BOOK REVIEWS

Jeffrey Weinstock, *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*
(New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

"I am secretly afraid of animals – of all animals except dogs, and even of some dogs," Edith Wharton confided to her diary in the mid-1920s. "I think it is because of the Usness in their eyes, with the underlying *Not-Usness* which belies it, and is so tragic a reminder of the lost age when we human beings branched off and left them; left them to eternal inarticulateness and slavery. *Why?* their eyes seem to ask us" (Lee, *Edith Wharton*, 2007, p. 741]. A quintet of ghostly dogs appears in Wharton's 1916 short story "Kerfol," connecting its worldly twentieth-century narrator to a three-hundred-year old tragedy. These "uncomfortable beasts," as the narrator calls them, were once the lady of the manor's pets. Suspecting her of infidelity, her husband destroys them one by one, leaving strangled pooches on the poor woman's pillow as a lover might leave roses. After he dies in suspicious circumstances, his wife is tried for murder and secluded for life; her secret admirer joins a Jansenist house in Paris where, as the narrator rather callously reflects, "he must have talked with Pascal." By contrast, the cruelty and confinement suffered by the heroine – a fate hardly better than that of her pets – offers no grounds for scintillating repartee.

Wharton's link between inarticulacy and enslavement, or at least victimhood, was a lesson hard-learned by successive generations of American heroines, with the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) not least among them. Yet Wharton was also conscious that articulacy, however glib, is more appealing than the silent witness offered by "uncomfortable beasts": those imaginary chats with Pascal are somehow more memorable for "Kerfol"'s narrator than any archival records of the emotional and legal persecution of a woman. Hence, from before the Civil War to the present day, a "d--d mob of scribbling women" have exerted their ingenuity to recapture American literature for women writers and readers (one wonders if Nathaniel Hawthorne would have allowed himself such careless vituperation had he known how jealously future feminist critics would treasure his phrase). The fact that so many talented female voices of this period remain unheard, despite reprints by modern editors like Jessica Salmonson or Alan Ryan, sadly vindicates the indifference of Wharton's narrator. Jeffrey Weinstock's *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* is part of a determined effort by modern critics to embed American Female Gothic writing in the nineteenth-century canon. Weinstock is best known to historians of the national ghost as editor of *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination* (2004), a vibrant essay collection which investigates ghosts as markers of "untold stories" within modern culture (my favourite article, by Mary Findley, casts Stephen King's haunted automobiles as indicators of "the contemporary American fear of spiritual loss in the face of technological advancement" ('Stephen King's Vintage Ghost-Cars: A Modern-Day Haunting', p. 207)).

Scare Tactics is neither an original nor an isolated project: Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar (*Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, 1991) sketched the need for this type of analysis of American Female Gothic and even predicted its thematic strands: domesticity, maternity, misogyny. Most of the texts selected by Weinstock already have a critical history, such as Harriet Prescott Spofford's mid-century Gothic novel *Sir Rohan's Ghost* (1860) and most of the fictions by so-called Local Color writers (such as Sarah Orne Jewett). Nonetheless, Weinstock deals ably and fairly with an over-abundance of precursors, weaving nimbly between the godmother of American Female Gothic, Ellen Moers, and recent scholarship such as Diane Hoeveler's Gothic feminism

and Terry Castle's *Female Thermometer*, while citing a number of – frustratingly – still-unpublished dissertations on individual writers. I have rarely read a clearer summation of Female Gothic criticism than Weinstock's introduction on "The Unacknowledged Tradition." Pledging to evade pat conclusions, such as the "compelling equation" that "woman equals ghost" (16), Weinstock generally favours textual analysis over theory, at the risk of involving himself in detailed plot summaries. Chapters 4 and 5, which do privilege theory ("Familial Ghosts" and "Ghosts of Desire"), are the weakest by far. The latter revisits the faultline between lesbianism and romantic friendship (which, for too many critics, is predicated on numeric analysis of iterations of the word "queer") in the nineteenth century, while 'Familial Ghosts' seems to confirm the very feminist truism this study originally sought to avoid – that ghosts signal the disempowerment of women. Such redundancies are better inferred than stated, or – to reference yet another Wharton spectre – not realised at all, until afterward.

