Harry Clarke, the Master of the Macabre

Marguerite Helmers

Widely recognised for his religious and secular stained glass, Irish artist Harry Clarke (1889-1931) was also an imaginative book illustrator, whose representation of the macabre and grotesque fused high-art and popular traditions. A critical publication marking a turn in his style to more ominous and complex subject matter is the edition of Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, published in London by George G. Harrap in 1919.[1] *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* followed the publication of *Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen* (also published by Harrap in 1916).[2] An unpublished work, destroyed by fires during the Easter Rising in 1916, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1916).[3] Following the publication of the Poe edition, Clarke's work took a darker turn, with illustrations for Goethe's *Faust* (1925) and Swinburne's selected poems (1928).[4] To borrow a phrase from literary critic Peter Coviello, just as in Poe's stories, a 'persistent erotic strain' is evident in Clarke's illustrations for the *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, a deliberately provocative amplification and distortion of natural forms that would become more marked in subsequent publications.[5]

In this essay, I explore the ways that five of the Poe illustrations use conventions of representation that are also found in the cheaply published and widely available crime literature known as 'penny dreadfuls' and the early tabloid publication *The Illustrated Police News*, while also borrowing from the exaggerated dramatic presentations in the theatre of the Grand Guignol. Together, these form a core of sensationalist visual spectacles that codified horror and the gestures representing the macabre. I look at five of Clarke's images: 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt', and 'The Man of the Crowd'. The first four are black-and-white line drawings

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, illus. by Harry Clarke (London: George G. Harrap, 1919; repr. 1923).
[2] *Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen*, illus. by Clarke (London: George G. Harrap, 1916).
[3] Nicola Gordon Bowe, *Harry Clarke: The Life and Work* (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2012), p. 87.
[4] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, illus. by Clarke (London: George G. Harrap, 1925); and Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, illus. by Clarke (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1928).
[5] Peter Coviello, 'Poe in Love: Pedophilia, Morbidity, and the Logic of Slavery', *ELH: English Literary History*, 70.3 (Fall 2003), 875-901 (p. 896).

and the latter illustration is a full-colour plate added to the second edition of *The Tales of Mystery and Imagination* that was published by Harrap in 1923.

A comparison between the traditions of horror from sensationalist media and Clarke's illustrations shows a clear visual correspondence. Accruing across the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, a catalogue of gestures and facial expressions became synonymous with alarm and fright. In order to consider how the language of gesture was used by Clarke, I often deal with affect, the emotional content of the image. I begin with an overview of Symbolism, an international art movement influential in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Symbolism predisposed Poe and Clarke to explore verbal and visual worlds that border the real and the unconscious. Dream states and death were Symbolist themes – sensations, impressions, and emotions. The same period of time that fostered the rise of Symbolism also saw the rise of sensationalist literature such as true-crime stories. The second section of this essay is focused on these forms of mass entertainment, which trod some of the same emotional ground as the 'higher' art forms of Symbolist poetry and painting. Penny dreadfuls and *The Illustrated Police News* were popular tabloid publications in mid- to late-nineteenth-century England. Penny dreadfuls were primarily aimed at a readership of adolescent boys, while *The Illustrated Police News* presumed an adult readership. They were known for their lurid black-and-white illustrations of ghastly crimes (according to Judith Flanders, one publisher's standing instruction to his illustrators was 'more blood – much more blood!').[6] By the end of the nineteenth century, the Théâtre du Grand Guignol was founded in Paris and, like penny dreadfuls and sensationalist tabloids, it relied on shocking and purportedly true tales of intrigue and murder, going so far as to publish a staging guide for actors to exaggerate panic and distress.

The macabre vision of Harry Clarke continues to intrigue viewers, in part because of the detailed nature of his technique; his ability to synthesise multiple artistic inspirations and traditions resulted in layers of allusions. He was a keen lover of literature, theatre, and film and drew on an abundance of visual material for his book illustrations and his stained glass. In his own time and in ours, art critics and historians connected Clarke's illustrations to high-art traditions, such as the works of Gustav Klimt, members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Aubrey Beardsley – each of whom explored Symbolist themes and probed the relationship

[6] Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2011), p. 59.

between Eros and Thanatos, purity and transgression. Yet as Jarlath Killeen points out in his recent study of the relationship of pantomime to Clarke's portrayal of 'Little Riding Hood', and as Nicola Gordon Bowe has noted about Clarke's love of the Ballets Russes and Charlie Chaplin films, Clarke also owed his inspiration to popular cultural forms of his day.[7] Placing Clarke's Poe illustrations within a milieu of theatrical and modern entertainments highlights the fluid boundary between high and popular arts.

Poe's tales were continuously in print since their initial publication in magazines and were often gathered together into volumes that also contained his poetry. A 1902 World's Classics edition published by Grant Richards collected them under the title *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.[8] Interestingly, it was another Irishman, the writer Pádraic Colum, who in 1908 organised the selection of stories into the relatively stable collection of tales that continues to be published to this day. Colum's edition, with an introduction by himself, was published by J. M. Dent in London.[9] In his Introduction, Colum cites Poe's predilection for describing events 'on the margin' – 'experiences on the margin of sanity, or on the border of unconsciousness'.[10] Given that Dent's publication of the *Tales* remained in print and continued through twelve subsequent reprintings, it was likely this edition that inspired Clarke to create his own illustrations of the strange, aesthetic, and beautiful aspects of the tales (to borrow language from Colum).[11] Due to the unflagging demand for Poe's work, it would have been clear to Clarke's publisher George Harrap that a market existed for a new edition that could augment Colum's selections of tales with Clarke's unique vision.

Artistic Traditions of Naturalism and Symbolism

Clarke joined a long list of famous illustrators who illustrated Poe's tales and poems, beginning with Edouard Manet in 1875 and followed by Odilon Redon (1882), Gustave Doré (1883), Aubrey Beardsley (1894), William Thomas Horton (1899), Édmund Dulac (1912), and Arthur

[7] Jarlath Killeen's discussion of the perceived dangers of fairy tales and pantomime appears in 'Meeting Little Red Riding Hood Again: Harry Clarke and Charles Perrault', in *Harry Clarke and Artistic Visions of the New Irish State*, ed. by Angela Griffith, Marguerite Helmers, and Róisín Kennedy (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2019), pp. 224-45 (p. 232). Clarke published his image of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (London: George G. Harrap, 1916). On films, see Bowe, *Harry Clarke: The Life and Work* (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2012); she discusses Chaplin and also F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).
[8] Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: Grant Richards, 1902).
[9] Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1908).
[10] Pádraic Colum, Introduction to *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1908), pp. vii-xv (p. vii).
[11] Colum, Introduction, p. xiii.

