

# English Literature

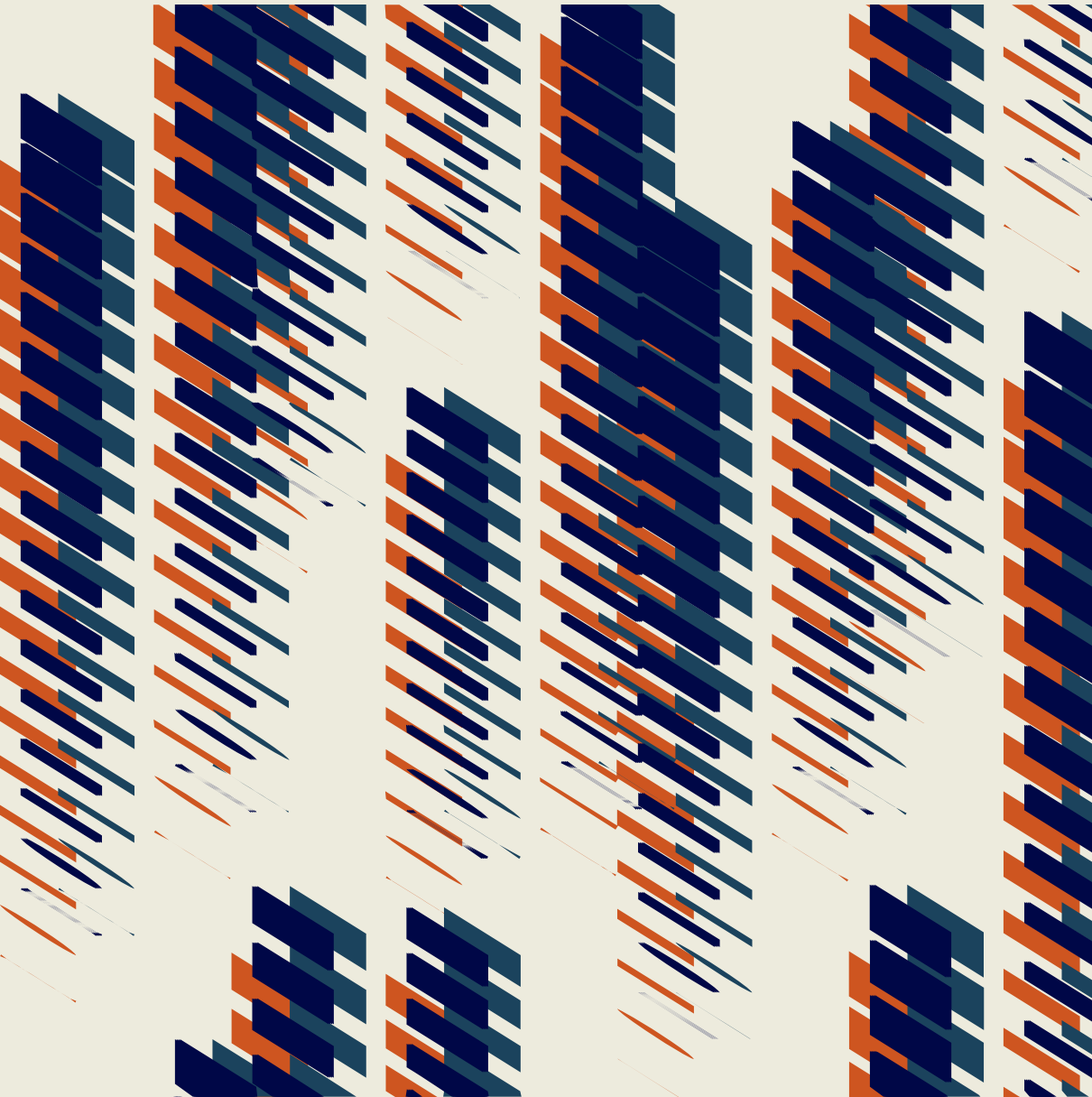
Theories, Interpretations, Contexts

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# **English Literature**

## Theories, Interpretations, Contexts

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# English Literature

## Theories, Interpretations, Contexts

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# Introduction: The Supernatural between Fact and Fiction, from the Gothic to the *Fin de Siècle*

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**Sommario** 1. The Invention of the Gothic and its Ambivalences. – 2. The (Partial) Domestication of the Supernatural. – 3. The Persistence of the Gothic in the Early Nineteenth Century. – 4. The Supernatural in a Disenchanted World. – 5. Coda: Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment through Fact *and* Fiction.

## 1 The Invention of the Gothic and its Ambivalences

When Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* was first published on 24 December, 1764, its title-page and preface left the readers bewildered as to its authorship. The book purported to be the English translation of an Italian story composed by "Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto", a manuscript "found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England", then printed "at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529" (Walpole 2014, 1, 5). The *topos* of the 'found manuscript' was one of the best favoured devices among writers of histories, story-mongers and narrators, from Antonius Diogenes' *The Wonders Beyond Thule* (1st cent. CE) to Dicty's *Journal of the Trojan War*, and then Ludovico Ariosto's reference to Turpin's pseudo-chronicles, Cervantes' ironic allusion to Cide Hamete Benengeli. The frequency with which this *topos* was used peaked in the spate of the 'discovered documents' produced between the end of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century (Maxwell 2003, 248-52). Walpole's presentation of a printed book that looks like the typeset copy of a hand-written document was meant to

entangle the reader in a web of pseudo-evidence that should substantiate its 'real' existence as a historical manufacture and testimony. Walpole's 'unknown author' of the first preface suggested that the book has as many as three layers of archival pre-existence: an implicit Italian manuscript, a 1529 printed book in Italian that copied, in its Gothic typeface, that manuscript, and the present book that translates the 'original' printed copy (Maxwell 2003, 256).

On that pseudo-documentary strategy Walpole inflicted a dreadful blow with the preface to the second edition of the novel:

The favorable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public, calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he composed it. But before he opens those motives, it is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt, were the sole inducements to assume that disguise, he flatters himself he shall appear excusable. He resigned his performance to the impartial judgment of the public; determined to let it perish in obscurity, if disapproved; nor meaning to avow such a trifle, unless better judges should pronounce that he might own it without a blush. (Walpole 2014, 9)

Walpole's two prefaces notoriously contradict one another, with that of the second edition revealing the subterfuge of the 'invented manuscript' and asking for the reader's forgiveness for publishing under the fictional "disguise" of "the borrowed personage of a translator" (9). The second preface shows with sufficient emphasis that the antiquarian reconstruction on which his story is built is not only an artifice but also an implicit farce mocking the notion of the truthfulness of the historical search for the true origins of a fact.

With such fictional manoeuvring, Walpole aligned himself with writers so different from him as Laurence Sterne or Henry Mackenzie, who poked fun at the search for the origins of a story, event, conception, idea or belief. In the hands of those writers the fictionality of storytelling became a show imbued with the scepticism at the wonders of story-telling, and brought on stage the consequences of "telling a false story as true by [putting] it into the mouths of others", since "every relater vouches it for truth, though he knows nothing of the matter like family lies handed on from father to son, till what begun in forgery ends in history, and we make our lies be told for truth by all our children that come after us", as Defoe wrote in a parody of Charles Gildon (who, it so happens, had attacked him for creating forged stories; Defoe 2008, 127-8). Although *The Castle of Otranto* does not display any of the highly self-conscious narrative tricks that are flaunted in *Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*,

its erasure of the credibility of the source of its story increases the attention given to a text as an artificial manufacture. It also promotes the enjoyment of its fictitious aspects, enhancing the more theatrical qualities of the descriptive *mise-en-scène* and making large use of the “inexpressibility topos” (Hammond, Regan 2006, 159) that should help the readers gulp down all its implausibilities.

Moreover, the treatment of the supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto* points the reader to an allegorical and moral interpretation of the story rather than a realistic-historical one. In fact, Walpole’s plot narrates of a usurpation, Manfred’s takeover of Otranto from the family that should rule it *de iure*. According to Walpole’s second preface, this story presents itself as a fable (*fabula*) that asks the readers to interpret the fictional past “as a repository of the truth, a truth that the present has disregarded, but whose force nonetheless be manifested in the present” (Ellis 2000, 33). The manifest absence of an origin for the historical credibility of the story, and the fact that the events involving Manfred and the other characters is a patent fiction, provide the foundation for the quest for a reliable, truly ethical ‘moral’, thick with political and contemporary overtones. The novel’s reference to historical characters of Medieval Sicily<sup>1</sup> does not make much sense, in fact, and can be understood only as an allegory of English political figures, either historical ones such as the above-mentioned kings of England, or contemporaries of Walpole, such as John Wilkes and Henry Seymour Conway (Samson 1986; Wein 2002, 53-9; Lake 2013).

Walpole’s second preface goes on to declare that his story

was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if, in the latter species, Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, and conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days, were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion. The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. (Walpole 2014, 9)

With this metafictional justification, Walpole inevitably got entangled in the discussion about novel and romance, between the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the usurper, Manfred, probably alludes to Manfred of Sicily, the illegitimate son of Frederick II, who declared himself king in 1258 when he heard rumours of the death of the legitimate grandson of Frederick II, Conrad.



a mode of narration based on “formal realism” (in Ian Watt’s famous wording; Watt 1957) and the resisting presence of a mode based on fabulous story-telling, extraordinary characters, and improbable elements, as practiced in ancient times or in seventeenth-century France, which Walpole’s contemporaries saw as “restricted by no fetters of reason, or of truth”, depending on a “lawless imagination”, and transgressing “all bounds of time and place, of nature and possibility” (George Canning, 1787, quoted in Day 1987, 3). Walpole reiterated his intention of blending the two modes in his letter to Monsieur Elie de Beaumont: “To tell you the truth, it was not so much my intention in writing *The Castle of Otranto* to recall the exploded marvels of ancient romance, as to blend the wonderful of old stories with the natural of modern novels” (18 March 1765; Toynbee 1904, 6: 201).

## 2 The (Partial) Domestication of the Supernatural

Although the two terms, romance and novel, were often interchangeable in the eighteenth century (Day 1987, 6-10), the acknowledgment that there are various forms of narration based on a different relationship to facts, reality, truth, historicity, was becoming part of the common theoretical baggage among writers, critics and scholars. In his second preface, Walpole uses the word ‘romance’ to designate both *novel* and *romance*, but is clear that he has in mind the very distinction Clara Reeve introduced in her *Progress of Romance* (1785): “[the] Romance in an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. - The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. - The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves” (Reeve 1785, 1: 111). Walpole used the word romance as James Beattie would do in his “On Fable and Romance”, distinguishing between the ancient, fabulous romance (“Oriental tale”, “Fabulous historical allegory”, “Moral and religious allegory”, “Allegorical prose fable”) and the “New romance”, serious and comic, by Defoe, Richardson, Le Sage, Smollet, and Fielding. In the latter, critics and readers agreed, there is or should be a “notional representation of reality” to be observed (Day 1987, 63-110 [70]), based on verisimilitude of description, probability of situation, “acute discernment [and] exact discrimination of characters” (*The British Critic’s* review of Frances Burney’s *Camilla*, 1796; quoted in Day 1987, 75).

Clara Reeve, while observing the merit of Walpole’s story in uniting the ancient romance with the modern novel, and acknowledging that her plan, too, was to blend the characteristics of both modes of narration, noticed “a redundancy” in the Walpole’s handling of the

marvellous, which “palls upon the mind [...] the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite”. The main problem of *The Castle of Otranto*, according to Reeve, is that its story is not kept “within the utmost verge of probability” (Reeve 1967, 4). Reeve believed that supernatural events such as those found in Walpole’s story “must keep within certain limits of credibility”. Her own narrative recipe was based on “a sufficient degree of the marvellous, to excite attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work” (4). In fact, her own novel, *The Old English Baron* (1778, first published as *The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Story* in 1777), “domesticates the extravagancies of Walpolean Gothic through a bourgeois-puritan moral discipline” (Duncan 1992, 24). Reeve’s plot makes the best of Walpole’s moralising on the legitimacy of inheritance and power, and downplays its most supernatural elements in favour of higher probability, which is obtained not so much by way of referential mimesis but, rather, by a more plausible representation of the past: “Reeve puts greater emphasis than Walpole on sociological and legal institutions of the past, less on ghostly visitations and apparitions” (Maxwell 2008, 69).

Walpole and Reeve dealt with the supernatural in a sort of chiasmic way: Walpole paid lip service to the emerging realistic mode but believed that its “strict adherence to common life” (Walpole 2003, 9) obstructs fancy and inspiration, which justified his recourse to excess in order to heighten the narrative’s capacity to entertain and make believe; Reeve continued in the romance tradition, yet was convinced that credibility should be preferred to sensation. Even if both Walpole and Reeve based the acceptability of their usurpation and restoration plots on the device of the “found manuscript”, they had two different approaches to the supernatural. Walpole resorted to an allegorical moral that should absorb the absurdities of the supernatural and make them work to tighten the plot and lead the story to its conclusion: “Everything tends directly to the catastrophe” (Walpole 2014, 6; on Walpole’s absurdism, see Watt 2004, 12-41). Reeve purified the Walpolean Gothic from its most implausible elements and cared less about surprising developments of the plot – indeed her plot is highly predictable. The legal resolution of the estate settlement restoring Edmund to his position as rightful heir to Lord Lovel at the end of *The Old English Baron* is rather prosaic, having the protagonists make budgetary calculations concerning the value of the estate, before Edmund’s final marriage to the daughter of the ‘usurper’. By lessening the supernatural and foregrounding historical details, Reeve paves the way for Walter Scott, who would purify the historical novel from metaphysical events and settings in order to increase its credibility.

However, neither Walpole nor Reeve pointed to a mimetic use of details and characters. Reeve’s verisimilitude rested on narrative el-

ements that do not belong to the to the kind of formal realism associated with the “rise of the novel”. As Emma Clery observes, Reeve’s verisimilitude derives from a Johnsonian notion of the “exemplary function of the novel” that urged her to rewrite the Walpolean model as “*Pamela* in fancy-dress with the spice of the paranormal, an illustrative conduct book for the proper correlation of wealth and virtue” (Clery 1995, 84). Thus, *The Old English Baron* honours the readers’ request that the supernatural element be shown in a legitimate way: “[the] supernatural is admitted to representation on condition that it exists *only* in representation, as fiction, myth or superstition, without claims to external reality” (54).<sup>2</sup>

Reeve’s tendency to naturalise the supernatural, which Walpole in turn criticised,<sup>3</sup> is active in other Gothic novels of the end of the eighteenth century, as in Sophia Lee’s highly historical *The Recess, or A Tale of Other Times* (1783-1785), or in Ann Radcliffe’s novels, whose “explained supernatural” reconciles the rational needs of an enlightened age and “the taste for primitive superstition” (Clery 1995, 107), by using rational explanation for supernatural phenomena that have been presented earlier in the story, bringing “readers and characters back to eighteenth-century conventions of realism, reason and morality” and “highlighting their excessive credulity” (Botting 1996, 65). The moralising bias that can be found in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Radcliffe’s other novels and which was intended to redeem characters and readers from their penchant for excessive sensibility and irrationality is not unambiguous. In fact, Radcliffe sermonises on the Quixotic dangers of indulging in one’s imagination and, at the same time, reinforces the fantastic effects she would like to undercut through her representation of preternatural events and effects. Her absorption of the supernatural in its moralising rationalisation is not complete. As Terry Castle notices, “[the] supernatural is not so much explained in *Udolpho* as it is displaced. It is diverted – rerouted, so to speak, in the realm of the everyday” (Castle 1987, 236). Such displacement produces an effect that is analogous to Walpole’s early (and later demystified, in the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*) displacement of the supernatural into a different time and culture:

<sup>2</sup> This sentence, in Clery’s book, refers to the *Monthly Review*’s diverging receptions of the first two editions of *The Castle of Otranto*, which accepted the supernatural elements within the framework of an ancient text but rejected them as absurd in a modern novel.

<sup>3</sup> Walpole wrote to William Cole. “I have seen, too, the criticism you mention on *The Castle of Otranto*, in the preface to the *Old English Baron*. It [...] directly attacks the visionary part, which, says the author or authoress, makes one laugh. I do assure you, I have had not the smallest inclination to return the attack. It would even be ungrateful, for the work is professed imitation of mine, only stripped of the marvellous; ad so entirely stripped, except in one awkward attempt at a ghost or two, that it is the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw. It certainly does not make me laugh; but what makes one doze, seldom makes one merry” (Toynbee 1904, 10: 302)

*The Mysteries of Udolpho* projects the explanation of the supernatural to a future time in the story that should free it, and its readers, from the fetters of superstitious delusion.

Radcliffe participated in the enlightened agenda of the disenchantment of the world founded on the procedures of modern, post-Baconian science, and on the secularisation of society. Fred Botting draws attention on a passage from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which, in its satirical self-consciousness, prefigures Jane Austen's debunking of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and calls for a rational dismissal of ghosts and ghost-stories (Botting 1995, 68-9). Yet, as we will see below, there is a significant residual element of *non finito* in the disenchanting project of Radcliffe's stories, which prevents the disenchantment from being complete. Therefore, the displacement of which Castle speaks is in fact never resolved in the here and now of everyday life, because this is the very here and now on which the readers' desire for the terror that Radcliffe offers them is based. Radcliffe's very practice of "terrorist novel writing" impinges itself on the here and now of common life, making it uncanny.<sup>4</sup> This is not the only ambivalence in Radcliffe's writing. Her explained supernaturalism corresponds to a middle-class transformation of society along the ideological lines of a utilitarian project reshaping and obliterating the old aristocratic *régime*. Yet, her distinction between acceptable and superstitious supernaturalism is based on a sharp class distinction: it is the uncultivated lower classes that believe in horror stories, and the aristocratic ones that are able to distinguish acceptable sensitivity from excessive imagination; middle-class (female) readers are warned which perspective they should adopt to read the astonishing events narrated (Botting 1995, 71-5; for a nuanced analysis of the role of servants and lower classes in the Gothic, see Hudson 2019).

Both of the two articles devoted to the Gothic supernatural in the present issue of *English Literature*<sup>5</sup> tackle the issue of the complex relationship between fiction and reality, the verisimilar and the completeness (or incompleteness) of explanation. John Bender's "Foley Effects in the Gothic: Sound in *The Castle of Otranto*" considers an aspect of *The Castle of Otranto* that Clara Reeve seems to have overlooked in her evaluation of that novel when she says that its "machinery" is too violent and "palls upon the mind (*though it does not upon the ear*)" (Reeve 1967, 4; emphasis added). According to Bender, the ear has instead a central role in the novel, both in thematic and for-

<sup>4</sup> "The Terrorist Novel Writing" is the title of an essay on supernatural fiction published anonymously in 1798 (Clery, Miles 2000, 182-3).

<sup>5</sup> More articles on the topic of the representation of the supernatural will appear in a future issue of this journal.

mal terms: the novel is full of terrorising noises and ghostly silence, its characters are anxious about hearing and interpreting sounds, while the readers confront the great quantity of auditory signs with which the novel is burdened. Bender observes that Walpole was experimenting with “a new written technology of sound description”, with which he had become familiar through his acquaintance with stage-effects at David Garrick’s Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Those effects were the eighteenth-century equivalent of the present cinematic “Foley” sounds, i.e. the noises produced in a studio with several kinds of props, and dubbed over the film soundtrack in order to produce a more effective impression onto the viewer in cinema theatres. Foley effects are simulations of real sounds that are not real but, like the off-stage sounds, achieve a higher level of realism than live recording. Likewise, Walpole created the literary equivalent of the “audio-visual contract” with the audience that is typical of cinematic aesthetics and, through a narrative synesthesia, was able to open “a whole world of sound to the novel as a form” organising the various ways with which novelists referred to sounds into “techniques for the narration of thought and of thought about thought –consciousness- in prose fiction”. Thus, the lack of that representational realism that Walpole excluded from his fiction is counterbalanced by an auditory-psychological realism obtained through narrative tricks that later writers would also use in their realist fiction.

Zack Watson’s “The Supernatural Subject of the Sublime in Burke and Radcliffe: A Reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*” offers a reading of the presence of Burke’s aesthetics and his psychological sublime in Ann Radcliffe’s novel, which explains the strategy of the “explained supernatural” and, at the same time, complicates its interpretation. The sublime experience that Radcliffe’s heroine undergoes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* paves the way for a conclusion of her story that does not draw the psychological adventure of her heroine to complete close, leaving room for further mystery. As Radcliffe learned from Burke, one’s physical exposure to terror does not coincide with its mental experience: this gap creates a space for the aesthetic enjoyment of the sublime. However, Watson adds, Radcliffe departs from Burke’s analysis in two ways: for her “delight is not the mark of the sublime”, and “not all sublime encounters conclude with a fortified sense of self”. In Watson’s view, the “explained supernatural” can be considered Radcliffe’s way of applying the resolution of the passage from pain to delight that marks Burke’s sublime. The sublime delight comes from the idea of a danger that does not affect the subject directly, “without being actually in such circumstances” (Burke 1986, 51). The sublime experience is indeed sublime when it goes beyond the mere exposure to terror and pain and opens itself to enjoyment. If the original experience of terror introduces an ambiguous suspense that might lead the stunned subject nowhere (or even to

his/her perdition), a delightful conclusion triumphs over the original fear and astonishment. Yet, Radcliffe does not present Burke's complete trajectory of the sublime that absorbs of the supernatural experience into its psychological explanation. Therefore, Watson contests Walter Scott's famous interpretation of Radcliffe's "natural principles" into which she resolves her supernatural, insofar as her narration does not conform to the binary principle of natural vs supernatural that Scott finds in her novels. Mysteries, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, are not explained away by their natural explanations: "Radcliffe all but assures readers that her protagonist never has the most traumatic supernatural element dissolved by explanation by setting so many mysteries in motion that there is no character who can explain them all". If "the explained supernatural implies a meaningful universe in which cause and effect can eventually be explained", in Radcliffe's universe there is always room for uncertainty. Even the novel's conclusion leaves an odd sensation in the readers that their "desire for narrative" has not been fulfilled, and that Burke's sublime enjoyment has not been attained, giving way instead to an "immanent sublime" that can never be brought to an end.

### 3 The Persistence of the Gothic in the Early Nineteenth Century

Both trends in the Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth century, the irrational (Walpole, Beckford) and the explanatory-historical (Reeve, Lee, Radcliffe), had to balance the interest in the supernatural with the demands of a rational age.<sup>6</sup> The marvellous, the extraordinary, the monstrous had to be confronted with the ordinary, the real, the empirical. Even if polite culture and society had moved from an attitude of general hostility towards the supernatural to its acceptance at the end of the eighteenth century (Clery 1995), the representation of abnormal and uncanny events continued to pose problems and questions to both writers and readers. The supernatural novels obliged their readers to acknowledge and, at the same time, question the mimetic underpinning for the "rise of the novel"; as Deirdre Lynch observes, "these books characteristically arrange for their characters [and we may add, their readers] to pass back and forth between real and aesthetic experience. They arrange for a 'real' experience of the supernatural to be counterpointed by the illusions of immedi-

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<sup>6</sup> There are other varieties of the Gothic novel, which we cannot take into account here, such as the sentimental Gothic of Charlotte Smith and Catherine Cuthbertson, or the revolutionary Gothic of William Godwin. On the relationship between the historical novel and the Gothic, see Punter 2013, 51-2, 140-64.

acy engendered by works of mimetic art (the statues of saints, portraits of dead relations, and absorbing old romances that litter the dilapidated abbeys and castles that house these characters)" (Lynch 2015, 185-6). Gothic fiction reinforced and subverted realist fiction at the same time.

The Gothic novel did not always domesticate the supernatural: inexplicable and, to some, inexcusable excesses abound in William Beckford's *Vathek* (1782, French version; 1786, English version), which joins the Gothic with the Oriental tale, and particularly in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Lewis's extravaganzas were so shocking as to prompt a spate of criticism that considered it "unfit for general circulation" (*The Monthly Review* 1797, 405; on Lewis and censorship, see Ellis 2000, 81-115). Ann Radcliffe wrote an essay, published posthumously in 1826, to distinguish the truly sublime "terror" of her stories from Lewis's "horror", which, in her interpretation, provides no 'expansion' of the soul, either aesthetically or morally (Radcliffe 2017, 403). In his anonymous review of *The Monk* for the *Critical Review*, Coleridge praised some of the "merits" of Lewis's novel but overall condemned it for being too full of "meretricious attractions". In Coleridge's opinion, even the portrayal of the hero of the story, which shows some knowledge of the human heart, then "degenerates into an uglier fiend than the gloomy imagination of Danté [*sic*] would have ventured to picture". One of the novel's main problems, along with its obscenity and profanity, is that the romance-teller, who has "an unlimited power over situations", does not make his characters act in congruity with the situation with that scrupulousness that the mode of narration itself should command. According to Coleridge, not only does Lewis overstep the limits of reason and judgment, confusing the preternatural with that which is "contrary to nature", but he also frequently produces "incongruity of [...] style with his subjects", which "is gaudy where it should be have been severely simple; and too often the mind is offended by phrases the most trite and colloquial, where it demands and had expected a sternness and solemnity of diction" (Coleridge 1995, 60). Clearly, Coleridge considered both the immorality and the implausibility of *The Monk* as its damning defects.

So, in addition to the outraged reaction to the scandalous side of *The Monk*, the stylistic criticism of Lewis's novel shows one of the main cruxes of the Gothic: its unstable mixture of fact and fiction. The eighteenth-century novel had progressively emerged as the genre that was able to present a fictional narration masked by claims to truth, and which produced in the readers an ambivalent response "as to whether they were reading something true or false" (Davis 1983, 21). By presenting stories as real, and by assuming that fictionality is based on events *as if* they were real, readers had become able to introject the principle of 'factual fiction' that provided

the justification for an acceptable and commonsensical willing suspension of disbelief. In turn, this suspension of disbelief allowed the writers to develop a conscience of belonging to a larger community sharing interests, views, and demands (Capoferro 2017, 244). *The Monk* stretched the propensity to suspending one's disbelief to its extreme and, as the reactions of reviewers and readers show, broke the unstable but epistemologically and morally profitable bond between fact and fiction. The artificiality of Walpole's, Beckford's and Lewis's novels is so evident that they seem to verge on 'pulp fiction', on counterfeit rather than truth (see Hogle 2012). Yet they never go beyond the limits of some kind of verisimilitude.

Similarly irrational and unnatural aspects can be seen in some extravagant and macabre novels that are variously related to *The Monk*, such as Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya or, the Moor* (1806), Edward Montague's *The Demon of Sicily* (1807), James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Charles Robert Maturin's *Fatal Revenge, or The Family of Montorio* (1807) and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), "a rather defiant swing back toward the Gothic proper at a time when it was becoming unfashionable, due in part to the all-powerful influence of [Walter] Scott" (Sage 2012, 139). So, even after the Romantic interest in Gothic themes – as in Percy B. Shelley's *Zastrozzi* (1810), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and in Coleridge's, Keats's, Byron's, and Polidori's poetry – had waned, and after Walter Scott had absorbed the Gothic fiction and cleansed it of its implausible and shocking aspects (see Richter 2016, 485-7),<sup>7</sup> supernatural, demonic, ghostly themes continued to run like a subterranean river under the more respectable fields of the realist fiction of the nineteenth century, resurfacing in writers who cannot be considered Gothic *prima facie*. Among the realist writers who absorbed supernatural issues there were Emily Brontë, whose *Wuthering Heights* (1847) partakes of the demonic sensibility of Romantic fiction,<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*, 1847), Charles Dickens (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain", 1843, and other ghost stories), Edward Bulwer-Lytton (*Zanoni*, 1842, "The Haunted and the Haunters", 1852), William Harrison Ainsworth (*The Lancashire Witches*, 1848), G.W.M. Reynolds (*The Mysteries of London*, 1844-1845), Wilkie Collins (*The Woman in White*, 1859-1860; Mil-

<sup>7</sup> "It is ironic", observes David Richter, "that the Gothic was displaced by 1820 by the historical romance of Scott, who adopted its plots and themes, but set them in a colder verisimilar world" (2016, 473).

<sup>8</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar demonstrate Brontë's dependence on Mary Shelley's technique of "evidentiary narrative technique [...] a Romantic story-telling method that emphasizes the ironic disjunctions between different perspectives on the same events as well as the ironic tensions that inhere in the relationship between surface drama and concealed authorial intention" (Gilbert, Gubar 2000, 249).



bank 1992, 54-79). The Gothic did not disappear, it became, in fact, “ubiquitous” (Killeen 2009, 3).

Both the writers in the realist mode and the supernaturalists were conscious of the bond between fact and fiction: the former would not exclude the supernatural from their works by incorporating it in a domesticated form, the latter would try not to fully subscribe to a contrary principle of ‘pulp fiction’. As we have seen in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic writers considered the necessity of presenting the marvellous, the monstrous, the abnormal within the limits of factual and social acceptability. Some may have extended the limits beyond the given norms, or invented new modes of representation,<sup>9</sup> while others agreed to a compromise between excess and moral and stylistic decorum on the other. The realist writers absorbed the Gothic in the psychology of their characters or in the historical context of their stories. It is possible to extend to most novels what Andrew Smith says of *Jane Eyre*: “the Gothic permeates the novel by turning commonplace phenomena [...] into symbolic realities” (Smith 2007, 82).

#### 4 The Supernatural in a Disenchanted World

The nineteenth century saw the transformation of English society and culture towards the “disenchantment of the world”, according to Max Weber’s famous formula. Science, the Industrial revolution, and the hegemony of the new economic interests were replacing theology with materialist thought, and a religious telos with utilitarian, commercial and budgetary aims. “Facts, facts, facts!” cries Mr. Gradgrind, the Benthamite schoolmaster of Dickens’s *Hard Times*, a parody and satire of the advent of a utilitarian and philistine age in which no imagination and even no representation can match the usefulness of utmost factuality:

“Fact, fact, fact!” said the gentleman. And “Fact, fact, fact!” repeated Thomas Gradgrind. “You are to be in all things regulated and governed,” said the gentleman, “by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don’t walk upon flow-

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<sup>9</sup> According to George E. Haggerty, Lewis and Maturin found a new way of overcoming the dichotomy between romance and novel by blending the subjective and the objective “in the depths of a perceiving consciousness [and] as a result, the limits of the real can be extended to include detail of a kind that is inadmissible in objective literature” (Haggerty 1985, 391).

ers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use,' said the gentleman, 'for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste". (Dickens 1989, 12)

In a secularised world in which only facts count and you are not permitted to imagine, project or paint things with your mind, in which taste is equated with statistics, life can no longer be regulated by "mysterious, unpredictable forces, [...] on the contrary, we can in principle *control everything by means of calculation*"; in the brave new world of engineers, medical doctors, economists, planners, etc., technology has replaced magic: "we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead technology and calculation achieve our ends" (Weber 2008, 35; emphasis in original).<sup>10</sup> Weber's disenchantment thesis has been discussed, contested and rephrased, and Charles Taylor's reformulation of a dialectics between disenchantment and re-enchantment in his monumental *A Secular Age* seems closer to what happened in the literary field too (Taylor 2007; for an application of Taylor's thesis to Victorian aesthetics see, for instance, Lyons 2015).

The nineteenth century is, by general (though not undisputed) critical consent, the age of realism and the realistic novel. This has been accepted as a truism possibly ever since Virginia Woolf launched her famous attack on the novelists of the previous generation in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924), in which she denounced the methods of realistic fiction to describe people, events and settings in the minutest physical detail, as opposed to the Modernist fictionalisation of characters' minds and the inner meanders of the self. Woolf's essay has thus been considered a turning point for the critical recognition,

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**10** Dickens's exaggeration of course is a satire of some tendencies of his times. According to Northrop Frye, "*Hard Times* [...] comes nearest to being what in our day is sometimes called the dystopia, the book which, like *Brave New World* or *1984*, shows us the nightmare world that results from certain perverse tendencies inherent in a society getting free play". Frye clarifies that Dickens defends realism from the more uncanny aspects of the utilitarian - we can add, disenchanted - trends in nineteenth-century society. Paradoxically, an extreme factualism is a form of imaginary delusion, to which a just proportion of imaginative powers is the right antidote: "Dickens sees in the cult of facts and statistics a threat, not to the realistic novelist, but to the unfettered imagination, the mind that can respond to fairy tales and fantasy and understand their relevance to reality" (Frye 1974, 549).

and at the same time the modern demise, of the domain of realism. It certainly helped to mark the beginning of a new theoretical and technical awareness that was to change the course of fiction.

Although Woolf exposed the tendency of Victorian and Edwardian fiction to overemphasise realistic features, she apparently failed to recognise the less patent, but vital and indeed ubiquitous presence of a series of modes related to the fantastic – the preternatural, the marvellous, the wonderful, the abnormal, the monstrous, etc. – that equally pertained to nineteenth-century literature and often underlay the hegemonic realistic mode, as has already been suggested (see also Willis 2012). Moreover there can be little doubt that such literary undercurrents diverting from the realistic norm impacted on Modernist literature itself, and even on later twentieth-century works, with a culmination in the postmodern era.

William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1801), the manifesto of Romanticism, referred to a generic supernatural as a necessary mode in the new literature his and Coleridge's collection proposed. This supernatural most often took the form of the Gothic in the fiction of the period, ranging from James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* to the later short stories by E.A. Poe, or it became the object of a parodic re-reading, as in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*<sup>11</sup> and Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). The presence of the supernatural and of annexed expressions of the improbable or implausible in the poetics of Romanticism was first evidenced by Meyer H. Abrams in his two ground-breaking studies *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971).

The interest in the fantastic and its ramifications that traversed Romantic literature was substantially subdued in the high Victorian age, when literature became aligned with the prevailing ethos of efficiency, pragmatism, and earnestness, and was consistent with burgeoning positivism. Nevertheless, even though this epistemological approach was predominant throughout the period, the presence of eccentric, non-normative, anti-realistic literary modes was never seriously challenged. Sometimes these were marginal, underdeveloped manifestations within traditional portrayals of reality, such as in the above-mentioned novels by Dickens or by Emily and Charlotte Brontë; very occasionally, on the other hand, the deviations from the realistic norm surfaced more clearly in texts that can well be considered as belonging to the fantastic, the preter- or super-natural, the grotesque, etc. This is the case of George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" (1859), "a tale of the supernatural [a] strange and disturbing occult novella"

<sup>11</sup> According to Robert Miles, it is a "carnavalesque" parody that sets a dialogue with the Gothic without rejecting it entirely (Miles 1993, 136).

(Pickett 2000, 193), which stands out as a generic *hapax legomenon* not only within the author's macrotext, but also in contemporary literature. The tendency increased as the century drew to a close and the epistemological framework moved towards the non-representational precepts of the Aesthetic Movement recommended by Walter Pater in his aspiration "To burn always with [a] hard gemlike flame" (Pater 1873, 210), uncorrupted by the world's ugliness, in both art and life. Among Pater's disciples, Vernon Lee was the one who most conspicuously scrutinised the anti-realistic implications of his poetics. In her collection *Hauntings. Fantastic Stories* (1890), she rejected Victorian codes of representation to bring forth issues related to Aestheticism, Symbolism, and Decadence. The "Preface" to that volume offers a unique theoretical contribution on the *fin-de-siècle* conception of the supernatural, which is described as "terrible to our ancestors and terrible but delicious to ourselves, sceptical posterity" (Lee 1890, vii), thus signalling a clear-cut rupture with the mode's past production and reception practices. Lee's definition of the ghost story elevates such practices to the mere psychological level:

[Ghosts] are things of the imagination, born there, bred there, sprung from the strange confused heaps, half-rubbish, half-treasure, which lie in our fancy, heaps of half-faded recollections, of fragmentary vivid impressions, litter of multi-coloured tatters, and faded herbs and flowers, whence arises that odour (we all know it), musty and damp, but penetratingly sweet and intoxicatingly heady, which hangs in the air when the ghost has swept through the unopened door, and the flickering flames of candle and fire start up once more after waning.

The genuine ghost? And is not this he, or she, this one born of ourselves, of the weird places we have seen, the strange stories we have heard? (xi-x)

Unsurprisingly, the intellectual milieu of which Lee was part produced a hitherto unknown abundance and variety of fantastic fiction. Hybrid typologies, such as the sci-fi and detective story supernatural, the vampire story, the *femme fatale* ghost fiction, the mythological supernatural, the feminist utopia/dystopia, were all encompassed within the overdetermined label 'fantastic', as explored by some of the articles in the present issue. The re-discussion of aesthetic, social-political, gender, scientific, or racial categories that was emerging and growing more radical at the time found frequent literary expression in a questioning of the nature and statute of mimesis. The most significant text in this sense is Oscar Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" (1891), in which mimetic practices are refuted through paradox and witticism coupled with unprecedented iconoclasm. Wilde's argumentations are not restricted to literature but include the figurative

arts, as when he declares that the *fin de siècle* is no longer an age for taking nature as a paragon, since art is so far superior to both nature and life that, in the writer's programmatic aphorism, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life (Wilde 1905, 32). The controversial repercussions of Wilde's thesis were still echoing ten years later, when George Bernard Shaw appropriated them as evidence of the necessity for a thorough reform of drama. Shaw put the blame for the contemporary theatrical "misrepresentation of humanity" – an unforgivable fault in his opinion – on the unexpected mythopoeic power of popular, and lower in his eyes, forms of art. Not only did he notice that "when a certain type of feature appears in painting and is admired as beautiful, it presently becomes common in nature", but also that the conventions of the worst sentimental literature are often bound to become "the laws of personal honour" (Shaw 1906, xix), thus hinting at moral biases behind Wilde's "reverse mimesis" (Burwick 2001, 161). Despite Shaw's resistance, and though being disregarded by the following pre- and post-war generations, the *fin-de-siècle* tenets codified by Wilde paved the way for anti-mimetic Modernist poetics.

Theoretical recognition of the fantastic in its broadest sense, that is to say as a possible representational model of reality, however transformed and distorted, only came much later, in the seventies and eighties. Structuralism, with its formalist interest in genres and modes, produced Tzvetan Todorov's landmark study *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970), which was soon countered by Irène Bessière's *Le récit fantastique: la poétique de l'incertain* (1973), a wide-ranging historical overview of fantastic fiction from the perspective of what would nowadays be called world literature. Postmodernism, with its re-evaluation of the eccentric, deviant, non-normative and with the challenges it posited to representation, gave full-fledged importance to non-realistic modes of expression which were at the centre of Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion* (1981). Remo Ceserani's later *Il fantastico* (1996) is not only a fine example of such criticism, but possibly the first study to identify a variety of characteristic fictional forms that pertained to nineteenth-century non-realistic literature: the archeological fantastic, erotic fantastic, aesthetic fantastic, decadent fantastic, etc. Only in the last twenty years or so have critical contributions concentrated more and more on the fantastic in the nineteenth century, often discussing single forms stemming from that overarching category and selecting precise historical intervals within the broader periodisation. Specialists have hence fostered the debate around certain aspects or manifestations of the fantastic in the Victorian age (see Wolfreys 2002; Brown, Burdett, Thurschwell 2004; Harris 2008), and late-Victorian times (Smith 2004; Ruddick 2007; Grimes 2011; Beran, Grubica 2016).

The articles on the nineteenth century supernatural contained in this issue of *English Literature* deal with a variety of issues hinging

upon the complex relationship between realism and the marvellous or the abnormal. The vampire story, for instance, a genre that often lay at the intersection of different types of the nineteenth-century fantastic, is central to the first article here devoted to *fin-de-siècle* literature: Laura Giovannelli's "'Things that make one doubt if they be mad or sane': Coping with the Monstrous in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*". Giovannelli examines the interaction between the phenomenology of the monstrous and an array of historical and socio-cultural discourses in Stoker's novel. She analyses Stoker's transcultural and transhistorical sources, as well as his reliance on contemporary (pseudo)scientific notions ranging from criminal anthropology to biomedical research, sexology, degeneration theory, and atavistic regression. Stoker is shown to appropriate contentious political topics of debate of the time, such as ethnic allegiances and the fear of attacks by marginal subjects of the British Empire that would produce reverse-colonisation processes, also bringing with them the threat of viral contaminations. The commingling of the monstrous and abnormal with these elements from everyday reality shows how *Dracula* provides crucial insights into the oxymoronic 'mimetic wonders' of its age.

The theme of vampirism is also central to Angelo Riccioni's "Robert Louis Stevenson and the *fin-de-siècle* vampire: 'Olalla' (1885) as 'Aesthetic Fantastic'". The article provides unusual critical perspectives in discussing Stevenson's vampire short story, set in Spain, in which the preternatural overlaps with the exotic and aesthetic. The composition of "Olalla" was concomitant with that of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, whose publication it shortly preceded, and hence the short story has often been overshadowed by that greater achievement. On the whole, "Olalla" has been seen as a derivative work whose interest mainly lies in its concoction of different sources. Riccioni resists such traditional interpretations and contends that Stevenson's inspiration for the text came from the most typical verbal-visual imagery of prominent aesthetic artists, in particular Walter Pater and Edward Burne-Jones.

Julie Gay's "Monstrous Islands and Literary Hybrids at the Fin de siècle in Conan Doyle's, R.L. Stevenson's, and H.G. Wells's fiction" explores those authors' choice of marginal islands as fictional settings and views it as both a literal escape from the contemporary world and an artistic one from the constraints of realism, thus following Suzanne Keen's definition of the "narrative annexe" (see Keen 1998). Their ultimate aim was an aesthetic aspiration to more imaginative forms of writing whose origins lay in the interaction between geographical spaces and literary aesthetics. Specifically, islands became the ideal locus to challenge realism and develop discourses around the fantastic, the marvellous, and even the monstrous that led to the creation of distinctively hybrid literary texts.

Nicholas Freeman's "Realism and the Supernatural in Ghost Stories of the *Fin de Siècle*" examines preternatural-themed short fictions by Vernon Lee, Ella D'Arcy, Rudyard Kipling, and Gertrude Atherton, ultimately finding that forms of realistic practices typical of the late-Victorian period are central to these texts and contribute to their complexity and sophistication. An example of such imbrications between realism and the fantastic is given by Henry James's psychological realism, which Freeman finds influential for *fin-de-siècle* fantasy and horror stories. However, Freeman's analysis is not restricted to late-Victorianism. He draws significant connections between turn-of-the-century short fictions (from the 1880s to 1905) and Modernist novels, identifying continuities in both realistic practices and the treatment of the supernatural, thus implicitly finding fault with the revisionist attitudes of Modernists, who underestimated Victorian and late-Victorian fictions as sites for literary experimentation. It follows that the rigid dismissal of realism by Modernists, as exemplified by Woolf's aforementioned essay, underestimated its importance and adaptability for the following generation. Woolf and her contemporaries called for a shift in authorial perspectives in order to bring human psyche to the fore of narrative attention, without realising that those perspectives were often already present in nineteenth-century narratives associated to the fantastic mode, as was the case with Vernon Lee.

## 5 Coda: Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment through Fact and Fiction

In one of the most interesting monographs published in recent years on the wonderful in English literature, Sarah Tindal Kareem's *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (2014), the question of the disenchantment and the re-enchantment of the world is raised in terms that converge with the dialectics of fact and fiction that is visible in the formation of modern narrative. Kareem finds that the current (we might add, post-Enlightenment) condition of inhabiting a world that believes and does not believe at the same time, that is divided between credence and scepticism, reflects the condition of disenchantment and re-enchantment we experience at the same time. This was the condition experienced by the writers of the supernatural, the marvellous and the abnormal, but also by the realist writers too who aligned themselves with a disenchanted thought (based on empirical epistemology, roughly stated) but then discovered and proclaimed the enchantment of ordinary life. Elaborating on Michael McKeon's dialectics of naive empiricism and extreme scepticism (McKeon 1987), Kareem thinks that a new category emerged in the interplay between a naturalistic and a wonderful approach to

narration, the discursive category of ‘fiction’ as distinct from fact, which however does not erase fact but incorporates it in the representation of “the marvellous in life”. “In a delicate negotiation”, adds Kareem, “fiction accommodates readers’ skepticism while also asking that readers allow the possibility of the strange and surprising to infiltrate everyday life” (Kareem 2014, 3). The disenchanting attitude typical of sceptical philosophy (for instance, of Hume’s refusal to confound *post hoc* with *propter hoc*) and the emergence of common sense that frees man from the fetters of superstition do not oppose the wonder promoted by fiction, which does indeed succeed in re-enchanting ordinary experience and in tempering the extraordinary through the ordinary:

Instead of arguing [...] that early eighteenth-century fiction produces enchantment by shielding the reader from reality’s randomness, I suggest that eighteenth-century fiction produces wonder by plunging its reader into the radical indeterminacy that Hume’s epistemology reveals [...] I attend to the period’s embrace not of irrationality, but of more equivocal feelings: doubt and diffidence, feelings that are at once destabilizing and exhilarating, and that foster a pleasure in the sensation of not knowing – of wondering – itself. In arguing this, I show how eighteenth-century fiction enchants not despite but because of its skeptical impulses. (Kareem 2014, 15-16)

The pleasure of the wonderful delight produced by both the ordinary and the supernatural, in their respective and different forms, reformulates the re-enchantment of the world in a way that goes beyond the disenchantment-enchantment opposition. Both realist novels and supernatural stories invoke a willing suspension of disbelief: in the former, the fictional trick works precisely because we marvel at the capacity of a convincing representation of ordinary life to involve the readers in what Edgar Allan Poe called “the potent magic of verisimilitude” (13); in the latter, the suspension of disbelief is brought to its extreme and produces a sceptical awareness of the philistine way in which society may consider the commonsensical. The result, according to Kareem, is that fiction exposes “self-proclaimed arbiters of truth [...] as promoters of false realism that conceals its artifice” (188), produces a “self-awareness” that combines reflection and engrossment in the act of reading, and continuously shapes and reshapes wonder, estranging it from uncritical admiration and reconfiguring it as “open, critical wonder” (216-20). The dialectic of the verisimilar and the marvellous does not result in an erasure of both of them, but in their reconfiguration, so that disenchantment and re-enchantment produce a higher form of new (disenchanted) enchant-



ment.<sup>12</sup> In fiction, doubt and marvel do not necessarily oppose one another: they may also converge and even coincide. The fiction of the supernatural helps us to marvel at both the wonders of nature and our capacity to reason on them, even in the most commonsensical ways, without ever letting us fall into the trap of making a fetish of facts and truth.<sup>13</sup> In the end, as Walpole believed, it may be possible “to reconcile the two kinds” of fiction, the natural and the supernatural.

