THE OUTLANDISH, UNCANNY, BIZARRY: CULTURE LITERATURE PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

The outlandish, uncanny and bizarre are the terms familiar to almost every reader and student of Western culture who has read, for instance, Shakespeare or Edgar Allan Poe. The fantastic and the vampiric are the elements very popular in English and American literature since their early beginnings (the anonymous Beowulf, Washington Irving’s “Rip van Winkle” or, later, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, just to mention a few examples). This, of course, can be extended to other literatures in English and Irish or Australian literatures that generally abound with metaphysical motifs are good examples here. Gothic literature, fantasy and science fiction also share many elements of outlandishness, uncanniness and the bizarre, which makes strict categorisation impossible. Yet, even though the role of all these “old” genres has been taken over in recent times by new media (TV series) and new devices (smart phones and the Internet), the textual element remains the same.

Today, however, outlandishness as a concept in cultural and literary studies, philosophy and psychoanalysis, is not as widespread and trendy as uncanniness, the concept popularised by Sigmund Freud’s Unheimlich (unhomely) taken from Ernst Jentsch’s study of 1906, Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen (On the Psychology of the Uncanny, trans. Roy Sellars). Freud famously stated that the unheimlich is what was once heimlich, homelike, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression, the statement which is now widely disputed, also in this volume. The outlandish serves here, therefore, as an umbrella term to cover all other kinds of abnormalities present in
discourses of culture, literature and philosophy themselves, being derived from Old English to denote, first, a remote foreign land (out-of-the-way), then, the appearance, objects, ideas or practices as freakishly or grotesquely strange or odd.

This volume aims, thus, at bringing together multiple perspectives on what the weird, the strange, the odd is, on the things which cannot be explained in rational terms and on what, for long, has been the focus of attention and interest of generations of writers, philosophers, thinkers and, in more contemporary times, also of film directors as a form of protest or rebellion against rationalism as it was formulated by the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. Interestingly enough, in contemporary times, however, there is still a need for the spiritual, the spectral, which the twentieth-century philosophy evaded so much (the concluding essay discusses this issue).

The present volume falls into three parts, each devoted to one notion under discussion. The book starts with Tadeusz Rachwał’s inspiring paper, “Outlandishness and the (New) Worlds of Constant Nieuwenhuys and Yona Friedman,” which formulates the concept of outlandishness as opposed to “thislandishness” constructed on the figure of the *litotes*. It is discussed with reference to the notion of utopia as no place and serves as an introduction to the concept which is not so much common in the current critical thought.

In his essay, “Here Comes Honey Boo Boo: The Outlandish American Norm,” Tadeusz Lewandowski gives a practical example of American outlandishness in popular culture, where a child TV star and her family set a very low standard of behaviour as norm, which, in the longer run, may serve as the symbolic portrait of the U.S. economic and social decline as well. Outlandishness here is understood as decline, both material and moral.

Adam Aleksandrowicz’s “The Kafkaesque in Ian McEwan Black Dogs” explores the nature of evil and prejudice, showing how they contest the humanity of the protagonists of *Black Dogs* (1992). The author applies the term Kafkaesque to entail alienation, oppression, mutilation, gloom, alongside a panoply of other modern traumas like insecurity, the labyrinth of state bureaucracy, the corrupt or whimsical abuse of totalitarian power, the impenetrable tangle of legal systems, the knock on the door in the middle of the night, in an attempt to recreate the atmosphere of outlandishness of contemporary Europe.

The Uncanny part of the volume opens up with Tomasz Pilch’s thoroughgoing academic explanation of the history and usage of the term Unheimlich, in which the author makes references to both Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund
Freud. Intended as a polemic with Freud and his over psychoanalytic understanding of the term, Pilch’s “This Uncanny Scrivener: or, the Uses and Abuses of Staring at the Wall” is a neat analysis of some uncanny scenes from Herman Melville’s rich literary output.

In his “Das Unheimliche or l’étrange? Sherlock Holmes and the Uncanny Adventures of Fake Vampirism,” Jacek Mydla analyses the case of English famous detective through the prism of das Unheimliche, pairing it, simultaneously, with Tzvetan Todorov’s similar but different term l’étrange. For Mydla, the uncanny, as a result, is a product of conflict between the centripetal force of domesticity (the homely, das Heimliche) and the centrifugal powers of rationality (logic, logos).

In her essay “Dracula: The English’s Uncanny Double,” Josephine Sharoni offers an in-depth insight into Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis while discussing the canonical Gothic text, making frequent references to one of Lacanian theorists, Mladen Dolar, who markedly pointed out that the Gothic novel’s first appearance came at the pinnacle of the Enlightenment at the end of eighteenth century, when many elements of the old religious order were swept aside in favour of rational thinking, human rights and scientific empiricism, which made the presence of vampiric characters in novels particularly shocking and disturbing.

Tomasz Gornat’s “Death, Doubles and the Uncanny Realism in James Joyce’s ‘The Dead’” concentrates on the issue of the uncanny in the Irish context supplied by James Joyce’s “The Dead,” a story of ghosts, of the dead who return in envy of the living. Exploring the story’s manifest and latent uncanniness, the author concludes that the unheimlich tropes of “The Dead” are embedded in its realistic texture, hence its peculiar “uncanny realism.”

Marek Błaszak’s text, “The Uncanny Flying Dutchman of Capitan Frederick Marryat,” gives the discussion of the uncanny an extra dimension since he takes the reader out of this land to the sea to talk of the notorious ghost ship called Flying Dutchman, and the eerie spectacle she created on the sea. The author concludes by arguing that the originality of handling the uncanny in The Phantom Ship does not consist in Marryat’s surpassing the Gothic-Romantic practitioners of terror and sublimity, but in his approaching the modern novel in which the source of uncanniness shifted inside the characters’ psyche.

In his “Uncanny Interpretations of Class and Authority in Monty Python’s Flying Circus,” Stephen Dewsbury formulates a thesis that the uncanny is part of Englishness and that the term “pythonesque,” denoting bizarre and uncanny sense of humour, has entered the English glossary. The show
replaced a late night religious programme and, although not an overnight success, the author argues, the Python team managed to produce television series after series, later films, stage shows, music albums and books. They themselves and their uncanniness were to become widely accepted and appreciated not only by British audiences but especially popular in America and warmly received internationally as that peculiar type of British sense of humour.

Agnieszka Kaczmarek’s “Edward Abbey Speaks: The Uncanny in Desert Solitaire” explores the idea of the inhuman as a departure from the (human) norm, seeing in Edward Abbey’s eccentric behaviour, which teeters on the brink of insanity and his constant balancing between life and death, a clear sign of the American writer’s being an inhuman humanist.

Dilek Menteşe’s “Reversing the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’: Humour and Horror in Bernardine Evaristo’s Blonde Roots,” the uncanny postcolonial horror of 2009, presents the picture of a familiar Western beauty who becomes the “ugly monster,” while the “monster” (a black person) becomes the representation of the standards of beauty in contemporary Britain, which makes the homely (das Heimliche) and the unhomely (das Unheimliche) overlap, and the final reversal of master/slave image proves the absurdity of colonial discourse.

In her “‘Devourers of Men’s Flesh’: The Uncanny Representations of Irish Cannibalism in the Elizabethan Era,” Marzena Keating discusses cannibalism as the most primitive custom humans have practised, contending that among the known adherents of such ritual feasting were Aztecs, Anglo-Saxons, Chinese, Celts, Romans, Scandinavians, Spaniards and the Irish. The author argues that anthropophagic acts have not only been enacted but also represented in literature and popular culture of the Irish.

As the opening of the Bizarre section of the book, Liliana Sikorska presents the visions of monsters and monstrosities in medieval and nineteenth-century romances. Her “The Bizarre Bazaar, or on ‘Going into Hethen Cunte’ in Medieval and Nineteenth Century Romances,” explores the idea of monster and monstrosity, arguing (after St Augustine) that monstra is derived from monstrare, i.e. to demonstrate, which makes monsters as real as, say, domestic animals. While, she argues, in the Middle Ages the dominant sciences were theology and ethics, in the nineteenth century it was history, proto-anthropology and archeology that thrived on the outlandish and the bizarre. Both medieval and the Victorian travellers and explorers endeavored to catalogue and describe the hitherto undiscovered, they wrote for audiences hungry for the outlandish experience that offered them “true fiction.”
Andrew Taylor’s “The Exotic and the Bizarre in Australian Fiction: *Maurice Guest* and *Tourmaline*” uncovers the bizarre elements in the twentieth-century Australian literature, making references to two significant novels, *Maurice Guest* (1908), by an author who called herself Henry Handel Richardson, and *Tourmaline* (1964) by Randolph Stow. Because of its quite explicit exploration of sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, in its time *Maurice Guest* was both unexpected and deeply transgressive, which made it an absolutely bizarre phenomenon in conservative Australia. Stow’s *Tourmaline*, which is also the name of a kind of stone, is set in the arid desert landscape of northern Western Australia, exotic and bizarre for European settlers.

In her essay, “Manliness, Morality and Ghosts in Victorian Tales of the Supernatural,” Marlena Marciniak explores the figure of Doppelgänger—the spectral double—in English literature of Queen Victoria’s times, thus, connecting the bizarre with the age’s reaction against the material, mechanised and industrialised world.

Barbara Braid’s essay, “The Bizarre Performative Murders in *Hannibal* (2013-),” contains a long list of bizarre, elaborately cruel and shocking murders: victims drugged and buried alive to become fertilizers for fungi; a young couple murdered and skinned in a way that their stretched skin resembles angel wings; bodies filled with surgical tools or other sharp objects by the Chesapeake Ripper in a recreation of “the Wound Man”; a musician having his throat cut and a cello neck inserted, so that the voice cords can be played like a cello. This extreme objectification of human victims in a TV series, Braid concludes, shows signs of bizarre, macabre artistry, as if murder were a work of art.

In her essay, “Conspire or Expire? Conspiracy Theory as Postmodern Gothic,” Pavla Veselá discusses present-day Gothic and dystopian narratives, arguing that in the post-Holocaust, post-Cold War and post-9/11 era, conspiracy theories do what “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” did for Edgar Allan Poe’s nineteenth-century audience. Building on the reflections about conspiracy theories by Mark Fenster, Fredric Jameson, Jodi Dean and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, among others, the author asks what happens when Gothic tropes are adopted for the purposes of other than blatantly reactionary politics.

The theme of conspiracy is continued by Daniel Broudy’s “Manipulations in Chemicals and Communications: A Bizarre Blend of Facts and Fiction,” in which the author discusses, in the Foucauldian style, the issues of relationship between the powerful, the institutions and the discourses they
produce in acts of deception, arguing that contemporary America engages herself in bizarre cultural communications such as “lies by omission.”

Finally, from the discussions of the outlandish, uncanny and bizarre in literature and culture, in the last chapter of the volume, a move is made to philosophy in order to explore the concept of God as a spectre, which is outlandish (out of this land, not from the earth), being, at the same time, uncanny (irrational, illogical) and bizarre (cannot be comprehended). In “God as a Spectre: Human, All Too Human,” Ryszard W. Wolny refers to the great triumvirate (Marx, Nietzsche and Derrida) to speak of God’s human-made character that has been haunting minds of people since primitive times.

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THE OUTLANDISH
Outlandishness and utopia seem to be somehow related terms. They are both related to a displaced territory which is posited outside their own scope, outside their own latitude. Something outlandish can also be seen as what is unwelcome within the spaces of the established normality of things as strange, weird, or odd not only due to being unsuitable, but also because of having gone too far, to another, perhaps too distant, land. Yet the out of the out-landish is an incomplete out, and incomplete outsidersness, and what it marks as not belonging, belongs to the originary place of departure by the very gesture, or attempt, at excluding it. Something outlandish can thus also be read as simply too distant to be reached, as a faraway place which constitutes an invitation to a journey.

The case of utopia, of no-place (ou-topos), seems to be slightly different because what the litotetic character of its construction invites is thinking about a world where the absence of a place does not disqualify it as, say, a habitable area, though the area, as no-place, may not have the qualities of place, at least in topographical terms. The litotetic half-negation only problematizes utopia’s topographical identification as a place, as a finite and closed domain which can be given a name and mapped within some broader
territorial context. No places may thus be treated as places whose “placeness” itself has become blurred, de-identified.

Utopian no-places are somehow related to Marc Augé’s non-places (non-lieux) which he posits, “in opposition to the sociological notion of place, associated by […] the ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space” (Augé 34). Though also litotetic, non-places seem to be “thislandish” extensions of the existing places, their fake copies deprived of rootedness in the originary communitarian demands of living together. Places like supermarkets, airport lounges or motorways are now an unavoidable part of the “thislandish” global landscape. However, according to Augé, they are invaded by texts which fabricate a new man, an “average man” defined as “the user of the road, retail or banking system” (Augé 100). This transformation of dwellers to users also transforms the traditional dwelling places, invades them with prescriptive instructions for use and handling. It is the guided, instructive use which normalizes and uniformizes non-places via informative or prohibitive inscriptions.

Both no-places and non-places are inevitably “thislandish” due to their, however negative, relation to the existing places. The rhetoric of litotes always leaves behind some traces of what it seems to be negating or denying. All the thinkable projects or projections of other, “outlandish” worlds carry in themselves some traces of the “here” with which they are correlated, including, of course, the ideas of a heaven or a paradise to come. Yet, as Marc Augé remarks in the context of the colonial experience of the European encounters with remote cultures, this “experience of the remote has taught us to de-centre our way of looking, and we should make use of the lesson” (Augé 35). What he suggests is a rethinking, or rather, a relearning of our thinking about space: “we live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at. We have to relearn to think about space” (35-36).

Perhaps one way of such relearning lies in noticing the fact that we tend to think of space as if it were a kind of place, as localizable and mappable area. This relatedness of the ideas of space and place seems to be as inevitable as the relatedness of subjectivity and objectivity in which one triggers, as if it were, the other. This relatedness is strongly present even in those philosophical readings of the world that, like Derrida’s project, are critical of simple presences and their categorizations. This mutual relatedness, which characterizes what Quentin Meillassoux calls correlationism, is a weaker version of a metaphysics of presence in which the strong belief in the exteriority of the world in relation to thinking and representation is replaced by “the thesis of the essential inseparability of the act of thinking from its
content. All we ever engage with is what is given-to-thought, never an entity subsisting by itself” (Meillassoux 36). In other words, what correlationism disqualifies is the claim that subjectivity and objectivity can be considered independently of one another (cf. Meillassoux 5). What this predicament enforces is the necessity of regimentation, and thus of a regime of meaning in which putting in place (either that of a subject or that of an object) is inevitable. Correlationism thus “pertains to the existence of a regime of meaning that remains incommensurable with rational meaning because it does not pertain to the facts of the world, but rather to the very fact that there is a world” (Meillassoux 41).

The idea of a regime of meaning is, of course, much broader than Jacque Rancière’s category of “aesthetic regime” (cf. Rancière The Politics of Aesthetics), yet what it brings to the fore is the question of the possibility of approaching anything that may be termed outlandish otherwise than aesthetically, and the question of approaching the “facticity of the ‘there is’” (Meillassoux 42). What this facticity may reveal is, in fact, a certain outlandishness of the “thislandish”. Such a revelation is not a consequence of an intellectual sophistication, but rather a return to naivety of approach, to a “naïve realism” in which “there is” is not eclipsed by speculative allegations, which, as in structuralism, are absolutized as reality. “I speak of ‘naïve’ realism,” writes Meillassoux,

> And of ‘speculative’ idealism in order to underline the fact that, from within correlationism, the realist construal of the absolute is inevitably considered inferior to its idealist construal, since the former marks a break with every form of correlationism, while the latter acknowledges it sufficiently to absolutize it. (Meillassoux 132)

What is idealised in correlationism is the conceptual world which does not quite deny the existence of the world to which it is related, though reduces right to absolute and exclusive existence. What, in turn, correlation makes unthinkable is the naïve obviousness of reality which Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the fathers of structuralism, put in question, simultaneously paralleling geology, psychoanalysis and Marxism in thus respect:

> All three [geology, psychoanalysis and Marxism] showed that understanding consists in the reduction of one type of reality to another; that true reality is never the most obvious of realities, and that its nature is already apparent in the care which it takes to evade our detection. In all these cases the problem is the same: the relation, that is to say, between reason and sense-perception; and the goal we are looking for is also the same: a sort of super-rationalism in which sense-perceptions will be integrated into reasoning and yet lose none of their properties. (Lévi-Strauss 61)
Reality is obvious for Lévi-Strauss only if it is super-rationally “outland-ished” and removed to the conceptual sphere of potentiality which controls its sensual formulations or actualizations itself remaining formless. In Meillassoux, it is idealistically absolutized and posited as inferior to the obvious. This kind of “science of what we can’t see” (Wood 11) enforces the ordering of the world in which the impossible, or perhaps utopian, worlds are unrealizable because they are in fact unthinkable as independent worlds, unrelated to the overdetermined grounds which structure them. Yona Friedman’s “realism” which, to the contrary, makes utopias realizable in the epigram above seems to be a kind of realism which is not less contradictory than Meillassoux’s plain statement proclaiming the possibility of thinking the impossible: “I cannot think the unthinkable, but I can think that it is not impossible for the impossible to be” (Meillassoux 42).

Some earlier gestures towards formulations of the impossible can be found in the Situationist attempts at freeing individual creativity and to thus deregulate the world in which the monopoly of infallibility has been given “to a collection of hypostasised, gnarled forms: Power, God, the Pope, the Führer, Other People” (Vaneigem 219). Raoul Vaneigem proposes in his *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) a shift from subjected to “radical subjectivity” which he associates with “ancient love of mazes, the love of getting lost solely in order to find one’s way again: the pleasure of the dérive,” of drifting (Vaneigem 138). This pleasure is the pleasure of pure mobility of bodies and minds unhindered by the correlationist teleology of predesigned destinations, by the teleology of the desire to uncover Lévi-Straussian underlying realities which dominate over the real and living world. What drives Vaneigem’s text is a rhetoric of undoing the “thislandish” world by way of returning to what seems to be past (“ancient love of mazes”), which past is simultaneously posited as a newly radical beginning that has never taken place:

> The limitations imposed by social alienation still imprison us, but at least we are no longer taken in by them. People have been standing for centuries before a worm-eaten door, making pinholes in it with increasing ease. The time has come to kick it down, for it is only on the other side that everything begins. (Vaneigem 138)

The seeming outlandishness of this other side, which seems to be a version of William Blake’s doors of perception, is the space for making of the “radical subjectivity” which will eventually transform people into people. So far people had been “made into dogs, bricks or Green Berets, who is to say that they cannot be made into people?” (Vaneigem 139). It is not impossible
for this impossibility to be, and though Vaneigem questions the utopianism of his project (“Utopia? Not in the least,” 219), this questioning clearly results from the trust in its realisability.

What, among others, links this project with Meillassoux’s critique of correlationism is the necessity of a radical break with mediation. According to Benjamin Noys, the radical thinkers of the Situationist International, like Raoul Vaneigem and Guy Debord, “remain within a highly abstract condemnation of the ‘spectacle’, which then commits them to an impossible position of revolutionary purity supposedly outside its domain” (Noys 97). Positing “life” against mere “survival,” the Situationists saw the authenticity of unmediated contact with reality as a promise of active participation in it, a participation devoid of the theatricality of assigned roles and narratives. In the now canonically Situationist Society of the Spectacle, Debord sees spectacle as “a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities and to equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws” (Debord 22). The “opium war” clearly refers to Marx’s view of religion as opium of the people. As McKenzie Wark observes, the Situationists “had long thought that the precursor to the critique of the spectacle lay in the critique of religion” (Wark 166). Their radical break with mimetism is also a break with correlation, and the world without it, however unthinkable, offers a literally outlandish space without, or after, what Meillassoux saw as finitude. After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency, the title of Meillassoux’s book, in fact promises an inevitably varied and contingent world whose vague silhouette has been noticed by the Situationists and offered as a kind of heresy which, in François Laruelle’s phrasing, “presupposed that Life is a first name of the Real” (Laruelle 19-20).

To live rather than to merely survive, or to live “a counterfeit life” (Debord 23), was a watchword which inspired Constant Nieuwenhuys’s project of New Babylon upon which he embarked in 1959 and to whose elaborations he devoted nearly two decades of his life. Like Vaneigem, Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005), or Constant, also drew from Johan Huizinga’s idea of the primacy of the ludic in human nature. Constant’s New Babylon, on which he continually worked between 1959 and 1974, was a project and a promise of “liberation of man’s ludic potential” for which it is necessary to rethink “social space” in terms of “social spatiality”:

social space is social spatiality. Space as a psychic dimension (abstract space) cannot be separated from the space of action (concrete space). Their divorce is only justified in a utilitarian society with arrested social relations, where concrete space necessarily has an anti-social character. (Nieuwenhuys)
The liberation of the ludic sociality is intertwined with the necessity of a radical change of the attitude to this world as a place into which the utilitarian order translates spaces and thus, anti-socially, deprives people of their ludic and creative potentials. Constant's New Babylon is designed as a space which is free not only of private property, but also free of utility. It is creativity and creative imagination which thanks to which life was to change into “an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation, sustained by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity” (Nieuwenhuys). Originally called Dériville, the city of Vaneigem's drifting, New Babylon became a project of change which reached behind all the stereotypes and alleged “normalities” of existence, a post-correlationist world after the finitudes of architectural places in which people would be able to freely change the environment in which they lived:

With no timetable to respect, with no fixed abode, the human being will of necessity become acquainted with a nomadic way of life in an artificial, wholly ‘constructed’ environment. Let us call this environment New Babylon and add that it has nothing, or almost nothing, about it of a ‘town,’ in the traditional sense of the term. (Nieuwenhuys)

Such a break with relatedness to traditional architecture and organization of living spaces makes New Babylon an outlandish project, a projection of an unmapable territory which is simultaneously striated and smooth,\(^1\) and translates living into “an endless journey across a world that is changing so rapidly that it seems forever other” (Nieuwenhuys). Jan Bryant defined this othering “texture of Constant’s utopian project” as

an attempt to trap the dynamism of modernity (especially the excitement born from new technologies), while continuously reaching out to unchartered regions. An imperative of the project is to avoid the sedentary and habitual nature that defines the character of a “neighborhood” or the tendency that one has to stagnate in the suffocating narrowness of parochialism. Instead, Constant inscribed the spirit of the restless nomad (the gypsy) into the project, she who remains forever other to the fixed dweller of the town or the city. (Bryant)

Interestingly, the idea of the project was prompted to Constant not by the Situationist theory, but by an enclosure constructed near the Piedmontese

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\(^1\) I am using these Deleuzian/Guattarian terms as Nieuwenhuys's project in many ways anticipates Deleuze's and Guattari's writings on nomadism and rhizomatism. They develop it in numerous writings, but see first of all their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988).
town of Alba in December 1956 by gypsies expelled by the town council from the city space. “That was the day,” he writes,

I conceived the scheme for a permanent encampment for the gypsies of Alba and that project is the origin of the series of maquettes of New Babylon. Of a New Babylon where, under one roof, with the aid of moveable elements, a shared residence is built; a temporary, constantly remodeled living area; a camp for nomads on a planetary scale. (Nieuwenhuys)

The project may rightly be called an outlandish one, as against the fixity and stability of land it poses constant movement and change, a flow of alterations and adjustments from which no final totality could possibly result. There is, of course, no possibility of erecting any walls and of separating New Babylon from the world, which impossibility adds to it an infinite dimension – New Babylon would be “a temporary, constantly remodeled living area; a camp for nomads on a planetary scale” (Nieuwenhuys).

What Constant has left behind except for the idea of New Babylon are quite numerous maquettes, drafts and paintings which closely resemble abstractionist paintings. Yet, this resemblance seems to have little to do with abstraction and more with mapping of a possible utopia, with the unthinkable mapping of the outlandish for which traditional maps are not really useful. The images in fact illustrate the impossibility of mapping and, as Hilde Heynen notices, “[t]hey might even be understood as a critique of the simplistic way in which the models and narratives present the society of the future, rendering visible many contradictions and incommensurabilities” (Heynen 35). What Constant’s project of New Babylon seems to be offering is not an idyllic and harmonious future of mobile living. Its truth, as Heynen phrases it, “lies in its very negativity and in the dissonances that pervade the images of harmony” (Heynen 28). Rather than harmonious continuities and correlations with the existing realities, the project harshly breaks through towards the outlandish, perhaps towards an “after of finitude” which, as we have seen, is unthinkable though not impossible.

Another situationism-related project at which I would like to have a brief look in the context of thinking (about) outlandishness is Yona Friedman’s (born 1923) idea of spatial village. He elaborated on it in mainly his Feasible Utopias (Utopies réalisables) which appeared in 1974. Though he was well known among architectural circles for his Manifesto de l’architecture mobile which was first presented in 1956 in Dubrovnik, his consistent come-back in the beginning of the twenty-first century may well be read as a token of “discovering him for the first time” (Orazi and Price 39). This rediscovery
may be a result of the radicalization of philosophical and critical thinking on postmodern condition which implicitly underlined his visions of architecture which he perceived to be a constitutive aspect of identity. If Roland Barthes can be held responsible for the birth of the reader and the repositioning of reading from passive reception to active creativity, Friedman wanted to diminish the authorial position of the architect and share it with the dweller. The architect was to be an instrument in the hands of the user whose wishes he or she was to carry out. Similarly to Constant, what was at stake in Friedman’s vision of mobile architecture was a certain “do-it-yourself” kind of milieu, though constructed on the base of pre-designed elements. As he wrote in *L’architecture mobile* (1960):

The essential for the spatial town is what I call ‘spatial infrastructure’: a multi-level space-frame grid supported by pillars separated by large spans. […] This infrastructure represents the fixed part of the city; the mobile part consists of the walls, floorslabs, partitions, which make possible individually decided space arrangements: the “filling in” within the infrastructure. Thus all elements which are in direct contact with the user (i.e. those which he sees, touches, etc.) are mobile, as opposed to the infrastructure which serves for collective use and is fixed. (qtd. in Eaton 221)

Friedman’s spatial town, in its philosophical and social dimensions, was not a simple return nomadism of which he was accused, among others, by Henri Lefebvre (Camaton 67, cf. also Stanek 247). Friedman’s main concern was the autonomy of individual actions which would be, at least partially, independence of heavy machinery and of technologies beyond individual grasp. Dependence on such technologies made the existing urban structures rigid and resistant to changes. This rigidity and inflexibility was “manifest in the constricted movements of the population,” and “a new, mobile architecture would have to respond to […] the will of the inhabitants and the demands of changing external conditions” (Camaton 70). Unlike Michel de Certeau who found a liberation of the constricted movements within the regulated spaces of the city in individuals’ finding their own ways and paths, in Friedman it was the city which was to be constantly changed and remodeled. For this reason the spatial town was in a way a provisional kind of construction, which provisionality offered itself as an alternative to the ideological, aesthetic and ethical demands of permanence characterizing, generally, modernity (cf. Bauman 4).

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2 The concept of “do-it-yourself-ism” is used by Nicholas Negroponte in *Soft Architecture Machines* to describe Yona Friedman’s model of design. Cf. Vardouli 15.
Although, unlike Constant’s New Babylon, Friedman’s mobile architecture did not demand any new worlds or territories for its construction, its outlandishness consisted in its positioning “next to,” or rather “above” the existing places. While Le Corbusier famously proposed the destruction of Paris and other old European cities to clear the space for the newer ones, Friedman wished to preserve existing cities while building huge superstructures over them. He imagined that these superstructures would consist of gigantic multilevel space-frame structures resting on support columns that would also function as access points for people, electricity, water, et cetera. Urban dwellers would also build homes in these superstructures. (de Wit 193)

This, however rhetorical, movement of dwelling places to superstructure seems to be an expression of doubt in the Marxist prioritization of base as the foundation of the economic system. It is hard to say who owns means of production in Friedman. The mobile spacing of the dwelling places above the rigidly permanent old city clearly questions the ownership of those places and, rather that offering their property to the masses, it implicitly suspends property and ownership rights and makes them vaguely undecidable. Though Friedman does not address the question of property extensively in his writings, his fear of architectonic foundations and of everything that is fixed seems to be an expression of his views on commodification of space and its regulatory control. In an interview with Rajan V. Ritoe he expressed this, saying that “architecture is dangerous and city planning by its technical nature creates obstacles […]. I also find foundations very dangerous. Everything that is fixed. The real city is not fixed. Look at people walking in the street, I can’t tell where somebody wants to go […]. There is absolutely no rule” (Ritoe).

The fixity of the world is an illusion which comes from what Friedman terms “species interpretation” (“On Theoretical…” 217) and which partly consists in our inability to see the reality from the perspectives of other species, from the perspectives which may be called outlandish. In an interview with Theodora Vardouli he talks about his experience with an extraterrestrial:

I am a non-specialist. I have a professional Architect’s Diploma but I am not working with Architecture like the craftsman-architect. I simply follow my curiosity. I don’t know what to say. I had a dog; and I learned enormously from the dog. You will laugh but from the human point of view the dog is an extraterrestrial; it is completely different! So I was living for years with an extraterrestrial, observing

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3 The affinities of the two projects as well as disagreements between Constant and Friedman are discussed in more detail in Wigley 40-41.
He also refers to this extraterrestrial experience in an article devoted to construction of theoretical models in which he elaborates on the question of interconnectedness of mathematics and language, claiming that “[m]athematics is great, beautiful and often misleading, inadequate to map the ‘real’ world (whatever the term might mean)” (Friedman “On Theoretical…” 216). His extraterrestrial, and thus in a sense outlandish, dog inspires him to think about a pre-theoretical and holistic vision of the world which is always prior to abstraction and categorical individuation: “I have a dog. My dog – like her colleagues – sees the world holistically. A ‘frame’ (I use the term as it is used in film) contains everything in her visual field, without particular attention to things distinct. Distinguishing things is a later operational step” (217). The dog’s vision is evidently a naïve one, and Friedman, perhaps like Meillassoux, sees in this naivety something which we have unlearned through mathematical abstraction which is for him one of technologies of mapping reality. Talking about graph theory, for instance, he returns to the idea of “later operational step” of abstraction, though this time without any reference to his dog:

The graph theory was practically a mapping of reality, but reality itself is a much better mapping! You can use graph theory, it is no contradiction, but you can shortcut it if you want. This is a prolongation of the experience I had with real cases: it takes time for people (to think abstractly). (Vardouli 123)

This reversal of Borges’s map of the Empire from Del rigor en la ciencia is also a metaphor of Friedman’s spatial town as a, however utopian, space of the unlearned world which we think is only outlandish. The “better mapping” of reality by itself is a naïve mapping without abstracting and naming, a process rather than an immobile presence. “It would be useful,” Friedman ends his essay on theoretical models, “to re-orient our attention to processes, an attitude we had at one time […] but an attitude that we have unlearned” (Vardouli 123). To unlearn the already unlearned may seem to be utopian, but in Friedman it is evidently a realizable one, and, as in the epigram opening this text, par excellence so.

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4 Friedman’s dog also made him think about the question of private property to which I have already briefly alluded: “Dogs […] did not invent a language, but they also lack the concepts of ’property’ and ’exchange of goods’; thus they do not know arithmetic. Nor did they invent ’slavery’, the transformation of a being into an item of property who performs tasks in one’s stead” (“On Theoretical…” 217).
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Here Comes Honey Boo Boo: The Outlandish American Norm

*Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* debuted on *The Learning Channel* (TLC) network in 2012 and instantaneously became one of the most controversial and widely discussed reality shows in the United States. Its star, Alana Thompson, is an eight-year-old beauty pageant contestant nicknamed “Honey Boo Boo,” who lives in rural Georgia with her colorful and obese family. Headed by “Mama June” and father “Sugar Bear,” including Alana’s half-sisters “Pumpkin,” “Chickadee,” “Chubbs,” and a pig named “Glitzy,” the clan faithfully embodies what could accurately be called America’s proud yet unrefined “redneck” population. Together, they engage in shockingly low-brow antics, utter bizarre phrases and malapropisms and glory in the gluttonous consumption of fatty foods – much to the delight of approximately two and a half million viewers a week (Bibel). Critical response, unsurprisingly, has been largely excoriating. Some detractors have charged that the program exploits the poor for the nation’s amusement. Others have described it as genuine child abuse. In a review that well encapsulates such sentiments, *TV Guide* declared: “Jeers to *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* for existing. Alana Thompson and her family have lowered the TV bar to new depths while introducing viewers to the terms ‘forklift foot’ and ‘neck crust.’ In a word, eww” [emphasis in original] (qtd. in Brumback). Nonetheless, some critics have praised aspects of the Thompsons’ life as promoting thrift and family values. What few reviewers have picked up on, however, is how in contrast to personality-driven reality shows that draw on the fabulous exploits of wealthy
celebrities, such as *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* or Paris Hilton’s now defunct *Simple Life, Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* realistically represents how much of the US population lives – that is, the forty percent who experience official poverty (around twenty-three and a half thousand dollars a year for a family of four), or the eighty percent who at some time experience near poverty while depending on welfare, food stamps or unemployment compensation (Rank). The Thompson family, the growing outlandish norm, therefore represents a cogent, symbolic portrait of American economic and social decline at the beginning of the twenty-first century, rather than any grotesque, marginalized subgroup.

