genre as a whole in *Watchmen* (1986), and his ultra-violent interpretation of Batman's nemesis the Joker in *The Killing Joke* (1988). Yet despite having made his name taking apart and reassembling superheroes, Moore has subsequently disavowed the genre, criticising it in an interview in *The Guardian* in November 2013 as adolescent and banal. In the last few decades, his work has shifted away from trademarked men in tights to creator-owned properties. The most prominent of these works are those influenced by Victorian history and culture, such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999–present), which resurrects a group of characters culled from the annals of nineteenth-century adventure and horror fiction (including Allan Quatermain, Mina Murray, Captain Nemo, and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde) in the service of further supernatural adventure. In the meticulously researched *From Hell* (1989–96), Moore takes on another monster of the Victorian psyche, Jack the Ripper, here imagining the murderer as a man who both embodies and is driven by his culture's fears concerning sexuality and modernity. An eccentric and polarising figure both within and outside of his own creative sphere, Moore is famous for his copious facial hair, avowed anarchism, and claim to be a ceremonial magician and devotee of the Roman snake-god Glycon.

A number of studies have already been published on specific works within Moore's *oeuvre*, including Jess Nevins's series of companions to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003–04) and the essays edited by Mark D. White in *Watchmen and Philosophy* (2009). *Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition* is to my knowledge the first broad-ranging study of the author's works, covering not only his graphic novels but also prose fiction such as the novel *Voice of the Fire* (2009), and spoken-word and performance pieces. Its unifying theme of 'the gothic' is one that is naturally prevalent in the work of an author so well-versed in both horror and nineteenth-century literature: even works we might not immediately think of as 'gothic', such as *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta* (1982–89), are shown here to be laden with allusions to the genre's tropes and *topoi*.

Although 'gothic' is a usefully broad term, and perhaps one which in contemporary scholarship resists any narrow definition, its flexibility and ideological capaciousness also present a problem. The editor's introductory essay on 'Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition' provides little in the way of firm guidance as to what the term means for the volume and its contributors. A number of key gothic concepts are indeed flagged here in relation to Moore, such as 'unwavering belief in the intercourse between the fictional and the real', the 'occult dimension of writing', 'representations of the sublime and of the abject', and 'unsettling boundaries and destabilising hierarchies' (pp. 4–5). However, the lack of even a basic literary

and critical history of the gothic in this preface means the ensuing collection is made to seem diffuse and decontextualised.

Many of the contributors approach Moorean gothic by highlighting its complex intertextuality and homage to Victorian texts. In his essay, Jochen Ecke considers the writer's evocation of doubleness and *doppelgängers* as part of a tradition going back to J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871), while Michael Bradshaw outlines the complex allusions to medieval and classical legend, as well as Romantic poetry and the American gothic that are threaded through *Swamp Thing*. However, this approach is not always compelling or conclusive. This is especially evident in Brad Ricca's comparison of the thematic and architectural ideas of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) with Moore's early Superman story 'For the Man Who Has Everything' (1985). Similarly, Clare Sheridan positions Moore's *Watchmen* as part of a tradition of 'the philosophical gothic' (p. 179), evoked particularly by Godwin's *St Leon* (1799) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). While there seems little reason to doubt Moore's familiarity with these texts, neither essay fully persuades the reader that these connections are sustained, intentional, or significant.

There is an overall trend in many of the essays towards open-ended discursiveness, and the lack of robust argument makes the volume as a whole feel hesitant and curiously muted. Moore is thanked in the acknowledgements by the editor for his input into discussions concerning the book and its ideas, and perhaps his over-seeing (however distant) proved an inhibiting factor — there is an overwhelming support for his self-image as magisterial, magical auteur and a reluctance to delve into the more contentious issues relating to his writing. Thus Laura Hilton's comparison of the Mina Murray character in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Volumes I and II of Moore and artist Kevin O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999–2003), and its 2003 film adaptation, broadly concludes that Moore's version of the character has the most power and agency. Nonetheless, neither in this essay nor elsewhere in the volume is there any more critical engagement with or problematising of gender in Moore's work: for example, his frequent depictions of rape and violence against women, which were the subject of a Twitterstorm and defensive rebuttal from Moore earlier this year (in an interview in the 'Slovobooks' blog), and the eroticisation of adolescents in *Lost Girls* (1991–92).

