, Barb (who became an unexpected fan favourite), is also taken by the creature.

But it is the younger actors who really shine in this cast. The four main child characters — Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin), and El (Millie Bobby Brown) — are remarkable for the strength of their performances, with Brown in particular earning well-deserved critical praise for her ability to create such a compelling character without the assistance of much dialogue. It is gradually revealed that El, known as Eleven at the lab, was taken from her mother when she was a baby and raised as a lab-rat by Dr Brenner. Possessed of extraordinary psychic powers and the ability to slip into the Upside Down, she has had no contact with other children, no socialisation beyond her interactions with those in the lab, and calls Dr Brenner 'Papa'. Her vocabulary is limited and

her knowledge of the outside world is non-existent, something that would be a challenge for the most experienced of actors to play and yet Brown manages it with ease.

The three actors playing the boys who shelter her when she escapes are similarly noteworthy in their performances. These kids are proud geeks, revelling in their board games and science experiments, using all their game-playing skills to try and outwit their own real-life Demogorgon. The use of the name 'Demogorgon' is an interesting device here, given that it is also the name of one the best (or worst) demons in *Dungeons & Dragons*. Naming the monster, and associating it with the board-game they have forged their friendship over, enables the kids to process their fear of the monster without compromising their desire to outwit and defeat it. It is a dehumanising tactic — if it is possible to dehumanise a monster from another dimension. There is real heart at the core of the kids' narrative as they try to find their missing friend, keep El hidden while also trying to use her powers to their advantage, and deal with the emotional rollercoaster of losing Will but gaining El, and then having essentially to swap them both again at the end.

Beyond this, part of the charm of *Stranger Things* is the very blatant homage to all things 1980s in which it indulges, although this can also be a failing, depending on your point of view, as one person's homage becomes another's rip off. From the visual cues to Spielberg movies, including the boys' bikes that anyone who has seen *E. T.* will constantly expect to take flight, to the nods to *Twin Peaks*, among countless others, it could seem like an exercise in seeing how many cultural references can be crammed into a single episode. But all of this is handled with a deftness of touch and an obvious love for the pop culture of the era, leaving me feeling all warm and aglow when I found myself remarking aloud that 'we have that same jug!' during the final dinner scene at the Byers house. The soundtrack, and use of music throughout the series, is pitch perfect and generally follows the music of the period the series is set in. A notable exception to this is Peter Gabriel's cover of Bowie's 'Heroes' that scores one of the more emotional moments of the series, as Will's 'body' is recovered from the quarry at the end of Episode 3. It is one of those powerful instances where visual and aural registers beautifully combine to heighten the emotional impact of a scene.

This is not to say that the series is without its flaws. There is nothing particularly innovative about the story when it is broken down into its constituent parts, and it ticks many of the standard boxes for constructing a scary story, including creepy forests and lost children. The character pairings are also decidedly heteronormative, even though there are attempts at some quirks. Nancy, initially the annoying older sister, transforms into some kind of warrior princess, yet she still ends up with the jock boyfriend instead of the more sensitive,

lonely outsider Jonathan. There has also been some criticism of the scene where El is dressed up in a wig and dress by the boys in order to disguise her, with its obvious reference to a similar scene in *E. T.* Physically androgynous in the beginning, El's knowledge of and investment in the concept of 'pretty', despite her limited vocabulary and having been essentially a lab rat for her entire life, is somewhat jarring.

And yet in spite of this, *Stranger Things* is still one of the television events of the year, primarily because it knows how to tell a story well. Netflix have also recently confirmed a second season, thereby ensuring that they won't keep what Dustin calls 'the curiosity door' closed for long.

Jennifer Daly

***Making a Murderer* (Netflix, 2015)**

A dead young woman, false imprisonment, heroes and villains, a murder mystery, salacious details, and a public viewing gallery: *Making a Murderer* has all the elements of an excellent gothic novel. Yet this is a true story, presented via a Netflix original documentary that covers twenty-two years. The series follows Steven Avery, a resident of Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, and his various trials and tribulations with the law. Firstly, it shows how Avery was wrongly convicted of sexual assault in 1985 and consequently imprisoned for eighteen years. It then focuses on how, following his release, his attempts to press a civil lawsuit against Manitowoc County were interrupted when he was accused and found guilty — alongside his nephew Brendan Dassey — of the rape and murder of a woman named Teresa Halbech. The series documents the case against Avery and the efforts made by his defence lawyers, Dean Strang and Jerry Buting, to show how the police failed to handle the evidence correctly and planted incriminating evidence in order to indict Avery. In its structure and style, the series draws on several elements of the gothic tradition, producing what is essentially a gothic murder mystery for the twenty-first century.

Making a Murderer exemplifies how the gothic is continually changing medium, and particularly one that reflects changing technologies. While television is not a new phenomenon, the way in which we can now consume television programmes has altered radically in the past few years. Netflix, for example, allows subscribers to 'binge watch', meaning that you can view every episode of a series both consecutively and immediately. The appeal of such a viewing model relies on the fact that the programmes themselves are marketed as addictive, therein ensuring a loyal audience. Series become phenomenon, as for

example *Breaking Bad* (2008-13) and *Stranger Things* (2016), with thousands of viewers avidly watching before moving on to the next craze. In some ways, this mirrors the reading habits of readers of the early gothic — perfectly parodied in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (published 1817; begun in the mid-1790s) — as they would move voraciously from one salacious novel to the next. This method of consumption, however, becomes problematic when the subject is nonfiction, when it involves real-life cases and people who are still affected by the events depicted. In *Making a Murderer*, the cooperation of Avery and his family with the documentary's production is motivated by a hope that this coverage will force a re-trial. Though it did result in a petition and caused widespread furore, there is the risk that with the confirmation of *Making a Murderer* Season Two, viewers will be appeased by the show's release — and not by Avery's — feeding the demand for further episodes.

