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Leda or Living Doll? Women as Dolls in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*. by Donna Mitchell

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10104>



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Leda or Living Doll? Women as Dolls in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*

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Donna Mitchell

ABSTRACT

This article will use the figure of the doll to consider female identity and performativity in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). It will build upon recent Gothic criticism from Andrew Hock Soon Ng's *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject* (2015), which defines the domestic space in this novel as a theatre box that reduces its occupants to actors that must execute the correct gender performativity at all times. Specifically, it will use a doll motif to explore the effect of this demand on the Gothic heroine who is demoted to the status of a silent and submissive doll-like entity. Firstly, it will discuss the complex formation of female identity and the various elements that influence the process. Secondly, it will analyze the female subject's struggle for control of her identity and autonomy against a villainous patriarch, which is a common theme in many classic and contemporary Gothic narratives. Finally, it will evaluate how the doll and heroine analogy epitomizes the many components of female identity and performativity as well as the repression of the Gothic heroine by outside forces through its discussion of the relentless conflict between Melanie and Uncle Philip.

KEYWORDS:

Dolls, female identity, mirrors, gothic feminism, gender studies, Angela Carter.

Female identity and performativity in Gothic narratives is often strictly governed and monitored by entities, human and otherwise, that are closest to the female subject. Domestic space is one such factor as it is a site that usually contains mirrors and/or a male gaze that influences and reminds the Gothic heroine that she is under constant surveillance. In *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject* (2015), Andrew Hock Soon Ng argues that the domestic interior of Angela Carter's fiction can be read as an "abode in which to live and a theatre box through which to perform" (35). In other words, the family home can be regarded as a theatre box that turns its occupants into actors who must execute the correct performativity for their gender at all times. This article will build upon Ng's theory by exploring the influence of this theatre box on the specific topic of female identity and performativity. A doll motif, by means of relevant analyses and Gothic feminism, will be applied to Carter's heroines in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) in order to examine how this repressive environment reduces the Gothic female to the status of a doll-like being. Uncle Philip's house will represent how domestic space is often established as "a patriarchal institution writ in miniature" in many Gothic narratives, and Uncle Philip himself will be central to the analysis as he undertakes the villainous role of antagonist to

the Gothic heroine (Ng 26). The toymaker's subjugation of his female subjects in particular will be discussed as he demands their compliance with his every "hegemonic, masculine whim ... so much so that their expressions must accord to his desires and determination, or be unpermitted" (Ng 26). The doll is therefore a fitting model for the female figure in this discussion because it is defined by its manmade and perfect physicality that also underlies the unattainable version of female identity that is presented to women on a daily basis through various mediums that reduce them to the sum of their body parts. The doll in this text represents the repetitive image of "deathly femininity" that can be found in much of Carter's fiction, which is rich in female characters who often exist in a dreamlike state of limbo where they are "neither fully dead nor fully alive" (Munford 16, Carter 597). By this logic, "the signifier Woman" becomes intrinsically connected to non-human entities as "women in [Carter's] text[s] appear in transmogrified forms, as puppets, dolls and phantoms" (Munford 47). The doll motif in this article will therefore illustrate how the Gothic heroine personifies how women are conditioned to objectify and dehumanize themselves in an effort to epitomize the social perception of beauty and feminine performativity. Finally, this article will determine how the ominous power of the mirror and the male gaze within the theatre box subsequently encourages

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the female character to engage in an incessant performance as exemplified by Melanie and her puppet double, Leda. These factors are indicative of an exclusively female experience that is discussed in many Gothic narratives. They emphasize the genre's ability to vocalize disregarded issues of womanhood and demonstrate why "women often look to literary texts for a female history which is left out of history books" (Wallace 135).

When Melanie is first introduced to the reader she is on the delicate brink of adulthood which sees her maturing physical and mental states evolve towards the creation of a new sexual identity. She embodies the "childlike innocence of the heroine" that is a core feature of so many Gothic narratives and used to accentuate the sinister nature of the impending villain (Georgieva 3). Her bedroom becomes a crucial component of the theatre box of her family home and acts as a personal site of observation and government when she uses her mirror to privately observe her sexual maturation through a series of provocative poses. This practice illustrates how mirrors are inextricably linked to the "male gaze" and the construction of female identity. Melanie's obsession with her reflected self represents the universal struggle that occurs during the young girl's formative years when her identity becomes defined by the sexualized physicality of her newfound status as the object of male desire. Her identity becomes fragmented when she presents different versions of herself to the mirror in a range of disguises that express the uncertain nature of adolescent sexuality. She demonstrates the female figure's attempt to become comfortable and familiar with this new version of herself by embarking on a journey of self-discovery in front of the mirror, which sees her realize that she was "made of flesh and blood" (Carter 1). This simple observation can be read as a satirical commentary on her current state and her near-transition into a doll-like woman in Uncle Philip's house. As the mirrors of Angela Carter's fiction are often feminine spaces that monitor significant changes in her heroines' identities, they can illustrate the influence that social definitions of gender performativity have on the development of female sexual identity. Examples of this feature can be seen in *The Passion of New Eve* when Leilah uses the mirror for a daily beauty ritual that creates a more sexualized version of herself. Later in the same novel, Eve uses the mirror to become familiar with her post-transformative self. Similarly, the anonymous narrator of "The Bloody Chamber" watches herself lose her virginity in a sea of mirrors that surrounds her marriage bed.

As a Gothic element, the mirror can be read as potentially threatening as an ego is "liable of losing itself in [its] other space [only to] become replaced by an *image* of

self instead" (Ng 31, original emphasis). This interpretation presents the mirror as yet another threat to Melanie's identity as her self-image becomes trapped within it when she engages in her narcissist displays:

For hours she stared at herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe; she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib-cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breast-bone to navel (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto), and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulder blades. And then she would writhe about, clapping herself, laughing, sometimes doing cartwheels and handstands out of sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now that she was no longer a little girl. (Carter 1)

Her understanding that "she was no longer a little girl" is confirmed by her naked adolescent form which marks the start of her transition from childhood to young adulthood. The mirror is instrumental to the reader's understanding of how her psyche matches her evolving physicality when she quickly accepts her femininity and plays up to the version of herself that will be seen through masculine eyes and objectified by the masculine onlooker. This suggests that in order for the young girl to accept her new identity she must first objectify herself and position herself as an object of the male gaze. In other words, she must define her beauty solely in terms of the masculine concept of feminine beauty. Her attempt to personify this version of femininity that is defined by its appeal to a masculine audience raises the notion of Diane Long Hoeveler's discussion of Irigaray's notion of the "feminine feminine" and "masculine feminine" woman in Gothic narratives. In *Gothic Feminism*, Hoeveler asserts that women will only be able to formulate their own determined version of identity when they "undo the effects of phallogocentric discourse" that currently govern it (11-12). She stresses the fact that this can only be achieved by acting out and hyperbolizing the strict patriarchal codes that manage female identity. A defining element of this code is the performative requirements of the woman under the male gaze, which requires a removal of certain natural elements that effectively dehumanize her and demote her to the status of an idol or the inanimate object of the doll that is admired only for her youthful beauty and silence. Melanie's hyperbolic and over-sexualized playacting with her mirror image can therefore be read as a private act of transgression with the mirror as her only witness. She will reminisce about this rebellious practice and its inherent freedom many times

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afterwards when she finds herself entrapped in Uncle Philip's house where there are no mirrors. Her fixation on her reflected self is most evident when she is still within the safety of her original home and can use her bedroom mirror to shape herself through male art: Pre-Raphaelite, she combed out her long, black hair to stream straight down from a centre parting and thoughtfully regarded herself as she held a tiger-lily from the garden under her chin, her knees pressed close together. A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face and sat down in a chair with her legs apart and a bowl of water and a towel at her feet. (1-2)

It is important to note that the subverted depictions of Melanie created during this presentation remain specifically masculine. They are portraits of femininity inscribed by male authors, painters and from women's magazines proving that the boundaries of her adolescent imaginings are thus "marked by thoughts of her future roles as lover, wife and mother" (Gamble 36). These versions of Melanie therefore demonstrate how patriarchal ideology prevails her bold attempt at transgressive behavior.

Her desire to experience the male gaze through the execution of these roles means that she spends much time during her performance conjuring up a phantom groom who can appreciate her developing beauty. She becomes obsessed with the sexual rite of passage that comes with the experiences of love and marriage, which causes her to try on her mother's wedding dress and in doing so, becomes her replacement. This development is indicative of many Gothic novels that demonstrate the child-bride's ability to replace the mother. Laura Mulvey discusses Melanie's behavior and claims that her "over-involvement with her image is her fault and her downfall [as] it is her fascination with her mirror-image that seduces her into wearing her mother's wedding dress" (245). She does this in an effort to envisage herself as a bride and as a sexually active woman, because, despite her belief that "virtue is fragile," she still prayed: "please God, let me get married. Or, let me have sex" (Carter 13, 8). The dress, which is "white satin [with] scooping sleeves, wide as the wings of swans," and is accompanied by "a wreath of artificial roses [for] her forehead," foreshadows her later costume as Leda in Uncle Philip's puppet show (11). Once again, Melanie performs in front of the mirror as she imagines a bridal version of herself seen through the male gaze and checks her reflection to confirm that "she was beautiful ... A bride" (16). Her possession of beauty is inextricably linked to her exemplification of youthful femininity and so is simply taken for granted, as according to Marie Mulvey Roberts, beautiful women are presupposed creatures because

"ugliness is incompatible with the feminine" in Gothic texts (86). But this attempt to imitate her mother's sexual rite of passage prematurely results in her being "bruised and filthy ... [bleeding] from a hundred little cuts [with] the dress ... in ribbons ... filthy, streaked with green from the tree and her own red blood" (22). Melanie believes this transgressive act to be the catalyst that sets off drastic changes in her world, causing both her parents' death and her subsequent entrapment within the theatre box of Uncle Philip's house and adjoining toyshop. As she is the Gothic child of this tale, Melanie is also "the carrier of the story," and so the domestic setting of the novel changes when her surroundings become Uncle Philip's house, which can be read as a sinister "parody of the notion of home itself" (Georgieva 45, Ng 35). It is this extreme change in circumstance that challenges her newfound identity and allows her to experience the full extent of male gaze as the oppression she encounters from Uncle Philip threatens to transform her further into a doll-like version of herself who personifies all of the objectifying traits of socially-constructed femininity.

Melanie recognizes the enormity of this relocation and considers the act of leaving the family home to be a final farewell to her childhood identity, imagining that a "part of herself ... was killed, a tender, budding part; the daisy-crowned young girl who would stay behind to haunt the old house, to appear in mirrors" (31). This apparition signifies her youth and innocence and so represents the childish part of her identity that cannot accompany her to the toy-maker/ Uncle Philip's house where she will gain firsthand experience of the omnipresent male gaze. Upon entering her new home, her loss of autonomy becomes immediately apparent. This is emphasized by her dismay at the lack of mirrors in the house as, up until this point, she has relied on them for the formation of her identity as well as validation of her beauty and worth. Their absence ensures that her ego will now have "no recourse to establishing a definition" because "her subjectivity will [now] be reduced to a thing whose function is to satisfy her uncle's perverse and sometimes violent desires" (Ng 35). She vocalizes her feelings of entrapment and recognizes her change in circumstance and identity when she "feels herself to be like one of her uncle's puppets [as] her feelings of powerlessness intensify [because] she has no mirror in which to see herself Control of her identity is [now] taken over by [others and] she begins to see herself as she is seen by others" (Gamble 36). In other words, the mirror has been replaced with the dual male gaze of Uncle Philip and Aunt Margaret's brother, Finn. Her frustration at the inability to continue carefully tracking any changes in her

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identity is portrayed in her wish “for a mirror to see herself ... [to see] if she was looking older, if she had changed at all,” and she wonders constantly if “I still look the same? Oh God, could I still recognize myself?” (125, 103). She relies on tracking the fleeting glimpses of herself in “the black pupils of [Finn’s] subaqueous eyes” to see if “[s]he still looked the same” (105). The absence of mirrors also highlights the lack of control that she has on her emerging identity from this point as it is now being monitored and carefully molded by the toy-maker within his theatre box. Furthermore, the toyshop is filled with numerous different puppets that become a presence in her everyday life, and subsequently mirror the doll’s function of encouraging self-objectification in young girls.

It is not uncommon in Gothic texts for the heroine to recognize displaced versions of herself in other characters. Melanie engages in this practice by not only identifying with the various puppets in the toyshop but also with her Aunt Margaret. Her presumed fate initially appears to match that of her uncle’s wife because both women are “reduced to an automaton” when they move into his house (Day 25). Aunt Margaret acts as Melanie’s alter ego who lives obediently under Uncle Philip’s absolute power and whose silent existence mimics that of his inanimate dolls and puppets. Finn explains the unusual basis of Aunt Margaret’s condition to Melanie by telling her how she is simply “dumb Not a word can she speak. It is a terrible affliction; it came on her on her wedding day, like a curse. Her silence” (37). The nature of her illness suggests that her silence is symptomatic of her hopelessness as well as the imbalance of power within their marriage. Melanie is especially sympathetic towards her, as she views her aunt as a proleptic version of herself if she were to continue living in the toyshop. Furthermore, Aunt Margaret’s character is based solely on Melanie’s interpretation of her, and as such, she is initially described as being a mere “shadow in her mind, a wispy appendage of the toy making uncle” (37). Early observations of her aunt’s doll-like similitude support the vision in this memory as she describes how on the first night there:

She kissed Melanie goodnight on the cheek, taking her in a stiff, Dutch-doll embrace; her arms were two hinged sticks, her mouth cool, dry and papery, her kiss inhibited, tight-lipped but somehow desperate, making an anguished plea for affection. (48-49)

The various doll-like terms that Melanie uses to describe Aunt Margaret in this passage depict her as a personification of perfect femininity within the theatre box of the domestic sphere simply because she is both submissive and maternal.

She personifies the “archetypal Gothic heroine [that is] both locked away and physically silent, [trapped] in [a] helpless, dependent, childlike position” (Saunders 155). The genuine kindness that she displays to Melanie and her siblings further emphasizes the disparity between the good and evil natures of “poor Aunt Margaret, who was so gentle” and her husband, thus portraying a very different image of marriage to that of Melanie’s romantic vision (77).

The hopelessness of Aunt Margaret’s situation is further emphasized by Melanie’s thoughts that she “slept (probably) in the same bed as he, for they were married and [yet] she trembled when he raised his leonine voice” (77-78). This passive attitude illustrates her utter compliance with his ruling of the house, and confirms her status as the docile doll-like figure with whom she is associated in Melanie’s various accounts. Ultimately, she represents how life in Uncle Philip’s house makes many unusual demands of its female residents; Melanie is quickly informed of his prohibition of trousers for women, which Finn describes as being “one of his ways [as] he simply can’t abide a woman in trousers. He won’t have a woman in the shop if she’s got trousers on and he sees her. He shouts her out into the street for a harlot” (62). Additionally, she is advised to wear “no make-up And only speak when you’re spoken to. He likes, you know, silent women” (63). Finn’s description of the toy-maker’s rules for the women of his house emphasizes his wish to be surrounded only by inanimate, passive women who resemble his self-made dolls and puppets as well as his implementation of gender performativity within the theatre box. Melanie recognizes his complete management of Aunt Margaret’s appearance and behavior, and is wary that he does not repeat the process with her. However, she soon begins to describe herself in the doll-like terms that she previously used only for Aunt Margaret, which shows that her struggle to retain any residual autonomy is a difficult one. This notion is supported by her self-image as “a wind-up putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements” (76). Aunt Margaret’s main function as Melanie’s silent alter ego is therefore to represent her possible demise under Uncle Philip’s control if she is not strong enough to retain her autonomy. Melanie reveals that he “never talked to his wife except to bark brusque commands” and objectifies her as if she were one of his puppets (124). His ill-treatment of her is ominously signified by his wedding present, which “he made ... himself. To his own design” and by his wife’s distress while wearing it (114):

Aunt Margaret had one single piece of jewellery, besides her fat gold wedding ring ... a curious necklace

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which she wore on Sunday afternoons ... The necklace was a collar of dull silver, two hinged silver pieces knobbed with moonstones which snapped into place around her lean neck and rose up almost to her chin so that she could hardly move her head. It was heavy, crippling and precious and looked as though it may be very ancient ... Aunt Margaret had to carry her head high and haughty as the Queen of Assyria, but above it her eyes were anxious and sad and not proud at all ... she ate only with the utmost difficulty. (111-113)

Uncle Philip celebrates her misery by taking “a certain pleasure from her discomfort ... finding that the sight of it improved his appetite [as] it was the regal and hampering collar which made Aunt Margaret beautiful” (113). Because this ornamentation controls her limited movements, it merges her identity even further with that of his dolls and puppets, and confirms his position of power as puppet-master. It also emphasizes, albeit in an exaggerated fashion, the suffocating and restrictive burden of femininity that women must possess and epitomize through their gender performativity. And as the gift-bearer, Uncle Philip confirms his roles as both patriarchal enforcer and villain of Carter’s text.