Rackham (1935).[12] Of these artists, it is Clarke whose work bears the closest semblance to Redon's series of charcoals titled *To Edgar Poe* (Figure 1).[13] Redon was a master of the *unheimlich* and his dreamlike images fuse human, animal, and plant life in weird comic grotesques. Just as Clarke studied fossils and flora at the National Museum in Dublin, Redon worked from observation in the Museum of Natural History in Paris, and his drawings merge natural history and the supernatural in uncanny combinations. The surprising juxtaposition of the living and the dead in the subject matter, as well as the use of defined line against blackness, is an important precursor to Clarke's own depiction of horror in his illustrations for Poe. Much like Clarke's work, Redon's charcoal illustrations *To Edgar Poe* are not direct transcriptions of the tales; rather, they express the mood of darkness and the sense of fantasy beyond observable reality.

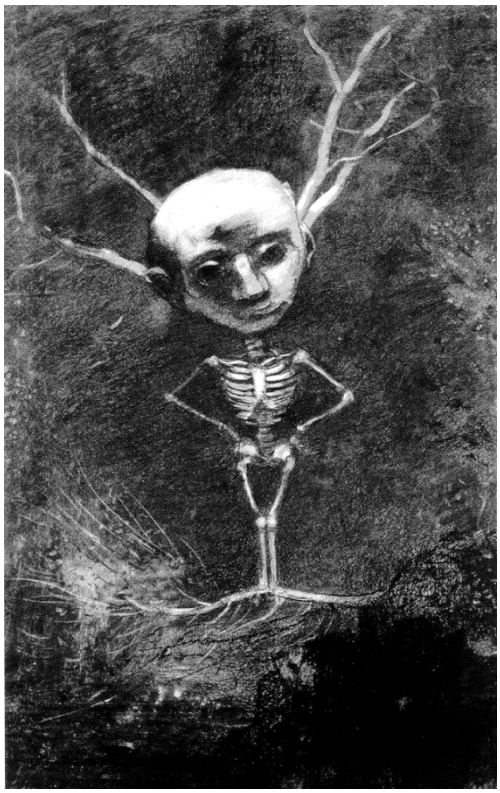

Figure 1: Odilon Redon, from *To Edgar Poe* (Paris: G. Fischbacher, 1882)

[12] William Thomas Horton was a mystic and friend of W. B. Yeats. Horton contributed seven illustrations and a cover design to the London publisher Leonard Smithers and Co. for a publication titled *The Raven, the Pit and the Pendulum*. A copy of this book may be found in the W. B. Yeats Library collection at the National Library of Ireland, YL 1600. Rackham's illustrations were published by Harrap as *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1935).
[13] Odilon Redon, *To Edgar Poe: Six Lithographies* (Paris: G. Fischbacher, 1882).

Clarke's illustrations should not be seen as imitative of Redon's. The greater influence on Clarke was the high-art tradition of Symbolism, a nineteenth-century continental artistic movement that encompassed painting and poetry. Symbolism drew from the earlier Gothic Revival and embodied its fascination with decay and ruins, as well as occult and religious forms of spirituality. Artists were inspired by dreams and sensations; they probed the mythical and religious for subject matter and exploited the connections between love, death, sexuality, and sin, particularly the linguistic and visual play between physical death (*le mort*) and sexual pleasure (*le petit mort*).[14]

Although Symbolist writers and visual artists turned to dream visions in a rejection of the almost scientific inquiry of the artistic movement known as Naturalism, at its core, Symbolism was also based on natural forms and the sordid aspects of daily existence. In literature, the duality emerged in the foundational publication of the poems *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire in 1857. Baudelaire was the first to translate the work of Poe into French and he became the pre-eminent writer of the Symbolist tradition. Clarke, who according to Nicola Gordon Bowe was 'a voracious reader', read Baudelaire's work alongside that of Poe, Nietzsche, Keats, Dante, and Pater, and one of his unfulfilled wishes was to illustrate *Les Fleurs du Mal* – a dream that his untimely death cut short.[15] Like Baudelaire, Clarke was fascinated by the 'supernatural or spiritual meaning […] beyond the observable world'.[16] In her exploration of Clarke's 'Gothic Modernist trope of balancing opposites', Kelly Sullivan traces Naturalist and Symbolist elements to 'a dark slum-urban Gothic' that arises in Clarke's work in the 1920s, particularly evident in his Nosferatu-like grotesque walking amidst a decaying Dublin, titled 'The Last Hour of the Night' (1922, Figure 12).[17] The representation of the human body in all its permutations – from fetal to wrinkled with age – would become increasingly complex in Clarke's drawings from 1919 onward, eventually erupting into homunculi that, like Frankenstein's creature, are a collage of body parts (Figure 2). In the *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, he begins an exploration of decay and death, how time and illness wear at the body.

[14] Among many works on Symbolism, one of the standard publications is Michael Gibson and Gilles Néret, *Symbolism* (London: Taschen, 2006).
[15] Bowe, 'Symbolism in Turn-of-the-Century Irish Art', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1989-90), pp. 133-44 (p. 140).
[16] Kelly Sullivan, 'Harry Clarke's Natural World', in *Harry Clarke and Artistic Visions*, pp. 101-30 (p. 120).
[17] Sullivan, 'Harry Clarke's Modernist Gaze', *Eire-Ireland*, 47 (2012), 7-36.

Figure 2: Harry Clarke, from *Goethe's Faust* (London: George G. Harrap, 1925)

The Forensic Horror of M. Valdemar

According to Bowe, 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' was the first illustration that Clarke designed for an anthology of Poe stories and he approached publishers in London to propose a full illustrated edition.[18] She writes, 'Clarke's diary records that he was reading Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* in the Spring of 1914 and an interview with Duckworth's resulted in his [devoting] three days to make a specimen design'.[19] Gerald Duckworth and Company was a rival publisher to George Harrap, but eventually the commission landed with Harrap, who later recalled, 'there could be little doubt but that Poe's bizarre and gruesome fancies would offer ideal inspiration to an artist of Clarke's particular bent, [and] we were glad to encourage him'.[20]

The hallmarks of Clarke's illustrations for Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* are cadaverous human figures. If they are not suspended in a moment of living death, they are exhibiting the pale skin, emaciated bodies, and darkly rimmed eyes of the terminally ill. As Coviello notes, in Poe's stories,

> death unfolds, in maddeningly partial and progressive stages. And to say that death unfolds is of course to intimate that death, properly conceived, actually *lives* in the bodies of Poe's creations, and has therefore an unnervingly animate presence in the body that in most instances cannot be readily distinguished from the functions of life – which is one reason why what are taken for corpses in Poe tend not to stay dead.[21]

[18] Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art* (Mountrath: Dolmen Press, 1983), p. 34. Clarke had been reading Poe's tales for several years and had created illustrations for 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) and 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843) as early as 1914.
[19] Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art*, p. 34.
[20] The quotation is from George Harrap and quoted in Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art*, p. 35.
[21] Coviello, 'Poe in Love', p. 884.

