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Editor’s Introduction

Jon Greenaway

As Fred Botting famously defined it, ‘Gothic signifies a writing of excess’¹ and what has held true for Gothic literature has spilled over into the world of criticism. As Gothic writing has become more and more ingrained in the literary tradition Gothic scholarship has grown and professionalised alongside it. From the eccentricities of Montague Summers to the mystical and numinous work of Devendra Varma to the insightful work of cultural critics like Nina Auerbach the field of Gothic studies has systematically advanced drawing upon ever more of our collective culture and literature to expose the Gothic wherever it may reside.

To some such growth seems unnecessary and a sign of academic and intellectual stagnation – since Coleridge’s famed dismissal of the ‘trash of the circulating library’ major pronouncements about the death of the Gothic have appeared with almost metronomic regularity. The Gothic is démodé, déclassé, something that deserves some little attention as a quirk of genre history but no more. To critics such as these the job of the Gothic scholar is to correctly classify and categorise these works of minor writing and move on to more substantial scholarship.

Yet for all of the declarations of the death of the Gothic this monstrous progeny shambles on, ingratiating itself with ever more depth into writing, mass media, culture and society. It is for this reason that Dark Arts exists – to expose the Gothic as field of frightening relevance for our current cultural condition. As neo-liberalism unleashes monstrous forces of financial power across the globe, as class divides widen, social inequality deepens and the despotic power of corporations and big business looms ever large the Gothic functions as a sight of exposure and resistance – uncovering the instability, the irrational and the imaginative that hegemonic forces all too often seek to keep in check and keep well hidden. In this first issue, Dark Arts contributors seek to expose and refine our understanding of the Gothic Subject – analysing our preconceived notions of the state of Gothic criticism, Gothic canon, its construction and form and even the condition of the subject itself within Gothic culture and texts. Bringing a significant range of analytic perspectives and, crucially, distinctive voices to bear upon the

¹ Fred Botting, Gothic (The New Critical Idiom) (London, Blackwell, 1996) pg. 1
topic the Gothic subject (in all of its connotations) undergoes a radical and much needed rethinking.

The purpose of The Dark Arts Journal is to provide an easily accessible and widely distributable platform for new and exciting scholarship within Gothic studies, allowing distinctive perspectives and new insights to emerge and impact the broadest audience possible. Not only will this serve our contributors, by allowing new names to come forward but we also aim to make a substantive impact on the field offering a jolt of fresh energy to the wider scholarly debate. Rigorous, distinctive and academic, yet accessible this first collection of essays provides a vivid snapshot of the current state of research into the Gothic. From the earliest incarnations of the Gothic in the 1700s to a vivid exploration of the ravages of capitalism in the 1980s these new scholars show that the Gothic as a field continues not just to fascinate, titillate and horrify but speak to the very largest and most urgent questions of literature, culture and subjectivity.
Nothing is that secure, nothing that stable; The Problems of Gender and Sexuality Within Bram Stoker’s Dracula.

Graham Holderness

Elizabeth Lee describes the Victorian view of gender as distinctly polarised: ‘a dichotomy of temperaments defined as feminine and masculine: an anabolic nature, which nurtured, versus a katabolic nature, which released energy.’¹ ‘The man’s power is active’, wrote John Ruskin, ‘he is pre-eminently the doer’, while ‘woman must be enduringly, incorruptibly, good.’² Men are active, strong, and energetic; women are relatively weak, passive and maternal. Both definitions map gender on the basis of biological function, and endorse social roles. Today gender and sexuality can often be thought of via ‘essentialist’ or ‘social constructivist’ paradigms. Essentialism is ‘most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the “whatness” of a given entity,’³ while for social constructivists gender is a ‘culturally-shaped groups of attributes and behaviours given to the female or to the male.’⁴ Sexual difference may be fixed and immutable; but gender is unstable, transferrable, culturally constructed.

Dracula is based on typically conventional ideas about women, men, marriage and the family. However, it also plays with ‘abnormal’ sexualities, homosexuality, and ideas about the ‘New Woman’. The story is set between a dark and mysterious past, out of which comes the monstrous Vampire, and a ‘modernity’ that is seen as both liberating and potentially dangerous. Modernity provides human beings with new skills and technologies that can be used to combat the Vampire. The text is continually referring to forms of writing and communication (typewriting, phonograph recording, telegraph, newsprint) and methods of information gathering, storage and analysis that prove useful in defeating the enemy. Seed refers to the ‘surprisingly modern emphasis on the means and transmission of information.’⁵ Many of these are skills available to women like Mina yet strikingly the novel also opposes some of the innovations of modernity, most notably the emergence of the ‘New Woman’ idea itself. The

text operates within and restores a ‘norm’ of gender stereotypes, but at the same time reveals their fluidity and instability. In terms of character Dracula himself is clearly a principle of masculinity: he already has three ‘wives’ and his driving ambition is the conquest of all women. None withstanding this, since vampiric blood-sucking is so clearly a sexual act, and Dracula feeds on men and women alike, he appears to be in effect bisexual. When Jonathan is captive in the castle Dracula acts behind the scenes as a kind of housewife, and rescues Jonathan from the female vampires to keep him for himself. ‘Dracula’s desire to fuse with a male … subtly and dangerously suffuses this text.’ In Dracula, of course this ‘polymorphous sexuality’ goes with evil. Nevertheless, the ‘good’ characters in the book also show signs of sexual and gender instability when under the vampire’s influence. Jonathan adopts the stereotypical passive disposition of the female when seduced by the female vampires. He wanders into a female area of the castle, and depicts himself writing at a desk where some ancient woman has penned her love-letters. (See Garrett 124-5) Then lying helplessly on the floor he is subject to an aggressive female sexuality:

There was a deliberate voluptuousness, which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth.

The repeated word ‘voluptuous’ links female sensuality with Jonathan’s ‘abnormal’ sexual anticipation. ‘Virile Jonathan Harker enjoys a “feminine” passivity.’ Woman is the sexual aggressor here, man the subjugated victim. Within this novel male characters often assume the characteristics of the female further destabilising secure and firmly delineated gender positions. ‘Hysteria’ was historically thought of as a female gendered disease. Van Helsing is a major figure of masculinity, opposing the evil force that is taking over the women: Dracula. Yet despite his overt masculinity in a diary entry Dr Seward describes Van Helsing suffering an attack of ‘hysterics’: ‘He laughed till he cried… just as a woman does.’ Throughout the text, there are repeated instances of men taking on the characteristics of women, and women taking on the roles of men. The vampire women reveal the possibility of sexual desire in women. Of

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6 Craft, pg. 96  
9 Craft, pg. 95  
10 Stoker, pg. 145
course, within the moral schema of the novel these are ‘fallen’ women, ethically corrupted. Officially, in the 19th century ‘good’ women were supposed to feel love and affection, but not sexual passion. Tellingly, Jonathan insists that his own Mina is a ‘woman’ and could have ‘nought in common’ with such creatures.  

Yet despite her ‘purity’, Mina almost becomes one of them, their ‘sister’, and warns Jonathan that she could become allied against him with the enemy (in other words she might not only submit to the foreign sexual invader, but come to desire the sexual transgression he offers. Lucy undergoes the transition from virginal female to voluptuous vampire, and becomes capable of feeling and reporting intense sexual passion (her description of the bite of the Vampire is an account of an orgasm), a ‘joy attendant upon liberation from the conventional self. This ‘answering desire’ is ‘the most disturbing part of vampirism.’ To Jonathan, Mina is a ‘woman’, and thus to be absolutely differentiated from the vampire women who usurp male desire. However, in the course of the novel Mina displays many traditional masculine characteristics. Despite some critics concentrating more on her domestic character and her role as ‘angel in the house,’, Mina shows throughout intelligence and organisational skills: ‘as Matthew Brennan comments, even Mina herself, “despite her jokes about the New Woman… resembles one in several ways.”’ Despite the novels ideological commitment to attempting to secure the gender position of its participants, even Mina displays a degree of awareness of the role of social construction. This revelation further reinforces the idea that the ‘New Woman’ was a threatening figure for Victorian ideologies. To quote Elaine Showalter, ‘politically, the New Woman was an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and be on top of it in a world carnival of social and sexual misrule.’

Mina in fact is Stoker’s ultimate figure of the ‘new woman’. She becomes in many ways the main character and hero. She is the key to finding where Dracula is, it is she that records and reports all of the details of this case through her expertise in modern technology. Crucially

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11 Stoker, pg. 46
14 See Garrett pg. 126
without this organisation, the men would have been completely unable to track down the
criminal. Furthermore, there are also social and societal implications for the idea of the ‘New
Woman’ that the novel takes pains to draw out. Heterosexual marriage is the norm in the society
of the novel – Mina and Jonathan marry, and Lucy accepts one of her suitors. In addition, Lucy
toys with the idea of polygamy, which links her to the polygamous Vampire. In a letter to Mina,
Lucy talks of her wish that she could marry all three suitors: ‘why can’t they let a girl marry
three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not
say it.’

When attempts are being made to save Lucy she receives blood transfusions from four different
men. Exchanging blood is seen as a kind of sexual union (Arthur feels he is already married to
her and Van Helsing jokes about the polygamous associations of sharing blood). It is as if they
are forced by the vampire’s transgressive sexuality to reconstitute their own sexual norms; or
as Garrett puts it, their ‘collaboration’ ‘mirrors … the obscene intimacies of vampirism.’ This
scene has been compared to ‘group sex’ and while in terms of plot at least, the men are trying
to win Lucy back to life, symbolically they are trying to break her away from the sexual hold
Dracula has over her. Dracula has penetrated Lucy and this makes her contaminated (as Mina
later bears the mark on her forehead). Despite the fearful invocations of Dracula’s power, what
they fear most is that Dracula can make Lucy an active participant in the sexual act, provoke
in her a transgressive sexual desire.

Once Dracula has corrupted Lucy, she is no longer the pure, feminine character; she is then
described as an animalistic, voluptuous, ‘devil’. She is compared to Medusa the ‘femme fatale’
who turned all men into stone if they looked at her. Lucy the vampire adopts the sexual freedom
of the ‘New Woman’, being able to pursue fantasies forbidden to a respectable woman. It is
Dracula who enables her to do so, just as Jane Eyre’s symbolic alter ego Bertha acts out these
repressed desires for her. Dracula’s authorising kiss, like that of a demonic Prince Charming,
triggers the release of the latent power and excites in these women a sexuality so mobile, so
aggressive that it thoroughly disrupts Van Helsing’s compartmental conception of gender.

18 Stoker, pg. 51
19 Garrett, pg 130
20 Ibid pg. 131
21 Craft, pg. 103-104
The scene in which the men kill vampire Lucy is written and framed as a sacrificial act. They must sacrifice Lucy’s body to God in order to save her soul. Arthur, Lucy’s chosen suitor, is the one selected to penetrate her body, while the other suitors along with Van Helsing watch. The reader is quite deliberately placed in the same voyeuristic position as the other men. The killing of the vampire is ambivalent, since it is both Lucy and not Lucy, and it is ‘both a holy rite and a group rape.’\(^{22}\) If the vampire bite is a metaphor of sexual penetration, the piercing of a female body with a stake is violently, uncomfortably phallic.\(^{23}\)

The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam.\(^{24}\)

The description of Lucy’s response almost resembles orgasmic sexual pleasure. As Arthur drops the hammer, he catches his breath as if he had just consummated a sexual act. The two major symbols of masculinity metaphorically ‘penetrate’ Lucy in some way: ‘Dracula enters at the neck, Van Helsing at the limb; each evades available orifices and refuses to submit to the dangers of vaginal contact.’\(^{25}\) Once again, there is a deep anxiety about the sexuality of women. The cutting off of Lucy’s head acts as another symbolic sacrificial act, men mutilate the ‘new woman’ before she can castrate them.