The aforementioned absence of mirrors in Uncle Philip’s house is frequently highlighted by Melanie, who notes that their nonexistence creates an even more foreboding and unfamiliar environment within her new abode. She can no longer rely on her reflection for self-assurance and so she seeks out any indication that she is still herself by looking through the one small broken mirror in the bathroom for any “glimpses ... of her face as she cleaned her teeth” (29). These limited and grotesque “glimpses ... of her face” confirm a revised fragmentation of her identity as she tries to maintain control of herself without the aid of mirrors. The difficulty of this struggle is more apparent when considered in terms of how the mirror has been replaced with Philip’s domineering and ubiquitous gaze, which acts as a literal portrayal of how female identity is monitored and shaped by male influences. In addition to his constant surveillance and due to the lack of mirrors in the house, Melanie has only the dolls and puppets with which to identify and relate. She is uncomfortably aware of their omnipresence around the house as they remind her of the chains that bind her identity. They remind her of potential fate of being “thingified” by Uncle Philip in order to become yet another fragmented prop in his puppet theatre (Munford 53):

The walls were hung with ... partially assembled puppets of all sizes, some almost as tall as Melanie herself; blind-eyed puppets, some armless, some legless, some naked, some clothed, all with a strange liveliness as they dangled unfinished from their hooks. (67)

She is initially intrigued by the possibility of embracing different identities and even admits to being “repelled, yet attracted by the ferocious masks, she finally tried on one or two, but there was no mirror where she could see herself” (84). Her hesitation in fully engaging with the various costumes suggests an underlying awareness of the threat to her identity which Uncle Philip quickly senses. He resents Melanie’s unwillingness to surrender to her new role within the theatre box of his toyshop and tries to subordinate her character to a doll-like status by forcing her to partake in his puppet show as the character of Leda. Mulvey highlights this aspect of Melanie’s journey as being an example of how Carter uses her female characters to subvert Freud’s uncanniness of “the beautiful inanimate woman with whom men fall hopelessly in love” by diverting the reader’s attention to Melanie’s resistance to her fate (Mulvey 246). She visibly rejects her position as the “fetishized object of spectacle [and] part of a performance in which she is reduced to the status of a wooden marionette” (246). This factor is crucial to the overall function of Melanie’s character in relation to the discourse of female identity and performativity within the story:

Carter ... makes the puppet central. She treats the relations between puppet-master and puppet as symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women, and the roles available to them. The roles, to which Melanie is introduced in her uncle’s toy theatre or in other episodes of the novel, include wood nymph, bride or victim of rape. In representing them, Carter pinpoints the ambiguities in woman’s position. She foregrounds the contradiction between the romantic images of femininity reproduced in culture and art, and the facts of sexual violence. (Gamble 34)

Uncle Philip’s efforts to compel Melanie into taking part in the rape scene of his puppet show is an act akin to sexualizing the child and so can be regarded as incestuous in nature. This act also embodies Gothic critic Lawrence Rickels’s idea that within the Gothic family “every body is made infinitely available to everybody else” (342). This concept undermines the rigid structure of the traditional family unit and changes the dynamic of familial relations within it. Additionally, it

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illustrates Melanie's function as an object of exchange between Uncle Philip and Finn who are the principal male characters of the story. However, as Melanie's character develops, and becomes more complex, she learns to challenge this simplistic role. The progression and maturation of her character is revealed by her reaction to the discovery of Finn's two peepholes in her bedroom wall, which can be read as yet another layer of the omnipresent male gaze with the theatre box of the toyshop:

Someone had made the spy-hole. Why? Presumably to watch her. So she was not only watching but being watched when she thought she was by herself, when she was taking her clothes off and putting them on and so on. All the time, someone had been watching her. All the time she had been in the house. They had not even let her keep her own loneliness but had intruded on it.... She guessed it was Finn ... who was Peeping Tom ... she pulled a chair in front of the hole and hung her coat over the back, so that the hole was blocked up. (109-110)

The two peepholes, which represent the male gaze and its observation of the female subject, reveal two things about the design of the Gothic house. Firstly, they exemplify how the "walls are often unreliable as boundaries" and, secondly, how they can encompass a revised function as a mirror that contains a host to observe the spectator (Ng 35). These subverted purposes remind the reader of how the female subject's identity and performativity is constantly monitored within the Gothic house. Even more important is Melanie's response to them, which can be read as an active rejection of her submissive position as recipient of the gaze. To further explain, her reaction to the situation is to take control and reverse the peepholes/male gaze so that she can observe Finn instead. By doing this, she takes on the traditionally male role of the spectator, which suggests her possession of an empowered female agency that challenges the fixed gender roles within this concept, as discussed by Paulina Palmer:

The power exerted by the "male gaze" is a practical means for men to impose control upon women, as well as a symbol of sexual domination.... On peering in [Melanie] catches sight of [Finn] walking on his hands She represents the norm while he, in his odd position, represents the freak and the spectacle [Suggesting that] the roles adopted by men and women ... are open to change. (Palmer, cited in Day 30-31)

Her subversion of this voyeuristic act draws attention to the power of the male gaze so "[s]he becomes the observer and he the observed" (Gamble 35). Her active revision of gender roles in this situation challenges the strict regulations of performativity within the theatre box and can be read as an example of how the house enables female subjectivity. Her appropriation of the peephole gives her the opportunity to spy on Finn within the patriarchal institution of the domestic sphere and therefore demonstrates how the house can play an active part in female resistance. But despite being offended by his actions, Melanie also revels in the knowledge that Finn made the peephole to watch her "because [she is] so beautiful" (Carter 123). He envisions a romanticized version of her as illustrated in his portrait, which tells her of "how he sees you. White chiffon and flowers in your hair. A very young girl" (141). His painted version of her reflects that of her younger, innocent self from the mirror at the beginning of the story and can be described as her idealized self. It is important for two reasons: firstly, it represents the purity of Finn's love for her, and, secondly, it gives the promise of a future version of Melanie that has escaped the darkness of her current circumstances.

Uncle Philip's effort to transform Melanie into a doll-like version of herself is foreshadowed in the first puppet show that he puts on for her. She recounts how one of the puppets in particular bore an uncanny resemblance to her, and reminds her of her earlier performances in front of her old bedroom mirror. As these displays were the last time she felt beautiful and connected to her true self, they emphasize the temptation to return to this state of being by sacrificing her autonomy and becoming a doll-like version of herself:

Lying face-downwards in a tangle of strings was a puppet fully five feet high, a *sylphide* in a fountain of white tulle, fallen flat as if someone had gotten tired of her [...] She had long, black hair down to the waist of her tight satin bodice [...] She was in the night again and the doll was herself. (67-68, original emphasis)

The blurring of the real-life and doll-like versions of Melanie in this passage raises the notion of the "girl-doll" whose body is "(re)written as a site of violent confusion ... [that is] sentenced ... to a series of sinister and violent assaults by the male artist" (Munford 126). Unaware of this inevitability and simultaneously intrigued by and cautious of the life-size dolls, Melanie is later forced to partake in one of the puppet shows. Her humiliation is ensured when she is cast as Leda in the staged rape scene of Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan". Her puppet status at this point contrasts greatly with her earlier epiphany of being

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“made of flesh and blood” and emphasizes how Melanie accepts that “she must keep her place as Leda to Uncle Philip’s Swan in the mythology of awakening in which women blossom into shuddering subordination” because Carter’s heroine’s deliberately “sign themselves up for display” (Carter 1, Roe 86). In other words, she must submit to her dictated role within Uncle Philip’s theatre box. Her encompassment of a doll-like identity represents Carter’s fascination with puppet-works and the “idea of simulacra of invented people, of imitation human beings ... [because] how do we know we’re not imitation human beings?” (Carter, cited in Smith 9). The figure of the doll then raises the notion of fixed and blurred female identity and questions our understanding of what influences govern its formation, especially in terms of gender performativity.

Melanie’s desire to be seen eventually overshadows her uncertainty as she is nostalgic for her old self and is excited to temporarily emulate this past identity and to become “a nymph crowned with daisies once again” (141). The puppet show is a dramatization of the mythological scene where Jove/Zeus rapes a mortal woman called Leda in the form of a swan. But Uncle Philip reveals his unhappiness that Melanie’s adolescent form may hinder his specific vision of Leda, and complains that she is too “well built for fifteen Do you have your periods? ... I wanted my Leda to be a little girl ... I suppose you’ll have to do. And you’ve got quite nice hair. And pretty legs ... But he was resenting her because she was not a puppet” (143-144). His irritation with her menstrual development illustrates his resentment of her maturity because it confirms her inability to fully execute his desired role for her as the inanimate doll, which is defined by its beauty, youth, and absence of genitals. Melanie’s encounter with the foreboding swan puppet is equally unpleasant, as she initially thinks that it is silly and “nothing like the wild, phallic bird of her imaginings” (165). But her actual interaction with it is more sinister because it ends up being one of physical and sexual entrapment that changes her opinion so much that she feels a dangerous need to remove herself from the situation. She does this in order to cope with the objectification of an experience that leaves the feeling that she was no longer “herself” (166). The swan incident makes her recognize the ominous nature of the puppet show’s subject matter, and she confesses that “I don’t think ... I want to be Leda anymore” (141). This admission represents her desire to return to a pre-adolescent time of simplicity and innocence when her identity did not have to be governed so strictly. Furthermore, she exemplifies the helplessness of the rape victim in the play by being “denied her own sexuality. She must take on the role of angel – passive and virginal” (Mills, cited in Gamble 36). Her anxious performance of Leda is defined by

wooden movements and frozen gestures that mimic her earlier rehearsals in front of the mirror and emphasize her proximity to a doll-like existence. Once again the male gaze dominates the situation with Uncle Philip overseeing her performance and then condemning it, telling her that she “overacted You were melodramatic. Puppets don’t overact. You spoiled the poetry” (167). His wish for her to repress her emotions in the piece further emphasizes his attempts to reduce her to an inanimate and doll-like status.

In the end, Finn releases Melanie from her doll-like entrapment as his rebellion against Uncle Philip and the toyshop eventually result in their escape from his control. His simultaneous destruction of both Philip and the toyshop illustrates their coexisting nature as entities that govern and repress Melanie’s identity and her subsequent freedom once they have been abolished. Despite his inability to fulfil the romantic image of her idealized and physically perfect phantom bridegroom from the beginning of the novel, she overlooks his physical shortcomings and adverse social status to acknowledge his kindness and selfless love for her. The development of their relationship encompasses two examples of the typical characteristics that can be found in Carter’s Gothic: Firstly, that she deliberately avoids stating that the female subject is in love. This is because the rescuers fall in love with these heroines because of their beauty, which symbolizes their goodness and inherent femininity. Secondly, that Finn’s reward for his good behavior is Melanie’s ability to see him from a new perspective. The non-rape scene of *The Magic Toyshop* is the best example of both Uncle Philip’s mistreatment of Melanie and Finn’s love for her. It comes about when Uncle Philip wants Melanie to practice Leda’s rape scene with Finn in private, so that he can have an opportunity to force her into having sex with him. His management of this situation and his corresponding disregard for Melanie’s desire to actively participate in this act demotes her to the status of a sex-doll, thus humiliating her further. Finn reveals the magnitude of Uncle Philip’s sinister request, which is another example of his desire to force her into inanimate subjugation:

He wanted me to fuck you He’s pulled our strings as if we were his puppets, and there I was, all ready to touch you up. He told me to rehearse Leda and the swan with you. Somewhere private. Like in your room, he said. Go up and rehearse a rape with Melanie in your bedroom. Christ. He wanted me to do you and he set the scene. Ah, he’s evil! (152)

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Uncle Philip's exploitation of Melanie convinces Finn to destroy the swan puppet that violated and "covered you. It rode you. I did it partly for your sake, because it rode you.... Besides, Philip Flower loved it so" (174). Its annihilation causes Uncle Philip to start a fire that destroys the house and presumably kills him. In doing so, the unconventional family unit is broken up and the theatre box environment is ruined, thus proving that female salvation lies within the house's destruction.

The aftermath of this incident marks the start of Finn and Melanie's life together. Their imagined future is one that is both pragmatic and ordinary as Melanie realizes her love for him and disregards her earlier judgment of his lower social status. This demonstrates Carter's re-visioning of fairy tales by reversing the usual dichotomy and rejecting the notion of a bourgeois romance in which a maiden is rescued by a handsome prince of a higher status. She defines it as being an alternative to the traditional fairy tale's happy ending because in her story when "the house is burnt down ... adult life begins" (Carter, cited in Sage 25). As Melanie's alter ego, Aunt Margaret also benefits from the house's ruin as she is no longer under Uncle Philip's control. Her newfound autonomy is signified by the return of her voice which can be read as a resonant metaphor for the vocalization of female resistance to this particularly restrictive mode of patriarchy. The reader is told of how "struck dumb on her wedding day, she found her old voice again the day she was freed" as she was suddenly no longer one of Uncle Philip's silent and inanimate dolls (193). The ability of the characters to move forward without the overbearing presence of Uncle Philip and his management of their identity confirms their victory against him. It secures their status as real people who are once again "made of flesh and blood" and can experience real adult life and freedom outside of the theatre box's stifling environment and their concurrent existence within it as silent and submissive doll-like entities (Carter 1). Melanie's role as the Gothic heroine and her fate at the end of this story is especially significant because it shows that the only way that she can finally escape Leda and gain freedom from Uncle Philip is to leave the toyshop, which acts as the theatre box of the text's social and domestic worlds. Her embodiment of the various changes that occur during adolescence, as well as her corresponding mentality, demonstrate the power of mirrors and the male gaze on female identity. However, her subsequent conflict with Uncle Philip can be read as a challenge of the social restrictions on female identity and performativity. The house's attempt to enable female subjectivity and Uncle Philip's later destruction of it suggests, albeit in very simple terms, that female autonomy and patriarchy cannot co-exist peacefully.

Finally, the alternative portrait of female identity that Carter creates in this novel illustrates how Gothic narratives can challenge fixed definitions and offer hyperbolic versions of the collective concept of femininity.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

The Hunters of Humanity: Creatures of Horror in M.R. James's Ghost Stories.

by Nataliya Oryshchuk

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The Hunters of Humanity: Creatures of Horror in M.R. James's Ghost Stories

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Nataliya Oryshchuk

ABSTRACT

In his ghost stories, M.R. James disclosed the most irrational and fearful aspects of archaic demonology still haunting the modern world. He turns humans into prey species, hunted and haunted by repulsive insect- and spider-like demons. This paper offers a closer look at the creatures of horror and the recurrent theme of the hunt in James's ghost stories, viewing them in the context of Victorian evolutionary theories as well as traditional medieval beliefs. James's protagonists, unimaginative and unadventurous scholars, suddenly come face to face (or face to tentacle) with the enormity of the Universe and its non-human creatures as they invade and shatter the homely Edwardian world. From this perspective, James's works express the social and cultural fears of his generation.

KEYWORDS:

M.R. James, ghost story, Gothic, spider, insect, hunt.

"I believe I am now acquainted with the extremity of terror and repulsion which a man can endure without losing his mind" (James, *The Ghost Stories* 176). In saying this, the Reverend Justin Somerton, a scholar in the story "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas," speaks for most of the characters in the ghost stories of M.R. James. While there are no reports of James's ghost stories actually driving anyone to madness, Jamesian creatures of horror have definitely produced a lasting impression on many readers, and influenced generations of writers in the supernatural genre (Smith 123; Dalby and Pardoe).

James's popularity, however, did not bring his works into the focus of literary studies until the 1970s. For several decades the academic reception of James's ghost stories was verging on dismissive. For example, Julia Briggs in her pioneering study on the English ghost story in 1977 insists that James's stories lack psychological depth describing his characters as "flats" (Briggs 135). Clive Bloom, in his 1993 study of twentieth-century British horror, described James as a "minor" writer for respectable readers craving light entertainment (64). David Punter, in his fundamental work on English ghost stories *The Literature of Terror* (1996), claims that, despite James's popularity, his stories represent the decay of the genre, the bare formula of what once used to be a rich Gothic tradition (90). However, Punter's interpretation of James's stories appears to be somewhat controversial because, as will be shown below, James masterfully uses all main themes

of the Gothic defined by Punter himself, with a particularly strong emphasis on paranoia and fear of being followed, fear of the archaic, fear of alienation and fear of close proximity of physical abnormality (87).