Clarke built upon Poe's own forensic interest in the progression of illness and the process of death to create his images. 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (1845) is told in the first person by one 'P.', who has a strong interest in mesmerism and who is an acquaintance of the writer and translator M. Ernest Valdemar of New York. Valdemar is dying of tuberculosis and accedes to P.'s request to hypnotise him at the moment of his death in order to determine whether the boundary between this world and the next may be suspended. Yet even in life, signs of death are evident: for one, 'the skin had been broken through by the cheek-bones'.[22] Valdemar remains mesmerised for seven months, attended by two nurses and visited daily by P. and Drs F. and D. In this state, although his mouth swings open at the jaw to reveal a 'swollen black tongue', Valdemar can still speak and shows an awareness of those around him.[23] He finally requests to be released from his half-life. Complying with Valdemar's wishes, P. reverses the spell, at which point, Valdemar's 'whole frame at once – within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk – crumbled – absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putridity.'[24]

In the black-and-white plate that accompanies the story (Figure 3), Clarke employs a stylistic device familiar from many of his works: the proscenium frame, complete with drapery and a stage door. The draperies and doorway create liminal spaces that represent life and death. The drama of the story – the story's probing of the unknown – is represented by the large top half of the image, which is almost blank, suggesting a deep void that the human mind cannot represent in words or images. Attending Valdemar are three fully realised figures at the right and two mysterious watchers on the left, figures who do not appear in the tale itself and are purely Clarke's invention. Their veils and the position behind the heavy curtain suggest shadowy guardians of the otherworld. One figure – possibly the narrator P. – is at the doorway, in silhouette. He is a voyeur, one of several introduced into Clarke's illustrations for the tales. One of the figures at the right reaches both arms toward Valdemar, drawing the readers into the central moment of waking death that Valdemar embodies. The figures at the right are also shown

[22] Poe, 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, illus. by Clarke (Mineola, NY: Calla Editions, 2008), pp. 374-82 (p. 376). All subsequent page references to stories by Poe refer here to the Calla edition.
[23] Poe, 'M. Valdemar', p. 380.
[24] Poe, 'M. Valdemar', p. 382.

with open eyes and open mouths, depicting their horror and revulsion at Valdemar's literal dissolution.

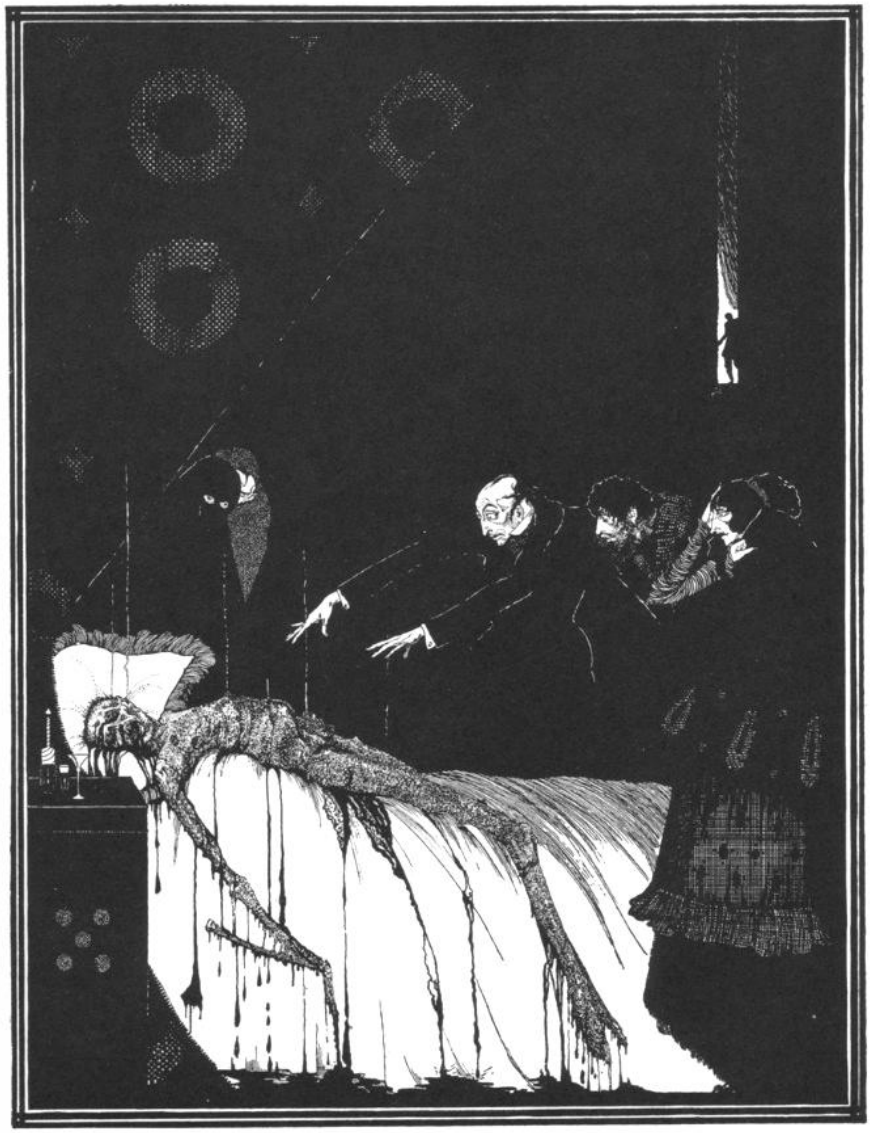

Figure 3: Harry Clarke, 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar'

These physical gestures are part of part of the penny-dreadful tradition, and the illustration for M. Valdemar owes much of its impact to the cross over between Clarke's distinctive style and his allusion to a range of prevalent popular aesthetic techniques for depicting horror. The position of the body on the bed, the framing device that marks us as witnesses to this moment of death, and the technique that Clarke has used to denote Valdemar's postmortem corporeal

fluidity echo the illustration techniques employed by the tabloid publication *The Illustrated Police News*. Introduced to the reading public by George Purkess in 1864, the tabloid was criticised for ministering 'to the morbid craving of the uneducated for the horrible and the repulsive'.[25] For example, similar artistic techniques to those used by Clarke are evident in an illustration that accompanied the story of murder committed by Robert Coombs and his brother Nathaniel in July 1895 (Figure 4).