At its best, however, *Scare Tactics* revisits writers we need to read – if only for the pleasure of their ubiquitous and resonant triple names (so redolent of Washington Square privilege, even if some of these women lived precariously off fees from monthly magazines and occasional journalism): Sarah Orne Jewett, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Georgia Wood Pangborn (mother of Edgar Pangborn), Mary Heaton Vorse, and many more. My favourite is Josephine Daskam Bacon, fondly remembered for her sinister medico, Dr Stanchon, an eminent Philadelphia alienist, who features in the collection *The Strange Cases of Doctor Stanchon* (1913). Weinstock's six chapters draw on this and similar material to examine (respectively) violence, domesticity, affection, maternity, socio-economic pressures and intertextuality. He mingles obscure and semi-obscure authors with the Stowes, Whartons, and Gilmans, and with a social adroitness that would have done him credit in a *fin-de-siècle* Boston parlour. The opening chapter, "The Ghost in the Parlour," explores the supernatural as a response to cruelty, rape or violence. He identifies Spofford's *Sir Rohan's Ghost* (1860) not only as a clever Gothic pastiche, but as an exercise in narrative subtlety: Sir Rohan is revealed as the villain of the piece only after he has won the reader's sympathy, and the heroine is left without a viable hero to weep on. Equally disturbing are Harriet Beecher Stowe's little-known "The Ghost in the Cap'n Brown House" (1872), the story of an old sea salt who may or may not have immured a woman in his home; and Anna M. Hoyt's "The Ghost of Little Jacques" (1863), in which a wife reluctantly abets her son's murder.

In the same chapter, Weinstock offers a searching and intelligent analysis of "Kerfol," although he misses the chance to note that, although the heroine is generally objectified by her spouse and family, her husband does acknowledge her sentience in the cruellest way – by unerringly killing everything she loves. Weinstock argues that the mute ghosts mustered in these stories collectively demand "a reordered social structure that affords autonomous personhood to women" (55). Less dramatically, Chapter 2, "Queer Haunting Spaces," investigates the dangers of domestic interiors, while Chapter 3, "Ghosts of Progress," intriguingly investigates the consequences of mid-century urbanisation and industrialisation for female authors and subjects. "Ghostly Returns," the final chapter, takes on the intertextuality between Male and Female American Gothic, discussing Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1891 "The Giant Wisteria" (which Weinstock intriguingly describes as *The Scarlet Letter* with a darker outcome) and Gertrude Atherton's overtly Jamesian "The Bell in the Fog" (1905) as both homage to and parody of Henry James. Overall, Weinstock convincingly shows how quotidian female anxieties – domestic, maternal, sexual and social – re-emerge in print as supernatural fables.

To his credit, Weinstock never venerates a text beyond its due simply because of its rarity: he is fully aware that many of these writers, often highly prolific, wrote rather from economic necessity than skill. As Louisa May Alcott confessed in advance of writing her early and now obscure ghostboilers, "I intend to illuminate the Ledger with a blood & thunder tale as they are easy to 'compoze' & are better paid than

moral and elaborate works of Shakespeare" (Louisa May Alcott, letter of 1862). But the hardship which inspired many of these tales – and informed their narratives – does not preclude the rediscovery of some real delights. Madeleine Yale Wynne's "The Little Room" (1895), the story of a room in a Vermont farmhouse perceptible to women but not to men – nor, in a particularly acerbic touch, to women accompanied by men – which gave its name to a Bohemian writers' club, is one such gem revisited by Weinstock.

While Weinstock defines American Female Gothic on the basis of shared themes with its European equivalent – oppression, sexual violence, imprisonment, and their domestic analogues – he avoids contrasting works by his American subjects with those of their direct contemporaries across the pond. It would be fascinating to compare Margaret Oliphant with the equally prolific Spofford or Pangborn, or to weigh Cynthia Asquith against Edith Wharton (a social acquaintance), considering not just shared themes, but the shared pressures that defined and limited their careers. *Scare Tactics* is both engaging and meticulously organised, but it polices itself too efficiently. Those few bald statements Weinstock allows himself, such as "Either explicitly or implicitly, ghost stories are always about violence" (p.105), invite demur: there are plenty of peaceable ghosts in the ether, and not every ghost story inevitably rewrites F. Marion Crawford's *The Screaming Skull*. Indeed, Crawford's 1911 tale (told by a male narrator) of misogyny, uxoricide and female revenge reminds us that it was not only the women of this period who wrote Female Gothic. Men were (and continue to be) equally haunted by the spectres of gender. Is it perhaps, ultimately, specious to define any genre by its authors' sex, rather than their theme? Surely an over-exclusive focus on women authors risks isolating them from male peers, mentors and rivals (a risk Weinstock only partially addresses in his chapter on intertextuality), and hurts the significance of feminist criticism in the long term? I would welcome a revised and expanded version of *Scare Tactics* that explores how both male and female writers visualised the terrors and tremors of nineteenth-century womanhood. Women writers are uncomfortable beasts, but so are the males of the species.