Despite the view on James as a minor writer of ghost stories, his works can be perceived not as the decline but as the innovative development of the Gothic horror tradition that expressed the social and cultural fears of James's generation. These anxieties are clearly manifested through ghostly Jamesian creatures of horror and the nature of their interaction with protagonists: the recurrent theme of the hunt and the fear of the touch of the ghostly ancient creature is particularly noticeable. The writer turns humans into prey species, hunted and haunted by repulsive insect- and spider-like demons, which can be viewed in the context of Victorian evolutionary theories and scientific discoveries, as well as in the context of traditional medieval beliefs. From this perspective, James's writings reveal a new level of complexity: they express the evolutionary anxieties of his time, including the fears of degeneration, while following the ancient tradition of depicting Satan as the Lord of the flies. James's protagonists, unimaginative and unadventurous scholars, suddenly come face to face (or face to tentacle) with the enormity of the Universe and its non-human creatures as they invade and shatter the mundane, protected, homely world.

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THE UNIVERSE AS THE HUNTING TERRITORY

The contrast between human (homely) and inhuman (alien, hostile) is strongly present in most of James's stories. In the story "Casting the Runes," the protagonist, Professor Dunning, is being slowly but inevitably hunted down - haunted down - by unseen demonic forces. He is not yet fully aware of it, but his night in a lonely house is restless. Trying to find a box of matches under his pillow, he suddenly, in complete darkness, touches what he later described as "a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being" (James, *The Ghost Stories* 252). It is unclear why James had to specify that it was not the mouth of a human being - surely, the presence of such an entity under one's pillow would not have been less unpleasant if it was human. But the distinction - non-human, alien - is emphasized. James connects this encounter with the acute sense of loneliness experienced by Dunning in the scene leading to this episode. "It seemed to him that something ill-defined and impalpable stepped in between him and his fellow-men" (250). It appears that loneliness makes humans easy prey for the haunting hunters.

Invariably, a malevolent presence creeps up slowly on the unsuspecting scholars. Professor Parkins, the protagonist of "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad," begins his journey of horror on a deserted seashore in twilight. A very unimaginative person, Parkins sees a distant silhouette behind him on the beach - apparently human - a figure that tries to catch up with him without making any progress. Parkins suddenly experiences the strange feeling of loneliness and alienation in the vast space - the first symptom of the approaching disaster. The deserted seashore keeps featuring prominently in his recurring night visions. In the climax of the story his nightmare comes to life when the professor is attacked by a ghostly creature of bedclothes with the face of "crumpled linen" (James, *The Ghost Stories* 148). The idea that something as mundane as bedsheet linen can have a horrible face produces the shock of horror. The homeliness of the object serves to intensify the dread and repulsion that are mixed with the sense of betrayal - how can something so comfortable, so intimate, behave in such an aggressive manner and break our trust? Most importantly, this creature is an invader from the outside: it followed its victim from the deserted seashore, the infinite space of the twilight beach. The homely cannot protect the protagonist, it turns against him, abruptly and horribly confronting him with the expenses of the infinite and unknown Universe.

The protagonist of "Canon Alberic's Scrap-book," a typical Jamesian scholar called Dennistoun, safely locks himself in his hotel room to investigate a precious manuscript - a scrap book - that he has discovered in a local church. One of the pages depicts a creature crouched on the floor before King Solomon. It makes an impression of such intense horror that, according to Dennistoun's friend (the narrator), it cannot be conveyed in words. The narrator attempts then to "indicate" the essential traits of the figure which, apart from its physical appearance, stresses that it was "endowed with intelligence just less than human" (James, *The Ghost Stories* 12). This ancient demon confronting King Solomon is not content to stay inside the scrapbook: it materialises in Dennistoun's comfortable hotel room to attack the scholar who escapes only through the presence of other humans. As he screams "with the voice of an animal in hideous pain," two local servants break in, helping the protagonist to reclaim his human status (16). It appears that Jamesian ghostly species do not dare to hunt humans *en masse*, and lone, socially isolated scholars are their preferred game. Human isolation and loneliness seem to empower the inhuman menace lurking in the shadows.

The creature that attacks the Edwardian scholar in James's story has inferior intelligence but superior power of hatred and physical strength; in this encounter, the sole reaction of a human participant is the intense feeling of physical and mental loathing. It is clear that this creature, inferior as it might be in its intellectual capacity, can easily overpower James's hero. In this respect, James's narrative is aligned to anxieties expressed by some evolutionary theories of his time. Earlier Victorian theorists, such as Robert Chambers, working within the long dominant Neoplatonic tradition of the Chain of Being, suggested that all living creatures could be placed in a hierarchy where fish, insects, and reptiles occupied lower planes while human Caucasians were placed on the top (Cowlinslaw 167). Brian Cowlinslaw claims that James seems to reverse this hierarchy, representing a Victorian "man of letters," who is supposed to be the pinnacle of evolutionary development (according to Chambers and similar Victorian theorists), as a prey species (Cowlinslaw 170). In the scene from "Canon Alberic's Scrap-book," the Edwardian scholar loses his human dignity when he screams "with the voice of an animal in hideous pain" (James, *The Ghost Stories* 16). In that moment, both participants are not human, demonstrating, according to Cowlinslaw, "supernatural regression to an earlier, less civilised stage of humanity" (Cowlinslaw 170).

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This view can be linked to the Victorian fear of degeneration as expressed by one of the followers of Darwinian theory, biologist E. Ray Lancaster, who claimed (several decades after Chambers) that high civilizations tend to decay and give way to intellectually inferior but physically more adaptable races. The fear was extended to humanity in general and was one of the great anxieties of late Victorian and Edwardian times (Glendening 20-21). In this light, Jamesian ghosts might represent the ominous “Other” - a barbarian ascending to take place of the modern “man of letters” who is no longer fit enough to survive in the hostile and cruel universe. He descends into the state of an animal and, further down the line, into an insect. H.G. Wells also expressed the fear of human degradation and degeneration: in his essay “Zoological Regression” (1891), he emphasised the fragility of human dominance in the biological world and gave examples of rises and falls of other species on Earth throughout billions of years. Wells made his readers ponder: what if the same fate awaits humans? Since the mud-fish of the distant pre-historic era is vaguely related to the human race, where is the guarantee that humans will not return to that state by some strange evolutionary whim? (Wells 166-167). Rejecting the idea of evolution as an inevitably progressive process, the science and the society of the nineteenth century had to face the fact that evolution can lead not only upwards, but also downwards. And, as Wells put it, perhaps some other creature is quietly waiting “to sweep *homo* away into the darkness from which the Universe arose” (168). This view deeply resonates with James’s stories: protagonists find themselves being constantly watched and followed, even if the identity of the watcher or follower is unknown.

INVERTEBRATES AND ARACHNIDS AS THE HUNTERS

Scenes and images of the hunting often appear in James’s ghost stories. As a rule, this hunt involves one creature (inhuman) pursuing another creature (human) with a malevolent purpose: most likely of capturing or killing. Sometimes capturing in itself means killing, as the prey cannot stand the hunter’s touch due to unbearable repulsion and terror. Such scenes can appear in a dream (“Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad”), or as a sequence at a magic lantern show (“Casting the Runes”), or as engravings on a tomb (“Count Magnus”). All of these scenes can be summarized by a passage from “Casting the Runes”: “And this poor boy was followed, and at last pursued and overtaken, and either torn to pieces or somehow made away with, by a horrible hopping creature in white” (James, *The Ghost Stories* 239). The keywords “followed, pursued and overtaken” describe the essence of haunting (and

hunting down) of many Jamesian protagonists: very often, however, the pursuer will remain unseen until the very last moment, remaining on the “haunted edge of vision” (Brewster 40). As James himself put it, “our ghost should make himself felt by gradual stirrings diffusing an atmosphere of uneasiness before the final flash or stab of horror” (*A Pleasing Terror* 482). The hunted/haunted characters definitely experience a feeling of uneasiness that intensifies as the story unfolds. The haunted Edwardian scholar sees nothing, but he suffers from the sensation of being watched and followed. In this respect, he is a typical ghost story character as defined by Julia Briggs: “alone yet always in company” (48). But who is his companion, and who is his pursuer?

The reader rarely gets to see the hunting creature clearly. It is only through pictures, dreams and engravings that we can have a closer look at him - or it. For example, an engraving on Count Magnus’s tomb showed

a man running at full speed, with flying hair and outstretched hands. After him followed a strange form ... The figure was unduly short, and was for the most part muffled in a hooded garment which swept the ground. The only part of the form which projected from that shelter was not shaped like any hand or arm. Mr Wraxall compares it with a tentacle of a devil-fish. (James, *The Ghost Stories* 113)

In a dream sequence from “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad,” the huntsman is seen as “a figure in pale, fluttering robes, ill-defined ... it would stop, bow itself towards the sand, then run stooping across the beach to the water-edge and back again ... at a speed that was startling and terrifying” (James, *The Ghost Stories* 135). Such movements remind the reader of insects or spiders with their irregular, unpredictable, instinctive and very fast changes of direction. The demon in “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book” is described as “one of the awful South American bird-catching spiders translated into a human form” (12), and the engraving in “The Mezzotint” shows a crawling spider-like figure with black drapery over its face. In “Treasure of Abbot Thomas,” an inquisitive antiquarian is followed and attacked by a creature with several legs or arms with “tentacles clinging to the body,” and in “The Residence in Whitminster,” the hero experiences “a sensation of the long thin arms, or legs, or feelers, all about my face, and neck, and body” (176, 383). The imagery of the hunt often features as a historical artefact to heighten suspense. Examples include the engraving on Count Magnus’s tomb and the passage from a mysterious eighteenth century folio in “Mr Humphreys and

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His Inheritance”:

he begun to be sensible of some Creature keeping Pace with him, as he thought, peering and looking upon him from the next Alley to that he was in; and when he should stop, his Companion should stop also ... wherewith he was so daunted that himself set off to run ... Sometimes when his Breath fail'd him, he would cast himself flat on his Face, and hope that his Pursuers might over-run him in the Darkness but ... he could hear them pant and snuff as it had been a Hound at Fault: which wrought in him so extreme an Horrour of mind, that he would be forc'd to betake himself again to turning and doubling ... to throw them off the Scent. (James, *The Ghost Stories* 340-341)

Very soon, however, the scenes from the distant past, legends or dreams enter the present, and the protagonist finds himself followed, pursued and (often) overtaken by the demonic creature resembling a giant insect or spider.

Ron Weighell suggests that the theme of hunt in James's stories is closely associated with ancient demonology and folklore, making a connection between James's main occupation as a scholar of medieval manuscripts and his literary works. He states that James's protagonists are essentially pursued by the creatures from pagan and early Christian demonology, claiming that the insect-like appearance of Jamesian ghostly huntsmen can be explained by the fact that Beelzebub was traditionally depicted as a gigantic fly - “the Lord of the flies” - a subject to which James devoted one of his undergraduate papers (131, 133). Weighell's view is well-justified: James's stories indeed carry a strong flavour of ancient beliefs and contain numerous references to the medieval practices of Black Magic. Insects and spiders have a long history of being associated with Satan. In the Middle Ages it was believed that flies, worms and other insects were creations of the Devil, and the rotting of corpses had been caused by insects hatching from the sins of cadavers after death (Coutts 301). Insects were also linked to the plague - perhaps due to their mass appearance on unburied decaying corpses (Coutts 300-301). This, according to Coutts, placed insects somewhere between the underworld and the real world: they belonged to both, being mysterious creatures essentially hostile to all Christians. James's story “The Ash-Tree” definitely reflects this medieval view: the threat comes from giant spiders crawling out of the body of the dead witch secretly buried under the gigantic ash tree.

Peter Haining in “The Haunted World of M. R. James” mentions James's personal arachnophobia (17). This personal fear is undoubtedly reflected in James's ghost stories - however, the spider-like appearance of the creatures that hunt (and haunt) Jamesian scholars can be viewed in a more generalized context. The fear of spiders itself, at least for the residents of the British Isles, is completely irrational, as is the fear of insects; Freud saw no logical reason for this phenomenon (Coutts 313). Katarzyna and Sergiusz Michalski explain arachnophobia as “an example of a biologically generated fear” rooted in the ancient times (45). Most sufferers from arachnophobia describe their emotion as the intense fear of something invisible, that is crouching and watching them silently - the “unwanted creepy company” (Michalski and Michalski 51). This experience strongly relates to James's protagonists: they are constantly watched by something invisible, followed and hunted down by a horrible unwanted companion with many arms and legs.

Spiders are also associated with cobwebs and therefore with the passing of time, with the past, and with the oblivion. It is a strong Gothic symbol that signifies the encounter with the archaic and the death itself. In “The Tractate Middoth,” the long-dead practitioner of Black Magic is seen as an old clergyman whose bald head and face are covered in thick cobwebs. He hunts down his victim leaving behind masses of cobwebs and spiders on the corpse. Metaphorically speaking, James's protagonists often unsuspectingly walk into this mass of cobwebs and try to sweep them away - but the cobwebs represent a past which is so powerful that it cannot be shaken off. The Edwardian scholars helplessly entangle themselves in the webs of the past, unable to get out.

The entanglement with the past is also represented by a chrysalis that appears in “Two Doctors”: Dr Quinn has a recurrent dream in which he is forced, night after night, to dig a grave in the garden: “the spade would uncover something light-coloured ... and this he must clear with his hands. It was always the same: of the size of a man and shaped like a chrysalis of a moth, with the folds showing a promise of opening at one end”; after parting the folds of the chrysalis, he discovers “his own face in a state of death” (James, *The Ghost Stories* 466-467). In this scene, the future, the present and the past become one: the present Dr Quinn digs out the past Dr Quinn to discover the future dead Dr Quinn - in the form of a chrysalis. Here James demonstrates traditional Gothic framework: grave digging, moonlight, extracting of the corpse, and the horror of the discovery. In his dream, Dr Quinn is unwillingly transgressing

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- through digging up the past and parting the folds of the burial shroud - and is punished by the vision of the dreadful future, his own dead face. The horror is intensified by the insect-like form of the corpse - the chrysalis.

Victorian and Edwardian scholars were fascinated by insects and the phenomenal power of their instinct. Carl Jung, for instance, believed that insects represented the power of the irrational and the “archaic mode” of life and survival (Sleigh 285). At the same time, the study of insects and their habits often inspired horror. It is remarkable that Charles Darwin himself was horrified by Ichneumon fly’s reproductive behaviour that involves devouring caterpillars from inside (Glendening 18). His reaction represents general Victorian and Edwardian attitude towards such facts of biology: advanced thinkers of the era could not comprehend why God, the creator of the Universe, allowed existence of something as ugly and cruel as Ichneumon fly. To a great extent, they continued Edmund Burke’s discussion on the Sublime: while exploring the idea of evolution, Victorian and Edwardian scholars were intently looking for the Omnipotent Creator and his role in preserving the moral order of the Universe. Gradually, many of them despaired to find any morality in the laws of nature: chaos seemed to triumph over reason. The study of the insect world reaffirmed this idea: French entomologist Fabre was simultaneously thrilled and terrified to discover the habit of the female Mantis to devour their partners during sexual act. Fabre described it with typically Victorian sentimentality and modesty as a “lengthy embrace” that “made one flesh in a much more intimate fashion” while the female would “methodically devour her husband mouthful by mouthful, leaving only the wings” (cited in Sleigh 288-289).

This description sounds unexpectedly Jamesian with regards to the scenes of physical contact between the inhuman (insect-like) hunter and his human prey. James’s protagonists express panicky fear at the idea of touch or any physical contact with their dreadful unwanted companion. The most unfortunate protagonists experience something very similar to the embrace of a Mantis. This physical contact can be often interpreted as rape or molestation, or an attempt at such, which may result in death. The protagonist of “Treasure of Abbot Thomas,” for example, narrowly escapes death or madness as a result of such experience. During his night-time search for the treasure in the old medieval well, he pulls out of a cavity what he thinks is a great leather bag. However, this leather bag unexpectedly embraces him:

I was conscious of a most horrible smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own, and moving slowly over it, and of several - I don’t know how many - legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body. I screamed out, Brown says, like a beast (James, *The Ghost Stories* 176)

Mr. Gregory faints and is saved by his servant who pulls him out by the rope from the well. The scholar, however, is haunted during the nights by something that keeps scratching at the handle of his door. Finally, the well is sealed again, and Mr. Gregory leaves the town, escaping the horrible fate. He, and the protagonist of the story, “Oh, Whistle And I’ll Come to You, My Lad,” are lucky survivors; Professor Parkins, as we remember, had a similar experience with the creature of crumpled linen whose intentions were vague but obviously very physical: it desired to touch and embrace - and we do not know what else exactly - but the idea of intimate physical contact with the creature nearly drew Parkins to madness. He, however, escaped through the presence of another human when his neighbour broke into the bedroom.

Others were not so lucky.