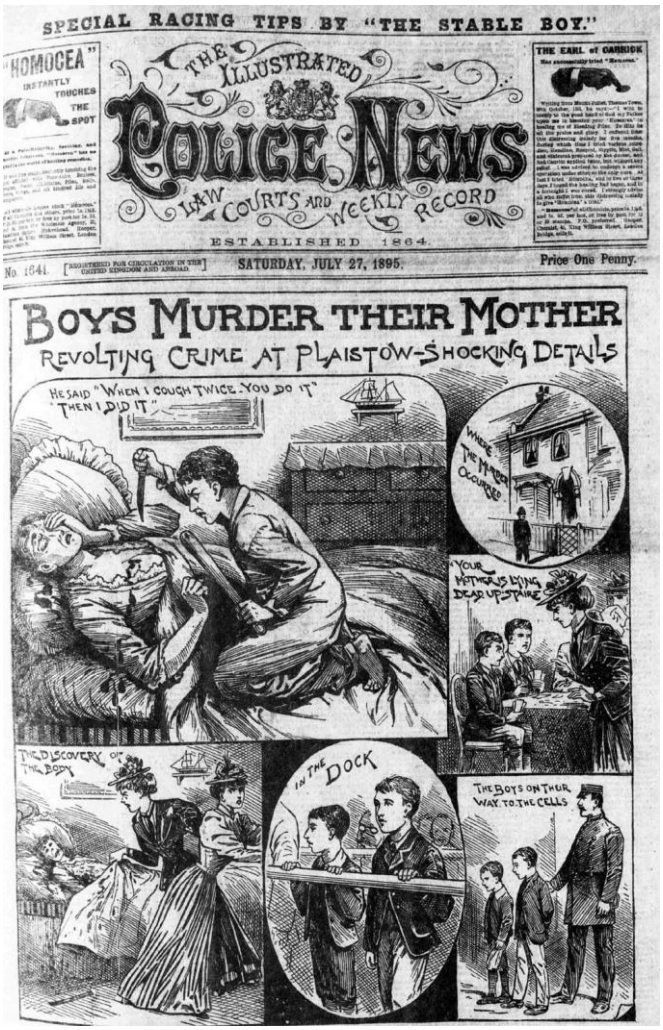

Figure 4: Plaistow Murder, *The Illustrated Police News*, Saturday 27 July 1895

[25] Francis Hitchman, quoted in Robert J. Kirkpatrick, *From the Penny Dreadful to the Ha'Penny Dreadfuller: A Bibliographic History of the Boys' Periodical in Britain, 1726-1950* (London: The British Library, 2013), p. 32.

As Kate Summerscale details the case, Robert Coombs had entered his mother's bedroom early in the morning and stabbed her while she slept. He and his younger brother then took the housekeeping money and went on a ten-day spending spree, leaving the body in the house. The engraving in *The Illustrated Police News* positions the figures in the way that Clarke would later use with the Valdemar plate, and a woman in the lower left of the page escapes the scene in terror.[26] Of course, Clarke would not have directly copied, but his own depictions of terror participated in the same visual shorthand that would be culturally understood by Clarke's contemporaries. The Coombs case was just one of many sensationalist crime stories from the time and illustrators had to focus on ways to heighten the drama of the crime. Consequently, they invented scenes and imagined emotions. At the core was something that Clarke contended with as well – how to represent feelings of fear and astonishment through scene, facial expression, and gesture.

The Mesmeric Effects of Bloods and Dreadfuls

Prosecutors in the Coombs case tried to ascribe the murder to Robert's avid consumption of penny dreadfuls.[27] The cheap publications were the cause of moral concern in England and Ireland: such reading materials were said to bring about 'an unhinging' effect in the young.[28] Among other reports of their deleterious effects, in one case, '[w]hen a twelve-year-old servant boy hanged himself in Brighton in 1892, the jury delivered a verdict of "suicide during temporary insanity, induced by reading trashy novels"'.[29] In 1896, when Clarke was seven years old, an English newspaper attributed 'the suicide of a fourteen-year-old London errand boy to the negative effects of reading "penny horribles"'.[30] It may have been around this time that Clarke encountered his first copies of the magazines. The following year, in 1897, six new 'boy's periodicals' were launched, adding to an already crowded field.

[26] Kate Summerscale examines the case in detail in *The Wicked Boy: An Infamous Murder in Victorian London* (New York: Penguin, 2017).
[27] Summerscale notes the tendency of the press to blame penny dreadfuls for Robert's acts (*The Wicked Boy*, p. 185). She further discusses the case in 'The Untold Story of a Mother Brutally Murdered by her Young Sons in Victorian England', *The Telegraph*, 22 April 2016 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/the-untold-story-of-a-mother-brutally-murdered-by-her-young-sons/> [accessed 14 April 2019].
[28] Summerscale, *The Wicked Boy*, p. 112.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Mimi Matthews, 'Penny Dreadfuls, Juvenile Crime, and Late-Victorian Moral Panic', *The Victorian Web: Literature, History, and Culture in the Age of Victoria*, 12 January 2016 <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/matthews1.html> [accessed 13 April 2019].

Following a tradition of bloody dramas extending back to Shakespearean times and Jacobean revenge tragedies, penny bloods and penny dreadfuls were part of a popular literary tradition that included the Newgate Calendar, the gothic novel, melodrama, folklore, and street ballads.[31] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the appellation changed from 'penny blood' (in use from the 1830s to 1850s) to 'penny dreadful' and encompassed a wide range of adventurous and far-fetched subject matter that included crime, detection, the supernatural, and even Wild-West adventures. In his short story from *Dubliners* titled 'An Encounter' (1914), James Joyce included a reference to the surreptitious circulation of the penny dreadfuls among Irish schoolboys, writing that one Joe Dillon 'had a little library made up of old numbers of *The Union Jack, Pluck* and *The Halfpenny Marvel*'.[32] Having brought his worn copies to school to pass among his friends, the unfortunate Dillon is confronted in the classroom by the teacher, Father Butler, who confiscates one of the magazines hidden behind a school book:

> 'What is this rubbish?' he said. '*The Apache Chief!* Is this what you read instead of studying your Roman History? Let me not find any more of this wretched stuff in this college. The man who wrote it, I suppose, was some wretched fellow who writes these things for a drink. I'm surprised at boys like you, educated, reading such stuff. I could understand it if you were ... National School boys […].'[33]

At the age of thirteen in 1895, Joyce likely was aware of the lurid tale of Mrs Coombs's murder through the trade in the literature among his school friends. Joyce was born in 1882, the same year as Robert Coombs (Harry Clarke was only a few years younger and he attended the same secondary school as Joyce, Belvedere College in Dublin). Stephanie Rains adds that, although Ireland did not produce its own penny dreadfuls, the ones that were purchased were shared among adolescent readers, suggesting 'that the contents of these publications were more widely influential than would be presumed simply from their circulation figures'.[34] Furthermore, in her study of the reading habits of English children, Kirsten Drotner notes that the 'most successful publishers of boys' papers were found among those who continued [the] more sensational style'

[31] Flanders, *The Invention of Murder*, p. 58. See also Michael Anglo, *Penny Dreadfuls and Other Victorian Horrors* (London: Jupiter, 1977); and John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture, and Moral Panics* (New York: St Martin's, 1999).
[32] James Joyce, 'An Encounter', in *The Portable James Joyce*, ed. by Harry Levin (New York: Penguin, 1976), pp. 29-38 (p. 30).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Stephanie Rains, 'Money Matters: The Cost of Books, Newspapers and Magazines in Early 20thC Ireland', *Irish Media History*, 4 October 2016 <https://irishmediahistory.com/tag/penny-dreadful/> [accessed 13 April 2019].