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<sup>12</sup> In Diderot’s view, “[c]ombining the ordinary with the marvelous is the goal of art. The purpose of verisimilitude is not to eliminate but to attenuate the marvelous, to render it plausible, to make it seem possible” (Cuillé 2021, 137).

<sup>13</sup> On the modern fetishism of the factual and of the rational (of an instrumental reason) see Latour 1999.

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## **Section 1**

The Representation of the Wonderful and  
the Preternatural between the Gothic Novel  
and *Fin-de-Siècle* Literature

edited by Elisa Bizzotto and Flavio Gregori



# Foley Effects in the Gothic Sound in *The Castle of Otranto*

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**Abstract** The insistence among later eighteenth-century critics of the Gothic novel that sound strongly marks the genre confirms the intuition that sounds in these works are meaningful. *The Castle of Otranto* is laden with the profusely sonic dimensions that start with the text's opening pages. The analogue in modern film of Foley effects resonates because these are sounds, applied post-production, that often are louder and more striking than real world sounds; similarly, film and the novel, unlike ordinary experience, can offer true silence. Walpole was experimenting with a new *written* technology of sound description, related to effects on the stage of his day. Such theatrical sounds form part of the historical background to the analogy with Foley effects in modern film. Walpole is pioneering a new kind of rendering of psycho-acoustic ambience in the novel, and also psycho-acoustically actuated action. He opens up modes of experience not found in fiction prior to this novel – both with the use of written sound effects, and also with the psychic introjection of these effects to produce terror and horror in the minds of fictional characters.

**Keywords** Foley effects. Psycho-acoustic ambience. Gothic Novel. Horace Walpole. The Castle of Otranto.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Foley Effects. – 3 Sounds and Silences. – 4 A Lens Opening the Way of Hearing.



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Foley sound replaces and reinforces sound effects from a film production track and sweetens and enhances effects such as footfalls and cloth movement by dramatizing the smallest of sounds and turning them into significant sonic moments.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

Noises were considered strong generic markers of the Gothic at the end of the eighteenth century. Modern critics have written about Gothic music yet, with a few exceptions, say little about other sound effects. But when periodicals of the time offered profiles of the Gothic, they insisted on sound. For instance, the *Spirit of the Public Journals* of 1798 sets forth a ‘recipe’ requiring “noises, whispers, and groans”, and demands in fact “three-score at least” of each (see “Terrorist Novel Writing”, 1798). Other profiles add wind, whistles, howls, rain, creaking doors, and clanking chains. The *Monthly Magazine* of 1797 specifies that castle doors must “grate tremendously; and there must be in every passage an echo, and as many reverberations as there as partitions”. In this magazine account, the wind “whistles, and then it shows how sound may be conveyed through the crevices of a Baron’s castle. Sometimes it *rushes*, and there is reason to believe the Baron’s great grandfather does not lie quiet in his grave”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the works parodied in this way marked a high point of novelistic noise, as shown statistically in Holst Katsma’s study of “Loudness in the Novel” (Katsma 2017). He finds a decline in loud novelistic exclamations across the nineteenth century, with the heyday of the Gothic from about 1790-1810 registering as loud.

This eighteenth-century inclusion of sound as a marker of the Gothic works to confirm my intuition that sounds had been less than prominent in the earlier eighteenth-century novel. Conversely, when I open *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) with specific attention to sound effects, I am powerfully struck by the profusely sonic dimensions of the text’s initial episodes. And with eruptions of sound everywhere come also important, markedly noted silences. How is Walpole’s strategy in his short but powerfully innovative text to be understood?

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<sup>1</sup> My epigraph modestly rephrases and compresses a sentence from the published abstract of Wright 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See “The Terrorist System of Novel Writing” (1797, 103), which is signed “A Jacobin Novelist”. When they do discuss sound, critics of the Gothic focus mainly on music and voice. An exception is Archambault 2016. See also Katsma 2017; Sacido-Romero, Mieszkowski 2015; and van Elferen 2012. I owe these references and those to some to other Gothic novels to Anastasia Eccles, Marion Leclair and Justin Tackett. More broadly, for this paper, I am indebted to conversations with Jean Ma of the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University.

I argue here that Walpole was experimenting with a new *written* technology of sound description, related to effects on the stage of his day, but with printed words of narration replacing physically produced backstage noises. Such theatrical sounds form part of the historical background to my analogy with what are called ‘Foley effects’ in modern film. Such distinctive sounds lie at the heart of this paper. But, in contrast to physical effects in theatre, including those introduced during the mid-eighteenth century by the great actor David Garrick, Walpole is pioneering a new kind of rendering of psycho-acoustic ambience in the novel. And also psycho-acoustically actuated action. He opens up modes of experience that I do not find in fiction prior to this novel – both with the use of written sound effects, and with the psychic introjection of these effects to produce terror and horror in the minds of fictional characters. Walpole promotes his innovations in the two prefaces to *The Castle of Otranto*, where he says that he wants to put ordinary people into extraordinary situations. He also puts readers into extraordinary situations that depend upon an audio-textual bond.<sup>3</sup>

Readers may find my discussion here of Walpole’s novel in the context of modern film sound to be an anachronistic adventure, although the tradition of artificially produced sound effects stretches distantly into theatrical history and, even now, such noises are staged in live theatre or in cinema using long inherited devices like thunder sheets and wind machines. During the mid-eighteenth century, Garrick brought innovations in scenery, sound, and silence effects to his stage. For silence, he wrote in his advice to an actor about how to play Macbeth’s murder of King Duncan that he

should be seen in *every Limb*, and yet every *Member*, at that Instant, should seem *separated* from his *Body*, and his *Body* from his *Soul*: This is the Picture of a compleat *Regicide*, and as at that Time the *Orb below should be hush as death*; I hope I shall not be thought *minutely circumstantial*, if I should advise a *real Genius* to wear *Cork Heels* to his Shoes, as in this Scene he should seem to *tread on Air*. (Garrick 1744, 9; italics in the original)<sup>4</sup>

Walpole’s own play *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) begins with the words, “What awful silence!” and goes from there to off-stage effects like a chapel bell, a choir’s singing, and a “violent storm of thunder

<sup>3</sup> On the theatrical background to *The Castle of Otranto*, see Brown 2005, 42-65.

<sup>4</sup> Garrick is possibly indulging here in a little sarcasm. It appears from a report of about a hundred years later that Garrick may have worn the cork soles to increase his height; see *The Players*, for May 12th, 1860 (Wisgast 1860, 1: 157); Hitchman 1881, 154, takes this view but offering no citation. Garrick indeed was short: see for instance Zofany 1768. On scenic effects, see Baugh 2007.

and lightning". We even get a debate over a real or imagined off-stage groan (Walpole 1768, 1, 33, 38, 43). Thus, I find that comparisons with what I may call the 'sound tradition', from eighteenth-century thunder sheets to Foley effects, bring the profusion of sounds and silences in Walpole's Gothic into sharp focus. Noise and silence in *The Castle of Otranto* take on fresh significance when analysed specifically within the frame of Foley sound, long the most prominent kind of auditory effect in film.

## 2 Foley Effects

Here, I am viewing Walpole as an unseen sound artist who generates sounds in prose, who calls attention to noises, and who, like the Foley artist, embraces silence as crucial in his spectrum of effects. Walpole's sounds, like those in films, are highly selective and, very importantly, more prominent – louder – than in real life.<sup>5</sup> They are not just sounds but artificial effects. He simulates a sense of real sonic experience using the unreal device of printed words.

What are Foley effects? They were named after Jack Foley, the early sound man who transferred the art of the auditory effect from radio to film. Like virtually all sound other than dialogue in film, sound effects are not recorded on set – because on-set ambience may be too dim or full of conflicting noises – but are superimposed later by the invisible hand of the Foley artist. Perhaps counterintuitively, these overlain Foley sounds often jump out as louder than they might in real life (tinkling ice in a drink) or may in a true sense be fake (frozen romaine lettuce for bone or head injuries).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, "Hyper-real Sound", <http://www.filmsound.org/terminology/hyper-realistic.htm>, and "The Role of a Foley Artist", <https://bridgmansblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/15/the-role-of-a-foley-artist/>.

<sup>6</sup> On the basics of Foley sound, with the history that includes a list of Foley tricks for making seemingly real sound effects from strange materials (for instance, frozen romaine lettuce for bone or head injuries), see "Foley (filmmaking)" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foley\\_\(filmmaking\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foley_(filmmaking))) and Wright 2014. The film *Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound* (2019) traces the shifts in cinematic sound production across time into the digital age, showing the history of Foley effects and their persistence even in present-day sound mixing, which is largely digital. The film is directed by Midge Costin, written by Bobette Buster, and produced by Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet Corporation and Goodmovies Entertainment. *Making Waves* concentrates on the sound revolution in film of the seventies. Walter Murch emerges as its central figure. His powerful innovations, linking film sound to emotion, are documented mainly online. See <http://www.filmsound.org/foley/> and <http://www.filmsound.org/murch/murch.htm>. For a Murch filmography see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Murch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Murch). Note especially Murch 2000; also Murch, "Walter Murch", and Freer, "Walter Murch: A Conversation With the Legendary Sound Designer". Murch 2001 is about film editing, but also discusses principles that govern his work in sound.

The film sound theorist Michel Chion says that the “realist art” of cinema has “progressed only by [...] straining against its own principle through forceful doses of *un-realism*” (Chion 1994, 54). *The Castle of Otranto* illustrates this observation for the novel. Indeed, the novel in general produces its most striking effects by straining against the limitations of mere words on the page. For instance, dialogue, which everywhere appears in novels, is more suited to vocal representation than to writing on printed pages. The notably modern novelistic device of free indirect discourse works to escape these limits by using shifts of person and tense that do not occur in ordinary written or spoken language in order to project to readers the consciousness of fictional characters drawn in the limited medium of printed words. Such transparent access to the minds of others does not occur in lived life, where we must resort to guessing – mind reading – in order to know the thoughts of others. It is no accident that the sonic Walpole of *The Castle of Otranto* was the first British writer to employ sustained free indirect discourse in rendering mental states (Brown 2005, 32 and 34-41).

Foley sounds are made with real physical objects but disconnected from the real. They are simulations. Foley effects, like mechanistic off-stage sounds, achieve realism, but often by employing the not real. Sound engineers know well, for instance, that the crunch of cornstarch underfoot sounds more like snow than snow itself. This kind of realism, like others, does not equal the real but simulates it. In this sense, Foley effects imply an almost Gothic spectrality because they come out of nowhere. How do these sounds become so convincing? As Chion argues, Foley works because of an “Audio-Visual Contract” with the audience, underlain by the synergistic co-presence of image, sound, and audience. All the more so I am arguing when it comes to written sound in the Gothic novel (Chion 1994, 44).

### 3 Sounds and Silences

Foley effects have specific attributes that I am placing in tandem with sounds and silences in *The Castle of Otranto*. They are actual sounds overlain on the film track: sounds like clicking locks, creaking floorboards, clinking or breaking glass, folding sheet metal, or a television set in an adjacent or distant hotel room. Crucially, and with significance for *The Castle of Otranto*, Foley sounds most usually are louder than in ‘real’ life.

Silence, perhaps surprisingly, is part of sound effects because what we call silence in real life actually contains noise, and Foley puts that subtle noise of silence on film. Even in a remote spot on the globe, the sound of rustling leaves or faint insect noises hangs in the air. Background sounds like a turning lock in film then run on top of that

seeming but noisy silence – continually present as ‘atmosphere’ in most films – street noise, undifferentiated voices, fuzzy and far away sounds of a house or a hotel like door hinges or footsteps, a television or radio playing in a remote room or humming kitchen appliances. In Foley language, this is called ‘atmosphere’ or ‘atmos’. At the same time, a film is capable of a kind of total silence impossible in real life: the silence of a blank soundtrack. Such is all the more true of written narration in the novel, where silence, when it is declared, must be absolute – drained of all background noise, even of living breath.

Foley effects are made with real objects but are distinct from the real. They are simulations and thus, always, to some degree spectral in their out-of-nowhere impact. They achieve realism but in film production they are disarticulated from the real. Foley is not just sounds but *effects*. Its sounds jump out from the subtle background vibrations of its humming silence, or even from the apparent visual frame of action because they are louder than the real – that clinking glass or that clicking lock tumbler would not command attention in everyday life.

Tod Browning, the director of *Dracula* (1931), perfectly understood the power of silence punctuated by sound effects, with no music. He had the benefit of sound by none other than Jack Foley himself. A leading film critic endorses this approach:

*Dracula* had no musical score when it was first released, apart from some fugitive strains of Swan Lake [...] Purists argue that Browning’s original decision was the best one – to enhance the horror by eerie sound effects instead of underlining it with music. (Ebert, “Dracula”)<sup>7</sup>

Browning was responding in part to technical limitations imposed at an early moment in film sound when, for instance, atmospheric effects were not possible within the single track then available; but the film caught an essential trait of the Gothic, with its reigning silences broken by specific Foley effects.

Robert Bresson noted that there was no silence in silent film. Cinematic silence became possible, said Bresson, only with the advent of sound in film: “The soundtrack invented silence” (Bresson 1986, 28). Profound silence is very rare in real life, if it exists at all, and perhaps rarer still in film, although Bresson often left sustained gaps in

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<sup>7</sup> The scholar Titas Petrikis (2014, 3) underlines the point: “*Dracula* (Browning 1931) belongs to the transitional period between silent and sound films. *Dracula*’s original soundtrack consists of only a few sonic elements: dialogue and incidental sound effects. Music is used only at the beginning and in the middle (one diegetic scene) of the film; there is no underscoring. The reasons for the ‘emptiness’ of the soundtrack are partly technological, partly cultural”.

his soundtracks, which seldom included the music that in most modern films bridges gaps between dialogue or sound effects. One powerful example of total silence in film, however, is at the end of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather II* (1974). Walter Murch reminisces about his creation of this twenty-second instant:

One memorable scene [...] was the end of *Godfather II* [...] where Michael Corleone [...] is sitting by the lake. I dropped the soundtrack down to the atmos and then shut it down completely, which transmitted the interior emotions being felt by the character. (Murch, "Walter Murch: The Sound Film Man")

During Murch's twenty seconds of film silence, Michael is contemplating his order to kill his own brother, while viewing the very spot of the murder on Lake Tahoe.

Foley effects typically are louder than the sounds they represent would be in real life – the creaking door hinge, the clinking glasses, the key in the turning latch. These are made relatively loud to prevent our missing them in the audience, but they lead a double life, for they are background noises for the characters. The worlds of audience perception and those of characters are separate. Characters may not notice that ice clinks in their glasses or that a distant television set is playing. *We* may. Foley implicitly opens a gap between sound as perceived by the audience and by characters in the fiction. In another register, however, Foley can provide noises that frighten characters into action, or that actuate psychic process. The power of sound in cinema to actuate characters is obvious in horror films. We experience Walpole's version, for example, as *The Castle of Otranto's* Isabella flees through a tunnel beneath the castle:

An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror;—yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her. She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave,—yet frequently stopped and listened to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. (Walpole 2014, 26)

Here a perfect reigning silence, artificially produced through novelistic discourse, is punctuated by noises both real and imagined, for novels can confer absolute silence in ways not found in real life or in

film. Silence, sound, and mind are fused. In a film of this scene, Foley would render each noise.

The fullest way to demonstrate Foley effects in action would be for readers to watch the splendidly amusing video titled, "Track Stars. The Unseen Heroes of Movie Sound".<sup>8</sup> It shows a Foley sound stage in action on split screen with a recorded action scene of an indoor police chase. On the left, a very young security guard, alerted by clumsy noise from a break-in artist, chases him through offices, corridors, staircases, and some kind of manufacturing plant. The chase culminates in two brutal fist fights. On the right, two Foley artists use surprising gear and go through amazing contortions, to produce the sound effects essential to this film yet not recorded on set.<sup>9</sup>

We are treated to obvious analogue effects like tumbling trash cans, a door lock opened with a metal pick, a smashed board for a shattering table top and sticks for a destroyed wooden chair, a real bottle splintered to a parallel one, broken on the guard's head, and countless running footsteps by the two Foley performers - these even reflect the fatigue of the burglar's running steps toward the end. But other sounds are represented by objects remote from those evoked by the film. Steel pliers become a dropped gun, and a metal sheet stands in for a crash into the side of a large holding tank. The real fun begins with the two vigorous fist fights, during which blows to a raw leg of meat hanging on the Foley stage absorbs tough gut punches, while cabbages take the hits for other body parts - one cabbage smashed on the head of a Foley artist. Above all in these moments, the Foley production of realism through stand-in sounds that are more convincing than the real itself becomes obvious. "In real life", as Chion notes, "a punch does not necessarily make noise, even if it hurts someone" (Chion 1994, 60). Something real - that raw leg of lamb - stands in for something else that is real - the body punch - and projects a phantasmatic spectre of pain. This is a realist illusion produced by high artificiality through an alternate Foley stage reality that is factual.

Often, in *The Castle of Otranto*, crowds of people and servants make up background noise. By contrast, when Isabelle is alone in the castle's tunnel, with its novelistic total silence, every moment strikes her with new terror. In a film, the phrases "she thought she heard a sigh", and "she thought she heard the step of some person", might be spoken as dialogue, but more likely would emerge as sound effects in a spectral, perhaps echoey, Foley register different from that of the wind and other noises in the 'real' of the novel. This is a sound-

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00NaPcZ4EAs>.

<sup>9</sup> Sound Ideas is a company that produces and sells sound effects: <https://www.sound-ideas.com/Page/about-us.aspx>. The video I am describing appears on the website of Sound Ideas and also on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00NaPcZ4EAs>.

intensive passage, with noises amplified by total darkness. Here, the sound effects are not just part of realism, they are psycho-acoustically present in the mind of the character. The text confirms this psychic effect, for it instantly moves into Isabelle's thoughts:

Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw any body to her assistance.—Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind.—If Manfred knew where she was, he must have followed her: she was still in one of the cloisters, and the steps she had heard were too distinct to proceed from the way she had come. Cheered with this reflection, and hoping to find a friend in whoever was not the prince; she was going to advance, when a door that stood a-jar, at some distance to the left, was opened gently. (Walpole 2014, 26-7)

Here, starting with the words “Yet the sound seemed [...]”, is one of *The Castle of Otranto's* many innovative passages of psycho-narration. We find no incipit, such as “she considered”. The verbs shift to a conditional voice and then to the past perfect tense. The psycho-acoustic effects of Foley, enabled by an underlying audio-visual contract, parallel the rendering of mental states through psycho-narration in the novel, where a written technology that omits introductory phrases (e.g. “she considered”), includes shifts in verb tenses, and maintains third-person narration (with underlying first-person reference), projecting the illusion of entry into consciousness. This is the specialised grammar of free indirect discourse, which produces spectral entry into the mind of a character, and which Ann Banfield calls a written technology because it is analogous to the operation of sentient instruments like recording thermometers or barometers. Crucial, here, is the presence of sound effects to actuate or to render mental states.<sup>10</sup>

The single most famous image in *The Castle of Otranto* evokes silence and speechlessness as much as sound. Speechless astonishment is the rule in this opening scene, leaving aside the noise of “shrieks, horror, and surprise” from a crowd surrounding the mammoth helmet that has just crushed Conrad, the heir apparent. Returning from the scene, a servant of Manfred, the villain, “said nothing, but pointed to the court”. The princess Hippolita “swooned away”. The servant “made no answer, but continued pointing towards the court-yard”.

<sup>10</sup> Psycho-narration is Dorrit Cohn's term, see Cohn 1978, 21-57. See also Banfield 1987, and 1982. Free indirect discourse can be slippery in English because the language offers no distinct marker. In French, by contrast, the marker lies with a verb tense, the *imparfait*. For general discussion of the mode, see Fludernik 2009, 64-9, 78-85.



Manfred at first views “something that appeared to him only as a mountain of sable plumes”. And then,

But what a sight for a father’s eyes!—He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers. (Walpole 2014, 18)

Those “proportionable” feathers remain silent, their rustling perhaps drowned out by shrieks. But the giant feathers soon return when the lascivious Manfred approaches Isabella, his dead son’s fiancée, with a transgressive marriage proposal. Here, and in the action to follow, we see how Walpole employs sound as the infrastructure of an episode:

At those words he seized the cold hand of Isabella, who was half-dead with fright and horror. She shrieked, and started from him. Manfred rose to pursue her; when the moon, which was now up, and gleamed in at the opposite casement, presented to his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet, which rose to the height of the windows, waving backwards and forwards in a tempestuous manner, and accompanied with a hollow and rustling sound. (24)

The giant feathers, rising to the windows on the main floor of the castle, now show great agitation and resound with threatening noise. The encounter resembles one in a play, with the window and feathers in recession and off-stage sound effects. The “hollow and rustling sound” is a kind of speech, warning Manfred away from his near-incestuous plan. Isabella translates the sound into words:

Isabella, who gathered courage from her situation, and who dreaded nothing so much as Manfred’s pursuit of his declaration, cried, Look, my lord! see Heaven itself declares against your impious intentions!—Heaven nor hell shall impede my designs, said Manfred, advancing again to seize the princess. (24-5)

The sound of a “deep sigh”, not vision, immediately motivates the next action: the scene of a portrait’s coming to life that anticipates countless moments in later Gothic novels, including Oscar Wilde’s modulation in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890):

At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast. Isabella, whose back was turned to the picture, saw not the motion, nor knew whence the sound came, but started and said, Hark, my Lord! what sound was that? and at the same

time made towards the door. Manfred, distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and inability to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, had however advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its pannel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air. (25)

The spectre remains silent, apart from a further sigh, relying only on gesture to lead Manfred onward in pursuit. Sound powerfully emerges here as a psycho-acoustic effect centred on the mind of Isabella and motivates her speech, along with the action to follow. The reinforcement of images by sound, and the more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts aspect in these scenes, exploits to the full the bond between text and audience that Chion calls the “audio-visual contract” (1994, xxvi).

Meanwhile, Isabella, fleeing to the bottom of the principal staircase on her unknowing way to the scene in that subterraneous passage with which we began our discussion, stops to reflect on the moment in a brilliant passage of psycho-narration:

The gates of the castle she knew were locked, and guards placed in the court. Should she, as her heart prompted her, go and prepare Hippolita for the cruel destiny that awaited her, she did not doubt but Manfred would seek her there, and that his violence would incite him to double the injury he meditated, without leaving room for them to avoid the impetuosity of his passions. Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could for that night, at least avoid his odious purpose. – Yet where conceal herself! How avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle? (26)

The shifts in verbal mode and tense that signal free indirect discourse allow the ghostly entry into consciousness that Walpole pioneers in tandem with his sustained use of sound effects; and, along with that, allow entry into Isabelle’s mind as she struggles to parse Manfred’s mental reflections. Walpole here is opening the kind of layered rendering of thought about thought usually assigned to much later novels.

Those memorable feathers, which wave proportionably atop the giant casque, became actors when their “hollow and rustling sound” interrupted Manfred’s assault on Isabella (24). They also vigorously intervene later as the novel unfolds. These sable plumes signal the novel’s deep structural interplay between sound and silence, which, as Bresson observes for film, became possible only within the domain of sound itself.

A prolonged episode, near the centre of *The Castle of Otranto*, illustrates both this interplay and the psychic effects that accompany it. Central is the terrifying knight whose huge company bears a gigantic sword and includes two troupes of footmen clad in scarlet and black. The arrival of this mysterious knight of the gigantic sabre is heralded by the sound of a “brazen trumpet, which hung without the gate of the castle” and, with it, “at that same instant the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet [...] were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer” (55). Manfred’s misgiven heart now pauses on beholding the tempestuous yet textually silent “plumage on the miraculous casque shaken in concert with the sounding of the brazen trumpet” (56). When Manfred questions these doings, a stage direction in brackets declares that now “the plumes were shaken with greater violence than before” (56). But do they rustle? The plumes may, it appears, be agitated, or even tempestuous, without accompanying sound. They hover at the margin between sound and silence.

A flood of narration unfolds during the several pages of print that intervene before the knight’s procession enters. We range from Father Jerome’s gaining pardon for his son Theodore, through the foreign herald’s twice declaring that Manfred is the “usurper of Otranto” (57), to a long passage in which Manfred ‘reflects’ on crucial points in the background of the history now unfolding for us as readers (57-8). Manfred works here as an internal reflector figure in the terms of modern narratology. Amidst further exposition, Father Jerome’s “mind”, like the plumes themselves, is “agitated by a thousand contrary passions” (58), and we get a long thought report as he works through the moment’s fraught implications for Hippolita, Theodore, and Isabella. At last, after confusion over their locations in the castle complex, and doubt about Hippolita’s possible death, the shifting scene returns to the pageantry accompanying the mysterious knight’s entry – his own helmet “surmounted by a large plume of scarlet and black feathers” (60).

This cavalcade, comprising by my count well over three hundred men and over one-hundred horses, centres on the one-hundred gentlemen who seem to “faint” under the weight of an “enormous” sword (60). Yet this potential orgy for the Foley artist is accompanied only by trumpets! No footsteps, no hooves, no groaning under the sword’s weight (the gentlemen are merely fainting). But a “tempest of wind” rises behind Manfred, who turns to behold “the plumes of the enchanted helmet agitated in the same extraordinary manner as before”, while the knight silently “stopped to gaze at the miraculous casque; and, kneeling down, seemed to pray inwardly for a few minutes” (60-1). The knight shakes his head, refusing Manfred’s request to disarm, while the “gigantic sword burst from [its] supporters, and, falling to the ground opposite to the helmet, remained im-

moveable" (61). Some silent magnetic force works to reunite these fragments of a gigantic statue, dismembered parts of which terrify the servants Diego and Bianca in the great chamber.

Walpole stages a comedy of desperate conversational gambits from a Manfred who frantically attempts to break the knight's silence, which is recorded in brackets like stage directions. This continues for some five pages until Manfred descends to "incoherent sentences" (65) as the knight at last speaks to demand the meaning of Isabella's flight from the castle. At this turning point, the word "silence" appears twice within four lines of text. In this sequence, at the core of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole puts sound - trumpets, the wind surrounding the plumes, and ultimate speech from the mysterious knight - into counterpoint with silence. From the vortex of this episode springs the true story of Manfred's usurpation of Otranto. The secret of silence is broken by the speech of truth.

#### 4 A Lens Opening the Way of Hearing

I might work through the entirety of *The Castle of Otranto* in this way, pointing out Foley effects and psycho-acoustic engagements, or even jump far ahead via the novels of Ann Radcliffe and others to the effects of wind in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), or to the use of supernatural voices, real or imagined, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), and James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Walpole set the paradigm for such effects, as we see if we return to that recipe from the *Spirit of the Public Journals* with which we began. That summa of Gothic effects, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk: A Romance* itself, which had appeared in 1796 just two years earlier than the recipe, might have been the basis of the recipe - and far more. For *The Monk* condenses the effects of the Gothic to the point of parody, as it became the most Gothic of the Gothics and embraced their extremes in ways that crystallise the genre. This concentration is no less true of sound effects than of those of plot, character, and setting. The final scene of *The Monk* presents a heady distillate of the effects Walpole pioneered. Once the hero Ambrosio is cast into the dungeon from which the devil alone can free him, we encounter: multiple silences, "gloomy" and otherwise, "repeated" loud bursts of thunder that shake the foundations of buildings and even the earth itself, chiming bells, abounding shrieks with which "Caves and Mountains rang", bolts and bars of a door that "grated heavily upon its iron hinges", rattling chains, a key turning in its lock, a roof that opens to the soaring daemon carrying Ambrosio aloft above "the wildness of surrounding scenery" where "the wind of night sighed hoarsely and mournfully" amidst "the shrill cry of mountain Eagles" that later will

tear at Ambrosio's flesh beside "a silent sluggish stream", and will dig "out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks [while] the winds in fury rent up rocks and forests" (Lewis 2008, 331-9). All of this would reduce the Foley artist to a frenzy. The 1972 film *Le Moine* hardly began to cover this range of sound and silence.<sup>11</sup>

I suggest that Foley effects in film can become a lens, a kind of optic, that, to mix metaphors, opens a way of hearing *The Castle of Otranto*. This opening points up the value of placing the arts in juxtaposition with one another. An awareness of and curiosity about Foley effects has caused me to consider this novel differently and quite firmly to underline Walpole's marked originality. When we say that he invented the Gothic novel, we say something remarkable, for very few genres in the arts have been created from scratch. But his invention seems now to have gone much further, for he opened a whole world of sound to the novel as a form, and shaped the previously fragmentary resources of psycho-narration into techniques for the narration of thought and of thought about thought - consciousness - in prose fiction that would become central to, for instance, Frances Burney and Jane Austen - themselves long treated as precursors of a central nineteenth-century mode of narration.

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<sup>11</sup> The film to which I refer, *Le Moine* (1972), based on the novel, was directed by Ado Kyrou, and written by Luis Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière. A later film by the same title (2011) was directed by Dominik Moll and written by him with Anne-Louise Trividic. This film employs a few Foley effects but largely relies on music.

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# The Supernatural Subject of the Sublime in Burke and Radcliffe: A Reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

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**Abstract** The article aims to explore how the supernatural is represented in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), arguing that it reflects Radcliffe's ideas on the matter, described in her theoretical work *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826). Following Walter Scott's representation of Radcliffe in his work *Lives of the Novelists* (1825), her works have been associated with the concept of the explained supernatural. The article argues that the supernatural present in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) complicates the subjective safety implied by the explained supernatural, a complication visible in the novel's narrative closure.

**Keywords** Gothic novel. Supernatural. The Sublime. Empiricism. Narrative. Edmund Burke. Ann Radcliffe. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Burke's Apocalyptic Sublime. – 3 "Amidst All the Tumult": The Explained Supernatural as a Reading of the *Enquiry*. – 4 "She at Length Concluded:" Narrative Closure in *Udolpho*. – 5 Coda: Representing the Ghostly Subject of Empiricism.



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## 1 Introduction

As is appropriate for an article analysing *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (henceforth *Udolpho*), this one aims to tell a doubled story, a twined narrative of the explained supernatural and the sublime. While those categories may seem to be mutually exclusive – what could be less explained than the obscurity of the sublime? – they both emerge from empiricist epistemology, and they both struggle to provide satisfying narrative closure. Through the explained supernatural, Radcliffe tries to fuse the thrill-and-revelation structure of the sublime with the rigours of realistic representation, hoping to solve one difficulty, concluding a narrative, with another, concluding a sublime experience. While her critics point out the failures of this attempt, her fame suggests she was also surprisingly successful. But I would suggest that *Udolpho*'s failure to provide conclusions that match the emotion stirred up by its initial circumstances indicates an important feature of the sublime that is ignored in much of the primary and secondary literature on the topic: its failed attempt to give its heroine an un-haunted home free of unsolved mysteries.

This article begins by re-examining Burke's sublime shift from rhetoric to nature and from pain to delight. This return to Burke reveals that his attempt to reconcile the physiological and the moral should raise our suspicions, and we will see that Radcliffe puts Emily St. Aubert in that very gap. In fact, his conclusions undermine the empiricist foundation he tries to provide for taste, because they retroactively depend on the empiricist subject, which is an emergent phenomenon in the eighteenth century. Burke is central to eighteenth-century English discourse on the sublime, but his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (henceforth *Enquiry*) is also central to Radcliffe's explained supernatural and her terror/horror distinction. The next section tracks Radcliffe's adaptation of his sublime to her narrative ends in *Udolpho* and treats Radcliffe as a canny reader of Burke. That novel has been read as ending with a sublime return of readers and characters to their places of safety, compensating physical suffering with a subjective home. While it is typical to read Radcliffe as an adherent of Burke's aesthetic theory, she is better understood as a respondent. She uses the narrative powers of the realist novel to clarify the narrative logic of the sublime, neatly separating the physical question of safety from the more important questions of knowledge and certainty, which drive the sublime. In *Udolpho*, she advances two key corrections to Burke's *Enquiry*: that delight is not the mark of the sublime, and that not all sublime encounters conclude with a fortified sense of self. I investigate the first point in the third section, and the second in the fourth. Surprisingly, Radcliffe's Gothic novel respects the limits of rationality imposed by empiricism more completely than Burke's treatise.

tise. Radcliffe knows that empiricism and subjective certainty cannot comport with one another, and both the charms of *Udolpho* and her revision of the sublime grow from that knowledge.

## 2 Burke's Apocalyptic Sublime

Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVI-II-Century England* stands a touchstone for understanding the century's discourse on the sublime, even as it has been corrected for making Kant's third *Critique* the telos of the sublime and for ignoring English discourse on the sublime stretching back to the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> The precise importance of the *Enquiry* has shifted over time: Ashfield and De Bolla's anthology contextualises Burke's originality within other works in the tradition, and J. Jennifer Jones makes it clear that both appreciative and performative modes were already available in Longinus's treatise (see Ashfield, de Bolla 1996; Jones 2015). Rodolphe Gasché maintains that

Burke was the first to propose an uncompromising empiricist - that is sensualistic - account of aesthetic experience, and to have radically uncoupled this experience from extrinsic considerations (particularly, moral and religious), which still dominate Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725). (2012, 24)

However, there is more to the *Enquiry* than a strictly empiricist account of aesthetic experience. As Frances Ferguson points out, the work is as notable for empiricism as for its

emphasis upon the significance of the passions, or in other words, psychology. Obviously, Burke appears to be caught between a completely nonsubjective (nonidealist) scientism on one hand and a completely subjective irrationalism on the other. (1992, 40)

I want to focus on Burke not because he moved the sublime from rhetoric to aesthetics, nor because he introduced empiricist rigour to the aesthetics, but because his narration of the sublime experience sets a pattern for the discourse and shows the difficulties of capturing a preternatural object - the subject - in representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Monk (1960, 86-7) marks Burke's 1757 *Enquiry* as a turning point in the sublime's journey from rhetoric to aesthetics when he calls it "certainly one of the most important aesthetic documents that eighteenth-century England produced".

In fact, the *Enquiry* aims to bring a most elusive quality, human subjectivity, into the realm of representation with sublime rhetoric, and to make it the bedrock of taste. I claim that Burke uses narrative to first confront a difficulty, then describe its progress in physiological terms, and then to triumph over it with moral meaning and the emergence of a stable subject, treated as if it were a return. I call the end of Burke's sublime narrative "apocalyptic" because the conclusion redeems the chaos of experience with the certainty of an articulated subject. One of the less examined qualities of the *Enquiry* is its goal of settling the problem of subjectivity or selfhood for empiricism. As I will explain in the following sections, Radcliffe exploits the difficult problem of the empiricist self to maintain the realism of *Udolpho* and explore the consequences of the sublime for a heroine who cannot return all the way home.

It may seem odd to address subjectivity from an empiricist perspective. After all, empiricism rejects the *cogito*, and Hume denies that we ever have a "simple and continu'd" sense of self (1978, 252). However, the sublime often involves subject and object confusion, and often concludes, as in the egotistical sublime, with a restoration of the sense of self. Since Burke attempts to bridge empiricism and psychology in the *Enquiry*, a closer look at subjectivity will establish how Burke makes this move. The subject or self, for Hume, is an emergent phenomenon. As an emergence, it is beyond the given and therefore supernatural in the strictest sense. Subjectivity haunts the mind. Like a ghost, it emerges and departs from the chaos of sensation. Like the supernatural, it is an object of belief, experience notwithstanding. Humean subjectivity is a product of the assumptions required for daily life, but which cannot be proven with reason. However, Hume also warns that mere custom can be mistaken for more. John Wright explains that

in the *Treatise [of Human Nature]*, Hume describes his 'present hypothesis' as the claim that 'from custom' there is formed 'an easy transition to the idea of that object, which usually attends' the present impression [...] By constant repetition the pathway linking their corresponding brain traces gets deeper, facilitating the motion of the animal spirits and making us conceive the 'idea in a stronger and more lively manner.' As the pathway grows deeper the belief grows stronger. (2009, 110)

In other words, an object of belief like the self can be built up through repetition and strong emotion into something we take for a simple idea, even though it is not. Burke uses the "easy transition" from custom to idea to locate stable subjectivity at the conclusion of the sublime.

Between the first and second edition of the *Enquiry*, Burke made substantive changes to answer his reviewers, though James T. Boulton points out that "the revisions in the second edition do not repre-

sent a full answer to his critics, nor do they on every occasion successfully meet the objections raised" (Burke 1986, xxv). In addition to the substantive changes, Burke made smaller revisions such as removing some section breaks that repay a closer look. The most important of these changes are his removals of sections 19 and 20 of part one, the first of which was unlabelled, and the second of which was labelled "The same". Those sections were additions to "The Recapitulation", which became one section in the second edition, simply called "Recapitulation". I say these are the most important changes because the recapitulation gathers his argument about how the sublime unfolds and states them plainly. The removal of breaks in the recapitulation of Part One reveals a key rhetorical move. Burke's emphasis on finality, the completeness of the conclusion drawn in the recapitulation, links the *Enquiry* to the tradition of the rhetorical sublime. While the *Enquiry* describes a natural sublime that confronts the observing body, it addresses itself to its readers through the rhetoric of haste recommended by Longinus in his *Peri Hypsous*.

Burke is deeply interested in proving that subjectivity emerges from experience, and that subjectivity is a proof of the grounds of his science of taste as much as it is a result of the aesthetic experience he narrates. As Barbara Claire Freeman puts it,

Burke's wager in the *Enquiry* is that theory can put certainty in the place of ambiguity and replace diversity with fixed and universal 'principles in nature'. (1997, 43)

Burke writes about the sublime and the beautiful to solidify the subject as stable ground for his science of feeling. That is, in its essence, the rhetorical trick of the *Enquiry's* treatment of the sublime. A close reading of the revisions to the recapitulation and conclusion of Part One of the *Enquiry* reveals the moment of narrative repetition when physiological experience gives way to subjective certainty. The substitution of the result for an antecedent appears in the narrative of the sublime given in part one of the *Enquiry*. In both form and content, Burke uses the sublime to shape chaotic experience into a meaningful narrative whose result is an apparently returning subject, which is actually an emerging subject.

Jones (2015, 185-7) ties the natural sublime to the rhetorical sublime by showing that Burke relies on the same dialectic of concealment and revelation that Longinus does, though Burke attempts to eliminate concealment. Craig Smith (2018, 112) also ties Burke's project to the rhetorical roots of the sublime by arguing that

[a]tribution of causality is *rhetorical* because it is a product of the imagination that rationalizes simultaneous occurrences". Eva Antal links Burke to Longinus: "those providing sensations

to Burke's imagination are poets and the classics. The method is borrowed from Longinus. (214)

I want to emphasise the temporal connection between the rhetorical and the natural sublime: Burke uses Longinus's method and borrows his dialectic of concealment and revelation, while also adopting Longinus's recommended technique of encouraging his readers to a hasty conclusion. The rhetorical sublime and the natural sublime share a temporal structure in which subjective suspension of certainty is followed by a subjective rush to conclude: our senses or intellect are presented with something beyond their capacities, a sublime object or utterance, and our intellectual response is to rush to a conclusion.<sup>2</sup> When reading *Udolpho*, we watch the heroine stumble across a veil and demand an explanation, though the text leaves us suspended for hundreds of pages.

Because Longinus's treaty is an educational text, he has no motivation to hide the hasty conclusion-forcing that comes with sublime rhetoric. He tells his student that "[s]ublimity [...] tears up everything like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's power at a single blow" (Russell, Winterbottom 2008, 143). Sublime rhetorical power, yes, but also, haste – the power is concentrated in an instant. Longinus goes on to say that the "amazement and wonder" produced by sublimity, unlike persuasion, cannot be controlled, and "they exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer" (144). He identifies the trope of asyndeton, the deliberate leaving out of conjunctions, as one that produces sublimity. Leaving the conjunctions out "convey[s] the impression of an agitation which both obstructs the reader and drives him on" (165). Asyndeton compresses time and strikes the listener with ideas faster than she may be ready for them, first obstructing sense but then driving the listener to a conclusion. As long as the rhetorician's tropes elude detection, the physically agitated listener will conclude before reason can intervene, yielding to the demand for immediate conclusion.

Burke recognises the place of haste in the power of the sublime. He says: "[the sublime] anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (Burke 1986, 57). The sublime does not leave time for reflection, and from its incitement to haste comes part of its powers. However, referring to astonishment as the most powerful effect of the sublime, Burke states that "astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (57). Suspension vies with haste in the sublime, just as he says that pain and fear affect the body

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<sup>2</sup> For another perspective linking Burke's sublime to temporal experience see Yahav 2018.

with an unnatural strength, which sometimes suddenly changes into an extraordinary weakness [and] that these effects often come on alternately, and are sometimes missed with each other. (132)

The middle of the sublime narrative is characterised by both suspension and agitation, alternating or mixed. I call particular attention to this because the torments of the sublime narrative's middle are retroactively changed by its conclusion.

"Delight" is the term that Burke uses to mediate the conflict between suspension and haste, whose status changes under the revisions of the recapitulation. He defines delight as "the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger" (Burke 1986, 37). It is not a positive pleasure that arises of its own causes, but a privation of positive pain. The sublime poses a difficult question - how can something terrifying, like the sublime, give rise to pleasure? - which Burke answers with delight. That Burke makes a distinction between pain and delight indicates that he aims at more than a physiological explanation of the sublime. If the sublime were merely physical, it would collapse into fear. Is delight part of the sublime, or is it a separate emotional response that comes afterward? If delight is merely a response to sublime terror, and not part of the total complex named by the term, then it is hard to see that there is any difference between the sublime and simple abject terror. However, if delight is part of the sublime experience, and not just an adjunct to it, then the sublime has a coherence of its own. With delight as a necessary conclusion, the sublime provides a conclusive narrative structure for experiences of terror and the emergence of the subject of taste.

On this important question of delight and the sublime, Burke is equivocal. Introducing the sublime, he says that

[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger [...] whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*. (39)

He goes on to identify the sublime with "the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling" (39). He holds that

if danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience. (40)

The sublime is terrible, and so are pains and dangers that press too nearly; the possibility of delight comes second, logically and temporally, to the presence of terror. It would seem at this point that de-

light is not a necessary part of the sublime, but a reaction to it. Without delight as part of the scheme of the sublime, the subject is left with the potential of unending terror uncushioned by delight. The distinction between the sublime and mere pain is not a physiological one: though it starts in the body, the sublime ends in the subject that transcends experience.<sup>3</sup>

Burke resolves the contradiction between pain and sublimity in the recapitulation of part one:

The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger without being actually in such circumstances [...] Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*. (1986, 51)

At this point, it is clear that delight, and not terror, is the mark of the sublime. Burke has made a subtle and important move here that is paradigmatic of discourses that could control the sublime: he eliminates the temporal movement of vacillation or suspension that initially characterises the sublime and gains the certainty of his delightful conclusion. Delight is the result of the Burkean sublime, just as loss of control, overwhelming of judgment (leading to a rhetorically advantageous and hasty conclusion) is the result of the Longinian sublime. In both cases, there is a move to get past the impasse, to put an end to the uncertainty introduced by the sublime experience: delightful conclusion triumphs over astonishment. The body suffers pain, but the empirical subject experiences delight as a return to its previous state.

This solution to the problem of pain in the sublime is textually overdetermined. In the first edition of the *Enquiry*, the recapitulation gathers three separate points, as it promises to do in its first words: “[t]o draw the whole of what has been said into a few distinct points” (Burke 1986, 51). Three recapitulations are rendered there in three sections. The second edition recapitulation erases these boundaries and makes one solid recapitulation of the whole of Part One, offering what looks more like a systematic conclusion of the whole, something more appropriate to the sense of the word recapitulation. This is a crucial moment because recapitulating and concluding are not simply rhetorically required moves for Burke. In this case, to restate is also to alter the foregoing arguments, to draw them into a narrow circle and collapse their rhythmic existence into a flash of insight. In short, Burke’s recapitulation and conclusion to part one of the *Enquiry* attempt to replace the deliberative, discursive exposition of the sub-

<sup>3</sup> For another perspective on the role of the body in Burke’s sublime, see Ryan 2001.

lime and the beautiful with a sublime rhetorical fulguration, a transcendent statement that sweeps all before it and declares itself the truth about the sublime. Burke provides a narrative solution to the problem of the sublime, bridging the gulf between the body and the subject, concluding with the delightful supposed return of the subject to its point of homeostasis and safety. The moment of suspension overwhelms the subject physically, and challenges the limits of representation, but the moment of conclusion tries to grant meaning to suspension by sating the passion for self-preservation.

The recapitulation redeems the chaos of experience and retroactively installs the subject as a foundation; it is self-discovery (or self-making) presented as self-preservation. In Burke's hands, recapitulation is not just a section demanded by the genre within which he writes. It becomes an enactment of the phenomenon it describes. His recapitulation hurries the reader on, exchanging process for product, foreclosing experience and forgetting that foreclosure in a moment that fuses the sublime with delight. Burke's revisions bid his recapitulation to partake of the religious sense of the word, the redemption of all experience in the return of the saviour.<sup>4</sup> His forward-looking, subject-discovering, apocalyptic sublime is built on the certainty that the Other, in the Lacanian sense of a treasury of signifiers, will finally reveal the meaning of all experience.

### 3 "Amidst all the Tumult": The Explained Supernatural as a Reading of the Enquiry

Radcliffe's *Udolpho* is, at surface, the story of its heroine's adventures in the world and her eventual return home. Emily St. Aubert questions her family identity, confronts death in many forms, and ends the novel in wealth and wedlock. Without ever depicting supernatural events, Radcliffe's most famous novel presents Emily, several of her fellow women, and readers with the thrill of sublimity, but also gives them the closure demanded by late eighteenth-century readers. She navigates the two goals with the explained supernatural, balancing between the desire for narrative and the law of closure much as Burke balanced the chaos of experience with the retroactive certainty of the subject.<sup>5</sup> In this section, I argue that the explained supernatural is Radcliffe's reading of Burke's sublime, and that she main-

<sup>4</sup> In Paule theology, "recapitulation refers to both the headship of Christ over his Body, the Church, and to the unity of all Things, the whole cosmos, under Christ" (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 952).