MUIREANN MAGUIRE

Mary Y. Hallab, *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*
(New York: SUNY, 2009)

Vampire God aims to explore the persistent presence of the vampire in western culture, tracing the trajectory of the vampire from its origins in "early Greek and Slavic folklore" to its ubiquitous, alluring presence in "present-day popular culture." The vampire is at once a thing of fascination and of fear, and Hallab analyses the ways in which vampire literature provides society with a means of working through these fears and fascinations. For Hallab, the vampire ultimately becomes a kind of deity, a lord of the underworld who simultaneously embodies our projected desires for resurrection and rebirth. The central, underlying question of this text is why vampires are so popular and Hallab, more than anything, seeks to find answers for this question and to account for western society's growing obsession with vampires. Rather than tracing the history and development of vampire literature chronologically, Hallab arranges her work thematically. The text is divided into four sections exploring the different functions vampires fulfil in western culture – scientific, in which the vampire myth may provide a primitive explanation for illness; social, in which the vampire represents an ancestor or a living representative of history; psychological, whereby the vampire is seen to externalise the problems of life and death, universal human fear of death and the desire for eternal life; and finally religious, wherein the vampire is considered as a supernatural being whose violence and powers of resurrection bring it close to both demonic and deific states. A fifth chapter discusses vampires in the Christian tradition in the twentieth century where the demon/deity dualism is examined more closely. Hallab's final chapter discusses the role of the sublime in vampire literature and considers what vampire myths, ancient and modern, "imply about the meaning of death and universal order."

There are some small problems with this book. There are inconsistencies in format – for example, book titles are not always or consistently followed by publication dates, which can make it difficult to appraise the relationship between two texts under comparison. The "wry humour" promised by the blurb manifests itself only as parenthetical comments in casual slang which detract from the academic style which Hallab seems to be straining for, and which quickly become tedious.

However, these small flaws are overshadowed by the major problems which litter this book. Though it purports to be a critical overview of the representation of vampires in modern literature, Hallab's analysis depends heavily on a mere handful of texts. Essentially, Hallab critiques Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – and its various film versions – *Varney the Vampire*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and a small selection of Anne Rice's novels. A quick glance at the index reveals the astounding bias in favour of these texts. Some modern and popular texts are hardly dealt with at all; the graphic novel and film *Blade* merits one solitary reference, while Stephanie Meyer's phenomenally popular *Twilight* series gets four scant lines (in which the series is treated as a homogenous whole). Some influential authors, such as Angela Carter, are omitted and, even more unforgivably, whole genres and sub-genres are left out of Hallab's analysis. Children's fiction, such as Marcus Sedgwick's *My Swordhand is Singing*, and crossover texts such as L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (now a major TV show) and Mary Janice Davidson's *Undead and Unwed* series are completely absent. Even Charlaine Harris's phenomenally successful *True Blood* books and TV series are ignored. These omissions prevent Hallab's book from becoming an up-to-date reference guide to vampire literature, and also prevent it from fulfilling its potential as a truly comprehensive overview of the history and development of the vampire myth in western culture.

Moreover, the research underlying the book is deeply flawed. The blurb declares the book to be "thoroughly researched" and if that is the case then it is a great pity that such research is never evident in

the finished product. Firstly, the research underpinning this book is out of date. The vast majority of critical texts quoted or referenced by Hallab were published in the last century. In the fifteen-page bibliography, only thirteen of the references are to non-fiction or critical works published in the twenty-first century. That, perhaps, would not be an issue if we were witnessing a sudden or unprecedented revival of interest in vampires in literature, but Hallab assures us that the vampire is a "constant presence" [1] in western culture. Indeed, the vampire is also a constant presence in academic studies of Gothic and horror fiction and it is jarring to see that such a recently published work contains in its opening chapter only one reference to a study published in the last ten years. Overall, the impression is that Hallab completed this book some time ago and it has been dredged up for publication on the strength of the recent "rise" in vampire criticism.

Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of original research here. Much of the thesis of this book is based around the folkloric origins of the vampire myth but while Hallab quotes and references various anthropologists, she does not deign to find out anything new. There are no interviews, no newspaper reports, and no exclusive surveys of superstitions or beliefs – nothing to suggest that Hallab ever questioned the findings of anthropologists (whose work dates from the middle of the twentieth century). Most worryingly, Hallab does not distinguish between different folkloric traditions, treating Slavic traditions and Greek customs in the same paragraph, as though "folklore" is homogenous and ubiquitous. Hallab frequently refers to "folk cultures," assuming that folklore can only persist in isolation from modern civilisation. It is clear from this that Hallab sees herself as writing from the centre of the modern world. Folklore and folk-culture are something strange and esoteric that happens "out there" in the wilds of a barely-civilised Europe. America, the apex of reason and logic, has moved away from folklore to a much more sensible thing called "popular culture". Her work is founded on this stark binary and she even calls attention to it in her introduction, saying "I prefer to take the approach that most people – peasants and scholars – pretty much know what they think and believe" [5]. Thus, Hallab's world is neatly divided: superstitious folkloric peasants on the one hand and clear-thinking, wise-cracking scholars on the other.