and in 'an industry rife with rivalries, it became imperative to secure' working-class juveniles as readers.[35] She continues,

> The introduction of the rotary press and the use of wood-pulp paper had facilitated the expansion in mass literature at mid-century, and the invention in the late 1880s of the Linotype machine, casting whole lines of type, forged the final link in fully mechanizing the printing process. Furthermore, the general expansion in retail trades created a national network of local tobacconists, sweetstalls, and cornershops to which adolescents swarmed on their way from school or work to get their Wednesday and Saturday weeklies.[36]

One popular tale persisted for over one hundred years and appeared in serials dating well into Clarke's teens and adult life. This was the story of London's Spring-Heeled Jack, who attacked servant girls, clawing at their clothing before leaping or flying away over gates and fences. Spring-Heeled Jack first appeared in the penny literature in 1837, and was still a feature in *The Boys' Monster Weekly* (1899) and the twelve weekly issues of the *Spring-Heeled Jack Library* (1904). As the legend grew over time, he was variously depicted in bat costume or as a cross between beast and man, nude and with horns (an allusion to the sexual nature of his crimes against young women, Figure 5). A sketch by Clarke for the cover of Poe's *Tales* hints at a Jack-type character in the making (Figure 6); it shows Clarke working with the idea of horns or a crown and a naked torso. Clarke would later create figures that crossed genders and species, and this sketch offers an early taste of a bi-gendered creature, cloven-hoofed, giving birth to an effluvium of atrocity.

[35] Kirsten Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 124.
[36] Ibid.

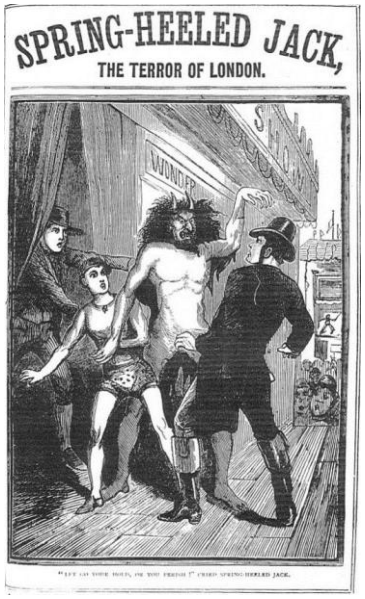

Figure 5: One of a series of publications featuring Spring-Heeled Jack [c. 1840]

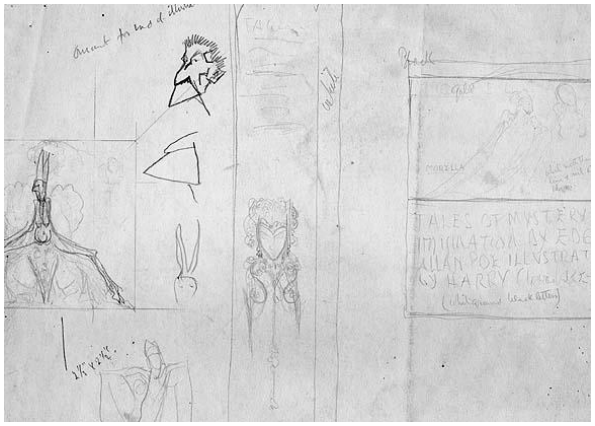

Figure 6: Harry Clarke, 'Design drawn in pencil for book jacket of Edgar Allan Poe's book *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*' [c.1919], National Library of Ireland PD 3046 TX 2 (A).

Poe, captivated by gothic sensationalism, ultimately plays with the concepts of murder and bestiality in his tale 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841). The story is the first to feature Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, who works through the logic of a locked-room mystery. A woman and her daughter are found brutally murdered; the daughter's body has been thrust up the chimney and the mother's head has been severed from the body. Dupin deduces that the deed was carried out by an orangutan, who had escaped confinement and brutality at the hands of a sailor.

The brilliance of Clarke's illustration for 'Rue Morgue' is that he captures what is hidden in the text: the moment of death. The orangutan, crazed by years of savage abuse, squeezes the final breath from Mlle L'Espanaye, while the body of her mother lies thrown on the bed (Figure 7). In Clarke's illustration, the full fury of the orangutan is on view. He faces the readers and dominates the frame, issuing a direct threat to our interference. The daughter reaches upward toward the beast. Poe writes, '[t]he sight of blood inflamed its anger into phrensy. Gnashing its teeth, and flashing fire from its eyes, it flew upon the body of the girl, and imbedded its fearful

talons in her throat, retaining its grasp until she expired.'[37] The sailor peers in from a window on high, a voyeur looking upon the grisly scene unfolding in front of him. The horrible face of Mme L'Espanaye the fortune teller gazes upwards, implicating the sailor as the orchestrator of destruction, having ruthlessly imprisoned and abused the orangutan. As in 'The Facts of the Case of M. Valdemar', the onlooker is present in the liminal space of the window. This theatrical theme frames the moments of death between the reader of the text and the watcher in the tale.

Figure 7: Harry Clarke, 'Murders in the Rue Morgue'

Clarke's illustration directly quotes the gestural language of the tabloid press. Peter Haining notes that 'fierce plates' of lurid scenes on the covers of tabloids increased sales. They also codified the visual language of true crime, hoping to capitalise on the emotional experience of the viewer. As Haining asserts, '[t]he woodcuts and stories perfectly supplement each other [...].

[37] Poe, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', pp. 177-210 (p. 208).

The outstretched hands point to the power of destiny, the falling curve of the heroine's body illustrates her helpless innocence, the villain's enormous eyes show devouring lust.'[38] Clarke takes the representation one step further. Mme L'Espanaye's body is represented as so many illustrations of Jack the Ripper's victims were in the illustrated press – discarded almost carelessly, in a heap (Figure 8). Thus, Clarke's work is a step beyond the literal, raising questions about the bestial, sexual, and gendered nature of crimes against women.

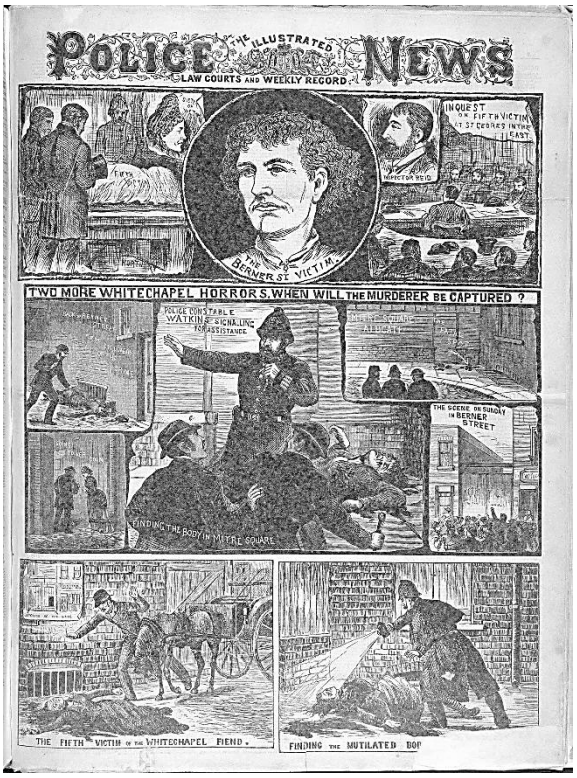

Figure 8: Coverage of Jack the Ripper, *Illustrated Police News*, 1888

From the Penny Blood to the Blood Moon of the Grand Guignol

Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol opened in the Pigalle district of Paris in 1897 and quickly became identified with graphic horror. Established by the playwright Oscar Méténier and under the direction of Max Maurey from 1898 onward, the theatre specialised in shock and terror, offering

[38] Peter Haining, *The Penny Dreadful* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 15. Haining is citing Louis James, who published *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early-Victorian Urban England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1963).

audiences an animated view of tabloid fodder. One of the major contributions was a staging guide to expression and gesture.