…the Freudian equation of decapitation and castration itself a product of \textit{fin-de-siecle} culture. The severed head also seems to be a way to control the New Woman by separating the mind from the body.\(^{26}\)

Generally, the men in the novel are firmly attached to conventional ideas about women, and this proves the basis of serious mistakes on their part. They leave the ‘New Woman’ Mina behind, whilst they go on their quest for Dracula in order to protect her from violence. Yet it is precisely when in ‘their patronizing desire to protect her’\(^{27}\) they segregate her and treat her as a conventional woman, that she becomes prey to the vampire. If they had treated her as an

\(^{22}\) Garrett, pg 135
\(^{23}\) Craft, pg 107
\(^{24}\) Stoker, pg. 179
\(^{25}\) Craft, pg 235
\(^{26}\) Showalter, pg. 182
\(^{27}\) Garrett, pg. 134
equal, respecting her ‘man’s brain’, this would not have happened. Mina then starts to become a vampire, allied with the alien enemy.

Once Dracula is killed, Mina is able to return to the ‘normality’ of conventional womanhood. She remains a devoted wife and becomes a mother. Her child is named after all the male members of the vampire-hunting ‘band’. The little boy is ‘symbolically fathered by the whole group.’

He thus inherits a shared bloodline that includes the vampire, since Mina drank from Dracula blood obtained, via Lucy, from all the men who had given her their blood. The woman’s body is covertly a site of polygamous masculine cross-fertilisation. In it ‘male and female bodily fluids intermingle terribly.’ And the character of Dracula ‘presents a characteristic, if hyperbolic, instance of Victorian anxiety over the potential fluidity of gender roles.’

During the 1880s and 1890s femininity and sexuality were major topic of discussion. Fixed gender roles and a common model of the family were publicly enforced onto society, and people resisted these pressures in all sorts of ways. George Gissing described this era as the time of ‘sexual anarchy.’ Stereotypes of sexuality and gender were being discarded as people rebelled against the political and social constraints of their day. As Karl Miller notes ‘men became women. Women became men. Gender and country were put into doubt. The single life was found to harbour two sexes and two nations. During this period both the words “feminism” and “homosexuality” first came into use, as New Women and male aesthetes redefined new meanings of femininity and masculinity.’

*Dracula* introduces various kinds of instability into gender ideologies, but ultimately reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. The novel presupposes conventional gender and sexual norms, disrupts them, and then closes them back together again. In this troubling process it reveals some of the complexities and instabilities in sexuality and gender that are now much more clearly visible to modern critical theory: ‘Thus to deconstruct language is to deconstruct gender; to subvert the symbolic order is to subvert sexual difference.’ In *Dracula* ‘the ultimate restitution of

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28 Garrett, pg. 132
29 Craft, pg 110 and see also 115-116
30 Craft, pg 220
31 Showalter, pg. 3
32 Showalter, quoting Miller pg. 3
33 Showalter, pg. 2
conservative social order is … problematized.” The novel has given full scope to ‘vampirism’s threat of gender indefiniteness’ before the vampire is destroyed. For a novel so deeply conservative, it seems that there can be no stable definitions of definition of sex or gender; no fixed definition of what it is to be a ‘woman.’

34 Byron, pg. 5
35 Craft, pg. 111
Works Cited


The Mutilation of Charles Mandeville

Richard Gough Thomas

I had received a deep and perilous gash, the broad brand of which I shall not fail to carry with me to my grave. The sight of my left eye is gone; the cheek beneath is severed, with a deep trench between. My wound is of that sort, which in the French civil wars got the name of _une balafre_. [...] The sword of my enemy had given a perpetual grimace, a sort of preternatural and unvarying distorted smile, or deadly grin, to my countenance. This may to some persons appear a trifle. It ate into my soul. Every time my eye accidentally caught my mirror, I saw Clifford, and the cruel heart of Clifford, branded into me. My situation was not like what it had hitherto been. Before, to think of Clifford was an act of the mind, and an exercise of the imagination; he was not there, but my thoughts went on their destined errand, and fetched him; now I bore Clifford and his injuries perpetually about with me.¹

Charles Mandeville is our narrator, and Clifford his brother-in-law. Mandeville receives his scar in a failed attempt to abduct his sister from her new husband, a man who Charles feels has wounded his honour time and time again since both were boys at school. Clifford’s crimes against Charles are mostly unwitting. He is the brooding protagonist’s bright mirror: fair, where Mandeville is dark; gregarious, where he is taciturn. I shall argue in this essay that Mandeville’s upbringing has made him into a wild and hateful man. In cutting his face, Clifford gives Charles an outer mark that reflects his inner turmoil. The novel’s conclusion reminds us of the author’s interest in physiognomy (the ‘science’ of understanding individual character through outward signs), and problematises the use of scarring and the ‘wounded soldier’ figure in eighteenth-century fiction.

William Godwin’s _Mandeville_ (1817) is a tale of obsession and mania. Orphaned by the Irish rising of the 1640s, the protagonist’s tutor raises him to commemorate his parents as martyrs to the Protestant cause. The family home is otherwise a silent place. Charles’ uncle mourns for a lost love, and the boy embraces his tutor’s fire-and-brimstone Protestantism as the only source

of life and energy about him. An early introduction to Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* sets the tone of the protagonist’s education, however:

…nor did I need much persuasion to study, to which my temper inclined me, and which occasions that sort of tingling and horror, that is particularly inviting to young persons of a serious disposition. […] The representation of all imaginable cruelties, racks, pincers and red-hot irons, cruel mockings and scourgings, flaying alive, with every other tormenting method of destruction, combined with my deep conviction that the beings thus treated, were God’s peculiar favourites.  

At school the other boys (Cliffoi’d among them) have their own martyrs, fathers and brothers who died bravely for the king. Young Charles learns lessons in hatred (of Catholics, Parliamentarians) and in the veneration of death. Mandeville seeks out honour by enlisting in Penruddock’s 1655 attempt to raise the country in support of the king, but flees in frustration when the commission he desires is given to Clifford instead. The insurgency is, of course, doomed to failure and (hearing of its failure from the safety of Oxford University) Penruddock becomes another martyr in the protagonist’s eyes. ‘It may therefore easily be supposed’, the narrator tells us, ‘with what feelings I listened to the conclusion of the story, and the undaunted and heroic behaviour of Penruddock and his associates, in the public, final scene of their human existence.’ Implicitly Penruddock’s glory lies in his righteous death, not in any hope of restoring the king, and the culture that surrounds the protagonist suggests to the reader that this is the only honour that Charles Mandeville truly understands.

Charles’ only friend at Oxford is Lisle who, brought up amidst similar mourning, is able to join Mandeville in his outpourings of rage against a world that has denied them their fathers.

Sometimes we would sit silent together for hours, like what I have heard of a Quaker’s meeting; and then, suddenly seized with that passion for change which is never utterly extinguished in the human mind, would cry out as by mutual impulse, Come now let us curse a little!  

These sessions are not purgative, however and the violence within Mandeville seems endless. When malicious rumours present to Lisle that Charles was involved in Penruddock’s betrayal,

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2 Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 6: Mandeville*, p.52  
3 Ibid pg. 129
the protagonist flies into the first of his psychotic episodes. After weeks of madness and fever Mandeville is revived by the care of his sister Henrietta who, raised apart from him by family friends, suffers from none of his misanthropic character. Henrietta attempts to reconcile Charles with the blameless Clifford (who has escaped Penruddock’s fate) and seems to succeed, at least for a time. The settlement of their uncle’s will and the tricks of Mallison (a schoolfellow of Mandeville and Clifford, now acting as lawyer) re-ignite Charles hatred once more, and the revelation that Henrietta and Clifford are in love (and that Clifford has ‘turned Papist’) sends the protagonist into another hate-filled episode of madness.

…my blood seethed and bubbled in my veins. I exclaimed with all the energy of rage: “They insult and despise me; they count me for nothing. Yes, I know they think, the moment I hear of their execrable crime, I shall become transfixed and insensible; my heart shall burst with a thousand flaws; I shall be like one struck with heaven’s lightning, and turned at once into a brittle and marrowless cinder. They are mistaken. There is a vivifying principle within me, that they remember not: vengeance, inextinguishable vengeance!”

Leading hired soldiers to take Henrietta away from Clifford and (it is implied) forcibly marry her to Mallison, Mandeville receives the sabre cut that leaves him with the permanent death’s-head grin described in the novel’s conclusion. As a slave is branded, the narrator tells us, “…so Clifford had set his mark upon me, as a token that I was his for ever.” Mandeville’s cut is an outward sign of inner conflict, a recurring theme in Godwin’s writing. The author distanced himself from Lavater, the thinker most associated with the theory of physiognomy, but affirmed that the traces of physiognomy could be found in the countenance, voice, gesture and habits of the individual. Godwin suggests in Political Justice (1798) that humanity’s moral character is written in traces that can be observed (“…the traces of stupidity, of low cunning, of rooted insolence, of withered hope, and narrow selfishness, where the characters of wisdom, independence and disinterestedness might have been inscribed”).

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4 Ibid pg. 312
5 Ibid pg. 325
Scott J. Juengel’s essay, ‘Godwin, Lavater, and the Pleasures of Surface’ discusses the ‘physiognomic narrative’ of *Caleb Williams* (1794). Denied the language of justice by an aristocratic system that gives all power to his accuser, Caleb must (Juengel argues) ‘read’ Falkland’s body in order to expose his employer’s guilt: ‘every muscle and petty line of his countenance seemed to be in an inconceivable degree pregnant with meaning.’

We should read *Mandeville* in the same fashion. The novel’s physiognomic markers are bold: Henrietta and Clifford are fair of face and bright of demeanour; Mallison dark, and cruel in his sense of humour. Hilkiah Bradford, the tutor who sets Charles down on the path of hatred, is described as emaciated, with yellow-brown skin that reminds the reader of parchment. ‘…my tutor regarded light laughter, and merriment, and the frolics of youth, as indications of the sons of Belial and heirs of destruction.’ Such stark moral divisions apparent in the countenance of the character’s rest, again, on the author’s use of the first-person narrative. Seeing the story through Charles’ eyes, events and figures take on an element of hyper-reality that reflects the volatility of his mind. Wherever the narrator walks with Henrietta, her presence gives the place ‘inexpressible charms… the beauty of the Elysian fields.’ When Charles’ honour is impugned at school he describes the surface of his body burning, ‘so that every one that approached me, and touched my flesh, suddenly snatched away his hand, as if it had been scorched with fire.’ Charles’ world is both brighter and darker than ours, his passions greater, his imagination more extreme. Godwin’s critics were quick to criticise the novel’s excesses but they contribute towards a consciously heightened effect that recalls the *sturm und drang* novels of early German Romanticism.

The protagonist’s reading of physiognomy reminds us of what Charles subconsciously knows. Despite his hatred for Clifford, Charles cannot but praise his good nature and kindness, or comment that ‘the bloom of health revelled in his cheeks.’ Clifford’s worth is clear, and the narrator cannot help but acknowledge it, albeit in mostly unconscious ways. Clifford’s

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10 Ibid pg. 63

11 Ibid pg. 105

12 John Gibson Lockhart opined that all Godwin’s protagonists were maniacs, but that Mandeville was ‘more essentially and entirely a madman than either of his brethren’. Thomas Love Peacock was quick to parody Mandeville in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) as ‘hatred – revenge – misanthropy – and quotations from the Bible’ (p.58)

character is a celebration of life – his manner places everything on the surface, ‘…his soul was elastic; and the spring that kept all his thoughts in activity and motion, was always working, and never went down.’\textsuperscript{14} Charles has been brought up to venerate death, and his silent and contemplative exterior masks a turbulent inner life.

