Trafficking in Death and (Un)dead Bodies:
Necro-Politics and Poetics in the Works of Ann Radcliffe

Carol Margaret Davison

At the conclusion of his essay 'The Melancholy Briton: Enlightenment Sources of the Gothic' (2009), Peter Walmsley states that

> Ann Radcliffe's [*The*] *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), with its unquiet graves, its terrors of entombment in a foreign land, and its complex negotiations with Catholicism, partakes of a tradition of nationalist discourse about death that reaches back through [Laurence] Sterne and [Edward] Young, claiming the melancholy of the bereaved and the serious propensity to live with death in view, once again, as the peculiar property of the British psyche.[1]

Apart from this single, overarching claim, Walmsley offers no examination of Radcliffe's masterpiece as read through the lens of what may be referred to as the Death Question. Piggybacking on his astute observation that the gothic emerges out of a 'wider [, national] discourse of death' and that it evidences the 'obsession with death' that Marilyn Butler rightly claims as prevalent in literature produced between 1760 and 1790, I would suggest that there is a great deal at stake, particularly in regard to national identity and its religious inflections, in Radcliffe's engagement with the Death Question.[2] Under that aegis may be placed the issue of our social duty towards the dead, the existence and status of the afterlife, and modes of mourning and memorialisation. In its representation of a transitional era characterised by a new culture of death practices, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* foregrounds the fraught inter-generational politics between the living and the dead (who often remain undead) as they, effectively, negotiate a new social contract reflective of national values. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* also supports Thomas Laqueur's claim that cultural

---

[1] Peter Walmsley, 'The Melancholy Briton: Enlightenment Sources of the Gothic', in *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832*, ed. by Miriam L. Wallace (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 39–54 (p. 53).
[2] Walmsley, p. 39; and Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 53.

representations of death reflect how 'one kind of world is transformed into another', thus contributing to the establishment of the modern secular order.[3]

According to Tony Walter in his work devoted to our contemporary 'revival' of death as a crucial topic for social consideration and discussion, '[t]he Age of Reason shifted death from the frame of religion into the frame of reason, from the frame of sin and fate to the frame of statistical possibility.'[4] This seismic shift, however, was not without its significant aftermath, as renowned thanatology historian Philippe Ariès makes clear in his magisterial work *The Hour of Our Death*. In his view, the advent of secular modernity and the unsettling of religious certainties alienated us from an earlier familiarity with death that he calls the 'tame death', when death's unknowns were mitigated by communal rituals that assuaged the grief of the mourners and ensured the deceased's transition to eternal life. Thus did the Enlightenment engender what Elisabeth Bronfen astutely describes as 'a double gesture of denial and mystification',[5] as death became defamiliarised despite the efforts of science and medicine to 'naturalize' it.[6] Death, the 'most persistent and indifferent' adversity faced by humanity, according to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his illuminating book *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* (1992), proved to be, therefore, unmasterable by the Age of Reason. Using notably gothic rhetoric to describe it, Bauman deems death the 'guilty secret' and 'skeleton in the cupboard left in the neat, orderly, functional and pleasing home modernity promised to build'.[7] This description places gothicists in well-travelled terrain, for death serves as the quintessential emblem of the Freudian uncanny: while being 'of the home' and familiar, it also remains secret, concealed, and unfamiliar, shrouded in mystery. The cultural schizophrenia that resulted involved, especially in works of Romanticism, the denial of the death of the self, a shift perhaps best captured in a line from Edward Young's renowned Christian consolation poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–5), that reads, '[a]ll men think all men mortal but themselves'.[8] This significant cultural transition also evidenced the recognition and exultation of the death of the Other, an Other who, due to our acute anxiety about the status of the corpse as corruptible and depersonalised, was transformed into the *Beautiful* Other who remained incorruptible and identifiably individualised.

---

[3] Thomas Laqueur, 'In and Out of the Panthéon', *London Review of Books*, 23 (20 September 2001), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n18/thomas-laqueur/in-and-out-of-the-pantheon> [accessed 5 December 2014].