Drawing topics from crime reports in newspapers similar to those discussed above, the plays were about criminals and prostitutes, lust and revenge, rape and murder, and initially exposed the underside of the Parisian *Belle Époque*. Yet Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson point to the theatre's eclecticism, noting that, although the Guignol tradition emerged from 'Zola-inspired naturalism', by the *fin de siècle*, Symbolism became more important as a means of expressing visually, through melodrama, 'hidden, internal and unutterable fear'.[39] By 1901, when the theatre hired André De Lorde as its principal playwright, the focus of the performances turned to interior mental states, exploring psychology and insanity, themes that resonated with the oppressive atmosphere of Poe's tales, in which the narrators are 'prone to madness, drug-induced visions, and mental illness, especially in the form of "monomania" through which they fixate upon their beloved not as a person, but as a physical fragment'.[40] Agnes Pierron writes that Grand Guignol excelled at exploring the borders of consciousness and morality:

> [W]hat carried the Grand Guignol to its highest level were the boundaries and thresholds it crossed: the states of consciousness altered by drugs or hypnosis. Loss of consciousness, loss of control, panic: themes with which the theatre's audience could easily identify. When the Grand Guignol's playwrights expressed an interest in the guillotine, what fascinated them most were the last convulsions played out on the decapitated face. What if the head continued to think without the body? The passage from one state to another was the crux of the genre.[41]

As a term, 'Grand Guignol' 'soon became synonymous with the excesses of heightened horror' and its taxonomy of melodramatic gestures had a lasting influence on horror films in the twentieth century.[42] Although there are no photographs of the actual plays from the war years, Grand Guignol's André de Lorde wrote a staging guide to expression and gesture in 1908 that offers 'clues to the stylization of the body in Grand Guignol performance'.[43] It is this staging

[39] Claude Schumacher, *Alfred Jarry and Guillaume Apollinaire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 16, quoted in Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 8.
[40] Jenny Webb, 'Fantastic Desire: Poe, Calvino, and the Dying Woman', *The Comparatist*, 35 (2011), 211-20 (p. 216).
[41] Agnes Pierron, 'The House of Horrors', trans. by Deborah Treisman, *Grand Street*, 15 (1996) <http://www.grandguignol.com/grandstreet.htm> [accessed 13 April 2019].
[42] Hand and Wilson, *Grand Guignol*, p. 19.
[43] Hand and Wilson, p. 40.

guide that provides the visual cues for the iconic gestures of outstretched arms and twisted faces. It included instruction for posture, head position, eyes, lips, and mouth: eyes to be 'wide open [in] amazement, anger, terror', lips and mouth to be 'wide open [in] astonishment'.[44]

Far from being an underground or subversive activity, Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol drew in a fashionable crowd. By the 1920s, '[e]vening dresses and tuxedos were a commonplace', and the theatre attracted celebrities and royalty.[45] An evening at the theatre usually included four or five plays, alternating between 'hot' tales of horror and 'cold' comedies, a duality of expression that Clarke himself revealed in book illustrations that combined frightful emotions with playful fantasy. Although his diaries and correspondence are silent on the subject, it is possible to imagine that, with his interest in the macabre, Clarke may have visited the theatre; he was in Paris in 1914 in the midst of sketching his initial ideas for *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* and may have taken in a performance.[46] However, should Clarke have opted out of an evening in Paris, he would have had another chance in London. The Grand Guignol opened at the Coronet Theatre in Notting Hill Gate on 14 June 1915, after which its popularity necessitated a transfer to the more centrally located Garrick Theatre on Charing Cross Road, in the heart of the West-End theatre district. At the start of the London run, only one horror play was included in the repertoire, *La baiser dans la nuit* by Maurice Level, in which the main character is monstrously transformed by facial disfigurement. *La baiser dans la nuit* was so enthusiastically received, however, that by the end of the London season (16-21 August 1915), the majority of the evening's entertainment consisted of the horror plays. Of particular note is *Sous la lumière rouge*, also by Level, which plays on fears of being buried alive and reveals the influence of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839): the main female character is exhumed and revealed to have tried to claw her way out of her casket.[47]

In fact, two of the plays produced in Paris by Grand Guignol were based on Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* – 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1908, retitled *Lady Madeline*) and the 'Telltale Heart'. This points to a similar affinity between Poe's sensibilities and those of the Grand Guignol. In Poe's telling of 'The Fall of the House of Usher', the narrator visits his old

[44] Ibid.
[45] P. E. Schneider, 'Fading Horrors of the Grand Guignol', *New York Times*, 17 March 1957, p. 7.
[46] Clarke, pocket diary, 1914, National Library of Ireland MS 39,202/ B.
[47] Helen Brooks, 'Horror on the London Stage: The Grand Guignol Season of 1915', *Great War Theatre*, 26 January 2018 <https://www.greatwartheatre.org.uk/2018/01/horror-on-the-london-stage-the-grand-guignol-season-of-1915/> [accessed 13 April 2019].

friends Roderick and Madeleine Usher in their old mansion, much dilapidated. During his visit, Madeleine Usher dies in the night. Her brother buries her in the mausoleum under the house, a 'temporary entombment' in an oppressively small, damp, and pitch-black vault behind iron doors. But Roderick continues to be haunted by noises in the night and days later cries out, '*[w]e have put her living in the tomb!*' (Figure 9).[48] Madeleine emerges from the crypt and, as in the story of M. Valdemar, the doors between life and death are opened briefly.