<sup>5</sup> I borrow "desire for narrative" and "law of closure" from D.A. Miller (Miller 1981, 272-3). Radcliffe finds a way between the alternatives that Miller represents in de Sade and Austen.



tains the agitation of the second moment that Burke waves away in his conclusion. *Udolpho* stands as a critique of his sublime and an alternate take on the power of the Other to supply meaning and coherence to experience. Opposed to Burke's apocalyptic sublime, which takes its meaning in a final totality, Radcliffe's explained supernatural grants moments of revelation without committing to the certainty of a final revelation by the Other.

In his review of Radcliffe's work in *Lives of the Novelists*, Sir Walter Scott reads Radcliffe's famous practice of the explained supernatural and the tastes of the reading public together. Characteristic of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances is that

all the circumstances of her narrative, however mysterious and apparently superhuman, were to be accounted for on natural principles at the winding up of the story. (Scott 1906, 326-7)

According to Scott, the reading public demands that mysterious events be rendered either supernatural or natural. Todorov (1975, 41) uses the same distinction: the fantastic is resolved either into the uncanny or the marvellous, depending on whether the phenomena receive a rational explanation or not. The explained and unexplained supernatural have long marked the male and female Gothic, with Matthew Lewis serving as Radcliffe's counterpart.<sup>6</sup> My reading resists both the hasty conclusion and the gender binary suggested by Scott's influential take on the reading public. Radcliffe expands the possibilities of the narrative middle.

Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror, set forth in essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," explains that the suspension of certainty is more important than its re-establishment. Suspension distinguishes readers. She writes:

They must be men of very cold imaginations [...] with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as the source of the sublime, though they all agreed that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (Bloom 1971, 66)

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<sup>6</sup> See (Macdonald 1989, 197-9) for a representative reading that maps Todorov's uncanny onto Radcliffe and his marvellous onto Matthew Lewis. For a more nuanced take on the underpinnings of the terms "male" and "female Gothic", see Ledoux 2017.

Readings of this passage usually emphasise the equation of horror with presence and terror with absence, but certainty and surmise are subjective states, not objective descriptions. The point of this exchange is not to decide whether causes of horror exist in reality, but how a reader responds to a stimulus. Those with warm imaginations suspend certainty, and enter into obscurity with the possibility of encountering novelty. Those with cold imaginations see through obscurity, but never experience the swelling of the soul that accompanies the suspension of the sublime middle.

While the explained supernatural may seem to let Radcliffe have it both ways, thrilling and explaining, her textual practice requires us to consider other possibilities between the binary solutions to the supernatural. As a narrative enactment of the Burkean sublime, the explained supernatural lets Radcliffe explore the subjective possibilities opened by terror while avoiding the subjective destitution of horror. However, many critical accounts, starting with Scott's, tend to overweigh conclusions. Nelson C. Smith (1973), for instance, reads *Udolpho* as a didactic novel in which Emily is disciplined until she has replaced the dangers of sensibility with the safety of common sense. Natalie Neill reiterates this common view when she states that Radcliffe ultimately "asserts the realism of her work through her policy of including rational elucidations" (2018, 169). Such readings follow the logic of Burke's sublime by discounting the value of the suspension of certainty occasioned by the not-yet-explained supernatural. Radcliffe's fiction and her literary criticism value the time between the initial shock and the eventual explanation as a signal of the quality of the observer over the correctness of the final answer.

Critics who pay close attention to *Udolpho's* surface find that time and narrative are stranger there than the more conclusion-focused conservative critics lead us to expect. Richard Albright (2005) argues that time in *Udolpho* is chaotic, flowing back and forth. Brandy Schillace notes that out of place memories make for a "disorienting overlap of past, present, and future" in the novel (2009, 274). Michael Paulson goes even further, stating that "*Udolpho* severs the fundamental link between time and narrative, thereby elaborating a highly original and utterly inhuman form of time" (2019, 605). These readings indicate that both time and narrative fail to progress, as the empirical subject of sensations through which the novel is focalised stutters aimlessly from point to point. If Emily's time and subjectivity are chaotic, it is because Radcliffe refuses the easy transition from custom to idea that Burke uses to retroactively install subjective certainty through the sublime. An examination of responses to obscure stimuli in *Udolpho* shows that time and narrative are not equally strange for all characters. Heroic capacity in *Udolpho* is measured in the ability to defer the desire for conclusion.

The garrulous servant Annette represents one end of the spectrum of ways to read mysterious stimuli. Having seen strange men coming and going from Castle Udolpho, she reports to Emily. As is her wont, she starts with her conclusion that “they are coming to murder us all” (Radcliffe 2008, 297). After more than one lengthy passage of dialogue, reduced by her tactful direction, Emily gets Annette to tell her what makes her think that. She finally reveals that “ill-looking men” have come to the castle, and are currently housed close by (299). That event is enough to encourage her breathless report and conclusion. Annette fills the page with her words, leaving herself no time for hesitation or vacillation between different states.

Annette does not experience the sublime time of suspension. Instead, she has a purely physical reaction to what she has seen, jumping directly to the direst conclusion. She is an embodiment of the physiological side of Burke’s *Enquiry*, rebounding by reflex. Emily’s cooler response shines by contrast:

She forbore to speak her apprehensions, because she would not encourage Annette’s wild terrors; but the present circumstances of the castle both surprised, and alarmed her. (299)

The next paragraph jumps to the evening hours later, indicating that Emily has been sitting with this new sense of alarm without forming the kind of wild conclusion that Annette has. Like so much of the novel, Emily spends these hours in a state of suspense largely unknown to Annette, who always has a conclusion.

At the other end of the spectrum stands Montoni. During one of his attempts to get Emily to sign her Aunt’s lands over to him, they hear a voice with no apparent source in the castle. He promises her a terrible punishment “this very night” – “This night!” repeated another voice” (394). The mysterious voice interrupts Montoni only very briefly, who then continues his harangue. Even as the voice moans, the most we see is “something like a shade of fear” on his face. Meanwhile, “Emily sat down in a chair, near the door, for the various emotions she had suffered, now almost overcame her” (394). He continues to ignore the groans, and finally declares: “And for these fool’s tricks – I will soon discover by whom they are practiced”(395). So sure is Montoni about the mundane truth of cause and effect that he never enters Emily’s space of being nearly overcome by the uncertainty of experience. Montoni reasons by pure custom, so sure of the traces laid in his brain by repetition that he forgets the gap between cause and effect.

Annette and Montoni are surprisingly connected by their inability to enter the state of suspension so familiar to Emily and to readers of *Udolpho*. Both Annette and Montoni reach conclusions quickly, even if they are opposite conclusions. Annette’s certainty that

she (and everyone in her party) is to be murdered equals Montoni's certainty that the groaning voice is a trick. The servant's reactions are physiological and the villain's are customary, but they both stop them from entering into the subjective process that promises to transcend experience.

The circuit between stimulus and conclusion is longer and less direct for Emily, so she (like the novel's readers) spends a great deal of time in suspense. Late in the novel Emily and Dorothee, housekeeper at Chateau-le-Blanc, explore the long-closed north end of the chateau where the Marchioness died. Their experience is a microcosm of sublime suspension and vacillation. They enter the death chamber, and they both see a human face rising from the bed. Their initial reaction is to scream with terror and flee. In Burke's terms, danger pressed too closely, and was simply terrible. Once they are sure of their physical safety, the two sort through possible causes of their vision, checking experience against what they know. Could it have been the wind? Maybe someone followed them? One by one, explanations are tried. Conclusion is suspended as they vacillate among possibilities. Reaching no conclusion, "Emily was very solemnly affected". The combination of the strange face, the setting of the death chamber, and Dorothee's telling of the Marchioness's fate "affected Emily's imagination with a superstitious awe". Emily concludes: "'Time [...] may explain this mysterious affair'" (537). Emily experiences the astonishment of the sublime without having an answer to her question anywhere in sight, indicating that the most powerful emotion belongs to the time of suspension, not the moment of conclusion. Here we see Radcliffe neatly separate physical safety, an adjunct to sublimity, from the return of certainty, the conclusion to a mystery. If Emily becomes more disciplined over the course of the novel, it is not toward Montoni-like faith in habit and loss of sensibility, nor toward Annette's hysterical certainty. Rather, it is toward suspending conclusion and dwelling in the possibilities opened in the middle of the sublime narrative.

Caught between provocation and conclusion, the narrative loops along with possibilities, stretching the time of suspension just as it stretches for *Udolpho's* readers. Instead of minimizing the time and experience of suspension and dissolving it in a sublime conclusion, as Burke does in the *Enquiry*, Radcliffe fills the middle of her novel with uncertainty, raising expectations beyond any hope of a satisfactory conclusion. Every reader of Radcliffe is dissatisfied at some point, because the size of the explanation cannot match the length of the suspension. The deficit of textual pleasure signals her disagreement with Burke's too-perfect sublime narrative.

#### 4 “She at Length Concluded:” Narrative Closure in *Udolpho*

Critics in Walter Scott’s camp, those who emphasise the consonance of *Udolpho*’s conclusion, tend to treat the whole last volume of the novel as a straightforward series of revelations. Indeed, many (though crucially, I argue, not all) of the mysteries are wrapped up in the fourth volume. Emily is doubled by Blanche, whose romance with M. St. Foix parallels Emily’s with Valancourt. The action is set in the Chateau-le-Blanc, Castle Udolpho’s double, where Emily discovers the strangely familiar image of the Marchioness de Villeroi and finally speaks to Signora Laurentini di Udolpho, in the guise of Sister Agnes. All of the doubling and Emily’s return to La Vallée seem to lead to the perfect authentic cadence required by the law of closure.

However, that sense of completion falls apart under closer attention to the narrative structure of the text. It is typical for Gothic novels to exhibit narrative complexity, presenting stories-within-stories, interruptions, flashbacks, and other set-pieces that challenge textual wholeness. *Udolpho* is not among the more complex Gothic novels in this regard. Readers only have to negotiate among two or three narrative levels. The extradiegetic narrator recounts some of the action. At times, various characters speak, effectively becoming brief narrators. Included in this level are snatches of poetry that are presented either in a character’s voice or as textual artifacts. A third level appears when a character reads a book and take readers with them, as in the case of Ludovico reading “The Provençal Tale” as he watches for ghosts in the Marchioness’s bedchamber in Chateau-le-Blanc (552-7). Even as one level mirrors the events of another, Radcliffe carefully articulates their transitions and readers rarely have to wonder which level they are reading. In fact, keeping those levels separate is key to the book’s imposition of suspense on characters and readers alike. The fraying of the narrative’s management of knowledge in the final volume is Radcliffe’s method for advancing her second response to Burke, that not all sublime encounters conclude with an empowered sense of self.

One facet of Radcliffe’s strong reading of Burke’s sublime is manifested in the knowledge and control of her narrator. In order for the suspension of the explained supernatural to exist, the reader must assume that an explanation will be forthcoming, and the narrator is the guarantee of the explanation. Characters operate under this injunction, too. This required assumption matters for the sublime, because Burke also knows that for the sublime to provide subjective certainty as an outcome of the sensate chaos of the empirical mind such protention and retroaction is needed. The projection of subjective stability into the shadowy past of the subject is Burke’s goal, and Radcliffe achieves a similar expectation of returned stability with her extradiegetic narrator. The two works share the need to bridge be-

tween physiological disorder and subjective order, and they both do it by breaking their own empiricist rules and appealing to an authority that stands outside the physical realm. While Burke hides such an authority in his recapitulation, Radcliffe also refuses to completely satisfy the need for an external Other in her narrator.

Readers and characters must share the belief that an explanation will come forth in order to experience the sublime, but the narrator of *Udolpho* manages the two groups separately. The knowledge of the narrator (and of various characters) overlap with that of the reader only when it suits the narrator. However, for readers to continue in the text's illusory scheme of explanation, explanation must be accessible within the diegesis. In other words, explanations of mysteries that start in the diegesis are not typically limited to the first level of the narrative, where the extradiegetic narrator speaks to the readers. Effective conclusions to mysteries are shown, not told. The reader's experience of the explained supernatural is typically focalised through Emily. However, *Udolpho* continually plays with knowledge. There are sensations known to characters, but not to readers, such as what Emily thought she saw behind the black silk veil. There are facts known to the reader, but not to Emily, such as the events that happened at Castle Udolpho after Emily's escape. There are also facts apparently known only to the narrator, at least until they are revealed. For the explained supernatural to work, the narrator must exercise complete control of knowledge, so she can reveal what she wants to when she wants to. Readers (and characters of Emily's sensibility) have no choice but to trust the narrator. The narrator's perfect and complete knowledge makes her an Other like the one Burke implies, a guarantee of the meaning of experience, and a home for the subject. Burke and Radcliffe both write narratives that hinge on such an Other, but Burke is more deeply committed to the actual existence of such an Other because he aims at a scientific description of experience, not Gothic entertainment.

Radcliffe challenges the Other as guarantee of meaning in the third-to-last chapter, when the narrator reports that Signora Laurentini, known as Sister Agnes, left behind a will that transferred considerable property to Emily. After that, the abbess reveals, through convolutions, that she has learned more than needs to be revealed to Emily. Closure, a satisfaction both libidinal and narrative, finally appears on the horizon. However, readers do not get to know what the abbess tells Emily. Instead, the narrator says that,

as the narrative of the abbess was [...] deficient in many particulars, of which the reader may wish to be informed, and the history of the nun is materially connected with the fate of the Marchioness de Villeroi, we shall omit the conversation, that passed in the parlour of the convent, and mingle with our relation a brief history of LAURENTINI DI UDOLPHO. (655)

Radcliffe doubly curses the abbess's narrative, Emily's last chance to reach closure. First, the abbess's narrative is called deficient and, second, it does not appear in the book. Readers are separated from Emily in their knowledge of one of the most important facts in the narrative.

Radcliffe all but assures readers that her protagonist never has the most traumatic supernatural element dissolved by explanation by setting so many mysteries in motion that there is no character who can explain them all. Like Burke's sublime, the explained supernatural implies a meaningful universe in which cause and effect can eventually be explained, but Radcliffe makes a universe in which some bits of knowledge cannot be located, and desire for narrative survives the law of closure. The "oddly preternatural" language that permeates the end of the book, Terry Castle (1995, 122) notes, upsets the reductive impulse that would render *Udolpho* a didactic text about disciplining sensibility.

Radcliffe does not, or cannot, completely end narrative desire in her text, leaving two possibilities: either Emily does know what happened, and the novel cannot contain a revelation to her and to readers, or Emily does not know what was behind the veil because the diegetic world of the novel cannot answer all the questions it contains. Even after her meeting with the abbess, Emily cannot believe that Montoni would let her stumble across a victim's corpse, but her doubts "were not sufficient to overcome her suspicion of Montoni; and it was the dread of his terrible vengeance, that had sealed her lips in silence" on the matter (Radcliffe 2008, 663). Emily's silence is the last word on the wax corpse, eliminating the possibility that its mystery was revealed to her. The maintenance of suspense on the novel's final mystery, death itself, castrates the Other and leaves Emily without a subjective foundation. With this inconclusive conclusion, Radcliffe reveals that the mechanisms of the Burkean sublime can all function without necessarily leading to delight and subjective certainty.

## 5 Coda: Representing the Ghostly Subject of Empiricism

Instead of final certainty, the explained supernatural and Radcliffe's fiction provide only momentary consolations for the chaos of sensation. Both the novel and Emily's occasional glimpses of the divine in nature are momentary stays against confusion. With the incompleteness of the novel's conclusion, Emily's subjectivity is haunted and split by desire, without a final answer. That subjectivity riven by questions and uncertain of its own end is, surprisingly, much closer to the subjectivity described by Hume than that which appears in Burke's apocalyptic application. Radcliffe blends the realistic novel with the romance, but refuses to abandon desire for the law. The result is a text that repre-

sents the supernatural subject more effectively than any text answering all its questions can do.

The bounds of the realistic novel would seem to limit Radcliffe to the explained supernatural and to compel her to explain every mystery, yielding the bathos decried by critics from Sir Walter Scott to today. However, a more careful reading reveals that the necessarily incomplete realistic diegesis of *Udolpho* actually cannot contain and express all explanations. Ironically, it is Burke's philosophical treatise and not Radcliffe's Gothic novel that requires its readers to believe in apocalyptic revelation to make sublimity produce a stable subject in its conclusion. By leaving Emily without a conclusion to the mystery of the veil, Radcliffe presages what Simon Bainbridge (2020, 123) calls the negative sublime, opposed to the egotistical sublime:

At the moment of his greatest mountaineering achievement, Keats rejected what Ross has termed the 'ultimate sublime experience', embracing instead what I have termed the 'negative sublime' [...] his ascent confirmed the value of a poetic identity that was as 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' as he had been when standing 'in a Mist' on Britain's highest summit.

Instead of giving Emily the mountaintop mastery of the triumphant sublime, Radcliffe gives her terror, brief reprieves, and a conclusion that acknowledges the incomplete state of knowledge under empiricism.

Instead of a stable subject that can serve as the bedrock of a science of taste, the subject of the sublime depicted in *Udolpho* is one whose certainty emerges and disappears. This subject is much closer to Hume's bundle of perceptions than it is to a triumphant ego. It is a subject that exists in the suspension between provocation and conclusion, reified neither by physiology nor custom, the correspondent of an Other that is either incomplete or inconsistent, which is precisely the position of *Udolpho*'s narrator.

The novel ends with an excuse for its existence:

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. (Radcliffe 2008, 672)

Radcliffe's distributed and immanent sublime does not present the final certainty of Burke's but delivers on its promise. After finishing *Udolpho*, readers have redeemed time in suspension, not in apocalyptic conclusion. If they are disciplined, it is toward Emily's openness to possibilities, not to Annette's hasty conclusions or to Montoni's mistaking custom for reality.



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# “Things that Make One Doubt if They be Mad or Sane” Coping with the Monstrous in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

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**Abstract** This article focuses on Bram Stoker’s landmark novel *Dracula* (1897), in order to better assess how the phenomenology of the monstrous emerges as inextricably interfused with a late-Victorian socio-cultural background. Attention is drawn to a discursive framework pivoting on scientific discoveries and medical research, as well as degeneration theories and the motif of atavistic regression. Taking its cue from recent trends in literary criticism, this paper also examines how the resort to a cutting-edge technological equipment, such as Mina’s portable typewriter and Dr Seward’s phonograph, can be instrumental in abating Dracula’s vampiric threat.

**Keywords** Vampire. Supernatural horror. Late-Victorian context. Mimetic dimension.

**Summary** 1 Introduction . – 2 One and Many: Dracula’s Sprawling Polymorphism. – 3 Mimetic Wonders: Towards an Abatement of the Monstrous Threat.



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## 1 Introduction

Originally (under)rated as a late-Victorian potboiler in the stock genres of Gothic horror and the supernatural adventure story, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) has long been accorded the iconic status of a literary landmark from a variety of perspectives. Over and above its popular appeal, this monumental shocker can be read as a cult classic, a vampire-literature *Urtext*, as well as an impressively stratified work. Wavering between the poles of novel and romance, journalistic writing and the play-script form, the epistolary/diaristic style and the medical case report, *Dracula* locates itself at a semantic intersection where a cluster of topical issues compellingly come to the fore, or are implicitly addressed. That is why simply letting Count Dracula fall into the category of the bloated, enervated, and blood-thirsty predator of folkloric tradition and popular mythology would be ultimately misleading, from the point of view of both the 1890s' backdrop and the character's overflowing afterlife in literature and the arts, let alone his teeming progeny within the film industry and the media. In our times, Dracula's virtual scion continues to be perceived as "a being who is simultaneously terrifying and attractive [...] a being whose allure reaches to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious" (Heldreth, Pharr 1999, 1). Such an image also elicits strong responses in the spheres of sexual initiation, transgression or perversion and taboo breaking, and often feeds into our deep-seated fears of tainted blood, racial contamination and infectious diseases being spread via the 'deadly bite' of a stigmatised Other. In John S. Bak's hyperbolic statement, in

the age of AIDS and widespread HIV - that postmodern plague not only of sexual transgression but also, and if not more so, of Third-World poverty and postcolonial wreckage - Dracula seems as poised as ever to haunt humanity. (Bak 2007, xiv)

Stoker's Undead is said to have "simply haunted the 1980s as ubiquitously as he had the 1890s, and continues to do so to this day" (xv).

A transhistorical figure who maintains his ethno-cultural ties and yet resists containment by overcoming boundaries and resorting to versatile adaptation, Dracula has grown into a political metaphor and a symbolic receptacle for a whole range of attitudes, drives, and behaviours (anthropological, psychological, archetypal). One of the reasons why Stoker's novel remains a stronghold in the vampire (and literary) canon is to be found precisely in such an extraordinary communicative potential. That is to say, in its 'cannibalistic' capacity to digest and allegorise aspects of a multifarious phenomenological context which encompassed, among others, scientific advancement and occultism, evolutionary tenets and magnetic telepathy, national/co-

lonial issues and late-capitalist economy, commodity culture and the woman question. Importantly, however, these multiple strands are woven together in a text that, while showing a rich metaphorical potential and an underlying mythic structure, also spoke “very specifically to the heady world of fin-de-siècle London in the year of Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee”. *Dracula* has thus retained its force as a “political and context-specific” narrative (Luckhurst 2018, 2). One might even contend that the book has functioned “like a generative machine for criticism”, being so dense in informational details and

taking on the rich colourings of many artistic, cultural, political, social and scientific discourses that swirled anxiously through the public sphere in the 1890s. (4)

By treading a mimetically-orientated path, this article aims to investigate such a pivotal intermingling in Stoker’s novel between the dreadful manifestations of the preternatural and a historical, socio-cultural background that greatly contributed to the text’s reception and long-lasting dissemination. This porous overlapping enhanced the impact of a vampire narrative that acted like a magnet for a reading public who lived on the cusp of a new century, but was in many ways attuned to the inheritance and axiology of the previous age. When approached as a visionary, ominous offspring of the last years of Queen Victoria’s reign – with its reactionary forces and unsettling counter-currents throughout the Decadence interregnum – Stoker’s ‘possible world’ proves to be a crucial nexus, a graphic locus of encodings and reverberations where supernatural horror tapped into the notions of madness, deviance, social pathology and ‘unnatural’ desires. To be sure, in “no other British fin de siècle novel is the sex=disease equation so prominent or so uniquely played out as it is in *Dracula*. Vampirism is the ultimate ‘sexually-transmitted’ degenerative disease” (Davison 1997, 27).

## 2 One and Many: *Dracula*’s Sprawling Polymorphism

On the paratextual level, a suitable point of departure to deal with the iridescent qualities of Stoker’s literary creature is constituted by the loose structure of the book itself. The main backbone of *Dracula* – its articulation in chapters and sections – is similar to an open and permeable matrix wherein the plot flows along. Indeed, the twenty-seven chapters making up the novel provide but a basic, paratactic palimpsest where one would look in vain for a clearly progressive sequence of interlocking frames or a thematic development. The titles are all rhematic and often interchangeable, with the same heading featuring in different chapters. Moreover, none of them is associated with

the name of Dracula, so that in the very table of contents the eponymous protagonist appears to be forcibly silenced. By contrast, this opening appendage does shine a spotlight on the main characters involved in the lacerating struggle with the Transylvanian Count. Glancing through the titles, the reader thus comes across "Jonathan Harker's Journal" (I-IV, XIX-XX, XXII); "Mina Murray's Journal" (VI, VIII), supplemented with a newspaper clipping posted in her diary ("Cutting from *The Dailygraph*, 8 August", VII) and her post-marriage "Mina Harker's Journal" (XIV, XXVII); "Lucy Westenra's Diary" (XI), along with the letters exchanged between her and Mina (V, IX); "Dr Seward's Diary" (XII-XIII, XV-XVIII, XXI, XXIII, XXV-XXVI), with the addition of his correspondence with Arthur Holmwood ("Dr Seward to Hon. Arthur Holmwood", X) and a symbolic bow to Abraham Van Helsing ("Dr Seward's Phonograph Diary, spoken by Van Helsing", XXIV).

Intriguingly, then, when skimming over the book one wonders where the title character may be found and how he is to jostle for textual ground. Accompanying the table of contents is also a paratextual gloss that reinforces this sense of mystery and puzzling elusiveness:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made clear in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past events wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them. (Stoker 1994, 8)

In the first place, of course, due consideration must be given to the codes and *topoi* of Gothic, fantastic and sensation fiction, among which is the well-known repertoire of authentication strategies aimed at supplying incredible stories with a factual patina (the semblance of 'simple fact'). Even so, this tacit fictional pact risks being invalidated when, in the novel's last page, we are faced with Jonathan Harker's curiously dismissive "Note", in which the reliability of the contemporary eye-witness accounts is virtually - and safely - debunked. As Jonathan surmises:

In the summer of this year we made a journey to Transylvania, and went over the old ground which was, and is, to us so full of vivid and terrible memories. It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of all that had been was *blotted out*. The castle stood as before, reared high above a waste of desolation. [...] I took the papers from the safe where they have been ever since our return so long ago. We were struck with the

fact that, in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is *hardly one authentic document!* nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as *proofs of so wild a story.* (Stoker 1994, 449; emphasis added)

This passage is worth quoting in full because, from the point of view of our analysis, it records a salient shift in perspective. As though hovering on the threshold between the diegetic and extradiegetic spheres, the author seems now to pave the way for another kind of contract, along the lines of an 'epistemological agreement' with his Victorian readership. In a nod to reasonableness and sound judgment, *Bram Stoker* might be said to ultimately perform an exorcism in the style of *Abraham*, his literary projection and legendary vampire hunter. As it happens, in his annotation sneaked in seven years later as a coda to the happy-ending closure of Mina's journal (Chapter XXVII), Harker proceeds to take stock of their terrifying ordeal only to tone it down through the corrective filter of pragmatic and prudent detachment. Not only does he emphasise how difficult it would be for anyone to credit what had once been their "living truths", but he also quotes Professor Van Helsing as celebrating the untainted virtues of Mina, now the mother of a little boy, and gleefully exclaiming: "We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us!" (Stoker 1994, 449).<sup>1</sup>

Possibly a wink at a complacent middle-class public, this reminds us of a Prospero-like farewell bringing down the curtain in/on a work that, in his acting manager's role for the Lyceum Theatre, Stoker had initially conceived for the stage. Be that as it may, the novel's post-script offers a helpful entry for pondering, in hindsight, the effects of Dracula's mesmeric (in)visibility. Jumping back to the story's *dénouement*, just a few pages earlier, one is indeed struck by the frantic, breathtaking dynamics of the Archenemy's much-awaited death. According to Mina's reconstruction, in the section of her journal dated 6 November, the band of five 'brave men' (plus herself) heroically succeed in neutralising the monster in his own mother country and

<sup>1</sup> Raj Shah makes an interesting point here by highlighting the aporias of mechanical reproduction from a metaliterary perspective that draws on Walter Benjamin's seminal "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936): "Despite Van Helsing's truculent denial of the significance of the absence of the original documents ('We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us!' [Stoker, *Dracula* 351]), the above comment betrays an evident dissatisfaction with the banal material residue of the adventure, which lacks the legitimacy of the lost original papers. The very text in the reader's hands, therefore, is itself a mechanically reproduced simulacrum, establishing a *mise-en-abyme* of the novel's reconfiguration of the hierarchy of the original and the copy" (Shah 2014, 430). On the disruption of textual closure enacted by Harker's appended "Note" see also Arata 1990, 641-5.



within reach of his castle. Their impetuous, lightning-swift attack sows bewilderment and eventually overawes the gypsies who are carrying the Count's coffin back to his fortress. Nonetheless, doubts arise in relation to the hasty and unorthodox manner of this execution, where no homage to sanctified rituals is paid. Gone is the wooden stake to be driven through the heart or chest of the Undead, with the holy water, sacred wafer, crucifix and wreath of garlic blossoms being equally wiped out of the picture.<sup>2</sup> In their freewheeling assault, Van Helsing's male allies can be shown to dangerously – if unwillingly – twist the rules and get to grips with the red-eyed corpse as if it were a mortal, a flesh-and-blood antagonist to be defeated on the battlefield. Winchester rifles and, most of all, knives take the place of the sacred tools that are a staple of any vampire slayer's killing kit:

As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph.

But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr Morris' bowie knife plunged in the heart.

It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight.

I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there. (Stoker 1994, 447)

At this point, the action-packed plot gives more space to Quincey Morris's courage, unconditional devotion and self-sacrifice – the intrepid man from Texas is fatally injured during the fight – than to Dracula himself, who is simply stabbed to death and portrayed as an evil spirit ostensibly appeased. Dracula's head is not cut off and his body is not burned to ashes: rather, he appears to suddenly crumble into dust and evaporate in a flash. As a result, when thinking of how summarily the vampire meets his end in the novel's epilogue, we are prompted to ask if such a turn of events should be passed off as just one of Stoker's 'mental lapses', in a book too often assumed to be flawed and hastily written, or if, on the contrary, this fleeting climax was a conscious and carefully-crafted choice on the author's part. Leaving aside the vein of garish sensationalism and the plain moral pushed home, the Count's final metamorphosis into a cloud of dust might ac-

<sup>2</sup> This blatantly goes against the grain of Lucy Westenra's highly ritualistic execution. In the wake of her *post-mortem* transmutation into a 'foul Thing', she undergoes heart-staking, mutilation and destruction at the hands of Holmwood, Van Helsing, and Seward. See Stoker 1994, 256-60.

tually be a reminder of his numinous transformative capacity. One even catches an appalling echo of Mina's vampirisation in Chapter XIX, where one night, while staying as a guest in John Seward's lunatic asylum, she falls prey to Dracula's hypnotic powers and defiling 'kiss'. After creeping in through the joinings of the bedroom door as "a thin streak of white mist" growing thicker and thicker, he materialises into a whirling "pillar of cloud" with shining red eyes (Stoker 1994, 308, 309). In her journal entry for 1 October, Mina observes that "through it all came the scriptural words 'a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night'" (309), and this supports the idea that the vampire's demonic vitality is likely to become all the more loathsome and desecrating the moment he levitates and floats in the air as a phosphorescent mass. Tellingly, Mina's parallel casts Dracula as a direful replica of the pillar of cloud and fire evoked in Exodus (13: 21-2), in which the Lord manifests Himself as a luminous beacon guiding the Israelites during the day and night on their way out of Egypt.

Needless to say, the spinning incorporeal column that temporarily engulfs Mina is no spiritual guidance, but a corrosive flow of energy unleashed by the Antichrist - a draining and parasitic force that strives to cripple the will, weaken the body and corrupt the soul of its victim. In physical terms, Dracula seems to mark off his territory as a quickly rising 'dust devil', a whirlwind that humans must resolutely prevent from sweeping across their domain.<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid being caught up in the foul debris of such a vortex, Professor Van Helsing goes to all lengths to establish his alliance with a secularised 'confraternity of knights' who are called upon to defend the English (and Western) kingdom in the name of civilisation, progress, and peaceful coexistence. Albeit not always above reproach, the Dutch metaphysician's paladins do step into the arena and never betray their apostolic zeal and solemn duty. From the initially phlegmatic, traumatised and then daring Jonathan Harker to the doubting-Thomas qualities and hard-line positivism of Dr John Seward, from the generous, sometimes oversensitive 'noble soul' of Arthur Holmwood (soon-to-be Lord Godalming) to dauntless and tough Quincey Morris, this assorted task force is motivated by one paramount goal: chasing the Archfiend back to the nether world where he belongs.

At a critical juncture in the story, Catholic Abraham Van Helsing - whose first name chimes not only with Stoker's, but also with that of the biblical patriarch hailed as the progenitor of a new spiritual race and "friend of God" (Isaiah 41: 8) - commits himself to cat-

<sup>3</sup> Again, Lucy's case affords an instance in point. In her memorandum relating to the Count's last attack, she states that her bedroom was invaded by an entity appearing in the guise of a big bat, a gaunt grey wolf, and eventually a myriad of floating little specks "blowing in through the broken window, and wheeling and circling round like the pillar of dust that travellers describe when there is a simoom in the desert" (Stoker 1994, 174).

echising his ‘circle of the faithful’ in preparation for a sort of Armageddon. With the shining star of virtuous Mina metaphorically illuminating their path, they proceed to make their covenant and share terrible secrets about a diabolical foe capable of jeopardising the very existence of mankind. In this connection, Van Helsing stresses how counterattacking such a foe requires a formidable act of faith as well as the scrupulous examination of fact-based reports, with an eye to the effective measures to take and the tactics to adopt. In other terms, a gruesome scenario jammed with “possible impossibilities” (Stoker 1994, 231) is bound to call for a plan of battle and a phase of focused training by an evolved ‘medicine man’ like this Doctor of Medicine, Philosophy and Letters. As Seward describes him in his correspondence with Holmwood, Van Helsing is an open-minded thinker and scientist who “knows as much about obscure diseases as anyone in the world” and is gifted with a unique blend of traits ranging from an iron nerve and resolution to a humorous side and an all-embracing sympathy (137). All in all, Van Helsing is to be trusted like a spiritual father, especially when it comes to his tying up loose ends and finally getting to the heart of the matter, as exemplified by the following couple of excerpts, the former taken from his first encounter with Mina (Chapter XIV) and the latter referring to a climactic, strategic briefing with his allies (as related in a section of Mina’s journal included in Chapter XVIII):

I have learned not to think little of any one’s belief, no matter how strange it be. I have tried to keep an open mind; and it is not the ordinary things of life that could close it, but the strange things, the extraordinary things, the things that make one doubt if they be mad or sane. (223)

There are such beings as vampires; some of us have evidence that they exist. [...] This vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in person as twenty men; he is of cunning more than mortal, for his cunning be the growth of ages; he have still the aids of necromancy [...] he can, within limitations, appear at will when, and where, and in any of the forms that are to him; [...] and he can at times vanish and come unknown. (283)

The conviction, energy, and unwavering dedication to the cause connoting Van Helsing’s close-knit committee are of a piece with an access to initiatory knowledge and a healing craft inextricably linked to the victory of good over evil and the future of humanity. With all this in mind, and returning full circle to the previously raised point concerning the anomalous *modus operandi* of Dracula’s murder, we can now make some assumptions about Stoker’s depiction of the Count’s last hours. The perfunctory way the Lord of the Undead

is seen to cross the threshold of death might have stemmed from a choice grounded in both an external logic - i.e. the publishing market - and an internal, diegetic one. The first scenario hinges on the possibility to set the scene for a sequel to the novel and therefore securing a viable space for Nosferatu's resurrection: for his return with a vengeance, as it were.<sup>4</sup> Although that route was not directly followed by Stoker, it is unquestionable that his hint would yield a rich harvest among a host of succeeding authors over the decades (from writers to film directors, screenwriters, and playwrights). Suffice it to mention, among the earliest seminal reworkings, German F.W. Murnau's Count Orlok in *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, the renowned 1922 silent movie that stealthily drew so much lymph from Stoker's source as to lead Florence Balcombe (Stoker's widow) to sue the producers for copyright infringement. Incidentally, seventy years later, Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* would turn this polarisation on its head by flaunting a literal adherence in a filmic transposition that was partly an operatic reinterpretation of the book and a revision of Dan Curtis's 1974 television movie. Predictably enough, latter-day revivals reached a peak in 1997, which marked the centenary of *Dracula*'s first publication and was celebrated through commemorative sequels worthy of the original, such as Freda Warrington's prize-winning novel *Dracula the Undead*.<sup>5</sup> A similar title recurs in *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009), a riveting rewrite by Ian Holt and Dacre Stoker, the author's great-grandnephew, who also released *Dracul* (2018), a prequel he penned in collaboration with J.D. Barker.

Tracing a chronology of the genre-diversified, myriad 'revampings' of Stoker's hypotext would fill many pages. *Dracula*'s afterlife, whether commercially successful or critically acclaimed, has been flourishing to a ripe old age, and the list of the novel's countless appropriations, adaptations, or reviving continuations to date scarcely needs illustrating here. Without taking anything away from this copious allographic production and the policies targeted at re-launching the book, I would rather shift the focus to the internal logic of the 1897 version and supply some inferential cues. *Dracula*'s epilogue might well have met the reading public's expectations on ac-

<sup>4</sup> Clive Leatherdale pursues the same tantalising line of thought: "Folklore, too, insists on ritualistic observation of prescribed rites. These are not followed in the case of *Dracula*, who is dispatched as if he were human, with cold steel [...]. Initially it seems that *Dracula*'s look of 'triumph' is premature, but could it be the attackers' sense of satisfaction that is misplaced? Stoker had already informed his readers that vampires have the power of dematerialisation and can transform themselves into specks of dust. Conceivably, then, the Count dematerialised just in time. Realising his narrow escape he prefers to lay low, until such time as Stoker resurrects him in a sequel" (Leatherdale 2001, 115-6).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed survey of *Dracula*'s glittering afterlife within a century of the novel's first publication (1897-1997), see in particular Davison 1997 and Madison 1997.

count of the well-deserved triumph of the good and righteous, but, on closer inspection, some spine-chilling implications seem to lurk behind that auspicious veneer. As a matter of fact, one is tempted to posit Dracula's instant pulverisation as a temporary stage within a phoenix-like process preluding to a new, devilish dawn. If, in Van Helsing's phrasing, the strong and cunning monster is able to "vanish and come unknown", then a reasonable doubt remains that his passing might boil down to yet another disappearing trick, in spite of the dependability and accuracy of Mina's reconstruction of his assassination. Alive and dead, aristocratic and degenerate, a mighty intellect and a child-brain, a synecdoche for an arcane species take-over and an evolutionary dead end, Dracula is one and many, and his sprawling polymorphism is certainly too deeply ingrained in the novel's universe to be downplayed.<sup>6</sup>

This being so, my impression is that Stoker metaphorically capitalised on the vampire's protean and prismatic identity from start to end, on the level of structure as well as plot threads and incidents, in such a way that many facets and issues end up clustering around his character. In the orchestration of the narrative, the eponymous anti-hero keeps on slipping through the textual net, only to frequently re-emerge as a mutating signifier, a nightmarish vision, a distorted memory trace, a haunting reification of traumatic experiences and phobias. A case in point regards the aftermath of Jonathan Harker's miraculous survival in the first half of the novel. If a defence mechanism induces him to suppress memories concerning his ghastly captivity in Transylvania, the amount of psychic energy absorbed in this process of denial (literally, his brain fever) is suddenly curtailed the moment he is seized by panic at the sight of a rejuvenated, red-lipped Count walking down Piccadilly like a peeping *flâneur* (Stoker 1994, 207-8). When realising how easily the wall of psychological resistance can be smashed down, Mina resolves to open the so-far sealed parcel containing her husband's shorthand diary. This eye-witness testimony will of course unveil Harker's buried memories and help him tackle their traumatic impact by assimilating them "belatedly after a period of latency" (Khader 2012, 79) and towards the regaining of control over his life. As he remarks, "now that I know, I am not afraid, even of the Count" (Stoker 1994, 225; emphasis in original). At the same time, his journal - which Mina has the foresight to typewrite, so that "we shall be ready for other eyes if required" (215) - adds to

<sup>6</sup> To put it in Jamil Khader's words, despite "the apparent containment of the threat of the foreign monster at the end of the novel, there is no simple return to normality, no celebration of the triumph of good over evil, and no closure for the victims. Not only [...] does Dracula's blood run through the veins of the Harkers' son Quincey, while Mina remains contaminated in some sense by the vampiric, but also the vampire's victims continue to be haunted by Dracula's polymorphous spectral presence" (Khader 2012, 95).

the archive of documentary proofs that will be instrumental in rooting out evidence about Dracula's moves and plans. In other words, it contributes to awakening Van Helsing's Christian warriors to the monstrous threat embodied by the 400-year-old Vampire-King.

In a relevant sense, therefore, *Dracula's* world lends itself to being read as a (pre-)Freudian substitutive formation seeping into the remotest areas of the unconscious: into one's drives, submerged memories and fears, repressed desires, subliminal perceptions and sexual fantasies. This is, again, suggested by an episode relating to Jonathan's Transylvanian ordeal. Namely, by his erotic encounter with three women vampires lying in wait in a secret portion of Dracula's castle, where the stupefied solicitor would have surrendered to the predatory advances of one of those voluptuous creatures, had it not been for the totemic Count's imperious interdiction. Indeed, before being overwhelmed by castration anxiety, Jonathan describes his excitement through phrases overlaid with guilt-ridden sexual allusions, such as "wicked, burning desire", "agony of delightful anticipation", and "languorous ecstasy" (Stoker 1994, 51-2). Even more perturbing is the notorious scene of devilish communion, or baptism of blood, that casts a heavy shadow of uncleanness over Mina, as Dracula endeavours to turn her into 'flesh of his flesh' and 'kin of his kin', in a grotesque mimicry of Adam and Eve's consubstantiality (Genesis 2: 23-4) and the Christian marriage service (from Ephesians 5: 28, 31). This hideous violation holds centre stage in Chapter XXI ("Dr Seward's Diary"), via Dr Seward's first-person record (336, 339) and an embedded narrative focused on Mina's point of view (341-3), in a Chinese-box structure where the testimony of the vampiric rape's victim is conveniently filtered through the physician's 'clinical' (and male) perspective. In essence, Dracula would elect Mina as his Lilith-like companion and helper by officiating an obnoxious rite that sees him open a vein in his breast and press the woman's mouth to the wound, so as to force her to swallow the spurting putrescent fluid (blood/semen).

Despite its heavy sexual symbolism and potentially devastating effects, this abominable intercourse also lays the groundwork for a momentous backlash enabling the good brave men to plan their countermove and arm themselves to cope with the monstrous. As happened with the transcription and circulation of Jonathan's journal, or with the sharing of Lucy Westenra's papers, they can be shown to admirably make a virtue of necessity. Proverbially, the tougher things get, the more these tough associates are propelled to rely on their own expertise, mutual support, and entrepreneurial aptitude. As pointed out by Van Helsing, "it is need that we know all. For now more than ever has all work to be done quick and sharp, and in deadly earnest" (341). It is as if, once the truth of weird phenomena is verified, a conduit for wholesome action and a restoration of order would also come to hand. This is what a mentally recovered Harker implicitly

confirms when extolling Van Helsing's capability of casting out demons (including inner ones):

[Mina] showed me in the doctor's letter that all I wrote down was true. It seems to have made a new man of me. It was the doubt as to the reality of the whole thing that knocked me over. I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful. [...]

"But Madam Mina told me you were ill, that you had had a shock." It was so funny to hear my wife called "Madam Mina" by this kindly, strong-faced old man. I smiled, and said:

"I was ill, I *have* had a shock: but you have cured me already."

"And how?"

"By your letter to Mina last night". (225-6; emphasis in original)

Spiritually and psychologically set free by the truth - this time in an echo of the Gospel of John (8: 32) - Harker eventually quells self-doubt and succeeds in chasing away the spectre of madness. Such a reining of the monster within, however, is ominously countervailed by the foreign monster's further spreading his tentacles into the God-fearing men's path to heaven. As anticipated, Dracula's vile scheme to subjugate Mina and claim her as his property is an attempt to irrevocably subdue his enemies by striking at one of "God's women fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth" (226). Through an infective exchange of bodily fluids, the Count forges in fact a mesmeric, telepathic bond whereby that angel-like woman, a model of selflessness and sympathy, risks being metamorphosed into a maleficent automaton condemned to do his bidding. And it is precisely at this scathing juncture that Van Helsing's contingent manage to turn the tables by transforming Harker's wife into a benevolent proto-cyborg of sorts, with whose aid they will track down the opponent at the acme of his homeward journey. While preventing their 'white lily' from sinking into the filthy mud, and therefore fighting for her soul, they resort to her newly-acquired psychic ability as a research implement, a sensory receptacle, a "piece of technology within the men's arsenal of vampire-hunting tools" (Brownell 2010).<sup>7</sup> As Roger Luckhurst vividly sums up, Mina appears as "a kind

<sup>7</sup> The complexity and sometimes contradictory features of Mina Harker - the female central character, fluctuating between the extremes of the Angel-in-the-House *topos* and the figure of the New Woman - are a staple in orthodox *Dracula* scholarship. Throughout the narrative, her agency is alternatively enhanced and reduced, as emblematically witnessed by the novel's very last words: "This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (Stoker 1994, 449). Through Van Helsing's crowning homage to her,

of embodied search-engine herself, with sailing times and train timetables at her fingertips. She even becomes a kind of occult communication device herself, a new-fangled two-legged telephone, able to dial up the Count from afar once she is in mesmeric rapport" (Luckhurst 2018, 4).

The special connection ensuing as an aftereffect of Dracula's attack is a form of intuitive/emotive telepathy that Van Helsing exploits by hypnotising the 'good woman' with a view to locating the vampire, who "lies hidden in the hull of a boat" within a coffin not dissimilar to "a telecommunication box" (Lanone 2018, 2). The penetration of Mina's subliminal mind triggers a long-distance conveyance of kinaesthetic perceptions through which she records and emits signals pertaining to both thought-transference and the sensory domain (sight, touch, and hearing). In the final stages of their epic battle, therefore, the nineteenth-century crusaders avail themselves of an upgraded armory in which Mina's peculiar sensitivity - her 'becoming-machine', so to speak - might be compared to the performance of a radio transmitter/receiver. Although the Count proceeds to "tune in and out" of this organic transceiver, the hypnotised medium's ability to enter the foe's mind at sunrise and sunset undercuts "the bat's system of echolocation". As a result, the message-conveying circuit is "switched on and off almost at will" by human operators and a virtual web is woven which tightens "around the Count, to prevent him from escaping" (Lanone 2018, 2-4). In short, Van Helsing's men waste no time in pressing home the advantage and remain in command.