Perhaps we can forgive Hallab for not spending years interviewing "peasants" but we cannot forgive her for not reading the books she claims to analyse. Hallab writes of "mindless zombie-vampires" and cites Frank Norris's "Grettir at Thorhall's Stead" as a text containing such an example. However, Frank Norris did not write *Grettir at Thorhall's Stead*. He adapted it from the Old Norse translations of William Morris. Perhaps, if Hallab had bothered to read Morris' translations rather than the much shortened and bowdlerised form which appears in *The Vampire Omnibus* [1995], she might have found in the Grettir's saga some of the authentic "folkloric" evidence for belief in the undead that her book desperately lacks. I say "undead" because Glam who appears in the Grettir saga is not a "zombie-vampire" but a draugr, a very different fish. He does not drink blood, nor is he infected in any way. Neither is Glam mindless; when Grettir, the hero of the saga finally defeats him, Glam still has the awareness and the linguistic control to curse Grettir to see horrors in the dark which will "drag [him] unto death."

Rather than adding to the recent critical movement, Hallab's dated, flimsy, unoriginal work weakens the academic position of Gothic literature. If this is scholarship, I'd rather be a peasant.

JANE CARROLL

Ian Conrich, ed., *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*
(London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010)

Horror is often studied under a psychoanalytic or a historicist lens. This is perhaps why *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema* (2010) feels like such a fresh take on a genre that only recently has started to receive the critical attention it deserves. Taking an approach closer to cultural materialism, this collection offers a variegated range of articles on contemporary horror and focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of what editor Ian Conrich calls a "definitive return within the contemporary form to its modern origins and to the classics of the horror new wave of the 1970s and the 1980s" (1). He acknowledges, as does the collection itself, the impressive number of remakes in recent years that do not necessarily hark back to the early Universal blockbusters (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* [2003] or *The Hills Have Eyes* [2006], among many others) and that have helped develop a new horrific mythology for the X and Z generations. Superseding an exhaustive scholarship that has favoured, for instance, Hammer productions, this collection puts special emphasis on particularly neglected areas of study like the role of special effects, the impact of the digital age, theories on audiences, or the relevance of an aesthetics of mutilation. Thus *Horror Zone* analyses the current state of horror and its importance as a particularly contemporary phenomenon whilst considering its many eclectic para-sites.

The first section, "Industry, Technology and the New Media," argues for the difficulty of considering contemporary horror as an isolated phenomenon. Much like the Gothic tradition, from which it has often been seen as originating, horror has fragmented and impregnated contemporary culture; horror is no longer a constrained filmic collection consigned to generic viewing, but rather an influential experience to be acknowledged at different cultural sublevels. Simultaneously, in a time when cinema is driven by a capitalist ethos, the simulated horrific experience needs to be rendered marketable and capable of being consumed over a range of different media. This necessarily expands the concept of a "horrific product," and indeed the experience of horror itself, into new uncharted territories. Drawing on Steffen Hantke's argument that horror should not be understood but rather felt, Angela Ndalianis's article, "Dark Rides, Hybrid Machines and the Horror Experience," establishes an affective link between the general notion of horror as a bodily lived-in experience and the experience created by horror-themed rides like *The Revenge of the Mummy*. Ndaliani explains this particular case as an example of hybridity where filmic and sensorial horror might come together productively, thus paving the way for further study in the field.

In the same section, Stacey Abbot's "High Concept Thrills and Chills: The Horror Blockbuster" considers the rise of neo-Gothic narratives, comic-based adaptations, and sequels, all of which she understands as a reaction to the success of the "arty-slasher" (29), especially in the wake of *The Silence of the Lambs*. A detailed discussion of the filmic successes and failures of the post-1990s period allows for a nuanced reading of contemporary horror that leads Abbot to conclude that these years may have been formative in encouraging the mainstream to embrace the genre. In "Bringing It All Back Home: Horror Cinema and Video Culture," Linda Badley contends that domestic consumption of horror films has intrinsically changed their creation and distribution. Through a very well-argued look at direct-to-video releases, "auteriusm" and successful horror films shot with small budgets like *The Blair Witch Project* or *The Last Broadcast*, Badley suggests that these phenomena may be contributing to a democratisation of taste, but also, and simultaneously, to the increasing representation of the "horror of video" (57) itself by revealing anxieties surrounding surveillance and voyeurism. If nothing else, these three articles problematise the activity of watching horror by pluralising the experience in terms of context, distribution and production.

This discursive approach is further expanded in the second part of this collection. “Audiences, Fans and Consumption” further pushes commonly-held beliefs of the genre and its audience by analysing them in a contemporary context. The section opens with an abridged version of the influential essay “‘Trashing the Academy’: Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style” by Jeffrey Sconce. Originally published in 1995, this article explores the cultural relevance of what its author terms “paracinema,” which is “less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus” (104). Seeking partly to legitimise films like *The Corpse Grinders* or *2000 Maniacs*, the value of which is very much contested or even denied, Sconce argues for their potential subversive qualities. Similarly, Matt Hills carries on the legacy of his work on Fan Cultures (2002) in his article “Attending Horror Film Festivals and Conventions: Liveness, Subcultural Capital and ‘Flesh-and-Blood Genre Communities,’” where he argues, following Bourdieu, for the importance of the subcultural value added to the experience of “being” in horror festivals and how this might contribute towards establishing an elite status within the community. Festivals like ‘”right Fest” put into relevance the existence of a “body” of fans with its own internal workings, and how these tend to function around access to material that is not generally available for immediate mass consumption.