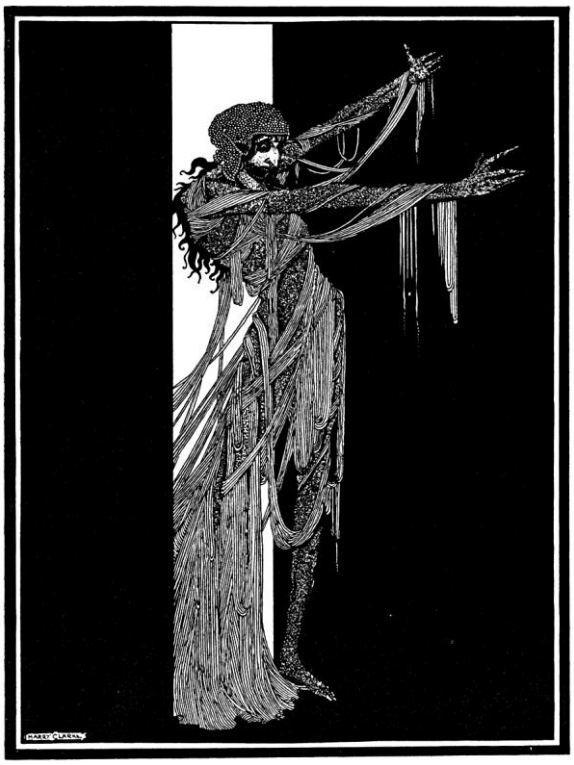

Figure 9: Harry Clarke, 'The Fall of the House of Usher'

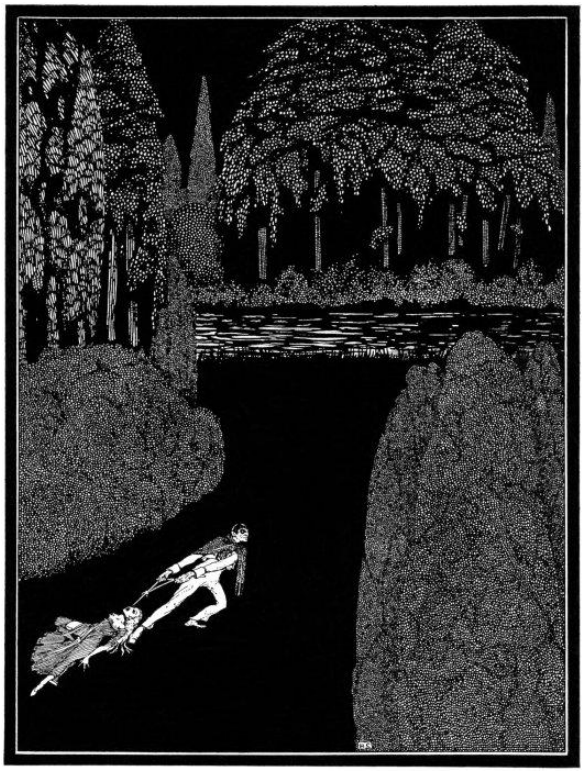

Figure 10: Harry Clarke, 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt'

Clarke's illustration for the story emphasises the theatricality of Madeline's entrance into the upper quarters of the Usher mansion. Poe wrote only that she was standing, 'lofty and enshrouded' and 'remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold', before falling 'heavily inward upon the person of her brother'.[49] But Clarke captures the weight of the doors

[48] Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', pp. 124-41 (p. 140), italics in original.
[49] Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', p. 141.

through the almost complete blackness of the page. Madeline emerges from the pit, wrapped in a shroud that trails behind her. Her eyes are wide open in astonishment and her arms claw the air in front of her. Furthermore, the webs and bindings of her shroud are both literal and metaphoric – synonyms for joining, attaching, and uniting. The tensions in Poe's tales between love and obsession, life and death, the natural and the supernatural are therefore replicated in Clarke's drawings.

The illustration to 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' equally employs the tropes of voyeurism and hyperbolic theatricality inherent to the Grand-Guignol stage, specifically invoking the viewer's position in relationship to the text (Figure 10). Set in Paris and again featuring the investigator Dupin, Poe's 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' (1842-43) is about the body of a young woman found floating in the Seine at the point where a forest path meets the water.[50] The central evidence in the crime is that the body was dragged from the point of death to the river's edge: Poe describes a witness who, 'while roaming among the woods near the Barrière du Roule, chanced to penetrate a close thicket', where she discovered that the 'earth was trampled, the bushes were broken, and there was every evidence of a struggle. Between the thicket and the river, the fences were found taken down, and the ground bore evidence of some heavy burthen having been dragged along it.'[51]

At two points in the tale, Poe refers to the murder of Marie Rogêt as a 'lonely' crime, with the word 'lonely' signifying a solitary killer and an isolated victim. Clarke capitalises on that word to draw the final moments of terror and misdeeds: the two figures in his illustration are the 'lonely assassin' and Marie. The blank space and the wide swaths of black emphasise that they are cut off from the people of the city. The murderer's eyes are histrionically rimmed in black to emphasise his association with depravity. The victim's eyes and mouth are open, in keeping with melodrama, in terror and shock. A further Grand-Guignol touch is the element of the erotic in this illustration. For example, in the words of the story, Marie's torn undergarment is twisted 'fast about the neck' to enable the murderer to drag 'his victim to the brink of the river', and Clarke captures this physical action in his image.[52] As I noted earlier, the reputation

[50] Poe had drawn his tale from newspaper reports of the disappearance of Mary Cecilia Rogers, a New-York shopworker who disappeared in 1841, and whose body was found along the shores of the Hudson River in New Jersey. Clarke's illustration shows something of the imaginings of an American frontier in his drawing of an abandoned wilderness with fantastically tall trees.
[51] Poe, 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt', pp. 210-56 (p. 221).
[52] Poe, 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt', p. 250.

of the Grand Guignol was based on its ability to apply tension to the balance between death (*le mort*) and sex (*le petit mort*), and it was reported that many of the theatre's patrons became so aroused by the pornographic sex and violence in the 'hot plays' that the private boxes needed to be swabbed down after performances.[53] Seducing viewers with that same salacious spirit, Clarke's Marie is barely clothed. Her bodice is ripped and her breasts are exposed; her undergarments are torn to shreds and the dress over her upper right thigh is cast open, a strap winding around it.

If Guignol performances were intentionally gory and racy, a 'concoction of sadism, alcoholism, eroticism and insanity', then Clarke's illustration for 'Marie Rogêt' brings that sadism and insanity, titillation and revulsion, to the viewers.[54] Because there are no other figures represented in the scene, the viewers are like theatre patrons in a balcony, positioned at a high vantage point and alone in the dark, looking down upon the murder. Readers occupy the same viewing space as the sailor in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and the spectators who witness the death of M. Valdemar.