OVERTAKEN AT LAST: DEADLY EMBRACE, CRUSHING KISS

A character from “The Tractate Middoth” is found dead. The reader knows that he was hunted down by the ghostly alchemist, the one whose face was covered in the thick cobwebs. The manner of the death is unclear - a heart attack is assumed - but there are some curious black marks and dust around the mouth of the deceased that open up a possibility of a deadly kiss from the creature of cobwebs. Near the body, a thick black mass of cobwebs is found. The face of the dead man is distorted. In “A School Story,” a teacher is apparently watched, visited, and then taken away by a terrible creature – an exact description is unavailable but we know it is somehow connected with the well - and thirty years later, the remains of the teacher’s body are discovered at the bottom of a well. He is not alone, however. There is another body with him, and it has its arms tight around him, in an intimate deadly embrace.

The most tragic of all is the story of Mr. Paxton - a scholar who unearths an Anglo-Saxon crown which has a ghostly guardian attached to it. He puts it back, but he does not escape the guardian’s revenge, which comes in a strange and horrible manner reminiscent, yet again, of the sexual habits of the praying Mantis: he is literally kissed to death, though it is not exactly described in this way (James never makes any direct

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references to sexual intimacy in his stories). What happens to Mr. Paxton is a long walk on the beach with what he believes to be friendly companions. This walk ends in the fall from an old martello tower. His tracks showed that he “must have dashed straight into the open arms of someone who was waiting there. His mouth was full of sand and stones, and his teeth and jaws were broken to bits” (James, *The Ghost Stories*, 584). His face is terribly distorted. The question is: why was his mouth full of sand? And why are only his teeth and jaw are broken, if he has fallen from a great height? The suggested answer is this: because, when Paxton ran straight into someone’s embrace, that ghostly someone had passionately kissed him, filling his mouth with sand, breaking his teeth and jaw *before* Paxton’s fall. Then it becomes very likely that the poor inquisitive scholar died before his fall, as a result of the violently forced physical intimacy with a horrible creature.

It is not difficult to notice that, if Jamesian ghostly creatures have any gender at all, they are described as males. Even the face of crumpled linen from “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” is associated with a masculine rather than feminine presence - probably because early in the story professor Parkins identifies the silhouette on the beach following him as male. Mike Pincombe concludes that James in his ghost stories expressed the homosexual panic of the Victorian and Edwardian era. Pincombe argues that James’s secluded antiquarian world in fact contains a lot of physical violence with distinct sexual subtext. And while James himself repeatedly asserted that “dragging sex” into the ghost story is a “fatal mistake,” Pincombe claims that James’s texts represent ideological terror of the invasion of patriarchal society into the life of an individual (cited in Pincombe 184). It is known that some of James’s close friends and colleagues were struggling with their sexuality, and it is also known that Victorian and Edwardian world viewed homosexuality as a crime, as was shown, among others, by Oscar Wilde’s case. James’s own sexuality was questioned by some researchers though the discussion was very inconclusive: it is true that James was a confirmed bachelor, and female characters rarely feature in his stories - but that does not necessarily mean that he was hiding his own homosexuality (Pincombe 185). It is obvious, however, that many men in his scholarly world lived in constant fear of being revealed or even suspected as homosexuals. Therefore, according to Pincombe, the theme of being haunted by an undesirable male companion who occupies a spare bed, or lurks in the bedroom curtains, or hides in the branches of tree waiting for his victim, can be read as the terror of forbidden sexual desire or an assault on an individual’s privacy.

Penny Fielding offers a completely different perspective on the theme of sexual assault in James’s stories. Using a Freudian approach, she reads the lack of sex and especially female characters in James’s stories as strong evidence of his obsession with, and the fear of, sex. In her interpretation, the main threat is represented not by the insect-like “other” or by a male companion but by the deadly female sexuality. According to Fielding, monstrous spiders and demonic “troglodytic characters” represent terror and the revulsion linked to the female presence (750). It must be said that her reading of the story “Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance” fails to provide sufficient ground to prove this point of view. Fielding interprets James’s antiquarian as “anal erotic” (767), and the library as his citadel while the books constitute his objects of sexual desire. She views Mr. Humphreys’s maze as a female symbol that invades the library, which is a male symbol. Therefore, a mysteriously moving “bush-thing under the library window” becomes a symbol of female genitalia, and the hole in the map of the maze, through which Mr. Humphreys is confronted with his horrible visitor, is “vagina dentata” (769). In James’s text the scene is described in the following words:

a terror was on its way ... It took shape as a face - a human face - a *burnt* human face: and with the odious writhings of a wasp creeping out of a rotten apple there clambered forth an appearance of a form, waving black arms prepared to clasp the head that was bending over them. With a convulsion of despair, Humphreys threw himself back ... and fell. (James, *The Ghost Stories* 365)

Fielding reads this passage, and the whole oeuvre of James as the recorded history of sexual repression and the fear of female sexuality. While some of her claims might be justified, most of them appear to result from what Scott Brewster dubbed as a “selective vision” of a Freudian approach (Brewster 40). This scene, however, proves that Jamesian demons crave physical contact with their victims: it looks as if the creature was about to embrace the scholar’s head - and then perhaps kiss him as violently as Paxton had been kissed? While Fielding ignores the reference to the wasp, and its “odious writhings,” it appears to occupy a significant space in the passage, conveying a sense of deep revulsion and intensifying terror. Somehow, medieval images of insects crawling out of and over the dead bodies of the sinners and suspected followers of Satan come to mind. The insect-like movements and the black hands appear to represent the embrace of death from which the protagonist

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draws back with “a convulsion of despair” that saves him. And while this horror of touch can be read as the fear of sexual contact, it can also be interpreted as the attack of cruel ancient chaos on an unsuspecting antiquarian. It can also be viewed from Punter’s vantage point as the essential Gothic fear of physical abnormality and its close proximity (87). The place of the attack - the library - is also significant. Quiet and seemingly safe, libraries hide the knowledge of the past that is dangerous to disturb or attempt to decipher.

Fielding places James within the context of Gothic modernism, strongly arguing against Clive Bloom, who suggested that James’s texts lack any social or ideological depth. While some of her own assumptions appear to be ungrounded, her claim that James’s ghost stories present an “encyclopaedia of social phobias” is justified (Fielding 762). We can also read in his stories the traditional Gothic fears of the archaic and the past as articulated by Punter; the fear of evolutionary regression; the fear of the Universe that reiterates the anxiety of his contemporaries about the nature of the Omnipotent Creator (87). The fear of insects combined with the fear of touch represents a curious mix: it appears as if Edwardian men of letters are in danger of degradation through physical contact with other biological species. Insects in James’s stories feature as human antagonists from the past, the present and the future alike: unseen, they watch and they wait - they prey on humans. Perhaps that “Coming Beast” that H.G. Wells expected “to sweep *homo* away into the darkness from which his Universe arose” is, after all, an insect with the supreme gift of instinct and complete lack of human morality as understood by Western cultures (168).

M.R. James - a well-respected academic, provost of King’s College and Eton College - in his precise academic manner disclosed the most irrational and fearful aspects of archaic demonology still haunting the modern world. Rationality never wins in James’s stories: protagonists’ scholarly well-ordered world turns out to be very fragile and is constantly subjected to hidden horrors and haunted by both the past (the Gothic) and the present (modernity). While modernity invades the private life of the protagonist as an unseen and unwanted companion, the personified past - the ancient insect- or spider-like demon - physically attacks James’s protagonist, making it impossible to escape into the nostalgic world of the bygone era. His hero is a lonely, helpless scholar pursued and trapped in the horror of an inhuman Universe.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

Gothic Landscapes and Seascapes: Dark Regions in Wilkie Collins's *The Dead Secret*.

by Joan Passey

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Gothic Landscapes and Seascapes: Dark Regions in Wilkie Collins's *The Dead Secret*

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Joan Passey

ABSTRACT

Wilkie Collins's *The Dead Secret*, arguably one of his most critically neglected novels, exercises the same concerns with ancestry, inheritance, and history as developed in Collins's later works, projected upon a Cornish landscape. In exploring the way Collins uses Cornwall (a location he had already toyed with in *Basil and Rambles Beyond Railways*), representations of the Cornish, and specifically Cornish seascapes, I propose that Collins is employing Cornwall as an ideal playground in which to experiment with his reworkings of Gothic tropes and motifs. Indeed, Collins's Cornwall provides a means of understanding debates surrounding regional identities and a lens through which to comprehend the Cornish quest to reclaim a notion of Celtic identity in the late nineteenth century. Collins's use of seascapes, ruins, transgression, and deadly secrets not only reimagines Gothic tropes in a Victorian context, but also uses them to express anxieties regarding disintegration of self, society, and borders in the period.

KEYWORDS:

Cornwall, Gothic, Victorian, seascapes, landscapes, ancestry, regionality, spectres.

*"Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
In that grey vault. The sea. The sea
Has locked them up. The sea is History."*
- Derek Walcott

"Civilization, we expect, will end on the beach."
- Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

The Dead Secret, one of Collins's earlier novels, was serialised initially in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* in 1856. The text is a relatively underexplored one, perhaps as a consequence of the overwhelming popularity of Collins's next novel, the celebrated *The Woman in White* (1859). As a result, the text is referred to more generally as the last of Collins's "apprentice novels" and serves to present many embryonic ideas Collins went on to develop in his later career (Nadel, xxiii). These include a preoccupation with the slippery slope of insanity; complicated gender roles; a concern with legality, legislation, and the failure of documents; and, predominantly, an overarching exploration of ancestry, inheritance, and challenging the value these impart to social status. More pertinently to the focus of this paper, the novel features Cornwall as its backdrop, the locale being a favourite playground of Collins's since his 1850

walking tour of the county, which is documented in the 1851 travel narrative *Rambles Beyond Railways; or, Notes on Cornwall Taken Afoot*. The novel follows the Treverton family, opening with the death of Mrs Treverton and the consequent move of Captain Treverton and his daughter, Rosamund, from the county. Rosamund marries the blind Leonard Frankland, and, through a series of complicated economic exchanges, Frankland becomes the owner of Rosamund's childhood home, Porthgenna Tower. Upon becoming pregnant, Rosamund seeks to return to Cornwall. Yet the narrative is, throughout, haunted by the figure of Sarah Leeson, maid of Mrs Treverton, who, bestowed with the care of a terrifying secret on her mistress's deathbed, spends her life seeking to preserve it. Despite her best efforts, and hiding the written confession in an abandoned part of the property, the burden of the secret slowly drives Sarah out of her wits. The conclusion is Rosamund's discovery that Sarah is her mother and that, as an infant, she was taken in by Mrs Treverton to protect the honour of her servant after the death of Rosamund's biological father in a mining accident.

This paper serves to ask why Collins carried the subject of Cornwall from 1851 to the 1856 publication of *The Dead Secret*, what elements of the Cornish landscape and people contribute to Collins's narrative, and how the various descriptions

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of Cornwall lend themselves to Collins's aforementioned reworking of Gothic conventions. In other words, what is Gothic about Cornwall, and what is Cornish about Collins's particular reimagining of the Gothic?

Bernard Deacon states that the nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in Cornwall and Cornishness, manifested in a proliferation of antiquarian quests to revive Cornwall's past, traditions, myths, and folklore. Jane Korey argues that this cultural intrigue was generated by the decline of Cornwall's mining industry in the 1850s and 1860s, opening up a "semantic space," a "vacuum promptly colonised by the romantic representations of outsiders who viewed Cornwall as a primitive and liminal place, an opposite and an antidote to urban civilisation" (148). This notion of both opposite and antidote is vital to an understanding of the representation of Cornwall in the nineteenth century imagination. The gradual replacement of a technologically advanced mining industry with the rapid development of a booming tourist industry lead to conflict between understandings of the Cornish as both an advanced people, and a primitive and "newly discovered" people. Increased transportation lead to the increased accessibility of Cornwall, and a sense of emergence, or archaeological rediscovery, of a place in England, but not English (Deacon 5). This uniquely locates Cornwall as a space fraught with contradiction, contrast, challenge, and confusion. Jarlath Killeen states that

Gothic writers have always held the colonial fringes to be particularly potent sources of horror for the English imagination, particularly those areas deemed part of the Celtic world. A view of England as surrounded, and concomitantly threatened, by the Celtic "peripheries" transformed these regions into zones of radical indeterminacy and fertile sources for fears of ethnic infection and moral pollution. (91)

While Killeen is referring more specifically to the more readily identified fields of Irish and Scottish Gothicism, their analysis is equally applicable to Cornwall as a Celtic fringe. It is this illusiveness of Cornwall and Cornishness that I propose initially lends itself to Collins's nineteenth century construction of the Gothic and caters to Collins's already recognized preoccupation with liminal space and tendency to use liminal space (and travel through liminal space) as a site for expressing national anxieties (Alan 251, Russell 17-31).

Jenny Bourne Taylor describes the distinctive features of Collins's work as revolving around "his fascination with the unstable boundary between the normal and the deviant," the "slippery and unstable," and the "double and fractured subjectivities" (2, 3). While John Bowen suggests these recurrent concerns lend themselves to the massive proliferation of psychoanalytic approaches to Collins's work, I alternatively propose considering Collins's historically documented familiarity and fascination with Cornwall to establish a more historiographical approach to Collins's depictions of Cornishness. While admittedly Collins's work overflows with theories of consciousness, nervousness, and anxiety, there is, too, a concern with histories, ancestries, and landscapes as hubs of regional identity that set the stage for these psychological concerns. In applying a framework of theory pertaining to regional identities to *The Dead Secret*, I hope to locate existing psychoanalytic research into Collins within a context of mid-to-late-nineteenth-century concerns with location and borders.

The first part of this essay will discuss the way in which contemporary regional theorists have negotiated the "Cornish problem" – namely, the difficulty in locating the county within current models as a result of its various internal contradictions. This will serve as more of an introduction than an exhaustive overview of the interactions between geographical, historiographical, and literary regional theory. The second part of the essay will use these ideas of regionality as a framework through which to dissect Collins's reworking of a Gothic tradition, in an attempt to answer the questions pertaining to Cornishness and Gothicism posed at the beginning of this essay. The final part of the essay will use Cornish coastal spaces and seascapes within Collins's work as a particular regional example upon which to apply these ideas of Collins's particular reworking of the Gothic.

Bernard Deacon, in his extensive work on Cornish identity, begins with questioning the very idea of regionality. The first model proposed is one outlined by Finberg, suggesting that regions serve as "social entities... so far united in thought and action as to feel a sense of belonging together, in contradistinction from the many outsiders who do not belong" (Finberg 32-35). This model is reliant upon exclusion and separatism; a sense of "us versus the world." Edward Royle moves away from a common other, towards a notion of common interest, as a region can be more closely defined as "a sentimental attachment to a territory shared by like-minded people" (Royle 4). This weaves identity with both location and the history of

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a location, the notion of “sentimental attachment” evoking a nostalgia and a deeply emotive relationship that transcends geographical conceptions of borders. Cynthia Applegate refers to this as a process of unwinding regionality from territory, and instead seeing the “social containers” inferred by regions as “a complex and unbound lattice of articulations” (134). The idea of “articulations” moves towards a performed notion of dialect or discourse and lends itself to a more creatively constructed mythos of community communicated verbally, through symbolism and representation of tradition, as opposed to something delineated by historically unstable topographical boundaries. Acknowledging history as unstable is vital to understanding the roles of “historical agents” in the constant process of shaping, re-shaping, imagining, and re-imagining the history of a populace, community, and their shared landscape.

Deacon proposes Cornwall as a prime case study for defining the limitations and adaptability of regionality. He states Cornwall as unique, in as much as it is “both ‘of England’ and ‘not of England’” (5). Philip Payton states that “Cornwall and the Cornish remain an enigma - not falling neatly or happily into the new categories that are appearing, a battleground perhaps for conflicting visions, constructions, imaginings of Cornishness, Celticity, and Britishness” (4). While both Deacon and Payton use this description of Cornwall as both-and-neither, forever edging on a multitude of definitions, shifting throughout history and perception, I propose that this can be extended to a more general sense of the instability of history, identity, and landscape. A conception of the Cornish as they “teeter on the brink of a conceptual and historiographical crevasse, neither county nor nation” allows space to be adaptable rather than concrete; abstract and fluid rather than strictly defined, and this rhetoric can be transferred to a sense of self, and the place of self in physical location and societal position (Deacon 7).

This difficulty with this proposed instability is that it calls into question the ensuing validity of using Cornwall as an example with which to understand any other framework. While it may be useful to open up the rhetoric used to interpret Cornish regional identity to apply to identity more generally, the process of generalization runs the risk of stripping all meaning from the framework. Deacon states that, “if regional identities are volatile and if discourses are constantly reshaping both the identity of a region and its consciousness then can any symbols be appropriated and attached to any place?” (7). In other words, can “Cornish” be used as a legitimate framework or valid variant on the Gothic if “Cornish” is ultimately forever

in flux? What significance does regionality have if the regional is forever in motion? It is its instability that enthralls us, that lends itself to the anxiety over instability that serves and fuels the Gothic, yet it is this same instability that may render it an ineffective lens through which to interpret literature. There must be elements of Cornishness that remain stable for its use as a shorthand or symbol within a narrative to function, and its fluid instability must be taken into consideration as a primary marker to be incorporated into an understanding of a particular brand of Cornish Gothicism or Gothic Cornishness.