Alana Thompson’s meteoric rise to national stardom at age six is due to another *TLC* program, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, a reality show dedicated to the pre-teen beauty pageant circuit. Here, heavily made-up children vie for cash prizes and, most importantly, the lofty distinction of being crowned “Ultimate Grand Supreme” – a title that continues to elude Alana. Tragically, her unsuccessful pursuit has caused much frustration and many bitter tears (Starr). Yet, this burning ambition to win, shared by so many on *Toddlers and Tiaras*, is not what distinguished Alana as a breakout personality. Instead, she achieved her notoriety by ingesting “go-go juice,” a potion concocted by her mother, June Shannon, from a mixture of sugar-rich *Mountain Dew* soda and *Red Bull* energy drink. Said to contain as much caffeine as two cups of coffee, go-go juice gives Alana the hyperactivity needed to sparkle in front of pageant judges. A brief clip from *Toddlers and Tiaras* featured Alana running in circles, dancing like mad and spinning herself in circles on the floor. It “went viral” in 2011, outraging American media personalities and parents from coast to coast. The firestorm put Mama June on the defensive. She explained in pragmatic terms: “We had tried Pixy Stix, as they’re called ‘pageant crack.’ We went through 15 bags at one pageant, and it just don’t do anything for her. …[Alana] just drinks [the juice] for pageants, to give her that extra ‘oomph.’ So, whatever works for your child, use it” (Golwert). June stressed the rightness of her approach in a subsequent interview, reminding concerned viewers: “there are far worse things […] I could be giving her alcohol” (*Fox News*). Regardless, the go-go juice controversy, coupled with Alana’s outsized personality and bold declarations – “I want to win because I want to make money” – established her fame and won her not the coveted title of Ultimate Grand Supreme, but her own series on *TLC*, the very next year (Golwert). Her catchphrases – “A dolla makes me holla!” and “You better redneckgnize!” – meanwhile quickly found their way into mainstream American popular culture (Brumback).
One would be remiss, however, to downplay Mama June Shannon’s own allure as a reality star, or that of her extended family. Shannon’s life story is a model of the realities of Southern American poverty. After becoming pregnant at age fifteen, she dropped out of high school and in quick succession produced four children out of wedlock by an unclear number of entirely absent men; the last, Mike Thompson, serves as live-in boyfriend and father to Alana (Hickman). Shannon is a larger-than-life matriarch. Rapidly approaching the status of morbidly obese, she washes so infrequently that a mysterious crust regularly forms between the rolls of fat on her neck (Goodman). She as well suffers from “forklift foot,” a deformity of the toe caused by an industrial accident. The injury forces her to wear socks while swimming (Kirby). In mixed company, Mama June is not averse to belching loudly and forcefully or breaking wind openly. Shannon is also known for her “extreme couponing,” a practice she calls “better than sex.” This obsession, along with bidding for expired goods at “food auctions,” allows her family to stockpile discounted paper products and eat on just eighty dollars a week. The family recipe for “sketti,” a pasta dish covered in a mixture of margarine and ketchup (Fox News), helps maintain the budget, as does a helpful sheriff who regularly informs Shannon of fresh road-kill in the area. “Why throw away free meat?” Mama June asks. Sugar Bear Thompson chimes in: “It’s messy but it does help save a lot of money. That way we can afford for Alana to do pageants” (Hickman).

Daddy Mike Thompson cuts a memorable picture. Age forty and toothless save some jagged, black bicuspids, Thompson works seven days a week as a miner. His expression is generally catatonic, his broken speech borderline unintelligible. Nonetheless, Mike adds the needed “trestosterone” (as Mama June puts it) to the family unit. In truth, he often appears overwhelmed by the five females who inhabit the modest family home (Starr). Mama June’s first three girls, Lauryn “Pumpkin,” Jessica “Chubbs,” and Anna “Chickadee” (twelve, fifteen, and seventeen in the first season), all dangerously overweight and the last expecting her first illegitimate child at any moment, provide a lethargic backdrop to Honey Boo Boo’s frantic exploits, her mother’s bodily functions, trips to scavenge road-kill, and shopping at the local dump for discarded but worthwhile items (Hickman). The setting for such events is McIntyre, Georgia, a town of six hundred and fifty residents, forty percent of whom live below the poverty line and the rest, one assumes, barely above. McIntyre exists almost solely on mining kaolin (a type of clay that is an ingredient in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and car parts) and boasts a small collection of stores on its Main Street, surrounded by stray dogs, rusting old
cars, and landfills (Brumback). TLC’s treatment of its subject is laced with mockery. In a telling move, the network has deemed the family’s Southern drawl so incomprehensible that the show is subtitled. (Perhaps justifiably, because it is estimated to introduce about twenty new malapropisms an episode). The opening theme music is punctuated by Mama June’s explosive flatulence, unique in tone, volume, and length each time (McGee).

The above description may appear outlandish, grim or exaggerated. A synopsis of the first season’s opening and closing episodes indicates otherwise. Here Comes Honey Boo Boo premiered on August 8, 2012, with a one-hour, double-episode extravaganza entitled “This is My Crazy Family.” Here we watch Mama June wash her hair in the sink, then scratch “the bugs.” The girls wake up around noon to a breakfast of cheese puffs, which Jessica “Chubbs” eats off the floor. Another family favorite is “fat cakes” – what they call pre-packed, mass produced, sugar-laden baked goods. All full, the Thompsons head to a neighboring town for the local “Redneck Games.” There they participate in “mud belly flopping.” Mama June takes care to ridicule the other mothers at the event for being even fatter than she, pointing out morbidly obese ladies in bikinis and commenting: “All that vagiggle jaggle is not beautimous.” Though June allows her daughter to bob for raw pig hooves, she disallows the family the pleasure of dipping in the local river, where an ungrammatical sign warns of flesh-eating bacteria within: “It has been reported that the Oconee River contain high levels of bacteria which is harmful to humans. Enter this water at your own risk.” The children protest: “It’s okay, Mama! It only affects one of three hundred people! You’ve gotta have an open wound or something!”

The day fades into evening and the family returns home. Chubbs proclaims while eating a bag of pork rinds that she wants to lose weight. Mama, also intent on losing one hundred pounds, thinks this can be accomplished by “farting twelve to fifteen times a day.” The first half closes with a raucous weigh-in that reveals six-year-old Alana to be seventy pounds (thirty-two kilograms), fifteen-year-old Jessica to be one hundred and seventy-five pounds (seventy-eight kilograms), and Mama June, after first making the bathroom scale malfunction, three hundred and nine pounds (one hundred forty kilograms). Her children dance with delight and describe her as “fat” and “enormous” (Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, episode 1). In part two, “Gonna Be a Glitz Pig,” the Thompsons attend a beauty pageant, only to see Alana lose and break into deep sobs. She is soon rewarded, however, with an unusual consolation prize: a baby pig named “Glitzy” that cheers the young Honey Boo Boo’s spirits. Despite his daughter’s considerable girth, Sugar Bear
proclaims in all seriousness that: “One day Alana could be Miss America” (Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, episode 2). This first season wraps up with “It Is What It Is.” Chickadee gives birth to Baby Kaitlyn, a three-thumbed infant whose father is nowhere to be seen. Alana, now an aunt at age six, is thrilled by the new addition to the family. She declares: “I’m so excited I’m about to piss all over myself. […] Baby Kaitlyn is so tiny… I POOP BIGGER!” [caps in original]. Meanwhile, the baby’s extraneous thumb reminds Sugar Bear “of a Swiss Army knife.” Aunt Chubbs quips: “gimme a high six” (Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, episode 10).

Momentarily disregarding the significance of such content, Here Comes Honey Boo Boo has done extremely well in the ratings. On August 29, 2012, the reality show’s fourth episode beat the Republican National Convention in the eighteen to forty-nine demographic, with almost three million viewers (O’Connell). Such grand success has come with concurrent censure. Many critics have greeted Here Comes Honey Boo Boo with outraged hyperbole, conjecturing that the show is “a sign of the coming apocalypse” (Brown), “a horror story posing as reality television,” and the “worst thing ever” (Santos). But along with this indignation at the show’s “moments of nausea-inducing horror” (Starr) and status as “simply trash” (Edenshaw), other critics have wondered what kind of effect this “exploitative mess” will have on its “young, impressionable 6-year-old star” (Santos). Given the nature of Here Comes Honey Boo Boo’s subject, critic Tim Goodman has condemned TLC as America’s “most socially irresponsible channel.” He likewise has disparaged June Shannon for exploiting her daughter for material gain in what is an “awful and soul crushing” spectacle (Goodman). Another television critic, Megan Carpentier largely agrees, adding that the show hinges on “implicit audience snobbery” in which other mothers gleefully judge a redneck woman’s parenting, “point and snicker” at southern poverty and ignorance, and mock the notion that the portly Alana can beat out other pageant contestants from “better” homes. This plot device casts the six-year-old as a sort of party crasher from the backwoods. From a safe distance, “the audience can laugh at [Honey Boo Boo’s] lack of middle-class manners and not have to think too hard about what it means when the only help you get from the local authorities to feed your four kids is a notification of where the freshest roadkill can be found” (Carpentier). Critics Mark Perigard and Ryan McGee also note this questionable paradigm. The former charges that TLC wants viewers to “feel superior” (Perigard). The latter observes that TLC prefers that viewers not dwell on Honey Boo Boo’s disturbing aspects, but buy the show’s ringtones and “pretend like it’s a grand old time” – when it is really rank exploitation of the nation’s poor (McGee).
By all indications, public response has matched that of these critics. Representative comments under the articles cited in this paper include: “This child and her whole family are revolting. Trashy, trailer park people and a little girl who speaks as if she's channeling a sassy drag queen,” and, “What a freakin’ ugly family […] like something from a freak show. Do people actually watch this garbage? If that is what this society is watching there is no hope for America. We are headed for total cultural destruction” (Golwert). Viewers from the South have also noted that the show, unfortunately, reflects the current reality. One admits: “The sad thing is having lived in the deep south the show is not an exaggeration,” while another laments that “the south is full of Honey Boo Boos. And it makes me feel ashamed of being southern.” Regardless of such verisimilitude, many viewers still denounce *TLC* for what they deem “just another form of child abuse.” Mama June, in particular, bears the brunt of such anger. “The mother,” one commenter writes, “should be ashamed and thrown in jail” (Santos).

In the face of such condemnation, *TLC* and June Shannon have been quick to defend their efforts. *Honey Boo Boo*’s executive producer, Lauren Lexton, has claimed that she is not exploiting the family, and, somewhat counter-intuitively, argues that the show is popular not for its shock value, but because of the family’s devotion to one another: “They seem outrageous, but once you get to know them, you really relate to them and like them” (Brumback). Yet, one may easily question Lexton’s statements. It is impossible not to notice how *TLC*’s cameras glance, linger and ultimately snicker as they pan over the cultural markers that distinguish proverbial rednecks: garbage, rusty cars, chickens sitting on laundry baskets, and misspelled local signs like that advertising delicious “peches” (Stuever). Nonetheless, Mama June has insisted that *TLC* films and represents her family accurately. Honey Boo Boo, too, is authentic; not merely a juiced-up version of one’s standard hillbilly. “This is who she is,” Shannon states, “This is her everyday life” (Brumback). In addition, Shannon is outspoken in refuting charges of child exploitation. As she puts it: “Alana thoroughly enjoys doing what she does” (Santos). Critics, therefore, should not be heeded. Mama June brushes them off with some down-home wisdom: “[P]eople are going to talk, good and bad, and it is what it is” (Venutolo).

Lexton’s and Shannon’s defenses have been buttressed by a small handful of commentators who have found redeeming qualities deep within *TLC*’s reality series. The LGBT magazine *Out* has praised *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* for its reoccurring gay character, Uncle Poodle (Lee Thompson, Sugar Bear’s brother), who proves that one can be both homosexual and redneck.
The Thompson family does not shun Poodle, but accepts him as an equal member. As June states: “We’ve always supported gay people.” Alana, of course, loves her uncle dearly. She is responsible for the endearing “Poodle” nickname (Sieczkowski “Lee Thompson”). In a different vein, Matt Hickman points out that in many ways *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is “a show about resourcefulness.” This fact is demonstrated by Mama June’s “keen business sense,” on display in her couponing and willingness to go to extreme lengths (road-kill again) to save money (Hickman). Jean Bently, meanwhile, places agency and self-awareness into the equation by noting that the Thomsons “embrace the redneck label.” Bently further argues that when one watches *Honey Boo Boo* with “a detached sense of amusement, understanding that these people are fully aware of their ridiculous habits and catch-phrases,” the show achieves a level of “fun” that is “endearing” (Bently). Finally, Hank Stuever declares the show “a fitting document for our times, good or bad.” It is ultimately an “entrée into America’s most pressing concerns: economy, equality, health, community” (Stuever).

Stuever’s point may be legitimate. The same may go for Mama June’s insistence that *TLC* faithfully portrays her family’s life. Tommy Floyd, McIntyre, Georgia resident and long-time acquaintance, corroborates this contention: “They don’t put on,” he reveals, “That’s everything they do every day. It ain’t just for the show.” And despite fame and money, the Thompson family, for some time, claimed they were “keeping it real,” even as their show became more outlandish. In 2013, *TLC* opened the new season with a “watch and sniff event” that featured the scents of the Thompson’s home and the Georgia summer. The numbered scent cards, available from *Time Warner Cable*, were coordinated with certain scenes to enhance the viewer’s experience. Amy Winter, general manager of *TLC*, boasted: “We couldn’t think of a more fitting way to kick off the new season than with two Watch’n Sniff episodes.” She further noted that “[t]he family loves coming up with crazy games and hijinks, so now our audience gets to play along with one. It’s an experience they certainly won’t want to miss!” (Bibel). *Honey Boo Boo* was renewed for a fourth season with added episodes and “specials.” *TLC* has also rewarded the family for earning consistent ratings. After being compensated a mere two to four thousand dollars an episode in the first season (Sieczkowski “*Honey Boo Boo*”), *TLC* first raised its compensation to fifteen thousand to twenty thousand an episode (Hill), and then fifty thousand (Grossberg). Still, the Thomsons have continued to live off Sugar Bear’s salary in the chalk mines and put all their TV money in trusts (Bumback). June is philosophical about her daughter’s fame. “We may do it for the next six months, we may
end it next month,” she has stated, “When [Alana] doesn’t want to do TV or pageants, then we quit everything and go back to our normal lives. We live a very normal life outside of the cameras and outside of the pageant world” (CNN).

Though the Thompsons have benefited financially from the growing Honey Boo Boo franchise, there is little question that their reality show reveals a deep undercurrent of exploitation in US society – not only of children for commercial purposes, but the greater exploitation (and deprivation) of the poor within the national economy. Honey Boo Boo’s depictions of “normal” life shows what has happened to middle-class living standards and the type of expectations the underprivileged can have in the United States. The Thompson family is, unfortunately, a highly representative unit of that eighty percent of Americans who at some time experience near poverty (Rank). Sugar Bear, working seven days a week and toothless, is a typical American worker, part of the one third that works through the weekend and with, evidently, little access to affordable healthcare (Ingraham). Mama June is one of the thirty-three percent, or approximately eighty million, obese Americans. Determined to add to these numbers, she feeds her children a steady diet almost guaranteed to cause Type 2 Diabetes later on in life. And Alana Thompson, were it not for her unlikely fame, would be headed for much the same poverty-marked fate as her parents. Here Comes Honey Boo Boo is a buffet of poor diet, poor health, teenage motherhood, functional illiteracy, frustrated dreams and abuse. Those families who have managed to remain above the vicissitudes of the last decade’s economic collapse, above the Thompsons in social terms, can look and gawk. America’s tragedy is now its own entertainment and, as outlandish as it may seem, it is all, statistically, more norm than fringe. Hyperbolically dubbed a “sign of the coming apocalypse” tongue in cheek, the reality show does not rise to this level in the biblical sense, but certainly does so in the social and economic sense for American society (Brown). These remarks, themselves, may appear hyperbolic – though less so in light of recent revelations that have exposed poverty-stricken America’s true dysfunction.

There is evidently a very dark side to being a redneck. The Thompson family and their show weathered a brief scandal in the summer of 2012, when reports surfaced that both June and Sugar Bear had been convicted of robbery. June had been imprisoned for stealing from the McDonald’s that employed her (Stiehl). Sugar Bear served a five-year sentence for a crime spree in the late 1990s that included arson (Shrayber). In Here Comes Honey Boo Boo’s fourth season, however, things suddenly got “too real.” Though
the show’s producer, in 2012, praised the Thompson family’s devotion to one another, the disturbing reality of their lives finally surfaced towards the end of 2014. First, sources reported that Sugar Bear had been kicked out of the family home for cultivating Internet romances (Zupkus). By this point the negative effects of Alana Thompson’s fame had already been widely reported. Several months before, during a television appearance, she had been openly hostile to the host. Alana then struck her mother June when she tried to intervene (O’Shoney). Soon after, June experienced her own sex scandal. Reports surfaced of her romance with a convicted sex offender, Mark McDaniel, freshly released after a ten-year prison sentence handed down for forcing oral sex upon an eight-year-old child. The girl was a relative of Mama June’s. June had been dating McDaniel at the time of the crime (Fisher). In light of the situation, The Learning Channel, unsurprisingly, unceremoniously cancelled Here Comes Honey Boo Boo (TMZ).

June initially rebuffed accusations that she was dating a sex offender. Uncle Poodle (now HIV positive) publicly countered her claims to innocence. On national television, Poodle announced that June was lying, and that she had recently had sex with McDaniel. Then, Poodle continued, June and McDaniel had spoken in graphic detail of their night together – in the presence of Honey Boo Boo (Huffington Post). In the midst of her denials, Mama June made a shocking admission. After years of hiding the truth, she confirmed that her daughters, Pumpkin and Jessica, had been fathered by Michael Anthony Ford, another convicted sex offender once featured on the crime show To Catch a Predator (MSN). Making matters even worse, June’s oldest daughter Anna came forward to accuse June’s current sex offender boyfriend, McDaniel, of molesting her as a child. Anna likewise condemned her mother for exposing Alana to McDaniel (Heller). As Anna made the rounds on talk shows seeking more fame in the wake of her revelations, she hired an agent in hopes of landing a Honey Boo Boo spin off. After confirming and apologizing for her recent affair with McDaniel, Mama June, now unemployed and without income, went house hunting. In early 2015, she purchased a massive four-bedroom home. Cashing in on personal tragedy? Living beyond one’s means? This, too, is the outlandish American norm.

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Gonna Be a Glitz Pig. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo:* Season 1. TLC, 2014. DVD.


It Is What It Is. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo:* Season 1. TLC, 2014. DVD.


This Is My Crazy Family. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*: Season 1. TLC, 2014. DVD.
McEwan’s fifth novel, dryly compassionate and superbly evocative prose, offers a respite from the grisly subject matter of his earlier books and short story collections in that it does not foreground death, murder, incest or abduction. Instead, the author tempers the macabre slant and constructs a profound meditation on the nature of evil and prejudice showing how they contest the humanity of the protagonists of *Black Dogs* (1992). It would be quite misguided, though, to assert that the author completely frees his book from the intoxications of violence. Suffice it to say that Jeremy, the narrator and chronicler of June and Bernard Tremaine’s lives, regularly witnesses his sister Jean being physically assaulted by the obstreperous husband Harper, and later in adult life he engages in a fist fight with a Frenchman. Nevertheless, nothing of the excesses preponderant in such novels as *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) or *The Innocent* (1990) is to be expected in *Black Dogs*.

McEwan’s departure from the stylistic course taken with the publication of *First Love, Last Rites* in 1975 appears to be the testimony of a painful compromise between the morbid literary panache and stylistic moderation, a concession symbolically reflected in the character of Jeremy and his protracted existential vacillation between two discrepant points of view epitomised in the attitudes and outlooks of June and Bernard Tremaine, into whose family he marries. Jeremy, whose parents die in a car accident, is uncouth and prone to violent outbursts, but equally capable of withholding the excruciating details and supplanting them with a profound intellectual
effort directed at the quest for the truth, stability and, more importantly, substitute parents. Black Dogs thus becomes a more universal and open work of fiction not only in terms of a dialogue with the reader, but also with other texts, among which one can effortlessly identify the fictions penned by one of the most influential European modernists, Franz Kafka.

Interestingly enough, the term Kafkaesque, as defined by contemporary literary studies, may entail alienation, oppression, mutilation, gloom, search for authority and, as John R. Williams supplements, a panoply of other modern traumas like “insecurity, the labyrinth of state bureaucracy, the corrupt or whimsical abuse of totalitarian power, the impenetrable tangle of legal systems, the knock on the door in the middle of the night” (Williams vi). Unsurprisingly, a number of these motifs intertwine with the subject matter of Black Dogs, if only because the physical and mental transformation of June Tremaine parallels the abhorrent transmutation of Gregor Samsa in “Metamorphosis” (1915).

The story material of Black Dogs revolves around a memorable encounter with a pair of stray canines in the Languedoc in 1946, after which the newly wedded June and Bernard Tremaine undergo a metamorphosis, incidentally accompanied by a gradual transformation from staunch communists into repentant liberals. The former becomes a reclusive thinker bent on lifelong meditation in her French hermitage – a cottage acquired from an accommodating peasant shortly after the event – whereas the latter, now of more liberal persuasion, remains a campaigning socialist cloaking his supercilious callousness with dismissive lenience. Both, though to a varying degree, seem to be affected by the violent onslaught, an event that not only constitutes the climactic moment in the novel, but also opens a trove of metaphors connected with the transformative process that is initiated in France and takes a heavy toll, most notably on June.

It is important to note that the opening chapter of Black Dogs, which is preceded by Jeremy’s confusing introduction entitled Preface (9), brings into focus the last stage of June Tremaine’s life. The female, currently institutionalised and confined to bed in one of the rooms at Chestnut Reach – a nursing home in the English countryside, is regularly visited by Jeremy, who as often as not concentrates his meticulous attention on a framed photograph standing on the bedside table next to her bed. As he contends, it “was there to remind herself, as much as inform her visitors, of the pretty girl whose face, unlike her husband’s, gave no indication of the direction it was set to take” (25). The narrator’s preliminary to describing the conditions
and circumstances in which the female patient is awaiting her dying day is at once a point of departure for recounting the story of June’s enduring transformation. Later, while conversing with June and eying the picture with curiosity, Jeremy says provocatively: “Bernard’s life seems to have been a steady progression, building on what he has, whereas yours seems to have been a long transformation” (38). Indeed, June’s appearance, deformed by the years of chronic ailment, differs markedly from the photograph of her younger self taken in 1946 just before her and Bernard’s honeymoon journey around southern Europe. What is more, when the two images are collated one may perceive an eerie incongruity, an indication that the resultant contradiction can be accounted for by an eerie transformation that has taken place in the interim.

Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis,” though more explicit in depicting the protagonist’s disconcerting transmutation, bears more than a passing resemblance to the regressive process that affects June Tremaine in Black Dogs. The short-story opens with a discombobulating description:

One morning Gregor Samsa woke up in his bed from uneasy dreams and found he had turned into a huge verminous insect. He lay on his hard shell-like back, and when he raised his head slightly he saw his rounded brown underbelly, divided into a series of curved ridges, on which the bedding could scarcely stay in place and was about to slip off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin relative to the rest of his body, wriggled helplessly in front of his eyes. (Kafka 3)

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that June Tremaine and Gregor Samsa have become subject to a process which leaves indelible marks on their physique, a transformation that has disfigured their bodies. However, only the author of “Metamorphosis” dispels any doubts as to the nature of Gregor’s transmutation, for it is stated unequivocally that the protagonist has become an insect. By contrast, June Tremaine’s dishevelled appearance may be explained by ovarian cancer. Still, the recurrent motif of an uncanny transmutation is present in Black Dogs under the guise of reincarnation, a concept known not only in India, but also in ancient Greece. Jeremy skilfully merges the idea with June’s political disenchantment and her subsequent resignation from the membership in the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1946. The narrator summarises it thus: “June lasted only a few months, until the confrontation on her honeymoon that gave this memoir its title, and hers was a profound alteration, a metempsychosis mapped in the transformation of her face” (McEwan 27). In the light of the cited passage it could be reasonably argued that Ian McEwan refers to Plato’s idea of life
after death contained in the last part of *The Republic* (380 BC). The chapter in question includes “The Myth of Er,” a dialogue that recounts the story of the eponymous Er, who is resurrected on the twelfth day after death and tells of his experiences in the afterlife. Central to Er’s story is a scene in which the souls of the dead choose their next lives. Significantly, the majority of them select animals as the successive incarnations: Orpheus decides on the life of a swan, Thamyris wants to be a nightingale, Ajax chooses a lion’s life, and Agamemnon wants to become an eagle (Plato 454). Curious as it may seem, the author of *Black Dogs* alludes to the eschatological myth in order to take advantage of the motif of metempsychosis and utilise it to build the character of June Tremaine. At the same time, however, McEwan conjoins it with the Kafkaesque concept of metamorphosis, and it is this amalgam of ideas that constitutes the conceptual foundation of June’s transformation in *Black Dogs*. The occurrence which initiates the lengthy process, leading Mrs. Tremaine to separation and death at Chestnut Reach, takes place on a winding, rocky path stretched between Saint-Maurice-Navacelles and Le Vigan in Languedoc on an unbearably torrid day in 1946. There, having overtaken her husband while making a swift descent of a steep elevation, she encounters two black, fierce strays roving about the deserted area. Mrs. Tremaine glances up the slope for Bernard but he is nowhere to be seen:

He was more than a hundred yards away. He stopped to re-tie his lace and had become engrossed by the progress, inches from the tip of his shoe, of a caravan of two dozen brown furry caterpillars, each with its mandibles clamped to the rear of the one in front. […] Bernard’s scientific curiosity was aroused. The procession along the path looked purposeful. He wanted to know exactly where it was going, and what would happen when it arrived. He was on his knees with his box camera. (McEwan 146)

Meanwhile, the savage dogs start to approach June so she decides to search for and deploy any weapon within her reach to defend herself against the beastly animals:

Her hands shook as she scrabbled on the path for rocks. She found three. She held one in her right hand, and kept the other wedged between her left hand and her side. She was retreating sideways, keeping her left shoulder towards the dogs. Where the path dipped, she stumbled and fell. (McEwan 147)

The excerpts portray a couple who are physically separated and already affected by the first symptoms of a process that has started its course. Firstly, both spouses change their position and begin to resemble stunted creatures as they have to bend either to tie a shoelace or grope for stones. Secondly,
they find themselves even closer to the ground: Bernard, who is a keen entomologist, happens to be so engrossed in inspecting the furry insects that his cheeks graze the mountain path (McEwan 149), and June, having decided to withdraw to a safer position, trips and falls on the rocks cutting her arm. It can therefore be inferred that Bernard – a man of considerable height now lying prone in spiky shrubbery – is similar to one of the worms he is observing. In consequence, the image of a gargantuan human caterpillar lying on a mountain path may correspond to June, who stumbles and lies momentarily in an unnatural position in a rocky hollow. Moreover, McEwan strengthens that verminous imagery with the sight of dogs that “had brought with them their own cloud of flies” (148), which, in its poignancy, alludes to Kafka’s mode of representation of repulsive, insect-like people. One also should not overlook the fact that a motif of lying and trying to sit or stand upright, present in both *Black Dogs* and “Metamorphosis,” is a key to understanding the nature of the transformations affecting the protagonists of the mentioned works of fiction.

More relevantly, the author of *Black Dogs* compliments the initiated process of June Tremaine’s transmutation with an uncanny happening linked with the canine attack. Namely, while fending off the two dogs, the woman experiences a manifestation of unexplainable force:

> It seemed to lift and flow upwards and outwards, streaming suddenly into an oval penumbra many feet high, an envelope of rippling energy, or, as she tried to explain it later, of ‘coloured invisible light’ that surrounded her and contained her. If this was God, it was also incontestably, herself. Could it help her? (McEwan 149-150)

From the presented quote it follows that Ian McEwan resorts to the supernatural and associates it with a couple of black dogs. Notably, June identifies this conjunction of circumstances as an encounter with evil fused with the discovery of God (McEwan 60). One, however, is eligible to assert that the scene is a modern illustration of Plato’s “The Myth of Er”: a heroine experiencing a metaphysical transformation in the presence of animals may comprise a succinct if superficial definition of metempsychosis. Nevertheless, a profound change in June’s life occurs, for the woman seems to have forged a new spiritual path to the truth; be it factual or philosophical certainty. She therefore engages in a dogged pursuit of answers to difficult personal questions, a metaphysical search that takes her to death and beyond.

A first-hand relation of what appears to be the terminal stage of June Tremaine’s metamorphosis emerges in the first part of *Black Dogs*. Jeremy,
who relates her behaviour, physical shape and the state of mind, describes June’s situation in the following words:

As though to emphasise her separation from what she called the ‘other inmates’, her room was at the far end of the corridor. I slowed as I approached it. I could never quite believe that I was going to find her here, behind one of these identical plywood doors. […] I tapped lightly on the door with a fingernail. She would not want me to think she had been dozing. She preferred to be discovered among her books. I knocked a little harder. I heard a stirring, a murmur, a creak of bed springs. A third knock. A pause, a throat clearing, another pause, then she called me to enter. She was just pulling herself upright in the bed as I went in. She gaped at me without recognition. Her hair was a mess. She had been buried in a sleep that had itself been smothered by an illness. (McEwan 33)

Compared with the opening passage in “The Metamorphosis,” Jeremy’s observations reveal a marked similarity. Both June and Gregor are isolated and unable to move freely due to a pronounced incapacity. Furthermore, Franz Kafka and Ian McEwan draw the readers’ attention to a conspicuous piece of furniture that as well as highlighting the protagonists’ vulnerable position, is directly associated with their immobility. The beds in both works of fiction become the instruments of oppression that incarcerate the protagonists’ bodies not only in the confined space of their rooms, but also in the form they have taken. It ought to be noted that the mentioned items continually force the protagonists to assume a horizontal position, which, as opposed to vertical, seems unnatural. It may thus be argued that both authors attempt to dehumanise their characters by likening them to helpless creatures incapable of leaving their cot-like beds. Moreover, June’s and Gregor’s attachment to the pieces of furniture also reveals their diseased state, a situation clearly identifiable in June’s case as the woman is being hospitalised in a nursing home and overseen by medical staff. Samsa’s physical shape is precarious as well. In addition to a profound disability coupled with a walking impairment, the omniscient narrator draws the readers’ attention to a building visible from Gregor’s window: “on the other side of the street, part of the endless grey-black building – it was a hospital – stood out clearly with its evenly-spaced windows harshly intruding into the façade” (Kafka 15). Undoubtedly, the bleak edifice symbolises the protagonist’s declining health and may be interpreted as a portentous sign of the process of transformation he currently undergoes. Naturally, in order to counterbalance the appearing symptoms of advancing degeneration and counteract the discomforting debility and clumsiness associated with languishing in bed, June and Gregor repeatedly attempt to sit or stand upright. Gregor Samsa, who
roused from a sleep on the day of his transmutation, goes to extraordinary lengths to stand erect and convince himself that the horrid transformation into an insect is but a temporary indisposition. Urged by the family with knocks at the door to leave for work, the protagonist endeavours to leap out of the bed, stand upright and reassert his status as a human being:

There was a loud thud, but it was not really a crash. His fall was slightly muffled by the carpet, and his back was more flexible than Gregor had thought, so the dull thud he made was not noticeable at all. But he had banged his head because he had not held it up carefully enough; he shook it and rubbed it on the floor in fury and pain. [...] While Gregor was stammering all this out, scarcely knowing in his haste what he was saying, he had managed without difficulty – no doubt thanks to the exercises he had already practised in bed – to get close to the chest of drawers, and was now trying to use it to pull himself upright. (Kafka 9-12)

Soon, however, Kafka's protagonist abandons his Herculean efforts to stand erect on the hind legs because the last spindly pair cannot support the shell-shaped thorax. The upshot of the situation is that the protagonist has to return to the previous position, thus reconciling himself to the incontrovertible fact that he has forsaken the human form and become a verminous creature.