[4] Tony Walter, *The Revival of Death* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.

[5] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 86.

[6] Julie Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation: 1750–1860', in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. by Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 202–29 (p. 203).

[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Oxford: Polity, 1992), p. 134.

[8] Edward Young, *Night Thoughts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 47, l. 43.

Although ultimately unrepresentable, death was a major topic of enquiry in Enlightenment discourses, especially those of a socio-political and theological cast. Enlightenment *philosophes* repeatedly underscored the civil and ecclesiastical exploitation of the fear of death as a means of social control, while a cultural epistemology grounded in a new relationship between the living and the dead, one religiously and nationally inflected, punctuated the works of Anglo-American radicals.[9] The necrocracy (dominion by the dead) famously identified by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as characterising the British constitution — 'an entailed inheritance' that grips the state and its citizens in a type of 'mortmain for ever' — was condemned by such thinkers as Thomas Paine and William Wordsworth as a type of 'necrophiliac abomination'.[10] Their writings suggest that they favoured Thomas Jefferson's philosophy, as articulated in a letter to James Madison in 1789, that 'the dead have neither powers nor rights over the earth' which 'belongs in usufruct to the living'.[11]

Fuelled by what Horace Walpole described in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as an 'engine of terror' and, more specifically, according to Burke's meditations on the sublime, the terror generated by 'an apprehension of pain or death', gothic works like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* registered these debates about inter-generational power politics.[12] As Wamsley notes, '[t]he Gothic novel explores Burke's urgent sense of the fragility of civilization and of the ghastly evidence, just across the Channel, of an utter betrayal of the dead', a terrifying prospect represented in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in the form of withholding respectful memorialisation, a prospect that might best be symbolised by an unmarked grave.[13] Further to this, many gothic works — *ars moriendi*-influenced cautionary tales — tapped death-related mysteries, and meditated on death and death practices as both a signpost of civilisation, in keeping with the work of Giambattista Vico, and a safeguard of that civilisation and its history, in keeping with the work of Robert Pogue Harrison.[14] Echoing Burke's notion of an existing social contract between the dead and the living,

---

[9] Elisabeth Bronfen and Sarah Webster Goodwin, *Death and Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 3; and Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 188–89.

[10] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), pp. 47, 48; and Tom Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 50.

[11] Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Letters*, ed. by Willson Whitman (Eau Claire, WI: E. M. Hale and Company, 1945), p. 130.

[12] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: J. Dodsley, 1767), p. 96.

[13] Walmsley, p. 53.

[14] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 120.

Harrison maintains that 'humans bury not simply to achieve closure and effect a separation from the dead but also and above all to humanize the ground on which they build their worlds and found their histories'.[15] Produced at a point of anxious historical transition between religious certainties and rational, sceptical empiricism, gothic works like Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) also manipulated the Death Question as a filter through which to view and engage with issues of personal/socio-political inheritance and national identity politics.

The rich and complex thanatological semiotics of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in combination with the configuration of, and power politics between, bodies — dead, living, uncanny, spectral, and living-dead — promote a new social contract in the British body politic that is decidedly Protestant in its make-up. This contract seeks to temper and ideologically reconfigure as atavistically Catholic what Peter Walmsley has described as the dark side of the British national character — 'the Briton as pathologically melancholy, incapacitated, and obsessed about the past'.[16] While *The Mysteries of Udolpho* attests to the significant 'shift in attention to the feelings of the bereaved' that occurred in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, there is also an undeniable gender-based aspect to Radcliffe's agenda of temperance that will be examined below.[17] She purposefully grafts elements of the conduct guide onto her female-gothic novel, a canny incorporation given the concurrent popularity of that form, coupled with the fact that an entire chapter in the original fifteenth-century *Ars Moriendi* was devoted to appropriate deathbed conduct for relatives and friends of the dying. In response to the popular representation of young women as excessively melancholic that Angela Wright has identified in the literature of Radcliffe's era, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* takes as one of its primary goals the reining in of excessive sensibility, which it associates with both Catholic superstition and mental disorder.[18] Dale Townshend's provocative and viable Lacanian assessment of the ghosts in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as symptomatic of 'failed' or 'inadequate' mourning should, I believe, be further qualified in terms of that novel's socio-historic contexts.[19] 'Failed' mourning in Radcliffe's novel involves excessive, unregulated emotion that is coded as Catholic, its terrifying ghosts both titillating emblems of what is repeatedly characterised as a dead religion or perverse

---

[15] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. xi.