Anthony Smith’s ethno-symbolism serves as an answer to the paradox of the “Cornish problem,” focusing less on a poststructuralist disintegration of meaning across time, and more on the “historical myths and memories involved in identity formation” (7). Before nations, nationhood, or national identity, there were “ethnic communities,” defined as “named human populations with shared ancestry, myths, histories, and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.” Smith’s ethno-symbolism relies less on geographical borders, or blood lineage, than shared memory and, specifically, the development of shared narratives through histories and myths (6-9). While these shared stories can be contained within geographical containers, they can also transcend and spread. This significantly less structured mode lends itself towards a more flexible and adaptable regional identity that develops and alters across time, while acknowledging its shared history. It is this historically and ancestrally-based definition of the populace of a region, alongside the notion of region as continually destabilising, that I propose to read into Wilkie Collins’s presentation of Gothic Cornishness in *The Dead Secret*. This is demonstrated by Sarah Leeson’s request that her Uncle “remember the history of my life” and “take that as an explanation,” as history both provides and justifies narratives (273). Doctor Chennery is the only trusted practitioner within the novel, as a direct result of being “well acquainted with the history of their families” (294). Personal, intimate, communal, and remembered histories are valued and treasured, but documented histories are subverted and mocked, as in the ludicrous title of the book describing the history of Porthgenna Tower:

The History and Antiquities of PORTHGENNA TOWER. From the period of its first erection to the present time; comprising interesting genealogical particulars relating to the Treverton family; with an inquiry into the Origin of Gothic Architecture, and a few thoughts on the Theory of Fortification after the period of the Norman Conquest. By the Reverend

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Job Dark, D.D., Rector of Porthgenna. The whole adorned with Portraits, Views, and Plans, executed in the highest style of art. Not published. Printed by Spaldock and Grimes, Truro, 1734. (307)

Collins is intentionally evoking the origins of the Gothic; the relationship between Gothic literature, history, and architecture; and the Gothic tendency towards excess to describe varying types of history and their preservation. Furthermore, it is an example of both book and building as historical artefacts, being read and interpreted in the present in order to contrast the two time periods.

Collins uses the idea of the Cornish having a shared sense of experience and land outside of Englishness, as demonstrated by his descriptions of their unruliness. Cornwall is presented as primitive early on in the text, as the rector ponders why the Trevertons, that ancient Cornish family, left the county: “Did he find the air unhealthy? I should think the local produce, in the way of food, must be coarse now in those barbarous regions?” (57). This illustrates a sense of the backwards, vulgar, and unsophisticated. “Barbarous” is an extreme but common way to refer to the Cornish region and its people, but that each assumption is framed as a question suggests something of the lingering mystery of the Cornish. This conveys that the Cornish landscape itself could be a threat to the health. Cornwall is dangerous not just because its people are ungovernable, but because there is something unsustainable or toxic about the land itself. Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot* capitalizes on this idea, by ruining Sherlock and Watson’s idyllic Cornish retreat with a series of grisly murders caused by toxic substances that poison the air. This is in direct contradiction to the promotion of Cornwall as a “health resort” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Shelley Trower attributes this recurrent manifestation of Cornwall as a space whose very landmass is laden with fear to the idea that Cornwall is an open wound, “a space where England might be especially susceptible to invasion from elsewhere. The Cornish cliffs operate as an ambiguous space, a permeable border at the edge of England that serves as both a point of destination and infiltration - by poisonous alien air” (201). While I agree with Trower’s assertion that it is something of the permeability of Cornwall and its openness to the Atlantic that serves as a threat, I disagree that this is the only threat present, or what all other threats serve to symbolize. For the coast to be an open wound in England, ripe for infection, Cornwall would have to be significantly more English. It is not just the idea that Cornwall can be invaded

by foreigners, but also that the Cornish are already foreigners - and worse, always have been. The threat is not encroaching, it is already very much present (and hitherto ignored) within England itself. This idea of assumed Englishness being false is the true anxiety of empire - that imperial spaces thought to belong to the home front retained their sense of the “alien” all along. In other words, the civilizing mission has failed, as the civilizing force bears marks of internal corruption.

This is seen in the description of the Cornish in response to the Englishman’s quest to appropriate their history:

Why, of course, every one of his plans turned out a complete failure. His Cornish tenantry received him as an interloper. The antiquity of his family made no impression upon them. It might be an old family, but it was not a Cornish family, and, therefore, it was of no importance in their eyes. They would have gone to the world’s end for the Trevertons; but not a man would move a step out of his way for the Franklands. (68)

The antiquity of the family means nothing to the Cornish because their history is separate from an English history. It is their shared experience as a populace that delineates their identity, outside of an English experience. Collins uses the Cornish to propose a space that exists outside of the bureaucracy and legality of England that much of his work so fervently criticizes. The Cornish preserve their history as separate, and refuse to be altered by exchanges of property or economy from within the center. The family, despite now owning the property, cannot “buy” rule or identity. Identity is non-transferable as it is historically based within community, lacks a material nature, and resists appropriation. The outsiders are seen as interlopers and lack the power to govern. This sense of the Cornish being an unruly and self-governing populace is extended, “as for the mine, it seemed to be inspired with the same mutinous spirit that possessed the tenantry. The wiseacres from London blasted in all directions on the profoundest scientific principles, and brought about sixpennyworth of ore to the surface for every five pounds spent in getting it up” (68).

This reemphasizes the value of shared spirit, nature, and experience, as well as highlighting the lingering threat of an uncontrollable people, resisting the “civilizing” forces of the outside world. This spirit is specifically associated with mining cultures and practices, emphasizing the idea that Londoners (those of the supposedly civilized metropole) are somewhat

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behind in mining technologies. The mines, in belonging to the Cornish, are somehow unreachable to others and will refuse to be productive for the interlopers. Rosamund, the heir to Porthgenna Tower, an emblem of Cornish wildness, is suitably wild herself:

“How can you doubt what will happen next? Am I not a woman? And have I not been forbidden to enter the Myrtle Room? Lenny! Lenny! Do you know so little of my half of humanity as to doubt what I should do the moment the room was discovered? My darling, as a matter of course, I should walk into it immediately.” (175)

As fittingly manifest of the ungovernable Cornish spirit, Rosamund is bestowed with masculine characteristics. This representation of androgynous behaviour is one that is recycled by Collins in his later works and suggests a transgressive sexuality attributed to the primitivism of her people and her character, as “I seem never to have grown up in my mind since I was a little child” (198). Rosamund’s androgynous behaviour transgresses anticipated social norms, forewarning her transgressive origins, and the transgressive behavior of both her birth mother, and adoptive mother. Diane Long Hoeveler discusses the recurrence of androgyny in Romantic and Gothic fiction as a manifestation of Victorian anxieties surrounding the disintegration of societal and cultural mores. In situating Rosamund outside of societal expectations and frameworks, androgyny and primitivism reinforce her marginalization as a Cornish woman on the periphery and a threat to the proper governance and maintenance of polite society – indicative of her working class, rather than aristocratic, origins. In Gothic terms, Rosamund is the monstrous threat to society, the ambiguous, amorphous, primitive antithesis to progress.

While Rosamund’s parentage (and thus identity) is the ultimate “secret” of the text, and the narrative revolves around destabilizing her position in society and her very concept of herself, it is vital to the functioning of the text that she remains Cornish. While her name may be different, she is a product not just of a Cornish community, but specifically a *mining* community. The overarching tragedy of the narrative is rooted in the mining accident that took her father, and prevented Sarah Leeson from entering into a union that would have rendered her child socially acceptable. Collins uses the very collapse of the mine, and larger de-industrializing collapse of the mining community, to represent destabilization of a personal self. Rosamund’s father is buried in Porthgenna cemetery, and, as

such, his body forms a part of her landscape. While she has no birth right to the name Treverton, she still has claim to her culture, community, and the landscape of Porthgenna, as her blood is very literally embedded in the earth. Once her parentage is revealed, and her inheritance returned to the next rightful heir, Andrew Treverton, the only reason he, in his misanthropic habits, returns it to her is explicitly because she is *not* the child of the “player-woman” he so loathed. Rosamund retains her right to live in Porthgenna regardless of her altered heritage, as despite the change in name, her blood remains Cornish. This suggests a strong sense of communal identity, in opposition to a more feudal sense of patriarchal economy. Sue Chaplin illustrates the long relationship between the Gothic and the power present in economic structures in their analysis of the Gothic and the law. Chaplin states that the history of the genre is entrenched in discussions of patrilineal inheritance, validating or invalidating lineage, and the division between classes. *The Dead Secret* feeds from this tradition, drawing a feudal economy in opposition to what Chaplin dubs a new “moral economy” (77). This moral economy privileges the community over the bloodline, enforcing Rosamund’s Cornishness over her specific parentage.

The Cornish used the project of reclaiming their history as a means of not only asserting their non-Englishness, but also their superiority. Charles Barham, President of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, in 1850, the year of Collins’s ramble, said that “it was from contact and communication with Phoenician civilisation, then the most advanced in the world, that the ancient inhabitants of Cornwall were raised above the level of other Celtic tribes” (10-11). Deacon points out that, in the 1850s and 60s, “the industrial region [of mining economy] was virtually synonymous with the historic territory. The critical role that Cornwall had played at the forefront of modernity as a testbed for the early development of steam engine technology before the 1840s added to a renewed regional pride” (12). This sense of pride led to a greater sense of superiority over the less-technologically advanced core, as “the thorough Cornishman’s respect for his own shrewdness and that of his clan is unbounded, or only equalled by his profound contempt for ‘foreigners’ from the east” (12). In the same breath as the “English” were describing the Cornish as a primitive and barbaric race, the Cornish held themselves as a more sophisticated and advanced people than the “English.” Yet this advancement was in the process of contraction. Mass emigration beginning in the 1840s fatally hit mining communities across Cornwall. Their advanced technology was being exported to and developed in richer geological sites globally. While early representations

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of the Cornish illuminated the people as the epitome of the Enlightenment project - examples of the vast potentiality of industrial development - their descent represented a larger anxiety over the potential failing of the Enlightenment project as a whole. In this way, as the Cornish moved further from the economic boom of the mid-eighteenth century, they became more of a manifestation of the threat of regression and decline seen as inevitably following a golden age. Not only was this a general threat, but also a more specific threat to the Celts, Celtic tradition, and Celtic revival. Deacon calls the Cornish a "Celtic warning story," the Cornish decline threatening that the same could happen to the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Manx if efforts were not taken to preserve their unique cultures dependently of English influence (3).

Smith and Deacon propose that the sudden absence of advanced mining as a cultural marker led to a middle-class Cornish project to unveil, revive, and perform a shared history, deeply embedded in the antiquarian drive of the nineteenth century. This collision of past and present is manifested recurrently in Collins's novel.

The source of Sarah Leeson's manifestation as an uncanny, haunting figure is her simultaneous embodiment of the old and young. Porthgenna Tower is half a celebrated mansion and half in absolute ruin. Cornwall represents Rosamund's past and future. The truly haunting moments of the text arise when characters are forced to confront their histories, as when Sarah Leeson faints before the Myrtle Room, her anxiety over the collision of past and present generating the impression of a ghost or spirit. This is embodied by the tensions between interior and exterior, silence and the sonic, generating a sense of disorientation representative of Sarah's mental state, as "Sarah listened, keeping her face still set toward the hall--listened, and heard a faint sound behind her. Was it outside the door on which her back was turned? Or was it inside--in the Myrtle Room?" (247). The fear leads to irrationality, as "all thought, all sensation left her," and "she became insensible to the lapse of time" (247). Time losing meaning, linearity, and coherence leads to her believing her mistress has returned as a ghost. The scene is protracted over a significant amount of time, employing frequent repetition and delaying the gratification of the reveal in order to generate anticipation. Sarah Leeson wonders whether it is the black dress she made for her mistress that rustles across the floor, hinting to Sarah as creator, and Sarah specifically creates for her mistress, linking the process of creation to the process of birthing a child that inherited her mistress's name. Sarah realizes that it is fallen strips of

wallpaper shuffling across the floor, rather than the dragging dress of her mistress. The ruin, rather than being inhabited with specters, creates the impression of specters in and of itself, as a product of its ruination. Her horror is demarcated as specifically "superstitious," conjuring local, shared belief. The prolonged terror is too much for Sarah's fragile nerves, and she drops the keys and hears a woman's piercing scream, only to faint at the top of the stairs. It becomes apparent that the scream was caused by the sound of the falling keys, as once again terror is generated by terror. This almost ham-fisted emblem of self-fulfilling prophecy, and the past coming back to haunt her, is the death belying the secret and presents history as an active threat to the present self. The overarching fear of both the Gothic ruin and the Gothic specter is the idea of the past remaining in or returning to the future, emblematic of the Cornish revival at the hands of tourism and antiquarian pursuits. The long buried Celts emerged from the ashes of their own economic decline, bringing a foreign history to the doorsteps of the English.

Bringing horror home was a hallmark of Collins's work. In 1865, Henry James wrote that sensation novels of the like written by Collins dealt with "those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors... the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings... [which were] infinitely more terrible" (qtd Bowen 54). This conjures Jarlath Killeen's proposition that the primary motivator of the Victorian Gothic was its movement away from the European monasteries and castles of eighteenth-century Gothic, swiftly towards the familiar (18). Collins, in using the familiar-unfamiliar, English-not-English, county-not-county of Cornwall manipulates this confusion between the foreign and the known to bring an unknown horror too close to the English bone. Bowen's assertion that Collins's horror is reliant on the uncanny is based upon his primary tendency to combine the real with the unreal; to inject the flat, realist narrative with echoes of the supernatural. In conjuring a place that was becoming increasingly known through tourist practices to an English populace, and reinforcing it as a space of barbarism and superstition, Collins is manipulating the uncanny to bring a haunting chill to an otherwise straightforward story of unknown birth and confused inheritance.

This sense of home is emphasised by the primary importance bestowed on Porthgenna Tower. The novel starts and finishes at Rosamund's childhood home, and events transpire to continually draw her there against the odds. She is kept away by the death of her father and the birth of her son,

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forewarning the idea that her inheritance of Porthgenna (and her ultimate homecoming) will be denied to her by death (the death of her biological father, forcing Sarah Leeson into giving her up) and birth (her own, false birth).

Collins frequently and explicitly contrasts the outside with the inside, destabilizing the boundaries between. "Inside the room the one audible sound was the slow, toilsome breathing of the dying woman, raising itself in its mortal frailness, awfully and distinctly, even through the far thunder-breathing from the bosom of the everlasting sea" (8). The permanence of the sea is contrasted with the mortality of Mrs. Treverton's body. The sea accompanies her in her death, breathing in harmony with her, demonstrative of the relationship between her and her surroundings. The description is given a sonic dimension, generating a multi-sensory experience of landscape.

Half of Porthgenna is inhabited, beloved, cared for, and grand. The other half is in disrepair. Despite its proximity to the civilized section of the house, it is filthy, broken, and covered in rubbish. This tension between the cultivated and the seriously neglected is manifest of the social and class tensions present between the duchy and the metropole. The space is "forsaken" (28). It is described as "lonely, deserted," in ironic juxtaposition with Mr. Munder's insistence that the mansion is featured as a tourist site in "The Guide to West Cornwall," which apparently Uncle Joseph would have done well to have made himself acquainted with (29, 234). Here, Collins juxtaposes Cornwall's burgeoning success as a picturesque tourist destination with the desolation of its landscape in the wake of de-industrialization. It "showed plainly enough that many years had passed since any human creature had inhabited" the north rooms, implicitly suggesting that perhaps something nonhuman had inhabited the rooms instead (29). In garnering an edge of inhumanity, the rooms show the necessary and mutually beneficial relationship between space and its (ideally living) human inhabitants. The rooms are "gloomy," "festooned about fantastically with cobwebs," and infused with a "mouldy coldness" (32). It conforms to all the demands of a Gothic ruin, replete with clouds of dust and family pictures "bulging" from their frames – a physical and aesthetic representation of the importance of inheritance and title projecting or protruding from the past into the future. Collins sets the past in the very same walls as the present; the progressive and homely with the ancient and the uncanny. The north rooms are the dark twin to the Porthgenna of Rosamund's childhood, forever warning the potential for ruin and disintegration that could potentially befall the rest of the Tower. In this way, Porthgenna

does not just contain Sarah Leeson's imagined specter, but it is constructed as a specter within itself.

This recurrent collision of past and present is referred to by Robert Mighall as "the Gothic cusp"; that Gothic texts frequently pitch past settings versus modern manners and morals to contrast the two (11). Collins instead uses this past-present dichotomy not to contrast modern and historic manners and morals, but Cornish and English manners and morals, in order to question notions of English civilization and advancement against Cornish advancement and decline. Mighall illustrates the importance of place in relation to history to the Gothic genre, a relationship that can be applied to this discussion of shared experience in regional spaces (xi-xvii).