The essays which are most successful are those which take account of the visual elements of the author's primary medium and consider its multimodality; the ways in which the comic's constituting elements of text and image intersect and combine to generate meaning. As Christian W. Schneider forcefully argues in his essay, the comic page has the

unique ability to represent time and space simultaneously; thus the formally rigid nine-panel layout of *Watchmen* imposes a truly gothic air of claustrophobia and impending doom. Though there are no gargoyle-adorned towers or labyrinthine edifices to be found in 1980s New York, 'the protagonists are trapped within the more abstract dungeons of history' (p. 91). Continuing in this vein, Chris Murray provides incisive analysis of the subversive nature of panel fixity and distortion in *From Hell*, relating it to Moore's interest in psychogeography and the text's disruption of time within space: here, juxtapositions between past and future within the regular and (seemingly) linear panels evoke how 'madness becomes mapped onto the environment, distorting it forever' (p. 224). These two essays drive home the vital point that the comics of Moore and his collaborators do not merely reproduce the nineteenth-century gothic novel in a different format, but utilise the unique visual, textual, and sequential properties of the comic-book narrative to innovate the gothic genre as a whole.

The volume will be of interest to both scholars and fans seeking to inform their understanding of Moore's work with knowledge of its literary heritage, as well as those invested in the links between writing and magic. There is much of value here: the essays are thoughtful and well-nuanced in their analysis; however, a note of hesitancy and inconclusiveness remains. The overall reluctance of the essayists to state a definitive thesis or to engage with some of the more contentious and problematic elements of Moore's work is perhaps not surprising — the living author is famously derisive of what he feels to be unlicensed criticism or adaptation of his work. Consequently, a reader who is seeking forthright analysis of the elements of violence and sexuality which so prevail in the Moorean gothic may find themselves wishing the volume had a little more of its bearded icon's defiant and uncompromising spirit.

Kate Roddy

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FICTION REVIEWS

Kenneth Oppel, *This Dark Endeavour* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2011)
and
Such Wicked Intent (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2012)

'No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. […] My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature they were

turned not towards childish pursuits but to an eager desire to learn'.[1] In so few words, Mary Shelley describes the childhood of one of the most influential 'mad scientists' in literature, Victor Frankenstein, in her 1818 novel. But the question of how such a past, spent largely on the bucolic shores of Lake Neuchatel, could lead a man to pursue obsessively the re-animation of an eight-foot-tall[2] body assembled from the parts of several corpses, might understandably give one pause. It certainly gave young-adult novelist Kenneth Oppel food for thought; as he explains on his website:

> Now, remember that this is a kid who goes on to dig up corpses, chop them up, sew the body parts back together, jolt them with electricity in the hopes of revivifying them, and creating life from death. Doesn't sound like a very happy youth to me. What might have happened to Victor to lead him to become the 'mad scientist' we all know?[3]

Oppel's duet of prequels to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* attempts to answer this question, by unravelling Victor Frankenstein's youth and the path by which the young man originally becomes interested in alchemy and resurrecting the dead. Oppel's Victor is obsessive, curious, and incurably love-struck, and both *This Dark Endeavour* and *Such Wicked Intent* are fine additions to the contemporary practice of reimagining canonical nineteenth-century literature for young-adult readers. However, as a response to the admittedly modern question of what Dr Frankenstein's psychological motivation is in his fanatical scientific experimentation, Oppel neglects Shelley's complex intersections between scientific rationalism and passionate idealism.[4] In the process, he replaces Shelley's literary homages — to the myths of Prometheus and Pandora, and to the Book of Genesis and Milton's *Paradise Lost* — with his own, occasionally laborious, mythos.