Likewise, Mrs. Tremaine also makes an effort to shift her position in bed during Jeremy's visits, partly to face her son-in-law with vestigial authority and make the conversations more bearable, and partly in the hope of concealing the symptoms of the progressing illness. Hard though she tries, June has to restrict herself to sitting upright as she is not capable of standing firmly on her feet, nor will she ever be able to until her demise. It is noteworthy that the narrator openly bemoans June's debility, as if demanding of fate that his mother-in-law's transmutation be reversed: “I resented the fact that she was dying. I was against it, I could not accept it” (McEwan 31). However, on one occasion, perhaps for want of a small triumph and in order to take vicarious pleasure in a surprising success, Jeremy watches a superannuated female trudging across the institutional lawn with the aid of a walking frame. The senile struggles against the wind, strains to conquer her weakness and eventually manages to achieve the destination – a border not far from June's window:

A strong gust could have carried her away. She arrived at a flower bed against a wall and knelt down before her frame, as though at a portable altar. When she was down on the grass on her knees, she manoeuvred the frame to one side, and took from one pocket in her cardigan a tea spoon, and from the other a handful of bulbs. She set about digging holes and pressing the bulbs into them. (McEwan 44)
Nothing can be easier than to demonstrate that the frail woman may be regarded as June’s uncanny simulacrum, if only because she shares a horticultural avocation with Mrs. Tremaine, who is known for a zeal for gardening. In this connection, the scene, recounted from Jeremy’s perspective, not only reveals his filial affection for the substitute mother, but also a growing rebellion against her progressing dehumanisation and frailty. It is worth stressing, though, that despite the fact that the metaphorical content of Jeremy’s depiction might counteract the pervasive transience and offer temporary consolation, it falls grossly short of expectations. Ian McEwan – in a way typical for his mode of writing – lets a glimmer of hope into the novel only to snatch it from the protagonists. The author does not take advantage of the opposition between closed space associated with infirmity and imprisonment in the book, and open space that could potentially offer liberation from the bonds of June’s eerie transformation as well as the imposed restrictions. On the contrary, the presented scene seems to underscore her verminous features, for the elder’s slow progress resembles that of an insect lured by flowers, the walking aid used for moving seems like an additional set of limbs, and the planting of flower bulbs may connote with the frantic activities of an earth-boring dung beetle. That observation seems to be confirmed by a striking parallelism which can be encountered in “Metamorphosis” when Gregor Samsa staggers towards the door to open it:

Gregor slowly pushed himself towards the door with the help of the chair, then let it go and threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it – the round pads on his legs had some sticky substance on them – and stayed there for a moment to recover from his exertions. (Kafka 14)

On the basis of the above citations it is possible to conclude that both novelists utilise physical objects available in the protagonists’ immediate surroundings to provide a gloss on the transforming image of the body. The bed, as an essential item and a point of reference in “Metamorphosis,” is supplemented by a chair that vaguely corresponds to a walking frame in _Black Dogs_. Nonetheless, a surreal image of chair legs or a crutch-like frame performing the function of supernumerary extremities aptly epitomises the uncanny process affecting the characters’ bodies. Both authors appear to deliberately manipulate the mechanics of the transformation by laying much stress on the physicality of the metamorphoses.

Also, another aspect of June’s and Gregor’s transmutations is divulged as the status of the protagonists in the analysed fictions changes into that of entities subordinated to the workings of forces they do not entirely
comprehend. One is able to observe how Kafka’s and McEwan’s characters suddenly become resigned, apathetic and passive, how they lose vitality and will to overcome personal adversities. Further, it ought to be reminded that before the dramatic occurrences, June was an activist, a member of a cycling club and a woman fond of hiking; whereas Gregor, a travelling salesman, is used to commuting and meeting clients across the country on a daily basis. Therefore, their current immobility seems all the more striking, not least because of Mrs. Tremaine’s and Gregor’s routine of drifting in and out of sleep in daytime, which, on mature reflection, makes them resemble inanimate entities, rather than human beings. Jeremy notes: “In repose her face had a chiselled, sepulchral look; it was a statue, a mask carved by a shaman to keep at bay the evil spirit” (McEwan 28). Moreover, in commenting on the outlandish transition from activity to inaction, June Tremaine correlates her habit of dozing fitfully with being completely covered by material: “Apparently these narcoleptic states were numbing and irresistible. It was like having a blanket thrown over your face, she had told me” (McEwan 45). Strikingly, both citations obliquely testify to a cruelly dehumanising aspect of June’s metamorphosis. However, a scene that casts more light on the observation is Samsa’s bizarre conduct that consists in hiding under the sofa in order not to frighten his sister when she enters the room. Unfortunately, the precaution is ineffective because Gregor’s broad thorax is plainly visible from under the bed. Thus, to prevent this “he dragged the linen cloth on his back from the table onto the sofa […] and arranged it so that he was completely covered and so that his sister could not see him even if she bent down” (Kafka 29). In this way the protagonist, now bearing an uncanny resemblance to a small table or a piece of furniture, becomes a mocking epitome of soulless degradation, a phenomenon also relating to Mrs. Tremaine’s, who during the recurrent spells of lifelessness becomes a senseless statue. Franz Kafka additionally supplements this symbolism with the gradual accumulation of useless household objects in Gregor’s room by the family who have to dispose of every redundant item to provide sufficient space for three fastidious lodgers they have recently taken. In the event, the protagonist’s cosy living space is changed into a lumber room, and when Gregor breathes his last, he is found among the clutter by the cleaner who exclaims: “Come and have a look, it’s croaked; it’s lying there dead as a doornail!” (Kafka 52). Surprisingly, as it may seem, Ian McEwan is by far more compassionate towards his protagonist than Franz Kafka, since in Jeremy’s depiction of June’s hospitalisation at Chestnut Reach, the female wants to be found by her
son-in-law among books which she pretends to read, but in fact is not able to
due to recurrent pain and stupor. In effect, she becomes one of the many artefacts
in the collection of texts surrounding her bed. Her mental incapacity
as a human being therefore transforms her into a talking curiosity examined
and interviewed with regular frequency by her son-in-law, an unfulfilled
historian labouring on a memoir. Her status as an object in the nursing
home thus partly stems from Jeremy’s passionate academic interest in June
as a fertile source of information and an open book to read from.

One also ought to take heed of the fact that Mrs. Tremaine’s sudden with-
drawal from life and people shortly after the canine onslaught resembles Gre-
gor’s surreptitious skulking under the sofa. The country retreat in McEwan’s
novel, a dilapidated cabin acquired from a French rustic, is situated near
the place where June clashed with the black dogs. Soon, the woman adopts
the hut as her hermitage where over the span of many years she attempts to
comprehend and explain to herself the overtone of her miraculous survival
against the savagery of two bloodthirsty animals. More relevantly, June’s
seclusion is a symbol of rejection by the closest family, or more specifically,
her husband, who constantly undermines the significance of the occurrence.
Bernard’s ignorance belittles the importance of June’s experience, and with
it leads to her rejection as a credible witness and a trustworthy partner.
Consequently, Mrs. Tremaine’s image of a serious and dependable person
becomes tarnished and grossly disfigured; the female is marginalised and,
in consequence, decides to retreat to a place of exile. That disfiguration is
epitomised in a scene in *Black Dogs* when Jeremy, a few years after his moth-
er-in-law’s demise, visits the family hut in Languedoc in order to undertake
the necessary repairs before winter and reflect on the book he is writing. On
entering the cottage in the midst of the night the narrator has to grope his
way to the fuse box and on the way he encounters with a verminous creature:

*The shadows of the switchboard cupboard bobbed against the wall at my ap-
proach. It looked different. The little wooden handle on its door was longer,
more ornate and set at a new angle. I was two feet away when the ornamentation
resolved itself into the form of a scorpion, fat and yellow, its pincers curved about
the axis of the diagonal, and its chunkily segmented tail just obscuring the handle
beneath. […] I remembered now that years ago we had found a nest of baby
scorpions in the same cupboard. (McEwan 116)*

Remarkably, Jeremy’s skirmish with a representative of “ancient cheli-
cerates” (McEwan 116) echoes distantly June’s violent clash with the black
dogs that took place forty-three years before. Apart from that, however, it
is a reminder of the woman’s impulsive retreat to the cottage after the harrowing experience, an absconding that resembles an animal’s headlong instinctive flight from danger. Also, the image of a scorpion hidden in one of the nooks of the gloomy room may symbolise Mrs. Tremaine’s mental transformation in the confines of her hermitage as well as Bernard’s contempt of her metaphysical turn and all the derisive comments denigrating June’s version of the story.

It should also be noted that June’s and Gregor’s rooms become the places of incarceration and oppression, threatening the protagonists with annihilation. Seen from this perspective, Ian McEwan’s novel engages in a dialogue with Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis,” for it can be claimed that the author of Black Dogs provides a gloss on Kafka’s conception of spatial oppression employed in “Metamorphosis.” Therefore, the Bakhtinian idea of dialogism finds its reflection in a happening that occurs during June and Bernard’s tour of southern Europe in 1946. While waiting at a train station for their connection to Arles, Mr. Tremaine spots a dragonfly and, driven by an impulse, takes the insect into his cupped hands, scurries to June waiting with the luggage on the platform and gets hold of his killing bottle. Naturally, before preparing the instrument and slaying the outsized creature, Bernard hands over the curiosity to June, who objects vehemently to killing it. In the end, however, the woman is duly forced to put the insect in the bottle, which starts one of the first marital squabbles of the Tremaines. Bernard summarises the quarrel in the following way:

Like the best of rows, it moved rapidly from the particular to the general. My attitude to this poor creature was typical of my attitude to most other things, including herself. I was cold, theoretical, arrogant. I never showed any emotion, and I prevented her from showing it. She felt watched, analysed, she was part of my insect collection. All I was interested in was abstraction. I claimed to love “creation”, as she called it, but in fact I wanted to control it, choke the life out of it, label it, arrange it rows. (McEwan 77)

From the citation it emerges that Mr. Tremaine’s account has got a demonstrably Conradian undertone: the mentioned assembly of insects labelled and arranged in rows is suggestive of Lord Jim (1900) and Stein’s substantial collection that is referred to by Marlow as “[c]atacombs of beetles” (Conrad 156). More importantly, Bernard’s entomological hobby metaphorically places June within an assemblage of lifeless creatures stifled to death and added to the grim menagerie that he owns. Undoubtedly, the killing bottle is both an ominous instrument of oppression connected
with death and a ghastly metaphor of Mrs. Tremaine’s situation. Not only is the female compelled to accompany in a procedure she would rather avoid, but also she is symbolically forced to reconcile herself unknowingly to the future confinement. This inhumane imagery finds its full realisation in Jeremy’s portrayal of Chestnut Reach, where his mother-in-law spends her last days:

The oak-effect panelling pressed in on all sides, and the carpet, patterned in kinetic swirls of red and musty yellow, rose up to assault my eye and restrict my breathing. The uncirculated air, held in long-term residence by a system of regulation fire-break door, carried in suspension the accreted flavours of bodies, clothes, perfumes, fried breakfasts. A shortage of oxygen made me yawn; did I have the energy for the visit? (McEwan 28-29)

Clearly, the institutional surroundings have a stupefying effect on the narrator as the space of the nursing home appears to be a macabre fulfilment of the imagery associated with Bernard’s killing bottle. The sturdy glass door seals the rooms hermetically like a tight stopper, thereby approximating the ward to a translucent receptacle. Soon, the rarefied air starts to affect the narrator who is feeble and listless, by which means a motif of sleep is evoked yet again. This image of comatose hibernation pertains to June Tremaine as well, since she is currently being hospitalised as a terminal patient in one of the frowsy rooms. Thus, the metaphor of slumber, incidentally one of the mainsprings in both works of fiction, is tied to the lack of air and death; all the more so because the female protagonist of Black Dogs dies “peacefully in her sleep” (McEwan 62), and Gregor Samsa expires in a dozy swoon at three o’clock in the morning (Kafka 51).

The symbolism of a bottle-like room, in which June contemplates the remains of her life, also constitutes an important part of Kafka’s deathly imagery in the short story. One is able to observe how space in “Metamorphosis” begins to exert a detrimental impact on the beetle-like character who is at once terrified and subdued by it and chooses to continue his existence under the sofa, thus diminishing considerably the amount of room available to him:

turning half-instinctively and feeling a little sheepish, he scuttled under the sofa where, although his back was rather squashed and he could not raise his head, he immediately felt comfortable […] (Kafka 21)

Kafka further develops the motif so that the self-imposed spatial restrictions are merged with breathing complications in the following manner:
He had eaten so much that his body had become rather swollen, and he could hardly breathe in the confined space there. Between brief bouts of suffocation he watched with protruding eyes as his unsuspecting sister swept up with a broom both the remnants of his meal and the food he has not touched [...]. (23)

It is hard to escape the obvious conclusion that a noxious atmosphere in confined space radically affects the protagonist who appears to be a perfect epitome of an insect placed in a killing bottle and sentenced to death by an almighty God entomologist; for it is noteworthy that in McEwan's novel it is Bernard who aspires to the role of the ultimate authority offering elucidation on all matters, whereas in Franz Kafka's story neither Gregor nor the omniscient narrator are capable of explaining the nature of the ongoing process. Also, one is under the impression that Samsa is kept alive not so much because of the leftover food that he is fed on, but rather due to the fact that Grete never omits to air her brother's room while cleaning it:

Scarcely had she come in than she would dash straight to the window without even taking time to close the door, however careful she was at other times to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, hurriedly fling it open as she were almost suffocating, and stand there for a time, however cold it was, taking deep breaths. (Kafka 28)

Apart from bearing powerful testimony to the squalid conditions in the foul-smelling place, the depiction offered by the narrator yet again brings into sharp focus the concept of a room as a closed airless container. It is implied that Grete's regular opening of the windows prolongs her brother's life as it lets more air into the otherwise hermetic space. However, the situation alters fundamentally when the sister takes a job and neither of the parents is fully fit for substituting the girl in tending to Gregor's needs. Thus, when the supply of air appears to be severely depleted, the protagonist breathes his last. Curiously enough, it is not until Samsa dies that the hired cleaner flings the windows open (52).

It is also noteworthy that Gregor Samsa's room has not only the earmarks of a stifling place, but also of a prison cell. Therefore, the protagonist's eerie transformation seems to be accompanied by the transmutation of space:

Often he lay there sleepless through the long nights, just scrabbling at the leather for hours. Or how would make a huge effort to push an armchair up to the window and crawl up to the window-sill, prop himself up on the chair and lean against the window looking out, evidently somehow recalling the feeling of liberation this had once given him. (27)
On closer examination it can be found that the protagonist feels imprisoned both in his room and in the form of an abhorrent insect. His determined attempt at standing erect at the window can thus be perceived as a quiet rebellion against being entrapped in confined space and lodged in a new incarnation. By staring at the view outside, Gregor also intends to achieve a fleeting sense of release from the existential ills as well as find a respite from the lingering sleeplessness. Intriguingly, the symbolism of imprisonment surfaces in “Metamorphosis” with relation to the period of time spent in the room by the protagonist: “the high spacious room in which he was forced to lie flat on the floor intimidated him, though he could not think why – after all he had lived in it for five years” (21). Significantly, the temporal perspective adopted by the narrator coalesces with an image of Gregor’s room transformed into a place of imprisonment. Consequently, the mentioned period of time may symbolise the duration of Samsa’s alleged sentence, which coincides with Mrs. Tremaine’s spell at Chestnut Reach: “Five years on and, June was still alive” (McEwan 30). Furthermore, both authors combine the protagonists’ incarceration with the position in which they are made to lie. Therefore, in order to highlight their status as prisoners, the characters are compelled to assume either prone or supine position during their confinement.

Franz Kafka and Ian McEwan additionally strengthen the symbolism of imprisonment by evoking the imagery connected with closed doors and various procedures applied by the visitors on entering the rooms in both works of fiction. Gregor’s sister, for instance, gets into the habit of peeking at her brother from behind the door standing slightly ajar before entering his room, which emulates a regulation procedure followed by warders in a prison. In *Black Dogs*, the complete seclusion of the inmates at Chestnut Reach is highlighted by the admission procedures required to enter the airtight space of the nursing home. Namely, after crossing the threshold of the sluice-like door and before gaining access to June’s room, Jeremy is asked to put his signature in a visitors’ book.

More importantly, both writers illustrate how their characters’ status in closed space transmutes from voluntary seclusion to enforced imprisonment. On the first leaves of “Metamorphosis” one finds an intriguing fragment relating to Gregor’s predilection for isolating himself from people:

[H]is sister whispered: ‘Gregor, open the door, I beseech you.’ But Gregor had no intention of letting her in; on the contrary, he congratulated himself on the cautious habit he had acquired while travelling of locking all doors at night, even when he was at home. (Kafka 6)
Yet, Samsa’s misanthropy, hitherto identified with safety, evolves into a dire predicament.

Earlier, when the doors were locked, they had all wanted to come in to his room; now that he had unlocked one door and the others had been opened in the course of the day, no one came, and moreover the keys were in the other side of the door. (21)

As can be observed, Gregor’s detachment develops into a rejection by the family members who eschew contact with the protagonist in favour of preoccupation with their current affairs. Samsa is in effect marginalised and eliminated from the community of people who, in addition, ostracise and separate him physically. This, in turn, is symbolised by the key situated in the lock, an instrument used for locking Gregor in his room. Consequently, the protagonist is rarely allowed out of his cell-like room, much less given permission to spend time out of doors.

June Tremaine’s situation uncannily emulates Gregor’s since the former willingly chooses to devote herself to intellectual meditations in seclusion in the mountains, thereby shutting herself away. The female, who similarly to Samsa, shows misanthropic inclinations, becomes a recluse in a remote cottage. Later, however, her exile in France changes into detention at Chestnut Reach, which she accepts with dignity but not without objection. “In the early days she was marked down as a difficult patient. There was even talk of Chestnut Reach being unable to continue with her” (McEwan 35). In addition to implying June’s disaffection with being confined in the nursing home, the narrator makes a mention of the impossibility of leaving the building by the patient by saying that “[s]he no longer walked the neglected footpath through the woods to the nearest village” (31). Naturally, it is June’s illness, not institutional locks, that precipitate her into incarceration, but still the fact remains that Mrs. Tremaine’s stay at Chestnut Reach bears likeness to imprisonment.

One of the most crucial factors accompanying and even determining Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis is space. The mutability of the protagonist’s surroundings intensifies the after-effects of Gregor’s transformation as well as determining his behaviour. From a place where the protagonist reposes after returning from work, Gregor’s room suddenly changes into a seclusion cell and a lair of a repugnant beetle. The fact that Kafka’s character feels dismayed at the cavernous size of the place he inhabits does not only stem from his diminutive stature, but also from a new quality that typifies it: the uncanny. The term, profoundly influenced by Sigmund Freud’s article
“Das Unheimliche” (“The Uncanny” 1919), may be defined as the apparently strange understood as a disguised representation of what is in fact familiar (Balick 346). In the paper the father of psychoanalysis probes the duality encoded in the uncanny in the following way:

In general we are reminded that the word ‘heimlich’ is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. (Freud 224-225)

Such is Gregor’s perception of reality: confused and ambivalent, conscious yet inaccurate. A dichotomy that emulates the protagonist’s schizophrenic awareness of the body and precipitates the dissociation of his personality. Initially, Gregor is convinced that his transformation is a temporary indisposition and ascribes it to “a severe cold – an occupational illness of travelling salesmen” (Kafka 6). Soon, however, the supposition is not confirmed and instead Samsa adopts two discrepant sets of ideas as regards his current state and uses them interchangeably in the hope that one will explain the other. The upshot of this is that the protagonist resembles, by turns, an animal and a human being. He wants to stand erect but his rickety legs cannot support the broad body. He strives to explain the situation to the discombobulated family and his superior, but all he emits is a soliloquy of inarticulate mumble. He crosses the threshold of his room to listen to Grete playing the violin in the living room, but is cast out by his father who does not see a son in him anymore.

June Tremaine, too, is affected by the uncanny, for her notion of space and body appears to be disfigured. At first, when the female is forced by the illness to return from France, she stays at Bernard’s. Then, however, her London flat is sold and a removal to the nursing home is arranged. Curiously, June’s new place of residence is mostly referred to as Chestnut Reach, a name that suggests a stately country mansion, rather than a hospice. The narrator confirms that ambiguity commenting that “[t]he intended atmosphere was that of a country retreat; the achieved effect was that of an overgrown bed and breakfast” (McEwan 29). What is more, June seems to embrace the idea of Chestnut Reach as her new substitute home because “[s]he had no wish to move out, back into the world. She claimed that her life was usefully simplified, and that her isolation in a house of TV watchers suited her, even did her good” (31). June, in a similar way to Gregor Samsa, is self-contradictory when referring to her physical appearance. On the one hand, Mrs. Tremaine seems to be fully aware of her condition because she understands
that she is being hospitalised, but on the other, she employs rather bizarre comparisons concerning her physicality, thereby undermining her sound judgement and sanity. An instance of such demented conduct can be found during Jeremy’s visit when the caring son-in-law fetches the patient a bag of groceries and the latter asks in a somewhat flirtatious tone: “Just what is it that’s been giving me this craving for lychees? Do you think I could be pregnant?” (34). Undoubtedly, June Tremaine’s perception of her body is distorted because she is not expecting a child. Moreover, it seems that June does not entirely comprehend that her physical condition is not a consequence of falling pregnant, but developing cancer.

However, one has sound grounds for asserting that June’s odd remarks are not a manifestation of progressing dementia, but rather a logical attempt to come to terms with the uncanny manifesting itself in her body. It therefore transpires that the protagonist perceives her present state as a disguised manifestation of the well-known and logically resorts to indelible mental images from her own experience in order to comprehend the uncanny. Consequently, an image of pregnancy recalled in relation to June’s incapacitating debility is merged into a new metaphor of being, for in fact both states, pregnancy and lethal illness are known to transform a woman’s body.

In respect of the nature of the metamorphoses described by Franz Kafka and Ian McEwan, an intriguing conclusion can be derived from their comparison. While it is true that the uncanny transformations of June Tremaine and Gregor Samsa are associated with insect imagery, the fact remains that the depictions may be perceived as a metaphor of senility. Samsa’s problems, for example, begin when he endeavours to climb out of bed:

> It was a simple matter to remove the bed cover; he only needed to expand a little and it just slid off. But then things became more difficult, especially because he was so unusually broad. He would have needed hands and arms to get himself upright; but instead he only had all these little legs which continually waved about in different directions, and in any case he was unable to control them. (Kafka 6-7)

The description of Gregor’s morning struggle with physical infirmity closely resembles the clumsiness of old age. Kafka additionally devotes particular attention to the protagonist’s numerous bandy legs that are unable to perform the proper function. Further, it ought to be noted that Samsa’s disfigurement connotes with senile contortion, and his spindly legs with withered limbs of an elderly person. Kafka’s recurrent concentration on Gregor’s dysfunctional legs comes into focus again when the dismayed protagonist is attracted by the food left near the door by Grete:
Moving slowly and awkwardly with the help of his feelers, which he was only now beginning to appreciate, he pushed himself towards the door to see what was going on there. His left side felt like long unpleasantly tight scar, and he was forced to hobble on his two rows of legs. Moreover, one of his legs had been injured during the events of that morning – it was almost miraculous that only one had been hurt – and trailed lifelessly behind him. (20)

It is reasonable to assume that Gregor's numerous stalks ought to facilitate his movements, but even so they seem numb and render the protagonist incapable of walking properly. Also, the legs have associations with subsidiary appendages or crutches that instead of setting Gregor's thorax in motion, reduce his pace to a crawl. This, in turn, corresponds to a scene from *Black Dogs* that features an elderly woman making headway with the help of a walking frame whom Jeremy observes from June's window. The elder traversing a lawn at Chestnut Reach pushes a walking frame in front of her as though the lifeless instrument were impeding her progress. Clearly, the woman outside may be regarded as June's simulacrum. It may thus be claimed that the casement in Mrs. Tremaine's room symbolises a mirror that reflects the woman's current situation.

Compared with Kafka, Ian McEwan is less blunt in depicting June's decrepitude; if only because his narrator is genuinely sympathetic towards his mother-in-law. Instead, Jeremy starts careful deliberations on the subject of age:

She was sixty-seven. At forty I had just reached the age myself when one begins to differentiate between the stages of later life. There had been a time when I would have regarded it as plainly untragic to be ill and dying in your late sixties, hardly worth struggling against or complaining about. You're old, you die. (McEwan 31)

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the narrator considers June's debility as a powerful metaphor of senility, a stage in life that she has entered prematurely. The female protagonist is weak, emaciated and unable to move by herself, and like Gregor, dependent on others. Yet, even at this stage the author of *Black Dogs* introduces an important component characterising senescence: inertia and powerlessness. McEwan elaborates on senility in a superb evocation of helplessness:

Only when she had all that could she begin to remember me. Beyond her window, anxious to prompt her, a horse chestnut was waving its limbs. Perhaps it succeeded only in confusing her further, for today she was taking longer to come to. (33)
The narrator centres his account on June’s dementia, yet another characteristic symptom connected with old age which deepens a sense of transience in the novel. What also attracts a reader’s attention is the massive chestnut characterised in anthropomorphic terms: its gnarled boughs and branches resemble an elder’s contorted fingers, arms and legs. Moreover, in the depiction there re-emerges a symbol of window as a mirror: the tree is clearly visible from June’s window and therefore the view outside may metaphorically refer to the female’s disabling condition. Not only is the massive chestnut fixed in its place like the bedridden June is rooted to her bed, but also its disfigured limbs can be treated as a reflection of the woman’s distorted physicality. In fact, it could be reasonably argued that the horse chestnut resembles a gargantuan insect with conspicuous extremities and forms an association with June’s transmutation.

In “Metamorphosis,” the imagery of senility is enriched by the deterioration of sight as another common symptom of ageing that troubles Gregor:

For in fact his sight was deteriorating by the day; even things no great distance away he could see less and less distinctly, and the hospital he had looked at all too often and cursed the sight of it – that he could not see at all now. (Kafka 27-28)

Franz Kafka appears to amalgamate the loss of sight with a view of the hospital, which not only implies that the affliction is a pathological state, but also that Gregor’s supposed senility ought to be treated as a serious condition. This imagery is stressed by the fact that Gregor remains active in the evenings and at night, a phenomenon relatively common among the representatives of Coleoptera. Therefore, he is forced to abandon the sense of sight in favour of touch so as not to lose direction. Accordingly, the protagonist takes advantage of the antennae he is possessed of and starts to resemble a blind senile feeling his way along with a white cane. Lastly, the narrator complements Samsa’s failing eyesight with a radical rearrangement of the furniture in his room. Although the verminous protagonist is practically blind, he is capable of overhearing Grete’s lively conversation with his mother about clearing his room of all the unnecessary objects:

In the discussions about Gregor with her parents she had become accustomed, not without some justification it must be said, to act as the expert in the matter, so on this occasion too her mother’s advice was sufficient to make her insist on clearing out not only the chest of drawers and the desk, which was all she had intended at first, but also all the other furniture with the exception of the indispensable sofa. (32)
Soon the plan is implemented and Samsa’s room is stripped bare of almost every object and piece of furniture it previously contained. Obviously, Grete’s motivation behind the initiative is to provide more space as well as prevent Gregor from running into unseen obstacles, but the symbolic overtone of the enterprise is far from the intended objective. One might with equal justice argue that the stark interior of the room epitomises Samsa’s visual perception of the surroundings, his empty vision of the world; for the removed objects are the ones, which he probably would not see anyway. Deprived of most of his possessions, Gregor Samsa becomes a walking testimony of indifference, a senile recluse and an eyeless worm that pricks the conscience of those who do not see a human being in him.

June Tremaine’s dementia compounded with narcoleptic dozes can also be taken for a symptom of senility. Even though that the female is sixty-seven, she behaves as though she were much older. On one of his repeated visits at Chestnut Reach, Jeremy observes how June’s “eyelids were flickering, and in the time it took to rescue the cup and saucer from her drooping hand and set it down on the locker she was asleep” (McEwan 45). Asked for reflections on the patient’s state, the doctor succinctly states: “She’s ill […] and she’s tired” (45). The physician’s utterance indicates lassitude as a possible cause of June’s fitful naps, but more importantly associates her general condition with one of the last stages in life at which one is resigned and world-weary.

Furthermore, Mrs. Tremaine’s dementia to a degree emulates Gregor Samsa’s blindness because every time the former wakes, she seems not to recognise Jeremy and consequently needs time to collect her thoughts to identify the son-in-law. In a scene with the horse chestnut, the narrator strives to put June on the right track and help her overcome the transitory loss of awareness, Yet, her vacant stare and a short period of time before the sudden revelation momentarily resembles blindness. Hence the “books and several sheets of blank paper” (33) strewn on the woman’s bed symbolically conglomerating mental incapacity with blindness. The fact of the matter is that June only pretends to read the volumes, and the empty leaves that will never be filled allude to her mental blindness in the moments of weakness. This encompassing stupefaction is also reflected by the décor of June Tremaine’s room: a small white-walled space with scant furniture. Similarly to Gregor’s, the female’s room looks rather austere. June apparently ignores that she is deprived of most of her possessions, for it seems that she has started to perceive differently the physical reality around her. Therefore, it can be claimed that the female has forsaken the world of
objects and focused her perceptive capacity solely on the realm of ideas. Incidentally, in addition to labouring on a book that she intends to complete before dying, Mrs. Tremaine is the author of “Ten Meditations” (30), a work influenced by the metaphysical thought. In the light of the presented arguments it transpires that June herself is reduced to an idea of a decrepit senile who is not perceived as a human being, but as a form of existence. Her husband Bernard classifies her as still another subspecies in his collection, whereas for Jeremy the eccentric mother-in-law is a source of information and an enthralling subject to study.

In is noteworthy that the symbolism of senility not only refers to June Tremaine and Gregor Samsa, but also to other characters in “Metamorphosis” and Black Dogs. Suffice it to mention Herr Samsa, Gregor’s father, who is affected by his son’s unexpected transformation to such an extent that in the evenings after a hard day’s work he ensconces himself in a chair and refuses to budge until late. “Sometimes his father would wake up and, as if unaware that he had been asleep, say to his wife: ‘What a long time you’ve spent sewing again today!’ and drop off to sleep again at once” (Kafka 39). It is beyond doubt that Herr Samsa’s behaviour parallels June Tremaine’s dementia, which partly confirms that her affliction is symptomatic of advanced age. McEwan’s protagonist is also as stubborn and difficult as Gregor’s father whose truculence and intransigence is hardly tolerable. The narrator in “Metamorphosis” describes the process of putting the elder to bed in the following words:

Only when the two women seized him under the arms would he open his eyes, look at each of them in turn and say: ‘What a life. So this is the peace and quiet of my old age.’ And supported by the two women, he would struggle to his feet as he were a great burden to himself […]. (39)

As can be seen from the excerpt, the author repeats a motif of sleep and merges it with senile awkwardness. This helplessness resurfaces in Black Dogs not only in connection with June Tremaine’s debility, but also her son-in-law who longs to be confined at Chestnut Reach. The narrator proclaims: “I could as easily have passed until I found an empty room and a bed made up. I would slip between the institutional sheets” (McEwan 29). Intriguingly, Jeremy’s innocuous reflection conceals a morbid fascination with enfeeblement and decrepitude. One ought to ask whether the male visits the nursing home out of affection for June or unwholesome interest in the infirmity of the patients confined to their beds. Given the fact that the author of “Metamorphosis” also foregrounds mutilation, senile degeneration and seclusion,
it can be inferred that McEwan's fascination with the corruption of the body and mind is partly inspired by Kafka's writings.

From the comparative analysis of “Metamorphosis” and Black Dogs it emerges that Franz Kafka's short story wields an enduring influence on the artistic imagination of contemporary writers. The surreal and at once palpable quality of the modernist text lies in the plasticity of Gregor Sam-

sa's hideous transformation, in the universality of human suffering and in one of the most repulsive human vices: a lack of compassion. Ironically, June's and Gregor's metamorphoses are not so much devised to question their humanity as to test the sensitivity of the people around them. In this connection it can be argued that the disfigured bodies of the protagonists in both works of fiction are not haunting reflections of how they perceive themselves, but rather of how they are regarded by their parents, spouses, siblings and employers.

In the closing paragraph of Black Dogs, a reappraisal of June's harrowing experience that returns to her regularly in the form of a vision “on the retina in the giddy seconds before sleep” (McEwan 174), Jeremy concludes that the two canines, “black stains in the grey of the dawn, fading as they move into the foothills of the mountains […] will return to haunt us, somewhere in Europe, in another time” (174). While it is true that the narrator's declaration stresses the threat of evil which constantly endangers the mankind and manifests itself in the form of wars, military conflicts and genocides, the fact remains that the feral dogs eternally prowling the tranquil landscape of the Languedoc symbolise the humanity's guilty conscience. In Black Dogs, McEwan seems to assert that it is our fellow humans, friends and neighbours who are capable of inflicting the worst atrocities on others. Remarkably, June's misadventure in France may be interpreted as a manifestation of the author's oblique remark because in fact the Tremaines tour Europe in 1946 as volunteers and work briefly for a charity organisation in Italy in expiation, it later transpires, for not being directly involved in the liberation of Europe from the Nazi occupation.

Thirty-five years later the shadow of collective guilt still looms large over the Tremaines. Jeremy and June's daughter Jenny, who sojourn in Lublin while touring Poland in October 1981, visit the Majdanek concentration camp. To their great disappointment, on a sign at the camp's entrance they discover that the communist propaganda has excluded the Jews as victims of the German genocide. The downcast Jenny comments: “No mention of the Jews. It still goes on. And it's official.’ Then she added, more to herself,
‘The black dogs’” (McEwan 109-110). Miss Tremaine’s discovery is simultaneously a damning indictment on the Nazis and a grim proclamation of the universal guilt referring to all those who are hostile and unsympathetic to others. The dogs following her across Europe thus represent the guilty conscience of the indifferent, a shame that will haunt us wherever we may roam.