It is not just Cornwall's history, mining, and process of reclaiming its past that lend themselves to Collins's Gothicism. The very make-up of the landscape itself is vital in forming the backdrop to *The Dead Secret's* unveiling of ghosts and madness. In representing a coastal space, the text is representing a liminal space on the periphery, perfectly situated to manifest the sense of unraveling, uncertain borders and boundaries, and contested identity rooted in geographical location. Not only is Sarah Leeson both youthful and elderly, she is a consciously conflicted character. She is both foreign, and local; of German ancestry, with a strong connection to Cornwall. She acts as both servant, and lady; she is the figure of caring mother and the monstrous mother driven to insanity, horrifying her own child. She is simultaneously Mrs Jazeph and Sarah Leeson. In serving as a vessel of these multifarious conflicts and contradictions, she presents the confusing binaries introduced by Gothicism - a tension between progress and history, between the monstrous and the humane, past and future, as well as disintegrating notions of class distinction and ancestral and patrilineal histories.

These conflicts struggling to be contained within one character are encapsulated through images of seascapes and wrecking. The Cornish sea is a part of the landscape, as recognisable and intrinsic to understanding Cornishness as the mines and moors. The rhetoric of the sea permeates the discourse of the Cornish characters, most prominently in their moments of introspection. Sarah feels that she is "the wreck of something that you might once have liked to see; a wreck that can never be repaired - that must drift on through life unnoticed, unguided, unpitied - drift till the fatal shore is touched, and the waves of Time have swallowed up these broken relics of me forever" (3). Fragmentation and disintegration of bodily

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self and psyche is represented through descriptions of the churning sea, and decline is seen as an inevitable consequence of the passing of time. This emphasizes the notion that the sea is a vital peripheral location for describing disintegration and threat to both self and the self as a larger representation of society. The sea forms part of Sarah's identity. Time is vitally aligned with space, and history is related to location, as discussed extensively by Mighall (xiv-xvi). The images of the sea are images of isolation and dislocation – “unnoticed, unguided, unpitied” – as inspired by the roar of the Cornish sea pouring through the dying woman's window. In this way, the sea air has the ability to bridge the borders between land and sea. Borders become insignificant and liminal, the sea is constantly smelt and heard throughout the narrative, nature pouring into constructed places, the outside pushing in. The shore itself is “fatal” – the space that isn't quite land and isn't quite sea; the space so hard to delineate, measure, know, is demarcated as dangerous, as where the sea and land ends is where life ends, connecting self to this notion of time as space, and space as time.

The sea is specifically and recurrently associated with, present alongside, and the cause of death. The sea continuously roars outside of the room of Mrs Treverton's death bed, bringing still as the breeze blusters through the window. Mr Treverton, too, dies at sea, without ever knowing his wife's secret. “Is my master alive now?” asks Sarah, “Rest, til the drowned rise. Tell him the Secret when the sea gives up her dead” (152). The sea is continuously personified, given voice and agency, a manifestation of the independence of the Cornish people. The sea, too, becomes a figure in the landscape, given body and its own power.

The sea is again used as shorthand for the most mysterious and unreachable of places, as Andrew Treverton insists, if he received money from his family, he “would take every farthing of it out in a boat, and bury it forever at the bottom of the sea!” (302). The sea is, effectively, the end, the ultimate nothingness. Scott McEathron addresses the fact that texts published earlier in the century laid the seeds for this representation of the sea as a space loaded with excessive gothic sentimentality. He references specifically Coleridge's “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and Shelley's “A Vision of the Sea,” two poems that significantly developed the complex relationship between Romantic poetry and Gothic imagery. For Shelley, as with Collins, the sea is a graveyard that kills, buries, and hides its victims. McEathron emphasizes the importance of the sea not just as a locus of threat, but also as a locus

possessing the capacity and potentiality for the “pernicious mystification and mythologizing of death” (177). The sea is a space that represents “the disintegration of the psyche” by virtue of it being a non-landscape, a non-land, unstable and unknown, with fathomless depths, yet utterly necessary and intrinsic to the development of empire and trade. John Mack highlights this preoccupation with the interconnected relationship between “inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in regards to seafaring and its textual representations (19). The sea is both mystery and opportunity, key to and representative of imperial development yet bearing the threat of reverse colonization and imperial fall. It offers potential for industrial development, while at the same time conjuring a primitive fear of the unknown. Cornwall's sea fulfills the same functions as Cornwall's land. John Mack's cultural history of the sea labors to remind us that “what happens around or even of the sea is often strongly coloured by what happens on the land” (13). The pervading representation of the sea in *The Dead Secret* supports the idea of the Cornish sea being an extension of the Cornish landscape and that Cornwall is significantly more connected to the seascape than the English landscape beyond the Tamar. In this way the waterways both unify and separate. Jonathan Raban talks at length about the differences in imaginative interpretations of the sea for those who know it and those who do not:

People on land think of the sea as a void, an emptiness haunted by mythological hazards. The sea marks the end of things. It is where life stops and the unknown begins. It is a necessary, comforting fiction to conceive of the sea as the residence of gods and monsters – Aeolus, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, the Goodwins, the Bermuda Triangle. In fact the sea is just an alternative known world. Its topography is as intricate as that of land, its place names as particular and evocative, its maps and signposts rather more reliable. (127)

This conjures the mythological dimensions of seascape rendered by Collins's conjuring of Shelley in the complex relationship between sea, death, and Gothic imagery. But beyond that, it suggests a tension between those who imagine the sea and those who live with it; the sea's multifarious differences in the eyes of the tourist and the eyes of the Cornish. John R. Gillis discusses the idea of the sea as extension of land as a process of “continentalization”; that claiming a sea, attaching it to a landmass, is a mode of appropriating, parcelling, and packaging the wild and ungovernable (175). This means of understanding

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the relationship between seascapes and landscapes also suggests a lens through which to understand the imperial motivations behind the simultaneous fear and curiosity of the English towards Cornwall in the late nineteenth century. In the same way the sea was being absorbed like a sponge into the rhetoric of landmasses and regionalities, the Cornish were being packaged into romantic holiday breaks and whimsical travel narratives. This process of claiming, Gillis insists, is one based upon fear of proximity of the unknown and the ungovernable, that “it is at the edge of the sea that we imagine both the birth of new worlds and the death of old ones” (174).

Collins’s use of the sea is at its most evocative as Sarah Leeson and Uncle Joseph stare across Porthgenna Tower and its surrounding beaches from a mount. Joseph analyzes the landscape and seascape through the new eyes of a foreigner, whereas Sarah approaches the landscape as one who is a fundamental (if transgressive) part of the heritage and history of this view, in a sense both aristocratic and domestic.

What third person, brought face to face with the old man and his niece, as they now stood together on the moor, would have suspected, to look at them, that the one was contemplating the landscape with nothing more than a stranger’s curiosity, and that the other was viewing it through the recollections of half a lifetime? The eyes of both were dry, the tongues of both were silent, the faces of both were set with equal attention toward the prospect. Even between themselves there was no real sympathy, no intelligible appeal from one spirit to the other. The old man’s quiet admiration of the view was not more briefly and readily expressed, when they moved forward and spoke to each other, than the customary phrases of assent by which his niece replied to the little that he said. How many moments there are in this mortal life, when, with all our boasted powers of speech, the words of our vocabulary treacherously fade out, and the page presents nothing to us but the sight of a perfect blank! (166)

Collins here expresses the failure of communication (physical and verbal) to articulate the depth of feeling associated between personal history, landscape, seascape, and regional identity. While on a superficial level the experiences of tourist and local seem largely similar, the depth of Sarah’s history with Porthgenna is manifest in the prospect. Collins is, essentially, imagining Andrew Smith’s significantly later construction of the cultural and regional ethnography. Sarah’s deeply internal

and imaginative relationship with the conflicted simultaneous representation of present and history demarcated by Porthgenna and its surrounding Cornish waters situates her as having a more nuanced relationship with landscape-history that leads to consequent identity formation and, arguably, psychological disintegration. It is this constant process of making, breaking, and remaking that signifies the rhetoric of regional identities within a context of Cornish Celtic history and Wilkie Collins’s reimagining of conventions and motifs within the framework of these identities. In essence, the Cornish landscape lends itself to Collins for both its flexibility and inflexibility. Its breaking, disintegrating permeability sets the stage for the Gothic horror generated by *The Dead Secret*, while simultaneously offering space for commentary on the dynamic flux of identity formation (in regards to location) in the mid-Victorian period of cultural and societal movement. Indeed, this forward-looking movement allows the novel to close with unanticipated beginnings. Rosamund assumes she has lost her mother and father, and, while she indeed has lost both her adopted and her biological parents, in the revelation of the secret she gains an uncle. Uncle Joseph, too, assumes he has lost all and frequently recalls the list of his deceased family, yet gains a niece and a great-nephew. Andrew Treverton, having utterly given up on humanity, gains hope through the way Leonard and Rosamund cope with the secret of her heritage:

“The only clouds on the sky are clouds of shining white; the only shadows over the moor lie light as down on the heather. Oh, Lenny, it is such a different day from that day of dull oppression and misty heat when we found the letter in the Myrtle Room! Even the dark tower of our old house, yonder, looks its brightest and best, as if it waited to welcome us to the beginning of a new life.” (117)

The revival of buried history leads to progression, in the same way the Cornish assumed the revival of their Celtic ancestry would drive their culture forward in a time of economic turmoil. Even the ruinous Tower is given new light and new life when its understanding is enriched with its true history. This mirrors the county’s attempt to recover its own secret of origins and ancestry from the rubble, in the hope of casting a new light on Cornish life and regional standing.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal, by Marie

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***Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal*, by Marie Mulvey-Roberts, Manchester UP, 2016. 258 pages, £70.00. ISBN 978-0-7190-8541-3**

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A book that comes with endorsements from Fay Weldon and David Punter promises to be an exciting addition to the recent rich scholarship on the Gothic. Marie Mulvey-Roberts's *Dangerous Bodies* does not disappoint. Her stated aim is to look at the relationship of English Gothic literature and German and Anglo-American film to historical horrors, detailing the interaction of fictional terror with real-life nastiness. The book displays a wealth of references and a dazzling array of authorities and scholars, from Foucault, Derrida and Žižek to writers on specific texts like David Punter, Robert Miles, Dale Townshend, and Steven Bruhn.

Inevitably the concentration on the body implicates institutions most eager to control and exploit it in our Western culture: medicine and the church. Mulvey-Roberts brings out the fleshiness of so much religious doctrine which concerns the persecuted and persecuting bodies; the dangerous ones she describes emerge from the English Reformation, the Spanish inquisition, and the French Revolution, as well as from Victorian medical (mal)practice, anti-Semitism, and warfare, from the Crimean to the Vietnam.

A fascinating strand in *Dangerous bodies* is the ambiguity of Gothic. While the major Gothic writers let their work unlock taboos and cross frontiers, they also perpetuate negative stereotypes of the Other. As Mulvey-Roberts argues, the fictional horrors of the Gothic may blind us to the horrors of the real; they may naturalize what should be opposed. The Gothic monster has, after all, been a rallying point for cultural, nationalist or religious hegemonies. At its most dangerous the Gothic can be a way of rationalising the Other. The horror text functions as “a rite of defilement that sometimes appears to collude with the forces of oppression and yet, at the same

time, can be cathartic and transformative by collapsing the boundary between the self and monstrous Other” (9).

Although wide-ranging in reference, the book's subject is primarily the vampire as iconically created by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*. It traces the immense influence of this book on German Expressionist cinema and in spinoff literature through the twentieth century. Mulvey-Roberts is less interested in the class-ridden vampire created by Lord Byron and his physician John Polidori about the time when Mary Shelley was getting the first inklings of *Frankenstein*, though their works are mentioned. What she chooses to investigate she looks at in intricate detail. Some of the arguments are not new but they are cleverly brought together in new ways, and all sources are meticulously referenced.

The book is divided into five large chapters. The first notes how the English Reformation and French Revolution appeared to destroy the Gothic world so that Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis, Stoker's precursors, try to recapture it imaginatively in Gothic fiction. Mulvey-Roberts considers the now conventional notion that English Gothic is anti-Catholic, arguing that, while anti-Catholicism remains an element, by the mid eighteenth century a greater threat was repressive secular government. This then was exacerbated once the fear of contagion from the French Revolution gripped England at the end of the century. Walpole, author of the first well-known Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, was a critic of Henry VIII, seeing him as a bloody persecutor through his violent break with Rome. In this context his novel becomes neither defence of nor attack on Catholicism but rather a satire on the Reformation that goes some way aesthetically to recreate abandoned Catholicism. The more overtly anti-Catholic *Monk*

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by Matthew Lewis is seen to replay the horrors of the French Revolution, especially through the image of the Bleeding Nun. This image draws on the Terror that enveloped women such as the queen, Marie Antoinette, and her close friend, the Princess de Lamballe.

The second chapter concerns the corruption and corroding effects of African slavery on all the cultures involved. It notes the connection with historical slavery of both Walpole and Lewis, to whom may be added other Gothic writers, William Beckford, author of *Vathek* whose vast wealth came in part from slave-worked sugar plantations in Jamaica, and, more controversially, Mary Shelley, whose *Frankenstein* uses both the abolitionist and the pro-slavery discourses. While taking the liberal side on the question of slavery itself, Shelley is less clear when it comes to the issue of immediate emancipation: whether slaves needed to be prepared for their freedom or set free at once. In a skillful close reading, *Frankenstein* becomes a parable of the life cycle of a slave, embodying real-life horror and terror. The monster's unfinished bride resembles the demonization of rebel female slaves and touches on fears of miscegenation. Stories of brutal slave uprisings play into the portrait of the monster as both worthy and blood-thirsty, while in life and fiction slave and slave-owner can change places and mirror each other.

The third and subsequent chapters concentrate on readings and permutations of *Dracula*. Associating the female vampire and the hysteric woman, Chapter Three concentrates on the book's subtext of sexuality. It describes the historical efforts to control male and female sexuality and comments in detail on the practice of sexual surgery which was used to cure deviant women at the time. *Dracula* is read as a medical novel merging medicine and the supernatural. Through his relatives Stoker knew something of the punitive operations on female sexual and reproductive organs, as well as the warning literature about female orgasm and the horrors of masturbation in both sexes. Vampirism, it is argued, forms a trope for invented female pathology needing surgery for a cure (female castration), as well becoming an image of sexually transmitted disease.

Bram Stoker may have read some of Sir Richard Burton's anti-semitic writings. In *fin de siècle* discourses of degeneration, the Jewish body is made pathological and criminal. *Dracula* is not explicitly Jewish, though a few hints suggest there might have been a slight reference. Chapter Four focuses on Jewishness and the blood through mediation of the

most famous film inspired by *Dracula*, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, which in turn inspired other works that clearly link the vampire and the Jew. Applying the vampire trope to associate Jews and sexual disease and plague, Nazi propaganda films made image after image of the vampiric monstrous Jew.

Whether or not Hitler ever read *Dracula* or saw *Nosferatu*, he was certainly influenced by their progeny. The Nazis brought about not only the vampire of anti-Semitism but also the vampire of the largest war ever seen. The final chapter of the book concerns war viewed as the ultimate blood-sucker. Stoker's brother sent him descriptions of the horrors he experienced in the Russo-Turkish war in the 1870s, showing the draining effect of war on the body politic and on men's bodies. In *Dracula* there seem to be traces of the Crimean War, while the pursuit of the vampire takes on the quality of a military campaign. War begets other wars as vampires make other vampires. So it is fitting that war is often allegorized as a vampiric woman, a woman who also spreads syphilis in wartime brothels. With war, tropes of fiction and history come together. The biggest mass of dangerous bodies arrives with the First World War, where history itself becomes the tale of terror.

In the conclusion, Mulvey-Roberts sums up the argument succinctly and convincingly: "Corporeality has been used by the Gothic to express horror of the Other, whether it be through the body of the Catholic, Caribbean slave, femme fatale, Jew or enemy soldier. The construct of the monster is a declaration of war on individuals, who are demonised for their marginality and whose bodies are overlaid with fear and danger" (221).

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

Women and the Gothic, edited by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Edinburgh UP, 2016. 239 pages, \$120.