[16] Walmsley, pp. 40–41.

[17] Rugg, p. 202.

[18] See Angela Wright's essay '"To Live the Life of Hopeless Recollection": Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic, 1780–1800', *Gothic Studies*, 6.1 (2004), 19–29.

[19] Dale Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ghost of *Hamlet*', in *Gothic Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis and Dale Townshend (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 60–97 (p. 93).

necrocracy in thrall to death, and remnants of an archaic era that return in uncanny forms to 'haunt' the smug certainties of rational modernity. In contradistinction, 'successful' or 'adequate' mourning in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* involves self-regulation, and an attendant lack of haunting by terrorising ghosts, and is figured as Protestant. As Francis Young has rightly noted, '[t]he titillating horrors of European Catholicism became central to the "Radcliffian Gothic" of the 1780s and 90s',[20] which, like the gothic more generally, as Diane Hoeveler has cogently illustrated, 'was committed, even if ambivalently, to chart the evils of the old world of Catholicism, communalism, feudalism, and the rise in its place of the Protestant subjects'.[21] Finally, as will be discussed briefly, Radcliffe advocates a noteworthy religiously inflected shift in modes of mourning and memorialisation away from those coded as Catholic that are designed to invoke terror, towards those coded as Protestant in their compartmentalisation, domestication, sanitisation, and sentimentalisation, that are designed to alleviate terror. This shift is, rather significantly, in keeping with the late-sixteenth-century historical setting of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when France was engaged in religious wars over the threat of Protestant accession to the throne.

Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a later literary masterpiece influenced by *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe's novel therefore assumes a greater thematic cohesion when read through the lens of the Death Question, a subject whose centrality is signalled in the opening chapter when the young Emily suddenly loses her beloved mother after she contracts her husband's illness while nursing him. Emily's traumatic loss of her mother is amplified when her father succumbs to death only months later during a trip undertaken to assuage his grief. Calm in the face of his impending death, St Aubert — a man well versed in loss after the devastating deaths of two young sons — prepares his daughter, on the cusp of womanhood, for life alone.[22] In a classic *ars moriendi* dialogue that reprises the principal Christian message of graveyard poetry *vis-à-vis* the afterlife, St Aubert reminds Emily of the naturalness of death in which 'there is nothing new, or surprising, since we all know, that we are born to die; and nothing terrible to those, who can confide in an all-powerful God' (p. 76). Underscoring the fact that he is dying in peace and will be spared the sufferings of old age, St Aubert counsels his daughter to retain her fortitude in the face of life's misfortunes, and to endeavour to chart a well-balanced course between excessive feeling and reason (pp. 81–82).

---

[20] Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p. 109.

[21] Diane Hoeveler, 'Demonizing the Catholic Other: Religion and the Secularization Process in Gothic Literature', in *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 83–96 (p. 91).

[22] Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 5. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Emily's two opposite responses to death, during this scene and her father's subsequent burial, register the internal battle at the centre of her narrative of development. On the one hand, St Aubert's lessons prove invaluable during Emily's subsequent trials, serving to complete his lifelong preparation of his daughter for what Radcliffe suggests is a Good Christian Death, which involves a peaceful, 'conscious and lucid' passing amidst loved ones, on the heels of an ethically upright life.[23] Although Emily is described as sobbing compulsively at her father's deathbed, Radcliffe underscores the fact that St Aubert's peaceful resignation, coupled with his 'faith and hope' (p. 81) in a post-mortem reunion with God, in whom he counsels his distraught daughter to trust, lend her some consolation. Although Radcliffe makes no reference to the Resurrection, in this instance she echoes a centuries-old idea that a Christian fearful of death dishonours Christ's sacrifice and denies the truth of the Resurrection.[24]