By a meaningful coincidence, *Dracula's* publication year also marked a historic milestone in the context of electric phenomena discoveries and the radio industry, since on 2 July 1897, in London, Guglielmo Marconi was finally granted a patent for his radio transmission system. Notably, when Stoker was writing his novel, the new horizons opened up by experiments on electromagnetic waves and wireless telegraphy had already garnered much public attention. The applied-science innovations "related to the second great industrial revolution - the electrical one - seemed to reinvent the possibilities of everyday life" by virtue of "communication technologies, wireless telegraphy and mysterious Hertzian waves" (Luckhurst 2018, 5) which ushered in developments by, say, Édouard Branly, Alexander Popov, Nikola Tesla, and Marconi himself. As to the corporeal transfer of information via trance states and hypnosis, it should be observed that 'telepathy' was given its official imprimatur by Frederic W.H. Myers, one of the founding members of the Society for Psychological Research (SPR), in 1882. Moreover, in the last decades of the

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the plot appears to be drawn together "as if it had been all along a romantic quest purely for the sake of Mina's salvation" (Brownell 2010).



nineteenth century, this sanctioning focus on telepathic communication and mind-reading came coupled with a larger debate surrounding Occultism, Spiritualism, and the notion of psychic force.

The line of thought pursued in the last paragraphs helps us set Stoker's work against the multifaceted background mentioned at the beginning of this article. The context-specific quality and cultural porosity of *Dracula* are in keeping with a semantically-loaded discursive terrain that branches out into different areas, so that the novel both stands the test of time and palpably interfaces with its contemporaneity. On the one hand, as we have seen, the book unlocked the key to an exegetical approach that would become a staple feature of psychoanalytic criticism. The vampire's egotistic craving, libidinal energy and sadistic bent are among the purple strands that have been picked up by Freudian-theory interpreters, in conjunction with the symbolism pivoting on skin penetration, 'unspeakable' urges and taboos, psychosexual stages or incest conflicts. Besides, a mode of enquiry revolving around the assumption of Dracula-as-id, or as an allegory for neurotic anxiety and a return of the repressed, has given impetus to speculations digging into Stoker's life, from his puzzling childhood illness to his marital relationship and patterns of behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, *Dracula* kept pace with the dynamic worldview of its age. It dialogued with an epistemological framework underpinned by old systems of belief, ideological footholds and firm reference points as well as emerging paradigms, ethical quandaries and thorny questions. Victorian sexology, for one, opened a Pandora's box in matter of abnormal sexual appetites or aberrant double standards, suspected dysfunctions and venereal diseases. Correspondingly, scientific investigation crossed traditional boundaries by gathering data on, say, the logic of dreams and altered states of consciousness, such as catalepsy, aphasia and somnambulism (Lucy Westenra's sleepwalking soon comes to mind), not to mention dissociation and hysteria. If attracted to the SPR's philosophical scope and far-fetched postulations of paranormal activity, Stoker was at the same time captivated by brain science, comparative anatomy and advanced surgical techniques. Another crucial issue involved the efforts of intellectuals and thinkers to heal the breach between religious truths and the evidence corroborated by empirical science, with a huge amount of interest (and concern) being mobilised by the Darwinian concepts of evolution and man's descent, the conservative determinants of heredity and the struggle for existence.

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<sup>8</sup> For a useful overview assessment of *Dracula* as the "Freudian text *par excellence*", see the papers collected in Hughes, Smith 1998. See also, among several others, the chapter "Freud, Orality, and Incest" in Leatherdale 2001, 175-92, who starts his commentary by noting that the "year 1897 marked *Dracula's* publication and the commencement of Freud's psychoanalytical researches. For advocates of psychoanalysis *Dracula* yields a rich harvest" (175).

All this brings us neatly into a wide-ranging subject that, in the novel, often becomes a matter of discussion among the characters, especially between far-sighted, paternal Van Helsing and John Seward, his twenty-nine-year-old ex-pupil. An enthusiastic, sometimes ludicrously naïve advocate of scientific materialism, the latter is occasionally a "vehicle by which Stoker explains everything to the reader through someone who cannot comprehend unless everything is reduced to first principles" (Leatherdale 2001, 129). During their instructive confrontations on the goals, limits and state of the art of coeval research, the professor and the young physician also pay heed to physiology and neurology, including induced trance states and hypnotherapy. On one of these occurrences, Seward suddenly feels a surge of confidence as the interlocutor prompts him to tease out clues about Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-93), currently hailed as the father of modern neurology. Charcot's groundbreaking career and influential teaching left an imprint in a field that embraced physiology, pathological anatomy, the classification and treatment of hysteria, multiple sclerosis and various diseases of the nervous system. Here is a relevant excerpt from the novel:

"You are a clever man, friend John; you reason well, and your wit is bold; but you are too prejudiced [...] it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain. But yet we see around us every day the growth of new beliefs, which think themselves new [...] I suppose now you do not believe in corporeal transference. No? Nor in materialization. No? Nor in astral bodies. No? Nor in the reading of thought. No? Nor in hypnotism –"

"Yes," I said. "Charcot has proved that pretty well." He smiled as he went on: "Then you are satisfied as to it. Yes? And of course then you understand how it act, and can follow the mind of the great Charcot - alas that he is no more! - into the very soul of the patient that he influence." (Stoker 1994, 229-30)

The French neurologist's therapeutic recourse to hypnosis, together with his rigorous selection of diagnostic criteria and structured clinical observations, would gain increasing currency among his disciples and fellow clinicians, such as Pierre Janet (with his theorisations of the 'subconscious' and the 'magnetic rapport'), Gilles de la Tourette and Charles-Joseph Bouchard. When retracing our steps to the British scenario, we also come across the theses of physiologist Herbert Mayo about nervous susceptibility and liability to trance, as well as those of surgeon James Braid, who built on the legacy of mesmerism. Braid coined the psycho-physiological term 'neurypnology' and published suggestively-titled volumes like *Hypnotic Therapeutics* (1853) and *Physiology of Fascination* (1855).

As regards the decades 1870s-1890s, credit must be given to Anne Stiles's recent studies, in which she draws illuminating parallels with a composite theoretical corpus that Stoker had evidently clear in mind, from a nascent psychiatry to late-Victorian neurology, experimental physiology, and the localisation of brain function. High on the list were the mechanisms of 'cerebral automatism' and 'reflex action' explored by David Ferrier in *The Functions of the Brain* (1876), the research conducted by John Scott Burdon-Sanderson in his co-authored *Handbook for the Physiological Laboratory* (1873), and William Benjamin Carpenter's association of subliminal mental processes with the phenomenon of 'unconscious cerebration'. By expanding on the polarity between the new postulates of biological determinism and entrenched beliefs in free will and the immortality of the soul, Stiles contends that Count Dracula's tyrannical attitude and control of people's minds might eerily allegorise man's *reductio* to a soulless machine spurred by physiological stimuli. The vampire villain appears in this sense as a veritable icon of modernity, metaphorically getting his nourishment from "a period of intense scientific progress"; by ruthlessly performing experiments on human beings, he ends by "robbing them of their souls and their essential humanity - all allegations that could be directed with equal fairness towards the most avant-garde scientists of Stoker's day" (Stiles 2006, 132, 148). Again, Dracula "can be seen as a mad scientist of sorts: a stand-in for localizationists and automatists who argued that we are no more than the sum of our brain functions" (Stiles 2012, 55).

This intriguing hypothesis - comparing Dracula to a dystopian harbinger of a new *Zeitgeist*, rather than, typically, an epitome of atavistic regression - adds to the evocative power of a novel to whose planning Stoker dedicated several years (1890-97) and energy, as testified to by his voluminous working notes discovered in the 1970s at the Rosenbach Museum & Library in Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> In relation to medical pathology and treatments, there is little doubt that the author's first-hand researches spanned across many case studies and records. One should also not underestimate the fact that his family shared a professional interest in medicine and that his elder brother, Sir William Thornley Stoker (1845-1912), had built a name for himself as a prominent surgeon, anatomist, inspector of vivisection and

<sup>9</sup> It is now a received view that Stoker's references and background knowledge reached back to folklore, anthropological studies, and ancient history. His sources ranged from William Wilkinson's *Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* to Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Book of Were-Wolves* and Emily Gerard's article "Transylvanian Superstitions", to say nothing of the notoriety of ferocious Vlad Tepes (Vlad III Dracula 'the Impaler'), the *Voivode* of Wallachia who, in the second half of the fifteenth century, had fought against the Turks. For an in-depth analysis of these models, see McNally, Florescu 1995 and Leatherdale 2001, 80-116.

cutting-edge expert in cranial and abdominal surgery. In 1896, when Bram was completing his novel, William became President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

In the upshot, *Dracula*'s subtext converging on healthcare practices and taxonomies, blood transfusion procedures and consultations on symptoms, injuries or syndromes, ought to be lent more credence than it has been routinely granted. Surely worthy of mention are Dr Seward's clinical reports on Renfield, who, besides announcing Dracula's 'Advent' in an obscene reversal of John the Baptist's prophecies, is first of all a mentally-ill patient, a zoophagous manic-depressive gorging himself on blood and living creatures and prone to violent spasms. As the director of a lunatic asylum in London, a sort of Salpêtrière Hospital in miniature, Stoker's physician implicitly opens a window on a *tableau* of degenerative and rare diseases that, in late-Victorian culture, were sometimes labelled in terms of 'vampirism', especially when blood disorders (e.g. porphyria), hematophagy, sexual perversion or sadistic violence were involved (Jack the Ripper's 1888 blood-shedding atrocities being a case in point).<sup>10</sup>

### 3 Mimetic Wonders: Towards an Abatement of the Monstrous Threat

It is now a critical truism that the nineteenth-century urban Gothic and romance revival offered glimpses into “modern perspectives” and that both strove “to reduce anxiety by stabilising certain key distinctions”, such as “male and female, natural and unnatural, civilised and degenerate, human and nonhuman”. Accordingly, the social drama unfolding in *Dracula* held up a startling mirror to the “ordinary middle-class Briton” (Spencer 1992, 203-4). Among the meanings and forms pervading the knotty complexity of Stoker's novel are in fact the ones relating to a contagion/invasion narrative where pathological abnormality exceeds the bounds of vampirism itself, whether folkloric or clinically-diagnosed. In this light, the Count objectifies such a monstrous threat and high viral load as to potentially infect a whole nation and undermine the palimpsest of key distinctions mentioned above. A voracious foreigner and sly plague-carrier, Dracula ignites in turn a process of projective and 'purgative' displacement among the invaded country's people, who would compel

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<sup>10</sup> This perspective further blurs the boundaries between factuality and Gothic fantasy. On this thought-provoking shift towards a portrayal of the vampire as 'only too human' and a 'clinical type', see Hallab 2015 and Mighall 2003, who casts Seward as a positivist psychiatrist and representative of the Krafft-Ebner and Lombrosian school. For an analogy between Stoker's Seward and real-life William Joseph Seward, the superintendent of Colney Hatch Asylum (1882-1911), see Vanon Alliaia 2015.

sively bracket him as the prototype of a reversion to a lower state and a malevolent outsider intent on creating a breeding ground of underlings. No matter how depraved and deformed, he is however sharp-witted and adamant enough to draw up a plan for a political and economic control of the English capital. This is hinted quite early in the story via his interview with Harker and the Carfax estate sale transaction, an official preamble which will be followed by the vampire's off-book purchase of other houses in London, where he finally settles down as aptly-named 'Count de Ville'. In the guise of an entrepreneur and businessman ready to blend in and bathe sellers in cash, he appears to break into the system, recruit acolytes and 'pollute' the British establishment from within. As a member of the landed aristocracy and a feudal tyrant (namely, a *boyar* and a Kingdom of Hungary's *Voivode*), he hinders the *laissez-faire* principles and the activities of bourgeois competitors. At the same time, his growing monopoly and financial dealings invite comparison with the well-known Marxian metaphor equating capital with a vampire-like agent that thrives on the living blood of labour.

While making every effort to be assimilated into the English sphere - as he confesses to Harker, "I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity" (Stoker 1994, 31) - Dracula gnaws away at its socio-political order and, most of all, at its western identity, core values, and traditions. Indeed, the nuanced connotations of his genealogical and cultural otherness - pan-ethnically Eastern European/Oriental, Hungarian-Romanian with an alleged Szekely descentance from Attila the Hun, Russian, Slavic, iconographically Jewish - have been in the forefront of various insightful discussions. One needs only to look at Stephen Arata's path-breaking, oft-cited depiction of the marauding intruder as an "occidental tourist" plunging the English into a state of "reverse colonization" anxiety (Arata 1990, 621), or at Judith Halberstam's pointing to the disquieting homologies with "anti-Semitic nineteenth-century representations of the Jew" (Halberstam 1993, 333), and, more recently, at Jimmie Cain's thorough investigation of Russophobia and the way Eastern menace in *Dracula* "should be read as Russia, England's greatest imperial rival of the nineteenth century" (Cain 2006, 2).

As Jonathan notes in his journal's first entry, the Count comes from a district "in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe" (Stoker 1994, 9-10). This is a sort of magmatic navel of the world that, by way of the tigerish warrior nobleman's infiltration into the English territory, frightfully brings into play the idea of an incipient decline of Britain as a world power. If emblazoned with imperial pageantry and jingoistic celebrations, Queen Victoria's di-

among jubilee was overshadowed by fears of attack, unrest in overseas colonies and possessions, and a palpable decay of global influence. As to the internal situation, this was of course the *fin-de-siècle* conjuncture, a connection one hardly forgets when considering that, on its first release on 16 May 1897, *Dracula* flaunted a bright yellow cover with the novel's title and author's name in bold red lettering. The extent to which the Yellow Nineties set about challenging traditional distinctions, along with the foundational principles of a patriarchal, heterosexual, Christian middle-class society, scarcely needs emphasising here. The collapsing bulwark of conservative discourse and bourgeois hegemony, the rhetoric of progress *vis-à-vis* the ideological strains concerning gender, class and race, were certainly grist to Stoker's mill. Well aware of such looming public anxieties, including a "crisis of imperial culture" and the harrowing possibility of a "reversal of Britain's imperial exploitations of 'weaker' races" (Arata 1990, 626, 634), he masterfully amplified these motifs and had his fictional 'guardians of the Empire' make common cause on issues like an impending moral decadence and the risk of 'going native'.

Not surprisingly, then, some of *Dracula's* abnormal anatomical traits (from his pointed ears to ape-like hairy palms), his morbid propensity for deviance and his being a primitive relic of a vanished race, are all elements that fall within the province of physiognomy, degeneration theories (e.g. Max Nordau's portrayal of the perverted egomaniac) and, last but not foremost, Cesare Lombroso's criminal anthropology. Importantly, Lombroso's notion of the "born criminal" as a savage and ancestral throwback, "good at crime because [he needs] only to repeat the same behavior" (Gibson 2006, 142), is pushed to the fore in the novel by means of Mina, the clever lady with a woman's heart and a man's brain. As she asserts, the Count is "a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and *qua* criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind. Thus, in a difficulty he has to seek resource in habit" (Stoker 1994, 406). Taking a lead from her evaluation, we can now make some final remarks on Van Helsing's team and their employment of an arsenal aimed at deferring the threat of such an "imperfectly formed" invader.

Another truism about *Dracula* is that "the more alien and mysterious the world Stoker presents, the more enthusiastically and ingeniously he exploits the technological innovations of his times" (Byron 2007, 48). While, in a state of emergency, the selfish vampire is supposed to fall back on habit or simply flee the crime scene, his human opponents rely on an ethics of communal commitment - their famed power of combination, stern sense of duty, progressive 'learning to believe' - and a striking ability to bend the rules and innovate strategies. As already underlined, the congregation's proficiency resides in their remarkable hold on - and even obsession with - timeliness, accurate classification and document filing. In consonance with Stoker's

knack for research, they are often intent on checking maps, studying train schedules, making calculations or inquiries on the spot and parading compelling deductions. Far from subsisting in ordinary clerical skills, their talents allow them to filter experience and transform it into a serviceable textual archive. By meticulously collating informational bits and knitting together in logical sequence each scrap of evidence they have managed to transcribe, they hit a significant mark. Again, in Mina's words, in "this matter dates are everything, and I think if we get all our material ready, and have every item put in chronological order, we shall have done much" (Stoker 1994, 268). As the plot thickens, she actually lends a helping hand as a board secretary ("Professor Van Helsing [...] made me sit next to him on his right, and asked me to act as secretary", 282) and spares no effort in producing copies, sending telegrams or scanning weather updates.

Therefore, the group has a few trump cards to play. Their supply of 'mimetic wonders' relating to communication modes and up-to-date information storage includes two nineteenth-century jewels of technology, namely Mina's portable typewriter, through which she converts handwritten material and oral recordings into searchable documents, and Dr Seward's phonograph. As highlighted by Leanne Page, Stoker proceeded to maximise the "high performance technologies" available in the late-Victorian period, as represented by "startling innovations in information and communication technology, such as the typewriter, the gramophone, long-distance telephone lines, and undersea telegraph cables" (Page 2011, 96-7). Diana Louis Shahinyan similarly underscores how the motley Crew of Light take full advantage of and openly discuss "typewriting, telegraphy, phonography, shorthand, postal and railway services, and the Kodak camera" (Shahinyan 2018, 120). These wonders of upgraded technology are tantamount to a talismanic equipment that would counteract the centuries-old Count's traditional learning tools (such as the civil lists and blue books collected in his Transylvanian library). The ingenious arrangement of vibrating stylus and metal cylinders covered with wax - a later version of Thomas Edison's 1877 phonograph - captures Seward's clinical notations and thoughts in real time, just like "a wonderful machine [...] cruelly true" (Stoker 1994, 266). By the same token, the handy traveller's typewriter used by Mina is endowed with a manifold function that enables her to produce multiple copies at once (Page 2011, 99). Above all, it could be seen as a hyper-mediating medium, since it is "the technology through which all other technologies in the novel (stenography, phonographic records, and telegraphed messages) are produced and made accessible to the characters and to the reader" (Page 2011, 109).

This said, however, there remains a margin of doubt that teasingly projects us back to the question of Dracula's spectacular polymorphism and resistance to categorisation. If it is true that, after the vampire has set fire to the phonographic cylinders and the parcel of manuscripts, the typewritten documents provide an anchoring point for memory retrieval, no graphomaniac labouring or clicking of the typewriter keys appear to lay the fiendish ghost to rest. When, in his appended "Note", Jonathan comes to the conclusion that a mass of type-writing has largely replaced authentic sources – with Van Helsing's corollary that "we ask none to believe us!" (Stoker 1994, 449) – we are encouraged to at least redress the balance and reflect on the limits, as well as the glaring strong points, of technology. If knowledge risks being transmuted into "a marketable product" (James 2012, 97), the Count's immersion in alchemy and Scholomance sorcery is probably bound to overwhelm the "stenographer's stake" (Fleissner 2000). Certainly a criminal, Dracula is neither insane nor childish, but rather a Devil's companion (his chosen tenth scholar, to be precise). And his menacing words, too, cannot easily be silenced: when humans try to hunt and frustrate him in his designs, they "will know in full before long, what it is to cross my path" (Stoker 1994, 343). In the meantime, Van Helsing's crew had better stay healthy and carve out time on their schedule in order to recuperate. Not for nothing do references to hearty meals abound in the text, as suggested by the following passages:

Now you must eat. You are overwrought and perhaps over-anxious. Husband Jonathan would not like to see you so pale [...]. Therefore for his sake you must eat and smile [...]. You must eat now; afterwards you shall tell me all. (222-3)

There are terrible things yet to learn of; [...] Come, there is dinner. We must keep one another strong for what is before us; we have a cruel and dreadful task. When you have eaten you shall learn the rest, and I will answer any questions you ask. (267)

Eating a good supper, sipping a glass of brandy, or sitting in a comfortable armchair are a kind of earth-bound, everyday equipment that assists human fighters in warding off exhaustion. When dramatically caught between mesmeric enchantment and her household duties, Mina herself is said to slip out of trance with a funny anti-climax: "Would none of you like a cup of tea? You must all be so tired!" (409). Warmly welcomed by the band of brothers, one hopes that this invitation might also help defer Dracula's peremptory demand for a chalice of blood.



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# Robert Louis Stevenson and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Vampire “Olalla” (1885) as ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’

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**Abstract** “Olalla” (1885) by Robert Louis Stevenson has usually been neglected by critics interested in late-Victorian culture. Preceding of just a few weeks the publication of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), this novella has been judged as a derivative work, a story whose interest lies in its different sources, ranging from Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *A Strange Story* to E.A. Poe’s tales. My analysis aims to prove that in writing this work, Stevenson is probably drawing inspiration from the imagery exploited by some members of the Aesthetic Movement, among them Walter Pater and Edward Burne-Jones.

**Keywords** Robert Louis Stevenson. Olalla. Aesthetic culture. The ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 “Olalla” and Aesthetic Culture. – 3 “Olalla” and the ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’. – 4 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

Usually regarded as a vampire story set in nineteenth-century Spain, "Olalla" (1885) by Robert Louis Stevenson has often been neglected by critics interested in late-Victorian culture. The plot, focused on the tragic romance between a nameless British officer (the narrator of the story) and Olalla, an enigmatic woman living with her mysterious family in a secluded, ancient Spanish house, offers similarities with the later Gothic fiction of Oscar Wilde and Arthur Machen, Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker. While these authors have been studied extensively in search of definitions for the late-Victorian Gothic genre, "Olalla" has been mostly overlooked by scholars, even deemed "a complete failure" by David Daiches (1957, 15) and "false" by the author himself (Stevenson 1995, 365). Given the peculiar position of this piece in Stevenson's literary career,<sup>1</sup> it is rather surprising that "Olalla" should be read too often as a derivative work, a story overly reliant upon its sources, ranging from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* (1862) to Théophile Gautier's "La morte amoureuse" (1836), from E.A. Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842) to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappacini's Daughter" (1844). This ambiguity in terms of literary genres has also put into question the label of 'vampire story' attributed to the tale. As a matter of fact, the reader is often puzzled by the inscrutable relationship between the homodiegetic narrator and the other characters living in the *residencia*: among them, Felipe, an idiotic boy with a passion for gardening and singing, and his enigmatic mother, who finally bites the narrator's hand at the sight of a blood-dripping wound.

I will argue here that in building a story based on different artistic sources, Stevenson is actually coming very close to the imagery exploited by some members of the Aesthetic Movement, such as Walter Pater and Edward Burne-Jones. "Olalla" could be easily associated with later works, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and Vernon Lee's ghost-stories collected in *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (1890), which are narratives that belong to the 'Aesthetic Fantastic' (Bizzotto 2016, 39-54). By analysing the recurrence of descriptive sections that seem to be inspired by Walter Pater's essays and late pre-Raphaelite pictures, this study aims to place Stevenson's cryptic Gothic tale at the crossroads of different late-Victorian literary trends.

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<sup>1</sup> "Olalla" has been recently rediscovered by Hillary J. Beattie as a story "organically connected" with Stevenson's most celebrated work, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) (Beattie 2005, 11).

## 2 “Olalla” and Aesthetic Culture

Originally published in *The Court and Society Review* in 1885, and later collected in *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* (1887), “Olalla” is a supernatural story haunted by shadows that are never really defined or even directly described. If in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* the line between the fantastic and the real is purposely blurred in order to create a powerful plot finally turning into “psychological horror” (Harman 2005, 303), “Olalla” is commonly considered to be a vampire story curiously deprived of a clear-cut vampire figure. Critics and readers alike have failed in recognising who the monster in the plot is. Is Olalla the vampire? Or is it her mother? The episode alluding to the vampiric nature of this woman is at least unclear, and it occurs after a self-inflicted wound, a primitive resurgence “showing that the narrator is not a rational onlooker” (Reid 2006, 85):

And then, like one in a dream, I moved to the window, put forth my hand to open the casement, and thrust it through the pane. (Stevenson 2002, 123)

Moreover, when the beautiful Señora, Olalla’s mother, bites the hero’s hand, at the sight of his blood the reader wonders whether this is due either to her supernatural nature, or rather to her problematic character:

And as I still stood, marvelling a little at her disturbance, she came swiftly up to me, and stooped and caught me by the hand; and the next moment my hand was at her mouth, and she had bitten me to the bone. [...] Her strength was like that of madness; mine was rapidly ebbing with the loss of blood; my mind besides was whirling with the abhorrent strangeness of the onslaught, and I was already forced against the wall, when Olalla ran betwixt us, and Felipe, following at a bound, pinned down his mother on the floor.

A trance-like weakness fell upon me; I saw, heard, and felt, but I was incapable of movement. (Stevenson 2002, 124)

What is striking in these lines is the dream-like quality of the accident; this aspect is further corroborated by Stevenson’s choice of using a “far from objective” narrator (Reid 2006, 85) in order to emphasise the Gothic shadows of Olalla’s house. It is significant, though, that this characteristic is indeed hinted at from the very beginning of the story. Even if “Olalla” is told from the perspective of the hero and narrator, the first words that the reader encounters on the page are those of a doctor, who seems to allude to a psychological burden affecting the soldier:

'Now,' said the doctor, 'my part is done, and, I may say, with some vanity, well done. It remains only to get you out of this cold and poisonous city, and to give you two months of a pure air and an easy conscience. The last is your affair. (Stevenson 2002, 95)

Even before joining the company of a family afflicted by Galtonian degeneration, the narrator is aptly described as a character who needs to get rest. There is, indeed, a clear allusion to an "uneasy conscience", and it is probably for this reason that the doctor suggests that the Scottish officer should find repose in the countryside. Significantly, the nature of this 'uneasiness' will never be fully clarified, especially since the hero's narrative is interspersed with dramatic events: first some uncanny cries, keeping him awake during a windy night, then his obsession with Olalla, the beautiful, intelligent "daughter of the house" (113), and finally a self-mutilation that appears as sudden and shocking as the reaction it inspires in his hostess, the seductive and aggressive Señora. Since these events will be related by a narrator increasingly haunted by the characteristics of the family he is living with, as well as by his passion for Olalla, it is telling that from the first paragraph the doctor should refer to the disturbed soul of the hero. It is therefore likely that Stevenson chose to insert traces of the narrator's unreliability right from the beginning, as has been argued by Julia Reid (2006, 83-9).

This way of recounting the story, from the point of view of a non-objective narrator, shows intriguing parallels with Vernon Lee's ghost stories collected in *Hauntings*, while also seeming to anticipate the technique employed by Henry James in *The Turn of the Screw*, published in 1898. One of Lee's stories that is most reminiscent of "Olalla" is "Amour Dure", a supernatural tale told by Spiridion Trepka, a Polish academic interested in Italian Renaissance culture. While researching the history of Urbania, a fictional Italian city probably inspired by Urbino, he falls in love with the ghost of a Renaissance *femme fatale*, Medea da Carpi. He quickly becomes obsessed with her portrait, finally claiming to see her ghost draped in a cloak. According to his diary, presented at the very end of the story, before getting stabbed to death, he waits in his rooms for the final encounter with Medea.

Similarly, in "Olalla" the hero is clearly troubled by a spectral presence, which, as in "Amour Dure", is first seen as represented in a portrait:

After I had supped I drew up the table nearer to the bed and began to prepare for rest; but in the new position of the light, I was struck by a picture on the wall. It represented a woman, still young. To judge by her costume and the mellow unity which reigned over the canvas, she had long been dead; to judge by the vivacity of the at-

titude, the eyes and the features, I might have been beholding in a mirror the image of life. Her figure was very slim and strong, and of just proportion; red tresses lay like a crown over her brow; her eyes, of a very golden brown, held mine with a look; and her face, which was perfectly shaped, was yet marred by a cruel, sullen, and sensual expression. Something in both face and figure, something exquisitely intangible, like the echo of an echo, suggested the features and bearing of my guide [Felipe]; and I stood awhile, unpleasantly attracted and wondering at the oddity of the resemblance. (Stevenson 2002, 101)

The woman in the picture arouses the imagination of the narrator, who falls in love with her straightaway, as does Spiridion in Lee's story:

and while I knew that to love such a woman were to sign and seal one's own sentence of degeneration, I still knew that, if she were alive, I should love her. (101-2)

If the motif of a character nurturing a love for a painting would be later in the century notoriously adopted by Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it is significant that almost a decade before "Olalla", Walter Pater's description of *La Gioconda* in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) as a vampire travelling through the centuries was circulating among the aesthetes. Pater's work, thus, presented to English readers a text featuring a connection between portraits and historical characters endowed with supernatural powers:

The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. [...] All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. (Pater 1986, 150)



According to Robert Mighall, it is likely that this paragraph might have inspired Stevenson for Olalla's representation as an 'atavistic vampire':

She is 'atavistic' in as far as her character and condition appear to derive from her distant ancestors (*atavus* mean ancestors), and therefore like a vampire she, or her ancestors, has lived and died many times. There is an echo [...] of Walter Pater's famous description of Da Vinci's 'La Gioconda' (known as Mona Lisa), which offered a template for prose stylists and a model for femmes fatales at the end of the nineteenth century. (Mighall 2002, XXXV)

This connection seems more evident if one considers the self-description Olalla herself gives to the narrator:

Have your eyes never rested on that picture that hangs by your bed? She who sat for it died ages ago; and she did evil in her life. But, look again; there is my hand to the least line, there are my eyes and my hair. What is mine, then, and what am I? [...] Others, ages dead, have wooed other men with my eyes; other men have heard the pleading of the same voice that now sounds in your ears. The hands of the dead are in my bosom; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me; I am a puppet at their command; and I but reinform features and attributes that have long been laid aside from evil in the quiet of the grave. Is it me you love, friend? or the race that made me? The girl who does not know and cannot answer for the least portion of herself? Or the stream of which she is a transitory eddy, the tree of which she is the passing fruit? (Stevenson 2002, 126-7)

Indeed, both Pater's and Stevenson's descriptions share similar linguistic features, with an emphasis on repetitions and the recurrent use of the semicolon. In Pater, the female character is frequently alluded to through the use of the pronoun 'she', while in Stevenson the use of this same word (referring to the woman in the portrait) gives way to a second subject (the past generations of men) who is stressed in the anaphoric refrain "they move me, they pluck me, they guide me". Moreover, both paragraphs tend to be circular in presenting characters that disappear through different generations, to finally return, at the end of this eerie time-travelling, in their own flesh. The resemblance is striking, confirming Mighall's view that Stevenson and Pater made similar stylistic choices.

This opinion is shared by other scholars too. Although it is not clear whether and to what extent Pater's works have influenced Stevenson's stylistic and narrative choices, their names have, nevertheless, been frequently associated by both their contemporaries and modern scholars. Arthur Wing Pinero compared Stevenson's theatrical

style to Pater's writing, for they both aimed at "the absolute beauty of words" (Pinero 1903, 26). If Mighall has found a resemblance between Olalla's portrait and the elaborate descriptions of female figures to be found in *The Renaissance*, Richard Ambrosini and Richard Drury have defined Stevenson "along with Walter Pater, [...] the supreme prose stylist of his age" (Ambrosini, Dury 2006, xiii). Furthermore, Peter Costello has traced the influence of Pater on Stevenson's writing, mediated by the work of George Moore (Costello 1996, 127-38), and Penny Fielding has interpreted Stevenson's poetry in terms of Pater's aesthetic principles (Fielding 2010, 102-17). The Scottish writer was obviously familiar with the Aesthetic Movement, both in literature and in the arts: his friendship with Sidney Colvin, who knew Rossetti, Ruskin and Burne-Jones (Gray 2004, 7-22), his way of combining "a Paterian attention to the intricacies of style and form with blood-and-thunder celebrations of male adventure" (Arata 2005, 199), even his habit of "dressing and behaving like a 'yellow yite'" (Harman 2005, 211) have been interpreted by critics and biographers as evidence of his interest in the poetics of Aestheticism. "Olalla" thus reveals, perhaps more than other, better-known works by Stevenson, an interest in historical portraiture and onerific effects that were being exploited by decadent authors and artists.

This influence is apparently not limited to these features: if one takes into consideration some details in the story, ranging from descriptions of clothes and jewels<sup>2</sup> to allusions to fairy tales, it is possible to understand how close the atmospheres in "Olalla" are to those conveyed by the artists of the Aesthetic Movement. It is perhaps useful, then, to underscore that "Olalla" lingers between different genres, showing not only the characteristics of a Gothic tale but those of a dark fairy tale too, as Giorgio Manganelli has suggested in describing it as a romance featuring modern knights, princesses and spells (1974, v-x). In these terms, it is no wonder that the hero compares the *residencia* to "the sleeping palace of the legend" (Stevenson 2002, 105), with a hidden and far from unintentional reference to the story of Briar Rose. In the courtyard of this enchanted castle, described as "the very home of slumber" (105), Olalla's mother is first met, dozing "with animal sensuality against the wall" (Beattie 2005, 19), a posture which is reminiscent of the princess in the fairy tale, asleep for eternity until a knight saves her through a kiss. If the English officer is playing the part of the "paladin" - "un paladino" as Manganelli puts it (Manganelli 1974, v) - it is Stevenson's

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<sup>2</sup> Clothes and jewels are mentioned more than once in the story. Olalla's mother, for instance, is depicted wearing a "dress that struck me first of all, for it was rich and brightly coloured, and shone out in that dusty courtyard with something of the same relief as the flowers of the pomegranates" (Stevenson 2002, 105-6). Olalla, moreover, is frequently adorned with a golden coin hovering "on her breasts" (125).

ironic twist that the kiss is a deadly one, delivered, moreover, not by him but by Olalla's mother. As already seen, it is probably a vampiric kiss, a bite that almost kills the narrator.

Interestingly, in almost the same years during which Stevenson was working on "Olalla", Edward Burne-Jones was under the spell of the Briar Rose tale too, dedicating much of his talent in the 1880s to a series of panels depicting scenes taken from the story. Teeming with figures that are represented completely asleep, as plunged in a deathly trance, the whole series exudes, as M. Clark Hillard has written, "a melancholy, if not threatening, sense of eternal stasis" (Hillard 2014, 110). This is the same impression evoked by "Olalla": a relevant part of the story is devoted to the description of the hero's wanderings through the *residencia* in a kind of repetitive, circular pattern. It should be noted, in this regard, that in "Olalla" the characters are almost exclusively absorbed in lazy activities: Olalla's mother is constantly watching the fire or dozing, her son Felipe is always intent on gardening, his favourite pastime, and the narrator is very fond of loitering in the halls of the castle, lost in his speculations on Olalla and on the woman depicted in the portrait. This kind of slothful life resembles the one led by the author a few years before, described in a letter to Edmund Gosse in which he expressed a connection between idleness and aesthetic pleasure through a reference to Burne-Jones's art itself:

I have fallen altogether into a hollow-eyed, yawning way of life, like the parties in Burne-Jones's pictures. (Harman 2005, 170)

Again, as in the case of Pater, it is not clear to what extent Stevenson was familiar with Burne-Jones's work. His friendship with Sidney Colvin, who dedicated a chapter of his *Memories and Notes of Persons and Places* (1921) to the painter, seems to have been instrumental in making him acquainted with his work. In his essay Colvin quotes a letter in which Burne-Jones declares his intention of illustrating Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) and reports on having met Stevenson himself:

It was a lovely evening with L.S. and I loved him. I wish he was fat and well and like a bull and lived here. (Colvin 1921, 57)

The reference to the 'yawning parties' in the aforementioned letter seems to suggest that Burne-Jones's pictures were likely to have been in Stevenson's mind while writing "Olalla". The description of the Señora as a "gaily dressed and somnolent woman" (Stevenson 2002, 114), stretching herself "in the bright close of pomegranates", keenly reminds the reader of pictures such as *Green Summer* (1868) and *Cupid Delivering Psyche* (1871) by Burne-Jones, equally featuring women surrounded by enchanted gardens and blossoming trees.

Another revealing detail of Stevenson's interest in Aesthetic culture seems to be Olalla's attire, and especially her pendant's description:

After the fashion of that country, besides, her bodice stood open in the middle, in a long slit, and here, in spite of the poverty of the house, a gold coin, hanging by a ribbon, lay on her brown bosom. These were proofs, had any been needed, of her inborn delight in life and her own loveliness. (Stevenson 2002, 118)

Indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century coins were much used as decorations; modern and ancient specimens were mounted as brooches and pendants after the 'archeological fashion' launched by the Castellani firm in Rome, becoming a sign for the purchaser of refined taste. An almost contemporary portrait by Kate Carr, representing Mrs. George Henry Boughton (1877), shows how this kind of coin-set jewellery was worn, the attention of the beholder (as that of Stevenson's character) being caught by "the large gold circular pendant with heavy loop in the manner of an ancient bulla, worn on a ribbon" (Gere et al. 1984, 141).

These golden jewels in classical style were "a particular favourite in 'Aesthetic' society" (Gere, Munn 1996, 61). As his letters seem to show, Stevenson was actually not at all uninformed about the matter of fashion and jewellery: he paid attention to his friend Walter Ferrier's "coral waistcoat studs" (Harman 2005, 257) and succinctly evokes Fanny's clothes and the ghostly quality of one of her "wild" dresses (Stevenson 1995, 137). An attentiveness to brilliancy and precious stones can frequently be detected in his stories: descriptions of diamonds play an important role, for instance, in the *New Arabian Nights* (1882), in which these gems, the favourite precious stones of the *fin de siècle*, are stolen and owned by different characters.

What is striking, then, is the consonance between the atmospheres usually cherished by Aesthetic writers and Stevenson's short story, a longing for tropes such as enchanted portraits, jewellery descriptions and references to fairy tales that are usually regarded as characteristics of the fantastic fiction of authors such as Vernon Lee, Wilde and Pater. Both fairy tales and jewels are mentioned in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in the section devoted to Sybil Vane's love story, which frequently features Dorian as an equivocal 'Prince Charming', and in chapter XI, in which ancient adornments are described as a "taste that enthralled him for years and, indeed, may be said never to have left him" (Wilde 1989, 148). Besides, in Lee's *A Phantom Lover* (1886) a locket containing "some very dark auburn hair" (Lee 2006, 153) becomes a symbol of the whole ghost-story, "in which the reader is led to doubt seriously whether the protagonists have actually come into contact with the supernatural at all" (Kandola 2010,

24). Since both these authors have been studied by Bizzotto as relevant writers of the ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’, it seems appropriate to adapt the theoretical framework exposed in her essay. My aim, then, in the following section will be to compare the peculiarities that Bizzotto has found in works by Wilde and Lee<sup>3</sup> with those of “Olalla” – a story written by an author rarely associated with the Aesthetic Movement – in order to claim for this narrative a specific category in the *fin-de-siècle* literary market, that of the ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’.

### 3 “Olalla” and the ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’

Elaborating upon theories by, among the others, Remo Ceserani (1996) and Rosemary Jackson (1981), Bizzotto writes that at the turn of the nineteenth century there “existed a specific submode of fantastic literature associated with the poetics of the Aesthetic Movement” (2016, 40). Walter Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits*, Vernon Lee’s ghost stories, and Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have been analysed by Bizzotto in order to find common features revealing “an urgency to redefine the nature and role of art and the artist” (40), along with the use of the fantastic mode. Among the characteristics that she deems typical of this fiction is the adoption in the plot of the motif of the “mediating object”, an object of art functioning “as catalyst to dimensions other than the *hic et nunc*” (44). Such is the case with Dorian’s portrait in Wilde’s novel, allowing the main character to gain supernatural powers and elaborate his own life as a personal work of art. In “Olalla”, as I have already discussed, the portrait of the beautiful female ancestor seems to have a similar function. While in Wilde’s work the fantastic dimension is directly asserted (the picture is described as changing from one chapter to the other), in “Olalla” it is instead suggested with a certain hesitancy:

to judge by the vivacity of the attitude, the eyes and the features, I might have been beholding in a mirror the image of life. (Stevenson 2002, 101)

Almost a living portrait, the picture seems endowed even with magic:

The first light of the morning shone full upon the portrait, and, as I lay awake, my eyes continued to dwell upon it with growing complacency; its beauty crept about my heart insidiously, silencing my

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**3** The list also includes Falkner’s *The Lost Stradivarius* and Beardsley’s *Under the Hill*, not to mention Merimée’s and Poe’s short stories as specimens taken as sources of inspiration by the writers of the ‘Aesthetic Fantastic’.

scruples one after another [...]. Day after day the double knowledge of her wickedness and of my weakness grew clearer. She came to be the heroine of many day-dreams, in which her eyes led on to, and sufficiently rewarded, crimes. She cast a dark shadow on my fancy; and when I was out in the free air of heaven, taking vigorous exercise and healthily renewing the current of my blood, it was often a glad thought to me that my enchantress was safe in the grave, her wand of beauty broken, her lips closed in silence, her philtre spilt. And yet I had a half-lingering terror that she might not be dead after all, but re-arisen in the body of some descendant. (101-2)

The immaterial and intoxicating presence of the portrait, corrupting the mind and the health of the narrator, is brilliantly evoked through the use of images pertaining to magic, hence the reference to the wand and the philter. Since Stevenson had planned the story in such a way as to leave unclear whether Olalla is actually a vampire or rather the descendant of a declining race, the paragraph seems to have been purposefully inserted in the narrative in order to stress this ambiguity: is the British officer burdened from the beginning by just a gloomy state of mind, or is Olalla actually a demon and the portrait (probably her portrait)<sup>4</sup> wicked? As in the case of Lee's "Amour Dure", or of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the question is almost impossible to answer, thus confirming the story's belonging to that group of fantastic texts that "sustain their ambiguity to the very end, i.e. even beyond the narrative itself" (Todorov 1975, 43). As such, the portrait convincingly fits in with Bizzotto's definition of the mediating object in the 'Aesthetic Fantastic', an item duplicating "a beautiful body or a talented temperament" and manifesting "an overwhelming capacity to create and propagate beauty, and, at the same time, to show the dangers of unconditional artistic devotion" (Bizzotto 2016, 45).

This concerns not only the portrait, which, as already seen, awakens an erotic obsession in the mind of the hero - a longing for an encounter with the real model that will take place only halfway through the tale - but also the other fragment/mediating object to be found in the story: a devotional poem in Olalla's chamber. Focused on the rhetorical dyad of pleasure and pain, found amid ancient treatises

<sup>4</sup> Critics have tried to single out who the woman represented in the portrait is by elaborating upon her closeness to Olalla, or rather to her mother. Ornella De Zordo, for instance, inclines towards the former (De Zordo 1994, 102), while Julia Reid towards the latter (Reid 2006, 87). It is likely, however, that the portrait is a symbol of the whole family, therefore being representative not only of the two women but of Felipe too. It cannot be denied, nevertheless, that the painted woman is strikingly redolent of Olalla; otherwise, the narrator would not look at the portrait later in the story proclaiming the female ancestor's inconsistency as compared with Olalla's beauty (thus implying a strong resemblance between the woman in the painting and her beloved).

in Latin, the composition seems to show that Olalla is not only beautiful but well-read enough to write religious verses:

Pleasure approached with pain and shame,  
 Grief with a wreath of lilies came.  
 Pleasure showed the lovely sun;  
 Jesu dear, how sweet it shone!  
 Grief with her worn hand pointed on,  
 Jesu dear, to thee!  
 (Stevenson 2002, 113)

As for the portrait, the poem is met by the narrator as the proof of Olalla's superior nature, a woman "whom now I conceived as of a saint" (114). In Stevenson's story a worshipful attitude towards beauty – represented by the picture and the poem – that is typical of the 'Aesthetic Fantastic' can be detected; the circumstances here described are reminiscent not only of *Dorian Gray's* first chapter, in which the character of Basil Hallward falls in love with Dorian's portrait, but also of many of Lee's short stories. Nearly every tale collected in Lee's *Hauntings* introduces characters that become obsessed with artistic representations of dead people: a portrait of a Renaissance *femme fatale* in "Amour Dure", as already mentioned; an eighteenth-century aria driving the composer Magnus to madness in "A Wicked Voice"; another portrait, this time of a sixteenth-century ancestress, exercising its peculiar influence on the mind of a Victorian noblewoman in *A Phantom Lover*.

This insistence on the peculiarities of fragments belonging to an ancient past, able to awaken the latent desires of contemporary characters, is aptly mirrored in "Olalla". The hero is, after all, quite fascinated by the Gothic pedigree of the *residencia*, "a rich house, on which Time had breathed his tarnish and dust has scattered disillusion" (Stevenson 2002, 112). It is here, among the walls that are set "with the portraits of the dead" (112), that he comes across antique images and artistic fragments in which Olalla's figure is curiously mixed with a dead past: first the portrait and then the poem, probably redolent of a religious literature inspired by her books "of a great age and in the Latin tongue" (113). Shortly after, the narrator meets Olalla herself, who is curiously depicted as if she is frozen, a statue gleaming in the darkness of the gallery, her eyes moving in the darkness:

My foot was on the topmost round, when a door opened, and I found myself face to face with Olalla. Surprise transfixed me; her loveliness struck to my heart; she glowed in the deep shadow of the gallery, a gem of colour; her eyes took hold upon mine and clung there, and bound us together like the joining of hands; and the moments we thus stood face to face, drinking each other in, were sacramental and the wedding of souls. I know not how long it was be-

fore I awoke out of a deep trance, and, hastily bowing, passed on into the upper stair. She did not move, but followed me with her great, thirsting eyes; and as I passed out of sight it seemed to me as if she paled and faded. (116)

This meeting will prove to be crucial for the plot: after this "wedding of souls" the narrator will devote his life to the pursuit of Olalla's affection, not fulfilling his goal due to her love's final refusal, motivated by her "fear that the hereditary taint will afflict their offspring" (Mighall 2002, xii).

There is an episode, though, occurring before this momentous encounter, in which the hero is seen examining the portraits hanging on the walls. While brooding on the decadence of the race that for centuries has owned the castle, he casts his eyes on a mirror and sees his own face:

And an ancient mirror falling opportunely in my way, I stood and read my own features a long while, tracing out on either hand the filaments of descent and the bonds that knit me with my family. (Stevenson 2002, 112)

If considered in connection with Stevenson's family history, dominated both by nervous breakdowns and ambitious aspirations, this scene seems to have been at least in part inspired by autobiographical considerations. According to Ornella De Zordo (De Zordo 1994, 101), Stevenson is here probably thinking of his ill health, very likely to have been passed on by his grandfather to him; as a consequence, this brief passage could represent an overt sign of his anxieties about his family taint, aptly inserted in a story that is focused on the issue of hereditary degeneration, as most of the critics have highlighted (Mighall 2002, x-xiv; Reid 2006, 83-8; Harman 2005, 308-9). Since he is transposing memories of his problematic family inheritance on narrative terms, it is likely that Stevenson has thus created a story in which his ambivalent relationship with his family is equally reflected in the narrator's analysis of Olalla's peculiar lineage.