Godwin’s use of the first-person narrative gives the reader a vivid sense of Mandeville’s inner violence. The narrator describes to us his bloody dreams of royalists beheaded on the scaffold, and of Clifford and Henrietta trampling his body in contempt. The protagonist’s greatest frustration is that he is unable to find a legitimate outlet for his hatred. He is denied a martial enemy to face; the lawyers, whom he knows to have manipulated his uncle for a hand in his settlement, tie him up with legal and business procedure; Mallison, who with hindsight he believes to be responsible for all the treasonous rumours that mar his honour, nurses him back to health after a fall. When Charles receives word that Clifford has renounced the Protestant faith in favour of Catholicism, he surges with relief. His private enmity has been vindicated:

\begin{quote}
I can once more walk abroad among my species: and, whatever secret wound I may bear about me in other respects, I need no longer conceal my hatred. I can say to every one I meet, \textit{Do you not see that Clifford? Do you not in your heart pass upon him the same judgment that I do?}\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

For a moment it seems as if Charles’ secret wound is healed. The hope that others might share his hatred seems to offer a path out of the alienation that his childhood has led him to. The revelation that Clifford has instead been honoured for his conversion, by the king above all others, is devastating.

\begin{quote}
Now it was, that I truly hated. Now it was, that I felt that Clifford was my fate, and that, as long as he existed, I must give myself up to the last despair. For me the order of the universe was suspended; all that was most ancient and established in the system of created things was annulled; virtue was no longer virtue, and vice no longer vice. This utter subversion related to me, and to me alone; every where else, in every corner of the many-peopled globe, things went on right; I, and I only, was shut out of the pale of humanised society.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} Godwin, \textit{Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 6: Mandeville.}, p.85
\textsuperscript{15} Godwin, \textit{Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 6: Mandeville.}, p.226
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid pg. 135
Lacking a legitimate target for his hatred, Mandeville’s rage turns inward and underlies the madness that bursts out of him on so many occasions. In the final volume, his madness spills out at the blameless Henrietta, as he begs her not to join herself with one of the ‘blood-thirsty and barbarian Papists’ that slew their parents:

Think you see them before you! Think you see them, as they appeared in the last moments of their mortal existence. Their breasts streaming with gore shed by the accursed hand of Papists, their hands lifted up to heaven in execration of that cruel religion!\textsuperscript{17}

When even his sister seems to turn from him, he has only his hate to cling to. Charles’ education has not prepared him to love, or to forgive. The heroes of his youth are martyrs: the only form of commitment he recognises is to resist and to die (imagining a gruesome fate for himself in the aftermath). As the novel concludes, the protagonist is left bearing the image of death (the ‘deadly grin’) – the violence of Mandeville’s dreams and imaginings is now apparent in his face.

* * *

The figure of the wounded soldier is a recurring one in eighteenth century and Romantic literature. We see the returning, crippled, veteran from Young’s \textit{Night Thoughts} (1742), to Mackenzie’s \textit{The Man of Feeling} (1771), to John Clare’s ‘The Wounded Soldier’ (1808-19). Similarly, the art of the period makes use of soldier’s injuries for purposes as diverse as the satirical (in Gillray’s ‘John Bull’s Glorious Return’) and the scientific (Charles Bell’s sketches from Waterloo). Charles Mandeville is not, of course, a soldier. His attempt to become one is thwarted and his story haunted by the memories of those who died as soldiers, both in the civil wars and (from the perspective of narratorial hindsight) in later conflicts. The difference is significant, and here I would contrast the use of the ‘honourable’ military wound in period literature with the image of the mutilated protagonist that closes the novel. Much has also been written on the subject of pain, both in terms of the period’s understanding of affect, and specifically in Godwin’s novels. Mandeville’s injury is not exclusively a source of pain, but rather a symbol of inner turmoil, visible to the outside world.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid 314
Simon Parkes has written of what he calls the ‘revenant-veteran’, a poignant figure who lurks in the margins of the sentimental novel. Focusing on Goldsmith’s The Deserted Village (1769), Mackenzie’s The Man of Feeling (1771) and Bage’s Mount Henneth (1782), Parkes discusses how injury allows the otherwise dangerous figure of the soldier to be contained, made safe, or diluted. The anxieties that surround such a character – as an outsider, as an ambiguous symbol of national cohesion, or as an embodiment of violence – are pushed into the background by his obvious stoicism, and by others’ offers of charity and protestations of social responsibility. The broken soldier is rendered dependent; his wounds make him fit only to tell his story in return for charity. Parkes argues:

The Broken Soldier is useless (unserviceable, ineffeectual) and, at the same time, a symbol of sacrifice and deference that (paradoxically) eases society’s guilt; he is a site/sight of contained violence: a sacrificial figure deflecting war from the home front via his play-acting and sanctioned tales.

We might also observe that the soldier’s injuries carry with them a kind of legitimacy, verified by the stories they have to tell. Wounded in the service of a higher cause, the soldier’s capacity for violence is granted social approval (as well as blunted by his physical emasculation). Mandeville cannot be contained in the same way. Like the wounded soldier of the sentimental novel, the mutilated Charles is a figure to be read by others. Unlike the soldier, however, the story behind his scar exposes the criminality of how he received it: he has not been wounded in pursuit of glory, or national interest, nor can he claim his scar as a symbol of family honour (for so many approve of Henrietta’s marriage). Mandeville’s wound more cosmetic than debilitating, the scar does nothing to suggest his ability to do violence has been diminished. Where the soldier’s wound grants him a conditional acceptance wherever he goes, Charles’ wound pushes him further away.

Mandeville is the product of an education that has groomed him for a particular kind of martyrdom – a death of angry defiance, cursing to the last, like the Reformation heroes he was brought up on. Without a legitimate outlet for this anger, Mandeville turns against himself and the world. His body contains the violence within him, but only just. Charles’ face shows the

signs of his internal struggle, hints of a mind fixated on past wrongs and barbaric cruelty. At the centre of the narrator’s thoughts lies an obsession with the physicality of suffering. Charles has carried his gruesome fantasies of martyrdom since childhood – they are part of him – and Clifford’s sabre cut allows others to see him as he really is. The protagonist’s scar allows others to read him as a gothic object, a reminder of death and torture, and of secrets that are better left unexplored. As readers we know that Charles would wish for an honourable wound, one that he could point to as his sacrifice for God or the king. Instead he is marked with a story of obsession and alienation, of the evil genius that possesses him. The soldier’s wound renders him safe, encouraging others to draw close and hear his tale. Mandeville’s deadly grin warns strangers to steer clear, lest his inner violence leak out and touch their lives.
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“This is how Life presents itself. This is what being Patrick means” – Revisiting Violence in American Psycho

Rachid M’Rabty

Throughout Bret Easton Ellis’s American Psycho (1991) a foreboding and traumatic sense of anger and disillusionment that is denied meaningful or rational form permeates. This, in turn, antagonizes the subject of the text – Patrick Bateman – to seek more monstrous and affective forms of recourse, ultimately leading to violence and a will to self-destruct, which as ‘Bifo’ recalls, is the most significant transgressive political act.¹ As Bataille states in his reaction to the violence of Sade, “that which destroys a being, also releases him,” and so violence, or at least, fantasies of violence become worthwhile when they enliven a distinctive sense of self-destruction that opposes an incommensurable closed economy, against which a subject identifies oneself.² Throughout this essay, we will engage with the significantly Gothic scenes/fantasies of violence and self-destruction within the novel to expose capitalism’s terrifying and obscene activities against the subject, and to explore violence as a means of annihilating that very system as it is embodied within the subject(s) themselves.

Despite the widespread controversy and moral outrage incited by Ellis’s third novel, both Patrick Bateman and American Psycho have become culturally significant points of reference in mainstream, cult and critical/academic circles, absolved, to some degree, of their supposed crimes against morality which first threatened its publication altogether.³ Twenty-five years later the novel is firmly established as a classic of American, Contemporary Gothic and postmodern literature and credited for its unapologetic deviance and “uncompromising face-off with [its] age.”⁴ The novel is a problematic exhibition of a principally Gothic and postmodern form of capitalist psychopathology which incites terror by obfuscating and undermining conventional subjective perspectives to facilitate a confrontation with one’s own “unconscious fears,” and also “the repercussions [this has] for society.”⁵ The contention of this

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⁵ Beville, Maria. Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p.16
essay is to assert that violence throughout American Psycho is an “exorsive force for the fears, desires and anxieties that plague society,” and through excessive, although ultimately meaningless, acts of unhinged violence Ellis foregrounds the “indeterminacy that is constitutive of postmodernity itself” as the most terrifying threat to society.6

The novel begins with a menacing warning to “Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here” written in blood-red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank as Patrick Bateman and his close friend Tim Price count the number of homeless people whilst discussing their obscene wealth.7 The opening scene sets the tone for a novel whose political, social and moral implications reflect a damning critical indictment of a culture overcome by a “systemic violence of global capitalism and Republican Ideology” and the “the socio-symbolic violence of social exclusion”, obfuscated by the excessive appetites and uncompromising extravagance that occupies their thoughts and appears in the subjective violence of Bateman’s murderous activities.8

The novel’s opening scenes present us with a perfect example of this as Price reveals the alignment of Capitalism with violence: “When your body has become so tuned into the insanity and you reach that point where it all makes sense, […] let the fucking bitch freeze to death, put her out of her own goddamn self-made misery.”9 This ‘logic’ is indicative of the way in which an inherently violent culture of competition and consumption applies and justifies itself, turning the victims of society into immoral, monstrous and disgusting enemies: “you reek of … shit. […] I don’t have anything in common with you.”10 That Price and Bateman can happily advocate letting the poor freeze to death (or in Bateman’s case, directly murder them) demonstrates the acceptability of classist violence and hatred at a societal and psychological level as the ‘logical’ and desirable way of thinking.

In a capitalist system that demands competition, winners and losers and ever more excessive and violent displays of power, it is ironic that in the run up to Price’s disappearance he is seen as pleading that “society cannot afford to lose me” as they pass by the word FEAR, sprayed on the side of a restaurant.11 This latent violence within capitalism provokes Price’s crisis as it

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6 Beville, p.23; Link, Alex. ‘The Mysteries of Postmodernism, or, Fredric Jameson’s Gothic Plots’ in Gothic Studies 11.1 (2009), pp70-85., p.70
9 Ellis, p. 5
10 Ibid p 125-6
11 Ibid p. 3
relegates individuality/personality and agency and rewards those who become well-functioning object/mechanisms of the system, or, in more financial terms, an “asset.” Price’s ‘downfall’ follows his recognition of his own dissatisfaction at his increasing depersonalization within the financial culture of which he is part. His hatred of his job is the first indicator of this, and an implied drug problem another. As a result, he seeks distractions in affairs with women, becomes self-loathing and cynical, and seeks an ‘out’ which is either taboo (reflected in Bateman’s embarrassment for Price’s antics in ‘Tunnel’) or rationally unconceivable: “not an alternative.”

Bateman’s relationship with Price unfolds as seemingly the only meaningful relationship that Bateman has. Colby describes this as something of a doppelganger relation and outlines the extent to which Bateman appears the rational double of this obscene antagonist, reflected in the way that Price and Bateman seem to mirror and revolve around each other. It is important that this relationship is thrown into crisis at Price’s disappearance and marks the point at which Bateman begins to perceive himself as de-centered from society itself, his appeals for company rebuked by McDermott and Van Patten: “Lunch? I ask them”, “What about breakfast?”, “How about dinner?” he appeals vainly. Earlier in the novel Bateman refers to Price as being the only interesting person he knows and at first this compliment refers to Bateman’s belief that Price is a successful capitalist of the ilk that he aspires to. However, I contend that Bateman actually is translating something appealingly Other in Price’s behaviours, something lacking in the interchangeable ‘GQ’ types who populate his environment and which causes him to reflect on his own idiosyncrasies. This radical otherness is attractive to Bateman and manifests itself in Price’s contemptuous predisposition and in his cynical approach to work, his overtly racist, classist and misogynistic attitudes (which Bateman increasingly adopts) and ultimately in his disappearance in Tunnel.