In Oppel's novels, Victor Frankenstein is born with an identical twin brother, Konrad. Konrad is a better dueller than Victor, and much more charming; charming enough, in fact, to win the heart of the twins' childhood playmate, Elizabeth Lavenza (Victor's betrothed and a pseudo-maternal figure in Shelley's text), without Victor's knowledge. Even as Konrad falls ill, Victor believes he has long come to terms with Konrad's superiority, and desperately hunts for a cure for his brother's mysterious illness. He rarely hesitates to embark on

[1] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by Martin Hindle (New York: Penguin Deluxe Editions, 2007), p. 39.
[2] Shelley, p. 54.
[3] Kenneth Oppel, 'Discussion Guide: This Dark Endeavour', *Kenneth Oppel Official Website, 2011*, <http://www.kennethoppel.ca/images/This_Dark_Endeavour_Discussion_Guide.pdf> [accessed 4 May 2014].
[4] Roslynn D. Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 95.

whatever dangerous expedition is required to find the ingredients of the alchemical cure for Konrad's illness, despite his own partially unrequited love for Elizabeth; Victor repeatedly considers the idea that, if Konrad were to die, he himself would certainly be able to take Konrad's place in Elizabeth's heart. Joined on this hunt by Elizabeth and a surprisingly timorous Henry Clerval, Victor journeys from a secret library deep in the bowels of the Frankenstein château to the laboratory of a nefarious alchemist in Geneva; from the top of an enormous tree growing deep in the Alpine forests to primeval (and watery) tunnels underneath Lake Neuchatel. Oppel pays homage to *Frankenstein*'s gothic tropes through these unearthly, almost abject environments: Victor and his friends repeatedly journey along dark and dusty passageways and secret rooms in which depraved knowledge resides, whether of an alchemical cast or the primordial and dank tunnels carved by nature.

Victor's perilous journeys are all for naught, however: Konrad, despite beginning to recover after being treated with Victor's potion, suddenly dies at the end of *This Dark Endeavour*. Victor, wracked with guilt, vows to 'unlock […] every secret law of this earth'[5] and bring Konrad back to life. *Such Wicked Intent* follows Victor in his efforts to do so, as he unlocks a secret portal into the spirit world, originally discovered (or perhaps constructed) by his ancestor, Wilhelm Frankenstein. Here, Victor, Elizabeth, and Henry find instructions for creating an artificial body out of mud which Konrad may inhabit upon his resurrection. In their pursuance of the occult, Victor and Elizabeth's respective demeanours change, influenced by the malevolent machinations left behind by Wilhelm to guide the young cousins into the spirit world, and they become consumed by anger and lust. It is not until Victor, Elizabeth, and Henry nearly kill each other that Victor discovers Wilhelm Frankenstein's evil intentions in creating the portal. Victor finally destroys the artificial body and resigns himself to the loss of Konrad — that is, until he witnesses the 'astonishing power' of a lightning blast and learns of electricity, at which point Oppel's narrative ends.

One of Shelley's great strengths in *Frankenstein* was in conjuring a truly ambiguous character in Frankenstein's monster, one who desperately yearns for companionship and love while leaving a swath of violence, sometimes intentional, sometimes quite impulsive, in his wake. Neither Shelley's Frankenstein nor his creation is fully cognisant of the consequences of their actions until it is far too late and the damage has been done. Oppel, drawing inspiration for Victor's character from Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, similarly

[5] Oppel, *This Dark Endeavour*, p. 298.

creates an ambiguous hero in his texts.[6] Victor bears a deep but complicated love for his brother, and a sexual desire for Elizabeth that he cannot always contain, nor does he wish to. In the character of Victor, Oppel skilfully combines a desperate desire for recognition and independence with an amorous nature and an insatiable curiosity, creating a character who is simultaneously attractive and repellent, an impulsive obsessive with mostly pure intentions.