Emily's other response to her father's imminent demise, however, involves raw, unadulterated terror and is more complex, transmogrifying as it does from 'terror *for* her father' when she first realises he is fatally ill (p. 65, emphasis added) to trauma in reaction to what is figured as his uncanny corpse on his deathbed with its fixed 'countenance, never till now seen otherwise than animated' (p. 83). Despite a subsequent waking dream in which St Aubert signals his ascension to heaven, Emily's act of gazing on his corpse with what Radcliffe notably describes as '*a mixture of doubt* and awful astonishment' (p. 83, emphasis added), followed by her breakdown just prior to his burial when she realises she will never again see him animate and in the flesh, attests to a serious anxiety about mortality. The episode involving Emily's final, poignant visit to her father's grave (pp. 90–91) prior to her departure from the region, magnifies this anxiety while referencing the novel's foremost object of terror — a black veil — that Radcliffe subsequently cunningly employs to tap Emily's psychic state, in particular her deep-seated fears about mortality. Deciding to make her final farewells at her father's grave privately — so that 'she might not be interrupted, or observed in the indulgence of her melancholy tenderness' (p. 90) — Emily waits for midnight and the prearranged arrival of a nun who guides her into a private church side-door and then leaves, 'her black veil waving over the spiral balusters' as she disappears into the darkness (p. 91) after warning Emily to avoid a 'newly opened grave' that she must pass on her way (p.

---

[23] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 26.
[24] This standpoint was reiterated by Reverend H. A. Paddon in his book *Death Abolished; or, The Saint's Deliverance from the Fear of Death* (London, 1875), where he writes, 'A Christian afraid of *death*!' how '*utterly groundless* are such fears; and how greatly dishonouring to Him who took upon Him our nature, *that he might deliver us from the fear of death*!' (p. 3, emphasis in original).

90). Quintessentially gothic atmospherics suffuse the rest of this narrative scene, which nicely prefigures the symbolic descent and journey into the underworld that Emily will undertake in the rest of the volume: with moon-light streaming 'through a distant gothic window', Emily sidesteps the open grave while overhearing monks 'chanting the requiem for [the] soul' of one of the convent's friars buried there the evening before (p. 91).

As Emily's mixed responses to her father's death evidence, her anxieties about mortality are essentially two-fold and anachronistic. The first involves death in general and the prospect of spiritual transcendence, given the possibly irreparable breach introduced between the material and divine worlds in the wake of modernity; the second a more immediate, personal concern about the prototypically gothic 'sins of the fathers' and the status of her father's soul. While Emily may not be haunted like Hamlet by the apparition of a vengeance-seeking, purgatory-bound paternal ghost — the idea of purgatory being an unsavoury and antiquated Catholic conception for Radcliffe's readership — she *is* haunted by the spectre of her father's dishonourable conduct and status in the afterlife.[25] This is particularly evident after she witnesses his emotional distress while contemplating the miniature of an unidentified woman shortly after her mother's death (p. 26), coupled with the suspicious, dying promise he elicits from Emily that she locate and destroy, without examination, a carefully hidden packet of papers (pp. 77–78). This scene of haunting tells the reader everything s/he needs to know about the value the middle classes placed on sexual chastity in Radcliffe's day and its importance to Emily's story more generally.