These fans also preoccupy horror critic Brigid Cherry in “Stalking the Web: Celebration, Chat and Horror Film Marketing on the Internet.” This article considers the impact that horror fans and their on-line practices have upon marketing success, but also demystifies customary notions of horror fandom as uncritical and uninformed, demonstrating that this section of the public can also be highly educated and discriminatory in their tastes. If suffering from a lack of immediate relevance (some of the examples in this section are from 2003), this section still manages to bring together the particular overarching preoccupation of this volume: that horror is a genre that cannot be easily defined or pinned down, and that its audiences are as complicated as the thought processes that go beyond the films.

Naturally following this much-needed examination of aspects largely neglected by scholarship, comes a section on those even more overlooked elements of the horror genre: manufacture and design. Part Three, comprises two articles on overlooked cinematic elements – mainly special effects and set designs – and two loosely related articles on the ascent of "art horror" and *The Friday the 13th* series. “They’re Here!: Special Effects in Horror Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s,” by Ernest Mathijs, builds on the work of directors like Tom Savini or publications like *Fangoria* to prove that these practical considerations not only constitute an important discursive site, but can even become the main premise around which the horror film itself is created. In a similar vein, Tamao Nakahara’s “Making Up Monsters: Set and Costume Design in Horror Films” paints an interesting picture of the relevance of the *mise-en-scene* to the construction of the film. Nakahara argues that the reason why such elements pass unacknowledged is precisely because if they are to serve their artistic purpose, then they should become as intrinsic to the filmic intradiegesis as to be unnoticeable. Violence and its re-enactment in the form of sites of cultural resistance is the main topic of Joan Hawkins article “Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror,” in which she considers new subgenres like the New French Extremity or films like the *Saw* series, and explains that dislikes for such cultural products might not necessarily stem from their use of exploitative techniques and gore, but rather from their “lack of a consistent humanistic tone” (133). As an interesting juxtaposition, Ian Conrich’s “The *Friday the 13th* Films and the Cultural Function of a Modern Grand Guignol” reads our on-going cultural fascination with this "slasher" series and its depiction of murder as revealing the dynamics of what he understands as a contemporary theatre of cruelty. If this section is particularly illuminating, it is also somewhat loose in its critical objectives, and perhaps too diverse for a productive sustained analysis.

Similarly, Part Four is also loosely connected by the theme of boundaries and their subversion, but offers some of the most enlightening articles. This final section updates certain myths and themes of horror film as well as investigating the limits of representation. Particularly revealing is Jay McRoy's "'Parts is Parts': Pornography, Splatter Films and the Politics of Corporeal Disintegration," where he analyses the relevance of "splatter" and pornographic films and establishes the subversive quality of their rejection of "fixed borders" (199). Likewise, Julian Petley's "Nazi Horrors: Hystory, Myth, Sexploitation" offers a well-researched and culturally sensitive reading of this particular subgenre of horror; while Mick Broderick's "Better the Devil You Know: Film Anthichrists at the Millennium" sees the rise of antichrist narratives as a post-war move towards the secular which culminates in the subgenre of "secular apocalypse" (235). The limits of female representation are also explored by Estella Tincknell in "Feminine Boundaries: Adolescence, Witchcraft, and the Supernatural in New Gothic Cinema and Television," which analyses the foregrounding of gender in products like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Ginger Snaps* but ultimately criticises their lack of adherence to a gender politics which is not sufficiently radical.

The closing piece, Angela Marie Smith's "Impaired Visions: The Cultural and Cinematic Politics of Blindness in the Horror Film," undertakes a rethinking of disability in the modern horror film and contends that, by portraying blindness as fragile and vulnerable, these narratives may be articulating contemporary anxieties about vision, but that they also, at a deeper level, could be "throw[ing] into relief our culture's solipsistic and self-serving vision of itself" (273). This is a debate that has long preoccupied horror-focused academia, especially after the scopophilic nightmares raised by *Peeping Tom* (1960), but has rarely been discussed outside the psychoanalytic remit. This article, like the entire section, is especially successful at proving that these diverse preoccupations (apocalyptic, power-related, gender-inflicted, visual) exceed the platform of horror studies and testify to their relevance to contemporary culture.

The extent to which a sustained discussion of these issues, and of those intrinsic foundational para-sites that have been pushed to the periphery, can have an important impact outside its scholarly niche seems to be the collection's main driving source, and this is perhaps what makes *Horror Zone* such a useful tool of study both for the horror connoisseur and the uninitiated. Perhaps at times too cursory to provide a nuanced analysis of any of the topics raised, this collection should rather be envisaged more as an all-encompassing introduction to the genre in its many contemporary manifestations than as an in-depth monograph. Most importantly, its contributors have managed to find fertile ground in which to base their research and open the way for future research in the field. Given its scope, it would be surprising if this collection failed to become a seminal text for academics working on horror films from the last three decades.