The cruellest twist in watching *Making a Murderer*, however, is the viewer's growing awareness, as the storyline unfolds, that its narrators, the filmmakers Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos, are ultimately unreliable. Whilst their access to those involved in the case was unavoidably limited by a number of factors (for example, many simply did not want to be interviewed), articles quickly arose after the series' release that accused *Making a Murderer* of drawing the viewers' attention only to evidence that was overlooked or misrepresented. For example, while the presence of Avery's blood in the victim's car was presented as planted, the filmmakers did not acknowledge other DNA evidence such as hair and sweat. The series was also accused of focusing solely on the defence, without allowing the prosecution to make an alternate case. It is difficult, if not impossible, to comment on the filmmakers' intentions — one can only speculate.

However, in offering a medium through which to discuss the unreliability of the series' creators, the internet becomes a useful metatext and draws attention to the engagement between the gothic text and the viewer/reader. Forums and discussions boards, as well as social media, became spaces to discuss and share theories about *Making a Murderer*. These concerns were picked up in mainstream media, with *The New York Times* releasing an article entitled 'Questioning the Evidence in the "Making a Murderer" Case' (29 January 2016). In particular, the programme's generic positioning as a documentary and its construction of the narrative were questioned in terms of its veracity. For many, the idea of a documentary suggests objectivity and truth; this can lead to people watching such shows without any critical engagement with the text. While we may be familiar with other gothic texts having unreliable narrators, such as the unnamed protagonist in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) or the killer in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843), documentaries often

try to hide of the fact that they feature a narrator at all. The filmmaker disappears behind the camera, negating the sense of a first-person narrative, and hence obscuring the possibility that the narrative voice or perspective might be unreliable. In *Making a Murderer*, the viewer does not even hear the filmmakers posing questions, concealing the fact that a story is being told and a narrative created.

More generally, the series draws on elements of sensationalism, the gothic, and detective fiction in order to draw in the viewer. By concentrating primarily on one victim of the failures in police procedures, *Making a Murderer* effectively creates a narrative around the man who becomes our protagonist — Avery himself — with whom the viewer readily identifies. Rather than considering a wide number of cases to show endemic failure in the American legal system, the programme concentrates on eliciting an emotional response from viewers in its depiction of Avery, his family, and his friends; the affective quality of the series draws on sensationalism. The story itself is also sensational; it is a murder mystery, one which provides a terrifying insight into the corruption of the legal system. In line with this disturbing material, the opening credits evoke a sense of the gothic through the use of sepia tones and shots of rural America complete with dark birds flying across a grey sky. The music is cinematic and plaintive strings evoke a heightened sense of drama. Thus the credits establish links to other gothic fictional television series such as the Nordic detective series *Jordskott* (2015), which also uses string music and dark birds in its opening credits, and the French ‘zombie’ series *The Returned* (2012-present), which features similar shots of a rural, isolated community.

Further underlining the show’s quasi-fictionality, each episode relies on a ‘cliff hanger’ to keep the viewer watching. This means that the information and facts of the case are regulated and re-ordered to create a credible narrative structure. Consequently, the documentary format is forced to fit within the structures of gothic sensationalism — each ‘reveal’ encourages the viewer’s desire to find out the ‘truth’. In a similar way, the sensation novels of the nineteenth century, such as Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White* (1859), drew on gothic and detective elements to create suspense. Readers wanted to reach a satisfactory explanation for the mystery which unravelled before them.

Peopling this narrative is a cast that is split into ‘good’ and ‘evil’ characters. Throughout the programme, the lawyers defending Avery against the murder charge are positioned as the documentary’s heroes. In many ways, these lawyers fulfil the role of the Crew of Light in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897): they are shown to be decent, honourable, and hard-working, fighting tirelessly for the good of the victimised. The idea that Dean

Strang and Jerry Buting, rather than Avery himself, should be viewed as the heroes has been confirmed by the viewing public — indeed, the online news and entertainment site *Buzzfeed* portrayed them as heart throbs. This was partially in response to further information about Avery's past coming to light. It was quickly noted by online viewers that the account of Avery killing a cat was dealt with very briefly by the filmmakers during the course of the series. The image of Avery as a cat-killer compromised his apparently absolute innocence — and, of course, the internet loves cats. Strang and Buting, by contrast, come across as intelligent and moral, and the internet was quickly flooded with memes featuring the pair of lawyers surrounded by love hearts.

The desire to find 'good guys' to counteract special prosecutor Ken Kratz's strangely convincing role as the 'bad guy' indicts the viewer and the filmmakers as much as the jury. Overall, the series creates a claustrophobic sense of the injustice and corruption that runs through the legal system in America. The inequity of the power of the police in regards to the Averys is reminiscent of the representation of the Roman Catholic Church in early gothic novels. There is a sense that those who work for Mantiwoc County have become corrupted by their power. There are parallels here with the Schendoni, the villainous priest from Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), and Ambrosio, the evil monk from Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), both of whom defend their actions because they are representatives of the Church. Similarly, Kratz and the police of Mantiwoc County are presented as feeling justified in their behaviour because they are representatives of the law.

Yet, just as *Making a Murderer* highlights the fact that jurors want to believe that the police are above reproach, and would rather imprison the wrong man than no-one for murder, the viewers are at risk of making a comparable mistake. We want the police and prosecution to be cruel and tyrannical, and Strang and Buting to be our romantic heroes. Thus, Avery's more ambivalent qualities are left underexplored, in favour of the presentation of Avery as a family man and, more compellingly, as a victim — both of the police and of social prejudice. Avery is also repeatedly depicted as childlike: the cover image for the series is Avery's face show on one side as an adult and on the other as a child. The inference is that his innocence had been lost through the behaviour of the legal system. In regards to Dassey, Avery's nephew, his victimhood is also framed as childlike innocence. Both men are presented as vulnerable and this creates a desire in many viewers to protect them. When this image of Avery was challenged online outside the documentary itself, particularly in regards to his killing a cat, the allegiance of the viewers shifted to the defence lawyers as less complicated 'heroes'. Moreover, the vehemence of opinions regarding the Averys' guilt or innocence, and

the number of alternate theories, highlights the desire for a clean ending to this narrative. In the murky obscurity of this gothic narrative, the viewers strove for clarity, taking on the mantle of the detective themselves. Although readers of gothic narratives are often (though by no means always) presented with happy endings and a clear sense of what is 'good' and 'evil', the viewers of *Making a Murderer* must make their own 'good guys' and 'bad guys'.