Emily ports these two radically different responses to death — one positive, the other negative — into her subsequent harrowing encounters in Italy, a journey figured by Radcliffe as a type of underworld descent where Emily, fittingly clad at the outset in 'mourning dress' (p. 121), is plagued by ghosts and corpses — some real, some imaginary — that either signify or trigger her various deep-seated death-related anxieties. In this psychomachia-style narrative, Radcliffe chronicles an internal battle, therefore, between what is, effectively, Emily's 'Protestant' self that strives to retain her fortitude and remain peaceful in the face of death and other threats to her honour and inheritance, and her terrified, superstitious 'Catholic' self that renders her vulnerable to various violations — emotional, physical, financial, and otherwise. Despite experiencing several serious traumas, however, Emily

---

[25] According to Young, '[t]he belief that Catholics were obsessed with purgatory lingered into the eighteenth century […]. However, for educated Catholics, the association of purgatory with ghosts was something of an embarrassment. English Catholic writers on purgatory made mention of ghosts, and even many Continental authors, steered clear of them. Protestants were troubled by the continuing importance of ghosts in peoples' lives; blaming Catholics for this externalized the phenomenon and made them feel better.' See *English Catholics*, pp. 96–97.

remains determined in this gothic detective tale to uncover the mysteries behind the connected fates of the Marchioness de Villeroi and Signora Laurentini, and ultimately lay the plaguing spectre of her father's dishonour to rest.

Foregrounding the conduct-novel component of her cautionary tale, Radcliffe promotes the Protestant middle-class mantra of self-regulation *vis-à-vis* both love and grief. According to Ariès, mourning was often regarded as 'an extension of modesty' by the European middle classes of the time.[26] Radcliffe signals this dual emotional self-regulation of love and grief early on in the narrative, as Emily experiences the first stirrings of love when she meets her beloved Valancourt on the journey during which her father dies. In Emily's subsequent separation from both men, Radcliffe rhetorically yokes two types of loss and mourning — that relating to love and that to death, both of which Emily experiences for the duration of her narrative trials in the face of which she must retain her modesty and gain fortitude without engaging, as the black-veiled nun and Signora Laurentini/Sister Agnes seem to signify, in emotional mortification.[27] That Emily is ultimately reunited with Valancourt during an evening walk as she contemplates her father's death (pp. 500–01) further connects these ideas, a conjunction that enhances the story's affective powers, while tapping some dark social realities of Radcliffe's era, including the ubiquity and unpredictability of death. Despite noteworthy population growth between the mid- and late-eighteenth century, which resulted in chronic overcrowding in towns, for example, diseases like cholera spread rapidly, capable of killing off healthy adults in a matter of hours.[28] These morbid realities were registered both in some conduct guides and gothic tales, like the popular American story *The Asylum; or Alonzo and Melissa* (1811), where one lover undergoes the emotionally excruciating experience and test of his devotion of believing his beloved to be dead for some years before their astonishing reunion and marriage.

The more complex and political female-gothic aspects of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* grant expression to the potentially fatal terrors faced by women in love and marriage. Notably, mortal dangers abound in this story for both impassioned women embroiled in excessive and transgressive love affairs and for those *femmes couvertes* like the Marchioness de Villeroi who are forced into loveless marriages for the sake of money, where they are rendered powerless under the law. Mourning for both Valancourt and St Aubert, and anxious about her father's spiritual status, the unmarried Emily confronts female-specific fears during

---

[26] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 578.
[27] Radcliffe, pp. 240, 558.
[28] Rugg, p. 217.

her dark Bildungsroman journey, fears that coalesce in her numerous and distressing encounters with both ghosts and corpses in Montoni's prison-like Castle of Udolpho — a decaying (p. 470) and unchristian (p. 246), vice-ridden (p. 448) locale to which Emily feels her fate connected as if 'by some invisible means' (p. 250). Under prolonged duress and vulnerable to violation, her honour and inheritance under siege, Emily's mind succumbs to superstition, phantoms (p. 329), and 'supernatural appearance[s]' (p. 356) in two locales that are, effectively, mausoleums. Thus are Radcliffe's ghosts employed to probe and express psychological states, all of which are ultimately exorcised in the face of the explained supernatural. These include the wife of Montoni's servant (who was killed when some of the battlements of the north tower of the castle collapsed on top of her) (p. 229–30); Signora Laurentini (whose dead body, Emily fears, is actually located behind the Castle's mysterious black veil); Emily's innocent aunt, the poisoned Marchioness (whose tragic betrayal and murder Emily uncovers only towards the novel's end); and Madame Cheron (Emily's negligent aunt who is incarcerated and dies while under her husband Montoni's care).