Works Cited


THE UNCANNY
Although *uncanny* is a sixteenth-century borrowing from Scottish, the word became the object of interest of literary criticism at the beginning of twentieth century due to a debate between two German scholars, Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud. The first to present his opinion was Jentsch, who in 1906 published “On the Psychology of the Uncanny.” The paper refuses to define the *uncanny* but instead, presents an array of situations likely to provoke a “lack of orientation,” resulting from the combined impression of being “not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situation concerned,” and the recognition that “the thing is or at least seems […] foreign” (2). Such impressions may, according to Jentsch, result from two possible situations:

1. when we encounter something of which we have no prior experience, and which is, therefore, recognised as a compound of “new/foreign/hostile” (4);
2. when we discover that what we have learnt to perceive as “old/known/familiar” (4) might be merely a veil hiding some mystery, which destroys the inherited comfortable familiarity and replaces it with suspicion accompanied by a “feeling of unease” (10).

Due to the predominantly intellectual and rational nature of Jentsch’s classification of the *uncanny*, it is obviously expected to disappear once the person experiencing it manages to work out a satisfying understanding of the uncanny phenomenon.
In contrast to Jentsch’s quite cautious approach, Freud’s “The Uncanny” (1919) is largely a one-sided advertisement for the psychoanalytic method of exegesis. Though he pretends circumspection, excusing himself for not having sufficient access to academic resources due to WWI, Freud takes advantage of the situation to present a largely essentialist argument. The text analyses a wide and diverse range of evidence. Freud consults foreign tongues’ equivalents of the *uncanny* in German, i.e. *unheimlich*, assembles and discusses the catalogue of meanings attributed to the word in German together with their etymology and, finally, analyses a number of literary works whose compositions are believed to exploit this phenomenon. However, a critical look at the structure of his argument reveals that all this richness, in fact, revolves round a certain reading of one of the meanings of *unheimlich*, which Freud believes to be pivotal, namely “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud 930). The author claims that he has reached this interpretation by inferring “the unknown nature of the uncanny” (930) from what could be found following two parallel paths of investigation – one consisting in studying “what meaning has come to be attached to the word […] in the course of its history” (930), and the other in analysing “all those properties of persons, things, sense impressions, experiences and situations which arouse […] the feeling” (930).

However, no matter how impartial Freud’s investigation is, his handling of the argument is far from that. The foreign terminology is critically reviewed against what may be judged as a clear preconception of “this particular shade of what is frightening” (931) and their incongruence simply brushed aside with a barely expressed suggestion that it “[t]herefore” (931) justifies seeking a solution in German. The analysis of the meaning and etymology of *unheimlich* is conducted through the thesis that its lexical deep structure derives its identity from the opposition of *heimlich*, i.e. “‘homelike,’ ‘belonging to the house’” (934) and its direct negation in the form of *unheimlich*, the fragments judged by the author as answering his needs, “helpfully” highlighted for the reader by italics. The conclusion of his investigation is that the intuited meaning of the *unheimlich* is a result of evolution of the meaning of “*heimlich* […] which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*” – the latter declared to thus become “in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*” (934), combined with an observation attributed to Friedrich Schelling that “everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (934).
This seemingly tentative standpoint, leaving the reader with just the author’s wink towards certain meanings selected at his discretion, actually frames the analyses of a number of works of German Romantic masters of fantastic terror narratives which follow and, in a way, turn the discussion on the nature of the uncanny into an advertisement for psychoanalysis as the only natural explanation of what is intriguing in these disquieting tales. Since Freud’s interpretation only juggles his own reading of unheimlich with the elements of his own psychoanalytic theory, ignoring practically all the other possible aesthetic and historical considerations, one should not be surprised that the conclusions designate the uncanny as the effect of mechanisms discovered by psychoanalysis, which demonstrate “why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche [‘homely’] into its opposite, das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something familiar and old–established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (944).1 Characteristic of this method of exegesis is the warning2 to the possible critics of his interpretation of The Sandman, a fantastic tale by E. T. A. Hoffmann, as merely a symbolic exemplification of the operation of the castration fear working within the Oedipal complex. Freud assembles a list of several alleged regularities that he discerns in the composition of the tale and concludes: “Things like these and many more seem arbitrary and meaningless in the story so long as we deny all connection between fears about the eye and castration; but they

1 The secret of the apparent ambiguity of das Unheimliche, denoting opposite notions at the same time, is explained by Georg Grzyb in his “W jakim stopniu ‘das Unheimliche’ może być ‘heimlich’? Kilka semantycznych uwag” [To What Extent Can ‘das Unheimlich’ Be ‘heimlich.’ A Few Semantic Remarks]. The fact that the homely/homelike and unhomely/unhomelike may be used (in different contexts) to denote both similar and opposite notions, oscillating between ‘familiar’ and ‘strange,’ is explained as an effect of difference of perspective upon a phenomenon of remaining at home: if it is viewed by one of the insiders, what is homely/homelike is familiar, safe; when, by someone residing outside and excluded from the homely/homelike circle, the same thing may turn strange, alarming, unsettling. In consequence, the positive notion belonging to one perspective (e.g. canny/familiar) comes close in meaning to the negative form (uncanny/unfamiliar) belonging to the other. If Grzyb’s explanation is correct, Freud’s interpretation, which ignores the consequences of the difference of perspective and which views the uncanny as the return of something that was once familiar, then repressed, and now coming back to us, is founded upon scientific fiction.

2 Expressing admonition for a potential critic, Freud uses a very strong language. He warns that he “would not recommend any opponent of the psychoanalytic view to select precisely the story of the Sand-Man upon which to build his case that morbid anxiety about the eyes has nothing to do with the castration complex” (938).
become intelligible as soon as we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is awaited” (938). The appended footnote presents a detailed interpretation of the tale that is more overtly psychoanalytical and more arbitrary still.³ Professing academic objectivity, Freud admits that he is aware of numerous cases in which his explanation fails to work convincingly, but he immediately solves this crisis by introducing a distinction between the uncanny “that we actually experience” and “the uncanny that we merely picture or read about” (948) – no need to add that in the realm of real experience it is the psychoanalytic method that he believes “fits in perfectly” and “without exception” (948).

Thus, an indispensable element of the architecture of legitimacy that Freud builds for his theoretical speculations is the analysis of the morphology and etymology of the word *unheimlich*. However, as demonstrated by Mark Falkenberg in *Rethinking the Uncanny in Hoffmann and Tieck*, the strength of this foundation is largely rhetorical fiction. According to Falkenberg, “Freud’s representation of ‘unheimlich’ is at odds with the more general, colloquial meaning of the word in German” (41). His analyses are also guilty of misrepresentation (47) and “simplification” (52). Meanwhile, Schelling’s views, with whose authority Freud fortifies his speculations, are actually “misinterpreted” (60) to suit psychoanalytic interpretation. Acknowledging Freud’s explanation to be “excellent […] for a certain number of cases” (17), Falkenberg deplores the fact that these cases have been since made the “benchmark for what qualifies as uncanny” (17), which, consequently, “has led to a restrictive reading of Romantic prose as only a dramatization of repression” (22).

However, the value of *Rethinking the Uncanny in Hoffmann and Tieck* lies not only in restoring the right proportions to Freud’s concept, but also, by reopening the question of the nature of the uncanny, in legitimizing the return

³ Although the note at first attempts to imitate a structure of a causal argument, Freud’s patience quickly evaporates, leaving psychoanalytic jargon as the only claim to scientific legitimacy of the increasingly bolder and more arbitrary opinions, apparently ready to perceive everything as the corroboration of psychoanalytic reduction, which justifies interpreting an automatic doll, Olympia as “nothing else than a materialization of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude to his father in his infancy […] a dissociated complex of Nathaniel’s which confronts him as a person, and Nathaniel’s enslavement to this complex is expressed in his senseless obsessive love for” her (939). Since Olympia is not a figment of a deranged brain but a real figure perceived and critically observed by Nathaniel’s friends, the reader of “The Uncanny” is at a loss as to what the object of Freud’s analysis is – is *The Sandman* interpreted as a return of the repressed to destroy its central figure or the evidence of such return to betray symbolically its author, E. T. A. Hoffmann.
to certain examples of the uncanny in which the psychoanalytic apparatus appears to fail. One such case is Herman Melville's mysterious scrivener, Bartleby, whose tactics of clearly deliberate uncanny social catatonia seem to derive their justification from (to employ Kantian discrimination from *Introduction to Critique of Pure Reason*) transcendent rather than transcendental considerations, i.e. from discoveries in the noumenal reality rather than in the subconscious structures controlling perception, which psychoanalysis might claim to be able to explain.

The demonstration of this alternative type of the uncanny, more in keeping with the interests of the times that created Melville's imagination, may be found in the fragment of Schelling's *Philosophie der Mythologie* quoted in “The Uncanny.” Accommodating the long paragraph of the original to the structure of his argument, Freud clips it to a short though cryptic definition of the uncanny: “‘Unheimlich’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained […] secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in Freud 933).

He thus supports his view that the uncanny is produced by the return of some repressed experience. As it is demonstrated by Falkenberg (58), Freud misunderstood Schelling's intentions. In reality, the fragment of *Philosophie der Mythologie* cited in “The Uncanny” discusses the shape and evolution of Greek mythology as a form of recognition of the need for intellectual mediation through religion or rational philosophy between man and the irreducible mysteriousness of reality (Marszałek 65-67).

The German philosopher suggests that “the pure sky,” which apparently stands for the intellectual clarity characteristic for Homeric world “cleared above Greece” only due to Homer's success in “vanquishing […] the dark and darkening power” of what Schelling enigmatically calls “all that was supposed to have remained secret, in concealment, in latency, and has become visible” (qtd. in Falkenberg 58). Schelling maintains that this “dark and darkening power” gives the world an uncanny aspect. Homer solved the problem by “banishing” this “uncanny

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4 “The world of gods created by Homer silently contains a sphere of mystery within itself, a world that has been erected over a mystery, which can be compared to an abyss. This abyss is covered as if by flowers by the world of gods […] Greece has a Homer precisely because it has mysteries. He was successful in vanquishing this principle of the past, which still reigned in the Oriental systems, and banishing it to the inside, the secret, and the mystery (from which it had originally evolved). The pure sky that hovers above Homer's works cleared above Greece only after the dark and darkening power of this uncanny principle (uncanny being all that was supposed to have remained secret, in concealment, in latency, and has become visible) – this ether, which expands above the world of Homer, could do so only after the power of the uncanny principle, which governed the earlier religions, was banished into mystery” (qtd. in Falkenberg 58).
principle” into a “mystery” and then concealing the mystery in the heart of its vision of reality (58). In consequence, “[t]he world of gods created by Homer silently contains a sphere of mystery within itself, […] a mystery, which can be compared to an abyss” (58). Homeric myths contain the power of this abyss to darken the world by covering it “as if by flowers by the world of gods” (58).

Thus, instead of prefiguring transcendental psychoanalysis, Schelling discusses the relation between the quality of a given culture and its ability to capture and absorb the mysteriousness of reality in a conceptually tangible network of some sort of intercessional structure – success clears the skies, failure leaves the world in the dark.

If the invention of mediating structures like religion banished the ineffable mysteriousness from perceived reality, the critical rethinking of the claims of metaphysics in the spirit of the Enlightenment rational scepticism inevitably brought it back. One, therefore, should not perhaps be surprised that it is in the second half of the eighteenth century that the formerly down-to-earth meaning of uncanny as mischievous, malicious, careless, unreliable, according to the OED, was enriched with references to the supernatural, though the kind that “does not ‘seem to come in God’s name’” (Royle 20). Thus, as observed by Terry Castle, the uncanny in the modern sense was invented in the Enlightenment (Royle 22) and handed down to Romanticism through such cultural phenomena as Gothic fiction.

As stated above, Jentsch recognises the capacity of reality to turn uncanny when one realises that what one believes he understands in fact works differently, like the discovery that the movement of the sun across the sky is only an illusion. Though this aspect of his views resembles Schelling’s observations, the similarity turns largely superficial when looked upon closer. Jentsch describes the relation between the phenomenon producing the uncanny impression and what it refers to in terms of narrowly taken semiosis, i.e. the signifying pointing to a certain more or less correctly identified signified. In the case of Schelling, the relation is fundamentally different – reality may turn uncanny because, like the Romantic symbol, it reveals and partakes in the inexhaustible mysteriousness behind. Paraphrasing Goethe’s seminal definition, as the particular represents the universal in the symbol, Schelling’s visible reality may reveal what it hides “as a living and momentary revelation of the inscrutable” which, in consequence of its nature, is bound to “remain eternally and infinitely active and inaccessible […] in [its] […] image, […] and even if expressed in all languages would still remain inexpressible” (qtd. in Halmi 1).
The earliest recorded encounter of Herman Melville with the uncanny can be found as early as in his first novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. The central character and narrator is detained in a village of reputed cannibals whom, however, he finds quite peaceful and humane. The delusive monismy of this pastoral vision is exploded when he discovers with a shudder that certain parcels hanging among others under the roof of the chief Marheyo's hut contain dried up heads, one of them apparently of a white man (Melville *Typee*... 269-270). The resulting alarm is underscored with an experience akin to the afore-mentioned type of Jentsch's concept of the uncanny – he has been reminded that under the apparent meaning of reality may all the time have been hiding another and a more sinister meaning. What is characteristic, the cause of alarm is not his discovery that reality cannot be interpreted, but that he may have made a mistake in choosing from among possible and quite definite meanings.

The evolution towards Melville's mature views takes him beyond this point in his third novel, *Mardi, and a Voyage Thither*, in which he makes one of his characters express the opinion that “things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative, conceits of the fancy” (Melville *Mardi*... 283-284), and that the question of what truth is “is more final than any answer” (284). By the time he finishes *Moby-Dick: or, the Whale*, Melville develops a vision of the nature of reality similar to that of Schelling in the fragment quoted above (additionally, like in Schelling’s case, it is difficult to say if the object of description is the reality or the perception of reality). In chapter 23, “The Lee Shore,” Melville exploits the image of a storm battered ship being pushed by the “wildest winds of heaven and earth” (Melville *Moby-Dick* 97) towards a dangerous shore in its lee. Recognising its symbolic potential, Melville pictures it as a parallel to the situation of “all deep, earnest thinking” (97). Claiming that “the highest truth” resides in “landlessness alone,” that it is “shoreless, indefinite as God,” he suggests that the shore should be regarded as “treacherous, slavish” (97). In consequence, he admonishes the soul to “keep the open independence of her sea” because “better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety” (97). Thus, like Schelling before him, Melville regards the natural human understanding of reality as underlain by the element that defies human perception, since it is as fluid, i.e. shapeless, indefinite, infinite. However, though he shares Schelling’s recognition of it as destructive and mortally dangerous, instead of advocating hiding it behind a flowery pattern, he sings the apotheosis of those who prefer to confront
this unfathomable element even at the cost of perishing rather than “worm-
like [...] craven crawl to land” (97).

Not all the characters whom Melville makes confront this abysmal element behind our perception choose, like Babalanja, Ahab or Ishmael, to become what, in a letter to Evert Duyckinck on March 3, 1849, he calls “thought-divers” (Leyda I 292) – there are also figures who prove the sound-
ess of Schelling’s warning of the consequences of unveiling the dark, uncan-
ny principle lurking in the heart of the flowery perception of reality. These characters, for example, Pip, a Pequod cabin boy, Benito Cereno, the captain of San Dominick, or Bartleby, the scrivener, were clearly pushed against their will to look behind the veil. They returned to this world, to quote again from the above letter, with “blood-shot eyes” (292), seriously incapacitated.

If we compare their experiences, it seems that what was revealed to them was man’s fundamental individual solitude vis-à-vis inhuman indifference and the fluidity of the substance of which the world is made. Pip experienced this when he was left alone in the midst of the indifferent ocean; Benito Cereno, when confronted with an overturning of his world by what he re-
garded as victorious, sneering evil; Bartleby, in the Dead Letter Office, where he could glimpse the futility of human hopes and miseries in confrontation with the cold indifference of life.

It is not from the start that Bartleby is classified as uncanny, i.e. as associated with the supernatural mystery but not of God’s origin. At first, he is recognised as unusual but still possible to pigeonhole – “pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn” (Melville “Bartleby” 19). This first impression, however, does not last very long. During the first confrontation with him about his refusal to participate in verifying copies, the narrator finds his employee not “ordinarily human” (21). He gradually realises that there is “something about Bartleby” (21) capable of disarm-
ing him “strangely,” and touching and disconcerting in a manner that he admits is “wonderful” (21). With time, as his experiences accumulate, he gradually slips into the habit of referring to his employee with terms bordering metaphysics: “ghost” (25), “apparition” (26), “cadaverous” (27), “inscrutable” (35), “incubus” (38). While thinking of him, he “strangely [feels] something superstitious knocking at [his] heart” (30). The narra-
tor’s emotions undergo a characteristic transformation – when he tries to reconstruct Bartleby’s situation and feelings, he first experiences “pure melancholy and sincerest pity” (29), but when he has let his imagination practice this empathy for a while, his “melancholy merge[s] into fear, that pity into repulsion” (29).
At the same time, though the scrivener is recognised as obviously out of the ordinary, he seems to be uncanny rather than bizarre or outlandish because his oddity infects rather than estranges. Having remained within Bartleby’s sphere of influence, the narrator trembles (31) to discover that the scrivener has “seriously affected” him and his clerks “in a mental way” (31) which he does not hesitate to call “aberration” (31) – Bartleby has managed, in some degree, to turn “the tongues, if not the heads” (31) of all in the office. It is a kind of “wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener” has over his employer, and “from which ascendancy, for all [his] chafing, [he can] not completely escape” (35). Additionally, in keeping with the nature of Schelling’s observation on the contrast between the uncanny and religion, the moment when he fully realises the peculiarity of Bartleby’s situation, the narrator finds himself “disqualified […] for a time from church-going” (29).

At the peak of his dilemma with Bartleby, the narrator concludes that his employee is a “victim” of some malady of the soul, and that the “disorder” from which he suffers is “innate and incurable” (29). Although, as attested to by the events that follow, he was correct to see Bartleby as doomed, his conjecture that this condition has always been his nature clearly alters in consequence of what happens next, and a rumour that reaches him about Bartleby’s prior employment in the Dead Letter Office. At the end of his tale, he ventures a guarded suggestion that what he has discovered in his employee is, therefore, not his nature but a result of a certain proneness to “a pallid hopelessness” (45) combined with what he discovered about the human condition in the Dead Letter Office. If, therefore, it is correct to conclude that the uncanny peculiarities of Bartleby’s character were acquired in contact with something of a like nature, the narrator unwittingly admits that Bartleby is not only a source but perhaps also a victim of the uncanny.

In American literature contemporary to Melville there is one work that clearly presents an experience similar to the one round which revolves the world of Bartleby, the Scrivener – it is a short story by Melville’s friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Minister’s Black Veil,” published in Twice-Told Tales (1837), and mentioned in Melville’s review “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850). The central character of Hawthorne’s tale, Father Hooper, makes himself as uncanny a figure to his parishioners as Bartleby is to his employer by covering his face with a black veil and refusing to lift it all throughout his life. His decision is possibly motivated by the same discovery that can be found in Schelling’s analysis discussed above as well as in Melville’s and
Hawthorne’s fiction prior and following the tale, namely that the visible, rationally controllable image perceived by man as reality is a man-made illusion covering the uncanny, ineradicable mystery.

Thus, it seems that Bartleby might not altogether be without relatives in the world of American fiction, though Father Hooper is not his twin. If the above diagnosis of his motivation is correct, it clearly stands behind his determination to turn himself and his life into a living symbol embodying a lesson and exhortation for his flock on the mystery hiding in the heart of the reassuring obviousness of sensual and rational perception. Therefore, in his case, it seems legitimate to conjecture the rationale for his behaviour as encoded in his own figure. With regard to that aspect, the case of Bartleby is different – it is quite clear to the narrator that Bartleby is a victim of some experience that has transformed him into the figure that has come to haunt him – he observes: “his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary” (23). Consequently, if a victim, Bartleby, with his uncanny behaviour, is not a vessel or emblem of the experience that has transformed him but rather a defensive response to it. Thus, if the scrivener is a dilemma, its cause and solution will be found not in him but rather in the direction opposite to what and how he is, where perhaps the curiosity concerning this enigma has a chance to find its satisfaction.

Therefore, to reconstruct the experience that has shaped Bartleby, one must begin by cataloguing his oddities and then search for a phenomenon, the discovery of which might possibly legitimise an escape into such a form. As we know, the most striking feature of the scrivener is his attempt to reduce his active participation in the life of man. He detaches himself from his past by refusing to give any details of his previous life and family. Although he spends all his time in his corner hiding in an enclosure of dead walls and a screen, separating him from the rest of the office, when a change of occupation to a clerkship in a shop is suggested he astonishes his well-wishing employer by dismissing it because there “is too much confinement about that” (41). When the offer is modified to companionship with a travelling gentleman, Bartleby disqualifies it too as not having “any thing definite about that” (41). He never speaks “but to answer” (28); he is never “seen […] reading” (28); he is noiseless, motionless, solitary and passive, “[n]ot a wrinkle of agitation [ever] rippled him” (21). Before he loses the ability to copy, he does a tremendous amount of work, he seems to “gorge himself on […] documents” (19) but, as his employer observes, his efforts lack cheerful industriousness (20), he writes “silently, palely, mechanically” (20). When he is not occupied, he evinces a propensity for losing himself as if in reverie,
contemplating a piece of dead wall – it grows into a habit in the Wall Street office, it is his sole occupation while in prison. Finally, one is struck by a passive but absolutely unflinching resistance to all calls to participate in anything requiring active involvement – he may copy documents, but he will not help verify their accuracy.

Bartleby’s inflexibility is customarily clothed in a misleading cloak of hesitancy – instead of using any phrases of definite refusal or denial, he disconcerts his interlocutors with the baffling phrase “I would prefer not to” (21). Grammatically, the phrase belongs to a segment of verbal structures sometimes called “unreal” or “hypothetical,” i.e. their use is a signal that the reality described by the communique is believed by the speaker to belong to a course of events alternative to what really happened, is taking place, or is going to happen. Its habitual use by Bartleby is clearly one more piece of evidence showing that the intention of the mysterious scrivener is not to control or master life, but to reduce his participation in it.

The question arises as to what sort of experience or discovery might have been responsible for turning a man into a solitary “wreck in the mid Atlantic” (32), unflinching in his determination “not to make any change at all” (41). When Bartleby is viewed in the context of the persistent preoccupation of Melville with the dilemma of human reaction to the fundamental mysteriousness of reality, he betrays a striking affinity with a range of figures in Melville’s fiction, e.g. Captain Ahab, Pip, Benito Cereno, and Starbuck, the first mate on board of Pequod, all of whom have been poisoned by the discovery of “the sane madness of vital truth” (Melville “Hawthorne” 542). If this conjecture is correct, unlike Babalanja and Ishmael, Bartleby is not seeking the truth, but asylum, where he can hide from it. Abhorred and paralysed by the discovery that reality might be but a mysterious “howling infinite” (Melville Moby-Dick 97), indifferent to human hopes and miseries, he quite naturally finds solace in near-stuporous staring at a featureless wall giving him the illusion of stability and reliability. Having unhesitatingly rejected all offers to improve his situation by taking another job that would immerse him in life, he unsurprisingly raises no objections to being transferred to the Tombs, the New York municipal prison. In view of what is known of him, a licence to hide behind the Egyptian masonry of blank walls, separated from life so completely that not a sound of it is heard, might be exactly what the scrivener desperately craves. The silent plea of this modern American Job is finally heard – having regressed to a near-embryonic state, Bartleby reaches the final safe haven in life’s shape-shifting
inhuman fluidity, the peaceful company of “kings and counsellors” (45) in
the motionlessness of death.

One might ask if Bartleby was bound to perish. It is true that, as his
employer observes, the scrivener evinces proneness to “a pallid hopeless-
ness” (45), but it does not seem to be a sufficient explanation – if we remem-
ber, the “overpowering stinging melancholy” (28) of his way of looking upon
life proves infectious in the case of his employer, who, nevertheless is not
permanently harmed by it. When looked upon from the perspective opened
by the whole of Melville’s fiction, a good clue to the probable answer to this
question is one of the bizarre elements of Bartleby’s behaviour, namely his
habit of spending time staring at a piece of dead brick wall. On the one hand,
to all probability it is not just a piece of eccentricity, but a kind of panic
reaction meant to free the scrivener of unbearable anxiety resulting from
the realisation of life’s shape-shifting fluidity by filling his consciousness to
capacity with the solid reliability of the dead brick wall. On the other hand,
this fixation may serve for a symbolic embodiment of a frame of mind that
justifies Ahab’s tragic mission, Pip’s madness, and the inability of Cereno and
Bartleby to return to normal life after their discoveries. Contrary to Mel-
ville’s repeated warnings that the nature of reality does not permit capturing
it in a single form, these characters take the gloomy aspects of reality to
be its heart and let the discovery poison their lives. Captain Ahab lets his
sinister suspicions paint the world as such, Bartleby tries to do the oppo-
site, namely to wall the dark aspect of life away from him – but the result
is identical. In Melville’s fiction, the only characters who survive are those
who instead of blindness cultivate restrained and uncommitted awareness
of all the shades of reality, the “open independence” (Melville Moby-Dick
97) that produces “neither believer nor infidel, but […] a man who regards
them both with equal eye” (314). In the case of such characters who are bold
enough to practise it, like Amasa Delano, Bartleby’s employer, or Ishmael
the result is affirmation of rather than estrangement from life. This frame of
mind is epitomised by Ishmael in a short characteristic of himself given at
the beginning of his epic voyage: “Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to
perceive a horror, and could still be social with it – would they let me – since
it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one
lodges in” (16).

Thus, Melville manages to compose a three-layered uncanny structure.
At the heart of it lurks the irreducible abysmal mystery of which the Ro-
mantics write and which they deplore. A glimpse of it granted Bartleby in
the Dead Letter Office, turns him into an uncanny figure himself, which,
through the agency of the first person singular narrative of Bartleby’s employer and respectful observer, in turn results in the reader’s confrontation with the uncanny. In this last case, however, Melville does not leave us unaided – we are offered a choice of either following Bartleby in his decision to take the darkness he has discovered at the heart of reality for reality itself, or emulate the narrator in his struggle to steer a middle course between the inhuman mysteriousness of reality and the clarity of human perception, never letting either one blind him about the nature of the other.

**Works Cited**


Introduction

Contemporary literary theory knows two conceptions of the uncanny. One comes from Sigmund Freud and was formulated in his 1919 essay on the uncanny (Ger. das Unheimliche). The other is Tzvetan Todorov’s and is an integral part of his conception of the fantastic, contained in his 1970 book, Introduction à la littérature fantastique. The word “the uncanny” in English stands for two terms, then: das Unheimliche and l’étrange. Because these two terms come from two different languages and traditions and also, chiefly, because they belong to two different conceptions, Freud’s uncanny and Todorov’s uncanny may have little or indeed nothing in common. The fact that they (i.e. the conceptions) share the same word in a language that is foreign to them is not only inessential to what they posit but may be fundamentally misleading. The situation might be regarded as a clear-cut case of Francis Bacon’s “Idols of the Market Place”1 (Vickers 226). That there is such a thing that answers to the word “uncanny” might be a delusion or misconception that has its source in language or, rather, a confusion of languages.

1 Idola fori (singular Idolum fori), sometimes translated as “Idols of the Market Place” or “Idols of the Forum,” are a category of logical fallacy which results from the imperfect correspondences between the word definitions in human languages and the real things in nature which these words represent. The term was coined in Latin by Sir Francis Bacon and used in his Novum Organum, one of the earliest treatises arguing the case for the logic and method of modern science (Web).
In order to avoid one of the commonest of errors, then, we should begin – upon Bacon’s counsel – “in questions and differences about words” (The Advancement of Learning; qtd. in Vickers 226). The question to ponder is: are the two supposedly very different ideas of the uncanny totally irreconcilable? Is “the uncanny,” as it occurs in the context of a theoretical discussion, bound to be and remain little more than an idol due to its purportedly incorrigible ambiguity? It is my aim in this essay not to settle this case outside the courtroom of literary interpretation. I submit, as a working hypothesis, that the two conceptions of the uncanny can be reconciled. For one thing, they do not contradict one another. True, both can be roughly described as “psychological” as well as “literary”; moreover, in both of them, terror plays a significant role, at least in as far as the so-called “fear literature” supplies the two scholars with illustrative material. However, while Freud is concerned with such mental processes as are not in their essence related to or stimulated by literary works, Todorov sets out to define a specific literary mode, a “genre,” which he calls the fantastic and under which “the uncanny” is subsumed as one of two possible subgenres.

As a “late-comer,” Todorov was in a position to compare his conception of the uncanny with that of Freud, and so in The Fantastic (a translation of Introduction à la littérature fantastique), we find comments to that effect, some of them critical. In one of them, he observes parenthetically that “there is not an entire coincidence between Freud’s use of the term and our [Todorov’s] own” (Todorov 47). In the same sentence, he calls Freud’s hypothesis one that “is still to be verified” and sums it up as positing that “the sense of the uncanny is linked to the appearance of an image which originates in the childhood of the individual or the race” (Todorov 46-47). In the main, Todorov’s critique of Freud’s conception consists in his refusal to treat a literary work as a couch on which its author reveals his psyche to an analyst. Writes Todorov:

Beginning with Freud, they [psychoanalysts] have always tended to consider literature as one means among others of penetrating the author’s psyche. Literature is thus reduced to the rank of a simple symptom, and the author constitutes the real object of study. [Here Todorov gives the example of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” (1816), the analysis of which is the main theme of Freud’s essay on the uncanny.] Thus, after having described the organization of “The Sandman,” Freud indicates, without transition, what in the author may account for it. (Todorov 151)

Todorov does not go far beyond this methodological caveat. His remark about there being “not an entire coincidence” perhaps sounds a little more
encouraging, but clearly Todorov leaves open the question about the extent to which his and Freud’s conceptions of the uncanny overlap. We might also add that, the psychoanalytic and the structuralist angles aside, the two conceptions speak from inside two different languages. To be more accurate, Freud in his essay penetrates language at least to the same extent as he does an author’s psyche. The different layers of meaning which he uncovers in the word unheimlich, most of them relevant and actively meaningful in his conception, are in vain to be sought in the French “equivalent.”

Because some choice of primary literature was necessary, I have decided to make use of two of Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories, namely the ones which make Todorov’s concept of the fantastic especially relevant. They are The Hound of the Baskervilles (1901) and, chiefly, “The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire” (first published in January 1924). However, as I suggest in the title, the encounter between the “calculating machine” (as John Watson sometimes calls his friend Sherlock Holmes; Conan Doyle The Sign of Four 61) and vampires, whether real or imaginary, promises to be especially gratifying; indeed, as offshoots, or so-called pastiches show, there seems to be something mesmerising about the battle between Reason and Unreason, the one embodied in Holmes of course and the other in the Un-dead. Hence, the presence in this analysis of two plots that feature both Holmes and vampires: The Last Vampyre (January 1993), a “free” television adaptation of “The Sussex Vampire,” and a pastiche novel The Plague of Dracula (2006/2012) by Stephen Seitz.

While in what follows the task is to make sense of the original plot and the post-Holmesian plots, which may strike us with their ostensible lack of consistency, the more distant goal, not to be attained in a brief analysis of the kind attempted here, is to gauge the possibility of a comprehensive theory of the uncanny. I believe that to combine Todorov’s and Freud’s conceptions is possible; there is a need to enrich – as if it were – the narrowly technical conception of the uncanny as a narrative device by linking it with Freud’s idea of the homely unfamiliar, or the repressed familiar. I suggest, further, that what emerges from this blending is an alliance, uncanny of course, between domesticity and unreason. Expressed in narrative form, the uncanny is the product of a conflict between these two forces: the centripetal force of domesticity and the centrifugal powers of rationality. However, as I hope

2 Todorov’s term for “the uncanny” (l’étrange) is not strictly that which is used to render in French Freud’s das Unheimliche, namely “inquiétante étrangeté.”

3 The Last Vampyre (1993, Granada Ventures Ltd. & ITV Studios); screenplay by Jeremy Paul, dir. Tim Sullivan; with Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes.
to show in my comments on the film adaptation of Conan Doyle’s story, in an age of unlimited and unbridled unconcealment, made possible by the new media and their absorption of the idea of repression, there arises a need for a new approach to and a reformulation of the Freudian concept. Vampire narratives may perhaps offer some assistance in performing this task.

**Todorov’s Uncanny, or Fake Vampirism Exposed**

Stephen Seitz’s pastiche novel, *Sherlock Holmes and the Plague of Dracula*, is a blending of Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker; apparently a felicitous one, if judged by the opinion of readers. It is also a narrative in which the Todorovian idea of the uncanny has been taken to extremes. As the word “blending” suggests, in Seitz’s narrative characters and situations known from the Sherlock Holmes adventures mingle with those from *Dracula*. Holmes, in the company of Watson, travels to Transylvania to look for Jonathan Harker; when in Dracula Castle he finds himself assaulted by three female vampires, whereupon the expected consequences follow. He then confronts Count Dracula to find out about some shady business deal between him and Professor Moriarty, etc. When halfway through the book, the reader can pretty much expect anything; no configuration of the well-known characters in familiar albeit bizarre situations should be impossible. At the same time, the readers keep expecting “natural” solutions to the “mysteries,” the greatest of them being the preposterous idea that Sherlock Holmes has himself fallen prey to the plague and become an un-dead.