In concentrating on the gothic elements of this series this review has, like the series itself, neglected Teresa Halbech, the woman whose rape and murder were attributed to Steven Avery and Brendan Dassey. *Making a Murderer* and the discussions that followed its release have tended to concentrate on the accused as the victim and not Halbech. Ultimately, in the real world, a young woman was murdered, and it is not clear at all if the murderer/s have been apprehended. Viewers have used the internet to pick at Halbech's bones, but have often wholly disregarded her personhood. Instead, to the viewers, she is represented only by her image; throughout the documentary, her identity is replaced with a picture of Halbech with her camera. Her image, like the narrative of *Making a Murderer*, becomes something to be consumed. In particular, Dassey's disturbing description of what happened to Halbech, which he later denied, mirrors the most prurient elements of murder mysteries. The obsession with the perpetrator and not the victim of the crime is reminiscent of the presentation of Jack the Ripper as an anti-hero. At the London Dungeons, the room dedicated to Jack the Ripper comes immediately after the one for Sweeney Todd, with no acknowledgement that one was real-life killer and the other a figment of the imagination. Moreover, the tourism which has sprung up around Jack the Ripper shows the potential danger in allowing the victim(s) of killers to become voiceless. The lives of Jack the Ripper's victims are ignored and his crimes are treated merely in terms of an enjoyable gothic tale.

In many ways, the treatment of Halbech as just another element of a sensational storyline is what makes *Making a Murderer* truly gothic. Though Ricciardi and Demos deride the manner in which Halbech's death was sensationalised for the jurors, the series allows the viewer to be similarly prurient. The series draws parallels between Dassey's description of Halbech's murder and James Patterson's novel *Kiss the Girls* (1995), which he was reading at the time. This detail suggests that there is an overlap between the world of fictional serial killers and the real world, one which Dassey fails to acknowledge. This is not to suggest that fiction causes people to behave like serial killers, but rather that it may be easier to frame real life within fictional constructs. In doing so, the threshold between popular accounts and verifiable narratives is blurred. The irony is that *Making a Murderer* itself often threatens to

cross this line. By drawing on gothic tropes to construct Avery's life, viewers are able to enjoy it as gothic fiction rather than gothic fact.

Kaja Franck

Scream Queens (Fox, 2015-present)

Wickedly funny, irreverent, and at times patently offensive, Ryan Murphy's darkly comic horror series, *Scream Queens* (2015-present) has a dramatically different tone from his other well-known creations. It is neither as saccharine nor as immediately accessible as *Glee* (2009-2015), the most recognisably mainstream of Murphy's works, while managing for the most part to sustain a structural coherence and critical focus that is otherwise lacking in *American Horror Story* (2011-present), an exhausting anthology of hyperbole and horror pastiche. Along with regular collaborators, co-writers, and co-executive producers Brad Falchuk and Ian Brennan, Murphy eschews the excesses of *American Horror Story* and transposes (with reasonable success) the conventions of the cinematic horror-comedy into the miniseries format. *Scream Queens* offers up a caustically witted, overdressed slasher mystery that apes most major classics of the horror genre (*Psycho* (1960), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Carrie* (1976), *The Shining* (1980), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and even the recent true-crime podcast, *Serial* (2015-present)).

The show's title is a conscious allusion to the ways in which female characters (and indeed the actresses who play them) are traditionally victimised in slasher horror — usually by phallic-symbol-wielding male assailants. *Scream Queens* is overtly aware of its status as meta-horror, and builds on the successes of its predecessors, most notably the *Scream* series (1996-2011). While *Scream Queens* certainly celebrates its heritage and revels in postmodern self-reference, the series' self-awareness is rarely overplayed, and it avoids the pointed, self-indulgent meta-horror of *Scream 4* (2011), for example, which utilises the horror-narrative-within-a-horror-narrative trope to an infuriating degree within its first ten minutes alone. (The film opens with a series of filmic *mise-en-abymes* that leaves the viewer unsure of whether the scenes they are watching are part of the film's diegetic narrative or of a narrative ruse designed to unsettle audiences' expectations of what they are watching). Nonetheless, in one episode of Murphy's series, the original scream queen, *Halloween's* ingénue Jamie Lee Curtis, recreates shot for shot the famous shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which starred her real-life mother, Janet Leigh. The show therefore teases but ultimately

rewards fans of the horror genre, and Murphy and the writers play with certain recognisable, classic tropes in a way that is readily understood by the initiated viewer.

The series follows the sisters and new pledges of a fictional college sorority house, Kappa Kappa Tau, who are being stalked by a serial killer dressed in a red devil costume (known simply as the 'Red Devil'), determined to wreak vengeance on the sorority for events that happened twenty years previously. The sisters are presided over by Chanel Oberlin (Emma Roberts), the spoilt, entitled, and fiercely vitriolic head of the sorority. Swaddled in haute couture, she is an unholy amalgam of Heather Chandler from *Heathers* (1988) and *Mean Girls*' (2004) Regina George, all the while addressing her friends as 'minions', 'dumb sluts', and 'idiot hookers'. The sisters of Kappa Kappa Tau must contend with a new decree by the college's Dean Munsch (Curtis), which allows *any* incoming female student to become a pledge — a decision that the wealth- and fashion-obsessed clique of young women (who the show appears, at first glance, to lambast) consider to be a travesty of what they believe a sorority should be, making a mockery of their beloved elitism. Munsch certainly serves as a counterpoint to the unchecked capitalist hedonism of the sorority girls, and she is very much Murphy's mouthpiece for the show's satiric derision of contemporary female youth culture, and its tendency to inculcate passive-aggressive and manipulative behaviour, and unbridled competitiveness, within young girls' relationships. As self-interested, fashion-conscious, high-consumerist products of twenty-first century reality television, saturated in the vainglory of social media, the 'Chanel's' (the collective term for Chanel and her minions) 'represent everything that is wrong with young girls nowadays'.¹ They represent a damning indictment of the superficial, jaded millennial culture against which Murphy and the show seemingly rail.