XAVIER ALDANA REYES

"A Creature Born Neither of God nor Man"
Richard Marsh, *The Beetle: A Mystery*
(Reissued by Penguin, London: December 2009)

A miserable night somewhere in Victorian London: delirious from hunger and exhaustion, Robert Holt seeks shelter from the pouring rain. Seeing an open window, he cannot resist. Climbing inside a seemingly empty house, Holt feels that he is safe at last, but he is wrong. Already within the house is a creature of unimaginable horror whose terrible mesmeric powers turn him into a weapon that will allow it to wreak untold havoc. Thus begins one of the greats of mad late-nineteenth-century Gothic literature, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*.

If *The Beetle* has any reputation today it is for being the Victorian horror novel which, at least initially, beat Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Both books appeared within a few weeks of each other in 1897 and Marsh's tale outsold Stoker's by a considerable margin. *The Beetle* was the first to receive a stage adaptation and was even the first to be filmed, with a silent version produced in 1919. It is an indicator of the novel's unusual popularity that it only went of print in 1960. It's our good fortune that, along with works by Ambrose Bierce and Wilkie Collins, Richard Marsh's spectacularly strange story has now been resurrected by Penguin books.

Reading *The Beetle* more than a century after it first appeared, and in view of the phenomenal impact that *Dracula* has had on contemporary culture, it's impossible not to compare the one novel with the other. Both involve the arrival in England from a distant land of a malevolent, seemingly-immortal, shape-shifting monster. Each is a patch-work of accounts, whereby the story is told from a number of viewpoints. In both novels the monster can drain the life of its victims, grows ever younger and possesses hypnotic powers that turn people into its puppets. Finally, both novels conclude with a race against time to save a brave young woman from the foul beast's clutches.

In fact, almost every feature of Stoker's novel has a parallel in Marsh's. *The Beetle*'s vile villain is an even more terrifying creation than Stoker's vampire Count, and Marsh's ability to send shivers along every last inch of his reader's nerves is even greater than his Irish counterpart's. In the same way, Marsh's heroes are as bland and uninteresting as Stoker's and *The Beetle*'s flop denouement is as much a damp squib as *Dracula*'s famously bungled finale. However, what separates the two books is the way they treat horror itself. Stoker's tale, apart from a few memorably ghoulish sequences, largely relies on the power of implication, whereas Marsh is inclined to let everything visceral and bloody hang out.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of his monster. When not manifesting itself as a deformed, wizened and manically chattering old man, the Beetle assumes the form of a gigantic, buzzing, slime-oozing scarab or of a beautiful nude woman with skin the colour of burnished gold. If this were not enough, the story also features cultists, cross-dressing, male and female rape, orgies, cannibalism and human sacrifice! No wonder it sold so well. While the monster's sexual polymorphism is a cause for concern for everyone, what surprises most of all, for a book written in 1897, is that (in spite of the last-minute rush to save the heroine) it is more often masculinity which is under threat in *The Beetle*. One man is kept as a sex-slave in the creature's Egyptian lair. Another has to endure the loathsome monster salivating over his "white skin" and kissing him as he lies naked and unable to move in the grip of its hypnotic influence. Aside from the fervent homoeroticism, Marsh's fixations with sadomasochism and sexual savagery are forever bubbling away beneath the novel's surface.

Recent research has revealed that Richard Marsh (1857-1915) was the pseudonym of Richard Bernard Heldmann, who wrote boys' school and adventure stories and rose to become co-editor of *Union Jack* magazine. Heldmann was fired for reasons unknown in 1883 and when he re-emerged five years later, his literary output could not have been more different. The mystery and horror novels he began writing are all concerned with the darkness and brutality inherent in human nature. It has been suggested that Marsh may have been involved in a financial or sexual scandal. This would certainly explain *The Beetle*'s preoccupation with blackmail, hidden pasts, false identities, secret papers and violent vendettas. The novel is certainly the product of a crazed, extremely jaundiced and even misanthropic imagination.

The Beetle also proves Marsh to be an expert exploiter of the prejudices and bigotries of his age. In his fantasy world, the Englishman is the only force for moral good: women are pretty idiots; every country aside from Britain is a "dog-hole"; and the "foreign bogies" (and this is what the hook-nosed, tiny-skulled, blubber lipped and luminous-eyed Beetle is – a composite of racial caricatures) who live in them are always either trying to sneak into the beds of nice, decent English girls or, even worse, nice, decent English boys. The object of the Beetle's revenge, Paul Lessigham, is a politician reviled as exactly the kind of "wretched radical" whose weakness of character would be the undoing of the Empire. His beloved, Marjorie, is depicted as a dangerous and incompetent New Woman who is neglecting her duty to have sons to further Britain's glory. In other words, anyone who deviates in any way from being a good, clean, upstanding chap is worthy of the deepest suspicion.