Personally, I cannot resist the impression that in devising this vamping of Holmes Seitz contemplated a revenge for the former’s paraded disbelief in the supernatural, let alone the supernatural of the vampiric variety. Reading about Holmes’s humiliations, which involve growing fangs and drinking stolen blood, the reader recalls the following exchange in “The Sussex Vampire”:

“Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It’s pure lunacy.”

“But surely,” said I, “the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? A living person might have the habit. I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth.”

“You are right, Watson. It [Holmes's index] mentions the legend in one of these references. But are we to give serious attention to such things? This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply.” (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 73)
Yet, Seitz knows how far he can take the matters so as avoid violating the rules of realism, which is a “genuine” Sherlock Holmes story ought to remain inviolate; when all is said and done, the agency in a story faithful to the spirit of Holmes must “stand flat-footed upon the ground.” Consequently, Seitz’s last-chapter resolution, which predictably cancels the many supernatural possibilities the narrative has planted, is flat, indeed. Vampirism, we are told, is a disease after all. Like every mundane disease, it too ought to be curable, and Holmes has found the cure. And the cure is garlic. And so superstitions have been exploded one more time and the laws of Nature have been asserted. And so Holmes is back to his old self again. And so the reader can go quietly back to sleep.

Is there a problem with this kind of narrative, regardless of the rather anti-climactic resort to old garlic, here cast as Defender of the Faith in Reason? Technically, nothing is wrong with The Plague of Dracula. As I have suggested, the opinions of readers must not be underestimated, and ratings have been positive. Clearly, Seitz has played by the rules, those of the Holmes pastiche. All the expected and required ingredients have been used and so the dish must be approved as a Sherlock Holmes Transylvanian style. What may worry a Holmes aficionado, though perhaps not excessively, is that in comparison with the “original” (although Seitz does not make explicit his debt to “The Sussex Vampire”; I have not detected any intertextual allusions; the presence of Dracula is, on the other hand, very conspicuous), The Plague is little more than technical.

As we have already observed, Todorov’s uncanny is a mode that is strictly related to the genre of the fantastic. Todorov defines the fantastic in psychological terms, namely, as a state of hesitation – in the mind of the reader and a character – about an event or events in the fictive world of a narrative:

The fantastic […] lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion. At the story’s end, the reader makes a decision […]. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny [l’étrange]. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous [le merveilleux]. (Todorov 41)

The state of hesitation that defines the genre of the fantastic is a very peculiar mental condition; it is directly related to the ontological nature of an event or situation. In the case of “The Sussex Vampire,” the hesitation concerns the putative existence of the “un-dead”; as Holmes and Watson
conveniently put the case for us: “walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their heart”; “the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth” (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 73). What is significant, Holmes’s scepticism, i.e. his determination not to admit the possibility of a supernatural agency (“No ghosts need apply”), should be countered by, or pitted against, an opinion which leaves open this very possibility. At the centre of the story is an event, a “phenomenon” which in the witnesses raises serious doubts as to whether the laws of this world “as it exists in the common opinion” have not been violated: a mother, “a Peruvian lady,” now married to an Englishman, has been “caught” in the act of sucking blood from the neck of her new-born child:

Nurse and master [the husband] rushed together to the nursery. Imagine the feelings, Mr Holmes, as he saw his wife rise from a kneeling position beside the cot, and saw blood upon the child’s exposed neck and upon the sheet. With a cry of horror, he turned his wife’s face to the light and saw blood all round her lips. It was she – she beyond all question – who had drunk the poor baby’s blood. (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 75)

The suggestion that the reader “must decide” “at the story’s end” is not a rule that applies universally to every story which meets the condition of the fantastic. Depending on how an author handles the genre in a particular case, the fantastic may last for so long and vanish before rather than at the story’s end. In the case of long narratives, the fantastic may occupy an episode. This is the case of Jonathan Harker’s journal in Dracula, at the end of which enough evidence has been presented to convince both Jonathan and the reader that vampires do exist, at which point the fantastic vanishes and the novel enters the genre of the marvellous.

The fantastic also vanishes the moment when a rational or a natural explanation has been provided and asserted. In this case, the genre that takes its place is that of the uncanny. We speak of the uncanny when – despite initial doubts – the represented world is after all the world as we know it, the world in which the laws of nature and rationality remain intact. Thus, in “The Sussex Vampire,” Holmes eventually delivers a last-page explanation and again expresses his scepticism about the particular species of the supernatural. His wonted commonsensical manner verges on the farcical:

The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England. […] If a child were pricked with one of those arrows dipped in curare or some other devilish drug, it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out. […] Your wife feared such an attack. She saw it made and saved
the child’s life, and yet she shrank from telling you all the truth, for she knew how you loved the boy and feared lest it break your heart. (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 86-87)

In this way Holmes leads his client and the readers up to the main link in his reasoning: “the boy,” a revelation that takes us entirely by surprise and is likely to “break the heart” of the loving father. This solution and resolution is a perfect specimen of the uncanny. It may be “natural” and “rational” but, at the same time, it cannot fail to strike us as bizarre. Though perhaps not exactly “deep,” Holmes treats us to a psychological insight or two; he explains that in building his “reconstruction” (87) he developed the profile of a seriously unbalanced young person. One of the crucial clues confirming Holmes’s theory has been the face of Jacky, of which he, Holmes, caught a glimpse when it was reflected in a window pane: “His face was clearly reflected in the glass of the window where the shutter formed a background. I saw such jealousy, such cruel hatred, as I have seldom seen in a human face” (87). To this observation Holmes adds a brief analysis, emphasising the element of pathology:

You have to face it, Mr Ferguson. It is more painful because it is a distorted love, a maniacal exaggerated love for you, and possibly for his [Jacky’s] dead mother, which has prompted his action. His very soul is consumed with hatred for this splendid child, whose health and beauty are a contrast to his own weakness. (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 87)

The last hint at the boy’s “weakness” is an allusion to his “condition.” Earlier in the story, Ferguson describes Jacky as “a poor little inoffensive cripple,” and explains that he has “a fall in childhood [resulting in] a twisted spine” (77).

If not exactly “Freudian deep,” Holmes’s insight into the psychopathology of everyday family life in an English countryside gives us a good sense of what Todorov’s uncanny may be about. The deflection, the shift away from the supernatural, may result – as it does in the case of the Sussex vampire – in disclosing a veritable hornet’s nest of domestic trouble. To put this differently, Holmes may have been successful in “explaining away” a blood-sucking demon and thereby proven his firm belief that “no ghosts need apply”; however, he has not really been able to exorcise a very mundane – but no less frightening – demon, one residing in the heart of an adolescent and making him capable of most heinous deeds. Holmes’s observations on the “cruel hatred, as is seldom seen in a human face” must haunt a sensitive reader.

There is then no doubt that despite the unquestionable victory of Reason and Nature over Superstition, there still remains a residue that refuses to be
wiped away or laid to rest. This is what we should properly call the uncanny. And this calls for psychoanalysis.

**Doctor Holmes: His Diagnoses, Surgeries and Prescriptions**

In a great number of the adventures, Holmes is called upon to pry into domestic problems. In some, the situations seem hardly plausible. In “A Case of Identity,” the female victim, almost a type with Conan Doyle, is tricked into falling in love with her stepfather dressed up as another man and readily eligible. To Holmes the truth of the matter seems too painful for the gullible young woman to digest; so he decides not to disabuse her. In “The Speckled Band,” another grasping male is caught, after killing one of his two stepdaughters, in the act of perpetrating another murder in a desperate bid to secure the inheritance. In another story, “The Devil’s Foot,” which incidentally meets the conditions of Todorov’s fantastic, for Conan Doyle plays here with suggestions of supernatural agency, Holmes is called upon to examine the scene of what soon turns out to be another merciless property crime. Also, all the four Holmes novellas tell of family secrets; two of them, *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, contain for their main motif a realisation of the biblical warning or moral about the “sins of the fathers visited on the children,” which, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole turned into a formula for reusable Gothic narrative structure.

In this respect, “The Sussex Vampire” is no exception. Here also Conan Doyle brings to the fore the anguish caused by the exposing of family secrets to the coldly scrutinising gaze of the detective: “For God’s sake, what do you think, Mr. Holmes? It may be a mere intellectual puzzle to you, but it is life and death to me! My wife a would-be murderer – my child in constant danger! Don’t play with me, Mr. Holmes. It is too terribly serious” (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 81).

Holmes may not exactly fit the description of a thinking automaton, insensitive to the sentiments of the people whose private matters he is summoned to look into; yet, he is never out of his character of a scientific investigator. In this and the similar cases in which the well being of a family is at stake, he eagerly assumes the capacity of the family physician, determined to use his scalpel no matter how painful the operation might prove to be:

“Now, Mr. Ferguson, I am a busy man with many calls, and my methods have to be short and direct. The swiftest surgery is the least painful. […]”

Ferguson sat up with a cry of joy.

“Prove that, Mr. Holmes, and I am your debtor forever.”
“I will do so, but in doing so I must wound you deeply in another direction.”
(Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 80; italics mine – J. M.)

The use of the surgical metaphor is suggestive, to use one of Holmes’s favourite expressions. For the cure to be effective surgery is needful; ulcers need to be exposed and cut open to remove the poisonous substance; in this case this would be the venom of jealousy, hatred, and a stop-at-nothing malice – all accumulated in Jacky. To allow the thus administered therapeutic wound to heal, Jacky needs to be removed and literally so. As he bids farewell to the family, Holmes leaves a prescription: “I think a year at sea would be my prescription for Master Jacky,” said Holmes, rising from his chair (Conan Doyle “The Sussex…” 88).

A Return of Freud the Un-Dead

Even assuming that Holmes’s prescription was applied, we shall never find out if, and can only hope that, it worked. The team involved in the production of The Last Vampire, a television adaptation of the story released in 1993, evidently thought otherwise. The plot, which predictably focuses on Jacky, is painted in sinister colours: the newborn child of Ferguson and his Peruvian wife does get killed. Instead of being sent off to spend “a year at sea,” Jacky leaps to his death, believing that he is a vampire and can fly like one. It is left to the viewer to decide whether the “last vampire” refers to Jacky or to a man called Stockton (not borrowed from Conan Doyle), a descendant of a clan whom the local people believed to be vampires. The figure of Stockton is a source of a good deal of confusion because the producers use it to play with suggestions of the supernatural. Chiefly, however, Stockton is there to bring out in Jacky the dark forces of his adolescent psyche. In other words, fake vampirism is a catalyst for the Freudian uncanny. Yet, while in Freud the uncanny consists in “bringing to light” what ought to remain concealed, in The Last Vampire, the fake supernatural is used to obfuscate the otherwise plain “Freudian” content.

Summed up in a formula borrowed from Friedrich von Schelling, the Freudian uncanny is defined as the revelation of what should remain hidden: “‘Unheimlich’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained … secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in Freud 2001: 933; deletion in the original). This is a neatly succinct description of the mechanism known as the return of the repressed, where “coming to light” is equivalent of “returning” and the “ought to have remained” suggests the work of repression
of unwelcome or otherwise disturbing mental content. The Freudian twist to Schelling’s definition consists – it will be recalled – in the way Freud directs our attention to vision; he performs this in his interpretation of Hoffmann’s story about the Sandman, a stealer of children’s eyes. This ultimate childhood nightmare, “the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes” (Freud 937), Freud links – predictably – with sexuality and the basic male complex it produces:

I would not recommend any opponent of the psycho-analytic view to select this particular story of the Sand-Man with which to support his argument that anxiety about the eyes has nothing to do with the castration complex. For why does Hoffmann bring the anxiety about eyes into such intimate connection with the father’s death? And why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disturber of love? […] We shall venture, therefore, to refer the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood. (Freud 938-939)

Vision, as we have seen, is also of primary importance in “The Sussex Vampire,” as indeed it is in the other Sherlock Holmes stories, due to the prominent position which observation occupies in the Holmes’s “science of deduction” (Conan Doyle The Sign of Four 49-56). In this story, the final clue is established by Holmes at the moment he catches a glimpse of Jacky’s face reflected in the window – this moment of illumination is in striking contrast to the blindness of the father to how his “boy” really feels about him, his Peruvian wife, and the new-born “young man,” a rival for his father’s love. This blindness of the husband and the father is the main cause of the domestic trouble and the basic reason for the summoning of the detective. The suspicion of vampirism – supported, paradoxically, by the evidence supplied by the senses, by observing what the woman was doing – is a direct consequence of the wife’s concern for the husband’s feelings. The passage of the narrative can, therefore, be described as that from emotional ignorance to awareness. The surgery performed by Holmes is an eye-opening operation.

In the film, I argue, the narrative movement is of a different nature. Already in the first domestic scene, we, the viewers, witness a situation fraught with Freudian connotations. We find ourselves inside the Fergusons’ house and see a servant woman looking after an infant while Jacky is playing the violin, vigorously and loudly. She gets irritated, but he does not stop and says that he will if she lets him kiss her. Upon this, she offers him her boot. As Jacky, a 15-year-old walking with a limp, lies down and kisses her extended leg, she kicks him away, crying “Asqueroso” (“revolting” in Spanish). Next, as a continuation, also to the accompaniment of the ferocious violin, we see the wife and mother, Carlotta. She snaps in fury at Jacky: “How dare you to
oppose me?” and calls him “desgraciado,” i.e. “a wretched creature.” Next, she shatters the violin to splinters. Entering upon this scene, the father takes the side of his wife and asks: “Why are you doing this, boy?”

These portrayals of domestic disturbances at the beginning of the film are the reverse of what we have in the story. The film, we might say, starts with the Freudian uncanny, for towards the end of the twentieth century there is no concealment about how childhood leaves us “crippled” for life. We have read *Oedipus* in Freud’s class. Thus, what the film offers is a projection of our Freudian awareness and our borrowed anxieties onto a fake Victorian setting. The logical consequence is that rather than curing the community of vampirism and preventing actual harm, the filmic Holmes is forced into the “role” of a passive observer, a witness to how a delusion, a fantasy runs amok and, taking control, gathers its grim harvest. There is no way to “cure” Jacky, for whom the fantasy of becoming a wielder of magical superpowers has become a substitute for full-blown manliness, which Nature has denied him. “Naturally,” then, he takes his life at a moment when reality has slipped out of his hands. Or did he intend to put fantasy to a reality test?

**Conclusion**

Already in the original story about the “Sussex vampire,” as we have seen, there are suggestions of problems and “anxieties” which elude the powers of scientific rationalisation. Holmes may have trained himself to “observe,” i.e. to see more than the average eater of bread and butter, but whether observation can be turned into an effective weapon with which to fight the demons residing in the human psyche is another matter altogether. The residue of the uncanny at the bottom of some of the cases is precisely what the scrutinising gaze of Reason cannot penetrate. Unreason, on the other hand, is a fertile author of plots and the powers of the uncanny “he” unleashes make them virtually un-dead.

Why are there no mirrors in Castle Dracula? The answer to which we have become used is that that is because a vampire casts no reflection. In this traditional role, the mirror would be used as a test for the supernatural. Not so in *The Plague of Dracula*. As a champion of rationality, Holmes offers a very different proposition: there are no mirrors in Dracula Castle precisely because Count Dracula does cast a reflection. This is what we are supposed to understand by the rule that tells an investigator to “exhaust all natural explanations” before admitting a supernatural one (see Conan Doyle *The Hound*… 22-23). In Seitz’s novel, Holmes is admirably consistent
in rejecting the supernatural, even though he himself has been turned into a vampire. In view of our analysis of Conan Doyle’s vampiric adventure, one conclusion presents itself: a warning not to take rationality too far.

In “The Sussex Vampire,” the mystery has been solved, the suspicion of vampirism has been debunked or “exploded.” The solution, one would say, “makes perfect sense”: the jealousy of an enfeebled teenager for the love of his father, now remarried and doting on his new wife and the second child. Yet, we cannot fail to be shocked by the murderous ferocity of this jealousy. Rationality may have been vindicated and reaffirmed against the powers of superstition; these, however, are always ready to return and make a fresh assault. This is the lesson learnt from the otherwise rather tortuous experience of watching The Last Vampyre.

Neither of the two conceptions of the uncanny addressed in this essay stands on its own; nor should it be expected or even allowed to. The uncanny can be defined as the unreason of domesticity; but it can only be perceived as such when caught in the very midst of rationality. Superstition surviving in the heart of the English countryside, Count Dracula becoming a Londoner – these surely defy logic. But the irrationality of an idea, as we have seen, is to be regarded as a challenge, just like vampirism is for Holmes.

A narrative may employ or even star Sherlock Holmes, but this nowadays, i.e. in a world defined and governed by the laws, Freudian analysis is no guarantee of that narrative’s rationality, its explicability. As the pastiches show us, the lack of narrative cohesion and the often preposterous assumptions (e.g. that vampirism makes sense within Darwin’s theory of evolution) may be reflections of the kind of content that these narratives engage. The inevitable discordances and inconsistencies may make some sense after all. If “without contraries is no progression,” than the opposition between Reason and its demoniacal enemies ought not to be ignored or exploded too rashly. Perhaps, rather, it ought to be cultivated.

**Works Cited**


Das Unheimliche or l'étrange?...


Dracula: The Englishman’s Uncanny Double

The vampire, Dracula in Bram Stoker’s eponymous Gothic novel of 1897 should be seen as the “double” of Jonathan Harker, an English solicitor visiting his castle in Transylvania in connection with a property deal. Lacanian theorist, Mladen Dolar, points out that the Gothic novel’s first appearance came at the pinnacle of the Enlightenment at the end of eighteenth century, when many elements of the old religious order were swept aside in favour of rational thinking, human rights and scientific empiricism. “Ghosts, vampires, monsters, the undead dead, etc.,” flourished “in an era when you might expect them to be dead and buried, without a place” (Dolar “I Shall…” 7). That period also saw first appearance of the theme of the double.

The exhaustive studies by Otto Rank and more recently by Karl Miller have shown the very extensive use of this motive in literature (and elsewhere), particularly its incredible proliferation in the romantic era. The authors range (apart from Hoffmann) from Chamisso (Peter Schlemihl), the Gothic novel [sic], Andersen, Lenau, Goethe, Jean Paul, Hogg, Heine, Musset, Maupassant, Wilde, etc., to Poe (William Wilson) and Dostoyevsky (Golyadkin). (11)

The motif continued with Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886), Joseph Conrad’s The Secret Sharer (1910) and even into the twenty-first century with José Saramago’s The Double or in a literal translation from the Portuguese The Duplicated Man. In such stories, the double is the (almost) identical twin or shadow of a character, usually the main protagonist and typically appears only in private. Dracula can be
considered as an exemplar albeit that in this case the double does not remain only Jonathan Harker’s concern but becomes that of a group, whose mission to track down and kill the vampire constitutes the bulk of the novel.

The imperative to produce an interpretation of the function of Dracula in the novel stems from the fact that while the vampires do exist in the diegetic space of the novel, in reality they do not. Whilst, for example, sometimes a cigar may be only a cigar, it makes no sense to say the same of a vampire. The routine blurring of the distinction between the factual or reality and the concept of truth misses one of the key functions of fantasy literature, namely, disclosing a normally hidden part of the truth which, in consequence, alters our conception of reality. Fantasy literature has to do with the counter factual bearing on the truth. Unrealistic or supernatural devices such as vampires can, in conjunction with Lacanian theory, say something of the truth of human subjectivity (primarily sexual) and culture. This element of the truth tends to be discounted in contemporary hegemonic discourses, first and foremost in the social sciences in not conforming to the demand for empirical observation, verifiable proofs and measurable data (a requirement entailing a naive disregard of the pre-constituted or theoretical nature of any perception of reality).

1 This is in contrast to Robert Mighall’s argument that “a vampire is sometimes only a vampire” (Mighall 1998: 74, qtd. in Hughes 5).

2 The concept of truth referred to here is taken from Lacan and is neither an “objective” truth, as that which exists. Instead, as will be discussed, it refers rather to an aporia marking the place where the truth, which can only partially be said, appear.

3 According to Freud, seemingly empirical observations are always subject to and posterior to the theories they purport to found: “We come to an understanding about their meaning by repeated references to the material of observation, from which we seem to have deduced our abstract ideas, but this is in point of fact subject to them.” It is, moreover, not clear where these ideas come from in the first place. Freud writes of “relations that we seem to divine before we can clearly cognize and demonstrate them” (Freud, Instincts and their Vicissitudes, in General Psychological Theory. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997: 83). This evidential impasse is not, however, unique to psychoanalytic thinking but also pertains to what is known as the “hard sciences,” such as physics and chemistry. As Adrian Johnston points out, many authors have argued that sciences, no matter how much they appear to rely solely on empirical data and unbiased observation, cannot function without a non-empirical foundation (such as a set of methodological presuppositions, issuing from specific epistemological and ontological convictions). Johnston refers to Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science, who showed that “the interpretation of empirical data is always governed by implicit scientific paradigms, which themselves are left untested” (Adrian Johnston, Time Driven. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005: 67).
The structure of my paper consists of this introduction and four sections. A short first section explains the nature of the space created in the novel by the device of the vampire’s castle, which proves devoid of the symbolic grid within which human subjectivity is constituted. The second develops this theme by means of a comparison with a dream of Freud’s, known as the Irma dream recorded in 1895, two years previous to the publication of Dracula. This enables an appreciation of the Lacanian categories of the symbolic, imaginary and the real as they relate to human subjectivity. The third section, a detailed account of Harker’s stay at the castle, shows how in representing Freud’s split of the psyche into Ego, Id and Superego, the use of a non-realistic fictional device, such as a vampire, elucidates something of the truth of the nature of human subjectivity and the sexual relationship. Finally, in the fourth section, I briefly point out how the plot of Dracula on Harker’s return to England (comprising most of the novel) concerns the restoration of what might be called symbolic “normality.” What is significant is the role of the group and its father-figure leader in the necessary elimination of the double at the end of the novel, enabling the consummation of the marriage and the birth of a child.

The Fantasy Area: Transylvania and the Loss of the Symbolic Grid

The novel begins with the journey of Jonathan Harker to Transylvania by train and then carriage to Dracula’s castle in order to draw up the deeds of a house purchase in England. This castle will become for Harker a space devoid of the symbolic grid in which a subject is constituted. As he travels further into Transylvania in this initial part of the novel (the first four chapters), Harker is gradually bereft of the categories of place, time and language. First to go are his geographical bearings. Although initially his destinations are scrupulously named – Munich, Vienna, Budapest, Klausenburgh and Bistritz, “the post town named by Count Dracula” (Stoker 27) such cartographical certainties are in the end eliminated. Harker had tried to come armed with such knowledge to keep a hold of his whereabouts, but he finds that the place is “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (27). Ultimately, he finds he cannot locate Dracula’s castle: “I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this Country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps” (27). This can be contrasted to Harker’s return at the end of the novel with a group of people to kill Dracula, when the castle reappears on the map.
As Jonathan’s wife, Mina Harker, records, “I have examined the map and find that the river most suitable for the Slovaks to have ascended is either the Pruth or the Sereth” (346).

Secondly, time as a symbolic framework, begins to disintegrate when the train that leaves Munich promptly at 8:35 and which should have arrived in Vienna at 6:46 (another very precise time) gets in “an hour late” (26). The trains seem to Harker to become more and more unpunctual the further east he travels. In the castle, Harker’s accustomed schedule decomposes as he retires to sleep at dawn, Dracula keeping him awake all night (“why, there is the morning again! How remiss I am to let you stay up so long,” 49). One day later on, he wakes to find his watch mysteriously left unwound despite his “rigorous habit” of winding it every evening (63).

Above all, it is language, the principal means of connecting with others, which gradually unravels for Harker. As soon as he leaves “the West” and enters “the East” no one speaks his native English. At first, he has a “smattering” of German and a polyglot dictionary, but as he proceeds further towards his rendezvous with Dracula, his interlocutors appear to start forgetting their German. “She was in such an excited state that she seemed to have lost her grip on that German she knew, and mixed it all up with some other language which I did not know at all” (30). As Harker climbs into the coach to begin the last stage of the coach journey, which ends with his rendezvous with Dracula’s carriage, he sees the driver, who has not yet taken his seat, talking with his landlady.

They were evidently talking of me for every now and then they looked at me, and some of the people who were sitting on the bench outside the door – which they call by a name meaning ‘word-bearer’ – came and listened, and then looked at me, most of them pityingly. I could hear a lot of words often repeated, queer words, for there were many nationalities in the crowd; so I quietly got my polyglot dictionary from my bag and looked them out. (31)

While evidently a realistic depiction of a tourist amongst many nationalities, Harker is here reduced to the position of a baby, the subject of those speaking around him (Harker knows the conversation concerns him) but the words are just meaningless sounds. As Lorenzo Chiesa writes, “the child from very early on begins to suppose that what appears to him as language qua letter is actually a fully articulated symbolic system of the Other” (62). This is what Harker assumes when he takes out the dictionary to try to find out what these words signify to the people around him, yet the answer leaves him excluded from the conversation. He cannot comprehend what they are
“really” speaking of (Dracula, the vampire, as the reader already knows or will find out shortly) and what it is that concerns him, even though he has an English translation. As Harker reports, this is “not cheering to me, for amongst them were ‘Ordog’ – Satan, ‘Pokol’ – hell, ‘stregoica’ – witch, ‘vrolok’ and ‘vlksolak’ both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Serbian for something that is either were-wolf or vampire” (Stoker 32). Thus, the people around him become “word-bearers,” rather than interlocutors. Words have returned to their originary status for the subject-to-be, in their opaque materiality no longer transparently referring to other things.

This crumbling of the symbolic grid of space, time and language (as a social system producing meaning) might be viewed in Lacanian terms as the overwhelming of the subject’s symbolic by the real, that undifferentiated “nothing,” which was presumed to have existed before the symbolic came into being (from the a posteriori standpoint within that symbolic). On several occasions, as Harker tries to look out of the castle window, the reality, which ought to have been perceived there, has disappeared, to be replaced by an undifferentiated, amorphous mass. “I went into my own room and drew the curtains, but there was little to notice; my window opened into the courtyard, all I could see was the warm grey of quickening sky” (49). As Jonathan records, “the castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice” (51).

**Dracula’s Castle and Freud’s Reception Hall**

The novel is, I argue, fundamentally one of two parts. The first is the initial isolated encounter with the double in a fantasy space stripped of the subject’s symbolic co-ordinates. The second is the “re-socialization” – the reintegration into society in the form of family, friends and colleagues and the re-instantiation of reality. The significance of this structure can be seen through a comparison with the record of dream of Freud’s known as the Irma dream published two years after *Dracula* in 1897 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. As in the case of the novel, the dream can be divided into two parts, the first taking place in Freud’s reception hall (paralleling Dracula’s castle) and the second, amongst a group of doctors, pertaining to the social space, speech and rules. Freud’s record of the dream begins as follows: “A large hall – numerous guests, whom we were receiving. – Among them was Irma. I at once took her to one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my ‘solution’ yet” (*The Interpretation…* 131).

The setting is a party or reception Freud and his wife are giving. Irma is the pseudonym of one of Freud’s patients whom he was treating by means
of his pioneering psychoanalytic methods despite the physical nature of her ailments. On the day of the dream, a family friend of Freud’s reports to him that “she is better but not quite well” (131). Freud thinks he hears a note of reproach in the words. In his dream, Freud’s wish is to blame the failure of the treatment on Irma’s rejection of his psychoanalytic explanations (the “solution”) of her symptoms.

In the opening of both dream and novel, the protagonist is already in a state of some anxiety concerning his social standing and, specifically, of not being equal to his profession of psychoanalyst or solicitor. As Lacan writes of Freud, “[h]e gets to the point of doubting the validity of the solution he has proposed, perhaps even the very principle of his treatment of neurosis” (The Seminar II 150). Harker has been sent to Dracula in his capacity as a newly qualified solicitor, but, as several commentators has pointed out, considers himself as not up to the new title. He still thinks of himself as a clerk as seen in this (Freudian) slip: “Was this a customary incident in the life of a solicitor’s clerk sent out to explain the purchase of a London estate to a foreigner? Solicitor’s clerk! Mina would not like that. Solicitor, for just before leaving London, I got word that my examination was successful, and I am now a full-blown solicitor!” (Stoker 40).

The critic, Elizabeth Bronfen, comments that “one could surmise that whatever event may have triggered the appearance of traumatic shock in Jonathan, his hysterical delusions also articulate his uncertainty about his symbolic mandate, about his becoming partner to Mr. Hawkins” (221). Thus, in both the trigger for the dream and at Harker’s arrival at the castle there is a certain “hysterization” of the subject. “What,” Žižek writes, “is the hysterical question if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfil the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate?” (The Sublime… 113).

More significantly for the purposes of my argument, the opening of both dream and the novel share another common process, which might be labelled the “evaporation” of the others: an initial crowd which dissolves leaving initially just two people and then a solitary subject. In the reception hall are “numerous guests” but then Freud takes Irma “to one side.” A dialogue takes place as to the responsibility for the failure of the treatment, ending with Freud getting Irma to open her mouth and his looking down her throat (Freud The Interpretation… 132). At this point the dream can be seen clearly to involve only Freud in that Irma, as a fellow human being has disappeared, leaving only the insides of her throat.
In the novel, Harker begins his journey to the castle using public transport in the company of other travellers. But then a private carriage comes to collect him with only a driver, who turns out to be Dracula. In the castle, which Harker imagines would include the presence at the very least of servants (“When I had done, I looked for a bell, so that I might let the servants know I had finished,” Stoker 43), there is nobody except the vampire. There are in another “forbidden” part of the castle three women but they also turn out to be vampires and can, in any case, be regarded as a part of Harker’s dream. A few gypsies appear outside of the castle, but Harker does not speak their language and, in any case, his attempt to procure help from them fails their being in the vampire’s pay. It is the relationship in the castle between an apparent two, Harker and the vampire, which should, as will be argued in depth, be viewed as that of the subject and his double, an exteriorisation of his own split subjectivity.

Finally, both dream and novel go beyond the hysterical doubt with which they began. Each initial part ends in an anxiety arousing sight causing the subject to take flight or “fade out.” Misgiving as to one’s symbolic mandate still takes place as a conscious thought, even if the question is not posed to oneself in those terms. Freud has been preoccupied with the Irma case in his waking hours. As Lacan points out, he was writing up his case notes on the evening of the dream (see Lacan The Seminar II). In the dream, the turning point comes when Freud sees the inside of Irma’s throat. There “on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose” (Freud The Interpretation… 132). In Lacan’s words: “There’s a horrendous discovery there, that of the flesh one never sees” (The Seminar II 154). Copjec identifies this sight as that of Lacan’s object a: “‘A large white spot […] curled structures […] white-gray scabs.’ Almost nothing. This is the climax of the first part of the dream, the anxiety-filled encounter with the object a” (27). As will now be discussed, the equivalent of Freud looking into Irma’s throat is Harker peering into a wooden box, where Dracula is lying like a corpse and suddenly being looked at by the comatose vampire’s eyes on their own accord.

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4 The episode of the three vampire women is introduced by Harker as follows: “I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real—so real that now, sitting here in the broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep” (Stoker 61). At the dénouement of the scene, Dracula says: “I must awaken him [Harker], for there is work to be done” (63).
Dracula in the Castle as Jonathan Harker’s Double

This section looks in detail at Harker’s stay in the castle, setting out the argument that Dracula should be seen as an exemplar of the literary double. During his stay in the castle Jonathan notices the vampire climbing down the walls, and discovers he is able to copy him. As Copjec notes, “vampirism presents us with a bodily double” but which “we can neither make sense of nor recognize as our own” (33). The double is seen by Dolar as standing for “all three instances of Freud’s ‘second topic’” (“I Shall…” 12), a topology of the human psyche as Ego, Superego and the Id. In the first of the following three sections, I discuss the double in terms of the Ego and the Id. In particular, it will be seen how Harker’s interaction with Dracula produces the sight of object a in the form of the gaze, the object missing from the Ego but represented in the Id. This also makes sense of the strange absence of mirrors in the castle. Harker’s mirror image has been replaced by the vampire, the subject’s double, making mirrors unnecessary and in the case of Dracula, unbearable, the object a (re-incorporated by the vampire) being that which cannot be reflected. The second section examines, from a retrospective viewpoint, the last stage of Jonathan’s journey to the castle, while the third and concluding section discusses Dracula in terms of the representation of the Lacanian concept of the superego.