Conclusion: From Tales of Imagination to the Madness of Crowds

Hand and Wilson argue that the First World War did not deter representations of gore in popular publications. Rather, 'one of the consequences of slaughter on such a grand scale was the realization that, under a certain set of circumstances, everybody was capable of extreme acts of brutality'.[55] In the wake of the war, mysteries and thrillers increased in popularity, potentially because, after 1918, as John Stokes notes, it was possible to conceive of 'the murderer as Everyman'.[56] In Clarke's lifetime, then, cheap thrills were plentiful, existing alongside serious social, economic, and racial horrors. The *Illustrated London News*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Times* all covered crime in lurid detail, and Madame Tussaud's waxworks continually updated its Chamber of Horrors near London's Regent Park.[57] In addition, the supernatural was in vogue; bereaved and traumatised relatives hired mediums and attempted to contact the dead and missing

[53] Hand and Wilson, *Grand Guignol: The French Theatre*, p. 74.
[54] Hand and Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), pp. 72-76.
[55] Hand and Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol*, p. 10.
[56] John Stokes, 'Body Parts: The Success of the Thriller in the Inter-War Years', in *British Theatre Between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. by Clive Barker and Maggie Gale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 38-62 (p. 57).
[57] Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), pp. 60-61.

through séances. This cultural moment, in which horror and loss merged with reality and extraordinary theatricality, likely accounts for why, of all his illustrated books, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* was the most commercially successful for Clarke, going into several reprints in his lifetime, including the 1923 edition that featured eight new full-colour plates.[58] Writer, painter, and visionary George Russell (A. E.) said that Clarke was 'the ideal interpreter' of Poe.[59] Harrap called *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* his 'greatest book' and claimed in its advertising that 'the morbid imaginings of Poe's extraordinary genius are depicted without any attempt to soften their weird effects upon most readers'.[60]

The colour plates in the 1923 edition are more abstract and dreamlike than the black-and-white plates produced for the 1919 edition. However, one stands out among them because of the way that Clarke connects the visceral effect of horror to social decay and the living conditions of the urban poor. 'The Man of the Crowd' (Figure 11) could be set amidst Dublin's tenements or even Dublin's main thoroughfare Sackville Street. The infamous Monto brothel district was to the east of the Clarke Studios, between Sackville Street and the railway station, but according to Maria Luddy, Sackville Street itself 'was a principal promenading ground for prostitutes, and many working as prostitutes were also to be found in St Stephen's Green and around the dock area'.[61] In Poe's story, a fevered flâneur follows a strange man, walking London's streets deep into the night, watching the flood of trades, professions, and characters around him. Clarke's illustration presents a goblin-like figure trampling on a dismembered female torso, surrounded by prostitutes and alcoholics breathing in and out the filthy ether of the city. The themes of sex and death are evident, as is an allusion to sin; however, the sin is less that of the individual than that of the government, abandoning sections of the city to waste and decay.

[58] *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* was published in America by Brentano's. Further editions appeared after Clarke's death. The current Calla Press edition reprints Harrap's 1923 edition of the book, including the colour plates.
[59] Quoted in Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art*, p. 53.
[60] Quoted in Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art*, p. 52.
[61] Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 35.

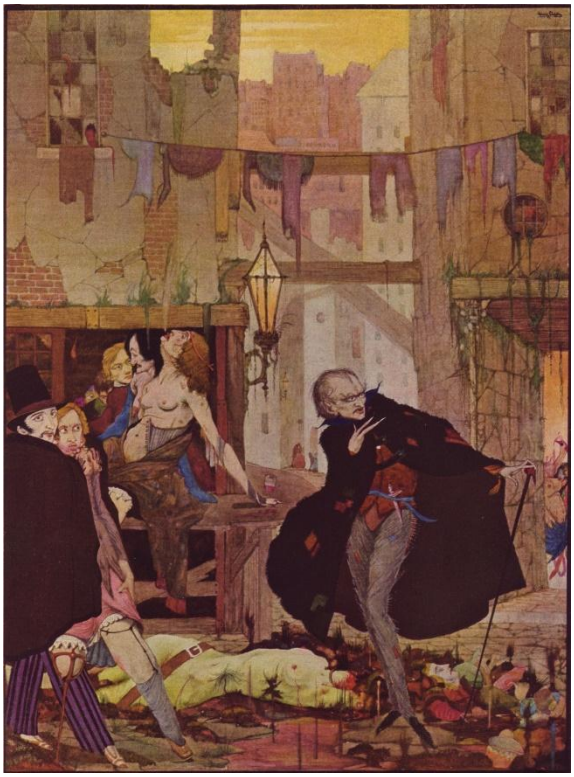

Figure 11: Harry Clarke, 'The Man of the Crowd'

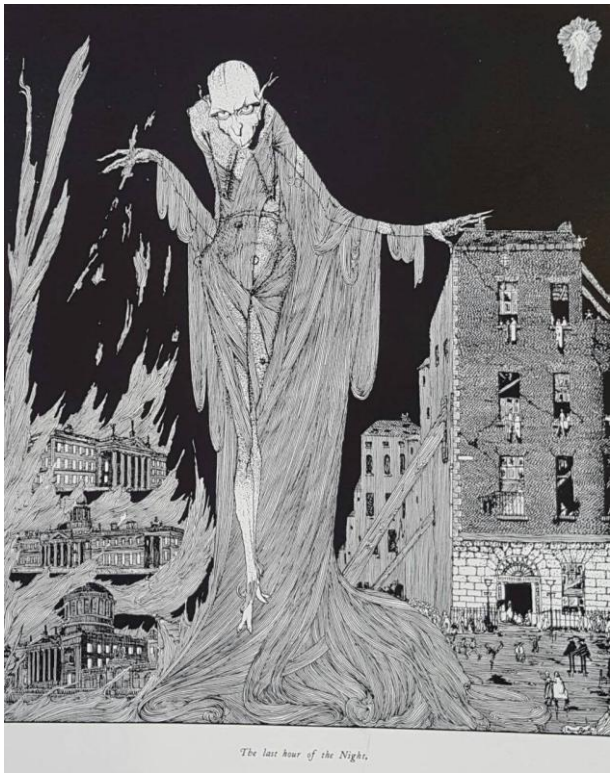

Figure 12: Harry Clarke, 'The Last Hour of the Night'

As in his social commentary 'The Last Hour of the Night' (Figure 12), published in the 1922 town-planning document *Dublin of the Future*, Clarke's illustration for the Poe story shows cracked brickwork, broken panes of glass in the windows, walls propped up with beams, people huddled in doorways. The central figures in the Poe illustration and the town-planning document echo Sigmund Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* or uncanny.[62] They extend long hands with pointed fingernails, share facial features, and even share strange plant-like protrusions from their faces that echo Redon's work for the Poe tales. In both illustrations, the psychological effect of the uncanny or *unheimlich* is used as a commentary on contemporary urban life.

Considering the book's debt to a range of horror genres, it is no wonder that Clarke's friend and supporter Thomas Bodkin wrote a review of *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* that was careful to point out that 'this is not a book which can be safely shown to a child shortly

[62] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', trans. by James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), XVII, pp. 219-52.

before its bedtime'.[63] The visceral impact of the book is, as I have been arguing, due to Clarke's ability to translate and embroider upon visual languages of his day inspired by both high-art traditions such as Symbolism and range of popular-cultural forms. As these rich visual texts from *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* demonstrate, Clarke can be considered a master of the macabre due to his ability to synthesise multiple visual traditions, stylising nightmare visions from the fabric of life.

[63] Quoted in Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art*, p. 54.