The Beetle is ripe with the kind of clap-trap that sent millions into the trenches. Violence is presented as the only effective means of defeating an enemy. Perhaps the novel's most disturbing scenes involve the scientist Sydney Atherton who merrily goes about creating the perfect weapon of mass destruction for Her Majesty. As he states, chillingly, "'If weapons of precision, which may be relied upon to slay, are preservers of peace - and the man is a fool who says that they are not! - then I was within reach of the finest imagination ever yet conceived.'" As he declaims, "'What a sublime thought to think that in the hollow of your own hand lies the life and death of Nations.'" And these are the words of the novel's hero!

The Beetle is one of the most deranged of books ever, and a treat for fans of Victorian horror. It's the sort of thing that is already so far beyond parody that the League of Gentlemen would have great fun with it, and it's a wonder that Hammer never produced a version (one can't read the story without imagining a Ray Harryhausen-animated Beetle). Indeed, it is a pity that this reissue comes without a proper scholarly introduction, as it's high time that Richard Marsh's work was set in its cultural context and his gift for the macabre and depraved finally recognised. The book may never live up to its stomach-twisting opening, which would be envied by Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Stephen King and Clive Barker, but it's a unique, terrifying read, all the more frightening for the fact that, once upon a time, it must have been taken seriously. As for the greatest mystery – what was going through Richard Marsh's mind when he wrote it – we shall have to keep guessing.

RICHARD ENNIS

Stephen P. Unger, *In the Footsteps of Dracula: A Personal Journey and Travel Guide*
(New York: World Audience, 2010)

In the blurb of Stephen P. Unger's *In the Footsteps of Dracula*, Dr. Hugh Fox informs the prospective reader that "Bram Stoker's novel Count Dracula was based on the life and killer-deeds of Prince Vlad the Impaler". Ignoring the fact that Stoker's novel was not called *Count Dracula*, it should be stressed that the story was emphatically not based on the "killer-deeds" of Vlad the Impaler. As Unger makes clear in the book, Stoker's source on Transylvania and its history, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia*, "never mentions either Vlad Ţepeş – that is, Vlad the Impaler – or his monstrous deeds, and neither does Stoker's novel" (48). This confusion succinctly sums up the problematic nature of this book. The link between the fictional Dracula and the historical Vlad the Impaler has always been tenuous and, as is clear to any reader of the book or traveller to the area in which its opening scenes are set, it is largely a fabricated link exploited for much-needed tourist income in rural Romania. Having travelled to many of the places mentioned in the book, I can certainly attest to the beauty of Transylvania as a travel destination; however, the various "Dracula's Castles" and other sites immediately bring to mind the numerous similar tourist traps of Europe – from "Romeo and Juliet's Balcony" in Verona, to the "traditional Irish pubs" of Dublin's Temple Bar. Unger is, of course, aware of the exploitation of the link as a means of attracting tourism, and takes a light-hearted look at many of the sights. Furthermore, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with using a literary and a historical character as the basis of a travel book, regardless of the rather loose connections between them. The question is whether Unger manages to blend the literary, travel and historical elements of his topic successfully; and, in the end, this is a task which he manages with somewhat varying degrees of success.

The book is divided into five parts, the first dealing with the two primary locations of *Dracula*, Transylvania and the North Yorkshire coastal town of Whitby. Given that "Stoker's Transylvania was the pipe dream of an armchair traveler with a genius for writing" (53), Unger sticks to illustrating the more generic descriptions of Transylvania as found in Jonathan Harker's diary, rather than any of the more specific scenes from the novel. To this end, landscape photos are provided with titles such as "The Lofty Steeps of the Carpathians" (21) and "Before Us Lay a Green, Sloping Land". In fact, as the title of Chapter 2 ("Bistriţa and the Borgo Pass Today: Life Imitates Art") recognises, the novel was not influenced to any large extent by the country itself and, in many cases, the inverse is true. An entire Dracula industry has been established in Romania and Unger visits some fairly tacky-looking sights such as "Hotel Castle Dracula," "Dracula's Vault" and "Salon Jonathan Harker". In reality, the town of Whitby, where much of the novel was written and set, is the only place where one can "truly walk in the footsteps of the literary Dracula" (53). It is here that Unger uncovers the far more direct inspiration for *Dracula*, and, accordingly, investigates many of the key locations in the Whitby section of the novel. He explores the location of the library where Stoker read an account of *Voivode* Dracula, "a sort of Warrior Prince... who crossed the Danube and fought the Turks" (48); of the wreck of the *Dmitry* of Narva (which became *Dracula*'s *Demeter* of Varna); and the legend of the phantom Barguest Hound. Reading the Whitby section, one quickly realises that Unger's description of Stoker as an "armchair traveler" is extremely pertinent. Dracula the character may be connected to Transylvania but, as the reader soon understands, *Dracula* the novel is far more closely connected to Whitby.