Scream Queens' aesthetic blends horror with a darkly derisive critique of these millennials, and the show's humour is problematically and frequently linked to images of imperilled young women in particular. For example, in a casting coup for Murphy, American music starlet Ariana Grande plays Chanel Number Two, one of the sorority sisters, who is stabbed by the Red Devil in the show's pilot. With her dying breath, the character uploads a status update about her own murder to an unnamed social-media website highly reminiscent of Facebook. The scene is parodic in nature, emphasising the overreliance of youth culture on social media to document seemingly everything that happens. Yet the threat to the female body (a consistent trope in horror, especially slasher horror) remains ever-present: from the

¹ 'Pilot', *Scream Queens*, Fox, 26 October 2015.

very first episode, the show encourages us to laugh at and mock both stupidity and female beauty, and the horror of this scene — in which Grande's character is repeatedly stabbed/penetrated — is couched in darkly humorous terms. In this way, *Scream Queens* is painfully unoriginal, as the show does very little to update the trope of the victimised and objectified young woman in horror.

In spite of the show's very subtle, sometimes very clever satire, Murphy seems to sanction for his (probably young) audience a spurious belief that the Chanel's wildly exaggerated, inappropriate, juvenile, and aggressive behaviour is justifiable — precisely because, it is largely implied, those whose economic and social livelihoods are imperilled by the Red Devil are attractive, wealthy, upper-class, young, and, for the most part, white women. The appalling behaviour of most of the young female characters is seemingly endorsed by the show precisely because these women are rich and pretty — certainly a questionable moral ethos. Indeed, Roberts' character, in particular, is so one-note in her function as satirical cypher that she becomes a veritable simulacra, both the vehicle through which the show critiques the horrors of capitalist youth culture and the un-ironic mouthpiece of that very culture. So hyperbolic is her portrayal of Chanel, and so outrageous is the character's behaviour, that the audience hardly fails to recognise her for what she is — an overblown indictment of fashion-conscious, cut-and-thrust, over-privileged millennial culture.

However, given that it ultimately falls to the audience to understand Chanel's significance as a satirical figure, the show runs the decided risk that many of its viewers will be unable or unwilling to discern its subtext. Murphy's evident fascination with college sororities seems to function as a rather shallow pretext for examining issues of class and female identity politics within American society (two issues that are firmly entwined within *Scream Queens*). It becomes apparent that, for everything the show wryly observes about the prescriptive authoritarianism and militant rigour of some strands of contemporary feminism, and the ways in which girls and young women are encouraged to behave, to dress, and to treat one another, Murphy nonetheless glories in the competitive backbiting, the duplicity, and the high-stake fashion wars of his characters, and in the superficialities of his own creation. As such, the satirical power of *Scream Queens* is lost in the show's more superficial interests.

More generally, the series is not really *about* who the killer is; the identity of the Red Devil is the show's MacGuffin. *Scream Queens* is about the perils of female relationships, and the ways in which those friendships presented in the show are frighteningly comparable

to the paranoia experienced within traditional horror narratives, where the characters never quite know who to trust (a common feature of the *Scream* series (2015-present), for example). Indeed, when one of the sisters of Kappa Kappa Tau rams a stiletto heel into her own eye in order to incriminate her supposed friend and sorority sister, Murphy underlines the duplicitous extremes to which young women can go in order to compete for one another's friendship. Here, the high heel is used as a tool by which the character mutilates herself: the phallic symbol and a symbol of both female sexuality and oppression are conflated to the point where they *literally* damage the character's own view of herself, linking the horror of this act to the series' implied wider social and cultural fears — namely, female paranoia about self-presentation and social status, and the simultaneous fear of/desire for penetration.

For all this, the show's use of horror is purely functional: by putting these women in mortal peril, and all but ensuring that none of the less stereotypically attractive or less obviously entertaining characters meet their end at the hands of the killer, the show's 'final girls' (pretty rich white women) are those who, for the large part, endorse an extremely problematic set of politics. The show's ostensible moral message (that sororal bonds are good) is all but glossed over, as Murphy's evident obsession with the Chanel's suggests that what is ultimately more important for a woman is the ability to undercut someone with a tart and efficient one-liner, all the while wearing a drop-dead-gorgeous dress — an impulse that clearly runs contrary to some of the series' more genuinely enlightened insights into sororal relationships. There are, after all, only so many times that the writers can have Chanel stomp around looking fabulous without the audience, too, glorying in the excess of her world.

While the show's writing is tremendously sharp in places, the writers make little attempt to conceal a troubling inclination towards (among other things) casual racism, homophobia, misogyny, classism, and the ill-treatment of those with mental-health problems. In one of many such scenes, Chanel forces the older, overweight sorority housekeeper, Mrs Bean (Jan Hoag) — whom she calls an 'obese specimen of human filth' and 'white mammy' — to ape Hattie McDaniel's line from the 1939 film, *Gone With the Wind* (1939), about 'birthin' babies'.² Hattie McDaniel, of course, played the African-American house slave in that film, which makes this a particularly uncomfortable comparison not least because of the writers' irresponsible disregard for issues of class and race in American history, but also because of the downright nasty relish with which Mrs Bean's physical appearance is insulted.

² 'Pilot', *Scream Queens*, Fox, 26 October 2015.

As the series progresses, there is a disturbing trend towards body shaming women, which amounts to the veritable ridicule of Chanel Number Five's body shape for no other purpose than malicious entertainment. (Abigail Breslin, who plays Chanel Number Five, was the only regular cast member who was still a teenager at the time of filming, and whose body is in fact the most realistically proportioned of these women.) Admittedly, all of these scenes are pointedly exaggerative and in line with the excessive, provocative nature of the show's aesthetic. However, it would be a mistake on the part of viewers to imagine that, just because the show delights in its status as a black comedy, the wilfully inappropriate attitudes displayed towards African Americans, homosexuals, poor people, and curvaceous women merit no objection. Indeed, it may be argued that the true horror of *Scream Queens* is not so much the traditional elements of the slasher thriller, but the horror of the cultural attitudes and ideologies defining contemporary North America that are represented in the show.