In the scene before his disappearance Price is seen murmuring to himself, and although what he says remains elusive, the act has a radical affect. In this gesture Price recognizes and relates to another sense of self and in so doing foregrounds a subjective disunity which the trappings of capitalist culture cannot obfuscate entirety. This fracture corresponds with his unwillingness to accept his place as another indistinguishable unit and influences his decision to “get out.”

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12 Ibid
13 Colby, p.74-5
14 Ellis p. 60
15 Ellis p. 57
Price’s almost blasphemous intentions to disappear and seek an alternative to the landscapes of Capitalism, to “find out what lies behind the blackness,” reflects a radical and self-destructive will to undermine capitalist excess through a desire for the bleak nothingness beyond the margins (or railings) of Capitalist reality. The impact this scene has on Bateman cannot be understated as it is not only the fraternal figure of Price who is undermined. Instead, the entire neoliberal ‘logic’ which Bateman commits to, the late-capitalist reality and one’s understanding of one’s place within it becomes a source of great anxiety throughout the rest of the novel, as he also, haunted by the implications of the meaningless of Price’s disappearance, becomes increasingly disillusioned and destructive.

Following Tim Price’s disappearance, Patrick Bateman increasingly loses himself in a reciprocal cycle of consumerism, capitalism and violence as he takes out his increasing frustrations on those who seem like the ‘logical’ threats to his position and mental stability such as women and the homeless. As Bateman increasingly cannot shrug off his threatening “need to engage in … homicidal behavior on a massive scale” the proliferation of instances where violence and capitalism are indistinguishable inscribes the strategic intention of the novel to illuminate the extent to which excess in all forms proliferates across the general operations of Capitalist society. Whilst torturing Christie, for example, Bateman stuffs pages of *Vanity Fair* in her mouth to stop her screams and pays careful attention to recall the particularly expensive restaurant from which he acquired the matches he uses to burn her. When Bateman tells someone “I’m into murders and executions mostly” the neoliberal economic occupation and process – mergers and acquisitions – also become horrific and violent. A satirical pun, yes, but one which Ellis uses with the intention of highlighting concerns at the kind of world inhabited by Bateman and his colleagues, in which the mundane occupations of a solipsistic elite have very real, life and death implications and leaves a menacing impression that violence is inexplicably entwined with coercive cultural apparatus.

What becomes clear is that throughout the idealized/exclusive landscapes of excess and consumption, a sense of entrapment and underlying fear and anxiety pervades. When shopping in Bloomingdales, for example, narrative structure and meaning completely falls apart as

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16 Ibid p. 57-8
17 Ibid p. 325
18 Ibid p. 279
19 Ibid p. 196
Bateman is overcome with terror at sight of the plethora of meaningless and identical objects. In another example at ‘The Chandelier Room’ everyone looks the same, the music incites an increasing sense of indescribable dread and he loses control of himself, visibly dissolving within this space: “I touch my brow by mistake and my fingers come back wet.” It also eludes to a sense that no alternative world exists other than that which unceremoniously drives subjects to shred any remaining vestiges of themselves which neither holds ‘value’ or is non-complicit with capitalist operations: “I have to return some videotapes”, states Bateman, and when asking himself why? He responds because “I know I should have done that instead of not doing it.”

After the disappearance of Price, deplorable sexual or violent acts and fantasies increasingly punctuate the monotonous description of consumer products and pop-culture references which hold Bateman’s attention. Conversely however, it is the most violent scenes that elicit the greater sense of frustration and boredom from the narrator as he confronts the extent to which his unfulfilled sexual desire “taunts” him and fills him “with a nameless dread.” The emotional depth and gratification in sexuality is implied as the thing which he desires, but in reality this becomes sinister and traumatically unattainable: “I had dreams that were lit like pornography and in them I fucked girls made of cardboard.” In the scene where Bateman “lasciviously” whispers his economic activities to unsuspecting victims, whilst maintaining “a strong pulsing erection”, it becomes clear to the reader that Capital itself has supplanted Bateman’s erotic desires. The degrading nature of capitalism is revealed in his “freakish piglike grunts” and explicitly aligns a perverse and threatening pursuit of sexual gratification to the obscene and deviant imperatives of the neoliberal cultural hegemony. What is further revealed through Bateman’s relentless cataloguing of perverse torture and death is a traumatic fascination with violence and the possibilities that undermining the common rationality elicit – a fascination which, like in the fiction of Sade, subliminally and self-destructively corresponds to “the possible desire of the executioner to be the victim of torture himself.”

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20 Ellis p. 172
21 Ibid p. 59
22 Ibid p. 383-4
23 Ibid p. 321
24 Ibid p. 192
25 Ibid p. 155
26 Ibid
27 Bataille, p.98
Sade’s influence on the novel is evident in gruesome scenes of violence that convey a disturbing impression of bodies within this flat consumerist dimension. Although Sade’s violent and sexual transgressions sought to exceed the body beyond its limits through re-augmentation/mutilation in what the libertine would consider a divine act. Bateman’s mutilations, however, are simply excessive for the sake of form and routinely fail to arouse any sense/experience of the erotic or transcendental which Sade’s libertines achieved, ultimately transgression is nothing more than an empty and dull distraction from the (supposedly) more disquieting apprehensions of consumer culture, such as “why Owen doesn’t have Cinemax[?]”

Within scenes such as when Bateman simulates oral sex on the decapitated head of Torri, one of his many victims, Bateman’s discerning perception of bodies as commodities is reaffirmed. As the grotesque act is “amusing for a while” it becomes that bodies are no more than objects to be used, abused and consumed, thus illuminating the intense stage of reification that the novel responds to and drawing attention to another of capitalism’s unseen and threatening forms of violence against the individual. Within a world wherein selves and the subjects are transformed into a series of removed objects, the individual becomes ever more deeply inserted into epistemological categories which further falsify their relation to the world. Bateman’s cannibalism in ‘Tries to Cook and Eat Girl,’ for example, expressively exhibits the effects of reification, delineating how bodies, and particularly (but not exclusively) women’s bodies, have become consumables and his repeated attempts to ‘possess’ women by having sex with and then eating them symptomatic of a perverse consumptive logic of capitalism, carried out to its most destructive degree.

Sadean forms of ‘pornographic’ and obscene violence reflect a darker side to literature that appeals to a marginalized, alternative set of moral codes, epitomized in the radical figure of the libertine. Patrick Bateman is not a libertine and in his financially-centered reality acts of serial violence fail to overcome his anxieties, nor achieve any meaningful relief. The aesthetic of violence in American Psycho leaves the increasingly disaffected and traumatized subject lacking the will and means to transgress the Capitalist system, or ascertain meaningful

28 Ellis, p. 292
29 Ibid
30 Bewes, Timothy. Reification, or The Anxiety of Late-Capitalism (London: Verso, 2002) p.xi
31 Ellis, pp.330-3
subjective or affective gratification which would reveal a sense of individual identity. This ‘failure’ however is not the limit of the novel’s ethical and political comment, instead, throughout Bateman’s experience of excessive violence and his moral ambivalence the novel poses a critical challenge to the logic of the “closed economy” and call on individuals, like Bateman “to reach [for] lower, more ‘essential’ human drives.”

Transgressions, such as trying to eat women, sexual assaults and violence against homeless people, etc. are not distinguished in the novel as morally or socially unacceptable as they do not go “beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention”, nor do these acts effectively correspond to a sense of arousal, gratification, denial or affirmation. Bateman’s acts/fantasies of violence do, however, have an important critical function within Ellis’s text as they undermine the reciprocal, capitalist compulsion to expend more energy and capital, converging in Bateman’s traumatic confrontation with the meaninglessness behind the mechanisms and logic of Capitalism.

Bateman’s existential breakdown is instigated by the atrocities he commits and culminates in the fraught realization of his “abstract” and “illusory” nature and subjective reduction to the point of abstraction by the spectral mechanisms of Capital, and in so doing, opens his eyes to the nightmare of reality. The foreboding erasure of the gap between reality and nothingness that applies throughout the novel incites a traumatic and nihilistic response, seen most clearly in the scene where a totally decentered and “out of sync” Patrick Bateman – appearing in the third person, rather than the first – runs through the streets of Manhattan in a murderous rampage. This scene is followed by a failed, self-destructive attempt at confession that reveals nothing other than Bateman’s lack of agency as his voice “lacks any authority” and he becomes a joke.

In a most uncanny and tragic of ages, “where illusion is mistaken for reality, and identities are perceived as authentic forms of belonging”, humans, one critic argues, crave a sense of agency denied them by the relentless neo-liberal “deterritorialization” and respond through escapism

34 Jenks, Chris. Transgression (London: Routledge, 2003), p.2; Ellis, p.314
35 Ellis, p.362
36 Ibid
37 Ellis, pp.333-9
38 Ellis, pp.372-3
and self-destruction.\(^{39}\) The reappearance of Price who eerily appears marked by his experience of the “depressing” margins into which he disappeared torments Bateman because it symbolizes the failure of a dissociative form of negation/self-destruction. Price’s return gestures toward the conclusion that one cannot escape the physical and mental landscapes of capitalism and that disappearance does not offer an affective or meaningful alternative to the increasingly dominant “conspiratorial” internal logic of neoliberal cultural reality.\(^{40}\)

Throughout the course of the novel Patrick Bateman’s encounter with “dreaded uncertainty” is instigated in the inadequacy of violence, an inadequacy which fails to afford him a state of release and which undermines conventional understandings of reality and his own subjectivity.\(^{41}\) The provocative contention that Bateman is not violent enough, is not an indicator of a disquieting belief on the part of this critic that Bateman doesn’t rape, maim and kill enough people as he should/could. Instead, it indicates toward a conclusion that outwardly directed lust for violence does not provide subjective and libidinal gratification nor the political alternatives he desires. As Bateman’s transgressions traumatically reveal the inherent violent logic of capitalism and his own terrifying “erasure” at the hands of spectral cultural forces, the potential of violence to undermine the common experience and expose the need to self-destructively unhinge oneself from the inexorable grip of financially obsessed society is developed. American Psycho’s Gothic and postmodern merits are found precisely in the terrifying portrayal of the subjective immersion within capitalism, revealing a claustrophobic and destructive sphere of nightmares established on a baseless and inherently traumatic ideological-aesthetic of underlying neoliberal violence, social inequality and fear.

Throughout this essay, we have seen how Gothic scenes/fantasies of violence and self-destruction within American Psycho expose capitalism’s obscene activities against the subject, and have also examined the implications of reading violence as a means of challenging, undermining and ultimately annihilating that very system as it is imbued within the subject(s) themselves. It is ironic that at the end of the novel Patrick Bateman abandons his own aspirations and cynically accepts this nightmarish late-capitalist reality as unsurmountable, lamenting “this is how life, uh, presents itself […] and this is what being Patrick means.”\(^{42}\) As Bateman struggles to reconcile that his actions and fantasies will never be

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\(^{39}\) Berardi, p.5
\(^{40}\) Ellis, p.380
\(^{41}\) Ibid p. 364
\(^{42}\) Ellis, pp.383-4
violent/excessive enough to evoke a sense of purpose, the novel demonstrates the “characteristically useless, senseless [role of] death” and conventional aesthetics of violence and transgression. In doing so, American Psycho succeeds in challenging the reader to re-evaluate the role and affect of violence, transgression and forms of self-destruction, as means of undermining the amorphous and inherently violent neoliberal social/cultural agenda in contemporary fiction.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{43} Ellis, p.315
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They are what is called ordinary people, *Engleby, The Wasp Factory* and the Structures of Violence in the British Gothic

Jon Greenaway

As Gothic writing has progressed historically, texts have managed to widen the ‘available terrain of description’ that the Gothic influences. Seemingly, without effort, the Gothic has managed to keep up-to-date and as such, completely new areas of life and culture have gradually become ‘Gothicised’ as writers explore and problematize almost every facet of our shared culture. Perhaps one of the most striking developments is how Gothic writing has turned its attention onto the structures of society within which it exists, showing the deep depravity and irrationality of the modern world. Arguably, the highest profile example of such a structural Gothic text would be Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* that, through its grim violence, aimed to uncover the truly Gothic nature of the organising principle of capitalism on American society. However, is not only or even primarily through economic systems that the represented world can be organised and this piece will trace the structures at work in two distinctly British examples of this kind of modern Gothic – Sebastian Faulks’s *Engleby* (2007) and Iain Banks’s *The Wasp Factory* (1984).