The Double as the Ego and Id

That Dracula should be regarded as Harker’s double is suggested when Jonathan sees the vampire, dressed in Harker’s own suit, emerging from his window and climbing down the castle walls, “lizard fashion”:

I had been at the window somewhat less than half an hour, when I saw something coming out of the Count’s window. I drew back and watched carefully, and saw the whole man emerge. It was a new shock to me to find that he had on the suit of clothes which I had worn whilst travelling here. (Stoker 67)

Later on, Jonathan again sees Dracula “leave the castle by the same window, and in my clothes.” Finally, barred all other means of escape, he copies him: “I have seen him myself crawl from his window; why should not I imitate him, and go in by his window?” (69) and succeeds, “I have made the effort, and, God helping me, have come safely back to this room” (69). Stephen Arata also pays attention to this doubling, pointing out that “the text’s insistence that these characters are capable of substituting for one
another becomes most pressing when Dracula twice dons Harker’s clothes to leave the Castle”5 (“The Occidental...” 638).

Viewing Dracula as Jonathan’s double makes sense of the disappearance of the castle’s mirrors. On his arrival, Harker finds that there are no mirrors in the rooms: “There is not even a toilet glass on my table, and I had to get the little shaving glass from my bag before I could either shave or brush my hair” (Stoker 44). Dracula, however, later smashes the shaving glass. “It is very annoying,” Harker writes, “for I do not see how I am to shave, unless in my watch-case or the bottom of the shaving pot, which is fortunately of metal” (50). Dolar notes that the appearance of the double on “the outside,” in the exegetic space of the literary works “can go along with the disappearance or trading off, of his [the subject’s] mirror image or his shadow” (“I Shall...” 11). Dracula, a vampire with no mirror reflection, will, as Harker’s double, replace his lost one:

I had hung my shaving-glass by the window, and was just beginning to shave. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, and heard the Count’s voice saying to me, ‘Good morning.’ I started, for it amazed me that I had not seen him, since the reflection of the glass covered the whole room behind me. (Stoker 50)

It as the replacement for Harker’s mirror image, that the double can be seen as representing the subject’s ego. A child, aged between six and eighteen months, “first recognizes himself in the image of his own body as it is reflected in a mirror” (Lacan The Seminar II 17). This Lacan calls the mirror stage. The child thereby acquires an image enabling him to constitute a sense of self, a “me” or, more technically, an ego. In the process however, something has to be lost. In Dolar’s words: “the doubling [in the mirror] cuts one off from a part, the most valuable part, of one’s being, the immediate self-being of jouissance” (13). It is the object a, which is precisely that one cannot see in the mirror, the part that has no reflection, the nonspecular. Thus, on the one hand, given that as Dolar points out, “it is only by virtue of one’s mirror reflection that one can become endowed with an ego, establish oneself as an ‘I,’” in its absence “my ‘ego-identity’ comes from my double” (13). Yet, crucially the double restores the object a, excised at the mirror stage. (And

5 Arata, however, interprets this doubling differently seeing it as an instance of “reverse colonialism.” He writes, “[s]ince on both occasions the Count’s mission is to plunder the town, we are encouraged to see a correspondence between the vampire’s actions and those of the travelling Westerner. The equivalence between these two sets of actions in underlined by the reaction of the towns people, who have no trouble believing that it really is Harker, the visiting Englishman, who is stealing their goods, their money, their children” (638).
it is for this reason that vampires cannot bear mirrors\(^6\). As Dolar writes, my double is “the same as me – plus the object a, that invisible part of being added to my image” (“At First Sight” 139). Or, in Žižek’s words, the subject’s double is the one “who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is ‘in the subject more than subject himself’” (Enjoy… 125).

As was noted in connection with Freud’s dream, the object a re-appears as the gaze on the vampire Harker finds lying comatose in a wooden box. By now a prisoner in the castle, Jonathan knows that Dracula is plotting to come to London – “where, perhaps for centuries to come, he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless” (Stoker 74) – and is intent on killing him with a shovel but finds himself confronted with an unbearable sight:

the head turned, and the eyes fell full upon me, with all their blaze of basilisk horror. The sight seemed to paralyze me, and the shovel turned in my hand and glanced from the face, merely making a deep gash above the forehead […].
I thought and thought what should be my next move, but my brain seemed on fire, and I waited with a despairing feeling growing over me […]. With a last look around and at the box which contained the vile body, I ran from the place. (74)

It is the gaze which is the manifestation of the object a. The look Harker sees on Dracula is not the vampire looking, since he is altogether unconscious of Harker’s presence. Hence, this look is not a part of normal everyday reality but an impossible one from eyes whose owner is comatose. It is actually, given the identification of the vampire as Jonathan’s double, a means of depicting Harker’s own look looking at him as if from another place. As Dolar notes the gaze is a presentation of the object a par excellence, “Lacan uses the gaze as the best presentation of that missing object; in the mirror, one can see one’s eyes, but not the gaze which is the part that is lost. But imagine that one could see one’s mirror image close its eyes: that would make the object as gaze appear in the mirror” (“At First Sight” 139).

As with the basilisk, a mythical reptile whose gaze is deadly, the look from the eyes which cannot see paralyses Harker with anxiety, stopping him from performing the deed he had intended. At that point, “the shovel turned in my hand and glanced from the face, merely making a deep gash above the forehead” (Stoker 74). Lacan reverses the prevailing conception in

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6 In Žižek’s joke, vampires have all “read Lacan and consequently, know how to behave” (Enjoy… 126).
psychology that the difference between fear and anxiety is that only the fear has an object (one is frightened of something but anxious about nothing). In contrast, Lacan maintains that “anxiety is not without an object”, the object a (“Introduction…” 25). As Chiesa points out; “anxiety thus corresponds to the fleeting surfacing of the part-object, to the appearance of the double who gazes at the subject with the subject’s own eyes” (166).

Moreover, the “plus object a,” which reappears on the vampire, also represents the lost object of enjoyment. For the human subject, the only enjoyment, or jouissance, obtainable is what Lacan calls surplus jouissance and which is, in Chiesa’s words, “always equivalent to the jouissance of the object a” (184). It is this aspect that leads to the interpretation of the double as standing also for the Id. As Dolar notes, “the double is always the figure of jouissance: […] he is somebody who enjoys at the subject’s expense; he commits acts that one wouldn’t dare to commit” (“I Shall…” 13-14). In other words, he “indulges in one’s repressed desires” (14), or that which one’s conscience would not let one do and “makes sure that the blame falls on the subject” (14). In the novel, when Harker sees Dracula dressed in his own clothes, he, as a matter of common sense, immediately considers it as an attempt to ensure that “any wickedness which he may do shall by the local people be attributed to me” (Stoker 30). The loss of the object is also the precondition of the subject’s access to a social reality. As Dolar points out, “The mirror in the most elementary way already implies the split between the imaginary and the real: one can only have access to imaginary reality, to the world one can recognize oneself in and familiarize oneself with, on the condition of the loss, the ‘falling out,’ of the object a” (“I Shall…” 13). Thus, the illicit restoration of the object in the space of the castle correlates with Jonathan’s feeling of the loss of reality – of seeing only a grey amorphous mass when he looks out of the window in place of the actual world he should have seen.

The Drive with Dracula to the Castle

This reading of the events in the castle as the encounter with the double leads to a re-interpretation of the last stage of the journey to the castle, when Dracula is driving Jonathan in his carriage. The vampire as Harker’s driver is what Lacan terms “extimate” (The Seminar VII 139), his own jouissance, as if coming from outside of himself. The term extimate, as Dolar explains, blurs the line between interior and exterior and correlates with Freud’s term unheimlich, or, in its English translation, the uncanny: “It points neither to
the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety. The extimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a word, it is unheimlich [uncanny]” (Dolar “I Shall…” 6).

After Harker enters the private carriage with the person he assumes is Dracula’s driver and it sets off, it appears to him that they are going over and over the same ground again. He checks his impression by taking note of “some salient point” and finds “that this was so” (Stoker 36). This otherwise trivial incident, which appears without any consequences (their destination, the vampire’s castle, is, after all, reached in due course), becomes more interesting as an incidence of the uncanny. One of Freud’s examples from his paper, “The ‘Uncanny’” (1958) is involuntary repetition, as if one is being acted upon by an outside force. Freud gives an illustration from his own life, an incident in an Italian town, where he inadvertently enters a prostitute’s quarter and hastens to leave:

But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another détour at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery. (“The ‘Uncanny’” 144)

The helplessness which Jonathan feels – wanting “to have asked the driver what this all meant,” but fearing to do so since “any protest would have had no effect in case there had been an intention to delay” (Stoker 36) – has its correlate in Freud’s comment on the compulsion to repeat which “recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream states” (“The ‘Uncanny’” 144). Repetition is that which is driven by jouissance and the uncanny is that unpleasantness or anxiety which arises on encountering this jouissance foreign to and uncontrolled by one’s conscious volition. In Lacan’s words, “repetition is what Freud finds beyond the pleasure principle,” and “what necessitates repetition is jouissance” (The Seminar XVII 45).

The second noteworthy episode on the journey is the sudden appearance of a pack of wolves. The word “uncanny” appears here, Harker recording that “this was all so strange and uncanny” (Stoker 39). Harker first hears their howling but only sees them when the moon suddenly emerges: “By its light I saw around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues, with long, sinewy limbs and shaggy hair” (38). This sight recalls
the dream of one of Freud’s patients known as the Wolfman in consequence, where “suddenly the window opened of its own accord” and the dreamer “was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window” (Three… 186). The ring of wolves and the “six or seven” wolves in the dream, rendered suddenly visible by the moon and the opening window respectively, produce an unaccountable anxiety on the part of the dreamer/protagonist. Harker records that the wolves “were a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than even when they howled. For myself, I felt a sort of paralysis of fear” (Stoker 38). The Wolfman later recounted to Freud that “in great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up” (38).

In the dream, the wolves become visible when the window opens as if of its own volition and not that of the dreamer’s. Yet, it occurs in a dream that has been scripted and staged by the dreamer. One could say it is his unconscious desire or drive which opens the window. The appearance of the wolves in the novel can, in the same vein, be seen as staging the jouissance summoned by the subject and, yet, as in the dream, simultaneously precipitating his anxiety. In Dracula, the wolves are finally banished by the mysterious re-appearance of Harker’s driver:

How he came there, I know not, but I heard his voice raised in a tone of imperious command, and looking towards the sound, saw him stand in the roadway. As he swept his long arms, as though brushing aside some impalpable obstacle, the wolves fell back and back further still. Just then a heavy cloud passed across the face of the moon, so that we were again in darkness. When I could see again the driver was climbing into the caleche, and the wolves disappeared. (39)

It is seemingly the count’s driver – Harker has still not realised that this driver is Dracula himself – who is orchestrating the events, yet as Jonathan’s double he is in an extimate position. The double is neither I, as what he does is not recognised or accepted as coming from oneself, nor he is another person existing in reality. Dracula’s driver, a vampire, is, hence, a fictional way of representing the psychoanalytic concept of the double, which in turn depicts the split Ego, Id and as will be discussed in the next section the Superego. Anticipating, it is the double as the subject’s superego who at this point banishes the wolves qua jouissance. When the clouds obscure the moon, the curtain finally comes down on the staging of his jouissance and the subject is no longer overwhelmed by anxiety. When Jonathan is able to see again, it is as if self-consciousness has been restored. The journey can now continue to the castle with his driver, actually, Dracula, his own double.
The Double as Superego and Its Ravages

So far I have discussed the double as standing for the subject’s Ego and Id. In the castle, Dracula also stands for the superego, but, as will be seen, in its less familiar, “Lacanian” version. In the words of the psychoanalyst J. D. Nasio, “while the superego is classically assimilated to the superego-conscience guarantor of the moral law of the interdiction of incest, we discover here another superego, the unconscious and perverse instigator which entices the ego with the charm of an ideal of jouissance” (221, translation mine – J. S.). Thus, on the one hand, there is the superego as moral conscience when the child, on the resolution of the Oedipus complex, internalises the interdictions of the parents. As Catherine Millot argues, the superego results “from the introjection of paternal authority” (74, translation mine – J. S.), or as Chiesa has it, the subject resolves its Oedipus complex by “an alienating identification with the imago of the father,” the entry into the Law and, as a consequence, the establishment of the “superego as repressive agency” (29).

On the other hand, however, the superego cannot be reduced to a pure psychical representative of the law. It is also the representative of the Id and the repressed drives. As Millot explains, “the superego is charged with the drives of the Id. As well as an authority of prohibition, the superego is the representative of the lost jouissance” (74, translation mine – J. S.) Hence, this second facet of the superego in Nasio’s words, “ends up representing the irresistible call of the id inciting the ego to violate the interdiction and dissolve in an ecstasy beyond all pleasure” (221-222, translation mine – J. S.). In consequence, what the superego commands us to find “is not the moral good (that is, what is good from the point of view of society), but absolute jouissance itself; it orders us to trespass every limit and attain the impossible of an always evasive jouissance” (221, translation mine – J. S.).

If the superego is, at the resolution of the Oedipus complex, both the representative of the law and of the now forbidden jouissance, there is also a third “legacy” or facet. As Nasio points out, the exit from the Oedipus complex signals that the child has renounced the “concretization” or “materialization” of his incestuous desire. He thereby saves “his physical and psychic integrity from the danger of the break which would follow had the ego of the child acceded to the tragic jouissance of incest” (217, translation mine – J. S.). The superego becomes the inheritor or representative of the maintenance of the ego’s integrity, thereby forming the final barrier to an otherwise destructive jouissance. The result is that “in a seeming breach of faith, not only does the superego incite but it simultaneously forbids that same jouissance” (217,
Moreover, in its contradictory functions, the superego becomes malevolent and savage; “the three primordial, superegoic functions of exhortation, interdiction and protection are only fulfilled by this tyrannical superego in a violent and morbid fashion” (223, translation mine – J. S.). In a similar vein, Lacan notes that at the same time as being “constant with the law” the superego does not comply with it so that one should emphasize “its senseless, blind character, of pure imperativeness and simple tyranny” (The Seminar VII 102).

Viewing Dracula as Jonathan’s double clearly illustrates this conception of the superego in its contradictory yet intertwined roles. There are two relevant episodes; Harker’s encounter with the three vampire women and later on his pleading with Dracula to be allowed to leave the castle. The affair with the women occurs in a part of the castle where Dracula had forbidden his guest to fall asleep.

Let me advise you, my dear young friend. Nay, let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned! (Stoker 57)

If, according to Freud, the dream constitutes a fulfilment of the subject’s repressed wishes then Harker is here forbidden to have “bad” dreams, that are, as will be shortly suggested, incestuous. However, in this fantasy space of the castle bereft of symbolic authority, Harker does not obey this injunction coming from his superego, in this first facet as law-giver (“the Count’s warning came into my mind, but I took pleasure in disobeying it”), and falls asleep in one of the forbidden parts of the castle: “In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, they threw no shadow on the floor” (61).

The women are evidently vampires because they have no shadow. Two of them, dark ones, also look like the Count “with high aquiline noses” and “piercing eyes, that seemed to be almost red when contrasted with the pale yellow moon.” The third one is different: “[s]he was fair, as fair as can be, with great masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where” (61).

7 For an account of Freud’s contention that every dream concerns the fulfilment of a wish see Freud, The Interpretation…, ch. iii.
This description indicates that, as Ken Gelder argues, Harker is seeing his own mother, otherwise absent from the novel. In both *Carmilla*, a vampire novel from 1872 by J. S. Le Fanu, and *Dracula*, “the fair-haired vampire women signal the (sexual) return of the mother” (Gelder 73). It is, indeed, this third one who approaches Jonathan whilst another woman says “Go on! You are first, and we shall follow. Yours is the right to begin” (Stoker 61). This vampire woman embodies a prohibited (and impossible) enjoyment; the incestuous recovery of the “mother-Thing” enticing the subject in preference to the “normal” woman, in this case, his betrothed, Mina waiting for him in England.

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest someday it should meet Mina’s eyes and cause her pain, but it is the truth. (61)

Harker submits himself to what he imagines will be an ecstatic enjoyment: “I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited, waited with beating heart” (72). At this point, however, Dracula suddenly appears, grabbing the woman by the neck and throwing her off Harker. He thus saves Harker since according to lore, had the women bitten him, he would have been turned into a vampire. This view of Dracula as the final superegoic protector from a lethal (incestuous) jouissance – the third facet in Nasio’s theorization – is strengthened by Harker’s recollection that the “fierce sweep of his arm, with which he hurls the woman from him” was “the same imperious gesture that I had seen used to the wolves” (62) on the journey to the castle. Wolves in the novel, as will also appear in my next example, signal a lethal threat of the recuperation of the subject’s (mythically) lost “originary” jouissance. Moreover, both wolves and vampire women appearing in the moonlight is another indicator that the same concept is being represented. The physical act of throwing off the woman using brute force is characteristic of the third facet as described by Nasio (in contrast to the presence of the law qua speech, which would have represented the psychical presence of the Law, the first facet of the Superego): “the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid, as if the flame of hell-fire blazed behind them” (62).

The second episode is the appearance of a pack of wolves one evening when Dracula opens the castle door for Harker. Dracula has finally permitted Jonathan to leave the castle on the morrow informing him that all has been arranged. “When they have gone, my carriage shall come for you, and
shall bear you to the Borgo Pass to meet the diligence from Bukovina to Bistritz” (71). These are the same places mentioned on Jonathan’s journey to the castle so that here Dracula as superego can be seen in its first facet, that of moral conscience leading the subject away from the castle (unregulated jouissance) and back to the space of culture and the law. It is subsequently seen, though, in its two other facets, that of inciter to jouissance and in, the last resort, the final barrier against that jouissance. On Dracula allowing his guest to leave, Jonathan immediately suspects “him,” that is, his own Superego, and is “determined to test his sincerity,” so he asks him “point-blank: ‘Why may I not go no-night?’” (71). Dracula refuses, “because, dear sir, my coachman and horses are away on a mission” (71). Yet, both the reader and Harker know there is no coachman, so the Superego is indeed not being “sincere.” Moreover, the superego now becomes the inciter to jouissance.

When Harker insists on leaving, Dracula tells him that he will not be kept “an hour” against his will in his house and Jonathan proceeds towards the door:

Close at hand came the howling of many wolves. It was almost as if [emphasis added – J. S.] the sound sprang up at the rising of his hand, just as the music of a great orchestra seems to leap under the baton of the conductor. After a pause of a moment, he proceeded, in his stately way, to the door, drew back the ponderous bolts, unhooked the heavy chains, and began to draw it open.

To my intense astonishment I saw that it was unlocked. Suspiciously, I looked all round, but could see no key of any kind.

As the door began to open, the howling of the wolves without grew louder and angrier. Their red jaws, with champing teeth, and their blunt-clawed feet as they leaped, came in through the opening door. I knew than that to struggle at the moment against the Count was useless. With such allies as these at his command, I could do nothing.

But still the door continued slowly to open, and only the Count’s body stood in the gap. Suddenly it struck me that this might be the moment and means of my doom. I was to be given to the wolves, and at my own instigation. There was a diabolical wickedness in the idea great enough for the Count, and as the last chance I cried out, ‘Shut the door! I shall wait till morning.’ (72)

It is Dracula who gives permission for Harker to leave and enables him to do so by opening the door without using a key whereas, as far as Harker knows, it is normally locked. The vampire is (literally) opening the door to a lethal jouissance. At the same time, the analogy of music controlled by means of the conductor’s baton makes it appear Dracula as the director or producer of the wolves outside, representing Harker’s jouissance. Yet, it is
also Dracula, who in finally shutting the door, becomes Harker’s last shield protecting him from the acute anxiety (“Shut the door!”) in the face of the looming gratification of his own desire (“I was to be given to the wolves, and at my own instigation”) and what would have been his literal bodily dismemberment. Dracula, as Superego in its third facet is ultimately the means of Harker’s not being “thrown to the wolves” by, as in the case of the vampire woman, finally blocking a desired but lethal jouissance (and which as duplicious superego the vampire had also instigated).

Thus, finally, it can be seen at the very end of the Jonathan’s stay in the castle how in this fantasy space it is the incestuous vampire woman representing the mother/thing who appears in place of Mina, the “normal” woman of the possible sexual relationship: “I am alone in the castle with those awful women. Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is naught in common. They are devils of the Pit!” (Stoker 75). The presence of the vampire representing the overbearing closeness of jouissance and the tyranny of the Lacanian superego leads to the imperative to escape: “And then away for home! Away to the quickest and nearest train! Away from the cursed spot, from this cursed land, where the devil and his children still walk with earthly feet!” (75). The devil can now be seen not as a supernatural figure but the extimate superego within (and without) accounting for the character’s torment. For Nasio, the psychoanalytic concept of the superego is “exactly opposite to the rational principles of the morality founded in the search for the good.” This “superego cruel and rapacious is the cause of the large part of human distress and the absurd, infernal action of men (suicide, murder, destruction and war)” (Nasio 221-222). Jonathan’s last words regarding his stay in the castle register exactly that despair: “At least God’s mercy is better than that of those monsters, and the precipice is steep and high. At its foot a man may sleep, as a man. Goodbye, all. Mina!” (Stoker 75).

The Role of Van Helsing and the Destruction of the Double

Following Harker’s initial encounter with his double, Dracula, most of the novel is taken up with the activities of the group directed by Van Helsing in neutralizing and finally destroying the vampire, paving the way to the happy ending. Dr. Prof. Van Helsing of Amsterdam, “a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day” (129) is summoned by Jonathan Seward, baffled by the mysterious illness of a lady friend turned into a vampire after being bitten by Dracula. The role of the professor can be clarified in a further comparison with the Irma dream.
As noted, my claim is that the second part of both dream and novel consists of the return to the sociability of the group and the assimilation of the trauma into the symbolic grid and shared discourse. At the end of the first part of the dream, after seeing the inside of Irma’s throat, Freud “at once calls in Dr. M,” a medical colleague:

he repeated the examination and confirmed it. M said: ‘There’s no doubt it’s an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated’. We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection. And probably the syringe had not been clean. *(The Interpretation… 131)*

The horrific and meaningless sight of the back of Irma’s throat is integrated into an established medical discourse – an infection from a (probably dirty) syringe. Dr. M also comes up with a (nonsensical) remedy (the elimination through dysentery) while a third doctor starts examining the patient, diagnosing an “infiltration” on the shoulder (131). As Joan Copjec points out, this part of Freud’s dream is a refuge from the eruption of anxiety consequent on the encounter with the object *a*. “The abruptness of the transition indicates that Freud flees from the real-Irma, her white scabs, the unconscious – into the symbolic community of his fellow doctors” (27). Likewise, a “Dr. H,” Van Helsing will provide explanations as unrealistic (outside of the novel) as those given by the reputable doctors in Freud’s dream – a story about a vampire, an un-dead creature who lives off blood and infects all those he preys on.

Nonetheless, the point of Van Helsing’s folklore is to make of Harker’s private phenomenon a shared communal object, albeit fictional. He organises a group who will together track down and destroy the vampire. To elucidate, I return to the scene where Harker sees the vampire lying comatose in the earth box where the gaze on the count is taken as a depiction of the object *a* (the representative of the lost jouissance). Typically in the literature of the double, the relationship to the double incarnating one’s jouissance becomes, as Dolar points out “so unbearable that the subject, in a final showdown, kills his double, unaware that his only substance and his very being were concentrated in his double”8 (“I Shall…” 11). Accordingly in Stoker’s novel, Harker tries to kill the count lying in the earth box with the shovel. Had Jonathan succeeded, he would, according to the tradition of the literary double, also have had to have died, thus bringing the story to a premature

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8 In much of the literature in which he appears, the double remains a private affair, appearing only to the one subject.
end, since in killing one’s double, one kills oneself. The double cannot be killed until it has become a shared object in a social space and a group bands together to commit the deed. As Harker writes on one of the occasions when he sees Dracula crawling down the castle exterior, “I wished I had a gun or some lethal weapon that I might destroy him; but I fear that no weapon wrought alone by man’s hand would have any effect on him” (Stoker 71). As one’s private double he is inviolate. It is only towards the end of the novel, that he is killed with two knives wielded by two different people” and after having been tracked down in, as is made very clear, a group effort.

To sum up, the traumatic experience undergone by the English solicitor in Dracula’s castle has been interpreted through viewing the vampire as Harker’s double, who in Žižek’s phrase quoted above “gives body to a certain surplus.” This, Lacan’s object a “represents what the subject must renounce, sacrifice even – the part in himself that the subject must murder in order to start to live as a ‘normal’ member of the community” (Žižek Enjoy… 125). It is exactly this trajectory that can be seen in the novel, beginning with the inability of Jonathan Harker, first in the Transylvania and then in London, to shake off Dracula and ending in the killing of the vampire by Harker and his colleagues back in the castle – now locatable on a map and hence no longer a fantasy space outside of the symbolic – thus enabling Jonathan, at the novel’s close, to consummate his marriage with Mina and become a father.

Works Cited


9 “On the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan’s great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat. Whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris’s bowie knife plunged into the heart” (367).
In the biographical *Recollections of James Joyce*, Stanislaus Joyce, James’s brother, gives the following succinct account of “The Dead”:

> The last story [of *Dubliners*], which serves as the final chorus of the book presents holiday life, the celebration of Christmas. In England and Ireland ghost stories are still told about the fire at Christmas time […]. The story “The Dead” is also, in its way, a story of ghosts, of the dead who return in envy of the living. (20)

Interestingly, this summary does not only indicate the mundane realism of this text (and the rest of the stories in *Dubliners*), but it also intuitively maps it on to its manifest and latent uncanniness. The uncanny, by definition, lurks in the ordinary and, as Freud argues, when “the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality […], he accepts all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story” (“The ‘Uncanny’” 18). The *unheimlich* tropes of “The Dead” are embedded in its realistic texture, hence its peculiar “uncanny realism.” The world depicted in the story has to be rendered “fundamentally ordinary before being invested with an uncanny aura; or, the uncanny works through the ordinariness of the world, even produced by it” (Jervis 28). It constitutes the crux of Freud’s idea of the necessary coexistence of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*.

“The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud’s seminal essay of 1919, commences with an inevitably imperfect definition of this psychological phenomenon eluding
human normative experience and linguistic expression owing to its terrifying psychological impact: “It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread” (1). This dread emerges from the collapse of the boundaries between the self, the known, the familiar, the social, the homely and the other, the unknown, the unfamiliar, the intimate, the strange. The foundations of human experience and knowledge are overturned due to a sudden realization that “What is heimlich [...] comes to be unheimlich.” Thus, Freud contends, “on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight” (3). In the midst of his etymological exegesis, he resorts to an apt quotation from Schelling which comes close to expressing the inexpressible: “everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (3). Schelling’s definition sounds particularly appealing to Freud since it directly pertains to his own psychoanalytic theory: the latent presence and abrupt terrifying emergence of some past traumatic experience that has been forgotten, repressed, buried in the depths of the unconscious psyche. It is through puzzling, unintended, unannounced repetition or recurrence that the archaic repressed material from the unconscious resurges to haunt the present and disrupt the familiar. The mechanism of this process is discussed in Freud’s later monograph of 1937 Moses and Monotheism, in which he explains “how something gets forgotten and of how after a time it can come to light again. The forgotten material is not extinguished, only ‘repressed’; its traces are extant in the memory in their original freshness,” adding that

It may happen that certain parts of the repressed material have escaped this process, have remained accessible to memory and occasionally reappear in consciousness, but even then they are isolated, a foreign body without any connection with the rest of the mind. This may happen, but it need not happen. Repression may also be complete. (152)

In “The 'Uncanny,'” Freud traces the phenomenon in question to two significant sources, the resurface of the repressed from the unconscious and the archaic beliefs threatening to disturb the logic of everyday life: “An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (17). Actually, the two are interrelated, because the latter results from the former. More specifically, as
listed by Bennett and Royle, the uncanny may derive from the following: repetition, odd coincidences, animism, anthropomorphism, automatism, “a sense of radical uncertainty about sexual identity,” a fear of being buried alive, silence, telepathy, and death (35-38). Unsurprisingly, death is the ultimate experience of the uncanny. Several of the uncanny experiences above disrupt the homely atmosphere of the Miss Morkans’ Christmas party in “The Dead” as the spectral past returns to haunt the present in the liminal borderland occupied by the living and the dead.

The overall uncanny character of the text evidently derives from its title. According to Ellmann, it was Stanislaus who sent Joyce the words of a song from Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies* entitled “O, Ye Dead” (253). It clearly introduces two related Gothic tropes that recur in the fabric of the narrative: death and ghosts, or the return of the ghosts of the dead. In the song by Moore, the shadows of the dead conduct a conversation with the living, the former claiming the right to return to the realm of the latter. The poet’s note to the lyric reveals that “there is a mountain in some part of Ireland, where the ghosts of persons who have died in foreign lands walk about and converse with those they meet, like living people” (Moore 209).

Both the time and the place are fitting enough for the irruption of the uncanny Gothic. It has been convincingly argued that the story takes place between Saturday, 2 January, and Wednesday, 6 January 1904 (Gifford 110), but it is tempting to assume that the time is Twelfth Night, the evening preceding the Feast of Epiphany, the time of the uncanny revelation. The place of the action is mostly the Miss Morkans’ “dark gaunt house” at 15 Usher Island (Joyce *Dubliners* 152), ringing a Gothic bell by its obvious reference to the bleak ancient mansion depicted in E. A. Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Additionally, as Kevin Whelan observes, “a ballad forms the emotional core of this story of the living dead [“The Fall”], [and] it features a storm outside, ‘gaseous exhalations,’ the ‘sentience’ of objects, and a series of words favoured by Joyce: sullen, vague, melancholy, bitter” (95-96).

In “The Dead,” the image and experience of home becomes eroded by the uncanny, resulting in a gradual transformation of the ordinary, familiar abode into “an *unheimliches* house,” “a *haunted* house” (Freud “The ‘Uncanny’” 13). The Miss Morkans are desperately trying to preserve the traditional, predictable and familiar character of their home and their annual party which has been invariably hailed a success for about thirty years:

*It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan’s annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members*
of Julia’s choir, any of Kate’s pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane’s pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style, as long as anyone could remember. (Joyce Dubliners 152)

All their routine social activities show how committed they are to the familial structure of the event. They convert “the bathroom upstairs into the ladies’ dressingroom,” can be seen “gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come,” greet and take care of the guests, entertain them by playing the piano and singing, encourage everyone to socialize and bid them goodbye. In his postprandial speech, Gabriel emphasizes this sense of the homely created by the hostesses, ambiguously praising, however true or hollow it appears to ring, their great merits: “Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not the first time that we have gathered together under this hospitable roof, around this hospitable board. It is not the first time that we have been the recipients—or perhaps, I had better say, the victims—of the hospitality of certain good ladies” (176). In fact, Gabriel himself is considered to be a reliable family member who can become readily engaged in the maintenance of the heimlich and be depended on in emergency, for example, to control drunken Freddie Malins. There is evident tension in Gabriel’s speech when the uncanny word “victims” emerges from “hospitality” and is even preferred by Gabriel to the homely “recipients.” Robert Spoo remarks that “Gabriel’s need for reiterated proofs of control and his aunts’ desire for annual success of their party reflect in different ways an obsession with keeping the unfamiliar from entering the circle of the home” and their “industrious staging of this homely experience prepares the way for das Unheimliche” (99). One of its most persistent representations already intimated in the title of the text, and unfailingly present in Gabriel’s speech, is the latent sense of death.

In “The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud mentions death together with several related sources of the unheimlich: “Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (13). Death is construed here “as something at once familiar […] and absolutely unfamiliar, unthinkable, unimaginable” (Bennett and Royle 38). Its ultimate irrationality becomes the source of traumatic anxiety which is temporarily warded off by scrupulous attention to the commonplace. In accordance with its “uncanny realism,” numerous references to death and the dead in Joyce’s story are either expressed in colloquial language or appear in homely, familiar, even comic contexts before its
final terrible irruption in the Gresham Hotel. When the Conroys arrive late at the party, Gabriel explains that his “wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself” and the aunts assume that “she must be perished alive” (Joyce Dubliners 153; emphasis added – T. G.). Another example of the unheimlich buried in the heimlich of commonplace speech are Gabriel’s words before he sets to his meal: “kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes” (172). The Miss Morkans’ house is teeming with the ghosts of the dead, familiar and unfamiliar, returning to haunt the memory of the living: their deceased brother Pat, “all those great singers of the past” (177), Gabriel’s mother, Patrick Morkan, Patrick Morkan’s horse, or, ultimately, Michael Furey resurrected in Gretta’s memory. Additionally, Gabriel’s speech sounds like a funeral oration, last homage to the memory of the dead and the living already on their way to nothingness, non-existence, oblivion. Gabriel clearly realizes the return and uncanny cohabitation of the dead with the living due to the faculty of memory: “there are always in gatherings such as this sadder thoughts that will recur to our minds: thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, of absent faces that we miss here tonight. Our path through life is strewn with many such sad memories.” Immediately, however, he swerves from the realm of past recurrence and circularity to the world of safe linearity: “were we to brood upon them always we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living” (177).