While spectres unsettle a grieving Emily at every turn to the tune of hundreds of pages, two traumatic confrontations with gruesome corpses in Montoni's castle subsequent to her exposure to her father's lifeless body highlight the threat of death as a means of controlling women. In the first instance, a fearless Emily views the picture concealed behind the black veil (pp. 248–49), which she believes, upon observation, to be the actual corpse of Signora Laurentini, a victim of Montoni. This distressing episode leaves Emily senseless and is linked to a second corpse-sighting sequence where she, fearing for her life while frantically searching for her aunt whom she believes has been starved to death, explores a room containing instruments of torture where she discovers a notably ungendered bloody corpse extended across a low couch (p. 348). In a later, semiotically loaded scene, where the Marchioness's beloved servant Dorothée shrouds Emily with the Marchioness's black veil in her bedroom in Château-le-Blanc, Radcliffe cunningly weaves the novel's various death-related mysteries together, as Emily remembers

> the spectacle she had witnessed in a chamber of Udolpho, and, by an odd kind of coincidence, the alarming words, that had accidentally met her eye in the MS papers, which she had destroyed, in obedience to the command of her father; and she shuddered at the meaning they seemed to impart, almost as much as at the horrible appearance, disclosed by the black veil. (p. 491)

Exposure of Signora Laurentini's diabolical machinations and the Marchioness's murder resolves the mystery of the miniature and lays the spectre of St Aubert's infidelity to rest,

alongside the ghosts of a Roman-Catholic past. In a similarly ritualistic manner, Emily's grief, which Radcliffe describes as diminishing slowly over the course of her lengthy trials (p. 494), must be — and is — contained and St Aubert duly memorialised. In the process, Radcliffe gestures towards what Thomas Laqueur has nicely characterised as a new culture of death. In stark contrast to what has been called the 'invisible death' of the twenty-first century in which, as Harrison characterises it in his compelling study *The Dominion of the Dead* (2003), 'the dead are simply dead [and] the living are in some sense dead as well', Radcliffe divests death of its terror by combining a respect for the dead with new modes of memorialisation.[29] What Townshend has described in his provocative essay, 'Gothic and the Ghost of *Hamlet*', as Radcliffe's act of secularising and psychologising a process of grieving that 'consists more of memory, tears and deliberately commemorative acts than anything approaching the religious' is actually, I would argue, an act of *Protestantising* the work of mourning.[30] As Roy Porter astutely notes about Enlightenment Britain, '[w]hat the political nation sought was a rational religion, involving the destruction of idolatry and priestly power. Enlightenment in Britain took place within, rather than against, Protestantism.'[31] While, as Townshend maintains, 'contrary to the neatness of Freud's psychoanalytic model, mourning the dead in Radcliffean *[sic]* Gothic is never completed', it becomes ritualised in new ways — sentimentalised and comfortably contained in newly landscaped cemeteries, the deceased memorialised by way of such objects as funerary miniatures.[32]

This transition in material culture is signalled in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by way of two items — the miniature possessed by St Aubert of his beloved sister, and the wax effigy of the corpse 'decayed and disfigured by worms' (p. 662) that Emily mistook for a picture, concealed behind the black veil. This latter item, a former *memento mori* and example, in the narrator's words, 'of that fierce severity, which monkish superstition has sometimes inflicted on mankind' (p. 662), serves as a quintessential example of the gruesomely graphic *transi* tomb objects that were common in the late Middle Ages in Northern Europe. Funerary miniatures, or ambulant portraits, of deceased relatives, often mounted in black frames and embellished with pearls to signify the mourner's tears, became more accessible to the middle classes in the eighteenth century when memorial jewellery was one of the largest categories of jewellery. This new material culture was a product of what Terry Castle has called the

---

[29] Harrison, p. 123.
[30] Townshend, p. 91.
[31] Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 99.
[32] Townshend, p. 93.