Set against Shelley's work, however, Oppel's Victor seems remarkably foolish, if not obtuse. Despite all the many, many signs (truly, almost to an absurd degree) warning him against his pursuits — nearly murdering Elizabeth and Henry, nearly losing his own life several times, the catastrophic failure of the artificial body he creates, and even his realisation that all his creations are infused with a spirit of evil — Victor is still intent on his unnatural quest to bring Konrad back to life at the end of the text. Where Shelley's Dr Frankenstein is driven by an all-consuming quest for knowledge without consideration for the moral and physical consequences of his experimentation, Oppel's Victor is guided simultaneously by an unmistakable thirst for adventure and by his obsessive, often manic love for Konrad and Elizabeth. Victor's interest in science is therefore effectively subordinate to his teenage fixations, which often read like an awkward concession to contemporary trends in pseudo-erotic young adult romance literature and are a clumsy imposition when read in the context of the very novel which Oppel aims to illuminate.

Where Shelley infuses both Frankenstein and his monster with a sense of nobility, complicating her critique of scientific knowledge and intellectualism, Oppel's criticism of unrestrained scientific experimentation through Victor is heavy-handed, and too muddled with supernaturalism and the occult to be truly resonant. *This Dark Endeavour* is the more cohesive and successful of the two novels, presenting young-adult readers with a challenging and atypical main character. For young-adult readers transitioning from other texts such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, and dipping their toes into the gothic for the first time, Oppel's texts are a tempting prelude to Shelley's classic work. For both long-time fans and critical readers of *Frankenstein* and other nineteenth-century science fiction, however, the varnish of contemporary psychology, teenagehood, and ill-defined mysticism that are made to coat Shelley's tale in both *This Dark Endeavour* and *Such Wicked Intent* are pleasant diversions, but ultimately fail to elucidate Dr Frankenstein's fascinating character.

Margot Blankier

[6] Oppel, 'Discussion Guide'.

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Shirley Jackson, 'The Man in the Woods'
(*The New Yorker*, 28 April 2014)

Recently excavated from 'among twenty-six unsorted cartons of her work sent to the Library of Congress' by her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Shirley Jackson's latest posthumous short story, 'The Man in the Woods', is a fitting continuation of her legacy.[1] Indeed, its publication in *The New Yorker* in April is a useful reminder of the role played by magazines and periodicals in the development of the uncanny, gothic, or horrific short story more generally. For much of the twentieth century, writers like Ray Bradbury, Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, and Joyce Carol Oates contributed stories to literary publications like *Collier's* and *Harper's*, and to 'women's' magazines such as *Mademoiselle*, as much as to *Weird Tales* and *Astounding Science Fiction*. Indeed, as attested to by the *Guardian Weekend* 'Winter Fiction Special' (21 December 2013), which featured eerie tales by Lionel Shriver and Jeanette Winterson (among others), as well as by *The New Yorker*'s own back catalogue, the tradition is by no means obsolete. Jackson, a once-famous American writer of dark fiction, whose work was critically and commercially neglected during the latter half of the twentieth century (following her untimely death in 1965), was a major figure in this magazine culture, publishing the bulk of her short fiction (both gothic and realist) in everything from *The New Yorker* and *Playboy* to *Cosmopolitan* and *Women's Home Companion*.

The New Yorker's decision to publish 'The Man in the Woods' (less than a year after they featured the less overtly supernatural 'Paranoia' [5 July 2013], also previously unpublished) therefore effectively recreates the environment in which mid-century readers would originally have encountered Jackson's short fiction. Her surviving family members have worked diligently to gather many of her unpublished and uncollected stories into anthologies: *The Magic of Shirley Jackson* (1966) and *Come Along With Me* (1968), both edited by her husband Stanley Edgar Hyman, and *Just an Ordinary Day* (1996), edited by two of her children, Sarah and Laurence. Doing so opens up the unsettling world of her fiction to a new generation of book-buying readers who might never have come across her work otherwise. At the same time, *The New Yorker*'s miniature Jackson revival acknowledges and extends the platform which, as her biographer Judy Oppenheimer details at some length, paid enough for her writing to allow her to be the primary breadwinner of the

[1] Laurence Jackson Hyman, interviewed by Cressida Leyshon, *The New Yorker*, 26 July 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-week-in-fiction-shirley-jackson-2> [accessed 4 August 2014].