In particular, *Scream Queens* is painfully aware of the destructive psychological effects that ritual bullying and humiliation have on young women — indeed, this forms part of the show's central message. It acknowledges these effects and goes to great lengths to drive home to the viewer (albeit parodically) its other central theme: the absence of parental figures and the psychological effects that a misplaced sense of loving approval can have on the young (a well-known horror trope, illustrated, for example, in *The Orphan* (2009)). Ultimately, the show's awareness of itself neither prevents nor excuses the writing from being unqualifiedly hateful. In Chanel, *Scream Queens* presents a version of 'femininity' that is problematically indistinguishable from satire. Chanel is both a critique and a vindication of certain tendencies within female youth culture towards bitchiness, capriciousness, and self-centredness. We want to hate her because she is despicable, but we love to watch her because she says despicable things that, arguably, few people in real life could get away with saying — and she is consistently glamorised while doing so. Most troublingly, this reviewer fails to see how the young women who might watch this show can distinguish with confidence between subtle satire and the glamorised, underweight characters/actresses who peddle the series' smothered moral message amidst its horror.

In spite of how unrelentingly offensive the show can be, the fact that *Scream Queens* has garnered a major cult following says a great deal about contemporary American sensibilities and anxieties surrounding political correctness. The series is entertaining and hilarious for all the wrong reasons — a troubling contradiction that perhaps speaks to popular culture's unquestioning blindness as to the damaging effects of language, and the comfortable bigotry which remains a consistent feature of post-reality broadcast media. The show is

certainly worth viewing, if only to allow one to recoil at the sheer deluge of bad taste, for there is certainly a limit to how effective its satire is. *Scream Queens*' content, as suggested above, adds very little in the way of original material or tropes to the horror genre, and while its presentation of contemporary female youth culture is the most noteworthy element of the show, it is also the most worrying. The horrors of real-world female peril, which include both the social pressures of female competition and the threat of unwanted penetration by masked men, are mitigated somewhat by the narrative's hyperbolic comedy, which ultimately transforms the show from relevant social satire into something considerably less palatable.

Although far from the best example of new-wave horror television (represented by shows such as *Hannibal* (2013-2015), *Jordskott* (2015), and *Penny Dreadful* (2014-present)), *Scream Queens* certainly does advance further possibilities for serial horror television — particularly in regard to those shows that delight in paying homage to the greats of the genre, but without allowing their own inter-referentiality to become stifling and distract from the main narrative (such as *American Horror Story*). However, much like *Scream: The TV Series*, the second season of which is currently airing on Netflix, *Scream Queens* will need to rely more on scenes of innovative and original horror for its upcoming season, and much less on its ailing satirical qualities, if it is going to sustain itself. Horror has entered a new phase — becoming serialised, episodic, and prolonged — but if this new format is going to survive, writers of horror television are going to have to devise new and believable ways of sustaining these narratives without descending so indulgently into self-parody.

Ian Kinane

***Penny Dreadful: Season Two* (Showtime, 2015)**

John Logan's Showtime series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) returned for its second season in May 2015 with ten thrilling episodes that (re)introduce spectators to this gothic costume drama set in late-Victorian London (and Season Three aired in 2016 while this review was being written). The protagonists of the show are the major characters of nineteenth-century gothic and adventure literature (such as Dr Frankenstein, vampires, and Allan Quatermain), united in what Jeff Jensen defines as 'a league of extraordinarily screwed-up demon hunters'.¹

¹ Jeff Jensen, '*Penny Dreadful*: EW Review', 30 April 2015 <www.ew.com> [accessed 13 April 2016].

Season One (reviewed by Bernice Murphy in Issue #13 of the *IJGHS* (2014)) presents the intertwined stories of Miss Vanessa Ives (Eva Green), Mr Ethan Chandler (Josh Hartnett), and Dr Victor Frankenstein (Harry Treadaway). The raven-haired Miss Ives is a rigid, though elegant woman who continually fights against Satan's possession of her body and soul; Mr Chandler is an American sharpshooter who transforms into a werewolf at full moon; and Dr Frankenstein is a young scientist who is forced to obey the requests of his malevolent Creature (played by Rory Kinnear). This group is headed by Sir Malcolm Murray (Timothy Dalton) — a Quatermain-like explorer and gentleman — and its mission is to search for Sir Malcolm's lost daughter Mina (partly based on the character of Mina from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)), who has been kidnapped by a group of vampires infesting London. Simultaneous with the central action are the narratives of the epicurean Dorian Gray (Reeve Carney), who attempts to seduce Miss Ives, and of the Irish prostitute Brona Croft (Billie Piper), who falls in love with Mr Chandler, but dies of tuberculosis at the end of the first season. Season One's finale depicts the group's failed attempt to save Mina, who is converted to evil completely, and Sir Malcolm's acceptance of Miss Ives as a substitute daughter. The parallel narratives also involve Mr Chandler's massacre of the Mariner's Inn's customers, Frankenstein's initial work on the corpse of Brona, and the Creature's eager anticipation for its re-animation.

Season Two picks up precisely at the end of Season One. It opens with the massacre perpetrated by Mr Chandler, and his subsequent anguish and regret, as well as his fear of being discovered because of the testimony of a vengeful survivor. Just as the wild werewolf into which he transforms hunts its prey, Mr Chandler is himself hunted throughout the ten episodes by a new character, Scotland Yard's inspector Bartholomew Rusk (Douglas Hodge), who attempts persistently (though with the most polite and gentlemanly of manners) to convince Mr Chandler to confess his crime and thus redeem his soul. From the first episode of the season, Mr Chandler entertains a closer protective relationship with Miss Ives than in Season One. These two characters represent the physical and psychological torment caused by the dark forces raging inside them, as they must each continually fight the temptation to succumb to fits of murderous wrath. Mr Chandler struggles against the werewolf inside of him, and Miss Ives against the Devil's possession: Chandler defines his dark forces as 'monsters', whereas Ives describes hers as 'demons'.