ISBN 978-0-7486-9912-4

by Kathleen Hudson

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***Women and the Gothic*, edited by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Edinburgh UP, 2016. 239 pages, \$120.**

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The Gothic has long existed as a mode that both facilitates creative and critical expression for women and interrogates their place in literary culture as figures representing and resisting generic tropes. With the recent re-evaluations of feminism as a broad literary critique and as a series of interconnected yet distinct political and social movements, it has become particularly important to reconfigure the Gothic mode's place within contemporary discourses. To this end, *Women and the Gothic*, a collection edited by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, re-assesses Gothic literature, film, and new media in terms of political and critical definitions of women, femininity, and feminism. An investigation of the fluid boundaries of such definitions and their impact on past and future readings of the Gothic forms the underlying narrative of this collection, while individual chapters anchor specific texts within the larger critical framework. This edited collection is one of the latest contributions to the Edinburgh Companions to the Gothic Series, a series edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes that aims to present a comprehensive overview of the Gothic while maintaining distinct thematic critical identities in each individual work. *Women and the Gothic* offers readers a new take on concepts of the female, femininity, political, and social feminist movements and the literary legacies of "Women's Gothic" while fitting snugly within broader criticism.

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik position Second-wave feminism (traditionally defined as the feminist developments of the 1960s-1980s) as a critical starting point, one which is then tested by the ambiguities of the Gothic and by the emergence of post-feminism and Fourth-wave feminism. Tapping into a range of research topics, *Women and the Gothic* sets out to facilitate a nuanced reading of feminist theory

without ignoring the social, political, and literary limitations therein. The work manages to create a very broad narrative of gender without losing sight of the central issues which define Gothic criticism.

The collection fittingly begins with the section "Part I: Family Matters," focusing on Gothic origins and the ways in which women do and do not fit within traditional roles. Angela Wright examines the birth of the Gothic heroine in "Heroines in Flight: Narrative Invisibility and Maturity in Women's Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period," introducing themes of commercialized femininity and ageism in order to provide insight into core early Gothic texts while laying the groundwork for the application of contemporary discourses. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas continues this push to redefine established modes in his essay, "Madwoman and Attics," the title itself suggesting one of the most famous feminist critical works. Talairach-Vielmas recasts the "madwoman" trope as an expression of uncanny liminal identity, examining Romantic and Victorian works such as *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White* in terms of social and legal powerlessness and in the context of the medical developments of the period. Ginette Carpenter has a similar strategy in "Mothers and Others," reading uncanny motherhood through the paradigms of Julia Kristeva, among others, in order to compare the films *Prometheus* and *We Need To Talk About Kevin* in terms of post-feminist anxieties. Lucie Armit's essay, "The Gothic Girl Child," is a fascinating survey of depictions of uncanny children as sites of transgressive desire and one which ultimately concludes that such depictions are often "disappointingly" consistently punitive for young women. Diana Wallace's work, "A Woman's Place," the final essay in this section, redefines the post-war domestic space in terms

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of the “dark arts” and witchcraft, and contains important implications for the recent re-evaluations of “witches” in feminist Gothic discourses.

“Part II: Transgressions” centers on alternative manifestations of the female, re-categorizing feminine identity in terms of physical, moral, legal, and supernatural representations while linking these identities back to central anxieties about the place and role of women. Anne Williams follows up on the previous section with her own study of witches in early Gothic texts, firmly establishing the origins and etymology of “Wicked Women” and examining unconventional source texts such as Alexander Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard.” Marie Mulvey-Roberts provides a survey of the demonized female body in and interrogates its implications for patriarchal systems in her essay, “The Female Gothic Body,” with especially interesting readings of the Bluebeard and Frankenstein mythologies. “Spectral Femininity” by Rebecca Munford applies Derrida’s “hauntology” to texts by Daphne De Maurier and Shirley Jackson before reconfiguring the issue through Ali Smith’s postmodern *Hotel World*. Sue Chaplin, whose work on Gothic legal identities remains unparalleled, contextualizes contemporary anxieties about legal identities and gender equality in a still predominately patriarchal “post-feminist” landscape in her chapter “Female Gothic and the Law.” Gina Wisker’s piece, “Female Vampirism,” wraps up this section by departing from typical readings of the female vampire and exploring how such figures destabilize the Gothic. She compares films such as *Byzantium* and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* with representations of vampires in Victorian fiction and identifies Angela Carter’s works as particularly game-changing.

The final section of the collection is entitled, “Part III: New Directions,” and, as the name suggests, this chapter constitutes the most comprehensive look forward towards developing feminist criticism and new modes of Gothic storytelling. Ardel Haefele-Thomas, in “Queering the Female Gothic,” incorporates queer theory into an evaluation of various threads of Second-wave feminism and indeed argues that the choice of the Gothic mode for lesbian authors and authors of color offers an alternative to essentialist and / or historically-determined identities. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik’s contribution to the collection, “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic,” similarly addresses a very troubling issue for contemporary feminism and one that has been a source of debate regarding the movement’s successes and failures. Ageism in the Gothic in terms of

female consumerism, queer theory, and the grotesque is examined through the lens of feminist theory, offering insight into the social and literary marginalization of women of a certain age. The final two chapters of the work contemplate the future of femininity in Gothic technologies, examining new Gothic modes in virtual media and literature and the implications of the “post-human” subject. Catherine Spooner’s “Virtual Gothic Women” discusses women’s complex relationship with technology in Gothic literature through an interrogation of concepts of “embodiment” and “disembodiment” in virtual spaces. Tracing texts by authors from Arthur Machen to Scarlett Thomas, this chapter interrogates Cartesian mind and body dualism in terms of the female subject and feminist critique. It is an interesting companion piece to the final chapter, “Formations of Player Agency and Gender in Gothic Games,” by Tanya Krzywinska, which interrogates concepts of female agency in the highly ambiguous space of Gothic games such as *Phantasmagoria*, *Primal*, and *American McGee’s Alice*. Krzywinska returns to core authors such as Radcliffe, Carter, and Whedon while offering fascinating insight into the potential implications of Gothic femininity within gaming and consumerist identity.

This collection achieves its goals in two ways: by linking long-established Gothic criticisms in innovative ways to feminist movements and to feminism as critical theory, and by examining new areas that have received relatively little attention and that need to be incorporated more fully in female Gothic literary criticism. Horner and Zlosnik identify “the negative way in which women are conceptualized in many cultures” as a core source for the anxieties that women and men have felt and continue to feel regarding gender stereotypes, agency, and oppression – and indeed, the Gothic mode in particular is responsible for many of the myths, both positive and negative, that have constructed cultural identities up to the present day (11).

Such a collection does require a relatively narrow thematic focus in order to incorporate all the nuances therein, though perhaps one of the most noteworthy issues currently being interrogated in terms of modern feminism is that of intersectionality. Wright and Horner and Zlosnik’s essays in particular do an excellent job of incorporating issues of ageism into critical Gothic feminism. Ardel Haefele-Thomas’s chapter “Queering the Female Gothic,” and other chapters throughout the collection also draw significant attention to feminism’s relationship with queer theory. However, women of color as characters and authors and race-based discussions

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of Gothic feminism more generally are mostly absent in this collection, though Haefele-Thomas does briefly discuss minority characters and authors. In spite of this, the text provides a solid basis for the incorporation of new areas of intersectional criticism in future feminist Gothic readings.

Horner and Zlosnik, in their selection of essays, incorporate complex and ambiguous feminist critiques to illuminate the ways in which definitions of “women” and “the Gothic” have developed in tandem from the eighteenth century to the present day. It is the forward-looking scope of this edited collection that makes it most notable among collections on “Women’s Gothic,” as well as its willingness to question how we define notions of the female and the developments of women in literary discourse. Even familiar, foundational arguments are redefined within this new topic and linked more comprehensively to developing criticism. The collection captures the ambiguity of women characters within texts, women writers, and the parameters of feminism and literature more generally, while never losing sight, even when there is reason for pessimism, on the potential for new avenues for women in the Gothic.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

Britain, France, and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror, by Angela Wright, Cambridge UP, 2013. 214 pages, \$29.99. ISBN 978-1-1075-6674-3

by Denys Van Renen

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***Britain, France, and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror*, by Angela Wright, Cambridge UP, 2013. 214 pages, \$29.99. ISBN 978-1-1075-6674-3**

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10109>

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In this tight, evocative critical work, Angela Wright describes how Gothic fiction provided a sort of diplomatic correspondence that maintained cross-cultural exchange between Britain and France from the end of the Seven Years War to the Napoleonic Wars. Wright creates a seamless narrative, providing a text that reads like a novel instead of a collection of individual essays loosely related through a connection to the Gothic. Indeed, one is much better served if one reads through the entirety of this manageable 152-page book. Its five chapters reconsider canonical Gothic authors from Horace Walpole to Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis and put forth a serious rebuttal to claims that the national character of Britain was fostered by a hostile reaction to its continental neighbor. While Gothic writers sensed the British hostilities toward France, “they all nonetheless dared to look across the Channel for inspiration, be it through the realms of translation, adaptation, or unacknowledged plagiarism” (10). The feats with which some Gothic writers eluded an increasingly rabid British press, hungry for any sign of French contamination, are, I think, what makes *The Import of Terror* such a riveting read; these allusions, sympathies, and borrowings provide a fecund canon for a perceptive reader, and Wright illuminates these winding corridors and dark recesses of Gallic appreciation.

Distinguishing her work from the many other studies on Gothic literature, Wright mobilizes an eclectic mix of paratextual material, letters, and even bedroom décor to buttress her points. Perhaps, especially in the first chapter, *The Import of Terror* could have developed more sustained readings of the novel proper (in this case, *The Castle of Otranto*), but her discussions of the maneuvers British authors employed to “cloak” their affinities for France in their

literary productions through prefaces and other introductory matter provide more than enough material to add significant historical context to texts widely read and taught from the Gothic canon (41).

One feels privy to insider information, decoding revolutionary sentiments. In the first chapter, for example, Wright unpacks Walpole’s sly allusion to William Marshal, who served as his “translator” for the first preface to *The Castle of Otranto*. The “real” William Marshal, an engraver who created the frontispiece of John Milton’s *Eikon Basilike* (1649), famously and scandalously depicted the deposed Charles I as a Christian martyr. Marshal also produced a portrait of Milton himself of which Milton was less than satisfied. This residual resentment provides the scaffolding on which to support Wright’s claims, centering on “anxieties about representing, mediating, copying and authorship” (25). I have, in fact, assigned Wright’s book to my graduate students for the reason that one of our jobs as literary “sleuths” is to untangle the complex interrelationships among authors from different eras even when they make strange bedfellows because they profess different political agendas. These connections do not demonstrate an “anxiety of influence” but, instead, underscore how authors seek the fellowship and inspiration from other authors, who, too, have persevered through duress and navigated factionalism. Wright’s surprising, and frankly rousing, arguments remind us of the pleasures of close textual analysis and historical reconstruction.

These interconnections among authors and historical periods thread through chapters two and three, in which Wright takes readers on a guided tour of, among other topics,

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seventeenth-century French Romance and Gothic writers' indulgence in myths about Mary, Queen of Scots. Wright also describes the precariousness of translators whose very work left them vulnerable to charges of Gallic sympathies. In particular, she provides ample evidence that Sophia Lee and Charlotte Smith were more than willing to entertain notions that the English had much to gain from exposure to French literature; they even nodded toward France's civil liberties, especially after habeas corpus was suspended in England in 1794, 1798, and 1801, and the rich social relations that extended beyond family and social class.

Wright details how the British press worried that the Gothic novel would supplant newspapers as the vehicle by which readers kept abreast of "political news from France" (81). Firmly establishing the importance of Gothic literature as the conduit across the English Channel, Wright introduces a little-known text, "The Terrorist System of Novel Writing" (1797), which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1797. Readers may be especially interested in Wright's discussion here as she demonstrates how this sensational text draws attention to the irony in a government which denounces Gothic literature through the very elements that underpin the genre: lack of transparency, despotism, extrajudicial punishment, and corrupt nepotism. Moreover, "The Terrorist System" reveals the fissures in English ideals of liberty and freedom of expression that were supposed to be the envy of its Continental neighbors.

Wright then uses this obscure treatise to underpin her discussion of Radcliffe, for the anonymous writer of "Terrorist Novel Writing" serves as Wright's most perceptive scholarly forbear. Chapter four, on the "famously proper" Ann Radcliffe, serves as the main attraction for me (49). Armed with allusions to Shakespeare and other English writers, Radcliffe protects herself against charges of treason while attempting to defuse heightened tensions between France and Britain. In this chapter, Wright also deeply engages with Rousseau's influence on English writers, delving into the nuances of sentimental narratives and pastoral space. As for the latter register, whether a device is used extensively at the beginning (Eliza Haywood) or the end of the eighteenth century (Ann Radcliffe), it needs to be treated as a rich critical vein. Countering Raymond William's charge that the pastoral mode indicates "a failure of the imagination," Wright insists that Radcliffe's invocation of it in her 1794 novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* serves as "an elegy for England's lost relationship with France" (95, 105).

Wright devotes much needed critical space to *Gaston de Blondville*, posthumously published in 1826 (a recent version was published by Valancourt Books and edited by Frances Chiu in 2006). Wright's analysis of Radcliffe is striking because she identifies in this work a "conscious attempt to defamiliarise the reader's expectations of what constitutes a Radcliffean romance" (117). That is, functioning as Radcliffe's *Northanger Abbey*, the novel both indicts the failure of leadership in England and reminds her countrymen of the role of art to revive an English readership that was conditioned by a febrile press to interpret literature as propaganda. Radcliffe's tentative allusions to the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* hark back to Walpole's inspiration for the first Gothic novel, reiterating that England suffers from a "crisis of imagination" (118). Although readers may want to attribute the ghost's impotence to Radcliffe's own shortcomings in this particular novel, for Wright, then, it serves as an indication that years of French hostility are starting to damage not just France, but England. Indeed, the fraying of bonds and indeed the outright hostility between England and France poison readers' appreciation for not only other cultures but also their nation's literary output.

Chapter five sheds light on how Matthew "Monk" Lewis's travels as a teenager to Paris influenced his great novel and less illustrious corpus. In particular, the French theater played a pivotal role in his balanced approach to the "things" of Gothic terror—Catholic iconography and scheming monks, for example. Experiencing his own terrors from critics already emboldened by frequent incursions on fabled British liberty, Lewis is quite explicit about the lessons he internalized from Boutet de Monvel's play *Venoni*. As Wright claims, he promoted "moderate revolution" (131); he was less interested in demeaning religions or professions and preferred to exhort the public to "BE TOLEARANT" (143). While she uses his exposure to French drama to tweak the established critical response to *The Monk*, the chapter mainly covers the modifications Lewis makes to his translations of French sources to mitigate anti-Catholic bias and instead show his sympathy for the French.

As with many coda and conclusions, which allow more free play and imaginative leaps, Wright's "Afterlives" leaves many intriguing readings open-ended. Short discussions of Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816) and *Ivanhoe* (1820) provide both a neat terminus to the book as well as opportunities for fresh interpretations. She concludes with an invitation to pursue her interventions: "The traces of the

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crucible of war are there to uncover” (152). While the thesis of the book is fairly straightforward—British writers navigated and benefitted from the influence of French authors—her close readings and excavation of archival and little-discussed material evidence the need for further critical inquiry. Indeed, as in the second chapter, Wright almost has to stop herself from reconstructing more of the background and afterlife of Lee’s translation: the “list of examples of influence that *The Recess* provoked could be endless” (48-49). *The Import of Terror* conveys the excitement that attends tracing these intricate networks; the sheer amount of sources, moreover, suggests that an underserved public and authors sought opportunities to learn from others and express their solidarity with people suffering from violence and oppression. Although the press whips up xenophobic sentiments, artists and their public thrive on cross-cultural exchange, in this case French literature and thought. Wright celebrates the authors who keep open channels of communication between warring countries and who recognize that, in order to maintain some semblance of social and intellectual life, a country must resist the urge to demonize others even under hostile conditions.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

The Gothic and the Carnavalesque in American Culture, by Timothy Jones.
Cardiff, U of Wales P, 2015. 256 pages,
\$160.00. ISBN 978-1-78316-192-8

by Jeffrey Cass

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***The Gothic and the Carnavalesque in American Culture*,
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In his well-documented and lively book, Timothy Jones argues for a carnivalesque gothic within American culture that distinguishes itself from more traditional, literary studies of the Gothic by concentrating on the playful surfaces of Gothic narratives and the pleasures that their “Gothic carnival” evoke in the reader, rather than the more serious practices of a literary Gothic that interrogates the depths of the historical “real.” With Charles G. Finney’s *The Circus of Dr. Lao* as his textual touchstone, Jones stresses that the carnival gothics within American culture “potentially delight, thrill and amuse their audience,” (3) but their intent is not necessarily to instruct or moralize, succinctly suggesting that carnival gothics valorize “erotics before hermeneutics” (4). Drawing on Bourdieu’s theoretical notion of *habitus*, which, for Jones, means the practical or commonsense knowledge about the ways in which common readers instinctively appreciate the practice of the Gothic text that inculcates pleasure, Jones decouples the activity of this form of Gothic textual practice from the literary one because he believes that the *habitus* of the Gothic carnival mode is an end unto itself, largely ignored in recent studies precisely because the Gothic field has vigorously attempted to establish its rightful place within literary studies and, as a result, ignores the practical allure of Gothic pleasure. For Jones, therefore, “Gothic texts are sources of thrill before they are sources of meaning” (35). His book is a discursus into the origins, development, and nature of the pleasures of the carnivalesque gothic, beginning with the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, skipping to the twentieth century with a chapter on pulp horror with focused discussion on H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, and then continuing the line of carnival gothics with chapters on Ray Bradbury, EC Comics, Stephen King, and more contemporary writers, such as Anne Rice and Neil Gaiman.