In this respect, it is revealing that the narrator is utterly fascinated both by the ancient, past-sodden *residencia* and by its eccentric dwellers, in the same way as Stevenson, the descendant of moody Scottish engineers, was fascinated by the dangers and joys of storytelling, imagination and literary creation: in one word, of aesthetic pleasure. Claire Harman has thus condensed the issues lying at the heart of Stevenson's notorious quarrels with his father:

Robert Louis Stevenson judged himself by the same family standards, which venerated professionalism, inventiveness, hard work and money-making and thought little of self-expression and art.



He came to feel that he was a very inadequate heir to these active men, a mere 'slinger of ink', sunk in comparative idleness. (2005, 9)

Given this dichotomy between 'professionalism', 'hard-work', and 'money-making' on one side, and 'art' on the other,<sup>5</sup> it would not be preposterous to argue that what is haunting the ancient manor is not madness or vampirism, but rather the risk of plunging oneself into aesthetic activities, in "comparative idleness". By creating a story in which a male character falls under the spell of two beautiful, dangerous women, dressed in an updated aesthetic fashion, Stevenson is likely giving voice to his dilemmas about an artistic career that in the mid-1880s was still met with covert disappointment by his father, and was not always able to provide him with a decent living. From this perspective, "Olalla" also becomes an allegory of Stevenson's efforts at making a living out of a purely artistic vocation, a battle that he shared with most of other late-Victorian writers, and that, for personal reasons, he wanted to win to prove himself worthy of his ancestors, not just a "slinger of ink" aiming at the "comparative idleness" of writing books. As a consequence, the portrait featured in "Olalla", not to mention the poem, the golden pendant and the other symbols above analysed, become a powerful emblem of the dangers of beauty (or rather of the pursuit of beauty), for all these features are bound in Olalla's world to decay and desperation.

#### 4 Conclusion

It is in order to save his hero that Stevenson makes the British officer painfully renounce Olalla's beauty: by leaving the wicked building, the main character saves his life. But even if the events occurred in that odd place have been told through the disturbed perspective of the narrator, the portrait (at this point, it is of no importance whether it is enchanted or not) has proved to exert a lasting influence on his mind. As in Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, in "Olalla" art seems always to retain its enchanted powers, regardless of the fate of those who are subjugated by it; they can die like Dorian Gray or they can survive; beauty is, nevertheless, eternal. At the end of the story, the portrait of Olalla's ancestor still hangs in one of the *residencia's* rooms, waiting perhaps for another victim that will be prone to nurture impossible dreams about the woman depicted on the canvas.

For these reasons, "Olalla" well fits in with the mode of the 'Aesthetic Fantastic', though not always confirming to Bizzotto's charac-

<sup>5</sup> For a stimulating book on how these categories overlap in the works of Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater see Freedman 1990.

teristics.<sup>6</sup> The story provides an example of an 'Aesthetic Stevenson' that is, perhaps, a different writer from the "leisured aesthete" of the first essays (Abrahamson et al. Thomson 2018, xxxviii) and the "elegant stylist" showing in *Prince Otto* (1885) his "purple vein" (Harman 2005, 251). "Olalla" seems to reveal how Aestheticism was deeply rooted not only in Stevenson's personal anxieties about the role of the artist at the end of the nineteenth century, but also in his 'romantic' imagination. By describing a 'palace of the art' fallen into decay and haunted by fascinating female demons, he has managed to create a powerful parable of the risks inherent in the translation of strange dreams into art, and of the dangers of escaping from reality in search of an absolute beauty, well represented by the handsome features of Olalla. It is perhaps on this account that fairy gardens and vampire women do not feature in Stevenson's nearly contemporaneous work, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Dr Jekyll's London is indeed almost an exclusively male world; the supernatural employed in the novella being an emblem of the uncanniest Gothic of the soul. It is as if Stevenson was not interested anymore in creating stories about haunting portraits and romantic intoxications. Perhaps for him, as for his hero, the enchanted courtyard of the *residencia* was precluded, the gay dresses and the brilliant tropes of the 'Aesthetic Fantastic' were not so irresistible after all. The hero will probably return to a gloomy English city, as his author did, at least figuratively, by creating the shocking tale of *doppelgängers*, set within the dark fabric and nightmarish urban landscapes, that is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, the idea of the 'god in exile', which Pater borrowed from Heinrich Heine and used in some of his short-stories, seems absent from "Olalla". Bizzotto devotes a part of her analysis to this feature, emphasising a "homosocial teacher/disciple relationship which appears as yet another *risqué idéal* of the Aesthetic Movement suggested through the fantastic" (Bizzotto 2016, 46).

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# Beyond the Boundaries of Realism

## Monstrous Islands and Literary Hybrids at the *Fin de Siècle* in Conan Doyle's, R.L. Stevenson's and H.G. Wells's Fiction

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**Abstract** This article explores the way in which at the *fin de siècle*, Doyle, Stevenson and Wells chose to set their works on marginal islands in order to spatially escape not only from the bleak reality of the modern world, but also from the constraints of realism, and to reconnect with more imaginative forms of writing. It thus aims to shed new light on the relationship between geographical space and literary aesthetics, and to demonstrate that the island space is especially conducive to generic excursions out of realism and towards the fantastic, the marvellous and even the monstrous, leading to the creation of eminently hybrid literary texts.

**Keywords** Islands. Monsters. Escapism. Genre. Realism. Romance. Gothic. Fantastic. Aesthetics. Form. Hybridity. Narrative Annexe. Space. Geopoetics. Border-crossing. Marvellous. Uncanny. Victorian Era. Fin de siècle. Stevenson. Doyle. Wells.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Islands and *Fin de Siècle* Escapism. – 3 Liminal, Enchanted Islands. – 4 Marginal Zoologic and Generic Encounters. – 5 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

Islands are deeply embedded in the European literary imagination and their separate, isolated nature appears to be particularly conducive to the occurrence of marvellous or preternatural phenomena, making them a favoured setting for storytellers. This ‘magical’ and mythical potential has been exploited time and again since as far back as the foundational myth of the *Odyssey* and Odysseus’ wonderful encounters with a colourful bestiary of hybrid and monstrous creatures across the Mediterranean archipelago. Yet the desert island is also, somewhat paradoxically, one of the several possible birthplaces of the realist novel, with the publication of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 (Watt 1984, 13). Such aesthetic plasticity might explain why by the turn of the 20th century, as the realist novel had reached its cultural peak, a number of authors decided to explore the *topos* of the ‘desert’ island anew and repeople it with some of its original monsters, in an attempt to negotiate their ambivalence towards the dominant realist model. Indeed, it is my contention that such a pregnant choice of setting can be interpreted as a way to spatially escape not only from the bleak reality of the modern world, but also from the constraints of realism, by reconnecting with more imaginative and marvellous forms of writing.

I thus aim to shed new light on the relationship between geographical space and literary aesthetics at the turn of the twentieth century, by demonstrating that the protean island space allowed some major *fin de siècle* authors to explore the boundaries of realism through various forms of generic excursions into the fantastic, the marvellous, and even the monstrous. I will focus in particular on H.G. Wells’s *Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and on his short-story “In the Avu Observatory” (1894), and compare it with Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Fiend of the Cooperage” (1897) and R.L. Stevenson’s *The Beach of Falesá* (1897), in order to determine how they each negotiate hybrid zoologic and generic encounters, notably through their representations of monstrous creatures or preternatural phenomena. This will lead me to highlight the way the island’s protean nature fosters hybridity at the diegetic but also at the textual level, as the island becomes a laboratory for the hybridisation of spatial, physical, as well as literary forms.

## 2 Islands and *Fin de Siècle* Escapism

In the Victorian era, the United Kingdom’s increased urbanisation and industrialisation brought about a sense of constriction which seems to have fuelled an escapist tendency in readers as well as in writers, who sought to expand their horizons through real or imag-

inary travels (Kitzan 2001, 85; Ho 2007, 2). Thus, while some went off to explore new lands, others found solace in literature and more particularly in the romance of distant lands, leading to a revival of the romance genre:

There has, indeed, arisen a taste for exotic literature: people have become alive to the strangeness and fascination of the world beyond the bounds of Europe and the United States. But that is only because men of imagination and literary skill have been the new conquerors – the Corteses and Balboas of India, Africa, Australia, Japan, and the isles of the southern seas. All such conquerors [...] have, at least, seen new worlds for themselves; have gone out of the streets of the over-populated lands into the open air; have sailed and ridden, walked and hunted; have escaped from the fog and smoke of towns. New strength has come from fresher air into the brains and blood, hence the novelty and buoyancy of the stories which they tell. Hence, too, they are rather to be counted among romanticists than realists, however real is the essential truth of their books. (Lang [1891] 1901, 200)

In this passage, the Victorian man of letters Andrew Lang highlights both the escapist potential of romance and its ability to breathe new life into fiction writing<sup>1</sup>, contrasting it with the apparently more out-of-date and less vivid fictional mode of realism<sup>2</sup>. The romanticist Henry Rider Haggard had made a very similar argument in his essay “About Fiction” a few years earlier, linking spatial exploration with poetic innovation:

Here we may weave our humble tale, and point our harmless moral without being mercilessly bound down to the prose of a somewhat dreary age. Here we may even [...] cross the bounds of the known, and, hanging between earth and heaven, gaze with curious eyes into the great profound beyond. There are still subjects that may be handled there if the man can be found bold enough to handle them. (1887, 180)

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**1** He also very clearly links it with the process of imperialist colonisation through the repeated use of the term “conquerors”, as this period witnessed the rise of a more aggressive and utilitarian imperialist trend, sometimes called “new imperialism” or “high imperialism”. I shall not, however, delve into this aspect of the island tale in this essay as it has already been discussed at length by many prominent critics (Brantlinger 1988; Loxley 1990; Phillips 1997; Weaver-Hightower 2007). I intend to focus instead on the narratological and poetic implications of such a pregnant geographical choice, which has been the object of much less critical attention in the existing literature.

**2** He had already famously voiced his stance in the contemporary debate opposing realism and romance in an earlier essay entitled “Realism and Romance” (1887), in which he defended the merits of romance.



“[C]ross[ing] the bounds of the unknown” is thereby perceived as a way not only to reinvigorate the author’s literary imagination by opening it up to new spaces and new ‘subjects’, but also to break away from the constricting realist norm of the time (“the prose of a somewhat dreary age”).

Yet by the turn of the twentieth century, as the last remaining “blank spaces”<sup>3</sup> had progressively disappeared from the map and most of the globe had been mapped out and settled through the process of colonisation, there seemed to be fewer and fewer places left for novelists to explore, and for their imaginations to roam freely. Islands were thus among some of the last unexplored spaces left, and appeared as the ultimate possibility for such geo-poetic freedom:

The central image of unknown space in the adventure story is, perhaps inevitably, the sketchy map of an island. (Phillips 1997, 8)

The choice of this *topos* indeed allowed authors to reconnect with romance and revive imaginative literature in a world that had developed an increasing faith in rationality and positivism, as indicated by the prominence of the realist and more particularly the naturalist movements at that time. Emile Zola went far as proclaiming “la déchéance de l’imagination” (the decay of imagination, my translation) in his *Roman Expérimental* in 1880 (206), intent as he was on championing his conception of writing as a transparent “maison de verre” (glasshouse) offering an exact depiction of reality (Zola 1893, 118). In reaction to this dominant trend, Robert Louis Stevenson was amongst the staunchest advocates for the revival of imagination and the rejection of the realist mimetic ideal, which he famously voiced in his literary “quarrel”<sup>4</sup> with Henry James, debunking James’s definition of the “art of fiction” in an essay entitled “A Humble Remonstrance”:

The whole secret is that no art does “compete with life”. Man’s one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality. (Stevenson [1884] 1948, 91)

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**3** To take up Joseph Conrad’s expression in his preface to *Heart of Darkness*, where he famously laments the disappearance of such unexplored areas: “Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, “When I grow up I will go there”. The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven’t been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour’s off” ([1899] 1989, 33).

**4** Which eventually became a friendship, as recorded in a collection edited by Janet Adam Smith and entitled *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of their Friendship and Criticism* ([1884] 1948).

In lieu of this apparently unattainable mimetic ideal, he foregrounds a vision of art that does not aim to “compete with life” or imitate it faithfully, but instead relies on the powers of imagination and narration to ‘filter out’ the chaos of reality and fulfil the readers’ escapist desire, transporting them away from the harsh reality of their daily lives:

The great creative writer shows us the realisation and the apotheosis of the daydreams of common men. His stories may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the daydream. The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing should follow. (Stevenson [1882] 1905, 236)

The use of the lexical fields of imagination and desire (“longings”; “daydreams”; “ideal”) bears testimony to his attempt to reconcile “great creative writ[ing]” with romance<sup>5</sup> and imaginative literature, which tended to be dismissed as ‘low’ or ‘popular’ forms of fiction at the time (Letourneux 2010, 205-6). The final sentence moreover underlines the importance of place in this creative process, each location being associated with a specific kind of event or even a specific genre, as he indicates earlier in the same essay:

Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. (Stevenson [1882] 1905, 234)

Following this line of thought, we might suggest that some islands demand to be peopled with monstrous beasts and become the scene of wonderful events, as is exemplified by the abundant literary tradition mentioned in the introduction. The island’s location, at the far reaches of the known world, indeed seems to remove it from the norms of reality and even realism (Grosmann 2005, 135), thereby making the magical or the marvellous somewhat more acceptable: Frank Lestrington notably describes the island as a kind of gateway into the world of myths and legends (2004, 10), again highlighting the link between space and literary aesthetics.

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<sup>5</sup> The quoted essay was tellingly entitled “A Gossip on Romance”.

### 3 Liminal, Enchanted Islands

The literary island's utter liminality, at the threshold between the real and the imaginary, is still very palpable at the turn of the twentieth century in the three works under study. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is set on what is initially depicted as an "unknown little island" ([1896] 2005, 19) "off the track to anywhere" (29), while its very existence is questioned from the start by the frame narrative, thus casting doubt upon the reliability of the tale:

The only island known to exist in the region in which my uncle was picked up is Noble's Isle, a small volcanic islet, and uninhabited. [...] So that this narrative is without confirmation in its most essential particulars. (5)

Due to its uncertain location, the island's existence is therefore never really ascertained, despite the fact that it is apparently set within the 'real' world: this leads the reader to inevitably question the veracity of this "strange story" (5), which is presented to him in the epistemic mode through the use modal verbs and phrases such as "he must have lived during the interval" or "it seems" (6). Moreover, in his preface to a later collection of his *Scientific Romances* (1933), Wells himself insisted on the marvellous nature of his tale and on the primacy of imagination over scientific accuracy, opposing it to Jules Verne's more verisimilar scientific tales:

As a matter of fact there is no literary resemblance whatever between the anticipatory inventions of the great Frenchman and these fantasies [which are] exercises of imagination in a quite different field. (cited in Bergonzi 1961, 17)

Similarly, Wells's short-story "In the Avu Observatory" is set at the edge of Borneo's still unexplored tropical forest, in a station that appears particularly difficult to access:

The observatory at Avu, in Borneo, stands on the spur of a mountain. To the north rises the old crater, black at night against the unfathomable blue of the sky. From the little circular building, with its mushroom dome, the slopes plunge steeply downward into the black mysteries of the tropical forest beneath. [...] [F]or the naturalist the virgin forests of Borneo are still a wonderland full of strange questions and half-suspected discoveries. ([1894] 1927, 241)

The observatory's round shape and its location at the top of a steep mountain make it appear all the more remote and insular, an enclaved

scientific outpost surrounded with wilderness. The spatial isolation of this island within the island again goes hand in hand with a departure from the realist norm, which is made evident by the author's lexical choices, as the terms "mysteries", "wonderland", and "strange" immediately transport the story into the realm of romance, despite its apparently realistic setting.

Conan Doyle's short story "The Fiend of the Cooperage" is similarly located "upon the edge of the great unknown" ([1897] 1924, 196), and appears as a gateway into the undiscovered and the strange: the island is located at the mouth of the Ogowai river (in current-day Gabon), which goes through a land "practically unknown to Europeans" according to one of its inhabitants, who adds:

Every log which is carried past us by the current has come from an undiscovered country. (196)

The island's liminal location, in-between river and ocean, wilderness and civilisation, thus seems to open the door to the most uncanny phenomena, as is again made clear by the use of a lexicon pertaining to the realm of the mysterious: "something out of the common"; "funny goings on"; "exciting"; "appealed very forcibly to my imagination" (198).

If Stevenson's island in *The Beach of Falesá* is located within a well-defined web of trading networks and in a seemingly realistic universe, its windward side nevertheless remains unexplored, and is depicted as a similarly desert and enclaved space:

For the whole "eye" of the island, as natives call the windward end, lay desert. From Falesá round about to Papamalulu, there was neither house, nor man, nor planted fruit-tree; and the reef being mostly absent, and the shores bluff, the sea beat direct among crags, and there was scarce a landing-place. (Stevenson [1893] 2008, 47)

A triple negation ("neither... nor... nor") emphatically hammers out the absence of civilisation in this part of the island, and the stark contrast it offers with the rest of the island. It is all the more enclaved as it is extremely difficult to access by sea as well as by land, being periodically cut off from the rest of the island:

[A]t high water the sea broke right on the face of it, so that all passage was stopped. Woody mountains hemmed the passage all round; the barrier to the east was particularly steep and leafy. (45)

The lexical fields of boundaries and wilderness only reinforce this sense of isolation, which is again linked with supernatural occurrences, as the main character Wiltshire finds out when he asks one

of the island's inhabitants why there is no road going towards this part of the island:

Too much devil he stop there. [...] Man devil, women devil; too much devil [...]. Man he go there, no come back. (46)

The desert part of the island therefore becomes a gateway into the island's folklore, and allows Wiltshire to learn about its myths and legends thanks to the help of his native wife Uma.

#### 4 Marginal Zoologic and Generic Encounters

The fact that it should be divided in two spaces, the "realistic" part and the "magical" part, nevertheless highlights the hybridity of the island geography at the turn of the twentieth century, which mirrors Stevenson's aesthetic ambivalence towards realism. The very geography of the insular space therefore isomorphically reflects the text's generic oscillation and foregrounds the inevitable influence of the realist trend on the romance revival, a generic tension which Stevenson himself acknowledged:

I still think the fable too fantastic and far-fetched. But, on a re-reading, fell in love with my first chapter, and for good or evil I must finish it. It is really good, well fed with facts, true to the manners. (1917, 3: 309)

His hesitation between the marvellous and the realistic is mirrored in the novella's very structure, which starts off as what Stevenson called a "realistic South Sea story" (1917, 4: 95) centred around Wiltshire's trading outpost in Falesá and his encounter with the local population, but progressively moves towards the marvellous as the character begins to explore the wilder part of the island and discover its folklore. This essentially *geopoetic*<sup>6</sup> distinction between genres and modes eventually leads the narrative to oscillate between the two tendencies according to the characters' trajectories, and their proximity to the edge of the island's wilder part. The frontier separating the two parts indeed seems to fluidify the distinction between species as it provokes the appearance of strange and hybrid creatures, a phenomenon that Franco Moretti has deemed typical of the border space (2000, 53). This is precisely what happens to Uma when she goes "too near the margin of the bad place" (Stevenson [1893]

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<sup>6</sup> By *geopoetic*, I mean the correspondence between space and literary form, and the way they interact.

2008, 50) and has an encounter with a seemingly hybrid creature in a gloomy atmosphere that is also reminiscent of the Gothic genre:

It was a dark day in the rainy season, and now there came squalls that tore off the leaves and sent them flying, and now it was all still as in a house. [...] Presently after she heard a rustle nearer hand, and saw, coming out of the margin of the trees, among the mummy-apples, the appearance of a lean grey old boar. It seemed to think as it came, like a person; and all of a sudden, as she looked at it coming, she was aware it was no boar but a thing that was a man, with a man's thoughts. At that she ran, and the pig after her, and as the pig ran it holla'd aloud, so that the place rang with it. (50)

In this new form of South Sea Gothic, approaching the "margin" leads the characters and the readers to experience what Tzvetan Todorov defined as the fantastic hesitation,<sup>7</sup> insofar as when faced with an inexplicable occurrence, they are torn between the rational and the marvellous explanation. Indeed, Uma's inability to grasp this creature's essence is illustrated by the accumulation of indefinite nouns or pronouns ("it"; "a thing") and by the constant oscillation between animality and humanity ("boar"; "like a person"; "no boar"; "a thing that was a man"; "the pig"; "it holla'd"). The use of the comparison and of the subordinate clause highlight this duality and fantastic hesitation that prevent her (and the reader) from deciding on one interpretation or the other, leaving her in this in-between, liminal state of uncertainty and hybridity. When he eventually explores what lies beyond this margin, Wiltshire experiences a similar fluidity between the kingdoms, in a place that again appears as distinctively uncanny:

But the queerness of the place it's more difficult to tell of, unless to one who has been alone in the bush himself. The brightest kind of a day it is always dim down there. [...] It's all very well for him to tell himself that he's alone, bar trees and birds; he can't make out to believe it; whichever way he turns the whole place seems to be alive and looking on. (Stevenson [1893] 2008, 51)

The uncanniness of the scene makes it almost indescribable, and its surreal nature can only be expressed through the antithetical use of the superlatives "brightest" and "always dim", creating a *chiaroscuro* effect that is reminiscent of the Gothic genre. The entire for-

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<sup>7</sup> "The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (Todorov 1975, 25).

est then seems to come alive in a highly anthropomorphic way, as it is successively endowed with fingers (“like the fingers of your hand” (51)), eyes (“looking on”) and even a mouth, which utters a sad, melodic complaint:

[T]here came a sound of singing in the wind that I thought I had never heard the like of. It was all very fine to tell myself it was the branches; I knew better. It was all very fine to tell myself it was a bird; I knew never a bird that sang like that. It rose and swelled, and died away and swelled again; and now I thought it was like someone weeping, only prettier; and now I thought it was like harps; and there was one thing I made sure of, it was a sight too sweet to be wholesome in a place like that. (52)

The hesitation process is illustrated by the binary syntactical structure and anaphoric parallelisms, added to the paratactic use of semicolons that makes the passage appear all the more chaotic, thereby mirroring the character’s conflicted train of thought. Wiltshire’s initially rational mind is gradually affected by the place’s superstitions, and he convinces himself he is faced with some of the fiendish legendary creatures Uma has been telling him about: “I had made up my mind to see an *aitu*<sup>8</sup>” (52). The introduction of Polynesian folklore thus allows Stevenson to depart not only from realism but also from more traditional forms of Gothic and marvellous tales, which usually relied on Western folk tales and superstitions.

Yet a few lines later, the fantastic hesitation and tension are suddenly deflated through a comically anticlimactic scene, in which Wiltshire realises he has in fact been fooled by the stratagem his enemy Case has devised to frighten the natives by toying with their superstitions:

I caught another glimpse of the thing, and that relieved me, for I thought it seemed like a box, and when I had got right up to it I near fell out of the tree with laughing. A box it was, sure enough, and a candle-box at that, with the brand upon the side of it. (53)

The evil fiend is therefore not marvellous but entirely real, as he lies at the core of the other white man, which might make it even more threatening. If the choice of the fantastic allows Stevenson to reconcile the tale’s conflicting generic tendencies by permitting the occurrence of seemingly supernatural phenomena in an apparently realistic universe, the author eventually decides to resolve this tension and return to the realist mode thanks to a third generic shift, towards the modern genre of the detective story: Wiltshire finally solves Case’s

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8 A demon in the local language.

case<sup>9</sup> and stages its theatrical revelation to the island's inhabitants, so that all loose ends are neatly tied up and he can return, victorious, to his trading outpost.

We might therefore analyse the narrative sequences devoted to such liminal spaces as examples of what Suzanne Keen defines as “narrative annexes”, which imply the crossing of a spatial as well as a generic boundary, so that the tale enters a space where fictional and moral norms, which are traditionally marked by clear boundaries, appear blurred:

All narrative annexes possess a shift to a previously unrepresented place and a simultaneous alteration in narrative language that sends signals of adjusted genre. (1998, 2)

She moreover highlights the transgressive nature of such boundary-crossings, and the intricate link between space and form in the Victorian era:

Since boundaries, borders, and lines of demarcation evoke not only the long tradition of traversing an ever-altering imaginary terrain, but also the censorious language of the Victorian cultural watchdog, or the formal purist (often but not always the same person), they become a vital element of the novelist's manipulation of spatial difference and dramatic generic admixture to challenge representational norms. (3)

The concept of “narrative annexe” thereby clearly underlines the isomorphism between space and literary form in the works under study, the crossing of the island's fluid spatial boundaries allowing for a certain fluidity between the kingdoms but also between the genres. In *The Beach of Falesá*, this results in the consistent subversion and hybridisation of generic norms as the author successively draws on romance, realism, folktales, the fantastic, the Gothic, and even the detective story: even the apparently realist ending is debunked by the text's inconclusiveness as it ends on a question mark and on Wiltshire's uncertainty about his daughters' fate, thus leaving the question of the text's genre open.

Similarly, Conan Doyle's short story “The Fiend of the Cooperage” opens on a rather difficult boundary-crossing, as the narrator Captain Meldrum, who later introduces himself as a “lepidopterist—a butterfly-catcher” ([1897] 1924, 194), struggles to go from sea to river and reach the island's shore with his ship:

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<sup>9</sup> The onomastics is rather revealing here, as Case's very name seems to clearly point to the detective story intertext.



It was no easy matter to bring the *Gamecock* up to the island, for the river had swept down so much silt that the banks extended for many miles out into the Atlantic. (192)

This border-crossing also results in a generic switch, as what initially appeared as a realistic sea story or even a scientific travel narrative swiftly turns into a “romance” (196) and a “mystery” (200; 201; 202) as soon as the scientist sets foot on the island. In addition to the semantic field of the strange mentioned above, we note again a certain fluidity between the kingdoms which adds to the uncanny atmosphere of the island, through the metaphorical animalisation of the fog which makes it appear like a monstrous maritime creature:

I looked and saw long tentacles of white vapour writhing out from among the thick green underwood and crawling at us over the broad swirling surface of the brown river. (Conan Doyle [1897] 1924, 198)

In this place, which is associated from the start with “fever” and “bacilli” (193; 195), we are indeed very far from the *topos* of the Edenic island. Despite this uncanny atmosphere, the mystery initially seems to adhere to the realistic codes of a detective case, which can be solved through rational thinking and deduction: “I have a little mystery to unravel” (201); “I mean to find out to-night what the cause of it all may be” (202). One of the island’s inhabitant, Doctor Severall, then proceeds to tell the narrator about the consecutive disappearances of two watchmen in the island’s cooperage, which have led the natives to believe that “there is a fiend in the cooperage” who “claims a man every third night” (202).

If the Doctor and the lepidopterist, whose scientific education makes them appear as the embodiments of the modern faith in rationality, initially reject these superstitious “Voodoo tales” (202) which they oppose to “facts” (202) and “evidence” (206), the “unnatural gloom” (204) surrounding their “dreary”, “melancholy” (203) night in the cooperage appears particularly trying on their nerves. The silent candlelight wait, which is marked by the appearance of a mysterious shadow and a “monstrous”, roaring storm (207), is again highly reminiscent of the Gothic genre, so much so that when they eventually go back to the house and find their friend’s dislocated, boneless dead body, the mystery turns into a horrific tale, with an emphasis on feelings of fear and terror: “dreadful face”; “a thrill of horror” (208); “a cry of horror” (209). The protagonists’ inability to make sense of this death leads them to experience doubt and fantastic hesitation, as they are progressively infected with the local superstitious fears:

It beats me - beats me clean. I’ve heard of Voodoo devilry, and I’ve laughed at it with the others. But that poor old Walker, a decent,

God-fearing, nineteenth-century, Primrose-League Englishman should go under like this without a whole bone in his body – it's given me a shake, I won't deny it. (210)

The insistence on the character's epitomical Englishness and even Victorianness, through the enumeration of the Victorian man's typical attributes, must have made his death all the more horrific to the readers of the time, the process of identification bringing the events even closer to home. Moreover, the fact that the other two should be a scientist and a doctor makes the supernatural element even more compelling, as the reader cannot but trust these evidently reliable characters' narrative. The narrator's recurrent comments on the Doctor's practical, courageous nature ("a big, bluff, hearty man", 198); "a man of iron nerves", 205) make the next scene all the more horrific, as the two white men abandon all courage and decide to flee the island and paddle to the yacht: the occurrence of the preternatural in this remote part of the world thus allows the author to speak to the reader's deepest fears, by threatening the typical Englishman's manliness, rationality, and courage.

On approaching the yacht, the pair notices one of the crew members pointing towards the sea and as they look, they come face to face with a fiendish, monstrous creature:

A huge black tree trunk was coming down the river, its broad glistening back just lapped by the water. And in front of it – about three feet in front – arching upwards like the figure-head of a ship, there hung a dreadful face, swaying slowly from side to side. It was flattened, malignant, as large as a small beer-barrel, of a faded fungoid colour, but the neck which supported it was mottled with a dull yellow and black. As it flew past the Gamecock in the swirl of the waters I saw two immense coils roll up out of some great hollow in the tree, and the villainous head rose suddenly to the height of eight or ten feet, looking with dull, skin-covered eyes at the yacht. (211)

The alternate use of vocabulary pertaining to the vegetal, the animal and even the human world leads the reader to wonder about the essence of this hybrid, seemingly wooden monster: "tree trunk"/"back"; "figure-head"/"face"; "fungoid"/"neck"; "mottled"/"coils". At the border between sea and river, boat and island, the monstrous makes a swift and terrifying appearance into the "real" world, only to be immediately evicted by the doctor's rational explanation:

"It is our fiend of the cooperage," said Dr Several, and he had become in an instant the same bluff, self-confident man that he had been before. "Yes, that is the devil who has been haunting our island. It is the great python of the Gaboon". (211)

As a metatextual replica of the effective story-teller Conan Doyle is, the Doctor maintains the fantastic hesitation until the very last sentence, and toys with the same Gothic tropes the narrative has consistently relied on (“fiend”; “devil”; “haunting”) until he finally reveals this creature’s essence, and with it, the solution to the “case”. The python, living in a hollow tree, had been brought down from the “undiscovered country” (196) to the island’s shore by the previous flood, and satisfied its periodical appetite with the watchmen until it was driven away by the candlelights, and later by the storm. All the loose ends are neatly tied up and the figure of the brave Englishman in the tropics reinstated, yet the python’s monstrous, horrific image cannot but echo in the reader’s mind: perhaps the fact that it is real makes it all the more terrifying, leading to the creation of a new kind of exotic or even zoologic Gothic/detective story. This new, hybrid genre relies on a new form of “real” monster in order to produce a stronger effect on the jaded reader looking for fresh sensations, thus departing both from realism and from traditional island stories. Here again, the “narrative annexe” (Keen 1998, 2) results in a generic excursion into the realm of the fantastic and even the horrific which allows the author to subvert generic codes, only to return to the realistic norm as the narrator crosses the boundary again to get back aboard his ship.

Wells’s short-story “In the Avu Observatory” (1894) similarly relies on a kind of zoologic Gothic or scientific romance, as its location at the edge of Borneo’s virgin forest makes it appear from the very first page as a gateway for the appearance of strange, monstrous creatures:

[T]he cry of some strange animal was heard from the midst of the mystery of the forest. Nocturnal insects appeared in ghostly fashion out of the darkness, and fluttered round his light. He thought, perhaps, of all the possibilities of discovery that still lay in the black tangle beneath him; for to the naturalist the virgin forests of Borneo are still a wonderland full of strange questions and half-suspected discoveries. ([1894] 1927, 241)

The adjunction of the qualifiers “strange” and “ghostly” to these unknown creatures highlights the encounter between Gothic and zoology, with the same insistence on uncanny sounds and chiaroscuro effects resulting from the irruption of these queer yet very real creatures. The second sentence then presents the scientist as a new kind of explorer or adventure hero, and the island as the rich conservatory of wonderful, endemic species, thereby reflexively commenting on Wells’s attempt to reconcile romance and science through the use of this new kind of monsters.

Just like the previous narrative annexes<sup>10</sup>, the narrative sequence opens on a boundary-crossing, as the main character enters the observatory:

The lantern flared as Woodhouse entered his circular den, and the general darkness fled into black shadows behind the machine, from which it presently seemed to creep back over the whole place again as the light waned. (242)

Again, this crossing brings about a certain porousness between the kingdoms and between the human and the animal, as the term “den” likens Woodhouse to a wild animal, while the darkness itself comes to life through the use of the animal metaphor (“fled”; “creep back”). Like Conan Doyle, Wells recuperates the motif of the long nightly vigil, this time giving it not a detective but a scientific turn as the main character is preparing himself for a “watch upon the mysteries of space” (243). This vigil is again marked by its “whispering stillness” (243) and profound silence, except for the “shrill hum of a mosquito” (243) which, as in Conan Doyle’s story (“the shrill ping of an occasional mosquito”, [1897] 1924, 206), seems to be the tropical equivalent of the howling wind trope in more traditional Gothic tales. The setting of this uncannily still and dark atmosphere allows narrative tension to build so as to make the occurrence of the unexpected even more striking, pulling the character back from the abstract, “incorporeal” exploration of the “ether of space” (Wells [1894] 1927, 244) into the thick of life:

Infinitely remote was the faint red spot he was observing. Suddenly the stars were blotted out. A flash of blackness passed, and they were visible again. (244)

The protagonist’s first impulse is to provide a rational explanation for the uncanny phenomenon: “Queer. [...] Must have been a bird” (244). Yet the indefinite nature of the creature which then penetrates the entirely dark observatory leads the character to experience extreme uncertainty and horror due to his inability to grasp its essence, as is evidenced by the repeated use of indefinite nouns, adverbs and pronouns, and the proliferation of conflicting adjectives and substantives to describe it: “some huge vague black shape”; “the unknown creature”; “the thing, whatever it was”; “it was big, whatever else it might be”; “the beast, whatever it was”; “some strange bird-creature” (244). According to Roger Bozzetto, the essence of the fantastic lies precisely in this irruption of the indescribable into the real world,

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<sup>10</sup> As defined by Suzanne Keen in the passage cited above (1998, 2).

which causes the protagonist (and the reader) to experience uneasiness, terror and even horror, as they struggle with the limitations of signification (1998, 210). Again, Woodhouse tries to come up with a rational explanation for the occurrence, by tentatively naming the “thing”: “As his thought returned he concluded that it must be some night-bird or large bat” (Wells [1894] 1927, 245).

Thanks to the consistent use of internal focalisation, we are then given a rather impressionistic depiction of the creature, as it only appears in fleeting touches and dislocated parts to the eye of the focaliser who tries to light a match and get a glimpse of it: “a vast wing”; “a gleam of grey-brown fur”; “a claw”; “the outline of a head black against the starlight”; “sharply-pointed upstanding ears and a crest between them” (245). Woodhouse then resorts to comparisons in order to try to grasp the creature’s essence: “as big as a mastiff’s” (245); “like the ear of a big cat” (246). Finally, after a dreadful clinch with the beast he seems to have accepted the creature’s marvellous nature and uses term “monster” (247) to describe it, while later when telling his friend about it he returns to the fantastic hesitation as he cannot even name it, and just capitalises the word “Thing” (248). By turning the indefinite noun into a proper noun he essentialises the creature’s indefinite nature, thus reinforcing the horrific nature of the tale. As opposed to Conan Doyle’s story, the characters (and the readers) are not provided with a rational explanation but only with the local legends about the beast, so that the fantastic hesitation is never resolved: “The Dyak chaps talk about a Big Colugo, a Klangu-tang - whatever that may be” (Wells [1894] 1927, 249).

Woodhouse concludes the discussion and the narrative by adapting a famous line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, highlighting the limited nature of human knowledge:

There are more things in heaven and earth, [...] and more particularly in the forests of Borneo, than are dreamt of in our philosophies. On the whole, if the Borneo fauna is going to disgorge any more of its novelties upon me, I should prefer that it did so when I was not occupied in the observatory at night and alone. (Wells [1894] 1927, 249)

If Woodhouse’s light tone allows him to deflate some of the tension accumulated, this intertextual passage nevertheless highlights the thin boundary between rational “philosophies” and “dream[s]”, or between the natural and the supernatural, especially when you approach the margins of the unknown. Hence, scientific explorations within the island space allow Wells to explore the limits of realism through his use of romance but also fantastic and Gothic tropes while still somehow adhering not to naturalism, but to scientific realism, as Simon James notes:

Wells's romances are still made to engage with the real material conditions of existence by their adherence to not a naturalist, but a scientific realism, hence, "scientific romances". (2012, 12)

The use of internal focalisation questions the realist ideal of the omniscient, god-like narrator, as the last word is left to the character who refuses to resolve the fantastic hesitation. Unlike Stevenson's and Conan Doyle's narratives, which eventually presented the reader with a rational explanation for the uncanny phenomena encountered, the narrator here is unable to stabilise meaning and provide a definite answer, thus leaving the reader in a liminal state of fantastic hesitation.

Wells explored the liminality and generic plasticity of the island space time and again in his work, but perhaps the most striking example of this hybridising process can be found in his novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, published but a few years later (1896). This text is similarly presented from its paratextual threshold as a real travel narrative, being introduced narrator's nephew who claims to have found the manuscript in his uncle's papers. This typical device of the realist novel aims to prompt the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief"<sup>11</sup> by establishing the narrative's reliability, its veracity being guaranteed by the fact that we get the account first-hand from their main protagonist, Prendick, who emphasises his reliability from the narrative's very first page: "I have the best evidence for this assertion - I am one of the four men" (Wells [1896] 2005, 7). This apparent reliability is however immediately questioned by his tendency to contradict himself: "I must state that there never were four men in the dinghy; the number was three" (7). Moreover, if Prendick's nephew confirms the accuracy of the narrative's timeframe ("a date that tallies entirely with my uncle's story" (6)), he also immediately casts doubt on the narrator's reliability by introducing the possibility of his uncle's madness:

He gave such a strange account of himself that he was supposed demented. [...] His case was discussed among psychologists at the time. (5)

From its very threshold, the text thus tends to oscillate between reality and fiction, veracity and improbability, as the author uses the creative potential of the paratextual margin in order to undermine the narrative authority, and with it, the realist norm, by immediately locating the text in the midst of the fantastic hesitation. This generic ambivalence is precisely what Joseph Conrad pointed out when com-

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**11** To take up the famous phrase coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* ([1817] 1983, 6).

menting on the innovative nature of Wells's art: "Realist of the Fantastic, whether you like it or not" (cited in Kleiner 1997, 161), while Wells similarly praised Conrad's dual aesthetics in a review of his novel *An Outcast of the Islands*: "Surely this is real romance - the romance that is real!" (cited in Parrinder, Philmus 1980, 92).

Prendick's sojourn on the island thus appears as another narrative annexe, where the character seems to spatially leave the world (or at least, the known world) for a given period:

[M]y uncle passed out of human knowledge about latitude 5° S. and longitude 105° W., and reappeared in the same part of the ocean after a space of eleven months. (Wells [1896] 2005, 6)

The terms "passed out" and "space" emphasise the spatial nature of such a narrative excursion. The character moreover has to cross a spatial boundary in order to reach the island, being shipwrecked and then picked up by a schooner, only to be cast away again near the island's shore. The uncanny nature of the place and its inhabitants is introduced from this very crossing through Prendick's encounter with one of the island's hybrid inhabitants on the schooner. He first describes him as "man", but later underlines its "animal swiftness" and the uncanny nature of its haunting appearance, as it gradually becomes an indefinite "creature" in his eyes:

I had paused halfway through the hatchway, looking back, still astonished beyond measure at the grotesque ugliness of this black-faced creature. I had never beheld such a repulsive and extraordinary face before, and yet - if the contradiction is credible - I experienced at the same time an odd feeling that in some way I had already encountered exactly the features and gestures that now amazed me. (14)

The feeling experienced by Prendick corresponds to the exact definition of the psychological uncanny, defined by Freud as the combined perception of something marvellous but also strangely familiar, like a *déjà vu* impression ([1919] 1973), the hesitation leading the character to question the reliability or at least the verisimilitude of his own perceptions. The fantastic uncanny may therefore be interpreted as a way for the author to renew the traditional marvellous by moving it into the meanderings of the human psyche, and questioning the character's mastery over his own mind.

This spatial, generic and even psychological transition allows Prendick to enter a strange, "enchanted" island world peopled with monstrous creatures, as can be sensed through the lexical emphasis on the marvellous and the uncanny: "strange crew"; "elfin faces" (Wells [1896] 2005, 27); "grotesque-looking creatures"; "extraordi-

nary" (28); "uncanny voices" (33). The place's boundaries moreover appear rather blurry, an instability which Prendick opposes to stable, stereotypical representations of the desert island:

[B]ut in spite of the brilliant sunlight and the green fans of the trees waving in the soothing sea-breeze, the world was a confusion, blurred with drifting black and red phantasms. (38)

In this mutable, liminal world, torn between the real and the "phantasms", the boundaries between the kingdoms and the genres in turn become increasingly blurred, as its inhabitant Moreau first defines himself as "a biologist", and the island as "a biological station - of a sort" (29), only to later describe it through the prism of the fairy-tale: "Our little establishment here contains a secret or so, is a kind of Bluebeard's Chamber, in fact" (32). The tension between the rational world of science and the marvellous realm of the fairy-tale is particularly striking here, and hints at the narrative's generic hybridity. Indeed, Prendick cannot resist the temptation to symbolically open this "chamber", which results in another generic switch towards the genre of the detective story as he tries to solve the island's mystery in order to understand those hybrid creatures' essence: "What could it mean?" (35). He thus decides to explore the island and after crossing the margins of the woods, he comes upon another boundary, that of a river, and momentarily lingers there. As he hesitates, he falls into a transitory state between sleep and consciousness, thereby questioning the reality of what he then perceives: "I fell into a tranquil state midway between dozing and waking" (39).

This spatial and mental transition brings about another narrative annexe, this time into the realm of the fantastic, as Prendick (just like Wiltshire in *The Beach of Falesá*) experiences the uncanny feeling of a tropical forest coming alive:

I began to realize the hardihood of my expedition among these unknown people. The thicket about me became altered to my imagination. Every shadow became something more than a shadow, became an ambush, every rustle became a threat. Invisible things seemed watching me. (41)

Note his initial tendency to present himself as a typical imperial romance hero, only to immediately start doubting his own senses as he hesitates between the supernatural and the "natural" explanation, that of his madness or hallucinatory state:

I half-persuaded myself that my pursuer had abandoned the chase, or was a mere creation of my disordered imagination. [...] I thought my nerves were unstrung and that my imagination was tricking me. (45)



The fantastic hesitation, which is illustrated in the first sentence by the exclusive coordination, is later echoed by Moreau's acolyte Montgomery, who suggests a marvellous explanation for the occurrence whilst simultaneously hinting at Prendick's potential madness: "If you don't sleep tonight [...] you'll be off your head tomorrow"; "I'm thinking it was a bogle" (49). Instead of the genre of the ghost story, Prendick then chooses to invoke the mythological tradition to try to grasp the situation:

[Moreau] had merely intended [...] to fall upon me with a fate more horrible than death, with torture, and after torture the most hideous degradation it was possible to conceive – to send me off, a lost soul, a beast, to the rest of the Comus route. (52)

Comus was a sorcerer in Greek mythology, the son of the enchantress Circe (whose island was indeed peopled with animals that once were men): he was the leader of a band of creatures, men whom he had turned into hybrid monsters. Moreau's monsters thus appear as the modern, scientific version of these mythical hybrids, a combination underlined by Prendick's repeated use of the term "Satyr" to describe one of them (86), a "creature of ape and goat" (83). Indeed, Prendick later finds out that to achieve these (evidently failed) metamorphoses, Moreau did not resort to magic but to vivisection, and he did not actually attempt to turn men into animals but animals into men: if they are not mythical hybrids, they are nevertheless monsters, whom Jean-Michel Racault defines as the products of incomplete metamorphoses (2010, 79). These modern monsters indeed speak to eminently modern fears, as they echo the contemporary debate on vivisection and the threat of an unethical use of science, but also the Victorian fear of evolutionary regression. From marvellous hybrids to scientific monsters, the island yet remains the ideal place to perform such metamorphoses, due to its extreme isolation, and its consequent ability to suspend natural laws and fluidify the boundary between the real and the imaginary: "I remember the green stillness of the island and the empty ocean about us as though it was yesterday. The place seemed waiting for me" (Wells [1896] 2005, 75), remarks Moreau when explaining how he came to settle on the island.

Yet in this case, Prendick's return to the "real" world does not lead to a return to the norm, as he lives as an outcast "near the broad free downland" (130) and is still haunted by the island and its grotesque "Beast People", which seem to have awakened the monster lurking within the chamber of his brain:

And it even seemed that I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain, that sent it to wander alone like a sheep stricken with the gid. (131)

The question of his potential madness thus remains open, leaving the reader in this fantastic oscillation and questioning the realist norm of textual closure: as Paul Ricoeur suggested, one might interpret this destabilisation of the character's identity and of the text's closure as proof of the narrative's modernity (1990, 177).

## 5 Conclusion

Due to its liminal, remote nature, the island appears as the ideal place for the irruption of the marvellous within a seemingly realistic universe, serving for a range of *fin de siècle* writers as a reservoir for mysterious monsters and strange creatures. This in turn makes them the perfect setting in which to revive imaginative literature whilst simultaneously renewing it, thanks to various types of generic mutations: if Stevenson finds new fiends and hybrids in Polynesian folklore, Conan Doyle and Wells explore the narrative possibilities offered by endemic zoology and scientific exploration, through the encounter with unknown yet potentially real or even manufactured creatures in these marginal islands. The excursion into the fantastic, in particular, allows authors to dwell in this in-between literary space, at the crossroads between realism and romance, and to challenge representational norms. This dialogic<sup>12</sup> process underlines the powerful creative potential of the insular "narrative annexe", and the intricate geopoetic link between space and literary form at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet some texts, in particular Wells's, go further than the others in this process of modernisation, and eventually leave the reader in this discomfiting yet delightful state of uncertainty by refusing to shut the door on these hybrid textual monsters.