Outside of Chandler and Ives own psyches, in contrast to the unnamed vampires who were the villains of Season One, Season Two's new adversaries are introduced almost immediately and assume the shape of a family-coven of shape-shifting witches headed by

Mrs Poole (a superb Helen McCrory, who appeared in Season One as the medium Madame Kali). Mrs Poole is a servant of Satan, to whom she intends to consign Miss Ives, who is part of a greater design involving the battle between ‘good’ and primordial ‘evil’. After numerous enchantments and several attempts to kidnap Miss Ives, Mrs Poole attempts to command Miss Ives from a distance by creating in her subterranean ‘sanctuary’ a puppet that works as a sort of voodoo doll and reproduces Miss Ives’ features with uncanny precision. An intriguing narrative element is added through the implementation — by Miss Ives and the witches — of the *Verbis Diablo*: the alleged dead language of the Devil, a form of mythological communication, similar to Tolkien’s Black Speech of Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings* series (1954-1955), which lends weight to the scenes involving witchcraft. Together with the graphic portrayal of murders and the nightmarish visions induced by black magic, the use of the *Verbis Diablo*, and the good characters’ progressive translation of it through a series of ancient artefacts recounting the Devil’s memoirs, is one of the most fascinating aspects of the second season of *Penny Dreadful*. Christianity, together with many of its symbols, is juxtaposed continually with a revised version of the story of the fallen angel dramatised in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667): according to the series’ narrative, there are two fallen angels, one of whom roams the earth in the form of a vampire and feeds on human blood, while the other is confined to hell and preys on human souls.

Though this is, arguably, an age of widespread desensitisation, to the extent that there are few scenes in *Penny Dreadful* that are genuinely frightening, the series nonetheless belongs under the heading of gothic television.² Indeed, the thematic focus on horrific themes and motifs, such as infanticide, paranoia, the grotesque body, and the invasion of the home by hostile forces, as well as the use of a series of morbid paraphernalia such as skulls, gargoyles, and trickling blood, renders the aesthetic of the show firmly gothic. Moreover, as is the case with many horror films and other gothic TV series such as *Twin Peaks* (1989-91) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002, 2016-present), the visual tone of *Penny Dreadful* is consistently dominated by drab and dismal colours, by closed-in environments and a stark use of lighting, which privileges exaggerated shadows and dark settings. The *mise-en-scène* is also characterised by the use of many low angles and out-of-focus frames, which emphasise the gory details and provide a disturbing perspective.

Although Season Two of *Penny Dreadful* is, as was the case with Season One, still impaired by its slow pace and what Murphy has called its many ‘lengthy conversation[s]

² Helen Wheatley, *Gothic Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 2006.

between [...] very messed-up people', its sentimental and intriguing subplots do provide some compensation.³ These are, however, more interesting than the suspenseful scenes belonging strictly to the horror genre and to the main characters. Indeed, the sequences depicting morphine-addicted Victor Frankenstein's love and subsequent raving jealousy for his new creature — the re-animated Brona Croft (Piper), now re-baptised through the experiment's rite of water and electricity as Lily Frankenstein — become all the more intriguing and compelling as the series progresses. This is also the case with the amorous adventures of the hedonistic Dorian Gray with the transgender woman Angelique (Jonny Beauchamp), a relationship which finally leads to the much-awaited unveiling of the immortal young man's picture. As was the case with Season One, an effective device here is the way in which many plots are structured so as to run parallel to each other in every episode: an illustrative example is provided by the juxtaposition of the sequences depicting the simultaneous love/sex scenes of many characters near the finale of the fifth episode of Season Two, 'Above the Vaulted Sky'.

The most captivating subplot is the story of Frankenstein's Creature (Kinnear), who now tellingly calls himself John Clare, and whose naïve smile and erroneous trust in human kindness and good-heartedness likely stimulates every viewer's compassion. The Creature's narrative, which is filled with poetic language, demonstrates — in accordance with Mary Shelley's original masterpiece (1818) — the immorality, brutality, and monstrosity of the human race when confronted with anyone 'different' or Other. The development of the character of Lily Frankenstein, who was created as a bride for the Creature, well surpasses the speechless roles interpreted by Elsa Lanchester in James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and by Helena Bonham Carter in Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994). Here, Lily evolves from a shy and weak woman dependent on the men around her to a conscious female being with ambitions of power and dominion. Mr Lyle (Simon Russell Beale) is also a more significant presence than he had been in the previous season. In Season One, Mr Lyle was introduced as an Egyptologist who entertained his guests with spiritualistic séances. In Season Two, he has an active role in the battle against evil: after hesitating between the two sides, he becomes a helpful advisor to the series' team of men who fight tirelessly against the diabolical and ruthless witches (and who strongly recall the 'Crew of Light' in Stoker's *Dracula*). With his bushy eyebrows, perspiring forehead, and

³ Bernice M. Murphy, 'Penny Dreadful: Season 1', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 13 (Summer 2014), 142-46.

thick fingers, Lyle seems also to be an excellent imitation of the cheiromantist Mr Podgers from Oscar Wilde's short story 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' (1887).⁴

The slowest parts of the story are those that concern the flashbacks of Miss Ives' initiation as a witch and her subsequent temporary retirement to an isolated cottage in the middle of the Western moors. These sequences do not have the charm of the urban settings portrayed throughout the rest of the season, in the realistic streets of fin-de-siècle London (evocatively defined by Frankenstein's Creature as a 'steel-hearted city'), the interiors of the character's homes (such as Mrs Poole's gothic mansion), and the storage rooms of the British Museum. More successful is the portrayal (through the character of the Cut-Wife (Patti LuPone), an old woman who tutors Miss Ives on the use of magic in the third episode, 'The Nightcomers') of white magic and the cruel persecution of alleged witches throughout history, a reminder of the unjust hatred towards people and phenomena that humans struggle to understand.

More generally, together with the precision in the depiction of the settings, costumes, language, and manners of the Victorian era, one of the greatest merits of *Penny Dreadful* derives from the actors' performances. The cast are all exceptionally good in their roles, especially Eva Green as Miss Ives and the magnificent Timothy Dalton as the guilt-ridden Sir Malcolm. Green and Dalton portray every nuance of their characters and their moods with convincing realism. Noteworthy, too, is the soundtrack, composed by Abel Korzeniowski, which contributes significantly to the series' ambience. Its use of choral and fast-paced orchestral tracks is highly effective, whilst its crescendos perfectly accompany the use of magic in episodes such as 'Verbis Diablo'.