Sebastian Faulks’s novel *Engleby* details the life and experiences of a man who is shaped and influenced by another structural system, one that may initially be assumed as being more benign and less violent than the hyper-capitalism of American Psycho — that of educational institutions. In Faulks’s novel, the structures in question are more diffuse and operate on multiple levels but the end result — the emergence of subjective violent acts — is the same. However, an important point of overlap is in the capitalist ideology that affects the protagonists of both texts although Engleby’s case the capitalist influence is not made as subjectively explicit its influence is still discernible. Engleby, as opposed to Bateman’s capitalist excesses, has much more subtle expressions of taste and value: ‘I really love cigarettes…advertised by a man’s hand emerging…to grasp a gear lever.’

Whilst Bateman uses these acts of consumption to construct an identity that conforms to the prevailing hegemonic discourse of capitalism, Engleby’s own reasoning for his specific capitalist

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2 ‘Subjective’ violence, one aspect of a triumvirate of violence that Zizek observes is “the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination”. Žižek, pg. 9
exchanges seem to be more nuanced than Bateman’s capitalism priapism. The commodities that Engleby emphasises, specifically different spirits, cigarettes and pharmaceuticals, are not necessary for the construction of his identity but in his own words help him to ‘understand the world better.’\textsuperscript{4} His reliance upon these specific products initially suggests a degree of disconnection – needing a narcotic solution to help him engage with society. These consuming choices he makes and his reason for them suggests that Engelby finds his world a complex and isolating one, an impression reinforced by the opening of the novel as it sets the tone as one that is laden with the complex hierarchy of class and a rich social history:

My college was founded in 1662, which means it’s viewed here as modern. Its chapel was designed by Hawksmoor, or possibly Wren; it’s gardens were laid out by someone else whose name is familiar…the captain of the Boat Club won a gold medal…the captain of cricket has played for Pakistan…\textsuperscript{5}

Whereas the American Gothic characters of Bret Easton Ellis exist in a world of conspicuous, hyper-violent and misogynistic consumption, Engleby moves through various structures of complex class relationships. This class-based environment is not just a matter of social prosperity or conceivable in solely economic terms, as it clearly has a deeply formative effect upon the protagonist’s character. Engleby admits that he ‘won a prize to come to my college and it pays my fees; my family’s poor’\textsuperscript{6} and this sense of inferiority is deeply felt and carried throughout the text. The fellow rival for the place at the prestigious university is another boy who ‘looked clever’\textsuperscript{7} and his home town of Reading is not a place that even has a theatre.

In addition to his self-declared poverty Engleby also explicitly refers to himself as an outsider – othering himself from those he comes across – ‘They are what is called ordinary people, though each person is really too specific to be called ordinary.’\textsuperscript{8} There is an uncomfortable awareness that despite his own ordinariness he does not consider himself an ordinary person – even without the unspoken snobbery implicit in labelling the scions of privilege who make up his university cohorts as “ordinary.” In addition to his estrangement from his own background, the acceptance of his place at university is done primarily at the level of the hypothetical rather

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid p. 6
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid p. 1
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid p. 2
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid p. 3
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid p. 6
than the actual. He imagines what his life could be like but seemingly lacks the social skills to manifest what he professes to desire; he is able to make only the one friend and forms no real close attachments to either his studies or his peers. This disconnection between his perception of himself and his own reality reveals the inherent paradox of the class system and the myth of social mobility with which Engleby seems to be a willing participant. By moving upwards from the ‘ordinary people’ he grew up with, he alienates himself from his original class and the class he attempts to join through his education as the disguising of his origins is not successful. Class, then, is a fundamentally alienating structure — isolating the subject even as it claims to provide a coherence and stability to social interactions.

As class is never in and of itself solely a matter of economy of possession of capital, but rather often expressed through and mediated by other, subtler means the class discourse also feeds into another structure that contributes to the subjective violence, namely – the educational institutions that help shape and form Engleby’s characteristics. These institutions are not separable from the class dynamic, but rather function as disciplinary mechanism which aim to police ideological boundaries and interpellate individuals as subjects. To see this in practise one only need to see the operation of the grammar school that he is sent to. His alienation from his own background coupled with his intellectual ability single him out as being individualistic and thus a figure that requires disciplinary correction ‘He told me that my attitude was wrong and he was going to beat me’ The school’s purpose is to form the individual into a subject, not through the totalitarian capitalism that Bateman experiences but through a methodology initially identified by Althusser – the Ideological State Apparatus. The school functions as a microcosm of the class and educational intuitions that Engleby continually moves through. The ideological manoeuvring of the institutions is well recognised by the protagonist –

   Behind all the posturing and telling us just how old and honourable and important they were – and how incredibly fortunate I was – I did sense a whiff of desperation. Why should that be? I wondered.”

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9 Ibid p.2
10 This process is best encapsulated by Karl Marx’s term of ‘Entfremdung’ or estrangement. Engelby’s success in moving across class boundaries effectively isolates him from his formative social background in Reading. See Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (London: Prometheus Books, 1988)
11 *Engleby* pg. 51
12 Ibid p.45
The school ‘functions massively and predominately by ideology but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately this…is symbolic.’\textsuperscript{13} Firstly Engleby is introduced into the world of the ideological organisation – the school with its accompanying ideas of duty, honour and responsibility which Engleby recognises is accompanied by that ‘whiff’ of desperation. Engleby’s own class based and ideological alienation single him out for disciplinary punishment from ideological authority figures. It’s important to note that this violent punishment does not come exclusively from recognised authority figures. Whilst the teachers of the school may only be able to deal out punishment in a highly regimented and symbolic way, the less ‘nervy’ members of the school who have become part of its ideological structures are capable of punishing Engelby violently and unpredictably. The acknowledgement of the ideological apparatus and its effect on the individual is something noted by Engleby even in the midst of his own punishments:

Hood…smiled a lot…he alone retained some pretence that this was all fair game, that it was part of normal life…Waingate and Baynes were in a different place…they had sold out, crossed over.\textsuperscript{14}

These characters become the repressive element of the ideological apparatus of the school – enforcing a particular pattern of behaviour through aggressive and unpredictable means which function alongside the more symbolic ideological conditioning mentioned earlier in order to constitute Engelby as a subject rather than an individual.

“When I got back that afternoon after football my sheets were soaking wet and all my clothes had been strewn around the room. I slept on the mattress…but the next day it too was soaked in water\textsuperscript{15}

The aim of this kind of violence is not to ensure his compliance to the structure of the institution – that is the function of the authority figures that can punish him only “symbolically.” Here the aim is a radical depersonalisation. The violence that the protagonist is subjected to forms the subject as a subject in relation to the ideology of the structure in which he exists. As Engleby goes through his school career he becomes part of the repressive mechanisms that he himself

\textsuperscript{14} Engleby pg. 65
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid p. 50
was victimized by, and therefore his own violence and aggressive behaviours becomes a by-product of his ideological environment. A key example of this is how he himself becomes an abuser of boys younger than himself, introduced with the chilling line ‘I noticed Stevens.’ After his exposure to the ideological apparatus of the school, the words take on an ominous connotation as it becomes clear that to be noticed is to be singled out for punishment, and that by the end of one’s education, whatever may have been noticeable in the first place will no longer be present.

The process that Engleby goes through is one that completes his own ideological indoctrination. Constituted as a subject by the violence of the school’s repressive element he becomes part of it. Despite his initial individuality eventually Engleby becomes one of the people, just as Baynes and Wingate, who has crossed over – in short Engleby the subject ‘works by himself…a subjecting being…stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission.’ From his admission to the school Engleby finds himself continually within the confines of an institution or ideological apparatus for the whole narrative – just as his class background is fundamentally alienating for him the same is true for his experiences with all other institutions he finds himself in – university, the city of London, the newspaper office and his relationship

A further point to explore is the tension between his background and early life and the effects this produces. In retrospect, he acknowledges his own class alienation and submits himself to the violent, dominant ideology of a powerful institution. It is the violence of his ideological conditioning coupled with the traumatic alienation of his past that results in the often borderline psychotic episodes he experiences. Just as with Patrick Bateman whose depersonalisation runs deep, Engleby lacks a coherent sense of self. The episode he experiences whilst travelling serves as a good example:

I had the strong impression that I was really outside time and place that the hostile otherness of my surroundings was such that my own personality was starting to

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16 Ibid p. 71

disintegrate. I was vanishing. My character, my identity, had unravelled. I was a particle of fear.\textsuperscript{18}

Confronted with an environment and culture that are so alien to himself and stripped of the protection that an ideological institution provides he is forced to confront the inherent instability of himself. His drive with and subsequent murder of Jennifer can thus be seen in a wider context. Rather than just the emergence of specific psychopathology combined with his obsession, his violence towards Jennifer is a reaction against the recognition of his own failure at interacting with her. ‘What I wanted was for her to say something that would make it all right and would give me a way out.’\textsuperscript{19} Removed from the depersonalisation of an ideological environment Engelby simply has no way of coping with her presence — her very presence, her \textit{realness} serves only to highlight his own absent ontology, which has in their conversation is painfully exposed. His own instability, derived from alienation in his own background and the brutal ideological conditioning of his upbringing is shockingly confronted by Jennifer as another ‘being-for-self.’\textsuperscript{20} Violence is not just a pathological reaction but a failed attempt at raising his ‘certainty of being for [himself] to truth status.’\textsuperscript{21} In short, the close immediacy of her presence as a real being – fallible, physical and repulsed by him, rather than an idealised object, threatens his own frail sense of identity – his violence is not just shocking in isolation but is the inevitable conclusion of his ideological background and mental construction. It is the frailty of the self that often provokes a violent reaction towards others in Engleby – he acknowledges that the psychiatrists who treat him need a way of ‘reshaping the geography of my mind’\textsuperscript{22} suggesting that violence is a condition of his mental life rather than anything extraordinary. In the case of Engleby Faulks raises the possibility that a self can never truly find authentic expression due to the depersonalisation of institutions – a process that is not only violent but indicative of these same institutions functioning successfully.

\textbf{The Wasp Factory and the Ambiguity of Violence}

In Iain Banks’s disturbing text, \textit{The Wasp Factory} violence is made an explicit part of the mental and physical reality of the protagonist. The ‘zero-level’ of violence is not, on initial

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Engleby} pg 35
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid} p. 256
  \item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Engleby} p. 284
\end{itemize}
examination, as difficult to identify in *The Wasp Factory* as in *Engleby* as Frank makes violence a crucial part of his daily life. From the opening of the novel, with his sacrifice poles\(^{23}\) to the key moment of hunting and then burning the rabbits (33-41), Frank normalizes the subjective violence he meets out as part of an explicit attempt to control his own physical space:

“I decided I’d caused enough mayhem for one day. The catapult was avenged, the buck – or what it meant, it’s spirit maybe, soiled and degraded, taught a good hard lesson and I felt good.”\(^{24}\)

This idea of domination over the physical world suggests a measure of insecurity – revealed in the climax of the novel as being well founded. The structure from which the often horrific violence emerges from is not necessarily the cause of the violence. Frank’s behaviour of building dams, making bombs, flamethrowers and other toys fit in with a normative assumption of what appropriate masculine behaviour is for children like him – best summed up by the cliché of ‘boys will be boys.’ The novel brutally undercuts this supposition by revealing this behaviour to be not the normal actions but a weird constructed farce imposed by false gender roles. It is within this strange disruption of normal binary pairings that Frank’s violence begins to emerge into a certain context as the deliberate effect of purposeful disruption of the structures which govern expectation on the part of the reader – gender, mental normalcy, appropriate social behaviours and so on.