Parts Two and Three return to Romania for an account of "Prince Vlad Dracula, aka Vlad Ţepeş, aka Vlad the Impaler" and a tour of the various locations associated with his life. The figure of Vlad the Impaler has been obscured and mythologised over centuries, and Unger provides a straightforward introduction to the real life of a staggeringly violent ruler. Having established the history, he then heads off to visit the

sights himself. The blend of history and travel narrative in this section works well, and Vlad's Romania is far more interesting than Dracula's, as reflected in the much longer section given to the former. For those seeking further links between the two lives, however, there are (mildly connected) instances such as the "uncanny resemblance" of Vlad's fortress at Poenari – "the *real* Castle of Dracula" – to "Count Dracula's fictional castle at the top of the Borgo Pass" (165). Again, depending on how one views Unger's attempt to merge his fictional and non-fictional characters, this resemblance can be taken as a fascinating coincidence, or a dubious attempt to make the historical element of the book more relevant.

It should be noted in passing that, curiously, in writing a travel narrative of Stoker's Romania, Unger is not just discovering the sights of *Dracula*, but actually recreating much of the opening section of the novel. Jonathan Harker's trip to Dracula's Castle is a recreation, if not a parody, of the Victorian travel narrative. With its comments on the "picturesque" Romanian people and villages, and Harker's complaints about the inefficient public transport, the novel sets up a sharp division between East and West. This division is subsequently shattered by the character of Dracula, a Romanian who not only speaks far better English than Prof. Van Helsing, but who has studied English property law and train timetables and wishes to pass as a local in London. It is this blurring of racial and social divisions which would have rendered the novel particularly frightening to the contemporary British reader. Seemingly, Unger is walking in the footsteps of Harker's depiction of Romania, as the author laments the difference between "England, which is modern and efficient" and Romania, in which it is difficult to travel "because of the decentralization and lack of infrastructure" (236). Harker's picturesque villagers become Unger's rural Romanian "Woman with Buckets" (26) or "Couple with Cart" (27), while Harker's stagecoach becomes Unger's MaxiTaxi. With this, the subtlety of Stoker's narrative is replaced by the mundane episodes of the travel narrative.

The final two sections provide "A Practical Guide to the Dracula Trail" and information on Bucharest and London, not destinations directly connected with the novel, but the presumed departure point within each country of any traveller following the route. The lack of any information on Dublin seems like a fairly major oversight at this point, and it is unusual that the book never mentions the city where Stoker was born and raised, or Trinity College, where he was educated. A lack of space may have dictated against an entire section on Dublin, but one imagines that any follower of the Dracula Trail would have an interest in visiting Clontarf and Trinity at the very least. While this information might have been included in the "Practical Guide," in examining this section, one of the major problems of the book is clearly highlighted: who exactly is it aimed at? Subtitled "A Personal Journey and Travel Guide," the book is a little bit of everything, but not quite enough of anything. As a travel guide, it is adequate, but certainly no substitute for a *Lonely Planet*. As a literary guide, it is well-researched but provides little if anything that an academic in the area would not already know. As a history of Vlad the Impaler, it is interesting, but far too short to provide anything more than a preliminary examination. Finally, as travel literature it is very readable, but lacking in any major insight into the destinations or people under discussion. What we are left with is an illustrated "personal journey" which is, in many cases, *too* personal. Does the reader really want to know that "the next morning [Unger] found an optometrist outside the citadel walls of Sighişoara who agreed to put the lenses [of his broken glasses] in a new frame for about $30"?

A more problematic example of this tendency is the numerous photos reproduced throughout. In a number of cases the photos serve an illustrative function, complementing descriptions of, for example, "The Houses of the Old Town" (58) in Whitby, or a "Dragon Crest" (114). Nonetheless, it soon feels like you are stuck in an overly-enthusiastic Unger's living room, watching an interminable slide-show of his holiday photos (there are over 180 photos in a 256-page book). The selection could be reduced by at least two-thirds without any real loss to the narrative, especially given that dozens of them are out of focus,

under/over-exposed, and, in any event, extremely badly reproduced. "Genealogy of Vlad Ţepeş" (149) provides an illegible family tree with flash glare in the centre; it is difficult even to find the violinist in "Violinist and Archway" (142); and an early illustration gives us a *black-and-white* photo of "A House of Many Colours" (24). A small assortment of key illustrations, ideally with a selection of them in colour, and a good quality map (I found myself continually consulting the tiny, colour map on the back cover) would improve the reading experience immensely.

Unger's stated aim in the introduction is "to entertain, to inform, perhaps even to inspire" (9) and, to some extent, he has succeeded. Certainly, the enthusiasm for his subject can be felt throughout, and the book is well-researched and stimulating in many parts (particularly the "Whitby" and "Vlad the Impaler" sections). In the end, however, it is let down by its attempts to be all-encompassing, and by its overly subjective narrative and photography, both of which can leave the reader rather uninspired for much of the book. Ultimately, it is a worthwhile introduction for a reader with a casual interest in Romania or Dracula but, unfortunately, very little beyond that.

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