Jackson-Hyman household.[2] I dwell on this publishing tradition at length because, in many ways, 'the medium is the message', as Jackson's contemporary Marshall McLuhan put it in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964); I would argue that the shock value of Jackson's fiction is heightened by the fragmented, multifarious nature of a magazine's content. A collection undeniably immerses the reader in the apparently inescapable world of panic and uncertainty conjured up by her writing. However, to come unexpectedly across something like 'The Lottery' (Jackson's infamous tale of small-town ritual sacrifice) in the midst of reviews, non-fiction pieces, and rather more realist tales, is to be plunged into this unpredictable, hostile and alienating world almost without warning, just as her characters so often are.[3]

Nor is Christopher, the male protagonist of 'The Man in the Woods', an exception in this regard. We first meet him walking along a path that soon tangles itself in dense woodlands, where a stray cat begins to follow him. Until he comes across a small cottage at the end of the road he's been following, this is the extent of the information we are given about him, except that he has travelled far, but is unsure about where he has come from, where he is, or where he hopes to go. Two strong, taciturn, rustically clad women unhesitatingly invite Christopher into the house, a stone construction the interior walls of which are covered in strange markings. They introduce him to the 'host', who is rather more chatty but equally mysterious, and considerably more welcoming than the protagonist had expected. I won't spoil the ending, but there are distinct echoes here of the fourteenth-century Middle-English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and of other mythological traditions that are older still.[4] Greek mythology is directly evoked in the form of the women's names: Aunt Cissy, short for Circe, famous for turning Odysseus's men into pigs; and Phyllis, which is also the name of a young mythological woman who transforms into a nut tree following her suicide.

As these names seem to imply, the themes of metamorphosis and the preternatural qualities of the natural world are central to the story, which is suggestive rather than explicit in its use of such imagery. The host is called Mr Oakes; the house is surrounded by trees that press ominously against the windows; and all three inhabitants wear green belted robes and go barefoot. These details may alert readers familiar with the central premise of James

[2] See Judy Oppenheimer, *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1988).
[3] First published in *The New Yorker* on 26 June 1948, the story generated an unprecedented number of complaint letters to the magazine in the weeks that followed.
[4] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) is a useful reference point in this regard.

Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1922), or indeed with the Fisher-King motif in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published the same year, as to where the story is going (and that the young man won't be going anywhere else in hurry). Matters come to a head when the protagonist's feline companion wins a battle against the house cat, Grimalkin, prompting an exchange between the women that implies that more is going on here than simply territorial rivalry. Nevertheless, Jackson's narrative voice is unobtrusive, stating facts without overtly directing the reader's interpretation of them. As Laurence Jackson Hyman, Jackson's son, mentions in an interview with Cressida Leyshon in the 21 April 2014 issue of *The New Yorker*, his mother wished her readers to work things out for themselves, rather than holding their hands and explaining what is going on — an authorial stance which demands considerable readerly effort and attention, while augmenting the sense of confusion and unease that permeates her stories.[5]