Moreau's exploration of "the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape" (Wells [1896] 2005, 75) may therefore aptly mirror the writers' efforts to explore the limits of generic and aesthetic plasticity in their insular laboratories. If Moreau can be considered as a meta-textual image of the artist<sup>13</sup>, "these strange creations of Moreau's art" (81) might be read as metonymies for the authors' queer tales, insofar as their creators explore the plasticity of the island narrative form and consistently dissect typical insular motifs to create hybrid literary "monsters". If Simon James suggested that "Wells himself is happy to murder romantic tropes to dissect them" (2012, 15), it is

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<sup>12</sup> To take up the term Mikhail Bakhtin uses to refer to this process of intertextual dialogue, which he studies in his work entitled *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981).

<sup>13</sup> "I suppose there is something in the human form that appeals to the artistic turn of mind" (Wells [1896] 2005, 73) ; "[he was] well known in the scientific circles for his extraordinary imagination" (34).

my contention that in fact the authors do not murder these tropes so much as they vivisection them, to paradoxically breathe new life into them through this highly reflexive hybridisation process. This leads to the creation of what Huntington described as a “new form” (1982, 11), which feeds on the aesthetic potential of the insular margin to go beyond generic limitations and create utterly heterogeneous literary objects.

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# Realism and the Supernatural in Ghost Stories of the *Fin de Siècle*

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**Abstract** This article examines the uses of realism in *fin-de-siècle* ghost stories by Vernon Lee, Ella D'Arcy, Rudyard Kipling, and Gertrude Atherton. It argues that forms of realist practice were central to the sophistication of these stories, and draws connections between their use in supernatural fiction and the work of modernists such as Joseph Conrad. Examining works from the late 1880s to 1905, it maintains that the dismissal of realism by modernists such as Woolf underestimated its importance and its versatility, and that the ghost story's importance as a vehicle for literary experiment is insufficiently acknowledged.

**Keywords** Ghost Story. Realism. Supernatural. Henry James. Virginia Woolf. Rudyard Kipling. Joseph Conrad.

**Summary** 1 Realism's Shadowy Realms. – 2 Vernon Lee, 'Amour Dure'. – 3 Ella D'Arcy, 'The Villa Lucienne'. – 4 Rudyard Kipling, "They". – 5 Gertrude Atherton, "The Bell in the Fog". – 6 Some Conclusions.



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## 1 Realism's Shadowy Realms

When Virginia Woolf caricatured the realist practices of Georgian novelists in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, she focused on what she saw as their overriding concern with external detail and insisted that their outdated 'tools' were 'useless' for the generation which followed them (Woolf 1924, 17). For Woolf and other modernists, fiction needed to engage with the processes of thought rather than merely summarising its content, a view which encouraged the development of techniques for representing interiority, most strikingly the stream-of-consciousness seen in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and her own *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Those such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H.G. Wells (whom Woolf was treating as the author of novels such as *Ann Veronica*, 1909, rather than scientific romances) were pursuing an outdated concern with exactitude that left their pages as cluttered as the columns of a Victorian newspaper. This reliance on an exteriority that constantly demonstrated its undermining imprecision was a dead end. To embellish Woolf's charges against Bennett, why tell the reader that a woman is wearing a blue hat when it is what she is thinking that really matters? In addition, the adjectival colour can only be an approximation, a rough gesture towards the subjective perception of chromatic subtleties rather than an accurate representation of them. Sherlock Holmes and his many rivals would have appreciated the significance and meaning of the hat's colour, but Woolf was not much interested in realism's causal plotting or in the ways in which the close analysis of apparently insignificant information could impact upon narrative development. 'Moments of being' were more important than pages of ratiocination, for, as she famously insisted in "Modern Fiction" (1925), life was elusive and impressionistic, not "a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arrayed" but "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf 2008, 9). Woolf admitted that her essay contained "some very sweeping and some very vague assertions" (Woolf 1924, 4), but her contemporary Mary Butts went further still. "Like the best of us, I am sick of realism", she wrote in her journal in December 1919. "I can do it down to the 'curl of the eyelash'" (Butts 2002, 124).

Ironically, Woolf's desire for new approaches and Butts' dismissal of Victorian (and post-Victorian) realist aesthetics only reasserted the fundamental importance of accurate representations of daily reality and lived experience. The search for these had fascinated English novelists since Crusoe set foot on his island in 1719 and led Woolf to much admire George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872). The debate about the 'new' realism also confined itself to 'advanced' or, at very least, self-consciously 'literary' fiction rather than acknowledging Woolf's own interests in the ghost story. In the highly accomplished

supernatural tales of Henry James in particular, Woolf had already seen a form of writing which was 'realist' in its depiction of setting and protagonists, yet experimental in its treatment of narrative viewpoint and psychology. It also balanced the relationship between plot and character, a topic which had of course obsessed James throughout his career. A story such as "The Friends of the Friends" (1896, which James retitled "The Way It Came" in 1909) offered a challenge to realist empiricism in its engagement with the world of the unseen and fantastical and its willingness to imply the existence of the supernatural, or, at very least, to consider events for which science had yet to provide a rational explanation.

In his many 'tales', James found ways to move fluidly between different types of subject matter. "The Jolly Corner" (1908), for example, utilises certain tropes of popular fiction such as mysterious houses, doppelgangers, and haunting but combines them with sophisticated meditations on ageing, choice, the formation of personality and, slyly, the life James himself might have led had he remained in the eastern United States instead of moving to England. The narration is alert to the slightest nuances of character and perception, immersing the reader in the sensibility and psychology of Spencer Brydon, while yet balancing the delineation of his inner life with the wider concerns of the narrative. In his private notebooks and the ruminative prefaces to the New York Edition of his collected works (1907-09), James dwelled endlessly on the complex relationship between what happens, how it happens, and how it affects those involved in the events. In doing so, he evolved a form of psychological realism which would prove highly influential for a certain type of supernatural fiction, one written by authors who also produced work which ranged from social comedy to fantasy and horror. As with him, it was often the latter styles which encouraged notable innovation and risk-taking, in part because of the challenge of presenting encounters with supernatural forces in a believable and convincing manner.

The four stories discussed here are by writers who knew James well. Vernon Lee, author of "Amour Dure" (1890), was initially an admirer of his fiction, though their relations cooled after she caricatured him as 'Jervase Marion' in "Lady Tal", a satirical novella from the perhaps ironically titled *Vanitas: Polite Stories* (1892). Ella D'Arcy, best known for her editorial assistance on the magazine, *The Yellow Book* (1894-97), worked closely with its literary editor, Henry Harland, whose admiration for James verged on idolatry. D'Arcy was less effusive, but there is a strong Jamesian presence in her *Monochromes* (1895) and *Modern Instances* (1898) - Wells felt she was "remarkably promising", and even at times, James's superior, possessing "imagination and insight" and "valu[ing] restraint" (Wells 1895, 731). Her brief but chilling story "The Villa Lucienne" (1896) shows her flair for descriptive language as well as icy detachment. James was a witness



at the marriage of Rudyard and Carrie Kipling in January 1892, and though he did not share the younger man's imperialist sympathies, they pursued a common interest in the mechanics of fiction and storytelling. Kipling's "They" (1904) is as sophisticated and original as any ghost story in English, making use of a characterisation tendency James had used in tales such as "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" (1884) and "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896). Finally, the American novelist, Gertrude Atherton, dedicated the title story of her collection, *The Bell in the Fog* to 'The Master, Henry James' in 1905. Offered as an act of homage and friendship, it is shot through with more troubling undertones, presenting a version of James which, to modern readers, may not look quite as flattering as she intended.

In 'mainstream' or 'literary' fiction of the *fin de siècle*, writers use versions of realism to present their readers with a believable version of the world they evoked. Some, George Gissing for example, itemised effects and domestic details to present the all-too-recognisable interiors also seen in the stage directions of Ibsen or Shaw. Others used it as Conrad did in the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), "to make you see" (Conrad 1977, 13) and hence accept experiences far outside their usual orbit. British readers of *Heart of Darkness* (1902) may, like Marlow, have had an awkward conversation beside the drawing-room piano but few would have seen a jungle stockade surrounded by severed heads. Realism was flexible enough to accommodate the apparently insignificant details of a Sherlock Holmes investigation and the complex psychology of Isabel Archer in James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). In the world of fantasy and what might now be termed 'genre fiction' however, realism's authenticating strategies fulfilled another role by encouraging readers to believe in events and situations which were either wildly implausible (the effects of a Martian invasion on the citizens of South-East England) or inexplicable by the laws of contemporary science. It was in the shadowy realm between the possible and the believable that the ghost story sought to operate.

One obvious strategy of authentication in ghostly tales was the use of a narrator who immediately confessed the implausibility of their story and/or emphasised their humdrum life and lack of imagination. The argument of such fictions was that because the narrator never had curious experiences and was incapable of inventing them, what they related must therefore have occurred. This tactic allowed the narrator to emerge as an eyewitness to the extraordinary, and when paired with convincing characterisation, invested even the unlikely tales with a patina of authenticity. Nevertheless, it remained a blunt instrument that relied more on narratorial assertions than the evocation of something the reader might judge for themselves. The widespread use of this technique was also, in part, a consequence of magazine publication, in that a periodical's preferred limits (of-

ten less than 4000 words) did not encourage the depth of “The Jolly Corner” or Oliver Onions’ “The Beckoning Fair One” (1911). Only the more prestigious periodicals – *The Yellow Book*, *Scribner’s*, *Blackwood’s* – allowed lengthier stories which could provide the psychological richness of novels. In essence therefore, the ‘unimaginative narrator’ was a useful convention rather than anything more ambitious, a device which allowed a story to be told simply and directly. There were those who were able to use the formula to impressive effect, with Edith Nesbit’s “Man-Size in Marble” (1887) employing a horrific denouement to undercut the narrator’s initial claim that his tale will not be believed, and Wells using a clever dialogue between the ‘ordinary’ narrator and his friend, a man of ‘vision and the imagination’ in the richly ambiguous “The Door in the Wall” (1906) (Wells 2004, 298), but it was all too often no more than a convenience.

## 2 Vernon Lee, “Amour Dure”

More ambitious writers, or those with an eye for the development of the short story’s aesthetic rather than commercial possibilities, acknowledged the usefulness of such conventions but sought other ways of extending the realist compass. Vernon Lee’s “Amour Dure”, from *Hauntings* (1890) is unafraid to tell its story through diary entries, a tactic which links it with much older examples of Gothic writing. However, Lee’s use of the diary is not the relatively simple detailing of events through selective chronology used in the more crudely plot-driven examples of the genre. She instead uses the freedom of the journal format to explore her diarist’s developing (or degenerating) character and to break away from neatly demarcated chapters or sub-sections. By titling the story, “Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka”, Lee frees herself from straightforward linearity, presenting the young man’s life as a series of moments, tableaux, and meditations shaped by an unknown editor. Entries are of varying lengths, some being relatively focused, others being more akin to letters sent to the self, intimate confessions which reveal the growing division between the diarist’s public and private personae. An ambitious young historian, a man trained to observe and analyse and to persuade his readers that his interpretations are the correct ones, Trepka is a fusion of the ‘unimaginative’ narrator and the repressed sensualist who is more open to visionary experience than he realises, something Lee exploits brilliantly as we see the young man moving from an academic interest in a Lucrezia Borgia-like *femme fatale* to an increasingly obsessive vulnerability to her continued charms. Diaries and journals typically allow for a single viewpoint (other viewpoints recorded by the diarist being reshaped in their own image), but Lee complicates this position by giving us Trepka’s engagement

with the historical record, an 'official' or nominally objective voice from which his own becomes progressively divergent, not simply because he is engaged in a professional argument (as he first believes) but because the spirit of Medea da Carpi seems to be possessing him. At one point he even asks himself, "Am I turning novelist instead of historian?" (Lee 2006a, 55). Sondeep Kandola notes how the story "links the purported supernatural encounter to the protagonist's disturbed sense of his own national and cultural dislocation" (Kandola 2010, 43), seeing Trepka (who is Polish) as struggling against a German historiographic tradition, but one should also observe how, like other visitors from the austere north in *fin-de-siècle* literature from Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) to Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912), his asceticism makes him at once suspicious towards and desirous of Latinate sensuality, idealising Lucrezia Borgia, Vittoria Accoramboni, and Medea da Carpi but scorning "Italian womankind, its shrill voice, its gaudy toilettes" (54). Christa Zorn has read "Amour Dure" as Lee's response to Walter Pater's study of the *Mona Lisa* (2003), while Patricia Pulham adopts a psychoanalytical position in examining Medea as "a variation of the phallic mother" (Pulham 2008, 124). Martha Vicinus's brilliant essay "Vernon Lee and the Art of Nostalgia" (2004) "explores the desire for and fear of merging with the beloved" in analysing how Trepka becomes "dominated by his fantasy" of the past (Vicinus 2004, 611-12). None of these critics however treat the story as evidence of Lee's skilful use of psychological realism, something which is the basis of its irresolvable ambiguity. Is 'Amour Dure' an account of Trepka's gradual breakdown through overwork and sexual frustration, or is it a ghost story in which a genuine and thoroughly malign supernatural force leads its protagonist to first vandalise a historic monument and then be murdered by person or persons unknown?

As early as 1880, Lee was speculating at some length on the relationship between "our creative power and our imaginative faculty" (Lee 2006b, 294). In "Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art", she argued that "the supernatural is necessarily essentially vague" whereas "art is necessarily essentially distinct: give shape to the vague and it ceases to exist" (295). When artists and writers "narrate the supernatural", she maintained, they turn "phantoms into mere creatures of flesh and blood" (296). For her, the supernatural was "nothing but ever-renewed impressions, ever shifting fancies" (304). Art, by contrast, defined, embodied, analysed and synthesised its materials, and artistic embodiment banished the supernatural by transforming it into mere pictorial or verbal arrangements. In the face of this, she concluded, the "stories which affect us most" are "those in which the ghost is heard but not seen" (310). Rather than seeking a definitive representation, a writer or painter should offer their interpreter a series of cues which prompt the im-

agination to conjure that which cannot be embodied and, as Maxwell and Pulham observe, respond to “associations that trigger imaginative recreation” (Maxwell, Pulham 2006, 13). Lee returned to this idea in her preface to *Hauntings*, though she distinguished between accounts of ‘true’ ghosts and the behaviour of ghosts in fiction, and pointed out that the dogged investigations of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and literary invention were diametrically opposed to one another. ‘Real’ ghosts were rarely the basis of compelling narratives, as could be seen from the SPR’s monumental *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), and in essence, showed a writer exactly how *not* to tell a ghostly tale. To invest a story with the “strange perfume of witch-garden flowers” (Lee in Maxwell, Pulham 2006, 39) required invention and a highly evolved handling of the nuances of atmosphere and language.

By contrast, the SPR’s investigators sought to measure, document, and authenticate like ghost-hunting Gradgrinds. The difficulty for a writer was to create an environment or setting in which the supernatural could manifest itself while leaving the reader space for the exercise of their own imagination. “Amour Dure” responded to this by offering a seductively believable account of Trepka’s moods, fascinations, and desires which made full use of the expansive word limits offered by the opening number of *Murray’s Magazine* in 1887. Whether the ghost of Medea da Carpi appears to him is less important than the fact that he is haunted by her, fantasising about her appearance, savouring her erotic allure, and unwittingly allowing these considerations to shape both his behaviour and his academic investigations. Long before Julian Wolfreys was insisting that in such stories, haunting is ‘irreducible to the apparition’ (Wolfreys 2002, 6) and far more than merely seeing a ghost, Lee was explaining that “by *ghost* we do not mean the vulgar apparition which is seen or heard in told or written tales” but “the ghost which slowly rises up in our mind, the haunter not of corridors and staircases, but of our fancies” (Lee 2006b, 309-10; emphasis in original). This deep embedding of the ghost within the innermost thoughts of the haunted is what makes Trepka’s journal so compelling.

Lee’s interest in the supernatural was not confined to ghost stories. Elsewhere, she depicted the return of pagan deities in “Dionea” (1890) and “Marsyas in Flanders” (1900), a Lamia-like figure imprisoned in a tapestry in “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady” (1896) and an item of terrifying *bric-à-brac*, “The Doll” (1900). These tales have attracted considerable scholarly attention since the revival of interest in Lee began in the early 2000s and the publication of an excellent critical edition of *Hauntings*, edited by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham in 2006. Welcome as this renewed scholarly attention has been, it has to some extent overshadowed a number of equally interesting texts by Lee’s contemporaries. One of the

most intriguing of these is a story which immediately preceded Lee's "Prince Alberic" in the *Yellow Book's* July 1896 volume, Ella D'Arcy's "The Villa Lucienne".

### 3 Ella D'Arcy, "The Villa Lucienne"

"The Villa Lucienne" was the second of a pair of D'Arcy's tales in Volume X, billed on the contents page as "Two Stories" and subsequently collected in *Modern Instances*. The first of these, "The Death Mask", was a decadent parable about the beauty or otherwise of macabre subject matter, but the second was rather different and undoubtedly a very chilly tale to offer the magazine's readers on a summer afternoon. Set in a sunny but frigid December in Mediterranean France, it is a richly evocative vignette, sparsely plotted and reluctant to explain itself.

The dramatic situation is a simple one. A group of women visit a neglected house one of them is considering renting, but the building's sinister atmosphere makes them uneasy and forces them to flee. Typically, a story of this kind has a 'buried' narrative beneath the surface events, but D'Arcy's characters never discover what gives the villa its menacing aspect, or who the young daughter of one of them sees rising from a dilapidated armchair. She is, apparently, "an old lady like Grandma" who "got up and began to - to come - ", but at this point the 'nervous and excitable child' starts to cry and the woman's identity and fate remain unknown, the reason why she haunts the summerhouse a mystery. "We made enquiries", says the narrator, "but we learned very little, and that little was so vague, so remote, so irrelevant, that it does not seem worth while repeating" (D'Arcy 1896, 285).

D'Arcy's story is a striking mixture of the innovative and the traditional. The mechanics of the narrator's reminiscence are fairly familiar, with the opening sentence the apparently artless admission, "Madame Coetlegon told the story" (274). Ingredients such as the menacing peasant and the heightened susceptibility of children and animals to the supernatural are almost hackneyed, but D'Arcy's willingness to withhold information and refer to 'off stage' events which the story never explains (such as the fate of 'poor Guy', the husband of one of the women) allies the story with the work of James, Kipling, Harland, and *Yellow Book* contributors such as Hubert Crackanthorpe and George Egerton. D'Arcy's storyteller does not tell her listeners what they know already simply to pass this information to the reader. As such, she breaks all manner of Victorian fiction's informal conventions, notably the generally understood promise that if the reader continues with a narrative their patience and forbearance will eventually be rewarded through revelation and closure. This may have been essential in winning a reader's loyalty towards a three-decker

novel from a circulating library or purchasing instalments of a serial, but the *Yellow Book* played by very different rules. In a waspish editorial in the same issue as “The Villa Lucienne”, Harland donned the garb of his alter ego, ‘The Yellow Dwarf’, and divided contemporary writers into two species: dogs and cats. The dogs, generally the more commercially successful, by and large conformed to Victorian expectations, but the cats, led by Henry James, anticipated Kipling’s “The Cat That Walked by Himself” (1902) in disdaining any cosiness and predictability. Rather than giving an audience what it wanted and compromise their artistic integrity, Harland’s cats wrote according to their own tastes, instinctively apprehending the impossibility of a mass readership for their subtle and personal effusions. If one may borrow the choice presented to Kipling’s cat, they scorned the comforts of the cave, that is, commercial success, in favour of the “wild wet woods” (Kipling 1902, 197) of artistic freedom. Harland regarded himself as feline, referring to his short story collection, *Grey Roses* (1895) as “very pretty Grey Kittens” (Harland 1896, 17). Unsurprisingly, he saw D’Arcy, his editorial assistant, in similar terms.

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of “The Villa Lucienne” is its vivid descriptive language. Like James, D’Arcy could craft a long and sinuous sentence clotted with polysyllables and far removed from the journalistic briskness of a weird tale by Wells or E.F. Benson. Madame Coetlegon tells the story “so well that her audience seemed to know the sombre alley, the neglected garden, the shuttered house, as intimately as though they had visited it themselves” (D’Arcy 1896, 274). Such are her powers of evocation that the listeners feel “a faint reverberation of the incommunicable thrill” (275) – a notably Jamesian phrase – experienced by those who were there in person as they made their way through:

A tangled matting of greenery, that suffered no drop of sunlight to trickle through. The ground was covered with lichens, death-stools, and a spongy moss exuding water beneath the root, and one had the consciousness that the whole place, floor, walls, and roof, must creep with all the repulsive, slimy, running life, which pullulates in dark and slimy places. (277)

The verbal luxuriance here is ‘decadent’ in the sense that it has become over-ripe, rotten, just as the house and its gardens have decayed into tenebrous deliquescence and ‘pullulation’. The same textual density might be found in Poe (in, say, the opening sentence of “The Fall of the House of Usher”, 1839), Pater, or Arthur Machen – it is beautifully controlled throughout the story and creates an immersive atmosphere of lurking evil, the more so for its source being unrevealed. D’Arcy’s descriptions exploit the resources of adjectives and adverbs to the full, creating a story which, though perhaps at

odds with later tastes for more direct and active writing, is powerfully evocative. In its brief compass, “The Villa Lucienne” manages an ingenious blend of familiar Gothic ingredients with newer ideas of narrative form, its refusal to allow closure and explanation recalling the records of ghostly encounters collated by the SPR, yet its language echoing the stylised, unapologetically literary manner of Lee’s foreword to *Hauntings*. “And yet, as you will see,” the narrator begins, “there is in reality no story at all”. It is “merely an account” of a visit to the old Villa, nothing more (275).

He may not have numbered Kipling among his “dogs”, but ‘The Yellow Dwarf’ nonetheless disliked his jingoistic politics, his fondness for vernacular speech and, very probably, his widespread popularity and its accompanying financial rewards. Yet, while decadent writers such as Harland often professed to abhor Kipling (and he was equally forthright in his dislike of “long-haired things | In velvet collar rolls” and those “who muddled with books and pictures” (Kipling 2013, 1319; Kipling 1940, 132), the two camps had more in common than they liked to admit where narrative experimentation was concerned. Kipling’s fondness for elliptical presentation of events, displayed in stories such as the perennially puzzling “Mrs Bathurst” (1904), was predicated upon what he called “the Higher Editing” which was rigorous to the point of obsession (Kipling 1937, 208). “[A] tale from which pieces have been raked out is like a fire which has been poked”, he wrote in *Something of Myself* (207). We know little of D’Arcy’s compositional practice, but one might surmise that her slow rate of production (and the fact that she published little) was due not to her laziness, as gossips muttered during the 1890s, but to a determination to polish her work to perfection. “The Villa Lucienne” follows Kipling in its concision and reluctance to explain itself, its emphasis being on the fear the women felt rather than any underlying cause. Unlike many Victorian ghost stories, it does not have an epilogue whereby someone returns to the Villa and discovers its past, and even its framing device leaves a great deal unsaid. What became of Guy, why he excelled in “the crystallisation of those subtle, unformulated emotions” (D’Arcy 1896, 285), how the little girl coped with her traumatic experience and what has become of the Villa since the women visited it are questions D’Arcy refuses to answer.

#### 4 Rudyard Kipling, “They”

Reticence was something *The Yellow Book* had explored in its first two issues, with Crackanthorpe responding to the opening number’s “Reticence in Literature” by Arthur Waugh with a similarly titled piece three months later. Crackanthorpe argued that artists should not restrict their choice of subject matter for nothing was aestheti-

cally irredeemable. What mattered was the ability to transform the sordid, the distressing, or the macabre into something artistically satisfying. Moral considerations and didacticism were less important than the writer's own aesthetic sophistication; in short, it was the judgement of the individual, rather than the shibboleths of Victorian society, which were the ultimate means of measuring a work's worth and success. Kipling certainly did not ally himself with decadents such as Crackanhorpe, yet his own approach was not unlike what the younger writer advocated. Kipling regularly shocked his readers with the violent, the uncouth, and the morally troubling, especially in stories such as "The Mark of the Beast" or "Georgie-Porgie" (1891) which revealed the underlying horrors of the imperial project, but he was secure in his belief that such stories needed to be told (he had, of course, begun his career as a journalist) and that his methods were the most appropriate for his message.

Kipling's stories were not always openly controversial. "They", first published in *Scribner's Magazine* in August 1904 and collected in *Traffics and Discoveries* later that year, is a work of great emotional power, not least because the subtlety of its denouement delays its impact. A wealthy man drives his new motor car aimlessly around the Sussex countryside until it breaks down in the grounds of a beautiful old manor house. Here a blind woman leads a mysterious existence, seemingly surrounded by children who play in the grounds but stay away from the narrator as he watches them flitting among the trees and topiary. When, on his third and final visit to the house, an unseen child takes and kisses his hand, the woman's secret is revealed. The children are ghosts, and only those who are themselves bereaved parents may witness them. The narrator has lost his daughter – and maybe his wife too. His daughter's touch is one of consolation but also of parting, for after it, the narrator knows that he cannot return to the house and must drive away alone.

The story's evocative power comes in part from its use of locations with which Kipling was intimately familiar. The description of the old woman's house recalls Bateman's, Kipling's own residence, while the woman herself has elements of Kipling's sister Alice, a psychic known professionally as "Mrs Holland". Kipling spent many hours driving around Sussex in his Lanchester, though his poor eyesight meant that he had a chauffeur, unlike the intrepid motorist of the story. Most tragically, the narrator's loss of his daughter was shared by his creator, Kipling's beloved Josephine, to whom he told the original "Just So Stories", having died aged only six in 1899. To these ingredients however, Kipling adds folkloric motifs (the dead children's euphemistic "walking in the wood"), deploys the 'rule of three' as a structuring principle, and makes the woman a recognisable archetype, the blind seer whose lack of literal sight only intensifies her visionary powers. References to the narrator having come from "the other side of the county" (Kipling 1904,



329) suggest symbolic as well as literal meaning, the phrase echoing the contemporary language of spiritualism and *Hamlet's* notion of the 'undiscovered country', while the overlaying of the events as they happen (a child's illness, the blind woman's tussle with a swindling tenant) with the underlying relationship between the narrator and the inhabitants of the mysterious house give us a sense of them occurring on two planes simultaneously. Also notable (and less remarked upon by earlier critics), is the way in which the narrator reveals so little about himself. His refusal to admit or acknowledge his loss and grief leave him susceptible to the supernatural presences which haunt the house and surrounding woodland. Only slowly do we realise that his aimless driving along lonely roads is his conscious removal of himself from the site of domestic tragedy: he does not want to be at home.

This sense of a narrator who talks about everything other than his powerful emotions is not simply an example of a repressed Englishman exercising the power of his stiff upper lip, but an awareness of the ways in which people cannot articulate or even consciously realise their innermost cravings. To give two examples, the narrator of "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" is apparently unaware of the powerful erotic feelings he holds for Mark Ambient, even though his choice of words (as well as his behaviour) betrays them at every turn, while the obsessive critic of "The Figure in the Carpet" applies his hermeneutic lens to the smallest details of Hugh Vereker's fiction without ever turning it upon his own character.

Of course, James did not have a monopoly on such figures. Similar patterns of displacement occur in works by his friends Wells and Conrad, such as the moment when Lionel Wallace finds himself resisting the lure of the portal by itemising "a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes" and other detritus outside a plumber and decorator's shop in "The Door in the Wall" (Wells 2004, 286), or, more notably, the moment in *Heart of Darkness*, when, reeling from the existential horrors of his encounter with the dying Kurtz, Marlow immerses himself in the familiar practicalities of mechanical itemisation, tending "the little forge" on the steamship and "helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting rod". This "toil[ing] wearily in a wretched scrap-heap" (Conrad 1995, 111) reveals a determination to control what can be controlled as a bulwark against ungovernable emotional forces, and it is shown in Kipling's story when the narrator's car breaks down. The mechanical fault could be rectified quite simply, but the narrator insists on laying out his various tools on the grass around the car as the "glittering shop of my repair kit [...] a trap to catch all childhood" (Kipling 1904, 313). His underlying need for the children's presence conveys, obliquely, the absence of them from his own life, but rather than admitting that, he concentrates on repairing the vehicle, just as later in the story he places his driving skills at the service of the strick-

en child rather than considering her likely fate or the parallels with his daughter. These incidents provide convincing illustrations of the ways by which people win themselves 'breathing space' in moments of stress and anxiety.

As elsewhere in his work, Kipling's treatment of the supernatural in "They" embeds the ghostly in everyday detail and imbues apparently insignificant occurrences with psychological depth. There is a sense of an encounter with the supernatural being a shared experience like it was in "The Villa Lucienne"; the narrator, the blind woman, and her servant all observe the children at different points of the story. The out-of-the-way rural setting, the folkloric touches, and the many uses of authenticating physical and psychological information produce a tale which is at once tragic and curiously consoling, with "They" belonging to a select group of ghost stories, E.F. Benson's "How Fear Departed from the Long Gallery" (1912) for instance, which use the supernatural less to frighten than to offer solace.

Each of these stories showed how flexible an instrument realism could be when used by a skilful and original writer. Lee, D'Arcy and Kipling mixed establishing and authenticating detail with psychological depth, not least in leaving so much unsaid. Their protagonists are all unable to provide a definitive and 'closed' account of events. Trepka is murdered, perhaps by the reborn Medea da Carpi, while Kipling's motorist is last seen leaving the old manor house rather than subsequently reflecting on his experiences there. Even D'Arcy's narrator, who stands at a safer distance from the events she recounts, reveals little of herself or her companions, concentrating instead on telling the story with rich descriptive effects that promote the same fear in her listeners as she and her friends experienced. All of them use techniques associated, to a greater or lesser extent, with Henry James, but the final story considered here, Gertrude Atherton's "The Bell in the Fog" is slightly different in that it depicts a version of James himself, one wrapped in the familiar accoutrements of his later fiction - art, wealthy bachelors, Americans in Europe, an historic stately home - but with an underlying suggestion of reincarnation or generational repetition.

## 5 Gertrude Atherton, "The Bell in the Fog"

The story of Ralph Orth is a peculiar tribute to James, though unlike Forrest Reid's dedication of *The Garden God* to him the same year, it did not result in a sundering of friendship. It portrays him as a writer of remarkable subtlety who has, while unappreciated by the multitude, a core of devoted readers who recognise the sophistication and intelligence of his art. However, it also depicts "a rather lonely man" (Atherton 1905, 7) who, adrift in his aptly named mansion, Chilling-

shurst, becomes fascinated by the two-hundred-year-old portraits of “a gallant little lad in the green costume of Robin Hood” and the boy’s beguiling sister, Lady Blanche Mortlake. She has dark-blue eyes which possess “a beauty of mind which must have been remarkable twenty years later” and “a mouth like a scarlet serpent” (8), a disquieting description of a little girl. “I believe these youngsters have obsessed me”, thinks Orth (11) – he is fortunate that the portrait does not affect him in quite the way that Medea da Carpi’s did Spiridion Trepka. Nevertheless, his interest in it makes him vulnerable, leading him to admit his longing that the children were his own and making him susceptible to imaginative suggestion. Wandering into the woods of his neighbour’s estate, he suddenly encounters a beautiful girl:

For the moment he was possessed by the most hideous sensation which can visit a man’s being – abject terror. He believed that body and soul were disintegrating. The child before him was his child, the original of a portrait... (18)

After what seems about to be to an epiphanic moment of supernatural revelation, he is wholly unprepared for her bathetic opening remark: “You look real sick. [...] Shall I lead you home?”

The little American girl is another Blanche, Blanche Root, who has come to England with her mother to visit her father’s relatives. Long ago, it transpires, one of his ancestors was involved in a relationship with the adulterous Lady Blanche and killed himself after she broke off the affair. It seems as though the modern Blanche might be a reincarnation of the seventeenth-century aristocrat, as she is quite unlike any of her family and feels remarkably at home at Chillingshurst, her surname indicating where her origins may lie. Orth becomes besotted with her, buying her expensive gifts, taking her to London to see a pantomime, and beginning “to monopolize her” at the expense of her mother (28). Orth, Atherton writes, “adored her as a child, irrespective of the psychological problem”. “Of course, you’ve fallen in love with Blanche, sir”, says a woman on the estate. “Everybody does” (21). At last, Orth proposes that he adopt Blanche but her mother refuses to allow this, ostensibly because it would remove her daughter from her loving family though perhaps also because she has no wish to hand over her child to an eccentric middle-aged bachelor in the grip of an obsession. Blanche returns to America and dies a year or so later, giving Orth the macabre pleasure of knowing that, because she never grew up, she never lost her youthful beauty and spirit or indeed, entered the adult world of sexual desire and betrayal. As one of Blanche Mortlake’s descendants tells him, “little angels sometimes grow up into very naughty girls” (25).

Summarised in these terms, “The Bell in the Fog” might almost be a malicious parody of James on the lines of Lee’s “Lady Tal”, with

Orth's acquisitive desires toward Blanche deeply troubling. Yet Atherton intended it as a wholly affectionate tribute, not just to James's preoccupations with the aristocracy of the 'old country' but also with his interest in the supernatural. Blanche's similarity to Lady Mortlake might seem a matter of genetic inheritance rather than spiritual possession, but the older Blanche had no children, ruling out heredity as the basis of their resemblance. "The Bell in the Fog" becomes therefore a story of haunting without a ghost, in which Orth ponders the life he might have had as a father and Blanche Root (whose thoughts we are not privy to) is shadowed by a woman who died two centuries before she was born. Atherton mixes Jamesian motifs with the suggestion of reincarnation or soul transfer, ingredients more likely to be found in sensational writers such as Marie Corelli, though she may have drawn on a novel by another of James's friends, Robert Hichens, *Flames: A Phantasy*, which had enjoyed some success in 1902.

Without descending to pastiche, Atherton gives an impression of James's style, albeit one closer to *Daisy Miller* (1878) than *The Ambassadors* (1903). She also strives to find a way to incorporate intimations of the supernatural without, in Lee's terms, making them "distinct". Unfortunately, her narrator's interventions are less polished than those seen in James's own ghost stories. "Possibly there are very few imaginative writers who have not a leaning, secret or avowed, to the occult", she writes. "The creative gift is in very close relationship with the Great Force behind the universe" (Atherton 1905, 24). Orth finds himself "in a subjective world, searching for all he had ever heard of occultism" (28). These asides foreground the story's possibly supernatural content rather than allowing the narrative to remain ambiguous, with Blanche's mother saying that her daughter is "an angel" who "came to us when we needed her" (and is yet to be a naughty girl) and Orth musing that her appearance at Chillingshurst is "Blanche Mortlake working out the last of her salvation" (41), a transgenerational expiation of her adultery and the suicide which it prompted. Lady Blanche was one of "the sinful dead" who linger in the "borderland" until sent back to earth to put right the wrongs they caused in life (28), a more overt, if idiosyncratic, Christian rationale for her activities than might have been proffered in James's own tales. The traditional third-person narration Atherton uses in "The Bell in the Fog" is insufficiently flexible for her purposes, only granting the reader a heavily mediated access to Orth's consciousness and, in its intrusiveness, disrupting the atmosphere which she is at pains to create. Had she employed free indirect style and exploited the ambiguity of the relationship between Blanche Root and the girl in the portrait instead of explaining it, she may have come closer to the Jamesian ideal she so admired.

## 6 Some Conclusions

As these stories attest, realism was a highly flexible instrument when used by skilled practitioners. Henry James had shown how sophisticated it could be in moving between interior and exterior worlds, conveying thought and sensation, documenting and itemising, and adjudicating between the related claims of characterisation and narrative purpose, but it would be wrong to see any of the writers here as simply following in his footsteps. “Amour Dure” started life as a richly detailed historical novel – Trepka’s discovery of Medea da Carpi’s murderous history is, in some respects, a summary of the longer work – and Lee’s knowledge of history and art, plus her willingness to experiment with form and her sly fondness for digs at male academic authority take the story into terrain she made her own in her writings on landscape and aesthetics. D’Arcy made no secret of her admiration for James, and one could see “The Villa Lucienne” as a subtler tribute to him than “The Bell in the Fog”, precisely because it avoids James himself. The willingness to withhold explanatory detail and deny revelation looks ahead to the stories of incident and momentariness in which Katherine Mansfield specialised and to later weird tales by the likes of Elizabeth Bowen and Walter de la Mare, which also relished the inconclusive and suggestive. Kipling’s “They” is an acknowledged classic of its kind, but its affecting storyline can distract readers from the recognition of the skill by which its author encourages belief in the ghostly children and the sadness of their fate, “walking in the wood” implying a purgatorial existence despite apparently idyllic surroundings. The story’s development appears as casual as the narrator’s seemingly aimless drives through the Sussex countryside, but it is, of course, nothing of the kind. Atherton’s story is openly Jamesian and in some respects suffers from comparison with its inspiration, but it shows too how uncanny effects could be created without the use of overt supernatural elements. Orth’s first encounter with what he thinks is the girl from the painting offers a genuine *frisson* because it suggests something which simultaneously is and yet cannot be, and though the subsequent explanations for the likeness between the two Blanches takes the story into areas James himself may have preferred to skirt, the dramatic situation remains a potent one. The celibate Orth is briefly haunted by his own un-lived life and wonders what fatherhood would have been like, a poignant moment that leaves one asking whether it drew upon Atherton’s private conversations with her friend.

Darryl Jones suggests that Gothic’s enduring popularity is partly because “there are whole areas of human existence about which realism has little or nothing to say: extreme psychological states and the limits of consciousness, metaphysical or spiritual questions; the paranormal and the supernatural” (Jones 2018, 9). His opposition of

the Gothic and the Realist novel supports this in some respects, but it does not allow for the ways in which realist practice informs and underpins much supernatural fantasy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the ghost story had become an extremely sophisticated form of literary art. Its older, cruder manifestations had been mercilessly burlesqued in tales such as Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost" (1887), and educated readers expected it to offer something more than a horrifying apparition, raw-head and bloody bones. Realism offered a means to do this, the challenge being to balance the detailed description of character and environment found in non-supernatural realist writing with the implication of something beyond material concerns. It was one which the writers discussed here addressed with considerable originality and ingenuity, creating in the process not only enduring specimens of supernatural fiction but also doing much to shape its course during the twentieth century.

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## **Section 2**

### Miscellany





# “Our Filthy LIVES in Swines are Shewd”: Deformed Pigs, Religious Disquiet and Propaganda in Elizabethan England

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**Abstract** This article takes into account some broadsheets published in London between 1562 and 1570, a span of time in which the birth of deformed pigs is read in the light of the conflicts that destabilised the auroral decade of Elizabeth I’s reign. In this period, both Protestants and Catholics fostered a symbolic imagery, as a result of which deformed animals (and humans) were deciphered instrumentally as signs of God’s wrath against the religious and political enemy. The pig – a dirty and obscene beast – embodied further meanings when its anatomy exceeded the laws of nature, and could be interpreted as a mirror of moral and social non-conformity.

**Keywords** Deformed pigs. Elizabethan England. Monstrous births. Religious and political propaganda. Street literature.

**Summary** 1 Horrible Monster cast of a Sow. – 2 They Threaten I Know not What. – 3 Forked Ears Deaf to the Word. – 4 Monstrous Visions for Monstrous Lives. – 5 Most Swinish are our Lives. – 6 A Miss-Shaped Pig declares this World Turned Upside Down.



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## 1 Horrible Monster cast of a Sow

In 1531, in an England still a few years shy of the Henrician schism, a broadside circulated with the news of a deformed pig. The document, printed horizontally and lacking a title, is in three parts, with a brief text in the centre between two large images of the monstrous creature. The prose, extremely concise, recounts that at Lehenhayn, a small village in eastern Prussia located two miles from the city of Kunyngbergh (the present-day Königsberg / Kaliningrad), a sow has given birth to a "horryble monster"; the text supplies nothing more than the event's geographical location and a short anatomical description. But the most striking element of the document (and the true 'motor' for its publication) is the two images of the creature (on the left the frontal vision, on the right the posterior), rich, detailed and – as the document itself affirms – "cou[n]terfeyted after the facyon of the sayd Monster". They represent with crude and realistic lineaments two piglets separated as far as the belly and united from the chest to the head: an evident case of what modern veterinary medicine would call craniopagus Siamese twins [fig. 1].

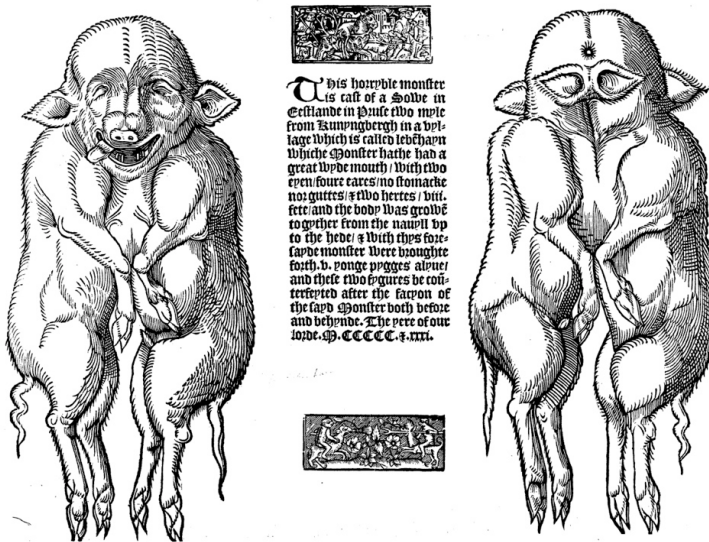


Figure 1 Anonymous, *This horryble monster is cast of a Sow*. S.n. [Germany], 1531.  
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The document, its significance and its *raison d'être* appear at first sight incomprehensible. Why publicise an event undoubtedly singu-

lar, but so apparently insignificant? What messages did the birth of a monstrous animal convey, apart from the taste for the unusual and the grotesque? And why should a deformed pig born in remotest Prussia have meaning for an English public? The present essay seeks to answer these questions, taking into consideration certain broadsides published in London between 1562 and 1570, in which the birth of deformed pigs is read in the light of the bitter conflicts that destabilised the first inaugural decade of Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

Symbolic readings of the freakish body were certainly not an exclusively English phenomenon: in the whole of Europe, at the dawn of the early modern age, both Catholics and Protestants fostered a powerfully numinous imaginative world, in which animals (and humans) born with appalling congenital malformations were interpreted as God's anger against the religious or political enemy (Niccoli 1987; Bates 2005; Crawford 2005; Baratta 2016).

To illustrate the formation, function and chronology of this important cultural phenomenon, this essay first offers a general overview of the allegorical use of monstrosity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, emphasising the important role of German printing in this process of symbolic construction. Next, the investigation abandons the continental territories and concentrates on England, to show this process *in actu* in a precise socio-political context, and within the confines of a specific animal species. The pig – perceived *per se* as a shameful, dirty, greedy and obscene beast – embodied further significances when its anatomy exceeded the natural norm, and was capable of embodying moral and social nonconformity.

As will emerge at the end of this study, the 'monstrous pig' could be a polysemic sign in the various phases of the period analysed: in the first years of Elizabeth's reign, it was used as a generic representation of sinful and unstable times, before becoming an unequivocal metaphor for subversive conspiracies against the Queen. No variation in the natural order took place by chance and spiritual disquiet – proper to changing times – offered instruments and occasions for the most unscrupulous political interpretations of the 'signs from heaven'.

## 2 They Threaten I Know not What

From the end of the fifteenth century, and throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth, in European culture the monstrous body is the object of supernatural interpretations that, despite different nuances and different uses, had long shared a common denominator: physical deformity implies moral monstrosity, and thus becomes a metaphor for the spiritual degradation of individuals, communities, nations and powers.

In the last four decades, research on the symbolic (and often exploitative) interpretation of monstrous animals or humans has made notable progress. Starting with the seminal study by Jean Céard (1977), it has become clear that the attraction for the monstrous, proper to modern Europe, was not simply linked to a taste for the bizarre or to pre-scientific curiosity but could be tantamount to a privileged key for the understanding of the world. It could also be, from the present point of view, a royal road to the imaginative world of this age. Thus it has emerged that the monster represented a sign in a complex numinous alphabet (also made up of earthquakes, storms, floods, and astral events such as eclipses or comets), where the alterations of nature could be observed, analysed and interpreted as prefigurations of catastrophic events such as war, famine or plague (Daston, Park 1998). In this imaginative world, every alteration in the repetitive order of nature was understood as an instrument for intuiting divine anger, foreseeing future punishment and taking measures to forestall it (Niccoli 1987, 47-52). In this way the Latin divinatory readings, which rested on the etymology (or para-etymology) of the word 'monster' itself, were recovered.<sup>1</sup> Monsters – such was the reasoning – are so called because they show something of the past (the fault) and of the future (the consequent punishment), and thus announce misfortune for the entire community or for the individual families to whom they are born.<sup>2</sup> Enigmatic conveyors of meaning, monstrous bodies thus acted as genuine emblems, whose physical (and therefore signic) ambiguity inevitably made of them symbols to be interpreted and deciphered (Bates 2005).

This is not to say that modern medicine, still substantially Aristotelian and Galenic, did not proffer 'biological' reasons for the formation of monsters: it explicitly appealed to the characteristics of male and female semen, affirming that monsters could be formed because the seed was too little or too much, or else bad (Huet 2004). At the outset of this process, however, even the physicians always placed the divine will, because, while it is true that biological events have

**1** See, for example, Cicero, *De divinatione*, I, 93: "Etrusci [...] ostentorum exercitissimi interpretes exstiterunt. Quorum quidem vim [...] verba ipsa prudenter a maioribus posita declarant. Quia enim ostendunt, portendunt, monstrant, praedicunt, ostenta, portenta, monstra, prodigia dicuntur" ("The Etruscans have become very proficient in the interpretation of portents. Indeed, the inherent force of these means of divination [...] is clearly shown by the very words so aptly chosen by our ancestors to describe them. Because they 'make manifest' [*ostendunt*], 'portend' [*portendunt*], 'intimate' [*monstrant*], 'predict' [*praedicunt*], they are called 'manifestations', 'portents', 'intimations', and 'prodigies'" (Cicero 1923, 324-5). Cicero associates 'monstrum' with the verb 'monstrare' and not – like modern etymological dictionaries – with 'monere' (to warn, to advise). Beyond subtle semantic nuances, the role of the imagination does not change.