Within the text Frank exhibits the constant desire for concrete meanings – the wasp factory and the sacrifice poles are not just markers of his territory but also serve a divinatory function – allowing him to receive signs or portents from which he predicts future events (though his predictions are ultimately proven rather inaccurate). He uses the poles to demarcate his territory and as a way of observing his territory when he learns that his brother has escaped:

“I thought again of the Sacrifice Poles, more deliberately this time, picturing each one in turn…seeing in my mind what those sightless eyes looked out to, flicking through each view like a security guard changing camera. I felt nothing amiss, all seemed well.”\(^{25}\)


\(^{24}\)Ibid p. 41

\(^{25}\)Ibid p. 19
The Wasp Factory also serves as a provider of signs or portents for Frank but he explicitly references the need for interpretation and any uncertainty is met with a degree of fear, ‘events were shaping up faster and worse than I could have expected. I was in danger of losing control.’ 26 Ultimately, of course, it is revealed that whatever concrete meanings Frank had constructed around himself his feelings of control were completely illusory. It is his desire not to ‘lose control’ and be certain, to cling to reassuring structures that drives much of his subjective violence. Frank’s first thought after his violent attack on the rabbits is to figure out the ‘whys and the wherefores’ 27 but his constant need for understanding and coherence does not completely disguise a certain ambiguity. The confession of his hatred for women and the sea also fits into this repeated pattern of disrupting received knowledge and expectations. Women and the sea both represent liminality and change to the character of Frank – the sea is something which ‘always frustrates me, washing away what I have left’ 28 and women are perceived threats as they are just ‘too close for comfort.’

Both of these hatreds are not of the thing in and of themselves but of what they represent and the structures they undermine – the sea with its constant possibility for change and encroachment on Frank’s personal territory, and women representing the fears around Frank’s own ambiguous gender identity. Violence towards the external is an outward sign of an internal uncertainty – driven by a gender ambiguity; a social uncertainty over his own existence, his violence is the manifestation of his own destabilising effects. With no official evidence from the government for his birth and a gender identity that has been placed in flux, Frank’s violent acts and are reflective of a distorted desire for control and consistency that his own upbringing and accident deprived him of. As he himself acknowledges, ‘I decided that if I could never become a man, I – the unmanned – would out man those around me.’ 29

His dramatic and violent overcompensation of clinging to the stereotypes of gender behaviour is emblematic of this desire for concrete and visible certainties that the narrative systematically undermines. The evidence of his own castration is entirely manufactured out of the liminal material of wax – itself a symbol of the violence he inflicts upon the wasps he tortures, and despite his own misogyny he is capable of bearing children. 30 Even his name becomes loaded

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26 Ibid p. 42
27 Ibid p. 41
28 Ibid p. 50
29 Ibid p. 242
30 Ibid p. 241
with ambiguity moving from Francis Leslie Cauldhame to Frances Lesley Cauldhame. As Frank puts it in reference to his violence, ‘talk about penis envy.’\(^{31}\)

As has been shown, the idea of violence as a unique phenomenon is not necessarily accurate but is inter-related to the ideological and structural tools that narratives employ – whether this be the deep depersonalisation of the ideological institution or the ideological structures of family and gender that function in such passive ways subjects are not always entirely aware of their entrapment. The critical effort to place violence within a wider context within narratives is important to engage with if violence is to be seen as anything other than a representational monstrosity. Whilst the violence within texts may be what attracts the critical and moral attention of readers and theorists, it has been shown that violence is in built into the worlds that authors represent violence also functions in more subtle and insidious ways. As Alexis de Conig explains, in *The Wasp Factory*, ‘the divisions between interior and exterior (or I/Other, mind/body) are fluid and unstable, permeating and influencing each other – they signal the inherent instability of the symbolic function.’\(^{32}\)

Thus Frank’s violence is not just part of his desire for rigid control and coherence, – and an exaggerated form of masculine behaviour, but is also the result of a symbolic instability inherent in his identity due to his father’s lies and manipulation. As with *Engleby* this is the result of the successful operation of the system within which Frank exists. Whilst his father disguises the reality of Frank’s existence, his violence can be seen as the evidence of his father’s success just as Engleby’s horrifying violence is the end result of the successful working of the elite British educational and class system. It is notable that when Frank discovers the truth his violent acts cease as he comes to a form of acceptance, escaping from the ‘successful’ gender roles he has been forced into. Whilst the subjective violence within these novels are what gain the most attention it can be seen that the structures within the texts are not only there to organise the world of the novel but are productive of the subjective violence itself. What the Gothic troublingly reveals is that ideological and epistemological systems of organisations cannot be said to be benign, and despite our collective belief of their beneficence and

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\(^{31}\) Ibid p.243

normativity they often conceal brutal violence, irrationality and deviancy that must be confronted and acknowledged.
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Frame Narrative and The Gothic Subject

Daniel Southward

The repeated appearance of this trope is merely a matter of pastiche, a knowing nod to literary tradition that is in itself unilluminating. [...] The found manuscript has in many cases become such a commonplace, even a cliché, that it often expresses nothing more than a desire to mimic earlier texts.


So endemic to the early Gothic, yet so often critically neglected, the trope of the found manuscript, and by extension the frame narrative, is nonetheless revealing of a particular anxiety within the genre as a whole. It is within contemporary Gothic texts that we see this anxiety increasingly problematized as a force of narrative antagonism. One only has to think, for example, of Patrick McGrath’s Spider (1990) and the eponymous protagonist who frames his own tale to establish it as a counterfactual truth; or Clive Barker’s Mister B. Gone (2007), where Jakabok Botch frames his tale, altering the representation of himself to repulse, allure or coerce the reader dependent on his needs; or even Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves (2000), where each framer seeks to control the narratives they find, as Zampanò frames the Navidson Record to exert critical mastery over it and is in turn framed by Truant. Whether found in the library of an ancient catholic family, as a book gifted by an Italian, or the retold tale of a stranger found floating on sheets of ice, the trope of the found manuscript ‘has been aligned with Gothic since its beginnings.’¹ Clearly, though, the humble convention has fallen into disrepute, as the epigraph by Baker establishes, though he goes on to acknowledge that the ‘continued popularity’ of this device ‘still merits attention.’² Rather than merely empty tropes that should only be examined in light of their continued survival, the frame narratives and found manuscripts of the Gothic are still as important to the Gothic of today as the early Gothic texts. It is by first examining an example of the found manuscript in the early Gothic, before investigating a more contemporary Gothic novel, that a significant set of anxieties for the Gothic subject as storyteller will be brought to the fore. Far from a simple nod to the conventions of the genre, there is a continuing thematic anxiety over representation and

¹ Baker, p. 55.
² Baker, p. 56.
containment that pervades Gothic manuscripts, seen not only in the apparently sycophantic Robert Walton’s mise en abyme in *Frankenstein* (1818), but continuing through to contemporary Gothic novels, and in particular Sid Hammet’s obsessive desire for significance in *Gould’s Book of Fish* (2002) both of which will serve as the focus of this analysis.

**Captain Walton’s Shade**

It can be easy to overlook Captain Robert Walton’s frame narrative within Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and, indeed, critical opinion generally tends towards condemning Walton as merely ‘Victor’s shadow self’ or omitting his presence altogether. Yet, via the finding and framing of this story, Walton asserts far more of himself upon the narrative than just serving as a sailor in search of homosocial companionship. One modern reviewer describes the text as ‘a seeming story of possibility and empowerment, which has at its heart something more archaic and brutal – a cautionary tale of the revenge of nature and order upon those who dare to oppose them,’ a sentiment reflected in the tagline to the 1994 Kenneth Branagh adaptation *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*: ‘Be Warned.’ However, Walton’s tale may be less a ‘cautionary tale’ than an entirely allegorical story intended to justify his own impending actions.

Before the appearance of Victor, Walton’s voyage appears to be reaching the first potential impasse with the ship becoming ‘nearly surrounded by ice’, ‘closed in […] on all sides’ and ‘compassed round by a very thick fog’ in a situation he stoically describes as ‘somewhat dangerous.’ The situation worsens when, with the clearing of the mist, Walton and the crew are confronted with ‘stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end.’ As the crew groan and Walton expresses anxiety over the sight, we see the first indications of the supernatural with the sighting of the creature – a being ‘of gigantic stature’ riding a sled across the snow. The ice then breaks and the following morning Walton, finds a man, Victor Frankenstein, afloat on the ice. A man who seems not only a

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7 Shelley, p. 12.
8 ibid
‘celestial spirit,’\textsuperscript{9} but whom Walton will come to reflect in the tale to follow; by ‘seeking after adventure and personal glory [Walton] parallels Victor Frankenstein’s more intense searchings.’\textsuperscript{10} Walton presents to his sister the tale of this apparent shadow self, a man who seems to reflect his own quest for scientific mastery, yet whose quest ultimately leads to the death of his family, closest friends and wife. What Walton achieves in framing Frankenstein’s tale is two-fold; namely, power over the truth and a control over those represented, both with the aim of mitigating his own impending failure in the arctic via juxtaposition and comparison with Frankenstein’s tragic tale.

As stated, Walton is generally critically accepted as the shadow of Victor, though through his use of framing, Walton can be seen to reverse this. By framing the story as his own, as a living manuscript that he has found, he establishes a hierarchical order in which his own account and self are presented before Victor’s, deliberately positioning them as the original of which Victor must be an emulation. Walton ‘carefully absorbs Frankenstein’s story – a story that will help vicariously to redeem the captain’s solipsistic quest’\textsuperscript{11} and, in doing so, establishes the primacy of his account via containment of the other’s narrative, forcing Victor into the role of the shadow, or rather a superior shade of himself. Instead of an imitation, Victor is presented as an idealised self: to Walton, he ‘seems not only a complete but a superior man.’\textsuperscript{12} Victor is described as a ‘noble creature’, ‘gentle’, ‘wise’ with a cultivated mind, and even in his initial wretched state ‘attractive and amiable.’\textsuperscript{13} It is significant that Walton presents Victor as this idealised self, as an educated man whose pursuits of science have led to his own ruin, in order to force the suggestion that Walton himself, being the lesser, could not hope to succeed in his own endeavour and is therefore wholly justified in attempting to avoid his superior shadow’s fate. In one telling section, Victor makes clear this warning, stating:

\begin{quote}
Listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject [of the secret]. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by example, how dangerous is the acquisition of knowledge, and
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{9} Shelley, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{11} Claridge, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{12} Dunn, p. 411.
\textsuperscript{13} Shelley, p. 15
\end{flushleft}
how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.\textsuperscript{14}

Walton is that man who ‘aspire to become greater than his nature’, whose voyage, as he states, will confer ‘inestimable benefit […] on all mankind to the last generation’, and by his framing of the tale he stresses that he is well justified, should he fail, in turning back to shore.\textsuperscript{15} Walton appropriates, or possibly even creates, Victor’s tale as an extended \textit{mise en abyme, a story nested within a story in which the inner reflects upon the outer}. He establishes his own power over the narrative, significantly, in order to allow his control over the representation of Victor; he presents Victor as an aggrandised shade of himself, an idealised shadow self, an allegorical and far superior man, who has failed in his scientific explorations to the extent of his own destruction. Further, when Walton turns back to Archangel and the safety of home it is only natural that Victor should die, as a final statement about the folly of reaching too far. The lesson to Margaret, surely, is that Walton was right in turning back, lest he suffer the same fate as this man who was so similar, yet so much more. In his desperation not to appear a failure, something he ‘cannot bear’ to contemplate, he appropriates the tale, framing it in order to allay his own anxieties of seeming failure.\textsuperscript{16} Walton is thus emblematic of an anxiety that presses the Gothic subject; an anxiety with representation, whether of the self or other – an anxiety that Frankenstein too shares, as evidenced by his corrections and augmentations of the notes.\textsuperscript{17} Far from the sycophant that Robert Walton may initially seem, his representations of Victor serve to emphasis the glory of the man, true, though only in order to make his fall all the greater, and Walton’s own all the more understandable.