'new-style devotionalism' of Radcliffe's era that was grounded in a spectralised mode of perception that benefited those on both sides of the grave.[33] On the one hand, it saw through the 'real person' towards their perfect and unchanging spiritual essence, a 'new immortalizing habit of thought' that denied death by reconceptualising heaven as a site of post-mortem family reunion, an idea evidenced by Emily St Aubert's various addresses to her dead father in times of trauma and need.[34] On the other hand, this new style of devotionalism comfortably reaffirmed the existence of the mourner, as captured in the phrase coined by Castle, '[l]ugeo ergo sum: I mourn, therefore, I am', to which should be added, to capture the comforting corollary, *Luges, ergo, aeternas* — 'You are mourned, therefore you are immortalised'.[35]

A one-woman Protestant Reformation in her promotion of a rationally enlightened response to death, bereavement, and conceptions of the afterlife, Ann Radcliffe promoted a Golden Mean in regard to attitudes towards and treatment of the dead in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one positioned between what she portrays as a perverse and superstitious Roman-Catholic necrocracy in thrall to the dead/undead, and a careless abuse and annihilation of the dead, as promoted in Anglo-American radical philosophy and exemplified by the highly publicised bloody and spectacular excesses and violations perpetrated against the dead during the September Massacres in the summer of 1792. Read through the lens of the Death Question, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* serves as a new type of Protestant consolation literature designed to divest death of its terrors, a literature that works from the premise that we are all mourners who, in our own turn, will require mourning. In case this narrative agenda is missed, Radcliffe's closing address renders her primary artistic objectives and viewpoint about her readership clear: 'And, if the weak hand, that has recorded this tale, has, by its scenes, *beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow, or, by its moral, taught him to sustain it* — the effort, however humble, has not been vain, nor is the writer unrewarded' (emphasis added).[36]

---

[33] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 135.
[34] Castle, p. 136; and Radcliffe, pp. 214, 219.
[35] Castle, p. 135.
[36] Radcliffe, p. 672.

The Horrors of Scientific Investigation: Parasitic Mesmerism in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Parasite*

Laura Habbe

In *Degeneration* (1880) E. Ray Lankester seriously warns against the common presumption that all evolution means progress. In the final paragraph of his work he pleads for the fostering of scientific rationality to combat the danger of degeneration: 'The full and earnest cultivation of Science — the Knowledge of Causes — is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race — even of this English branch of it — from relapse and degeneration.'[1] In Lankester's opinion 'Science' is a universal remedy to ensure the progress of humanity. Arthur Conan Doyle played his part and created more than one scientifically minded character who answers Lankester's challenge for the Anglo-Saxon race, including Professor Challenger and, of course, Sherlock Holmes, who has received the most popular and scholarly attention. Laura Otis believes that Doyle, a trained doctor himself, saw in his famous detective a way to alleviate a general fear of foreign infiltration and infection, both literally and metaphorically.[2] She suggests that 'Holmes unmasks innumerable "curses", reinforcing the empire's confidence that its science and technology could overcome demonic threats associated with the people it was colonizing.'[3] Indeed, much of Doyle's writing is informed by racial and imperial prejudices prevalent at the time.[4]

Soon after he killed off Holmes for the first time in 'The Final Solution' (1893), Doyle created a like-minded character, Professor Gilroy in *The Parasite* (1894), whose scientific examination of the mesmeric enigma represented by Penelosa, a woman from the West Indies, closely resembles Holmes's investigative method based on pure reason.[5] Somewhat surprisingly — considering the usual pattern of the Holmes stories — Doyle, in

---

[1] E. Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), p. 62.

[2] Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 90.

[3] Otis, p. 111.

[4] See for instance Catherine Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism, and the Gothic* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002).

[5] In most editions the name is rendered as 'Penclosa'. However, in the use of 'Penelosa' this article follows Catherine Wynne's 2009 Valancourt edition which is based on the text of the British first edition published by Archibald Constable in London, December 1894.