**2** For example, monsters testify to the lust of their parents, who did not abstain from sexual intercourse during the mother's menstrual periods (Niccoli 1980, 402-28).

their natural causes, it is always the First Cause that acts on the material world, intervening to sicken or to cure (Harley 1993). A powerful nexus was therefore created between humanist recuperation, theology and medicine, which would be gradually unpicked only in the course of the seventeenth century, with the progressive rise of the new Baconian science, whose mature fruit would be the founding of the various national scientific academies (in the case of England, the *Royal Society of London*, with its publishing venture: the *Philosophical Transactions*).<sup>3</sup>

So we begin to glimpse a complex significance in the broadside with which we began: in an imaginative world where aberrations in the order of the cosmos were letters of the divine alphabet, the birth of a deformed animal inevitably acquired a surplus of meaning and presented itself to the reader with all its arcane potential significance. It was the bearer of a sinister premonition, but also of an obscure fascination: for this reason the printers, always in search of material that would generate sales and therefore profits, promoted documents of this type, satisfying and at the same time feeding a need.

But if at this point the motivation (both cultural and commercial) that led to the publication of *This Horryble Monster is Cast of a Sowe* appears less obscure, its significance is still far from evident.

We are helped, at least partially, by what is probably the archetype: *De portentifico Sue in Suntgaudia*, a *Flugblatt* published in Basel in 1496 by the printer Johann Bergmann and devoted to the birth of a deformed pig, which took place in the small town of Landser, in the first months of that year. The author, the Alsatian humanist, jurist and poet Sebastian Brant, is known for a rich series of illustrated broadsides, many of them specifically devoted to monstrous births, human or animal, interpreted allegorically in religious and political terms.<sup>4</sup>

Let us take a quick look at it. At the top of the broadside is a representation of the monster: the double pig appears in the left foreground, dominating the little town which appears on the right. Above the image a short title ("Ad Sacrosancti Romani imperij inuictissimu[m] rege[m] Maximilianu[m]: de porte[n]tifico Sue in Su[n]tgaudia: kale[n]dis Marcijis Anno &c. xcvi. edito: co[n]iectural[is] explanatio. S. Brant"; "To Maximilian, undefeated King of the Holy Roman Empire: Sebastian Brant's conjectural interpretation of the portentous Pig born in Suntgaudia the first day of March 1496") in-

<sup>3</sup> For the slow process by which monstrous births were gradually shorn of their numinous qualities to become objects of scientific examination, see Baratta 2016 and 2017. Another important essay on the interpretation of monsters in an English context is that of Crawford 2005.

<sup>4</sup> For Brant's interest in monsters and their interpretation in political terms, see Wuttke 1974 and Kappler 1980. The broadside discussed here is reproduced in Brant 1915, 45.

roduces a long poem in Latin elegiac couplets, divided into two columns [fig. 2].

The composition begins with a long sequence of "crebra ostenta" ("frequent miracles"), a crowd of prodigies that serves to present the climate of obscure menace ("minant | nescio quid"; "they threaten I know not what"), over which the recent monster is to preside (Brant 1496, vv. 23-24).<sup>5</sup>

"Hunc cum porcellum tuerer: miratus habunde" (when you contemplate this piglet, you are filled with astonishment), writes Brant (v. 29), and the declaration of amazement is followed by a detailed description of the monstrous body: "Vidi illi linguas sub capite esse duas | Et fauces binas: unu[m] tantu[m] caput: et cor: | Quattuor auriculas: bis totidemq[ue] pedes. | At duplices dentes sub rostro ostenderat uno. | Iunctus erat supra: sectus ab umbilico" (I saw that it had below its head two tongues and two sets of jaws; the body was one, and so was the heart. It had four small ears and four feet. A double row of teeth grew from a single snout. It was joined in the upper portion, but separate from the belly downwards, vv. 30-34). But the aspect that most interests us is the allegorical reading that immediately follows, where Brant wonders about the monster's significance: "Continuo mecu[m] quaena[m] haec sic tristis imago? | Quid sibi vult facies tetrica & horridula? | Quam vereor ne fors no[n] fausta tomacula: porcus | Hic portentificus porrigat imperio" (I continually ask myself: what on earth is this sinister image? What does this menacing and terrible figure portend? O, how I fear that fate gives us poisoned sausages: this portentous pig weighs heavily on the empire, vv. 35-38).

So the monstrous body has something to do with the imperial power, and with the threats that risk weakening it: further in the text, the enigma of the double pig can thus be explained. In a complex, elaborate sequence of images, all referring to doubleness, division, breaking of unity, the monster slowly turns into a metaphor for the Islamic menace: "Hinc Mahumetana[m]: spurca[m]q[ue] libidine gentem | Hac designata[m] quis negat esse Sue?" (Who can deny that this pig alludes to the Muslim people, contaminated with lust?, vv. 63-64).<sup>6</sup>

At this point the composition closes with a peroration to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (to whom the broadside is explicitly dedicated), that he might take up arms and unite the Christian peoples against the common enemy: "Aspice maxime Rex: mox invictissime Caesar | Qua[m] tua dilanient regna decora Sues" (O supreme Sovereign, invincible Caesar, see to it that the Swine do not devas-

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all English translations are made by the Author.

<sup>6</sup> It is not without significance that, to symbolise the "Mahumetana gens", the choice fell on the animal that is impure *par excellence*, both for Muslims and Jews.

Figure 2 Sebastian Brant, *De portentifico Sue in Surtgaudia*. [Basel], J[ohann] B[ergmann], 1496.

© Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, Rar.287



tate your fair kingdoms, vv. 105-106). For Brant, therefore, the double body of the Landser sow means that the realm is threatened by an obscure and divisive power, in a rich interweaving of political and religious significances.

Perhaps it is an imaginative world of this sort that we may surmise to lie behind *This Horrible Monster is Cast of a Sowe*, the document with which we began: a sheet printed in Germany but with an English text, advertising in England an event that took place near Königsberg, and thus on imperial territory.<sup>7</sup>

The German provenance of the broadside need not surprise us: publications such as Brant's *Flugblatt*, with images and texts that allegorically interpreted monstrous figures, were produced in great numbers, between the end of the fifteenth century and the years of the Lutheran Reformation, by the printers of the Holy Roman Empire, who in this way spread throughout the continent the apocalyptic and numinous imagery related to the deformed body (Ewinkel 1995, 15-58; Spinks 2009, 13-57).

Germany played in fact a key role in the development of street literature, so much so as to be called the “print's engine room” of Europe (Pettegree 2011, 255). To read the double pig of Königsberg in the light of the Landser sow is to identify, at this point, a monster whose evocative power does not stop at the bizarre fact but casts its long metaphysical shadow over the reign of King Henry VIII, already troubled by religious disquiet in the years immediately preceding the break with Rome.

Although this is a plausible hypothesis, it remains a conjecture: the document is laconic, with its double image and brief text that merely sets the monster before the eyes of the reader/spectator, without explaining it, interpreting it or dissecting it metaphorically. This latter transition would be effected by a series of documents dating from the Elizabethan period (1562-1570), using deformed pigs as an explicit instrument of moral and political propaganda. And it is towards this specific cultural *milieu* that we now turn our attention.

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<sup>7</sup> The document does not bear publication details, but its German provenance is certain: the British Museum has a second version of the same *Flugblatt*, with a bilingual English/German text (Museum number 1928.0310.96); the Schossmuseum Gotha has a third variant with only a German text and the printer's mark of Niclas Meledman, a Nuremberg printer. It is easy to imagine that Meledman produced all these editions so as to serve an international public (O'Connell, Paisey 1999).

### 3 Forked Ears Deaf to the Word

In the summer of 1562, the *Stationers' Register* was enriched with a new item, a broadside entitled *The Shape of .ii. Mof[n]sters*.<sup>8</sup> Written by William Fulwood,<sup>9</sup> and prepared for the London book market by the printer John Allde, the document gives an account of the birth in London of a deformed pig, whose appearance is reproduced in a small print that occupies the upper part of the layout [fig. 3].<sup>10</sup>

In the brief piece of prose in the centre of the document, the author reconstructs the setting where the prodigious event occurred and describes the creature's anatomical features:

One Marke Finkle a Joiner dwelling beside Charing crosse by Westminster had a Sow that brought forth one Pigge onely, vpon the seuenth of Maye being Ascention daye, the whiche Pigge had a head much lyke vnto a Dolphines head with the left eare standing vp forked like as ye see in this picture aboue, and the right eare being like as it were halfe a litle leafe being deuided in the middes sharpe toward then lying downward flat to the head without any holes into the headward. The two fore feet, like vnto handes, eche hande hauinge thre long fingers and a thumb, bothe the thumbes growinge on the out sides of the handes, the hinder legges growing very much backwarde otherwise then the common natural forme hath ben seen, beeing of no good shape, but smaller fro[m] the body to the middle Joint then they be from the same Joint toward the foot. And the taile growing an Inche neare vnto the back then it doth of any that is of right shape. (Fulwood 1562)<sup>11</sup>

The description is extremely detailed and does not fail to emphasise features useful for increasing the numinous potential of the event: mention of the feast day (the Ascension, that closes the events

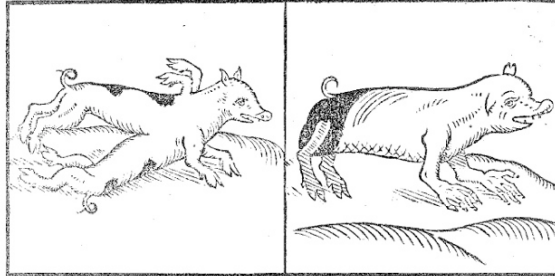
<sup>8</sup> For information on the context of the document's production, see Rollins 1967, 181.

<sup>9</sup> An eclectic personage, William Fulwood was a merchant, a translator of Latin classics and Italian humanists, and author of numerous ballads. His varied interests are testified by the distinct nature of some of his more important publications: in 1563 he published *The Castle of Memorie* (a treatise on mnemotechnics, significantly dedicated to Robert Dudley, the favourite of Elizabeth I and a fervent Protestant) and in 1568 *The Enimie of Idlenesse* (an epistolary manual). For a biographical overview, see Shrank 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Consistently with the title, two monsters are illustrated (a case of Siamese twins on the left, a variously deformed pig on the right). The textual part of the document however recounts and describes only the London case, illustrated on the right. Raphael Holinshed writes about these two cases in his celebrated *Chronicles*: "This yeare [1562] in England were manie monstrous births [...]. A sow farrowed a pig with foure legs like to the armes of a manchild with armes and fingers, & c. In Aprill, a sow farrowed a pig with two bodies, eight feet, and but one head" (1587, 1195).

<sup>11</sup> A modern transcription of the document is given in Lilly 1867, 45-8.

## The Shape of .ii. Mo[n]sters. M. D. Lxii



**T**his present yere of oure Lord God a thousande sine hundred thye foze and two, one Marke sinkle a Joiner dwelling beside Charing crosse by Westminster had a Sow that brought forth one Pigge enely, vpon the fourth of Maye beinge Ascension daye, the wiche Pigge had a head muche lyke vnto a Dolphins head with the left eare standing vp forked like as ye see in this picture above, and the right eare beinge like as it were halfe a ticle lease beinge bendid in the middes sharpe to ward thens lying downward flat to the head without any holes into the headward. The two fore feet, like vnto handes, eche hande hauing the long fingers and a thumbe, bothe the thumbes growinge on the out sides of the handes, the hinder legges growinge very much backwarde other wise then the common natural forme hath beene seen, beinge of no good shape, but smaller frs the body to the middle Joint then they be from the same Joint toward the foot. And the taile growinge an Inch neare vnto the back then it doth of any that is of right shape.

These strange sightes, the Almighty God sendeth vnto vs that we should not be forgetfull of his mighty power: nor vnthankful for his so greate mercies. The which see the wryth specially by geuinge vnto vs his holy word whereby our liues ought to be guided and also his wonderful tokens whereby we are most gently warned.

But if we will not be warned, neither by his word nor yet by his wonderful tokens: then let vs be assured that these strange monstrous sightes bee p[re]monstrate vnto vs that his heauy indignation wyl shortly come vpon vs for our monstrous lyuinge. Wherefore let vs earnestly pray vnto God that he wyl geue vs grace earnestly to repent our wickednes, faithfully to beleue his word: and strictly to frame our liues after the doctrine of the same.

### An Admonition vnto the Reader.

**L**et vs knowe by these ugly sightes,  
and eke consider well:  
That our God is the Lord of mightes,  
who rules both heauen and hell.

By whose strong hand these monsters here,  
were formed as ye see:  
That it mighte to the world appere,  
almightie him to see.

Who might also vs men haue formede,  
after a strange deuise:  
As by the Child of late deformede,  
appareth in plaine wise.

What might these monsters to vs teacher  
which now are sent to rise:  
But that we haue Goddes word well preacht,  
and will not mend our life.

At which strange sightes we meruel muche,  
when that we doe thus see:  
But can there not be found one suche,  
That so will warned bee.

And loke what great deformitie,  
In bodies ye beholde:  
Such moze is in our myndes truly,  
an hundred thousande fold.

So that we haue great cause to deede,  
Our liues for to confesse:  
And eke to call to God with spede,  
The same for to redresse.

Which if we wyl not fayne to doo,  
and purely to repent:  
We wyl no doubt, vs comforte so,  
as that our soules contente.

Now sith our God so louing is,  
and ready to forgive:  
Why doe we not abhorre all vice,  
and only to him cleave.

Which he also his hande can shake,  
And some bestrope vs all,  
Why doe we not then feare and quake,  
And downe before him fall.

Why doe we not amend I saye,  
Either for loue or feare:  
Why daine we of from day to daye,  
And sinning not forbear.

Good lynes of late renewde thee see,  
Such sinne for to suppress:  
God graunt that they faultles maye bee,  
To ouerflowe excelle.

Lord graunt be also thy grace,  
That by repentance pure:  
In heauen to haue a dwelling place,  
For euer to endure.

Amen. q. w. r.

Printed at London at the Long  
Shop in the Walley by John Alde

Figure 3 William Fulwood, *The Shape of .ii. Mo[n]sters. M. D. Lxii*. London, John Alde, 1562. © The British Library Board, London, Shelfmark Huth 50[37]

of Eastertide) serves to convey a supernatural aura on the birth; the dolphin's head is perhaps a reference to spiritual renewal and conversion;<sup>12</sup> the description of the organs of hearing, deformed or inefficient (the left ear is forked, the right ear small and deaf, having no auditory cavity) suggests poor or no attention paid to the truths of faith;<sup>13</sup> the hands, lastly, already supernatural *per se* because they did not conform to the species, are turned outwards (with the thumbs on the outside) and are therefore useless, perhaps a sign of inactivity or spiritual sloth.<sup>14</sup>

However, all these complex readings are left to the free interpretation of the reader/spectator. No explicit connection is made in the text between the animal's severe malformation and a specific human fault, except for 'deafness' to the word of God ('word' appears thrice in the text):

These straunge sights, the Allmighty God sendeth vnto vs that we should not be forgetfull of his mighty power: nor vnthankful for his so greate mercies. The which hee sheweth specially by geuing vnto vs his *holy word* wherby our liues ought to be guided and also his wonderful tokens wherby we are most gentilly warned. But if we will not be warned, neither by his *word*, nor yet by his wonderful workes: then let vs be assured that these straunge monstrous sightes doe premonstrate vnto vs that his heauy indignacion wyl shortly come vpon vs for our monstrous lyuinge. Wherefore let vs earnestly pray vnto God that he wyl geue vs grace earnestly to repent our wickednes, faithfully to beleue his *word*. (Fulwood 1562)<sup>15</sup>

If spiritual deafness be not corrected – this is the explicit signal sent by God through the “monstrous sightes” – men will be punished for their “monstrous lyuinge”.

The same moral concern also animates the ballad that follows (“An Admonition vnto the Reader”, comprising thirteen quatrains of alternately rhyming iambic tetrameters and trimeters): the manifesta-

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**12** See for example Chevalier and Gheerbrant, who in their *Dictionnaire des symboles* write: “[Le dauphin]: symbolique liée à celles des [...] transfigurations. Rien d'étonnant que le Christ-Sauver ait été plus tard représenté sous la forme d'un dauphin” (1969, 338-42).

**13** See St Paul's epistle to the Romans: “Howe shall they beleue on hym of whom they haue not hearde? Howe shal they heare, without a preacher? [...] So then fayth cometh by hearyng, and hearyng commeth by the worde of God” (*Romans* 10:14 and 17). This and the following scriptural citations are taken from the *Bishops' Bible*, which in 1568 replaced the *Great Bible* (1539) as the official text of the English Reformed Church.

**14** See again Chevalier and Gheerbrant: “La main exprime les idées d'activité, en même temps que de puissance et de domination” (1969, 599).

**15** If not otherwise specified, all italics are added.

tion of the monster fulfils the explicit function of denouncing the discrepancy between the divine gift of the Word and man's reluctance to receive it ("we haue Goddes *wurd* well preacht, | and will not mend our life", vv. 15-16).

So the deformity of the monstrous body does not indicate an individual sin, but is the emblem of the interior monstrosity of the whole human race:

And loke what great deformitie,  
In bodies ye beholde:  
Much more is in our mindes truly,  
an hundreth thousand folde.  
(vv. 21-24)<sup>16</sup>

The remaining lines of the ballad obsessively reiterate this message, exhorting the reader to penitence and to the request for grace – eminently Protestant themes.

More interesting seems to us the penultimate quatrain, which seems to reflect the crown's religious policies in these years:

Good lawes of late renewde wee see,  
Much sinne for to suppressse:  
God graunt that they fulfilde maye bee,  
To ouerthrow excesse.  
(vv. 45-48)

The "Good lawes" that Fulwood mentions are probably the recent legislative innovations introduced by Elizabeth in order to favour the consolidation of Protestantism after the Catholic parenthesis of Queen Mary Tudor.<sup>17</sup>

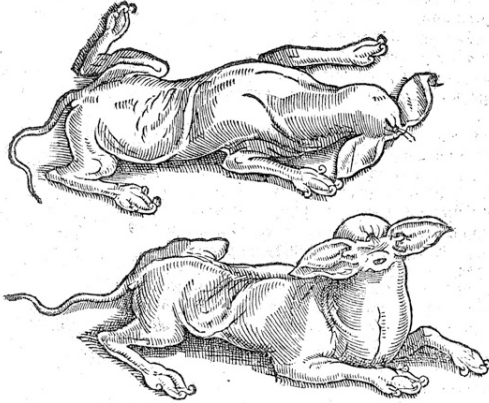
The author of our broadside thus declares his zealous adhesion to the moral renewal promoted by Elizabeth's propaganda and government, and in some way reflects a trend. In October of the same

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**16** In connection with the ballads of monstrous births, and of the cited lines in particular, Alan W. Bates affirms that "the broadsides describing monstrous pigs [...] are significant because they also speak of God's dissatisfaction with contemporary society but in circumstances where the births defects described could not be interpreted as deserved punishment, showing that the malformations are to be interpreted as a general warning of divine displeasure; a call for moral self-examination among those who witness the event" (2000, 204).

**17** Having ascended the throne in 1558, Queen Elizabeth became "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England by the *Act of Supremacy* of 1559; in the same year, an *Act of Uniformity* made provisions for the liturgy of the English Church, adding some catholic elements to the more strictly protestant character of the second Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552. For the laborious affirmation of Protestantism in England, see Collinson 1988 and Haigh 1993.

**The description of a monstrous Pig,**  
 the which was farrowed at Hamsted besyde London, the .xvi. day of October:  
 this present yeare of our Lord GOD, M. D. LXII.



**His present yeare of our lord**

**GOD**, a thousand, fyue hundred, thye scoze and two, one Robert Harrin of Hamsted, in the countie of Midd. besyde London, had a Sow the which brought forth .viij. Piggs, the .xvi. day of October, where of .viij. were of right shape and fallion, but the eight was a wondrous Monster, and moze monstrous then any that hath bene seene before this time, as you may se by this picture. It hath a head contrary to all other of that kynd, it hath a face without a nose or eyes, having a hole standing directly between the two eares which eares be broad and long, lyke the eares of a bloude hound, and a monstrous body, lyke vnto a thing that were

lean, without heare. It hath feet very monstrous, with the endes of them turning bywards, lyke vnto forked endes, as it is playnely set forth here by these two pictures, the one being the backe part, and the other the foze part. This monster lyued two houres, and the rest of them lyued about halfe a day.

These straunge and monstrous thinges, almighty **GOD** sendeth amongst vs, that we wuld not be forgetfull of his almighty power, nor vnthankful for his great mercies to plentifully powred vpon vs, and especially for geuyng vnto vs his most holy word, whereby our lynes ought to be guyded: and also his wonderfull tokens, whereby we ought to be warned. But if we will not be instructed by his worde, nor warned by his wonderfull workes: then let vs be assured that these straunge monstrous sightes do foreshew vnto vs, that his heauy indignation wyl shortly come vpon vs for our monstrous liuyng. Wherefoze let vs earnestly pray vnto **GOD** that he wylly geue vs grace speedily to repent our wickednesse, faithfully to beleue his holy Gospel, and cenerely to frame our lynes after the doctrine of the same to whome be all prayle, honour, and glory. Amen.

**Imprinted at London by**

ALEXANDER LACY for GARAT DEVVES,  
 dwelling in Poules church yerde, at the East  
 end of the Church.

Figure 4 Anonymous, *The Description of a Monstrous Pig, the which Was Farrowed at Hamsted Besyde London*. London, Alexander Lacy, 1562. © The British Library Board, London, Shelfmark Huth 50[39]

year, in fact, news of the birth of another deformed pig would circulate through the streets of the capital and would stimulate the London public’s taste for the bizarre.

#### 4 Monstrous Visions for Monstrous Lives

News of the new case is spread by *The description of a monstrous Pig*, a broadside composed by an anonymous author and printed by Alexander Lacy. Based on William Fulwood’s, like its predecessor this broadside reads in the birth of the deformed animal a severe warning for the entire community [fig. 4].<sup>18</sup>

The document is in this case bipartite. Above, we find an extremely detailed image of the animal, enriched with chiaroscuro; below, we find a piece of prose that reproduces the model *verbatim*, only correcting the indispensable i.e. the contextual information (time and place) and the description of the monstrous body:

One Robert Martin of Hamsted, in the countie of Mid. besyde London, had a Sow the which brought forth.viii. Piggs, the.xvi. day of October, where of.vii. were of right shape and fassion, but the eight was a wonderous Monster, and more monstrous then any that hath bene seene before this time, as you may se by this picture. It hath a head contrary to all other of that kynd, it hath a face without a nose or eyes, sauing a hole standing directly between the two eares which eares be broad and long, lyke vnto a thing that were flean, without heare. It hath feet very monstrous, with y<sup>e</sup> endes of them turning vpwards, lyke vnto forked endes, as it is playnely set foorth here by these two pictures, the one being the backe part, and the other the fore part. This monster lyued two houres, and the rest of them lyued about halfe a day. These straunge and monstrous thinges, almighty GOD sendeth amongst vs, that we should not be forgetfull of his almighty power, nor vnthankful for his great mercies so ple[n]tifully powred vpon vs, and especially for geuyng vnto vs his most *holy word*, whereby our lyues ought to be guyded: [...] But if we will not be instructed by his *worde*, nor warned by his wonderfull workes: then let vs be assured that these monstrous sightes do foreshew vnto vs, that his heauy indignation wyl shortly come vpon vs for our monstrous liuyng. Wherefore let vs earnestly pray vnto GOD that he wyll geue grace spedely to repent our wickednesses, faithfully to beleue his *holy Gospel*, and cencerely to frame our lyues after the doctrine of the same to whome be all prayse, honour, and glory. (Anon. 1562)

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<sup>18</sup> Modern transcriptions of the document are to be found in Lilly 1867, 112-13 and McKeown 1991, 20-1.

As in the model, albeit without the same symbolic complexity, emphasis is placed on the monstrous body's deafness (its ears are "without heare") and on the incapacity of the limbs to perform their functions ("y<sup>e</sup> endes of them turning vpwards, lyke vnto forked endes"). Again, from Fulwood derives the insistence on listening to the word of God (here too we have "holy word", "worde", "holy Gospel"); lastly, there is the same parallel between the monstrous body and a monstrous *modus vivendi*.

This obscure association reverberates also in the writings of other contemporaries, in this same year of 1562, which must have been perceived as a genuine *annus horribilis*.

For example, on 14 August the Bishop of Salisbury, John Jewel, sent to his friend the Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger a letter detailing recent events, the *mirabilia* of the weather being matched by those of generation:

There has been here, throughout the whole of this present year, an incredibly bad season both as to the weather and state of the atmosphere. Neither sun, nor moon, nor winter, nor spring, nor summer, nor autumn, have performed their appropriate offices. It has rained so abundantly, and almost without intermission, as if the heavens could hardly do anything else. Out of this contagion monstrous births [...] have been produced in abundance from swine, mares, cows and domestic fowls. (1842, 116-17)

The same almost apocalyptic tone is found in another broadside published at the end of the year, *A Discription of a Monstrous Chylde, Borne at Chychester*: "The scripture sayth, before the ende | Of all thinges shall appeare | God will wounders straunge thinges sende | As some is sene this yeare. | The selye infantes, voyde of shape | The Calues and Pygges so straunge | With other mo of suche mishape / Declareth this worldes chaunge" (J.D. 1562, vv. 49-52).

Comparison between *The Shape of.ii. Mo[n]sters* and *The Description of a Monstrous Pig* reveals another point in common between the two documents that it is important to emphasise: they leave to the total hermeneutic capacity of the reader/spectator the task of personally delineating the symbolic connections between the corporeal imperfections of the animal and the specific sin represented by its disfigured flesh.

Such freedom, on the other hand, disappears in a document published a few years later, also devoted to a deformed pig: here the allegorical reading becomes explicit, and an accurate rhetorical instrument persuasively designed to convey the message.



## 5 Most Swinish are our Lives

Printed by William How probably in the month of August 1570, *Meruayloy Straunge Deformed Swyne* presents a tripartite structure which it shares with analogous documents: the image at the top, beneath the title, shows the profile of an extraordinarily shaped pig, described in prose in the centre; lower down is a ballad of eleven quatrains of alternating iambic tetrameters and trimeters, the second and fourth lines rhyming [fig. 5].<sup>19</sup>

Composed by the mysterious I.P.,<sup>20</sup> the text gives an account of an "Englishman" who acquired and brought to London, possibly with a view to exhibiting it to the public, a monstrous pig born in Denmark, whose form suggests a strange hybridisation with quite different animals:

the forepart therof from the Snoute beneath the foreshoulders are in al pointes like vnto a Swine, except the Eares only, which resemble y<sup>e</sup> eares of a Lion, the hinder parte (contrarie to kinde) is proportioned in all pointes like vnto a Ram. (I.P. 1570)

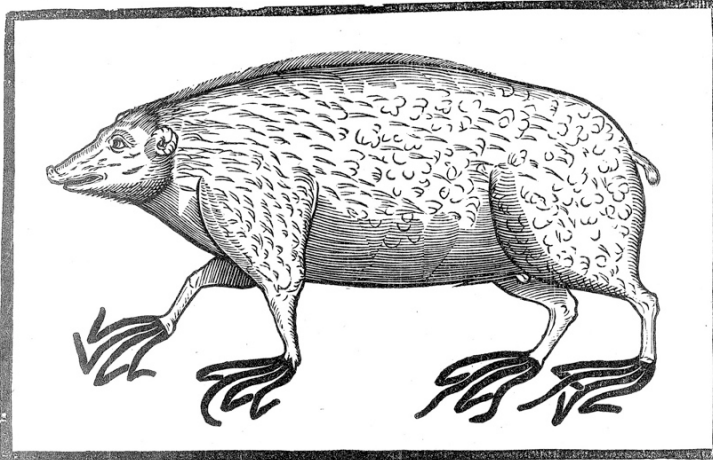
The fusion with other species seems to continue in the limbs, called "the most straungest thinge of all", very similar to human hands, but of gigantic size: the feet end in

certayne Tallents and very harde Clawes, doubling vnder his feete, euery Claw so byg as a mans fynger, and blacke of colour, and the length of euery of them are full.x. inches. (I.P. 1570)

<sup>19</sup> The broadside is undated, but was presumably composed and published shortly after 8 August 1570, the date of the execution of John Felton, mentioned in the text as a traitor. In support of this dating, it can be shown that the register of the *Stationers' Company* lists a ballad entitled *Monsterous Swyne*, signed with the same initials I.P. and presented to the printer Richard Jones for the year 22 July 1570-22 July 1571 (for these matters, see Rollins 1967, 155). Modern transcriptions of the document can be found in Lilly 1867, 186-90 and McKeown 1991, 16-19.

<sup>20</sup> There are at least two possible candidates for the paternity of this document. Of the first, John Phillips, we do not know the date of birth but we know that he began his career as a writer around the mid-1560s: his first publication, *The Commoditye of Pacient and Meeke Grissill*, dramatising the last novella of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, appears in the register of the *Stationers' Company* in 1565-1566. His writings included ballads, epitaphs, sermons, prayer books and short treatises on patriotic and moralistic subjects, which for theme and chronology would suit our broadside. The exact date of Phillips' death is unknown, though it was between 1594 and 1617 (see Walsham 2008). We know even less about the second candidate, John Partridge, a translator and poet. He was the author of three long poems, *Lady Pandavola*, *Astianax and Polixena*, and *The Worthie Hystorie of [...] Placidus*, all published in 1566 and all in iambics (hexameters and heptameters), just like our document. But what is more interesting is that Partridge composed a pamphlet entitled *The Ende and Confession of John Felton*, the celebrated papist who dared to challenge the authority of Queen Elizabeth and who appears also in the ballad that we are about to examine (see, for more details, Boro 2008).

## A meruaylous straunge deformed Swyne.



Ere Good Reader shalt thou beholde a straunge and deformed Swyne, farrowed and brought forth in Denmarke, and there bought and brought over by an Englishman, which hath it at this present, as is to be seen a lye, the proportion wherof is wonderfulous straunge to beholde and bew: the forepart thereof from the Snoute beneath the fore shoulders are in all pointes like unto a Swyne, except the Eares only, which resemble þe eares of a Lion, the hinder parte (contrarie to hinde) is proportioned in all pointes like unto a Man, having softe wooll both white and blacke mixed among the hard Haire, and so groweth from the Shoulders downe warde, all the body ouer, and it is a Swine þe pig, howbeit there doth nothing appeare outwarde, but onely the þyfell vnder his Belly, but if a man list to feele a greene it in the Grindes, there ye may feele his Coddes twit in his belly: and the most straungest thing of all, is the misshapen and deformed feete, wheron grow certayne Callents and very harde Clawes, doubling vnder his feete, euery Claw so big as a mans Frynger, and blacke of colour, and the length of euery of them are full x. Inches, very straunge and wonderful to beholde, it feedeth and eateth diuers and sundrie things, as well Haye and Graffe, as Beades and Apples, with such other things as Sheepe and Swyne do feede on.

¶ In exhortacion of warnynge to all men, for amendment of lyfe.

Some nere god Chyistians all,  
Beholde a Sponters rare:  
Whose monstrous shape, no doubt, foxtels  
Cods wath we should beware,  
His wondrous looks we ought not indge,  
as toys and trifes vaine:  
Whither it be Child or brutish Beast,  
for warnynge they are playne.  
As how, this mingled brutish Beast,  
Cods creature is he se:  
Although as strange of shape and forme,  
as possible may be.  
For if you do way well eche point,  
his nature and his shape  
I feare resembles some of these,  
as on the same do gape.  
For why most Swinish are our liues,  
and monstrous, that is sure:  
Although we resemble simple Swine,  
as Lambes that be most pure.  
But euery Swine it selfe will try,  
at last by his owne fruite:  
Although on our backs we carry Woll,  
our conscience is pollute,  
Although smilingly with flattering face,  
his same Cods wath to loue:  
Contrary wile from hate the same,  
as well their bodies did poue.  
Who ment the ruine of our Realme,  
as Traytours to our Quene:  
as Traytours to our Quene:

Some white fatte Lads have sought to do  
(that, monstrous Swine) I loue.  
But generally, I say to all,  
repent amend your life:  
He greedy rich, the nary pace,  
yea, young man, Spade, and Wisse.  
The Potellant, the Papiſt eke,  
what secte lo that ye be,  
Crye your own conscience, learne to do  
as God commaundeth ye.  
For all are sinners Dawis faith,  
Pea, do the best we may,  
Vnpoffible seruants fill we be,  
we can it not deny.  
Judge ye therfore how far amisse,  
all those their liues as fraine:  
That outwardly profess Cods truth,  
and inward hate the same.  
Judge ye againe that hate your Prince,  
and seke the Realme to spoyle:  
What monstrous Swine you proue at  
for all your counte carle.  
Experience late by Edens fall,  
and Nereons thoo I wane:  
Their Treason known were lodged at  
as they had Sponters bren.

And surely I can indge no lesse,  
but that they Sponters were:  
Quite changed from true fibians shape,  
their bodies did lo appeare.  
When let their bodies example be,  
to vs that Subiects are:  
For treason ends by Damfull death,  
therfore by them beware.  
I speake not here of monstrous Pide,  
in Pen, in Spade, and Wisse:  
For Wisdom which is daily vnde,  
in England ranke and rise.  
Of Conscience, what should I say,  
of Wifery daily ben:  
It beeth not to speake thereof,  
so much thereby is wounde.  
But if they well do their Carde,  
how God they do offend:  
I wis their liues ill gotten gaines,  
both false and bitter end,  
from the which end deliuer vs Lord,  
and graunt both hie and low,  
So become the seruants iust and true  
and then our end we know.  
God graunt our gracious foueraign Maier  
long ouer vs may raigne,  
And this life pass, with Christ our Lord,  
þeauenus ioyes he may attaine.

FINIS I. P.

Imprinted at London by VVilliam Hovv, for Richard Iohnes and are to be solde at his Shop  
sitting to the South-west doore of Pauls Church.

Figure 5 I.P., A Meruaylous Straunge Deformed Swyne. London, William How, [1570?].  
© The British Library Board, London, Shelfmark Huth 50[42]

There is no doubt however that the most spectacular feature was the animal's strange fur, which had "softe wooll both white and blacke mixed monge the hard Heare, and so groweth from the shoulders downward, all the body ouer". And it is this woolly covering, concealing the animal's true nature like a disguise, that the ballad fixes on for its allegorical scheme, constructing a Dantesque *girone degli ipocriti*.

In fact, after some introductory lines appealing to "good Christians all" and inviting them to observe with maximum seriousness the divine prodigies, and not to dismiss them "as toyes and trifles vaine" (vv. 1 and 4), the author exhorts his readers to grasp the meaning concealed behind the monstrous features:

For if you do way well ech poynt,  
his nature and his shape  
I fear resembles some of those,  
as on the same do gape.

For why most Swinish are our liues,  
and monstrous (that is sure:)  
Though we resemble simple Sheepe,  
or Lambes that be most pure.

But euery Tree it selfe will try,  
at last by his owne Fruite:  
Though on our Backs we cary Woll,  
our conscience is pollute.  
(vv. 13-24)

If we weigh well the body of the monster – says our I.P. – we must acknowledge its resemblance to many of those who gape at it. Our lives are those of pigs, continues the author with grotesque severity, but the tree is recognised by its own fruit,<sup>21</sup> and however much we disguise ourselves as sheep or as lambs, being covered with white wool, we all have filthy consciences, we all conceal some form of duplicity.

But the gravest imposture of all, for our author, the one that most attracts his moral indignation, is hypocrisy in relation to religious or political authority:

Though smilingly with flattering face,  
we seeme Gods word to loue:  
Contrary wise som hate the same,  
as well their deedes did prooue.

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**21** An obvious allusion to *Matthew* 7:16-20.

Who ment the ruine of our Realme  
 As Traytours to our Queene:  
 Som white faste La[m]bs haue sought to do  
 (nay, monstrous Swine) I weene.  
 (vv. 25-32)

The desecration of the word of God, and the ruin of the kingdom, its terrestrial mirror, are nothing but the shattering manifestation of a single fault. And nobody can say that he or she is truly innocent, everyone must repent, without distinction of gender, class or religious denomination:

But generally, I say to all,  
 repent amend your life:  
 The greedy rich, the needy poore,  
 yea, yongman, Maide, and Wife.

The Protestant, the Papist eke,  
 what secte so that ye be,  
 Gripe your own conscience, learne to do  
 as God commaundeth ye.

For all are Sinners Daud saith,  
 Yea, do the best we may,  
 Unprofitable seruaunts still we be,  
 we can it not deny.  
 (vv. 37-48)<sup>22</sup>

But we are not to suppose that the ballad is characterised by an ecumenical spirit. A few lines later the poet pours out his invective specifically on the traitors to Elizabeth, all leading exponents of the Catholic opposition:

Judge ye againe that hate your Prince,  
 and seeke the Realme to spoyle:  
 What monstrous Swine you proue at lenght,  
 for all your couert coyle.

Experience late by *Felton* false,  
 and *Nortons* two I weene:  
 Their Treason known were wo[n]dred at  
 as they had Monsters been.

<sup>22</sup> The allusion to David is not specific, though in many places the Psalmist expresses the original condition of man as sinner; see for example *Psalm* 51:5 ("Beholde, I was ingendred in iniquitie: and in sinne my mother conceaued me").

And surely I can iudge no lesse,  
but that they Monsters were:  
Quite changed from true subiects shape,  
their deedes did so appere.  
(vv. 53-64)

In these lines the monstrous pig suddenly becomes a grotesque correlative for the political crime committed by the traitors to Elizabeth, who are explicitly mentioned by name: "*Felton false*" and the "*Nortons two*".

None of the contemporary readers could fail to realise who it was that the author was attacking. Thomas Norton and his nephew Christopher were both members of a prominent Catholic family in Yorkshire. After constant involvement in conspiracies against the central government in London (culminating in the failed *Revolt of the Northern Earls* of 1569), they were imprisoned and executed on 27 May 1570.<sup>23</sup> John Felton was another Catholic rebel who was put to death on 8 August that year, guilty of having posted in front of the palace of the bishop of London *Regnans in excelsis*, the papal bull with which on 25 February Pius V had excommunicated the queen, denying her legitimacy to reign over the English.<sup>24</sup>

In the words of the anonymous poet, their act of "treason" that had "changed [them] from true subjects shape" is the greatest deformity, the one most to be avoided. Thus, their monstrous acts have led to an equally monstrous end, a warning and an example for all good subjects:

Then let their deedes example be,  
to vs that Subiects are:  
For treason ends by shamfull death,  
therefore by them beware.  
(vv. 65-68)

Having got over the more specifically political element of his composition, the author proceeds with a rapid listing of other sins common to his people: "monstrous pride", "whordom which is daily vsde | in England ranke and rife", "Covetousness", "Usery daily don" (vv. 69 and 71-74). To this last conventional reprimand I.P. adds an invocation to the divine benevolence, so that everybody - "both hie

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**23** On the Nortons and their execution we find a reference in the biography of Richard Norton, brother of Thomas and father of Christopher: "Richard's brother Thomas and son Christopher were executed at Tyburn on 27 May 1570: their exemplary Catholic deaths were celebrated in verse and prose by protestants as a warning to papists and traitors and lamented as martyrdom by Catholics" (Hicks 2008).

**24** For John Felton, Catholic martyr, see Lock 2008.

and low" – may be liberated from sin; as a good "subject", he ends with a final quatrain requesting a specific heavenly intercession for the beloved Elizabeth:

God grant our gracious souerain Queen  
long ouer vs may raigne:  
And this life past, with Christ our Lord,  
Heauens ioyes she may attaine.  
(vv. 85-88)

With this declaration of fidelity to the queen, we come to the end of this group of documents sharing the theme of the deformed pig, exploited for moral and political propaganda in the first years of Elizabeth I's reign.

We can identify two different moments, corresponding to different exegetic attitudes to deformity. In an initial phase, represented by the deformed pig of William Fulwood and by the anonymous document that reproduces the model, the monster is not affected, except marginally, by precise symbolic readings: the deformed creature's flesh is marked by the sin of the whole human race and constitutes the activation of a generic peroration exhorting penitence and the request for grace. Only in a second phase do we find, on the other hand, a specifically allegorical reading of the monstrous body: the Danish pig described by I.P., with its disguise as an innocent sheep, supplies an unmistakable metaphor for hypocrisy pursued to the point of the monstrous crime of treason, in which religious motives fuse with political ones, as appears from the explicit citation of the Catholic traitors against Elizabeth.<sup>25</sup>

## 6 A Miss-Shaped Pig Declares this World Turned Upside Down

In conclusion, it remains only to investigate the reasons why the deformed pig attracted the curiosity of the authors of these documents, of the printers and booksellers who produced and sold them, and of the public that appreciated them. From this point of view it is illuminating to consider the powerful symbolic charge that was traditionally attributed to the pig (and to its cousin the wild

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<sup>25</sup> The same process, from a more generic reading to a more rhetorically astute one based on allegory, is found in the same period also in connection with the exploitation of monstrous human births. For this subject, see Baratta 2016, 2017 and 2018.

boar),<sup>26</sup> characterised by strong ambiguities and ambivalences.<sup>27</sup>

The modern era inherited, as was natural, the complex symbolism elaborated in the Christian Middle Ages, in which the dominant Biblical component (negative and stigmatising) coexisted with the pagan and barbarian one (with more positive features). Greco-Roman culture appreciated the pig, for example, as a sacrifice to the gods: a swine, a ram and a bull were the offering that the seer Tiresias advised Odysseus to make in order to placate the wrath of Poseidon (*Odyssey*, XI, 131 ff.), and the same three victims made up the principal Roman sacrifice, the *suovetaurilia*. For the Celts and the Germanic peoples it was a symbol of riches, fertility and prosperity, but also of courage.

In the Christian world, both medieval and modern, the Biblical inheritance predominated, in which the pig and the wild boar were unambiguously unclean and repugnant animals: in the Old Testament the pig is the impure creature *par excellence*, one of the taboo creatures of the Mosaic Law, and the privileged attribute of the pagan world and of Israel's enemies. *Psalm* 80 indicates the wild boar as among the devastators of the Lord's vineyard, presenting it as a disturbing, ferocious being that symbolises blind and destructive violence, an animal "tout droit sorti du gouffre infernal pour tourmenter les hommes et défier Dieu" (Pastoureau 2011, 69).

Again, the pig is the symbolic correlative of ignorance, as expressed in the parable of the pearls cast before swine, an image of spiritual truths revealed to those unworthy to receive them (*Matthew* 7:6). Part of the Biblical inheritance is the notion that merely to have dealings with pigs is degrading: in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the fact that he fed the swine was a sign of the ungrateful son's utter degradation (*Luke* 15:14-16). Again, in the repertory of Sacred Scripture the pig is an explicitly diabolical animal, in which Satan takes refuge: the three synoptic Gospels relate the episode of the possessed man liberated by Christ, who orders the wicked spirits to enter a herd of nearby pigs; shortly afterwards, the entire herd plunges from the mountain side into the sea of Galilee (*Matthew* 8:30-32; *Mark* 5:11-13; *Luke* 8:32-33). It is this Gospel episode that has rendered the pig one of the possible incarnations of the devil.

<sup>26</sup> "À la fin du Moyen Âge [...] on commence à doter le sanglier de tous les vices jusque-là attribués au seul porc domestique: glotonnerie, intempérance, lubricité, saleté, paresse. Les savoirs et les sensibilités du haut Moyen Âge ne confondaient pas les deux animaux; désormais, entre le cochon domestique et le cochon sauvage la frontière symbolique n'est plus imperméable" (Pastoureau 2011, 69).

<sup>27</sup> The pig is one of the animals with the longest historical association with man (at least from the eighth millennium B.C.). For its domestication and raising, see Zeuner 1963; Baruzzi, Montanari 1981; Buren, Pastoureau, Verroust 1987; Steel 2011 and Paravicini Bagliani 2015. For the specifically English context, see Fudge 2000 and 2018.

But there is more. For Christianity the pig became one of the attributes of Judaism and, as we have seen in Sebastian Brant, also of Islam: by a singular semantic reversal, the animal abhorred by Jews and Muslims became one of the symbolic figures used to indicate them.<sup>28</sup>

The allegorical significances of this creature are not however confined to the religious realm: in the later Middle Ages the pig was considered, both by the religious and the lay authorities, as a moral and perfectible being, to whom it was right to attribute responsibility. It is not surprising therefore that the guilty party in the crisis that affected the Capetian dynasty in the twelfth century was considered to be the pig that, on 13 October 1131, caused the young prince Philippe, son of Louis VI the Fat and heir to the throne, to fall from his horse and die. This French experience of 'animal regicide' was repeated in 1314, during a hunt, when Philippe IV the Fair was slain by a wild boar (Pastoureau 2015 and Frugoni 2018, 309-321).

At the same time, the pig was the animal that appeared most frequently at the bar of courts of justice, to answer accusations of crimes usually committed by humans.<sup>29</sup> Infanticide is the most recurrent of these and is well exemplified by the well-known case in Falaise (Normandy), where in 1386 a sow was accused of having eaten the face of a child; it was tried, led to the scaffold dressed as a human and hanged, having suffered unspeakable mutilations.<sup>30</sup>

Whether the stigma was derived from religious tradition or from lay history, the pig seems to have been made the catalyst for every human wickedness and atrocity, becoming, as Chevalier and Gheerbrant suggest, "le symbole des tendances obscures, sous toutes leurs formes de l'ignorance, de la gourmandise, de la luxure et de l'égoïsme" (1969, 778). An attribute of Satan, of the synagogue and the mosque, even guilty of homicide and regicide, the pig appears as the receptacle of every deadly sin: filthiness (*sorditas*), greed (*gula*), lust (*luxuria*), anger (*ira*) and sloth (*acedia*), a powerful image of sinful

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**28** From the iconographic point of view, the subject was treated in various ways, but one image in particular occurs more frequently and gradually takes over: it shows Jewish children adoring a sow or sucking milk from its teats (see Pastoureau 2011, 224).

**29** Evans lists at least thirty-six trials of pigs. The cases run from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century and affect a very large geographical area, mainly in northern Europe but also in some American colonies (1906, 313-34). In these calculations, late-medieval and modern France holds the record for the greatest number of judicial proceedings taken against pigs: about twenty-nine between 1266 and 1613 (Francione 1996, 85-6). A pioneering study was that of Carlo D'Addosio 1892.