However, the living can assume ghostlike forms of the deceased. Many a time Julia Morkan is depicted in her Gothic spectrality: “Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with her large flaccid face” (155). The lyrics of “Arrayed for the Bridal,” the song that Julia sings, ironically contradict her spinsterhood and old age and, as her swan song, intimate her imminent lonely death. Even her spirited performance is ominous since, as Whelan has discovered, “Joyce also used here a motif from Irish folklore—the ‘lightness before death.’ (This was the common belief that just before a person died, they experienced a brief moment of renewed energy and exhilaration)” (75-76): “Her voice, strong and clear in tone, attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air and though she sang very rapidly she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes” (Joyce Dubliners 167-168). Later, while Gabriel is brooding over the futility of existence, his thoughts meander through numerous party-related issues to focus on Julia’s impending demise:

Poor aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. […] Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in that same drawing-room,
dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him Julia had died. (193)\(^1\) It is not surprising either that aunt Julia is often seen accompanied by Mr. Browne, who appears to personify death in the text\(^2\): “Mr. Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting aunt Julia, who leaned upon his arm, smiling and hanging her head” (167). After her successful singing performance, he exclaims: “Miss Julia Morkan, my latest discovery!” (168). Moreover, the farewell scene with the obsessive repetition of the expression “Goodnight” (thirteen times) is so suggestive that it borders on the ridiculous (184-185).

The topic of death is also brought up in connection with Freddy Malins’s plan to go to Mount Melleray, a Cistercian abbey in southern Ireland known as “a refuge for well-heeled alcoholics in need of a cure,” both physical and spiritual (Gifford 122). The place is peculiar since, allegedly, “the monks never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins” and “The coffin, said Mary Jane, is to remind them of their last end” (Joyce Dubliners 175). Although this information is factually untrue since the monks there slept in their habits and not coffins, it perfectly suits the uncanny atmosphere of “The Dead.” The narrator, expressing the common uneasiness, makes a fitting comment concerning the company’s ultimate withdrawal from the unheimlich: “As the subject had grown lugubrious it was buried in a silence of the table” (175; emphasis added – T. G.). There are two geographical reverberations of this issue in the text: Gabriel lives in Monkstown, “one of the exclusive ‘Protestant’ suburbs to which the wealthy had fled after the Union, leaving the old city to tenementize and moulder” (Whelan 78); additionally, there is a mention of Winetavern Street, where the Conroys catch a cab to the Gresham Hotel, which, together with the adjacent Cook Street, used to be the home of Dublin’s coffin makers (Dawson 82). These marginal details point to the uncanny kinship between Gabriel and Freddy Malins, his living double.

\(^1\) In Ulysses, Leopold Bloom recalls Julia as follows: “Great song of Julia Morkan’s. Kept her voice up to the very last. Pupil of Michael Balfe’s, wasn’t she?” and the anonymous catechist in “Ithaca” reveals that Stephen thinks of various apparitions among whom there are “his godmother Miss Kate Morkan in the house of her dying sister Miss Julia Morkan at 15 Usher’s Island” (205-206, 781-782). It means that aunt Julia had died by June, 16, 1904, within six months after the Epiphany party in “The Dead” (Joyce Dubliners 193).

\(^2\) See Kelleher 418.
Freud extensively examines in his essay the uncanny nature of the double, another significant trope in “The Dead.” The double is an example of the wider phenomenon of repetition, together with the experience of déjà vu, “the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name” (Freud “The ‘Uncanny’” 9). The doppelgänger repeats the ego and marks the unconscious recurrence of “some portion of infantile sexual life-of the Oedipus complex and its derivatives.” The figure derives from a broader tendency in the unconscious to “repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of […] remembering it as something belonging to the past” (Freud Beyond… 12). Following Otto Rank, Freud mentions “the connections the double has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death.” The association of the sight of the double with death stems directly from the Narcissus myth which Freud considers in its two developmental forms: “the stage of unbounded love,” “the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of the primitive,” and “the later stages of the development of the ego” when a “special faculty is slowly formed there, able to oppose the rest of the ego, with the function of observing and criticizing the self and exercising a censorship within the mind, and this we become aware of as our ‘conscience’” (Freud “The ‘Uncanny’” 9, 10). Accordingly, after Rank, he distinguishes between the primitive “invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction” and the modern awareness of the doppelgänger as “ghastly harbinger of death.” For modern man, “The double has become a vision of terror” (9, 10). This interesting transformation of the concept of the double is further glossed by Jean Baudrillard in Symbolic Exchange and Death:

With the internalisation of the soul and consciousness (the principle of identity and equivalence), the subject undergoes a real confinement […]. It is at this point that the primitive thought of the double as continuity and exchange is lost, and the haunting double comes to the fore as the subject’s discontinuity in death and madness. ‘Whoever sees his double, sees his death.’ (142)

There are two possible sources of the origin of the double and the resultant discontinuity of the ego: the id and the superego. In the former case, the doppelgänger embodies the repressed instincts and unconscious desires whereas, in the latter instance, the double symbolically represents the prohibitive conscience generating self-punitive guilt. In “The Dead,” Gabriel Conroy appears to be doubled by the existent and non-existent characters. His identity is split into the doppelgängers of the living, embodied by Freddy
Malins, and the dead, the spectral presence of Michael Furey. Moreover, another version of his double emerges as his reflection in the mirror/window at the climactic moment in the story, which evidently constitutes his conscience.

Freddy Malins may be perceived as Gabriel’s living alter ego, “a grosser edition of Gabriel” (Torchiana qtd. in Thurston 460). As for apparent similarities between the two characters, they are both late at the party, both are young and they physically resemble each other: “In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel’s size and build, with very round shoulders” (Joyce Dubliners 160). Gabriel and Freddy both eat celery for dinner, the former probably for health and fitness reasons and the latter as a home remedy for his alcoholism. Additionally, Gabriel delivers a speech which, for various reasons, turns out to be a personal failure in spite of his painstaking rehearsals (which he bitterly realizes only later, thinking of it as “his own foolish speech” [193]) and Freddy Malins fails to bring to a climax his sexually charged anecdote because of his unbuttoned fly euphemistically called by Mr. Browne “a disarray in his dress”: “his [Freddy’s] right hand [was] being engaged in the mechanical readjustment of his dress. Mr. Browne, whose face was once more wrinkling with mirth, poured out for himself a glass of whisky while Freddy Malins exploded, before he had well reached the climax of his story” (161). According to Dilworth, what is comically intimated here is “a correspondence between failure to complete the joke and premature ejaculation, which is the forerunner of impotency” (166), which may be symbolically related to Gabriel’s psychological ordeal caused by a series of frustrations involving women. Mladen Dolar observes that “The double is also a device to avoid a relationship to femininity and sexuality in general” (11). It is also no accident that Gabriel lives in Monkstown and Freddy is planning to make his recovery from alcoholism among the monks of the Mount Melleray abbey and even his surname hints at malean, the Gaelic word for monk (Torchiana 126).

The significant differences between Conroy and his double indicate his neurosis and psychic disintegration as the repressed threatens to disrupt his complacent ego. The major distinction corresponds to the transition between the primitive and modern understandings of the doppelgänger and the repression of the natural by the cultural. Natural, libidinal Malins embodies all those instinctive traits that artificial, cultural Conroy has either repressed or has been arduously striving to suppress. That Freddy Malins constitutes the “bad” dangerous double of Gabriel’s identity is also suggested
by his surname which, as Luke Thurston argues, “encodes mal, evil, as well as malin, shrewd or cunning” (461). Time and again in the text, there is evidence of Freddy’s authenticity and sincerity as contrasted with Gabriel’s calculated pretence and artificiality, his socially contrived persona. His obsessive preoccupation with the rational side of the mind is juxtaposed with Freddy’s natural vitality both enhanced and crippled by his drinking habit. Unsurprisingly, one of Malins’ dominant traits is his innate propensity for laughter and humour: “he [Gabriel] recognised Freddy Malins’ laugh”; “He [Freddy] was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs”; “Freddy Malins exploded […] in a kink of high-pitched bronchitic laughter” (Joyce Dubliners 158, 160, 161). The last quotation describing a genuine response to his own mildly indecent joke also reveals the spontaneous character of his language which, according to Thurston, “obviously contrasts with Gabriel’s self-controlled, measured rhetoric at the dinner table: just as the eloquent speech expresses the individual mastery of a responsible adult, so the vocal explosion indicates infantile loss of self-possession” (461). Unlike Freddy, Gabriel either laughs anxiously or his laughter is forced. When Gretta jokingly told aunt Kate that, having first made her wear goloshes, her husband would next buy her “a diving suit,” “Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly, while Aunt Kate nearly doubled herself, so heartily did she enjoy the joke” (Joyce Dubliners 156-157). There is one more mention of Gabriel’s laughing when he tells the story of “the never-to-be-forgotten Johnny.” Here, his uneasy, forced laughter evidently masks the unconscious traumatic nature of his colonial moral paralysis, a significant subtext in the narrative.

Gabriel’s repression of the natural and his failed sublimation of Eros are manifest in his lack of artistic ability and his indifferent response to art, most notably music and aunt Julia’s vocal performance. Otto Rank contends that “both the artist and the neurotic are beset by similar conflicts,” but the artist is capable of “justifying the survival of the irrational in the midst of our over-rationalized civilization” (Beyond Psychology 77). Though anything but an artist, Freddy expresses his passionate enthusiasm about the old lady’s singing skills: “Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear her better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and talking animatedly to his mother” (Joyce Dubliners 168). After a while, his excitement gives way to sheer exaltation as he addresses Julia:

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3 Thurston offers a detailed analysis of the different responses to her singing as reflected in Joyce’s style (462-463).
“I was just telling my mother,” he said, “I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is tonight. Now! Would you believe that now? That’s the truth. Upon my word and honour that’s the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so [...] so clear and fresh, never” (168). It is impossible to expect such a sincere response from Gabriel, a conduct unbecoming his seemingly self-controlled, aloof ego. Despite his artistic pretensions and studied sophistication, he neither understands nor particularly appreciates music, which is reminiscent of his mother: “It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family” (162). He finds modern music too demanding as evidenced by his evaluation of the composition played by Mary Jane: “Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed drawing-room. He liked music but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners” (161). Curiously, even the word “liked,” though used here, strikes one as false, especially because the narrator’s voice is aligned with Gabriel’s perspective. In order to justify his innate inability to enjoy music, he resorts to the safe realm of the homely, in this case the social, and attempts to identify his response with that of “the other listeners.” The same can be applied to his attitude to the old song “Arrayed for the Bridal” sung by aunt Julia: “Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close of the song and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper-table. It sounded so genuine that a little colour struggled into Aunt Julia’s face” (168). Once again his reaction is deliberately embedded in the social (“with all the others”) as the self-defensive mechanism of his ego wards off any potential attack of an uncanny impulse, a natural feeling from the unconscious. Gabriel’s ego, residing safely in the sphere of the *heimlich*, can only sound “genuine” whereas his living double, Freddy, epitomizes a fragment of the repressed nature. In Freudian terms, Gabriel’s conscious *heimlich*, the modern, the mature, desperately struggles to contain the unconscious other lurking in the depths of his psyche, the archaic, the infantile. Extending Thurston’s convincing argument, one may conclude that Gabriel and his double perfectly reflect the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the canny and the uncanny: “on the one side, a response knowingly caught up in a fictive social code; on the other, an entirely genuine, non-knowing or ‘infant’ response” (Thurston 464). His disdain for and patronization of other people, especially women, and his persistent habit of trivializing the uneasy irrational substance of life evidence his ego’s ultimately thwarted attempt to
contain the unconscious, to domesticate the uncanny. In his typical defense mechanism, he later resorts to a condescending remark playing down Freddy's sincere gesture: “- Well, poor fellow, he's a decent sort of chap, after all, continued Gabriel in a false voice. He gave me back that sovereign I lent him, and I didn't expect it, really” (Joyce *Dubliners* 188). Freddy Malins’ ghastly appearance, which, contrary to his convivial nature, shows signs of his possible premature death, foreshadows the imminent arrival of Gabriel’s more sinister double, Michael Furey.

The figure of Michael Furey combines the two primary uncanny tropes of the “The Dead,” death and the double. Although his spectral presence is ultimately conjured up in Greta’s mind by “The Lass of Aughrim,” a traditional Irish song sung by Bartell D’Arcy, Michael’s apparition is intimated by numerous textual details and intertextual interventions found earlier in the narrative. Thus, there are recurrent references to gas obliquely aligned with death: “The gas in the pantry made her [Lily] look still paler” (154), or “He [Mr. Browne] has been laid on here like the gas, said aunt Kate […], all during Christmas” (179). Nothing is accidental in Joyce and one may not ignore the fact that, in western funerary culture, the lily is the flower most frequently used in funeral services and, as stated above, in this particular text, Mr. Browne incarnates death, hence his ubiquity in the Miss Morkans’ house. Later, before it is unveiled that Michael Furey “was in the gasworks” (191), both Greta and Gabriel become physically and psychologically overwhelmed by gaslight: “She [Gretta] was standing right under the dusty fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her hair” (184); Gabriel tells the porter in the Gresham Hotel: “We don’t want any light. We have light enough from the street. And I say, he added, pointing to the candle, you might remove that handsome article, like a good man”; and the description of “A ghostly light from the street lamp [which] lay in a long shaft from one window to the door” of their room is also relevant here (188). This motif is enhanced by the Gothic aspects of the Dublin setting in general: “The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky” (185).

The significant intertextual elements reflecting both the role of the double and Gabriel’s ordeal are the two death-oriented paintings that he briefly contemplates: “A picture of the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower” (161). At the latent level, the illustrations evoke the coexistence of Eros and Thanatos which constitutes a major thematic thread in “The Dead.” On the manifest plane, the former mirrors Michael Furey’s real death and Gabriel’s symbolic
psychological demise, both resulting from their pent-up frustration in love. Dilworth convincingly explains this aspect of the doppelgänger:

when Romeo seems frustrated in love he kills himself. In his death-reverie, Gabriel bears a metaphorical resemblance to Romeo in this respect, and to that other Irish Romeo, his rival Michael Furey. After enacting his own balcony scene, Furey announces that, because of the disillusionment with love, he does ‘not want to live’ […], and by staying out in the rain he commits a kind of suicide. (167)

The other picture presents the sons of King Edward IV, Edward V and his brother Arthur, whose murders were reputedly ordered by their uncle, duke of Gloucester, later Richard III of England. This illustration complements the balcony scene, symbolically binding Michael’s and Gabriel’s deaths and additionally contributing to the development of the trope of the double (the murdered boys were brothers). Gabriel strives to domesticate the uncanny feeling produced by the illustration by reducing it to the fact that “aunt Julia had worked [it] in red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl” (Joyce Dubliners 161). Gifford remarks that “Illustrations of this theme sentimentally depict the apparently sleeping, actually dead princes as babys-in-the-woods” (116). This sentimentality evoked by the death of a child leads directly to “The Lass of Aughrim,” the song resurrecting the uncanny memory of Michael Furey long buried in the recesses of Gretta’s mind.

This song “in the old Irish tonality” appears to be uncanny in itself since Bartell D’Arcy “seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice” (Joyce Dubliners 183). It tells the story of a seduced peasant-born lass who, seeking Lord Gregory, her seducer and father of her child, in his castle, is refused entry by his mother imitating her son’s voice. Standing wet in the pouring rain, with her baby in her arms, she is told to drown herself in the sea. The “thought-tormented music” does not only trigger the deeply-buried memory of Gretta’s young suitor, who “used to sing that song” for her during their short-lived affair in Galway (190), but it also makes her relive the traumatic experience in the present. As the suppressed returns, Michael’s spectral presence assumes an almost corporeal identity. In her memory, the past merges with the present and her account makes it clear. “I can see him so plainly,” “I can see his eyes as well,” she tells her husband (190, 192), which indicates, as Nouri Gana insists, that “remembering does not consist in recalling the past apart from the present, but rather in their overlap and simultaneity” (163). The absent becomes the present, the unheimlich encroaches upon the heimlich. In the confusion of the realms, the dead claim the corporeal identity of the living. And vice versa. In the staircase scene,
Gretta herself, at least in Gabriel’s eyes, loses her bodily identity, turns phantasmal, uncanny, symbolic, estranged, remote:

A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmonpink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness. (Joyce *Dubliners* 182)

As a part of this bizzare *tableau vivant*, Gretta becomes transmogrified in Gabriel’s fancy into an inversion of the automaton which Freud, citing Jentsch, also considers, though reluctantly, a potential source of the uncanny. It occurs when one has “‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate’; and he [Jentsch] refers in this connection to the impression made by wax-work figures, artificial dolls and automatons” (Freud “The ‘Uncanny’” 5). Incidentally, for Gretta, the word “goloshes” is strangely reminiscent of “christy minstrels,” black or blackface performers appearing in popular music-hall entertainment, which in turn suggests “golliwog,” a grotesque animated black doll, a weird automaton (Joyce *Dubliners* 157). Yet, it is Gabriel Conroy, not Gretta, who is symbolically relegated to the realm of the dead through the encounter with his ghostly double, Michael Furey.

In his analysis of the double in *Beyond Psychology*, Otto Rank states: “Originally conceived of as a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, a reminder of the individual’s mortality, indeed, the announcer of death itself” (76). This transformation in the human comprehension of the doppelgänger perfectly applies to the uncanny relationship between Gabriel and Michael. Even Rank’s angelic link is significant. Their angelic names become relevant after Gretta’s revelation of her love affair with Michael. In Christian tradition, archangel Gabriel is invariably depicted as a messenger of life, most notably the angel of the Anunciation. Ironically, contrary to the role of his biblical namesake, Gabriel Conroy presides over the realm of the living dead and literally appears as the announcer of death (at first he mourns aunt Julia’s imminent death and later he muses: “One by one they were all becoming shades” [Joyce *Dubliners* 194]). Michael is the militant angel of the Last Judgment and, in this sense, “a harbinger of death.” Indeed, Gabriel senses his doom when he involuntarily invites his revenant double with his “warm trembling fingers tapp[ing] the cold pane of the window” (166).

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4 The only two angels actually named in the Hebrew Bible (“Gabriel”).
subsequently symbolically summons Gabriel: “A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window,” which in turn reverberates his throwing gravel at Gretta’s window mentioned in her account of the fateful night back in Galway (194, 192). Applying the context of Joyce’s story to Rank’s analysis, the phantasmal figure of Gabriel’s double conjured up in Gretta’s memory turns into “an omen of death in the self-conscious individual” (Rank Beyond Psychology 76). The modern literary double almost invariably thwarts the protagonist’s expectations and actions and thus brings about his ruin. In a desperate attempt to avert impending disaster, he gets rid of his double by killing him only to realize that, in the case of this uncanny twinship, killing results in dying. While Gabriel continually (mis)judges the other characters and announces their death, his double eventually forces him to shatter the insulating shell of his ego and to realize his myopic rationalism and inability to love regardless of the consequences for his emotional sanity, a bitter experience of psychic disintegration. Gabriel’s sudden overwhelming desire to possess Gretta sexually blinds him completely: “He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her” (Joyce Dubliners 189). Apart from being a lover, the double also becomes “a disturber of love.” According to Mladen Dolar, “he typically springs up at the moment when one is about to touch, or to kiss, the girl of one’s dreams; he springs up when the subject comes close to the realization of his wishes, when he is on the brink of attaining full enjoyment, the completion of the sexual relation” (14). Gabriel learns that Gretta has suppressed the memory of her lover whose revenant now returns in her story standing lifelike, rain-soaked in the cold of her garden and subsequently dying for his all-consuming passion. Michael may be considered here to embody Eros, Gabriel’s repressed life instinct. It does not matter that Gretta, probably unconsciously, confuses his death of consumption with a heroic act in the name of love, or, as Pecora argues, “fabricates the ‘legend’ of Michael Furey,” who “—once only a sickly, almost pathetic gasworker—has now been reborn, through the internalized, mythmaking machinery evident throughout Dublin, as a noble, tragic hero who sacrifices himself for the one he loves” (241). What counts more is the crushing blow inflicted to Gabriel’s smug rational heimlich ego by Gretta’s words: “I think he died for me” (Joyce Dubliners 191). Rank contends that “the double is the rival of his prototype in anything and everything, but primarily in the love for woman” (“Narcissism…” 125). Gabriel unconsciously desires to become his double, Michael. He is appalled to realize that, despite appearances, he has never really established an intimate relationship with Gretta: “He watched her while she slept, as though he and she had never
lived together as man and wife” (Joyce _Dubliners_ 193). It is not surprising since unconsciously he has always shared his dead mother’s view of Gretta as an ignorant peasant girl: “he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute” (162). Although he seems to think that it was “slighting” and “was not true of Gretta at all” (162), his behaviour, words and tone of voice suggest otherwise (Leonard 292). His answer to Gretta’s natural wish to visit her hometown is symptomatic: “I’d love to see Galway again. - You can go if you like, said Gabriel coldly” (Joyce _Dubliners_ 166).

His response to the double’s possession of his wife accurately reflects Freud’s dread of the uncanny other: “A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer, as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world” (191). The double becomes “the harbinger of the death” of his ego. In this paradoxical recurrent paradigm of the unconscious, the dead man, Michael-Eros, has risen from his Oughterard grave to assume the role of the living man, Gabriel-Thanatos, who confesses to having never really existed anyway. Gabriel desperately attempts to shake “himself free” of his repressed second self “with an effort of reason” (191), which is futile. His rational mind is of no avail and he becomes subject to the primitive desires of the id. He admits to himself that “He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love” and broods over “how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life” (194, 193). His ego has been humiliated by “the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy from the gasworks” (191) who returns to haunt him, because the revenant Michael Furey, at least in his reading of Gretta’s vision, represents everything that the living neurotic Gabriel Conroy has been trying to discard from his nature: love and natural passion (even his surname suggests “furious”), heroic sacrifice (however ambiguous), or youthful sincerity. Gabriel’s neurosis additionally results from his inability to sublimate his internal frustrations. In _Beyond the Pleasure Principle_, Freud writes that “everything living dies for internal reasons” (32). Gabriel’s painful recognition of Gretta’s otherness, the fact that “she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover’s eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live” (Joyce _Dubliners_ 194), makes him ruminate over his own symbolic

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5 Gabriel’s brief recollection of his overbearing mother and numerous references to his impaired eyesight constitute a significant Oedipal subtext in the story, his castration anxiety.
death, his failure as a husband, a father, a lover, and a man. His psychological process has taken him now to the realm of guilt.

The dualism, and the duplicity (both the very process of doubling and the idea of his false nature), of Gabriel’s identity is rendered through the portentous image of the mirror. Freud describes his own uncanny experience of the double in the mirror in a footnote to the text of “The ‘Uncanny’”:

I was sitting alone in my wagon-lit compartment when a more than usually violent jerk of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a traveling cap came in. I assumed that he had been about to leave the washing-cabinet which divides the two compartments, and had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass of the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. (17)

Freud’s account corresponds to Gabriel’s own two contrasting images of his internal split, his double image that he sees in the cheval glass and the glass of the window of the hotel room. At first he can only behold a projection of his rational ego, a reflection of his bourgeois complacency and his studied intellectual artifice. The focus is his external corporeal heimlich: “As he passed in the way of the cheval glass he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirtfront, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror, and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses” (Joyce Dubliners 190). There is a hint at the uncanny quality of his mirror image even here, but, after Gretta’s confession, Gabriel is confronted with the image of his unsettling, puzzling transformation, the recognition of himself as a stranger, as another alien being. Significantly, this self-reflection appears in the window which functions as a one-way reflecting mirror in the darkened hotel room. As if communing with the spectral presence lurking outside, Gretta, in her reverie, looks “away from” her husband “along the shaft of light towards the window in silence” whereas Gabriel faces his loathsome double inside: “A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught

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6 Earlier in the text, Gretta evaluates his role as a father: “He’s really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom’s eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Lottie to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it!” (Joyce Dubliners 156).
a glimpse of in the mirror” (191). He perceives here another version of his double, the symbolic image of his superego, his conscience. Rank’s observation that “The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt” explains the psychological function of the protagonist’s reflection (“Narcissism…” 126). Seeing his second self in the window, Gabriel comes close to a realization of his unconscious guilt that he has hitherto refused to acknowledge. He recognizes the insurmountable discrepancy between the demands of the superego and the ridiculous efforts of the ego to meet them. Referring to Freud, Rank further remarks that “this awareness of guilt, having various sources, measures on the one hand the distance between the ego ideal and the attained reality; on the other, it is nourished by a powerful fear of death and creates strong tendencies toward self-punishment, which also imply suicide” (126).

Discovering his double, Gabriel realizes his own repressed otherness and his estrangement from Gretta and other human beings. Michael Furey stands for the internal split in his apparent unity and indicates the necessity of ultimate synthesis in the accidental division of the human psyche. Yielding to a strange neurotic, masochistic impulse, Gabriel longs to be annihilated and imaginatively rehearses his death in the hope of overcoming his sense of discontinuity and alienation. When Freud revised some parts of his theory later in his career, his negative theory of perpetual conflict gradually gave way to an understanding of inevitable reconciliation, however partial and imperfect, of the past with present, Eros with Thanatos as the only way of dealing with neurosis and healing the tormented psyche.

At the end of the story, Gabriel approaches the liminal realm as “His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world” which was “dissolving and dwindling” and “His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (Joyce Dubliners 194). To quote Freud once again, “the aim of all life is death” (Beyond… 32). The climax of “The Dead,” Gabriel’s epiphany, hints at the necessity of embracing the double, this “detached personification of instincts and desires which were once felt to be unacceptable” (Rank “Narcissism…” 126), the recognition of the repressed and the realization that, as Freud seeks to prove in his essay, the heimlich and the unheimlich derive from the same root.
Works Cited


The Uncanny Flying Dutchman of Captain Frederick Marryat

According to An Encyclopedia of World Literature and the Arts, the Flying Dutchman is a “legendary spectral ship, supposed to be seen in stormy weather off the Cape of Good Hope, and considered ominous of ill-luck” (Benét 391). This wretched Dutch vessel apparently sank and its crew perished in a terrible gale off the said cape, only to be seen again – haunting sailors on their way to the Far East and back to Europe. The first written records of this ghost ship date from the end of the eighteenth century, and in the Romantic Age it became popular with writers on both sides of the Atlantic, such as S. T. Coleridge and Sir Walter Scott, or Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving. These nineteenth-century writers linked the fate of the Flying Dutchman with a crime which was supposedly committed on its board, or with a curse put on its captain for his impious oath (he was bent on rounding the cape by any means). It is no wonder that literary critics began to find resemblances between the demonized and romanticized figure of the ship’s commander and eternal wanderers and rebels such as Odysseus, the Wandering Jew, Faustus, or Byron’s Cain who undertakes a voyage to the Abyss of Space (cf. Abraham 195; Janion 18). The Flying Dutchman legend was also adapted for the theatre (Edward Fitzball), opera (Richard Wagner) as well as the big screen (directed and scripted by Albert Lewin). One could add the art of painting, music, and even video games.

Captain Frederick Marryat’s fascinating work The Phantom Ship, which a contemporary American critic called “the definitive Flying Dutchman
novel” (Schweitzer 5), has so far attracted little critical attention, perhaps because the author himself – a greatly acclaimed nautical writer in his own day – began to fall into oblivion in the age of railways in the second half of the nineteenth century, and motorways and air travel in the next. Marryat’s novel, begun during his American tour, was serialized in The New Monthly Magazine in England between 1838 and 1839, in which year it appeared in a three-volume book form. It has some historical basis, for its action starts about the middle of the seventeenth century and it gives an admirable and life-like picture of old Dutch seamanship. Its chief merit, however, lies in the highly dramatic treatment of the Flying Dutchman legend.

The first climax of the plot occurs right at the beginning of the novel. A still young but wasted widow confesses in her death agonies to her only child, a son aged nineteen or twenty, that her husband and the lad’s father did not perish at sea, as everybody in their hometown has been led to believe, but continues roaming the waters as a result of a terrifying punishment imposed on him by Heavens. It appears that the sailor in question, Captain William Vanderdecken, or rather his apparition, visited his widowed wife some seventeen years earlier to tell her the story of his doom. He had set out for India in his fine ship with a valuable cargo, but in an attempt to round the Stormy Cape (the Cape of Good Hope) he met with adverse winds and currents, which kept him in the centre of the raging elements for many weeks. Failing to effect the passage, he struck a mutinous pilot who fell overboard and drowned. Worst of all, Captain Vanderdecken swore by the Holy Cross worn by his beloved wife that he would gain his end in defiance of Heaven or Hell, even if he should beat about the seas until Judgment Day. Since that time he and his crew have been suspended in time, between life and death, sailing around the globe and bringing misfortune on all vessels that fall in with their Ghost Ship. Only one hope remains – and this is a secret contained in a letter left by Captain Vanderdecken and never opened by his wife.

The proper action starts when Catherine Vanderdecken dies and her son, then a child of three and now a mature young man, breaks the sealed letter and learns that in order to save his father from eternal damnation, he must try and somehow deliver him the holy relic on which the fatal oath was taken and registered by Heaven, so that the rash parent should kiss it in full humility and contrition and then be allowed to rest in peace. The bold and dutiful son swears by the same sacred relic that he will do all in his power to avert his father’s doom or perish. In such circumstances Philip Vanderdecken goes to sea. He embarks the “Ter Schilling” armed ship of the Dutch East India Company which sails from Amsterdam for the Straits of Malacca.
and the island of Java. His first encounter with the ominous Ghost Ship is foreshadowed by the superstitious seamen’s prattle about it. Since none of the crew has ever seen it, they disseminate all kinds of hair-raising stories about it, for example that it is a doomed vessel whose mates are pirates who have cut the captain’s throat. However, they agree on one point – namely that to meet with the Flying Dutchman “is worse than meeting with the devil” (Marryat 110). In this way the author very skilfully builds up suspense, even before the ill-boding ship makes its first appearance.

Altogether Philip Vanderdecken runs into his father’s ship five times, and each of his encounters takes place on board of a different vessel, in different circumstances, and at a different stage in the development of the plot. These encounters have considerable artistic potential for the exploration of the uncanny. On the first occasion the sea is as clear as a mirror and the “Ter Schilling” is unable to move in the still air. Therefore the ship’s company are dumbstruck at the sight of a large ship close to them “buffeting in a violent gale, plunging and lifting over a surface that was smooth as glass, now careening to her bearings, then recovering herself” (Marryat 120). They rub their eyes in disbelief to help their vision, but after a few seconds the stranger disappears. The outcome of this meeting is a dreadful storm that drives Philip’s ship to False Bay near the cape where it is torn to pieces and only two lives are spared. The second rencontre takes place several months later when the hero sails again to the Far East, this time on board of the “Vrow Katerina.” The vessel is caught in a violent storm near the notorious cape and it is hardly able to stay afloat under bare masts. Suddenly the Flying Dutchman appears on the horizon carrying full sails, without being affected by the seething waves that run mountains high. The seamen of the “Vrow Katerina” look in astonishment while the other ship goes out of sight. Soon after that an officer of the watch on the “Vrow Katerina” reports fire in the hold, which spreads fast so that the passengers and crew get into lifeboats and rafts which, however, are smashed by the mighty waves. The scene of the disaster is greatly agonizing, as among the drowning victims there are women and children. The next meeting with the Phantom Ship occurs in a different setting. This time Philip joins Admiral Rymelandt’s fleet bound for the Spice Islands by the western route, through the narrow and dangerous Straits of Magellan. It is just where the devilish vessel appears for the third time to decoy the “Dort,” the hero’s ship, into the rocks near the inhospitable land of Terra del Fuego. What is most amazing is that – having accomplished its aim – the Flying Dutchman continues sailing in the light of a dawning day apparently on land. This eerie spectacle ends as
usual, that is the stranger vanishes as suddenly as it appeared. The fourth encounter involves the “Utrecht” in which Philip makes a voyage to Dutch factories in the China Sea basin. Around the Andaman Isles the sailors spot a large vessel bearing right down upon them. They give all possible warning signals but these are neglected, and the Devil’s Ship eventually cleaves right through them. The panic-stricken seamen of the “Utrecht” jump to catch at the rigging of the other vessel which is literally sawing through them, but what they grasp is the void. No sound is made and no damage is done as the Phantom Ship passes through their hull. Nevertheless, several days later the “Utrecht” and its crew are lost when it runs on a sand bank in the middle of a night.

The fifth and last meeting with the Flying Dutchman coincides with the accomplishment of Philip’s perilous quest. Having suffered numerous hardships and losses, the hero who is now an old man sets out from Goa in India to Lisbon on board of a Portuguese brig called the “Nostra Senora da Monte.” Off the southern coast of Africa, in broad daylight, a bank of clouds suddenly obscures the sun, the wind subsides, the ocean is hushed, while the crew and passengers of the brig become involuntary spectators of the uncanny scene:

“There – there!” shouted the sailors, pointing to the beam of the vessel. Every eye looked over the gunnel to witness what had occasioned such exclamations. Philip, Schriften, and the captain, were side by side. On the beam of the ship, not more than two cables’ length distant, they beheld slowly rising out of the water the tapering masthead and spars of another vessel. She rose, and rose, gradually; her topmasts and topsail yards, with the sails set, next made their appearance; higher and higher she rose up from the element. Her lower masts and rigging, and lastly, her hull showed itself above the surface. Still she rose up, till her ports, with her guns, and at last the whole of her floatage, was above water, and there she remained close to them, with her main yard squared and hove-to.