Theoretically, Jones’s mentor is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose book, *Rabelais and His World*, underpins the “topsy turvy” nature of carnival, gleefully rejecting conventionality, overturning accepted social practices and procedures, and, for however limited a time, running riot over hierarchies of meaning. To paraphrase Bakhtin, it is a world turned upside down. In the world of carnival gothics, readers are “asked to withhold or bracket their moral judgments,” giving license to enjoy wickedness without endorsing wrongness. The “topsy turvy” nature of the Gothic carnival mode differentiates itself from the more “serious” Gothic texts that emphasize the historical real. This differentiation helps explain why Jones wishes to emphasize a writer like Poe, whose carnivalesque influence extends well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but whose writings do not “ask to be taken seriously,” unlike, say, Hawthorne, who “loads” his stories with a historically Puritan *mythos* because he wishes readers to decode and learn from them and not simply revel in the stories’ Gothic pleasures.

Poe’s canonicity conflicts with Jones’s intent on reconstructing him as a precursor and progenitor of the carnival gothics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. “To enjoy Poe’s tales, to immerse oneself in the fierceness of the delight of their horror, often requires the adoption of a carnivalesque reading practice,” which means abandoning “the polite and rational” world of critical inquiry (69). Unearthing a purer Poe in this manner just means to establish a reading practice for the next generation of the American Gothic, which includes the storied endeavors of *Weird Tales*. Lovecraft’s edgy “Cthulhu mythos,” Clark Ashton Smith’s Orientalized *Zothique*, and Robert E. Howard’s racialized “Black Canaan” and “Pigeons from Hell” illustrate the “delicious shudders,” a phrase Jones borrows from Herbert

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Jordan, one of the early readers of *Weird Tales*. These works produce what Jones labels “subjunctivity,” the “creation of order as if it were truly the case” (Jones 38). Borrowing from another theorist, unnamed in this case, Louis Althusser, Jones suggests that this pulp “subjunctivity” interpellates the reader into the fields of horror, immersing them in the text’s Gothic pleasures, rather than allowing readers to retain critical distance, as they might while reading the works of more “writerly” Gothic stories within the literary canon. The chapter’s “pulp subjunctives” are followed by a chapter on the October “aura” of Ray Bradbury, whom, Jones reminds us, *Time* describes as a “poet of the pulps.” Again emphasizing the nominally real modes of Bradbury’s fiction, particularly that in *The October Country*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *The Martian Chronicles*, Jones makes use of Walter Benjamin’s discussions of the aura, in which “figures ... encounter unusual and compelling atmospheres, objects, and events” (101). The “aura” in this case is a close cousin of “subjunctivity” because it holds reality in abeyance. It necessitates “an encounter with something close to us that cannot be touched, that remains unattainable, inaccessible, perhaps ghostly” (110). That Bradbury keeps the reader in suspense through the not-quite-definite portrayal of reality works well for the books cited above and explains a great deal about Bradbury’s fictional intentions. Ironically, the aura as a concept does *not* work well with Bradbury’s one novel about an actual carnival, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, whose Gothic mood animates an exciting bildungsroman, but which Jones amazingly brushes off by concluding only that the novel, in the end, “prefers the real,” with Jones oddly suggesting that “the symbols [the novel] offers ultimately render to an unproductive ambiguity; they do not quite make sense” (101). “Not making sense,” particularly as it alludes to the historical real, would seem to be the point of irrational Gothic titillations, which, heretofore, Jones had been proffering as the essence of the carnivalesque. One suspects that the real problem in Jones’s reading with *Something Wicked This Way Comes* lies in the fact that the boys in the novel “grow up” by overcoming Cooger and Dark’s nightmare travelling show and enter a more defined adulthood through its defeat. That’s far too conclusive and moralistic an ending to maintain the “delicious shudders” of the gothic carnival or the subjunctivity of Gothic fantasy.

Chapters on EC Comics and the culture of American Goth in popular culture are the best vehicles for Jones’s thesis principally because comics and film are better, more immediate textual modes for promoting the primacy of pleasure. The sections on EC Comics are especially good because Jones, in this case, spends some time on the

historical contexts for the comics that commodified horror in such successful fashion and then were eviscerated by publicity-seeking politicians and a conservative backlash against a culture that seemingly promoted violence and sexual promiscuity. William Gaines, the publisher, testified before Senator Estes Kefauver’s subcommittee on juvenile delinquency, explicitly noting, “Pleasure is what we sell, entertainment, reading enjoyment” (123). Jones recalls how Gaines neatly plays into the public’s paranoia about the effects of comics on the everyday lives of consumers, and, with the rise of commentators like Dr. Wertham, the psychoanalyst who believed that boys reading about Batman and Robin would naturally embrace homosexuality, Gothic comic horror was eliminated from publishing venues for several years. In contextualizing the reading tastes of the time, however, Jones continues to make the point that the universes given by EC Comics, particularly the “hosted” universes of the Crypt-Keeper, the Vault-Keeper, and the Old Witch, operated “within a ‘real’ of some sort, where everyday routines are interrupted by Gothic irruptions of violence, depravity, and the supernatural” (127-128). The point of these anthologized stories is that the “moral” is “evacuated of any meaningful value,” replaced instead with the kinds of delicious “shuddering” we see in Lovecraft’s horror fiction (129). Similarly, the shock value of “Gothic irruptions” suggests itself in films that explore the terrain of Goth culture. Jones includes discussions of Lestat as rock musician in *The Vampire Lestat*, the nihilistic death rockers from Dan O’Bannon’s *The Return of the Living Dead*, and, finally, the MTV rock generation as presented in Joel Schumacher’s *The Lost Boys*. In all cases, the rock band becomes a *figura*, the rhetorical occasion for Goth performance, a testament to the thrill of darkness, the fragility of mortality, and the fleeting nature of Gothic pleasure.

At times, of course, Jones’s study, despite his erudition and enthusiasm, seems a bit idiosyncratic. To appropriate Joseph Wittreich’s term, it is hard sometimes to see a carnivalesque “line of vision” that extends from Poe to H.P. Lovecraft and *Weird Tales*, to Ray Bradbury, to Stephen King, to Goth culture and film. Part of the problem lies in his extraction of these wonderful works from the Gothic tradition as a whole, which is rich and varied and which influenced all of the writers Jones identifies as key to understanding the carnivalesque tradition. In essence, Jones’s study is sometimes chronological without being historical. One suspects that this inattention to literary and historical interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity lies in his desire to render carnival gothics as distinct from other forms of the Gothic, particularly

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those works that are more “literary,” ones that require more systematic study and critical depth. After all, Jones’s principal argument is that the carnival gothics are all about their momentary textual pleasures, and not more cerebral, complex thematics. Still, the real issue is that Jones’s binary distinction becomes strained if one considers the broader sweep of Gothic history, especially since pundits, from the eighteenth century on, have always criticized the Gothic for being superficial, for catering to baser desire, for evoking the darkness from within. Indeed, Gothic Studies became a field precisely because it wished to show the richness of the genre, in all its forms, European and American. Frederick Burwick’s and Marjean Purinton’s works on the theatrical gothic, George Haggerty’s on the queer Gothic, and Diane Long Hoeveler’s work on Gothic feminism, Catholic chapbooks, and even an edition of Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* would enhance the insights of Jones’s notion of carnival gothics—they do not diminish it. In many ways, his chapter on Stephen King, which attempts to contrast, and not always positively, the violent, carnivalesque elements of *Carrie* and *It* to the more affected, intentionally literary, if also violent, Gothic of Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Morrison, would be more convincing had Jones demonstrated the textual and theoretical continuities of these writers rather than their ideological discontinuities, especially since King, despite his precarious perch within the literary community, still nonetheless grapples with literary and pictorial art and its depths, notably in his relatively recent work *Duma Key*.

But the real link between the carnivalesque and the literary gothic, the connection that makes the carnivalesque even more important to internalize, is the presence of satire within the genre, both locally within the carnivalesque and more generally within the broad range of the Gothic. It is hard not to view the horrifying surfaces of carnival gothics without it, on either side of the pleasurable/cerebral divide. To be fair, Jones does recognize the comic turn in the Gothic, but he eschews criticism that delves into a critical examination of its meaning within the carnivalesque. For example, Jones devotes much discussion to Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” as a Christian allegory, as a way of contrasting the story with Poe’s “The Black Cat,” which for Jones is an example of “practical” horror, as opposed to the more literary horror contained by Hawthorne. But is not Hawthorne’s ending a subversive wink to the reader who skeptically views Young Goodman Brown’s easy acceptance

of what he sees a satire, in other words, of Puritanism? Or, in the following chapter, is not Jones’s belief in Lovecraft’s insistence on the “articulation of horror” as “an end to itself” undermined by his Gothic McGuffins—both “sexless” narrators and monstrous antagonists, who Jones himself points out are “only representations,” ciphers that never completely come into focus (81)? Do not Lovecraft’s horrific creations become objects of satire precisely because of our desire to *de-cipher* them? Is this narrative strategy not a striking metacommentary that, to a limited extent, subverts the “practice” of Gothic horror, as Jones has outlined it? As a result, is not Lovecraft actually satirizing his own enterprise from the very beginning? And are not even the immediate pleasures of Gothic film and television often undermined by the patter of satirical commentary and narrative intrusion? Rod Serling’s *Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* drolleries, the maniacal but laughing *bon mots* of the Crypt-Keeper, the mordant wit of the grandfather in *The Lost Boys*, Lestat’s impatience with Louis’s two centuries of whining in *Interview with a Vampire* all point to the paradox of not taking carnival gothics too seriously and not taking them seriously enough. Jones makes a convincing case for not missing the pleasure of the Gothic text through the overanalysis and overinterpretation of texts in carnival gothics. And yet *understanding* Gothic pleasure, as Stephen King might say, is necessary to feed our hungry alligators—of the mind as well as the body. Bakhtin, Benjamin, and Bourdieu would have asked for no less.

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

The Age of Lovecraft, edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, U of Minnesota P, 2016. 256 pages, \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-8166-9925-4
by Jesús E. Navarro-Stefanón

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The Age of Lovecraft begins with a foreword of the famous British author Ramsey Campbell about Lovecraft's influence in the arts. Departing from the influence and popularity that Lovecraft has presently enjoyed, the editors, Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, propose key points of the book. "Lovecraft and Philosophy" reviews Lovecraft's relevancy in the principal current of the academy. "Speculative Realism and New Materialisms" raises the importance of Lovecraft for the philosophy of the twenty-first century in philosophers of speculative realism as Graham Harman inside the field of the object-orientated. "Posthumanism" is a central point in the book that proposes that we are in an age where the human being is displaced, which coincides with the cosmicism in the work of Lovecraft (6-8). "Popular Culture Presence" checks the influence that popular culture has had on Lovecraft's work in the arts and literature and it even refers to the adjustments of characters for television, such as Cthulhu's case in *South Park*. "Riding the Zeitgeist" indicates that Lovecraft has influenced both the literary canon of the mainstream and the culture of the Gothic, as well as so-called "nerdism". "Critical Questions and Future Directions" considers aspects of racism in Lovecraft, the style of his prose, and new directions. In "The Age of Lovecraft," Sederholm and Weinstock emphasize Lovecraft's works that relate to the destiny of civilization since Lovecraft questions the importance of the human opposite to the outside.

In "Ghoulis Dialogues," James Kneale analyzes the allusion, the space, and the modernity in the weird geography in Lovecraft's work, based on the categories proposed in the work *Weird Realism*, by Graham Harman. Kneale emphasizes

the importance of the weird style of Lovecraft in relation to the techniques of allusion and in "Cubism," as suggested by Harman.

From a more Gothic perspective, in "Lovecraft's Things," Weinstock observes some elements in the Lovecraftian narrative. Inside the sinister souvenirs that arise from the Gothic, Weinstock examines the castle, which represents the space in stories, as in "The Rats in the Walls;" the Gothic portrait, which reflects the human form, though in Lovecraft's work it goes beyond the human being, as in "Pickman's Model;" and the forbidden book as represented with the *Necronomicon*. Weinstock also mentions the machine of "From Beyond," which allows human beings to see other dimensions, and he concludes that in Lovecraft's Gothic narrative human beings are reduced to things, which returns to the origin of horror (76).

For her part, in "Hyper-Cacophony," Isabella van Elferen studies the implications in the speculative realism of sound and music, related to mathematics, in Lovecraft's stories. She names *hyper-cacophony*, the effect of which in Lovecraft's stories is to make "his universe echo with sounds that are inaudible, with timbres that are physically impossible, with music that is unimaginable even for an unearthly musicologist" (90).

In "Prehistories of Posthumanism," Brian Johnson compares Ridley Scott's *Alien* and *Prometheus* with the influence of Lovecraft's cosmic indifferentism, or cosmicism, in these films, particularly in *Prometheus*. Johnson thinks that, in *Prometheus*, there exists an intention of subduing the human being before these foreign creatures, which leads

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to the field of the posthuman as well as to an ecological conscience.

On the same topic of posthumanism, in “Race, Species, and Others,” Jed Mayer explores in an alternative way Lovecraft’s racial prejudices; he writes, “one that subverts constructions of human uniqueness and superiority” (119). Mayer reviews other intelligent beings in Lovecraft’s narrative, including some hybrids, such as the Deep Ones in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, especially with regard to the transformation of the protagonist, Robert Olmstead, or the advanced Great Race of Yith in *The Shadow Out of Time*, a story in which there was an experience of embodiment between Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee and a member of the Great Race.

In another diverse subject, in “H. P. Lovecraft’s Reluctant Sexuality,” Carl H. Sederholm observes the sexuality in Lovecraft’s life and later focuses on the feminine characters in his work. Sederholm analyzes the description of Lavinia Whateley in “The Dunwich Horror” and affirms that “Lavinia is therefore not a passive vessel, but a horrific means of spreading the awful abjection of Dunwich precisely through the power of sexual reproduction” (143). He concludes that scholars should consider the embodiment and importance of the human body and abjectness in Lovecraft’s work.

Another interesting chapter of the book is the essay, “H. P. Lovecraft and Real Person Fiction,” by David Simmons. Simmons analyzes Lovecraft as a personage of fiction, from his time period up to the present day, by means of the cultural fan (or “following” to Henry Jenkins), not only in literature but especially in comics, graphical novels, and movies.

In the field of fan culture, in “A Polychrome Study,” Jessica George explores Lovecraft’s influence on diverse authors of popular culture, to compare the human limits in the story, “A Study in Emerald,” by Neil Gaiman. She comments that Gaiman’s work is based on “A Study in Scarlet,” by Arthur Conan Doyle since the prominent figures are Holmes and Watson, compared to Moriarty and Moran as Gothic doubles. They face creatures of the Lovecraftian pantheon, though George drives this clash towards the posthuman.

The next essay is “Lovecraft: Suspicion, Pattern Recognition, Paranoia,” by David Punter. In this essay, Punter juxtaposes the Gothic tradition with the Enlightenment and

he focuses on the term *apophenia* (recognition of patterns as a result of schizophrenia) to interpret Lovecraft’s work.

In “Lovecraft’s Cosmic Ethics,” Patricia MacCormack proposes that Lovecraft’s work guides diverse configurations of the differences between minorities, regarding life from a more cosmic ecological point of view. She analyzes it in works related to Randolph Carter (199).

In the last chapter “Lovecraft, Witch Cults, and Philosophers,” W. Scott Poole analyzes Lovecraft’s perspective on witchcraft in New England, but he criticizes that it has been based on Margaret Murray’s works, and this resulted in Lovecraft racializing them. Later, Poole explores Lovecraft’s racism, though it seems to me that he neglects many chronological aspects of his sources. He also reviews philosophers such as Harman.

Finally, the book concludes with an interview by Weinstock of China Miéville. Miéville tells his experience regarding role-playing games (RPGs) and other games, his place as author in the “new Lovecraft circle,” the way in which Lovecraft seems to conceive time, his influence in popular culture, and the commercialism and importance of Lovecraft for scholars of posthumanism.

The Age of Lovecraft provides a new insight for scholars, fans, and the general readership on Lovecraft’s work, from the perspective of posthumanism, Gothic literature, and fan culture. The essays in this collection serve readers in better understanding Lovecraft’s cosmicism and his transcendence into a popular culture icon. This compilation of interesting essays catches the reader’s attention from the beginning and encourages a reevaluation of the Lovecraftian narrative from a twenty-first-century perspective.

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