This effect is produced primarily by means of a notably economical style, and it is through this sparse narration that the fear both described and evoked by the story first emerges. We are told, in a sentence that calls to mind Robert Frost's perennially evocative poem 'The Road Not Taken' (1920), that 'Christopher had come into the forest at a crossroads, turning onto the forest road as though he had a choice, looking back once to see the other road, the one he had not chosen, going peacefully on through fields' (p. 65). We later learn that he had been attending college (presumably a perfectly ordinary mid-twentieth-century American one), but, as he tries to recall why he left, he can only state, 'frankly', '"I don't know *why*." [...] "I don't know why," he repeated. "One day I was there, in college, like everyone else, and then the next day I just left, without any reason except that I did"' [emphasis in original] (p. 67). What is especially chilling about this detail is that it suggests that slipping out of the 'everyday' world and into the strange, threatening realm of myth and ritual is something we could find ourselves doing without realising it, and with an ease that is horrifying. At the same time, here, like so many of Jackson's characters, Christopher makes little effort to struggle against either his amnesia or the oddness of his current situation, while the narrative voice itself remains flat, almost affectless, and unnervingly matter-of-fact in the presentation of increasingly frightening events.

Indeed, Christopher's hosts participate actively in maintaining the dearth of background information or explanation that characterises the story, though we are left unsure as to whether this is because they think that their guest already knows exactly what's going

[5] Laurence Jackson Hyman, interviewed by Cresside Leyshon, *The New Yorker*, 21 April 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-week-in-fiction-shirley-jackson> [accessed 4 August 2014].

on. Phyllis ushers Christopher into the house, saying simply, 'Come along, please. I shouldn't keep you waiting' (p. 65). Treating him more like an anticipated guest (and indeed a distinguished one at that) than a random traveller seeking shelter, Phyllis behaves here in a manner that is sufficiently 'off' to set alarm bells ringing, but also potentially banal enough to leave us in the same situation as Christopher — doubting our own unease. After he is fed and stays the night, the host shows him around the house, keeping up a patter which extends rather than allays these fears. When Christopher remarks 'It's a very old house, isn't it?' Mr Oakes responds '"Very old," [...] as though surprised by the question.' He continues, confusingly, 'A house was found to be vital, of course' (p. 68). This is but one example of the way in which the host and the women talk as if Christopher understands completely the situation and the house he finds himself in (they say 'of course' with an incantatory frequency), and in his puzzlement and politeness, 'helplessly', Christopher never corrects them (pp. 66, 68). It would therefore be misleading to say that he is their prisoner; it is more that he is somehow manoeuvred into imprisoning himself.

For exactly this reason, warmth and welcome are always to be treated with suspicion throughout Jackson's work: 'The Lovely House/A Visit', 'The Rock', and 'The Story We Used to Tell' all imply this strongly; Eleanor Vance's seduction by the eponymous Hill House (in *The Haunting of Hill House* [1959]) is perhaps the most familiar example of this trope. The fear is not so much that the warm, welcoming home will turn out to be just the opposite, but that it might be dangerous precisely because it never wants to let you go — because its embrace is forever — and because the very cosy invitingness of Jackson's haunting houses tricks those who stumble into them into feeling that they belong there. A visit paid to an unknown house is always the most perilous of activities in Jackson's *oeuvre*. Those who already live in a house are part of its darkness and therefore apparently impervious to it; but those who intrude upon it from without are liable to become victims of its acquisitive nature. Merging this smothering-house motif with the mythic resonances of 'The Lottery', this newly unearthed story crystallises many of the concerns central to Jackson's writing, as Christopher becomes embroiled in an age-old ritual that is indifferent to his status as an individual, seeking only to draw him into its endlessly repeating cycles of death and renewal, violence and shelter, magic and domesticity.

The fact that 'The Man in the Woods' pivots around images and narrative patterns familiar both from mythology and from Jackson's own work does not, however, detract in any way from the pleasure of reading it, nor from the freshness and power of the ways in which she employs her materials. Laurence Jackson Hyman notes in the interview mentioned

above that '[Kenneth] Burke often pointed out that, while Stanley was a serious scholar of myth and ritual, Shirley's work embodied it'.[6] In other words, and as 'The Man in the Woods' amply demonstrates, to read her work is to catch a privileged glimpse of what a modern myth might look like.

Dara Downey

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[6] Laurence Jackson Hyman, April 2014 interview.