The season's finale resolves the central narrative arc in the first half an hour, with the emotionally intense confrontation between Miss Ives and her nemesis, the Devil himself (who physically possesses Miss Ives' doll), which occurs through a supernatural duel. Once this has been resolved, this final episode ('And They Were Enemies') leaves viewers with a series of poignant epilogues that separate the main characters — three of them are last seen aboard different ships. These epilogues, which effectively exemplify the characters' loneliness, are certainly distressing, but they simultaneously invite viewers to return for the series' continuation. For those who were not fully enchanted by Season One, Season Two will surely induce viewers' affection and loyalty. Season Three of the show has been aired since this review was written and it includes such infamous gothic characters as Dr Jekyll,

⁴ Oscar Wilde, 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime', in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 27-56.

Count Dracula, and Dr Seward, while it had been rumoured that Dr Moreau could become the villain of the fourth season, thus completing the show's series of mad scientists; however, we now know that Season 3 marks the end of *Penny Dreadful* — for now, at any rate. We will therefore never know whether H. G. Wells' Invisible Man, Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, Richard Marsh's Beetle, and Arthur Machen's Great God Pan could successfully have joined the cast of characters, or if Lucifer himself would have fully manifested and staged a final confrontation.

Antonio Sanna

The Black Tapes (www.theblacktapespodcast.com, 2015-present)

In the past eighteen months, the world of podcasts has been expanding at an astonishing rate. No longer the preserve of political commentaries and football analyses, the podcast is becoming an artistic medium in its own right. Reaching beyond the downloadable 'catch-up' of the consistently popular Radio 4 *Drama of the Week* and *The Archers* (1950-present), the podcast has become a common form for both fictional and non-fictional serialised storytelling, with historical surveys such as Dan Carlin's *Hardcore History* (2012-present) and sci-fi cult offerings like *Welcome to Night Vale* (2012-present) both receiving loyal followings. One podcast belonging to this new explorative generation is *The Black Tapes* (2015-present), a bi-weekly investigative gothic drama that has so effectively exploited the podcast medium's conventionally realist limits, with its commitment to imitating its journalistic counterparts, that confusion initially arose as to whether it was indeed fictional.

Few people could have missed the recent phenomenon that was *Serial* (2014-present), as millions of commuters were transformed into detectives while listening to the show on their way to and from the office. Since then, a permanent fixture on the iTunes home page has been a conveyor belt of the best true-crime podcasts, covering everything from brutal nineteenth-century murders to evidence tampering and urban legends, all of which raises the question: what is it about this medium that attracts such dark subject matter? Consistently throughout these shows, questions of truth, fiction and doubt are raised, and in many respects, these aspects also play significant roles in the realm of the gothic, for it is a genre that depends on the evocation of fearful possibility. The same may be said of the podcast form: it tells the listener what they ought to picture, rather than explicitly showing them. In some ways this is the difference between horror (the explicit) and terror (the possible), two components which shape the gothic. In her genre-defining 'On the Supernatural in Poetry'

(1826), Ann Radcliffe lays out the differences between horror and terror, asserting that the former ‘annihilates’ the senses in its use of shock and gore, while the obscurity of the latter stimulates them.¹ Following this logic, it may be argued that the podcast, with its singular and somewhat restrictive route into the imagination via the auditory, is the perfect vehicle for manipulating the listener into a state of terror of their own making. The podcast as a form piques the creative impulses, forcing the listener to pay attention to the surface text, while simultaneously reinterpreting the imaginative possibilities behind the words; the listener is essentially locked in a dark cupboard and asked to decide what is really happening behind the door. In a society so visually fixated (ideally situated for the shock of horror), this technique in *The Black Tapes* places the consciousness on shaky ground before even taking into account the fictional realism at play in how content is presented.

Essentially, *The Black Tapes* is *Serial* meets *The X-Files* (1993-2002). Opening under the guise of a documentary series looking at ‘people with interesting jobs’, gung-ho journalist Alex Reagan finds herself lured into the world of the notorious super-sceptic, Richard Strand, whose research institute is offering a million dollars to anyone who can legitimately prove the existence of the supernatural. Enter the titular black tapes, an assortment of video and audio recordings on a shelf in Strand’s office, detailing paranormal phenomena dating back decades that he can’t quite explain ... yet.

It has to be said, Alex is suspiciously like the journalist behind *Serial*, Sarah Koenig, in both terms of presenting style and personality. Much like Koenig (whose dedication to the Adnan Syed murder case extended to mapping defunct cell-phone towers and timing car journeys around Baltimore personally), Alex is consistently curious and open minded, going above and beyond the call of duty in her search for the highly abstracted but ever present idea of ‘The Truth’ — the holy grail for all investigative journalists. Indeed, perhaps the most telling nod to Koenig lies in the fact that both she and her fictional counterpart, Alex, frequently share their ethical concerns, personal anxieties, and innermost reactions to developments in their investigations, showing that it is not just the answers to questions, but the process of finding them, that profoundly affects the individual. Given the supernatural nature of *The Black Tapes*, it is perhaps unsurprising that for Alex these humanistic concerns will come to be manifest in imagery linked to demons and elements of possession (especially in Season 2).

¹ Ann Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, *The New Monthly and Literary Journal*, 6:1 (1826), 145-152 <<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/radcliffe1.html>> [accessed 9 September 2016].

Without giving too much away, Season 1 introduces us to the Torres family, who have been haunted for generations by a creepy black figure in their family photographs. Cue debates surrounding photo tampering, Babylonian demons, conventional horror tropes of imaginary friends gone rogue, and the commonly repeated term ‘apophenia’ — supernatural confirmation bias, the idea that once the idea of the paranormal is placed in someone’s head, they will subsequently seek out positive proof wherever possible. This dispute between science and the supernatural could get monotonous, and being very blunt, the dialogue in some parts does not do much to resuscitate such a well-worn trope. This can be forgiven, however, as the weightiness of the words is often due to over-zealous attempts to convey an encyclopaedic level of knowledge about the occult. In Season 1 alone, the Zozo demon board, the Tower of Marduke, sacred geometry, and bi-location are all treated with astonishing levels of precision. This does hamper the plot’s pace in parts, and in some respects you do have to work to find the fear factor. That said, with its convincingly naturalist production style, the risk of potentially farcical scary-monster voices is limited, and the emphasis falls instead on more menacing realist tricks like distorted riddles left on hacked mobile phones.