**30** There is an extensive scholarly literature on this case: see the several studies by Pastoureau 1993, 16-23; 1999; 2001, 77-89; 2004, 33-5. More recent is the volume by Friedland 2012, 1-11.



man wallowing in pleasures and filth, both literal and metaphorical.<sup>31</sup>

England shared this rich continental patrimony of negative associations concerning the pig: echoes of a symbolic world in which the pig appears as an infernal and destructive force are found even in rationalist texts, such as decrees, norms and injunctions. We find, for example, this ordinance of the city of Norwich in the later fourteenth century:

Boars, sows, and pigs before this time have gone and still go vagrant by day and night without a keeper in the said city [Norwich], whereby divers persons and children have thus been hurt by boars, children killed and eaten, and others [when] buried exhumed, and other maimed, and many persons of the said city have received great injuries as wrecking of houses, destruction of gardens of divers persons by such kind of pigs upon which great complaint is often brought before the said Bailiffs and Community imploring them for remedy on the misfortunes, dangers and injuries which have been done to them. At the assembly held in Norwich, [...] By the assent of the Bailiffs and all the Community of the said city present at the said assembly; It is ordained and established that each man or woman of whatsoever estate or condition he may be, who has boar, sow, or other pig within the said city, that they keep them within their enclosure as well by day as by night. (Hudson, Tingey 1906-10, 2: 205-6)

Here the pig is not only associated with the ‘vagrant’ (the dangerous vagabond who, in his uncontrollability and his being extraneous to society, embodies the chaotic and unstable principle that must be removed from the well-ordered community); it is hyperbolically described as a homicide, an infanticide, an anthropophage and a devastator of houses, orchards and gardens (in Biblical terms, the destroyer of “the Lord’s vineyard”): a malign force that every proprietor must keep in check.

Despite all these vices, however, the Christian Middle Ages sometimes viewed the pig in a more positive light, unlike Judaism and Islam (whose judgement on this animal was always absolutely and irrevocably negative). For Christians there was also a good pig, such as the one that accompanied St Antony Abbot (both in hagiography and in folk lore).<sup>32</sup> There are stories in which the pig becomes specifical-

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**31** A similar imaginative world appears, albeit rarely, in the classical world. Circe transforms men into pigs, in accordance with their character and nature: in this case the mythical narrative also sets up a man/pig analogy, based on blame (*Odyssey* X, 210 ff.).

**32** For the figure of St Antony Abbot and his piglet, see the studies by Zambon 2001, 131-49 and Pastoureau 2011, 66-72.

ly the symbol (and analogy) of human innocence: for example, in the legend of St Nicholas, the Saint miraculously revives three children who have been cut into pieces and sold as pork by a wicked butcher (Ferguson 1976; Seal 2005; English 2016). The man-pig connection is not found only in the lives of the saints: late-medieval medical literature describes the internal anatomy of the swine as the most similar to that of human beings (at a time when the dissection of human corpses was forbidden, in the schools anatomists practised on hogs and sows), and both theology and homiletics dealt with this analogy. In one of the sermons of the French theologian Pierre le Chantre or Petrus Cantor (?-1197), the association between man and pig is coloured by moral values:

Porcus autem multam habet convenientiam cum homine in corpore, sicut ex anatomia et divisione ejus patet: insuper et in spiritu, spiritu hominis rationalis quasi suffocato, et in spiritum bruti per immunditiam converso. [...] Propter hoc Dominus etiam super omne edulium, sub figura tamen, prohibuit carnem suillam. (Cantor 1855, 337-8)<sup>33</sup>

The juxtaposition of pig and man on the physiological level opens up spiritual perspectives, in which the animal appears as a sort of de-rationalised man, deprived of higher functions; in this context, the Biblical prohibition found in *Leviticus* 11:7 (“the Swyne [...] is vncleane to you”) assumes for Cantor a new significance, imposing a reading *sub figura*: the *do not take swine’s flesh* means, in other words, *do not become* such flesh, do not give in to the *uncleanness* that suffocates the rational soul. If man and pig are so similar – so the reasoning goes – then ‘porcification’ is at every moment a concrete danger.<sup>34</sup>

It is against the background of this complex imaginative world – here briefly reconstructed – and of its symbolism that we can finally re-approach the English documents of the early modern age to which this study is devoted. In them, in different forms and to different purposes, the pig is called upon to evoke an obscure force, an element of chaos (as in the two documents of 1562: *The Shape of .ii.*

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**33** “The pig has much in common with man at the corporal level, as appears from the conformation of his internal organs; moreover, he has much in common with man in the spirit, as though in him the rational soul was suffocated and transformed into the soul of a brute, because of impurity. [...] For this reason out of all foods the Lord prohibited swine’s flesh, though only allegorically”.

**34** Fabre-Vassas describes the pig as an ‘analogical being’ in the sense that the analogy with man makes possible a specular comparison, a correlation that does not sacrifice the dissimilarity between the two species (1994). Again, for the man-pig relationship, see Sillar, Meyler 1961; Hedgpeeth 1978; Scott 1981; Jay 1986; Nissenson, Susan 1992; Capatti 1998, 132-67 and Pastoureau 2009.

*Mo[n]sters* and *The description of a monstrous Pig*), if not the explicit crimes of hypocrisy and treason, or “potential” regicide (as in the document of 1570: *A meruaylous straunge deformed Swyne*).

The ambiguity of the pig, the fruit of several imaginative worlds converging (the pagan, the Germanic, the Christian), favours its profoundly enigmatic signic use and renders it a more or less explicit of evil, but also a conveyor of heavenly truth. The pig, especially when deformed, is therefore fully *sacer* (sacred and disastrous at once) and, by virtue of its analogical relationship with man, it appears the most suited, among animal flesh, to reflect (and denounce) human sins.

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# Literary Transmigration George Eliot, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Spirit of Transatlantic Exchange

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**Abstract** Reading several letters from the eleven-year correspondence alongside *Dred* and *Daniel Deronda*, this paper argues that the model of transatlantic spiritual communication presented by Stowe and Eliot's epistolary friendship takes on a new and potentially radical light when applied to the concept of a transnational and post racial spiritual community. Each text fundamentally challenges the ability of the realist novel to depict a nuanced understanding of racial identity through the use of spiritualist and religious discourse and imagery.

**Keywords** George Eliot. Harriet Beecher Stowe. Spiritualism. Mysticism. Transatlantic literature.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Literary Transmigration and the Afterlives of Texts. – 3 Insurrectionary Spirits: Racial and Mystical Communion in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*. – 4 A "Sense of the Universal": Mesmeric Cosmopolitanism in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. – 5 "[A] Yearning Disembodied Spirit, Stirred with a Vague Social Passion": Literary, Spiritual, and Racial Communion.



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## 1 Introduction

In the sixth book of *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Mordecai, George Eliot's Jewish prophet, explains to the novel's eponymous hero Daniel the Kabbalistic doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul and its ability to "transmigrate" or move into other bodies, uniting to a "fellow-soul that needs it, that they may be perfected together, and their earthly work accomplished" (540). Once united, these souls "will depart from the mortal region, and leave place for new souls to be born out of the store in the eternal bosom" (540). While Mordecai imagines a much higher purpose for these circulating souls than transatlantic reprints, translations, and unauthorised sequels, the image of constantly moving, transforming, and relocating souls can easily be mapped onto the circulation, reception, and adaptation of literary texts. Interestingly, as several reviews and personal letters reveal, for George Eliot and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose second novel *Dred; A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856) may have served as inspiration for Eliot's own 'race novel', it is not only the movement or reception of the text that carries the potential for spiritual communion, but also the physical object of the book itself. Eliot and Stowe's transatlantic correspondence exemplifies a form of literary communication that can be likened to spiritual communion.

Reading several letters from the eleven-year correspondence alongside *Dred* and *Daniel Deronda*, I argue that the model of transatlantic spiritual communication presented by Stowe and Eliot's epistolary friendship takes on a new and potentially radical light when applied to the concept of a transnational and post racial spiritual community. Since Stowe initiated their transatlantic correspondence following Eliot's favourable review of *Dred* in the *Westminster Review* in 1856 and the period of their communication coincides with the composition and publication of Eliot's final novel, it is not surprising that their letters in some ways echo their narrative techniques. *Dred; A Tale of the Dismal Swamp*, which was published simultaneously in the US and Britain, features several plot devices and characters that are remarkably similar to Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*.

While the novels' thematic and structural similarities have been catalogued in work by Daniel Hack (2013), it is not the novels' formal affinities but rather their use of spiritual communion as a blueprint for post-racial and global communities that concerns this project. I am primarily interested in how each text fundamentally challenges the ability of the realist novel to depict a nuanced understanding of racial identity through the use of spiritualist and religious discourse and imagery. Both *Dred*, the eponymous "hero" and the prophet of the "swamp", and Mordecai, Eliot's Kabbalistic Jewish prophet who transmits his spiritual mission to Daniel, have been dismissed by nineteenth-century and current scholarship as unsubstantial, ab-

stracted figures who do not fit comfortably within the narratives they inhabit.<sup>1</sup> However, if we examine both texts as exemplars of what I call spiritual realism, it becomes clear that the ‘halves’ of each novel are not in fact disjointed but rather, as Eliot maintained in response to the critical bifurcation of her novel, that “everything in the book [is] related to everything else there”.<sup>2</sup>

Stowe’s deployment of spiritual realism reveals the hypocrisy of American religious institutions that implicitly accept slavery in the South while preaching the gospel, as well as to rehabilitate the figure of the male slave from her allegedly emasculating depiction of “Uncle Tom”. Eliot’s use of supernatural and spiritualist discourse in a novel that has otherwise been designated as a work of psychological realism<sup>3</sup> is intimately connected to concepts of identity, both individual and national, that make it a rich text to examine in a transatlantic context. According to Sarah Willburn, Pamela Thurschwell, and James Caron, Eliot’s text does not simply advocate for the creation of a Jewish nationalism, but rather employs Mordecai’s visions as a way to gesture toward the concept of a world community. By highlighting the ecumenical history that links all people, Eliot suggests that a transnational community could be maintained on the grounds of “humanity’s essential unity”.<sup>4</sup> Mordecai’s discussion of the transmigration of souls implies a circulation, relocation, and movement that is also inherent in our understanding of the transatlantic nineteenth-century literary sphere. Thus, Eliot pushes Stowe’s vision of the intersection between racial identity and spirituality a step further, suggesting that this vital mysticism can connect and invigorate not only the African American slave community but a global community as well.

In a letter to Stowe dated October 29, 1876, barely two months after the final of the eight monthly instalments of *Daniel Deronda* was published by *Blackwoods* and *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* simul-

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1 For more on the reception of *Daniel Deronda* and *Dred* see Cognard-Black 2004 and Mullaney 2011.

2 Letter to Madame Bodichon, October 2, 1876 (Eliot 1995, 6: 290).

3 In “George Eliot’s Prophecies: Coercive Second Sight and Everyday Thought Reading”, Pamela Thurschwell suggests that Eliot must turn to the occult or supernatural in order to “represent the workings of the human mind realistically, through all its sudden turns, unwanted memories and unconscious desires” (2004, 91). In “Fiction as Vivisection: G.H. Lewes and George Eliot”, Richard Menke, when discussing Eliot’s novella *The Lifted Veil*, similarly suggests that “realist fiction may, without forgoing its realism pretend to give us access to something we never encounter in real life – the unspoken thoughts of the other” (2000, 630).

4 According to James Caron, Eliot’s Mordecai is not simply a figure for Zionism but rather represents a movement for global unity: “Most of Mordecai’s thoughts are not so much those of a patriotic Jew with a nationalist’s feeling, as those of a visionary who sees Judaic tradition as a symbolic nucleus for a future world” (1983, 8).

taneously, Eliot reflects upon the mixed and somewhat lackluster response to the 'Jewish element' of her final novel. Surprised that her "race novel" did not create "much stronger resistance, and even repulsion, than it has actually met with", Eliot reveals that she "felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to" and that there was

nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs. (Eliot 1954, 6: 301)

Such an inspiration seems to hint at her attempt to translate and extend what she calls Stowe's "grand element" in her October 1856 review of *Dred*. Declaring first that "Mrs. Stowe has *invented* the Negro novel", Eliot goes on to suggest that the most remarkable aspect of Stowe's latest work is its "exhibition of a people to whom what we may call Hebraic Christianity is still a reality, still an animating belief, and by whom the theocratic conceptions of the Old Testament are literally applied to their daily life".<sup>5</sup> Such a description could easily be applied to Eliot's Mordecai, Mirah, and Daniel. Although comparisons between biblical Jews and American slaves abound in both abolitionist texts and nineteenth-century African American literature, Eliot's translation of Stowe's "Hebraic Christianity" to a Kabbalistic and more "ancient" form of Judaism hints at a universal spiritual connection that seems to transcend both race and religious dogma.

## 2 Literary Transmigration and the Afterlives of Texts

In a letter dated May 25, 1869, Stowe writes to Eliot about the transformative power of reading her novels. According to Stowe,

[a] book is a hand stretched forth in the dark passage of life to see if there is another hand to meet it. Now in your works if you could read my marked edition of them you would see how often the hand has met the kindred hand. (quoted in Cognard-Black 2004, 1)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For Eliot's entire review see "Belles Lettres". *The Westminster Review*, 66.130, October 1856, 566-82.

<sup>6</sup> Selections of the original correspondence between Stowe and Eliot can be found in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

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Here the physical object of the book becomes the ‘medium’ through which spiritual communication can occur. This emphasis on the role of ‘hands’ in the transmission and interpretation of messages calls to mind the nineteenth-century spiritualist instrument, the planchette. A predecessor to the Ouija board, the planchette was operated by séance participants placing their hands upon a heart-shaped piece of wood that was equipped with a pencil and attached to two small wheels. Once a spirit was summoned, the planchette would slowly move, writing out the otherworldly message. The physical contact of the believers’ hands upon the instrument was seen as crucial in order to establish spirit communication, suggesting a complex relationship between the material body and immaterial ‘writing’. For Stowe, Eliot’s books call forth to the reader and become one with her, in the same sense that Mordecai and Daniel’s souls become one through transmigration. Although Stowe juxtaposes this type of spiritual and sympathetic communion with the “dreary” and “unsympathetic” “[r]eviews and book notices”, Henry James’s unsigned review of the first instalments of *Daniel Deronda* employs a similar language of spiritual transmission. Published in the *Nation* on February 24, 1876, the review suggests that

[t]he ‘sense of the universal’ is constant, omnipresent [...]. [I]t gives us the feeling that the threads of the narrative, as we gather them into our hands, are not of the usual commercial measurement, but long electric wires capable of transmitting messages from mysterious regions. (363)

Here James not only evokes the cables of the telegraph, a device that can literally transmit electric currents-turned-messages across the ocean, but he also transforms the text into a medium not unlike the spiritual mediums of popular séances.

In both Stowe’s letter and James’s review the materiality of the text is highlighted and it is the job of the reader’s “hands” to reach for the meaning of the literary work, suggesting that the text and the reader must work together in order for the meaning to be properly received. Eliot expresses a similar sentiment in her review of J.A. Froude’s *The Nemesis of Faith* in 1849:

on certain red-letter days of our existence, it happens to us to discover among the spawn of the press, a book which, as we read, seems to undergo a sort of transfiguration before us. We no longer hold heavily in our hands an octavo of some hundred pages, over which the eye laboriously travels, hardly able to drag along with it the restive mind; but we seem to be in companionship with a spirit, who is transfusing himself into our souls. (*Coventry Herald and Observer*, quoted in Price 2012, 265)

Here the materiality of the book disappears as the reader becomes one with the 'spirit' of the text, rendering the physical object obsolete.

Stowe's first letter to Eliot suggests that the two authors share a bond that implies the 'ideal' spiritual connection between reader and text. Stowe assures Eliot that, as she reads her novels and composes letters to her, "my soul is walking as it often does along side [sic] of your soul" (quoted in Springer 1986, 61). For Stowe, writing and reading become not only a means of literal communication but also spiritual connection. In a letter dated May 25, 1869, Stowe expresses her "love" for Eliot, writing "I love you - and talk to you sometimes when I am quite alone so earnestly that I should think you must know it even across the ocean" (80). Recognising the physical distance that separates them, Stowe implies that even simply thinking about or 'talking to' Eliot materialises their bond.

More explicit than Stowe's intimations of the spiritual bond that unites her to Eliot are her attempts to convince the British author of the validity of spiritualist practices. There is still an underlying focus on the ability of such communication to bridge the distance, both geographical and spectral, between great literary minds. In a letter written on May 11, 1872, Stowe relates her spiritual encounter with Charlotte Brontë through the assistance of a planchette. Through the planchette, Stowe is able to participate in a transatlantic and transworldly community of letters. Answering Stowe's question "Charlotte, you loved 'Shirley' better than any of your other works, did you not?" Brontë responds, "Yes; it was nearer and dearer to me than all. That is why I was so grieved at the severity of some criticisms. They called it coarse, - God forgive them!" (quoted in Cotugno 2006, 112). Not only is the 'spirit' of Brontë still troubled by past reviews of her work, but her spirit seems to be aware of the material literary market. When Stowe later asks Brontë why she has "crossed the seas to America" to interest herself in her séance, Brontë responds that "I know no England, or America, now" (112). In this mediated account from Brontë, national boundaries no longer exist in the spiritual realm.

In a way literalising this metaphor of literary transmigration, the transatlantic circulation of Stowe's first anti-slavery text and of Stowe herself during her tours abroad are also linked to the spread of the spiritualist movement. In the same way that the meaning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shifted with its publication in Britain,<sup>7</sup> Stowe herself became an international phenomenon when she arrived in England. Kohn, Meer, and Todd note that 'Uncle Tom mania' coincided with the arrival of the spiritualism craze. In 1853, Mary Howitt directly compared Stowe to spiritualism, writing to her husband Wil-

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the transatlantic reception and appropriation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* see Meer 2005 and Fisch 2000.

liam that “the great talk now is Mrs. Stowe and spirit rapping, both of which have arrived in England” (xxiv). As Alex Owen points out, 1852 was not only the year in which Stowe published her bestselling novel, but it was also the same year that Mrs. Hayden, an American spiritualist who had moved to London, began to advertise her services as a spiritual medium. Only one year later in 1853, Stowe began her lecture tour of England, arriving in the very midst of the growing spiritualist phenomenon. Thus, the popular practice of spiritualism, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Stowe herself are all American imports that become the talk of English society in the early 1850s.

Just as Stowe’s texts and persona were coopted by spiritualism, Eliot was often depicted as having a mystical or spiritual power through her novels. According to Jennifer Cognard-Black: “Eliot herself was defined in [...] periodicals as a writer who could see humanity through a universal lens [...] in review after review of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot was cast as a kind of mystic and immortal soul-maker” (109). Mimicking the transatlantic literary community of spirits that Stowe gathered around her planchette, the works of Stowe and Eliot, as well as their personas as authors, have a transatlantic afterlife of their own, taking on new print forms and circulating to new ‘souls’ but always maintaining a connection to the original spirit that envisioned them. The fact that in the spiritual realm, and even in the literary world, there are no national boundaries, only further highlights why Stowe and Eliot would mobilise such moments of spiritual and mystical communion in their fiction as a way to represent the potential for transgressing earthly boundaries, particularly those determined by race and class.

### 3 Insurrectionary Spirits: Racial and Mystical Communion in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Dred*

By the time *Dred; A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* was published in 1856, four years after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had emerged as one of the most popular books of the nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe was an international sensation. Although countless British and American texts had crossed the Atlantic before it, for many scholars Stowe’s first novel ushered in a new age of transatlantic literary exchange. According to Sarah Meer, the “celebrity” of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “both evoked and inspired” an unprecedented bidirectional circulation of print (2005, 197). Although not as popular as its predecessor, Stowe’s second race novel sold “upwards of 200,000 copies” (Levine in Stowe 2000, ix), reaching an eager and at times critical audience in both the United States and England. Despite Eliot’s oft-quoted praise of *Dred*’s plot for containing “that grand element – conflict of races” and for Stowe’s ability to allow herself to appear “all a-glow for the mo-

ment with the wild enthusiasm, the unreasoning faith, and the steady martyr-spirit” of her characters, ultimately concluding that Stowe’s “own religious feeling is a great artistic advantage to her”, not all of Stowe’s readers were equally enchanted by her second novel (Eliot 1856b, 571). By reading *Dred*, beside and through Stowe’s various writings on spiritualism, including her correspondence with Eliot, the eponymous hero who has been dismissed by nineteenth-century and recent critics as “a failed creation, a throwback to an Old Testament warrior-prophet who seems wildly misplaced in the novel”,<sup>8</sup> is recuperated as not only a potential model for Eliot’s own prophet Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda* but also as a visionary character who represents the potential of spiritual communion to bridge racial, social, and perhaps even national boundaries.

Stowe’s highly detailed and extensive ‘research’ into the spiritual beliefs and capacities of African slaves makes *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon which the Story is found Together with Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work* especially significant given the status of *Dred* as a mystical prophet. In 1854, two years after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and two years before the release of *Dred*, Stowe published the *Key*. As the lengthy subtitle implies, Stowe intended her ‘key’ to silence those critics who lambasted her first novel for featuring allegedly fabricated and hyperbolic scenes of slavery and also enlighten her readers as to the ‘real-life’ inspirations behind her now famous characters. Situated between two fictional renditions of the slave experience, *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* can be read as a source text for the spiritualist elements in Stowe’s later novel *Dred*. According to Stowe,

[Africans] are possessed of a nervous organisation peculiarly susceptible and impressible. Their sensations and impressions are very vivid and their fancy and imagination lively [...]. Like Hebrews of old and the Oriental nations of the present, they give vent to their emotions with the utmost vivacity of expression, and their whole bodily system sympathises with the movements of their minds [...] Their religious exercises are all colored by this sensitive and exceedingly vivacious temperament. (45)

Stowe’s comparison of the African slave to the ancient Hebrew is intriguing due to both the common nineteenth century parallel between the exiled Jew and the African American slave as well as Eliot’s ‘translation’ of *Dred* into the story of contemporary British Jews in

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<sup>8</sup> See Mullany 2011 for a reading of the novel as a mystical as opposed to spiritualist novel.

*Daniel Deronda*. The connection between the “Hebrews of old” and the African is further elaborated when Stowe reflects upon the power of the Bible in the hands of the African slave. When discussing the impact of the scriptures on Dred as a young man she writes that “when this oriental seed, an exotic among us, is planted back into the fiery soil of a tropical heart, it bursts forth with an incalculable ardor of growth” (1854, 211). Here Stowe defamiliarises Christian understandings of the Bible, referring back to its “Hebraistic” origin and suggesting that perhaps, due to its birthplace’s proximity to Africa, the African subject is able to tap into a realm of religious experience that is not available to ‘us’ or what she presumes will be her primarily white audience.

Stowe’s reflection upon the “nervous organization” of the African is also particularly significant because its sentiments are repeated and depicted in the text of *Dred*. While *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* serves as an ‘encyclopedia’ of the African temperament, *Dred* provides concrete examples of these alleged tendencies and behaviours. When Nina Gordon, the white heroine and southern plantation owner, attends a camp meeting with her fiancé Clayton and various other slave-holding neighbours she is shocked by the behaviour of the slaves who gather on the edges of the meeting-ground. Nina witnesses a “circle of men and women [...] sitting with their eyes shut, and their heads thrown back, singing at the top of their voices. Occasionally, one or other would vary the exercises by clapping their hands, jumping up straight into the air, falling flat on the ground, screaming, dancing, and laughing” (244). In response to Nina’s dismay, Clayton explains:

We must have charity [...] for every religious manifestation. Barbarous and half-civilized people always find the necessity for outward and bodily demonstrations in worship; I suppose because the nervous excitement wakes up and animates their spiritual natures, and gets them into a receptive state [...] No, let the African scream, dance, and shout, and fall in trances. It suits his tropical lineage and blood. (245)

Clayton’s speech not only echoes Stowe’s claim concerning the “nervous constitution” of African slaves but also, in his reference to trances and “receptive state[s]”, evokes a popular nineteenth-century belief that African Americans were more susceptible to the power of mesmerists. As Stowe writes in *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,

[m]esmerists have found that the negroes are singularly susceptible to all that class of influences which produce catalepsy, mesmeric sleep, and partial clairvoyant [*sic*] phenomena. (1854, 46)



Stowe connects this mesmeric potential to a long history of African involvement in magic and the supernatural arts:

The African race, in their own culture, are believers in spells, in “fetish and obi”, in “the evil eye”, and all other singular influences, for which probably there is an origin in this peculiarity of constitution. The magicians in scriptural history were Africans; and the so-called magical arts are still practised in Egypt, and other parts of Africa, with a degree of skill and success. (46)

Stowe’s attempt to link the mystical powers of African slaves to the prophets of the Bible, as well as her assertion that with such “peculiar constitutions” it is no wonder that the Christian religion can be such a “powerful stimulant” to the slave population, is fundamental to an understanding of *Dred*’s protagonist because he is neither fully a prophet nor completely an occult magician, but rather a hybrid of the two.

Both Stowe and Eliot employ spiritual realism in order to combine otherwise incompatible genres: the realist race novel and the supernatural tale. Just as spiritual realism allows both authors to create cohesive narratives, the spiritual and supernatural elements of their texts bring disparate characters together, creating a spiritual community in which race is no longer a divisive identity category. Dred first appears in the novel after eighteen chapters have passed, a delay that in many ways prefigures Eliot’s decentering narrative strategy of introducing Daniel in the first chapter of *Daniel Deronda* only to have him disappear from the plot and resurface in the sixteenth chapter. Prior to Dred’s appearance the novel’s plot revolves around the domestic drama of Nina Gordon and her slave Harry as they struggle to keep the family plantation Camena out of the hands of her drunken and dissolute elder brother Tom. Dred arrives in the novel at moments when interracial tension threatens to spill over into violence. He first materialises when Harry is walking back to his cottage after a confrontation with Tom regarding Tom’s desire to purchase Harry’s young wife Lisette. In the midst of Harry’s ruminations, Dred appears. Borrowing from popular nineteenth-century theories of phrenology, Stowe pays particular attention to the physiology of Dred’s skull:

[t]he perceptive organs jutted out like dark ridges over the eyes, while the part of the head which phrenologists attribute to moral and intellectual sentiments, rose like an ample dome above them. (198)

Beyond this phrenological reading of Dred’s appearance, Stowe hints at his prophetic abilities during her physiological survey of his features:

[T]here burned in [his eyes] like tongues of flame in a black pool of naphtha, a subtle and restless fire, that betokened habitual excitement to the verge of insanity. If any organs were predominant in the head, they were those of ideality, wonder, veneration, and firmness, and the whole combination was such as might have formed one of the wild warrior prophets of the heroic ages. (198)

Stowe simultaneously celebrates the animalistic force of Dred through her description of his physical prowess and underscores his intellectual, spiritual, and mystical abilities. While some scholars have criticised Stowe for such a seemingly ambivalent treatment of race, one that both emphasises the virility and the spiritual or mesmeric susceptibility of African slaves, Dred's status as a mystic and his tendency to fall into trances does not render him weak or effeminate, but rather connects him to a spiritualist tradition that transcends race as well as other earthly boundaries.

Existing in the space between insanity and divination, Dred is likened to the Biblical prophets and he has chosen a successor in Harry:

He had fixed his eye upon Harry, as a person whose ability, address, and strength of character, might make him at some day a leader in a conspiracy against the whites. (212)

Stowe reveals Dred's prophetic potential at the camp meeting, one of the novel's pivotal scenes. Under the cover of darkness, Dred bellows a prophecy of fire and brimstone to the terrified majority white audience in response to a slave-trade that was being conducted on the grounds of the revival between allegedly 'God-fearing' men. A performance that threatens racial unity with intimations of future violence, here the swamp prophet's psychological and spiritual liminality is further emphasised, and he is once more placed within a historical legacy of seers and oracles:

There is a twilight-ground between the boundaries of the sane and the insane, which the old Greeks and Romans regarded with a peculiar veneration. They held a person whose faculties were thus darkened as walking under the awful shadow of a supernatural presence; and, as the mysterious secrets of the stars only become visible in the night, so in these eclipses of the more material faculties they held there was often an awakening of supernatural perceptions. (273)

In the transitional state of dusk, Dred achieves his most powerful states of divination, as he crosses the boundary between the natural and spiritual realms in order to enter a state of "exaltation and trance" during which he predicts the threat that Tom Gordon poses

to Harry's wife. Adopting the rhetoric of the Hebrew Testament, Dred declares "in a hollow, altered voice, like that of a sleep-walker" that soon "shall the silver cord be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken. Yes, cover up the grave - cover it up! Now, hurry! come to me, or he will take thy wife for a prey!" (270). Unlike his more radical prophecy of bloodshed against slaveholders, Dred's vision regarding the safety of Lisette comes true and ultimately catalyses the creation of a multiracial spiritual community in the swamp. Drawn together by Dred's prophetic power, Harry and Lisette, as well as a Tiff, a loyal slave who takes it upon himself to raise his poor mistress' children after her death, retreat to the safety of the swamp. Even Nina's fiancé Clayton seeks asylum in Dred's community after he is run out of town by a lynch mob for espousing abolitionist views. Clayton is at first skeptical of Dred's preaching until gradually the prophet's "jargon of hebraistic [*sic*] phrases, names, and allusions" took on for him a "quaint and poetic interest" (509). Thus, Dred's camp becomes an even more intermediate space, one in which people of all races and social classes can reside in peace. Although this tranquillity is eventually destroyed when Dred is slain by Tom Gordon during a confrontation on the edge of the swamp, the camp itself is never tainted by violence and its inhabitants eventually flee the United States in order to avoid further conflict after the death of their leader.

Stowe's post-racial vision is clearly limited, since it is only by leaving the United States that the fugitive slaves and their former masters can live together in peace and this self-willed exile could be read as more conservative than progressive. However, instead of ending her text on a fearful and threatening note she suggests that Dred's revolutionary zeal has given birth to a concept of interracial communion that is ultimately more successful and productive than acts of insurrectionary violence. Stowe's decision to end her novel with Dred's death is more revolutionary than a climactic scene of interracial violence. After Dred's death, which echoes Uncle Tom's in its Christ imagery and sentimentality, his 'followers' travel North by means of the Underground Railroad. While some of the fugitives and poor whites establish themselves in various working-class positions in Northern cities, Clayton frees all of his slaves and takes them to Canada where he founds a settlement and school for free-blacks and fugitives. According to the narrator,

So high a character have [Clayton's] schools borne that the white settlers in the vicinity have discontinued their own, preferring to have their children enjoy the advantages of those under his and his sister's patronage and care. (544)

In a footnote added to the original edition, Stowe states that such facts "are all true of the Elgin settlement, founded by Mr. King, a

gentleman who removed and settled his slaves in the south of Canada" (544). Inspired by Dred's spiritual community in the liminal landscape of the Dismal Swamp, the ill-fated prophet's followers create an interracial community that defies the racial boundaries of the antebellum United States. Eliot takes up Stowe's vision in *Daniel Deronda* and complicates it by suggesting that spiritual communion has the potential to catalyze post-national identities.

#### 4 A "Sense of the Universal": Mesmeric Cosmopolitanism in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*

In a letter dated March 18, 1876, Harriet Beecher Stowe provides a lengthy and somewhat critical review of her correspondent's most recent novel, *Daniel Deronda*. While she states that her husband Calvin was especially interested in the Jewish question, having "cultivated a personal relationship with the leading Rabbi" in their hometown of Mandarin, Florida and that some of his "spare learning [has rubbed] off onto [her]", Stowe admits that her "heart blood vibrates more toward Gwendolen than Mirah" (quoted in Springer 1986, 65), a reaction that was not peculiar to Stowe but was rather nearly universal among audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. While it is not surprising that Calvin would be drawn to Mordecai's Kabbalistic brand of Judaism given his status as an acknowledged spiritualist, Stowe's reaction is perhaps more startling due to the marked similarities between the plots, structures, and prophets of *Dred* and *Daniel Deronda*. Despite the fact that Stowe's second race novel clearly pushes the boundaries of realism through its emphasis on spiritual communion and mesmeric trances, what she most appreciates about Eliot's final novel is not its equally spiritual and iconoclastic moments, but rather what she deems as the 'domestic realism' of Gwendolen's character.

Stowe's preference for Gwendolen's plot over that of Daniel's due to the former's realism is particularly interesting when read in the context of Eliot's reviews of Stowe. In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", Eliot lauds Stowe as an exemplar of social realism, asking her British readership "[w]hy can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England, as interesting as Mrs. Stowe's pictures of religious life among negroes" (1856, 252). Published in the same year in which *Dred* first appeared on the transatlantic literary circuit, Eliot's review implies that Stowe's depiction of the swamp prophet and his followers provides a truthful look into the spiritual lives of African slaves. In return for this praise, Stowe appears to dismiss any elements of *Daniel Deronda* that could render the text a work of social realism along the same lines of her own work, instead admiring Eliot's marriage plot. Stowe, like many readers of *Daniel Deronda*, appears to have been unable to reconcile what many critics

imagined as the 'two plots' of Eliot's final novel, a misreading that is particularly intriguing given the fact that Stowe's *Dred* was similarly criticised for having a fundamentally divided and ruptured plot.

Stowe's response to what has been erroneously labelled "the Jewish plot" of *Daniel Deronda* is even more surprising given Eliot's explicit emphasis on the racial element of her project in her letters. In a letter to Stowe, Eliot expounds on her intention to raise awareness of not only the mistreatment of Jews in contemporary British culture but also the inherent connection that exists between Judaism and Christianity. After castigating "the usual attitude of Christians towards Jews" Eliot writes:

I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to. Moreover, not only towards the Jews, but towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us [...] But toward the Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment. (quoted in Cave 1995, xxii)

For Eliot, the most significant part of her project is not simply distinguishing the Jew as a figure who has been egregiously mistreated both historically and in British contemporary society, but rather to bridge the distance between the two religions in order to promote a concept of community, both local and global, that transcends the boundaries of racial and religious difference. Although many scholars have suggested that *Daniel Deronda* can be read as a gesture, however ambivalent or successful, toward a nascent notion of cosmopolitanism,<sup>9</sup> the focus of this study is not only that Eliot's text is coloured by a transatlantic and transnational element but also why and how she uses religious and spiritualist doctrine to create the possibility of such a boundary crossing community.

While Eliot initially appears to be focused on the transformative powers of Judaism in particular and not spirituality as such, Mordecai and Mirah's religious beliefs advocate a humanistic and universal connection that in many ways ignores strict dogmatic divisions, echoing and putting into practice Eliot's statement in her first letter to Stowe that

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<sup>9</sup> In "Unspeakable George Eliot" (2010), David Kurnick goes so far as to claim that Eliot is the Victorian writer who is most often labelled as a cosmopolitan writer. For cosmopolitan readings of *Daniel Deronda*, see Anderson 2001 and Tucker 2000.

a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent, must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. (quoted in Springer 1986, 69)

This “more perfect” religion combines elements of nineteenth-century spiritualism, ancient mysticism, and the teachings of Kabbalah. According to Sarah Willburn, “[t]he complexity and heterodoxy of Eliot’s religious research and views” inherently reimagines the political or global message of her novel:

Judaism in this novel is unique because she imagines it is subsumed by a bigger category of Eastern pantheistic world religions, as opposed to solely imagining it within its own, traditional terms. (2006, 28)

By depicting Judaism as an ecumenical and universal system of spiritual belief, Eliot employs religious doctrine as a way to represent the need for community and interconnections between individuals and nations.

As is clear from Jane Irwin’s meticulously annotated edition of the *Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, Eliot immersed herself in the teaching and practices of not only traditional Judaism but also the more esoteric doctrine of Kabbalah while researching for her final novel. Solomon Maimon’s *Autobiography* (1792-1793), which is the very book that turns up in Mr. Ram’s second-hand bookshop in the novel, has multiple entries in Eliot’s journal, as well as Henry Hart Milman’s *The History of the Jews from the Earliest Period Down to Modern Times* (1866), another text that Daniel reads when he begins to explore Mirah and Mordecai’s heritage. In her notes on Graetz’s four volume study *History of the Jews* (1853-1870), Eliot pays particular attention to his discussion of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the transmigration of souls:

The doctrine of the Cabbala [sic] are neither ancient Jewish, nor new-philosophical. The ideal potencies, the spiritual intermediators between the Divine fullness of light & the dim world - the pre-existence of the soul - the transmigration of souls - the magical operation of human actions on the higher world - all belong to the Alexandrian neo-platonic philosophy. (1996, 175)

Here it is the immaterial materiality of the human soul, at once “magical” and divine and capable of catalysing real-world actions, that interests Eliot. The notebook entries dedicated to Maimon focus on “the twofold division of the Kabbalah into ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical,’ the latter being a mode of conjuring natural forces” (Irwin in Eliot 1996,

172). According to Irwin, Eliot's project becomes fitting "the theory or fable of Kabbalistic doctrine into the practical, naturalistic, world of her narrative" (172). Eliot fulfils this project through her depiction of the modern Jewish prophet Mordecai.

Daniel first encounters Mordecai when he wanders into the "Judengasse" of London in search of Mirah's family. Upon entering a book stall next to Ezra Cohen's pawn shop, Daniel sees Mordecai and is struck by his unusual appearance, thinking that he had "precisely such a physiognomy as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile, or in some New Hebrew poet of the medieval time" (386). The prophetic and visionary status of Mordecai is only further highlighted by Eliot's digression on the multiple definitions of "second sight" at the beginning of the thirty-eighth chapter, the chapter in which she relates Mordecai's history and spiritualist visions. Before narrating Mordecai's dedicated search for the fulfilment of his prophecies, Eliot discusses the nature of clairvoyance:

'Second sight' is a flag over disputed ground. But it is a matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conceptions - nay, travelled conclusions - continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on unnumbered impressions. (471)

In a similar fashion to the way in which she plays with the ambiguity of heightened consciousness in her private writings, Eliot utilises the instability of "second sight" in both this passage and throughout the text. Over the course of the novel multiple characters are said to have "second sight", including Gwendolen, Lush, and Daniel, however no character exhibits the supernatural and visionary meaning of the term in the way that Mordecai does.

Perhaps the most explicit evidence of Mordecai's prophetic powers occurs in the scene in which he meets Daniel on the Kew bridge over the Thames. It is not a coincidence that Daniel encounters Mirah for the first time while rowing on the Thames and also sees Mordecai while on the river. According to E.S. Shaffer, water plays an important role in the doctrine of Kabbalah:

The mystical transference of the name of God from master to disciple [...] traditionally took place over water [...] and achieves a portion of the restoration of unity to the severed parts of mankind through the special relationship of certain souls. (1975, 256)

Kabbalah's emphasis on "the restoration of the spiritual structure of mankind" and the interconnectedness of souls is emphasised in the

geography of the scene; Mordecai stands on a bridge, a structure that unites and connects divided banks of land. The bridge is also a liminal space; it is neither water nor land but a hybrid or intermediate space and thus an appropriate setting for this moment of spiritual revelation and connection. As Daniel ties his boat to the dock, his eyes meet Mordecai's, gazing out from a figure that is

brought out by the western light into startling distinctness and brilliancy - an illuminated type of bodily emaciation and spiritual eagerness. (1996, 493)

Once contact has been made, Eliot shifts perspective from Daniel's to Mordecai's in order to depict the ailing prophet's eagerness as his vision comes to fruition. Mordecai watches Daniel's progress up the river with

a recovery of impressions that made him quiver as with a presentiment, till at last the nearing figure lifted up its face towards him - the face of his visions. (493)

When the two are finally face to face, Mordecai declares "I expected you to come down the river. I have been waiting for you these five years" (493). After this prophecy-fulfilling meeting on the bridge, Mordecai reveals his spiritual mission to Daniel, as well as his need for Daniel to continue that mission after his death. Mordecai's mission is not strictly concerned with the transmission of Judaism as a biological, cultural, and religious inheritance, but rather his yearning for Daniel ties into a notion of spiritual transmission and its relation to nation-formation and national identity. Mordecai is not only concerned about the replenishment of the Jews, but rather of a world community that can be mobilised through such spiritual communication. As Avron Fleishman argues, Mordecai

is closer to being the spokesman of a religion of humanity, Jewish division, than he is of being either representative of the age-old Jewish anticipations of messianic restoration or a predecessor of the political Zionism that emerged later in the century. (2010, 204)

Not only is Mordecai's version of Kabbalah more invested in the potential for universal communion through the transmigration of souls than the more specific need to preserve and transmit Jewish doctrine to future generations, but his discussions of transmigration often look outward to a transnational notion of community. When reflecting on the various spiritual connections that exist between men, Mordecai states:



“Man finds his pathways: at first they were foot-tracks, as those of the beasts in the wilderness; now they are swift and invisible: his thought dives through the ocean, and his wishes thread the air: has he found all the pathways yet? What reaches him, stays with him, rules him, he must accept it, not knowing its pathway”. (1996, 503)

Here Mordecai refers not only to the “swift and invisible” pathways of the telegraphic cable that “dives through the ocean” to make transatlantic communication possible, but also to the equally invisible spiritual and mesmeric circuits that link humanity. This understanding of global spiritual transmission is only further developed when Mordecai takes Daniel to the Philosopher’s Club where he engages in a debate over proto-Zionist theories. Instead of arguing for the need of a distinct and separate Jewish state, Mordecai once more stresses the interconnectedness of all races, religions, and nations. According to Mordecai,

[t]he life of a people grows, it is knit together and yet expanded, in joy and sorrow, in thought and action; it absorbs the thoughts of other nations into its own forms, and gives back the thought as new wealth to the world; it is a power and an organ in the great body of nations. (526)

For Mordecai, the Jewish people are simply one part of a greater world community and it is his desire that his race “may be, as of old, a medium of transmission and understanding” to all nations (532). Thus, Mordecai’s spiritual transmission to Daniel at the end of the novel enacts on an individual scale what he hopes will one day occur globally.

Eliot’s spiritual realism not only serves to connect Mordecai and Daniel but also allows for a reading of the novel as one cohesive narrative. Just as spiritual realism links individual characters, in particular Daniel and Gwendolen through their almost psychic connection, the genre also links what has often been labelled a bifurcated plot. Thus, there is no longer the ‘English plot’ and ‘Jewish plot’ but rather a single plot that advocates for the creation of a more inclusive transnational community. Even in what has erroneously been named ‘Gwendolen’s plot’ by both nineteenth century and modern readers, there is an underlying emphasis on the need to look beyond one’s own experience to the global sphere. In several passages Eliot’s narrator seems to chastise Gwendolen and her neighbours in rural England for their limited vision of the world.

The connection between a global worldview and spirituality is made explicit in several conversations between Daniel and Gwendolen. Influenced by his interactions with Mordecai and Mirah, Dan-

iel is no longer as mesmerised by the figure of Gwendolen but rather takes on the role of a spiritual advisor to the novel's heroine. When Gwendolen desperately asks him how she can improve herself and be a better person, Daniel responds

Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action - something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot. (446)

Gwendolen responds to this advice physically as if "an electric shock" has been sent through her body, a reaction that further links such outward and global thinking to mesmeric and spiritual connections. This connection is perhaps most evident in one of the final scenes of the novel when Daniel tells Gwendolen of his impending marriage to Mirah and his plans to travel to Israel. After Daniel tells Gwendolen of his plans, there is a charged silence between the two:

There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind...enter like an earthquake into their own lives - when the slow urgency of growing generations turns into the tread of an invading army or the dire clash of civil war [...] Then it is as if the Invisible Power that has been the object of lip-worship and lip resignation became visible, according to the imagery of the Hebrew poet, making the flames his chariot, and riding on the wings of the wind, till mountains smoke and the plains shudder under the rolling fiery visitation. (803)

Here Eliot weaves together the central themes of her final novel. To show that Gwendolen's "soul" has finally been freed from its imprisonment in the limited circle of her life experience and given a glimpse of the wide world around her, Eliot links images of the American Civil War and global consciousness with "the Invisible Power" of the universal spirituality that Mordecai preached during his life. In one of the most pivotal scenes of the novel, one that has often been read as a scene of thwarted romance and separation, Eliot turns her reader's attention away from the particular situation of her hero and heroine to the universal spirituality that has the potential to create and invigorate a global community.

## 5 “[A] Yearning Disembodied Spirit, Stirred with a Vague Social Passion”: Literary, Spiritual, and Racial Communion

In the epigraph to the chapter in which Gwendolen and Daniel finally see each other again after their first mesmeric meeting at the casino in Leubronn, Eliot uses an excerpt from Walt Whitman’s poem “Vocalism”, a piece that celebrates the power of the human voice to captivate its listener:

Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice,  
him or her I shall follow,  
As the water follows the moon, silently,  
with fluid steps anywhere around the globe.

While the two lines chosen by Eliot prefigure Gwendolen’s reflection upon the “coercion” that Daniel had “exercised over her thought” since their first encounter and anticipates the “future influence” that his presence, both physical and epistolary, will have on her life, this excerpt also suggests the notion of global communion. “Silent” and with “fluid steps” the poetic speaker dissolves into near immateriality in order to follow the equally immaterial call of “the right voice”. In the lines preceding these, the speaker asks “Do you move in these broad lands as broad as they? | Come duly to the divine power to speak words” (3-4). Traversing earthly boundaries, the “voice” is endowed with a spiritual power that leads the listener to follow. Like the prophets Mordecai and Dred, the voice of Whitman’s poem has “the quality to strike and to | uncloseth” (20), breaking down barriers and seeking new forms of communication.

While this poem emphasises the power of the spoken word, I argue that these sentiments can easily be extended to the power of the printed word. Just like the voice celebrated by Whitman, the letters between Gwendolen and Daniel, Nina and Clayton, and, by extension, between Eliot and Stowe, literally cross national and geographic boundaries to reach their intended audience. Once they are received, they wield a similarly transformative force, establishing spiritual, transnational, and transracial communions between distant readers. The final line of Whitman’s verse suggests that this prophetic voice is not only needed for such new formulations of community to be possible but also to rouse the spirits of the dead: “Until that comes which has the quality to bring forth what lies | slumbering forever ready in words” (21-2). It is through words, whether written or spoken, that true spiritual power rests.

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