\textbf{Sid Hammet’s Significance}

Richard Flanagan’s \textit{Gould’s Book of Fish} also problematizes the act of storytelling, though not just with the aim of power over narrative truth, but with more emphasis on control over the representation of those contained within the narrative. \textit{Gould’s Book of Fish} is framed by the story of Sid Hammet, a down on his luck counterfeiter who finds a copy of William Beulow Gould’s \textit{Book of Fish}, a document that Hammet describes as ‘a dreadful hodgepodge, with some stories in ink layered higgledy-piggledy over others in pencil, and sometimes vice

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Shelley, p. 35.
\item[15] Shelley, p. 6.
\item[16] Shelley, p. 10.
\item[17] Shelley, p. 179.
\end{footnotes}
 versa.’

The text appears to Hammet with ‘numerous addenda and annotations crammed into the margins’ written on loose leaves of paper and ‘what looked like dried fish skin’ interspersed with watercolour paintings of fish. The story contained within this artefact is that of Billy Gould himself, a counterfeiter and occasional painter who is convicted of theft, insubordination and mockery of the crown and details his time served at the Sarah Island penal colony, Tasmania. Here, Gould tells his potentially mad and often grotesque story, detailing his employment painting fish for the colony surgeon, Lempriere, and the various island upheavals and schemes that he was privy to until his death by hanging.

Hammet’s actions in this initial frame of the novel may at first seem as sycophantic as Walton’s excessive adoration of Frankenstein. His first reaction to the text, and also the reader’s first contact with it, comes in the form of a pseudo-sublime reaction:

Luminous as the phosphorescent marbling that seized my eyes that strange morning glittering as those eerie swirls that coloured my mind and enchanted my soul- which there and then began the process of unravelling my heart and, worse still, my life.

In reaction to the book, Hammet is overwhelmed by phosphorescent marbling, eerie swirls and a sense that he is becoming unravelled. In line with a Kantian reaction, his sense of self is unable to comprehend the text, and so breaks down, yet he still receives a Burkean sense of exultation as the ‘gentle radiance’ makes him question whether he has ‘lived the same life over and over, like some Hindu mystic forever trapped on the Great Wheel.’ Importantly, Hammet becomes obsessed with the book, ‘carrying it everywhere, as if it were some powerful talisman, as if it contained some magic that might somehow convey or explain something fundamental to me.’ Throughout the narrative he becomes increasingly troubled by a desire

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19 Flanagan, p. 17.
20 Flanagan, p. 16.
21 Flanagan, p. 48.
22 Flanagan, p. 3.
23 ibid
24 Helen Dennis describes the difference between Burkean Sublime and Kantian as follows: ‘In Edmund Burke’s account of the sublime the subject encounters the external cause of terror, the subjects’ imagination “swells” and rises to meet it and feels a triumphant pleasure at having expanded the human facilities to join with it. In Kant, the sublime permits the imagination a merely futile attempt at this union before collapsing, and this failure produces not exaltation in the subject but obedient “Respect”’. Though Hammet’s self seems to both collapse and also receive the triumphant pleasure of expansion. (Helen M Dennis, “Questions of Travel”; Elizabeth Bishop and The Negative Sublime’, in Poetry and the Sense of Panic. Critical Essays on Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery, ed. by Lionel Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 53–63 (p. 55).)
to validate the book, taking it to historians, bibliophiles and publishers ‘for their opinion of its worth’ the result of which being that ‘the bellicose book’ is described as ‘the insignificant somewhat curious product of a particularly demented mind,’ a quality forgery, and a ‘sad pastiche.’ Following this and, in the wake of the book dissolving into a brackish puddle of water, he eventually takes up the task of re-writing the text from memory, creating the version that we are treated to as the text. This frame describes Hammet’s finding and subsequent recreation of the text, but this framing has a far more significant agenda than the mere expression of mania. Rather, the justification for Hammet’s seemingly sycophantic obsession with the text lies in the main theme of the narrative which he frames – that search for ‘something significant’, namely, significance itself.

Gould’s narrative, after all, is one of enlightenment and transcendence. It is the story of a forger forced to produce something original, the book of fish, and how this ultimately leads him to become something grander than he could have otherwise achieved – in this instance represented by his ultimate metamorphosis into a leafy sea-dragon. In repeating the refrain ‘my name is a song which will be sung’ throughout the novel, Gould makes clear his desire for permanence, or rather, a legacy that achieves either redemption or freedom, and one gained via the fish he paints. ‘The criticasters’, Gould writes, ‘will say I am this small thing & my pictures that irrelevant thing […] but I am William Buelow Gould, party of one, undefinable, & my fish will free me & I shall flee with them.’ He ardently believes that, via the painting of the fish pictures for Lempriere, he will achieve some form of freedom and a lasting legacy, that his name will be sung; Gould wishes to gain redemption via enlightenment, by finding and presenting some hidden meaning to the world for, as he writes, ‘my real crime was seeing the world for what it is & painting it as fish.’ The fish come to represent not just portraits of people, but instead genuine ontological insights, something of worth that he is able to pass on and, in doing so, gain transcendence. ‘Perhaps’, as Robert Hood writes, ‘it is best, then, to transform oneself, casting off the oppressive human form to live as a fish, free to swim the depths and watch the endless procession of human history.’ Gould casts off his human form as he transcends the

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26 Flanagan, p. 19.
27 Flanagan, p. 20.
29 Flanagan, pp. 88, 130, 445–6.
30 Flanagan, p. 104.
31 Flanagan, p. 286.
‘cruel and controlling ways of human history,’ knowledge he has gained via his artistic creations. Hammet correctly surmises this goal when first describing the book:

The author wrote in colours; more precisely, I suspect, he felt in colours. [...] his world took on hues that overwhelmed him, as if the universe was a consequence of colour, rather than the inverse. Did the wonder of colour, I pondered, redeem the horror of his world? 

Hammet frames the text in order to appropriate this message of redemption and to control the representation of Gould within it to just that aim; much as Walton turns Frankenstein into a grander shade of himself, so too does Hammet turn Gould into a shade of himself, albeit a darker one living in a far more Gothic world. However, not content to simply leave the glory of this transcendence to a purely mise en abyme event, Hammet places himself as a haunting presence within Gould’s tale through a distinct blurring of the narrative boundaries. One way in which Hammet achieves this is through the mirroring of chapter presentation in order to present his frame as part of Gould’s text. Each chapter of Gould’s Book of Fish is framed by a replica of the original fish paintings by the real William Beulow Gould, on whose life the text is roughly based, followed by a brief epigraph of the chapter events. This applies to both the first chapter (Hammet’s frame) as well as each subsequent chapter (Gould’s narrative sections).

The join between the frame and main narratives also works to blur the line between the two sections as the text states that ‘the first 46 pages of Gould’s notebook are missing; his journal begins on page 47’, page numbers which directly correspond to the pages of the text already expended by Hammet’s frame, additionally corresponding to the page on which the Gould narrative begins. In this, Hammet suggests that his frame is the missing 46 pages, or that his frame at least completes Gould’s journal and that the two are a whole.

Gould and Hammet both also express a concern over re-incarnation, or a question of a double identity. Hammet foregrounds this issue in the aforementioned ‘Great Wheel’ analogy, while Gould, in a moment

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33 Hood, p. 267
34 Flanagan, p. 18.
35 This being the original intention of the book as seen in the 1st edition, 2002, and subsequent hardback edition published the same year, though the 2014 re-print curiously decides to remove these replicas.
36 Flanagan, p. 45.
37 These page numbers change to reflect the same thematic concern in each edition. See, for example, the 2002 print, which changes the page numbers to 40 and 41, beginning the journal on the latter page number.
of seeming existential crisis, describes a terror that overtakes him with the suggestion that he ‘may actually be someone else’ 38

   Everything around me was beginning to whirl, that all my life was only a dream dreamt by another, that everything around me was only a simulacrum of a world, & I was crying, lost, I really was somewhere else, somebody else, seeing all this. 39

The blurring between the two characters continues as the similarities between the men continue to develop: Each is in possession of a book of fish, before this is either lost or dissolved, and each begins to recreate a second edition from memory; each man turns into a leafy sea-dragon at the end of their respective stories; each is a counterfeiter and a forger, convicted of their crime; and each falls in love with a woman in whose contact their identity becomes fluid (The Conga for Hammet and Twopenny Sal for Gould).

Hammet, in framing the text (one could even go so far as to state he has fabricated it entirely), presents Gould as a redeemable man, as a version of himself that has found some life affirming meaning and subsequent transcendence through artistic creation. In doing so he cements his own blurring with Gould, attempting a pseudo-vicarious experience where he does not actually live through Gould, but as the man. As Hammet tellingly reveals at the beginning of the text about the tourists: ‘They wanted stories, I came to realise, in which they were already imprisoned, not stories in which they appeared along with the storyteller, accomplices in escaping.’ 40 The tourists, as ironically hungry for meaning as Hammet himself later becomes, do not wish to travel along with the storyteller, but to be imprisoned within the story itself, an experience that Hammet himself desires; not a vicarious transcendence lived through Gould, but the same experience, the same reactions and knowledge gained by the blurring and becoming of him. The frame, in this modern Gothic novel then, links back to that of the early Gothic in the expression of a specific anxiety over representation. Walton and Hammet both claim manuscripts, one a man’s oral account transcribed and the other a text written by another, but both are taken and formed as allegory.

**Gothic Storytelling**

38 Flanagan, p. 125.
40 Flanagan, p. 10.
As a device, the frame narrative reveals much about the Gothic storyteller. By this, I refer to those characters who claim a manuscript, who frame a tale, in order to allay their own anxieties by exerting a power over the truth and a control over those represented within. These characters, these storytellers, are obsessed with containment as a means of establishing their own self-narratives: Walton controls the text that he finds in order to justify his own actions in the failure of his mission, controlling the example of Frankenstein to create a heightened mise en abyme that reflects his own tale, while Hammet grasps at Gould’s tale, desperately blurring himself into the narrative and framing it with his own life in order to attain some of the same enlightenment that his darker counterpart finds. The device allows the Gothic subject to claim tales grander or darker than themselves and use them as examples to illuminate their own lives and subjective apprehensions, though seemingly with the aim of allaying their own anxieties over representation in a somewhat ironic fashion; to affect a specific representation of the self, they must control the representation of others. This anxiety over representation litters the contemporary Gothic, where characters claim these tales as part of their own story, framing the narrative to embed it within their own and, in doing so, the Gothic Subject, the framer or finder of their respective tale, presses the tale to serve their own agenda. Anxious of their own representation, the Gothic storyteller is one constantly representing and being represented, telling tales to express their own self-identity and relying on framing the stories of others to present themselves as something more than their own tale could achieve alone. As Hammet ominously states on the process of writing, it serves to remind us ‘that we are more than ourselves.’