It is impossible to discuss *The Black Tapes* without dwelling on the show’s form and production, for it is without a doubt thanks to its commitment to realism that it has gained so much traction on social media. After listening to the first episode, I found myself googling ‘is *The Black Tapes* real?’ and I was not alone in my confusion. The somewhat anonymous team behind *The Black Tapes* have really outdone themselves in creating social-media accounts for their characters and fictional production team (complete with up-to-date interactions), as well as websites for The Strand Institute and the show’s host station, Pacific North West Stories. Needless to say, the novelty of this set-up can only be sustained for so long, and it is now common knowledge that the show is the summer project of Canadian English teacher, Paul Bae and his film-maker friend, Terry Miles. Amazingly, however, the identities of the voices behind the characters are still highly contested on fan forums such as Reddit, and it seems unlikely that Bae and Miles will be leaking the names any time soon. They have opted instead to expand the fictional PNWS network’s remit with a sci-fi sister series, *Tanis* (2015-present), featuring character crossovers, as well as episode sponsorship from well-known podcast supporters, and the inclusion of ‘bonus’ episodes and online features through subscription schemes.

Many elements of *The Black Tapes* phenomenon can be seen to echo the 90s cult classic *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which relied on early social-media hype before its

festival launch and played heavily on the ‘found footage’ format and total improvisation on the part of its actors, who for some time were actually listed as deceased on IMDb. However, perhaps where the two pieces differ is in the type of effects they hope their realist techniques will achieve. Whereas *The Blair Witch Project*, with its shaky cameras, blurry night-time footage, and traditionally gothic setting of a forest allows the viewer to experience the documentary makers’ ‘real’ terror as the film progresses, *The Black Tapes* relies more on ‘informed fear’, styling itself as an investigative-journalism podcast, and counting more on somewhat academic content regarding the occult than on form to create its ambience. In this respect, it is not a particularly immersive form of horror; there is very little in terms of the gratification of a good jump scare, and genuinely terrifying plot points can be missed in seconds if the listener accidentally tunes out of interviews with ‘experts’ or the subjects of each tape. So how is it still scary? The terror of *The Black Tapes* is one that lingers and makes itself known when it is least expected. Information about cults, possession, exorcisms and demons is presented in a totally matter-of-fact, academic manner and it’s only later that the mind fully processes what was actually said, and more importantly, why it’s so unnerving. There is no resolution in the black-tapes cases, no satisfying Scooby-Doo villain to put the blame on, no demon vanquished, allowing the suburban family to resume their everyday routines. Indeed, *The Black Tapes*, with its sceptic vs potential-believer dynamic, deliberately exploits this lack of closure, underlining the unique, individualised nature of doubt and belief. Anything is possible and that amount of free imaginative rein, combined with the supernatural information provided, allows the mind of the individual listener to go to all sorts of strange and frightening places at any time.

This is not to say that *The Black Tapes* is all about the writing and less about the production. *The Black Tapes* may not have an explicitly ‘scary’ form, but its commitment to realism does facilitate the aforementioned elements of debate surrounding doubt and belief. The show copies the format of the popular mystery and true-crime podcasts currently dominating the charts, making a point of integrating the simulated production process into the podcast itself, with Alex and her producer Nick Silver discussing the ethics of including particular interviews in the programme. Beyond this, the show is comprised mainly of narrative from Alex, coupled with telephone conversations and on-location interviews. There are some eerie found-footage elements (think baby monitors with ghostly voices), but for the most part the show uses these sorts of terror tricks sparingly, and they are still very much situated within the framework of doubt vs possibility, as Strand and Alex puzzle out what exactly is going on. Indeed, the show’s overall vibe is epitomised in its cautionary theme

tune, 'The Kingdom of the Universe' (2003), by Vancouver indie band Ashley Park: listening to the series, we are ill at ease and hyper-aware that something is not quite it seems regardless of whether this is a human conspiracy or something otherworldly. This sentiment is in keeping with the song's depictions of the otherworldly — allusions to the devil, spirits, and belief are interwoven in such a way that the demonic/supernatural is humanised: the question is not whether these things exist, but whether we wish to doubt or to believe in them. With its repeated instruction to 'fly away', 'The Kingdom of the Universe' echoes this conflict by suggesting that we may quite literally fly into the realm of the unknown, or metaphorically flee into the world of scepticism.

It is hard to predict what will happen next with *The Black Tapes*. Season 2 has seen a bit more character development in regards to Alex and Strand, and although this does impede on the show's initial structural impact as a 'documentary', listening to the audio-diaries of seemingly ordinary people coming to doubt their own systems of belief is perhaps more terrifying than any fuzzy found footage. In these diaries, we listen as painfully human themes of madness, faith, and science take hold, to the point where we ourselves begin to question what we believe. Studies of the gothic have always nodded to the concept of the 'uncanny' — feelings of familiarity tainted and gone awry. Through its familiar show formatting, insistence on 'accurate' journalism, and rigorous debates between the eternally doubting Alex and the absolutist Strand, the listener could be in more or less any of this year's popular wave of true-crime investigative-documentary series (recommendations include HBO's *The Jinx* (2015) and of course, Netflix's critically acclaimed *Making A Murderer* (2015)). The only difference is that, from the very first episode, we are dealing in questions of truth and fiction in an entirely fictional setting, and this is where the uncanniness very much begins.

The Black Tapes throws the listener into a house of mirrors with the suggestion of lurking monsters, and demands instead to know what the listener sees in his or her own distorted reflection. In many respects, what stares back in this artificial setting is entirely real human anxieties: the endless search for something to believe in and the pressure always to be accurate and factually correct in a society that often scorns those who believe too readily. *The Black Tapes*, with its reserved, probing tone, fascinating insights into the supernatural, and intelligent marketing, epitomises perhaps the greatest fear of the twenty-first-century sceptic: the open acknowledgement that, in a cynical world of fact, nothing is as certain as it appears and that there may just be the tiniest bit of room for doubt.

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