41 Flanagan, p. 33.
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Wholly Real and Yet Entirely Other: Monstrous Marionettes in Angela Carter

Sandra Mills

In Sigmund Freud’s pivotal 1919 essay ‘The Uncanny’, the uncanny is partly defined as ‘the feeling that arises when there is an intellectual uncertainty about the border line between the lifeless and the living.’¹ In this essay Freud outlined eight uncanny tropes, amongst them: inanimate objects mistaken as animate, the ‘double’ and confusion between reality and imagination. Freud reasoned that the term ‘uncanny’ ‘belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread […] the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general.’² This feeling of the uncanny is encompassed within the utilisation of lifeless forms in literature, and is often central to their depiction. As an archetype of the Gothic body, or an abnormal ‘other’, the puppet is abhuman. A term which Kelly Hurley defines as being ‘a not-quite-human subject, characterised by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other.’³ As part object, part being, a distortion of the norm which disrupts categorisation, it exists in-between states. Puppets replicate the human aesthetic, yet their expressions are frequently fixed and they are unable to move without human operation. Writers have capitalised on their eerie nature, creating narratives which transgress bodily borders, where toys come to life.

This paper will consider depictions of puppetry present within Angela Carter’s 1967 novel The Magic Toyshop and her 1974 short story ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’. It will discuss notions of the performing body and consider the puppet’s fluid corporeal identity and ability to alter in form. It will highlight Carter’s success at manipulating both the human and lifeless figure and determine the importance of the uncanny in these depictions. Within these wayward narratives Carter portrays the puppet, often concurrently, as a living entity and lifeless artefact, part human, part object. These monstrous marionettes embody the sinister uncanny nature of a performing object, eliciting fears surrounding the manipulated, mutilated and mutated body. The distinctly Gothic atmosphere of Carter’s fiction provides a perfect backdrop for

manipulations of the body, self and identity; it is through her portrayal of puppets that these sinister theatrical illusions are shaped.

*The Magic Toyshop* abounds with fantastically grotesque imagery, the puppet figure is central to this narrative which skilfully intertwines issues of class, gender, incest, tyranny, and sexuality. After the death of their parents Melanie and her two younger siblings, Jonathon and Victoria, are uprooted from a life of rural comfort to one of urban poverty when they are sent to live with their toymaker Uncle, Philip and his wife Margaret in his ominous toyshop. In this wonderfully sinister puppet-world, the boundaries of performance and reality, effect and affect, blur. Carter employs magical realism to transform the orphaned Melanie’s tale into something altogether more disturbing, part twisted bildungsroman, part gothic fairy tale.

In Philip, Carter portrays a grotesquely exaggerated form of patriarchy. As Sarah Gamble states, ‘while his artificial marionettes are life-size, his family are reduced to the status of playthings, tied to his whims by strings of fear, obligation and economic dependence.’ He denies his wretched extended family autonomy, his patriarchal power transforms his subservient underlings into mere puppets. In *The Magic Toyshop*, the female characters are impersonators of normative femininity, they characterise masculine desires. Early on in the narrative Margaret’s brother Finn instructs Melanie about Philip’s demands: ‘he can’t abide a woman in trousers […] no make-up mind. And only speak when you’re spoken to. He likes, you know, silent women.’ In his workshop Philip constructs compliant creations, lifeless marionettes which he manipulates into movement; in the domestic space the women are likewise forced to submit to his carefully constructed model of femininity. Margaret is the archetypal silent female. Literally rendered mute on the day of their wedding, she is to Philip little more than a mannequin, a puppet, reminiscent of those he constructs. She functions as the passive, domestic feminine ideal, economically dependent on Philip, his domestic slave, yet given eloquent means of expression through her volatile position as caring mother. Symbolically, at the novel’s ending when Philip’s patriarchy is overthrown, her voice returns.

As part object, part being, a distortion of the norm which disrupts categorisation, the puppet exists in-between states. Wolfgang Kayser defines the grotesque as ‘the distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the co-existence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly and

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repulsive. The puppet figure and thus those created by Philip within The Magic Toyshop embody this distortion in its entirety. Philip’s marionettes function as a form of the grotesque, his workshop overflows with ‘partially assembled puppets, hanged and dismembered, on the walls,’ these disjointed bodies are excessive in their artificiality. Melanie is frightened of their ‘carved and severed limbs,’ of the ‘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.’ The uncanny nature of these created beings is apparent; they are frightening in their replication of humanity and sinister in their lifelessness. Melanie notices a puppet with an eerie resemblance to herself, a ‘fallen doll in white satin and tulle’ mirroring her previous bridal attire. She observes that her artificial double had ‘fallen flat down as if someone had got tired of her in the middle of playing with her, dropped her and wandered off.’ This discovery foreshadows the fate that awaits her, manipulated by Philip in a revised performance of Leda and the Swan, she is forced to perform his ritualised, perfectly prescribed image of passive femininity.

Melanie performs her roles at Philip’s instigation; in a conventionally feminine guise she is alternately nymph, bride and innocent child, her final role is the reverse of the romantic personae as she becomes metaphorically a victim of rape. Through this sexualised performance, Philip transforms Melanie into a fetishized object, a desired spectacle. The novel, and indeed performance, reaches its climax as Philip ‘resenting her because she was not a puppet’ positions Melanie as victim, his swan puppet enacting the rape of Leda, Melanie’s current guise. This brutal act of masculine fantasy evidently highlights the revocation or denial of the prospect of feminine desire. Melanie as female, is rendered passive, controlled by this puppet-master, her sexual identity rebuffed, she is literally and metaphorically altered into the doll of Philip’s imaginings.

Regardless of the performative nature of this rape, and her laughter when first seeing the ‘dumpy and homely and eccentric’ swan, Melanie is genuinely frightened. She finds herself

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8 Ibid., p. 66.
9 Ibid., p. 67.
10 Ibid., p. 67.
11 Ibid., p. 67.
12 Ibid., p. 144.
13 Ibid., p. 165.
'wrenched from her own personality; watching this whole fantasy from another place; and, in this staged fantasy, anything was possible. Even, disturbingly, that the swan, the mocked up swan, might assume reality and rape this girl in a blizzard of white feathers,\textsuperscript{14} Melanie reduced to an object cannot tell actuality from imaginary, unable to correlate ‘this girl’\textsuperscript{15} with herself. She is rendered immobile, consumed by fear, she is unable to fight the obscene swan which had mounted her. Here, Carter expertly employs magical realism manipulating gender roles, crossing the boundaries between object and person, and furthermore traversing the limits of species.

‘The Loves of Lady Purple’, a short story from Carter’s 1974 collection entitled Fireworks, draws upon her experience of living in Japan from 1969 to 1971. Illustrative of Carter’s move to a more overt postmodernist form of fiction during this period, Fireworks consists of narratives which rework notions of meaning, truth and interpretation, disrupting the reader’s perceptions these tales merge fact and fiction, blurring boundaries between the two. Gamble terms ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ a ‘gothic fable of a life-size marionette who under the godlike manipulations of her puppet-master nightly re-enacts the monstrous career of Lady Purple, a courtesan who took to murdering her lovers before eventually becoming consumed by her own sexual veracity,’\textsuperscript{16} turning irrevocably into a marionette, transgressing from a human form to a lifeless state. A multitude of typical motifs of the gothic genre combine in the figure of Lady Purple the ‘Queen of Night’\textsuperscript{17} for she is concurrently unearthly vampire, flesh-eating zombie and monstrous marionette. This nightly dramatization purports to be fiction, myth and history, complicated further by the bodily manipulator, the Professor’s assertion that his marionette is this Lady Purple. This alteration from human to inhuman would transgress bodily borders; in ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ theatrical illusion is utilised to construct a puppet who is concurrently passive object and murderous femme fatale; thus rejecting established traits of the self.

The elderly male Professor, master of marionettes, manipulates this figure who ‘did not seem so much a cunningly simulated woman as a monstrous goddess, at once preposterous and magnificent, who transcended the notion she was dependent on his hands and appeared wholly

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 166.
real and yet entirely other.' This life-size feminine beauty, replica of the sexual courtesan, juxtaposes two states of being, an uncanny figure frail in form and humanity. Yet she ‘was nothing but a curious structure until the Professor touched her strings,’ she is only brought to a lifelike state by the hands of her male manipulator.

‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ is an overtly theatrical narrative which continuously highlights its own artificiality. The Professor in his position as puppet-master is said to be ‘always dusted with a little darkness. In direct relation to his skill he propagates the most bewildering enigmas for, the more lifelike his marionettes, the more godlike his manipulations and the more radical the symbiosis between inarticulate doll and articulating fingers.’ As Gina Wisker states, through her performance the marionette Lady Purple, ‘fills the silences of the men who manipulate her limbs, while she herself is literally voiceless,’ hers is an abject female body only able to communicate through male agency. Lifeless after each sexualised theatrical display, her female body is the subject on which her male manipulators express their erotic desires and supressed fears.

The professor entices his audience each night with ‘his claim that Lady Purple is eventually transformed into the very marionette who nightly re-enacts the story which is, in fact, her own.’ Her concluding spectacular transformation is from manipulated object to vampire. This ‘image of irresistible evil,’ an archetypal gothic figure, exemplifies all that fascinates and disgusts her spectators. The Professor, infatuated with his marionette, kisses her; as she gains ‘entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics,’ she transforms from puppet to ‘hot, wet, palpitating flesh,’ A hybrid of wood and body, this newly created being is an uncanny figure. Lady Purple in vampire form, drains the blood from her former master, then makes her way to the nearest brothel, ‘like a homing pigeon, out of logical necessity.’ Despite her escape she is destined to continue her part in these erotic fantasies, trapped in her

20 Ibid., p. 23.
24 Ibid., p. 36.
25 Ibid., p. 36.
26 Ibid., p. 38
predetermined role of deadly whore, manipulated by the strings of male pornographic adoration.

‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ centres then on the ambiguity of this puppet, whether ‘she was renewed or newly born, returning to life or becoming alive, awakening from a dream or coalescing into the form of a fantasy generated in her wooden skull by the mere repetition so many times of the same invariable actions.’27 Her form, whether lifeless or living, puppet or human, or somewhere in between is extraneous; for as Gamble argues ‘Lady Purple’’s rapacious desires lock her into a savage cycle of endless replication and self-destruction.’28 Within The Magic Toyshop and ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ Carter’s puppets exemplify the uncanny, where terror arises from the familiar and yet concealed, and evoke both fear and desire in the living. The Magic Toyshop and ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ utilise replication and repetition, abound with scenes of brutality and grotesquery and play wholly and persistently with Freud’s notion of the uncanny. In Carter’s fiction several subservient females are reduced to a marionette-like state controlled by tyrannical puppet-masters, others break free of their strings altering in form to something arguably more inhuman.

The closing narrative of ‘The Loves of Lady Purple’ poses the question: ‘had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?’29 Carter’s literary depictions of puppets distort the limits of reality, fantasy, human, object; her creations are much more than just curious structures. They are spectacular theatrical illusions, grotesque in their excess, skilled at manipulating desires. Within these narratives Carter deftly amalgamates the macabre and the comic, the mythic and the everyday, creating narratives which transgress conventional boundaries, which entertain and frighten, and where the undead awaken. As Wisker comments, Carter’s fictional world is ‘bizarre, unnerving, highly charged, powerfully erotic, and yet it is also domestic and every day,’30 in it the supernatural threat passes from the unknown to the domestic and the monstrous is made to be at home.

Fred Botting observes that ‘throughout Gothic fiction terror and horror have depended on things not being what they seem.’ These lifeless forms are the embodiment of this; they rebuff categorisation, subsisting in the intermediary. In literature the puppet is neither human nor object, animated by language, concurrently set in a lifeless state. Carter’s depictions of puppets align with Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject as something that ‘disturbs identity, system, order […] [that] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’ Puppets are disturbingly unkillable for they occupy that liminal space between life and death. Continuously revised, altered and modified, as incomplete doubles of human life, objects of external manufacture and operation, they possess a grotesquely dead-alive charm. These childhood toys have been absorbed by the gothic genre, influencing our ideas of innocence. This is the stuff of childhood nightmares, lifeless bodies now animated, suspended between human and inhuman states, inducing fear, and characterising horror.

**Works Cited**


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