‘Holy Virgin!’ exclaimed the captain, breathless; ‘I have known ships to go down, but never to come up before.’ (Marryat 484)

Philip and a sea pilot by the name Schriften, who are both suspected of having some connection with the Phantom Ship, are soon put into a boat, and the former begins to pull hard toward the spectral vessel which is visible at some distance, while the latter who is the hero’s long-standing enemy attempts to dissuade him from doing so. Philip not only remains deaf to Schriften’s provocation, but also forgives him his previous malicious and treacherous conduct. As it turns out, this practical promotion of the highest virtue of Christianity makes it eventually possible for the hero to board his
father’s doomed ship and give him the long-desired relic. Captain William Vanderdecken kneels down in thanksgiving and contrition; he prays and kisses the holy cross, his penalty is completed and the Phantom Ship slowly sinks in the blue ocean. Christian symbolism of this last scene is meaningful: the offender’s blasphemy against God and crime against man are punished, atoned for by himself and his son, who are in turn purified in their final plunge, which can be interpreted as spiritual cleansing and absolution. At the same time, the sky quickly clearing, the sun again shining and illuminating the joyful dancing waves and frolicking birds and fish – symbolize Christian reconciliation. Apart from this overt religious message, in the figure of the Ghost Ship’s captain the reader will also recognize the Romantic challenger, rebel and outcast, sinner and champion of mankind, one who knows no compromise, who strives for the forbidden, who is made to suffer, and who attains the position of disturbing greatness.

Cases of the uncanny described so far generally tend to be of the aesthetic type. The author of The Phantom Ship was familiar with and admired works in prose and in verse of the Preromantic and Romantic writers, and in a chapter heading in one of his novels (Jacob Faithful) made a telling reference to Ann Radcliffe’s talent as a leading practitioner of the Gothic school. However, the modern concept of the uncanny essentially differs from the Gothic-Romantic sublime, which is produced through the combination of terror and beauty and involves the experience of pleasure. Therefore, the following part of the paper focuses on the psychoanalytic examination of the protagonists in Captain Marryat’s novel with a view to the idea of the uncanny as elaborated by Sigmund Freud.

The first figure or rather subject for this kind of examination is Catherine Vanderdecken, the doomed captain’s widow. Half a year after her husband sets out on his fateful voyage to India, she begins to feel “unusual fear” whose source is indefinable. She resorts to the blessed water and crosses herself, but still she is full of “a painful, horrible foreboding” (Marryat 18). According to Freud, the uncanny arises, among others, from presentiments which usually come true and he gives relevant examples involving his patients who were obsessional neurotics (cf. Freud 943). In the case of the widow, her foreboding comes true in as much as that she is visited by the apparition of her husband who tells her he has lost his soul. This terrifying visitation involves another aspect of uncanniness described by Freud, namely effacement of the distinction between reality and imagination (cf. 946). The widow Vanderdecken is so confused by the said visitation that she first attributes it to her distempered imagination, taking the figure of her spouse for an apparition – ‘it’
enters their cottage through a casement, upon ‘its’ entry the shutters close of themselves, ‘its’ form and features are clearly visible in “intense darkness,” etc. Consequently, she falls into a swoon. Upon recovery, however, the woman forgets the supernatural signs accompanying ‘its’ appearance and notices that her husband has put her on the couch, that his clothes are wet with rain, that he accepts her caresses, and answers her questions. On the other hand, Captain Vanderdecken puzzles her again saying: “I am not dead, nor yet am I alive. I hover between this world and the world of spirits” (Marryat 19).

The most striking consequence of this visit – from the psychoanalytic point of view – is connected with a mysterious letter in a sealed envelope that William Vanderdecken leaves with his wife for their son, aged three at the time, and that remains unopened for seventeen years, similarly as the parlour in the cottage in which the eerie visitation took place and in which the letter is deposited. The “hermetically sealed” parlour (Marryat 8) that is part of the house and that belongs to the family, is thus isolated, concealed and kept from the inhabitants. In Freud's terms this can be seen as the case in point of the “Heimlich” which becomes “Unheimlich.” But this is not all. The secret of her husband and of the locked parlour becomes an unbearable emotional burden to Catherine Vanderdecken that she tries to repress over the following years, but that keeps recurring to her. “The poor woman […] would have hid herself from her own memory” (Marryat 16), but the effort is futile and the widow is gradually driven to a state of frenzy and eventually dies at the age of merely forty. Her case can be explained in terms of Freud’s theory of affects which are transformed into anxiety if they are repressed. The famous psychoanalyst believed that “among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny” (Freud 944).

A far more interesting subject for a psychoanalytic dissection is Philip Vanderdecken. His dying mother leaves him “a bitter legacy,” that is the terrible family secret which is like a “wound” ready to “unseat [his] reason” (Marryat 22, 25). In fact he extorts it from her by blackmailing her (“Either I know that, or I go to sea,” 10). The moment he unlocks the haunted room and reads the fatal letter left by his father seventeen years before, his ego is disturbed and he establishes a subconscious, mythic connection with him. My thesis is that in his father Philip discovers his double. This seems to be earlier implicitly suggested by his mother who emphasizes a striking similarity between them both in appearance and character (“Your father’s disposition was but too like your own,” 17). Readers can also discover some
significant parallels by themselves. For example, when the mother is dying, Philip very unceremoniously orders the local doctor to give up all his duties and come at once to her assistance – he actually grabs him by the collar and drags him out of his own house, crying: “You’ll not trifle with me […] go you shall, alive or dead” (12). Such must have been the character of his father who was bent on sailing round the Stormy Cape cost what it may. Their resemblance is also perceived by others. Once Philip finds himself on board of his first ship among sailors who whisper about the Flying Dutchman, Pilot Schriften remarks: “Now I think of it, you are of the same name” (111). What is more meaningful, however, comes from Philip himself who, having discovered his father’s secret, feels “as if it were only three days that he had begun to exist” (61). My interpretation of this reflection is that at this point in his life the hero realises he is a mortal not exempt from sin and damnation. He has passed the threshold of maturity leaving innocence irrevocably behind him. His father as his double begins to act as a constant reminder of this unwelcome truth. This seems to be confirmed by Philip who duplicates the criminal deed of his father, first in a dream and then in reality, by striking Pilot Schriften and hurling him overboard into the sea. Therefore, in order to integrate his ego again, the protagonist undertakes the perilous mission whose aim is both to avert his father’s doom and to erase the brand of mortal sin and the prospect of eternal damnation, that are connected with the parent as his double, from his own consciousness.

It is interesting to note that as the action develops, identification of the son with the father becomes more striking. During the fourth encounter with the Phantom Ship, when it cleaves through the “Utrecht” without actually colliding with it, the hero’s wife has a chance to observe Captain William Vanderdecken at a close range: “she beheld the image of her Philip – the same hardy, strong build – the same features – about the same age apparently – there could be no doubt it was the doomed Vanderdecken” (Marryat 303). While physical and characterological similarities between the two men have already been pointed out, what strikes the reader in the citation above is that they appear to be of the same age. Of course the reader will remember that in terms of the novel’s temporal setting Captain William Vanderdecken and his ship are suspended in time, but in the psychoanalytic approach time compartments are not binding, as in the human mind the past is all the time part of the present, similarly as the future. Another striking identification scene involving the son and his father takes place in the concluding chapter when Philip boards the Phantom Ship and – approaching his parent – asks him: “Are you Philip Vanderdecken, the captain of this vessel?” to which the other
man replies: “I am, sir” (492). This might be an oversight on the part of the author or editor, but I do not think so. The novel was published in 1839 and Captain Marryat lived nine more years to eliminate such a mistake from the following editions. The fact that Philip’s release from his double and recovery of his ego in the finale of the novel involves his own destruction, and not a return to health and happiness, can be viewed as complying with the Romantic tradition of heroic sacrifice.

The connection between uncanniness and ego disturbances, particularly the phenomenon of the double, which figures prominently in Freud’s essay, can be also related to Philip Vanderdecken’s awakened conscience. Freud believed that in the process of ego’s development “[a] special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’” (940). This kind of a double gradually emerges as Philip continues his quest in search of the Ghost Ship. He becomes more and more acutely aware of his alienation from the crews and passengers of the successive vessels in which he roams the seas:

How little do those with whom I am about to sail imagine the purpose of my embarkation? How different are my views from those of others? Do I seek a fortune? No! Is it to satisfy curiosity and a truant spirit? No! I seek communion with the dead. (Marryat 95)

His conscience begins to prick him every time that the hero looks forward to an approaching storm which will hopefully bring fulfilment of his mission and at the same time cruel death to others. He feels “like a criminal; as one who, by embarking with them, ha[s] doomed all around him to death, disaster and peril” (Marryat 161). In a sense then, Philip’s conscience becomes his double, criticizing and even victimizing his ego from two sides – on the one hand for pursuing his goal so indefatigably, and on the other for a potential neglect of his duty, as at one point two Catholic priests try to convince the hero that his quest is unholy and that they have power to absolve him should he give it up. Indeed, it is no wonder that Philip “felt an inward accusation” whose source is his conscience-double and which “preyed upon him, and wore him down to a shadow” (161, 188).

Another instance of the uncanny effect which involves Philip Vanderdecken can be referred to the principle that Freud calls omnipotence of thoughts. He relates it to the old animistic conception of the universe characterized, among others, by “the subject’s narcissistic overvaluation
of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and [...] magic” (Freud 944). Perhaps the best illustration of this kind of uncanniness is Philip’s conviction that the successive disasters which follow every appearance of the Phantom Ship, will not harm him. For example, when the tempest hits the “Ter Schilling,” his first vessel, after its encounter with the spectre ship, the hero remains “the only one calm and collected,” watching “this scene of horror,” certain that “This wreck then must not be for me, I feel that it is not – that I have a charmed life, or rather a protracted one, to fulfil the oath I registered in heaven” (Marryat 130).

According to Freud, many people experience the feeling of the uncanny, and that “in the highest degree,” in relation to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts (cf. 944). In the discussed novel such a figure is the one-eyed Pilot Schriften. He acts as a messenger who delivers letters to Philip from the directors of the Dutch East India Company summoning him to go to sea. His face is of a deadly white, his lips are pale, and his one eye is extraordinarily big and protuberant. His whole appearance impresses the hero and his wife with awe, and they both feel a strange chill in his presence. When he comes for the first time to their cottage, he says that he is going to take Philip away from love and comfort of the terra firma to a watery grave. Amine Vanderdecken, whose Arab mother once practised magic, immediately judges him to be “no earthly messenger,” but one who “appears to have risen from the grave” (Marryat 86, 203). She calls him “a ghoul with an evil eye, permitted for some cause to walk the earth in human form” and “the wretched Afrit,” where “ghoul” is an eastern ghost feeding on corpses and “Afrit” is the name of an evil demon in Muslim mythology (206). Later on in the narrative, considering numerous cases of his miraculous survival and unexpected reappearance, Philip also admits that Schriften “certainly is not [...] of this world” (389). This is certainly confirmed by the fact that the pilot does not age. When they meet for the last time on board of the “Nostra Senora da Monte,” the hero is a white-haired old man of a broken-down frame, whereas “There was no alteration in the man’s [Schriften’s] appearance; he showed no marks of declining years; his one eye glared as keenly as ever” (481).

Two more points must be made in reference to Pilot Schriften and the uncanny. One of them concerns his awesome eye. Freud mentions the dread of the evil eye as “[o]ne of the most uncanny and wide-spread forms of superstition” (943). This is because from time immemorial people have envied their fellow human beings whatever valuable objects they see in their possession. This bad feeling betrays itself without words – by a look.
In this light, what the pilot covets and what he actually tries to rob Philip of is his relic of the holy cross. Schriften's reason is clear: if he succeeds in taking possession of the relic, he will prevent the hero from carrying out his mission, and his father – who took the pilot's life – will remain doomed for evermore. In this way the wretched pilot will exact his vengeance.

The other point concerning Schriften with a view to the uncanny is that he also acts as Philip's shadow, and this involves another kind of a double. He turns up on each of the ships that the hero embarks and is always the only other survivor of the inevitable shipwreck. He then intrudes on Philip in his cottage to deliver him the following summons to set out on a new voyage. His mysterious and striking connection with the protagonist is observed by Amine, by his friend Hermann Krantz, and by the hero himself (“That he is mysteriously connected with my destiny is certain,” Marryat 207). When they meet for the third time, Philip is part owner and commander of the “Utrecht” and Schriften is picked up at sea near the cape, where he drifts in a small open boat. Philip offers him the rating and pay of a pilot, adding: “that is if you choose to follow my fortunes,” to which the pilot replies: “Follow? – must follow. Yes, I’ll sail with you, Mynheer Vanderdecken; I wish to be always near you” (289). Thus, they appear to be inseparable. Freud claims that in the mind of the child, dominated by primary narcissism, the double acts as an insurance against the destruction of the ego, but when this stage has been surmounted, “the double reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud 940). In my opinion this is exactly the role that Pilot Schriften plays as the hero's double.

The last means that creates the uncanny effect in the text under examination has already been mentioned in reference to the widow Vanderdecken and the visitation of her husband’s apparition. However, the blurring of borders of different kinds applies to many other elements of the novel. Each appearance of the Phantom Ship strongly appeals to the imagination of the characters and readers – it emerges from the depths of the ocean like a submarine, it apparently sails on land, it cleaves through the “Utrecht” without any visible or audible affect, etc. On the other hand, those who behold the ghost vessel can see its crew bustling about the deck, as well as they can hear their voices, the boatswain's shrill whistle, the creaking of the ship's timbers, and so on. Above all, in the end Philip embarks his father's ship and talks with him. Another striking instance of effacement of the distinction between imagination and reality, or life and death, is the scene of the hero's
return home three months after the shipwreck of the “Ter Schilling,” when his wife takes him for a ghost:

Amine, whose eyes were fixed upon him as he entered, and who was fully convinced that he was but a supernatural appearance, exclaimed: ‘So soon – so soon! oh God! thy will be done; but it is hard to bear. Philip, beloved Philip, I feel that I soon shall follow you.’ (Marryat 141)

The hero himself seems to belong both to the real world and the supernatural: “His mind was so continually directed to the [supernatural] object of his voyage that […] the business of life [i.e. mundane affairs] passed before him as a dream”; or: “At one time he would try to persuade himself that […] he was the victim of an illusion; at another he would call to mind all the past – he would feel its terrible reality” (Marryat 161). However, in the novel the distinction is effaced not only between real/unreal, living/dead, now/then, but also between sacred and profane, as at one point it occurs to Philip that his mission might be ungodly: “the thought would suggest itself that with this supernatural vision Heaven had nothing to do; that it was but the work and jugglery of Satan” (162).

In conclusion, the originality of handling the uncanny in The Phantom Ship does not consist in its author surpassing the Gothic-Romantic practitioners of terror and sublimity, but in his approaching the modern novel in which the source of uncanniness shifted inside the characters’ psyche.

Works Cited

Introduction

Towards the end of the twentieth century many British writers were musing over the future of their country. Prompted by political devolution and an expanding European Union, this debate, perhaps, gained momentum. There was a great deal of reflection on the possible demise of the state and reflections on who the British are and what it is which makes the British so. The cumulative effects of devolution were to be far-reaching and this especially increased the self-esteem of the Scots, the Welsh and, to some extent, the Northern Irish and further stoked impetus towards eventual separation. The English, on the other hand, were left feeling bewildered and perhaps out of all the British peoples they were disconcerted about who they really were (Davies 863). Nevertheless, the Scottish referendum vote for independence in 2014 was to no avail and the reaffirmation of British identity vis-à-vis the hosting of the Olympic Games in 2012 along with the Queen’s Golden Jubilee celebrations of 2002 suggests that British identity is somewhat intact, and that the Union is not dead yet. Such shackles appear to be difficult to truly break free from and the contemporary debate on Englishness continued to be deliberated upon. Amongst the notable observers in the quest for Englishness was Jeremy Paxman (1950-) one of Britain's most provocative television interviewers. His journey in search of Englishness produced a fascinating vista. In response to the question “What are the English celebrating?” Paxman responded with a panoramic list:
'I know my rights', village cricket and Elgar, Do-it-Yourself, punk, street fashion, irony, vigorous politics, brass bands, Shakespeare, Cumberland sausages, double-decker buses, Vaughan Williams, Donne and Dickens, twitching net curtains, breast obsession, quizzes and crosswords, country churches, dry-stone walls, gardening, Christopher Wren and Monty Python [emphasis added – S. D.]. (23)

In the debate on Englishness, the comedy troupe, Monty Python, is included as one of the benchmarks of the English psyche – just part of the criterion along with the likes of Shakespeare and Dickens. Monty Python's Flying Circus graced television screens across the United Kingdom on the BBC from 1969 to 1974 and featured many surreal, bizarre, outlandish and uncanny comedy sketches. Flying Circus was certainly a strange oddity at the heart of the establishment's national broadcasting organisation, the BBC. The show replaced a late night religious programme and, although not an overnight success, the Python team managed to produce television series after series, later films, stage shows, music albums and books. They themselves and their outlandish humour were to become widely accepted and appreciated not only by British audiences but especially popular in America and warmly received internationally as that peculiar type of British sense of humour. More surprisingly, by the end of the nineteen-seventies, the term “pythonesque” entered the lexicon as a catchall term to describe other humorous styles that were considered absurdist and with lyrical wit (Ellis 58). The Collins English Dictionary defines “pythonesque” as: “denoting a kind of humour that is absurd and unpredictable; zany, surreal” (1258). Despite all the musings and doubts concerning identity and the future of Britain at the end of the twentieth century, the British (and English) with their peculiar sense of humour remained solidly in place. This paper focuses on the Monty Python's bizarre and uncanny sense of humour with particular acknowledgement to the representations of class and authority in sketches featured in their first work: Monty Python's Flying Circus.

Something Completely Different

The bizarre sense of humour adopted by Python was certainly original and completely different. The catchphrase of the show, “And now for something completely different” epitomizes the show's objective to stray from the norm and to disconcert its viewers. This straying from the norm and disconcertedness may have its origins elsewhere but it can perhaps be claimed to be part of the sixties cultural upheaval or even as a result of it. John Cleese
provides sentiments towards the viewers’ experience: “The nicest thing I ever heard about Python was that people said that after they watched a Monty Python show, they couldn’t watch anything else on television that night and take it seriously [...] and I thought [...] that’s a great thing to have achieved” (Larsen 2).

It is well noted that the rise of the Monty Python comedy troupe appeared to coincide with the break-up in 1970 of The Beatles. According to Terry Gilliam in the documentary Life of Python, the late Beatle George Harrison had a theory that, Python “took over the spirit of The Beatles, cause we started just as they finished.” Monty Python’s Flying Circus premiered a year before The Beatles finished, Gilliam iterates that Harrison’s “… always been convinced, whatever the spirit was, we were the ones that carried it on” (Doherty). Shortly after the Beatles demise George Harrison wrote a complementary letter to the Monty Python team and praised them as: “The next incarnation of The Beatles” (Ellis 58). The Beatles are undoubtedly partly representative of a seismic cultural shift within British society in the nineteen-sixties and notably amongst a British working-class youth culture which became stridently more confident and upwardly mobile in this period. The Beatles also forged commercial pathways into America, as did Monty Python whose humour was warmly received stateside. It was The Beatles who represented a more confident youth and who freely found voice to criticise and mock authority and the class system as demonstrated by the group’s leader, John Lennon. During The Royal Variety Performance in London he famously remarked: “For our last number, I’d like to ask your help. Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? And the rest of you, if you’ll just rattle your jewellery” (Royal Variety Performance, London. 4th November 1963).

This was a significant moment in British contemporary popular culture. The Python comedy team were evidently from a different class to The Beatles – the four working class lads from Liverpool – but this did not prevent Python from mocking the British class system with their uncanny sketches. The Beatles certainly gained cultural power through their musical achievements and it allowed them to deliver critical commentary and help pave the way for other cultural quarters to be explored with equal confidence and bravado. If, as Gilliam stresses, Python took up the mantle from The Beatles then it was one which would also consist of a mockery of class and authority in swathes of television and stage sketches and later film. Arnold Brown, a stand-up comedian, resonates similar tones about the Python phenomenon:
It was about types, it was about class, it was about history [...]. They were satirizing, in a kind of surreal way, what they had been taught, all the educational values—the religion, the attitudes, the middle class attitudes, and one guy in particular epitomizes this, John Cleese. [...] – this anger welled up in him, and he created all these marvellous anti-establishment, anti-civil servant, anti-accountancy caricatures. (Larsen 2)

Although by the time Python enters the British comedy scene satire had already been reawakened. A trend for satire was born in nineteen-fifties conformist Britain when political life started to come under closer scrutiny and when the future members of the Python team were experiencing a middle-class upbringing. It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that such an existence which followed the rules of conformity possibly influenced the majority of the Python team’s off-the-wall nature of comedy. Satirical comedy in the form of radio shows like *The Goon Show* (BBC Home Service, 1951-1960) and stage productions such as *Beyond the Fringe* continued to break with a tradition of conformity setting a trend which would continue throughout the nineteen-sixties. It is noted that *The Goon Show* written by Spike Milligan remains “unsurpassed for inventiveness, sheer craziness, and an explosive use of the medium which did not just break conventions but trampled on them” (Wilmot xvii). The Python team even cite The Goons as such a significant comedic influence that their work is so closely modelled on The Goons’ that even the Pythons themselves admit near-plagiarism (Rowlings 187).

It was *The Frost Report* – broadcast on the BBC from 1966 to 1967 – which marks the beginning of all the Pythons, apart from Gilliam, working together on the same project. The show had a format in which all writers would meet weekly to come up with sketches. Such collaborative sessions allowed the Pythons to grow accustomed to discussing ideas with one another. Despite the prestige attached to *The Frost Report*, it was essentially a conventional show, and the frustrations that Cleese, Idle, Jones, Palin and Chapman developed doing shows like *The Frost Report* would eventually lead to *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*.

A sketch which is often heralded as ingenious for its satirizing of the British class system simply named “Class Sketch” was not written by any of the Pythons but features John Cleese, tall and patrician in appearance and demeanour who represents the upper class; Ronnie Barker, of average height who represents the middle class, and Corbett, short in stature who represents the working class. Each in turn describes their social advantages and disadvantages, and contrasts them with their neighbours, the effect is
emphasised by the actor’s relative heights as they look downwards or upwards to each other. Barker states: “I look up to him [Cleese] because he is upper class, but I look down on him [Corbett] because he is lower class.” Corbett retorts: “I know my place” (see Golden Years of British Comedy: The Swinging Sixties). It is this situation that gives Corbett the punchline; as the others describe their advantages in the form of “I get […] (e.g. a sense of superiority),” his character finally looks up at the others and says, “I get a pain in the back of my neck” (Golden Years of British Comedy: The Swinging Sixties). The British Film Institute (BFI) herald this particular sketch on mockery of the British class system: “Its twinning of height and social position, combined with a minimal script, created a classic TV moment” (The Frost Report, screenonline.org.uk). But the use of minimal scripts and punchlines in The Frost Report were about to be ripped up when the Python writers would collaborate for Monty Python’s Flying Circus.

Before Flying Circus occurred, however, Cleese, Chapman, Palin, Jones and Idle collaborated on separate projects. Cleese and Chapman were involved in At Last the 1948 Show (ITV 1967-1968), for which they were both writers and actors. For the first time, they were given a significant amount of control, which enabled them to incorporate sillier and riskier aspects into their comedy. Meanwhile, Palin and Jones were working on Do Not Adjust Your Set (ITV 1967-1969), a children’s program, which proved just as vital to the development of Monty Python. As Jones explains, the allure for most of them was the chance to perform their own material on a regular basis (Johnson 28). Eric Idle and Terry Gilliam contributed to the show as well. Gilliam was recruited after he had contacted Humphrey Barclay at John Cleese’s suggestion. Idle, Palin, and Jones were also involved with other projects that allowed them to further hone their writing skills. Chapman and Cleese also had this opportunity in How to Irritate People (1968) which they wrote specifically for David Frost, who wanted to break British humour into the United States. Michael Palin was recruited to act in some of the sketches.

Chapman and Cleese were interested in working with Palin in a more permanent context and Palin said he would agree if Jones could also come along. Idle and Gilliam were also added due to their contributions in Do Not Adjust Your Set. Barry Took, a producer at the BBC, felt that combining the Cleese-Chapman team with Palin and Jones would be a worthy experiment (Johnson 33). They landed a contract for thirteen shows in the late night slot. The six men crystalized well together but the obstacle they encountered was finding a name for the show. This was made more problematic because it mainly had no plot. After some deliberation, they accumulated
a long list of very uncanny titles, which included: “It's Them!,” “Megapode’s Panic Show,” “Owl Stretching Time,” “The 37 Foot Flying Circus” and “Ow! It's Colin Plint.” Eventually, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was settled upon. Interestingly the group has been known as Monty Python ever since. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was something completely different (Johnson 49).

**Python and the Uncanny**

Monty Python sketches are known for being particularly uncanny and even their trademark catchphrase “something completely different” is suggestive of this. In the shows whenever the catchphrase was heralded out loud the viewer was alerted to the fact that the television show was about to begin, end or abruptly veer off in to a completely different direction. The team was unique in the fact that they wrote all the material by themselves and for themselves to perform and act out and not just to be read. Despite claims to the contrary, especially at the BBC, Python's experimenting and unorthodox approach was expected to fail because it had not been done before. But Barry Took's and Python's attitude was that they “must do it because it's never been done before” (Larsen 39). Even though it is counter-claimed that the Pythons actually uphold or even revive a tradition in British performing arts that can be traced back more than three hundred years to other English playwrights of respected repute, namely, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson (Larsen 37).

The originality of Python's sketches were perhaps because television – in this case the BBC – had not dared to experiment too much before with the status quo despite the successes of *The Goon Show* on the radio and Spike Milligan's television series *Q* which only pre-dated *Monty Python's Flying Circus* by a few months. The Python team were rather flummoxed by Mil- ligan's sketch show. John Cleese recalled a conversation with Terry Jones as they both pondered anxiously, “I thought that was what we were supposed to be doing” (Chapman et al. 191). Cleese and Jones believed Milligan had got to the place in television comedy where they wanted to be but were equally confused as to what that was. But then Cleese makes the point that Milligan had in all likelihood paved the way for them, as he recollects, “However, when we saw it on the screen we recognised it, and in a way the fact that Spike had gone there probably enabled us to go a little bit further than we would otherwise have gone” (191).

Nevertheless, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* series is considered revolutionary especially in an uncanny context because of its lack of convention and willingness to take risks. Some of Pythons’ most famous and uncanny
sketches include “Dead Parrot” (Episode 8), “Ministry of Silly Walks” (Episode 14), “Spanish Inquisition” (Episode 15), and “Spam” (Episode 25). The “Dead Parrot” sketch features John Cleese as Praline and Michael Palin as Shopkeeper. Praline is trying to return a prostrate parrot:

PRALINE: Never mind that my lad, I wish to complain about this parrot what I purchased not half an hour ago from this very boutique.
SHOPKEEPER: Oh yes, the Norwegian Blue. What’s wrong with it?
PRALINE: I’ll tell you what’s wrong with it. It’s dead, that’s what’s wrong with it.
SHOPKEEPER: No, no it’s resting, look!
PRALINE: Look my lad, I know a dead parrot when I see one and I’m looking at one right now. (“Dead Parrot” Monty Python’s Flying Circus Episode 8)

Praline is not convinced that it is resting or “pinning for the fjords” as the Shopkeeper suggests, so Praline shouts at the parrot and then picks it up and bangs it against the counter. The Shopkeeper suggests the bird is “stunned,” or that it could be nailed; otherwise, it would escape and still insists that it is pining:

PRALINE: It’s not pining, it’s passed on. This parrot is no more. It has ceased to be. It’s expired and gone to meet its maker. This is a late parrot. It’s a stiff. Bereft of life, it rests in peace. If you hadn’t nailed it to the perch, it would be pushing up daisies. It’s rung down the curtain and joined the choir invisible. This is an ex-parrot. (“Dead Parrot”)

Although the sketch does not focus directly on satirising class and authority it is a good example of Python’s use of the absurd and uncanny and is one of the most popular of Monty Python sketches. It received popular commendation in polls in the Radio Times as top alternative comedy sketch (bbc.com). Yet, Monty Python and its use of the uncanny enters the cultural lexicon and in this case it is fed between television and authority, namely the government. Python functions within the realm of authority because it has been absorbed into that very cultural lexicon. At a 1990 political party conference, then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, used the “Dead Parrot” sketch to attack the Liberal Democrat party and their symbol/logo, a “flying bird.” Although the speech was written for her, and she allegedly had to research the sketch it was still present within the lexicon and furthered indication that Python and the uncanny is part of Englishness (Larsen 24).

The loose format of Monty Python’s sketches indicates Python’s use of the uncanny in their works. Some sketches appear to have no apparent beginnings or ends. Sketches were even interrupted by the dropping of a “16-ton weight.” Terry Gilliam’s animations were intertwined as quasi-transitions
and even the opening title sequences were not always found at the beginning of the programme, frequently appearing instead midway through the show or even later. In this way, Python mocked the very conventions of television and there are many Python sketches which are moulded in this way. "Dead Parrot" chiefly pokes fun at the many euphemisms for death in British culture and is uncanny because both Praline and the Shopkeeper are arguing over a dead parrot which was allegedly sold to Praline in bad faith. But Python's sketches become largely uncanny when the unexpected occurs and when what at first appears to be the usual, the norm or the familiar is unexpectedly twisted or changed into "something completely different."

"The Spanish Inquisition" sketch is a prime example of Python formulating an uncanny sketch and an uncanny narrative. Python uses this particular sketch as a recurring joke when three cardinals burst into and interrupt other sketches and scenes. When one character mentions that "they didn't expect a Spanish Inquisition" there is a sudden rupture of jolting and dramatic music as three cardinals burst in pronouncing to all: "Nobody expects the Spanish inquisition!" Again there are accounts of the English, claiming that to possess the wit of Python is a source of Englishness and a pattern of acculturation. Although the commentator here uses the term "British" probably interchangeably to mean "English":

I knew I was British because when I met other people who called themselves British we found we had things in common. They would look at the chicken in my fridge and say, "This parrot is dead!" and I would come straight back there with "It's not dead, it's only resting!" and my, but how we would laugh. For I knew that as I was watching Monty Python, so was every other 17-year-old in the country. I knew I could stand at the door of the sixth-form common room the next morning and shout, "No-one expects the Spanish Inquisition!" (Diamond 1)

On the surface Python's use of three cardinals bursting into other sketches is funny in itself for its uncanny style but again power and authority are present. In this case Python is also satirising Catholics and mocks the very absurdities of torture methods which in "The Spanish Inquisition" sketch involve a rack for drying dishes, cushions and a comfy armchair – hardly close to any torturous instruments used in the torture chambers of the real Spanish Inquisition. Python's use of history as subject matter for their comedy is widely used as part of their repertoire, but this is also presented slightly askew. In the case of "The Spanish Inquisition" sketch all of the inquisitors wear the customary red robes, but one of them sports a leather aviator's helmet and googles and is addressed as "Biggles" – the fictional flying ace
from W. E. John’s adventure stories – in this Python reveals more examples of layers of the uncanny. Python’s sketches can look at first, on the one hand, familiar but are in fact particularly odd and out of place. Just as the cardinals from “The Spanish Inquisition” turn the start of sketches upside-down other sketches graduate to a point of absurdity from which there is no return.

In the final sketch named “Spam” from Series 2, Episode 25 the setting is a familiar British greasy spoon café but, as the sketch progresses, it is clear that the café is not the usual café with which most Brits would be familiar. As two of the central characters to the sketch are lowered into the café on wires it is apparent that the other café-goers are a group of Vikings and that the food being offered on the menu largely consists of spam meat and that nothing can in fact be ordered without spam:

WAITRESS (Jones): Well there’s egg and bacon; egg, sausage and bacon; egg and spam; egg, bacon and spam; egg, bacon, sausage and spam; spam, bacon, sausage and spam; spam, egg, spam, spam, bacon and spam; spam, spam, egg and spam; spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam. (“Spam” Monty Python’s Flying Circus Episode 25)

Towards the end of the sketch, John Cleese enters in the role of a Hungarian tourist, the same role he played in an earlier sketch entitled “The Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook” (Episode 25) and tries to make an order using an inaccurate Hungarian/English phrasebook until he is escorted away by police constables. It appears that the sketch is to end when a new sketch featuring Michael Palin as a historian delivering a television lecture about Viking victories and refers to one such victory taking place at the Green Midget Café, Bromley. He then explains they had ordered spam, gets muddled with his sentence and launches into the chanty Viking song “spam.” The scenery behind Palin is raised to reveal the Green Midget Café, Bromley, with all the Vikings and Palin as the historian chanting “spam.” Some text on the screen rolls upwards reading: “In 1970 Monty Python’s Flying Circus lay in ruins, and then the words on the screen said…The End.” As the sketch finishes and the Liberty Bell theme tune strikes up, the credits to the show roll with the word “spam” and other “delights” from the menu interjected in and between the cast and television crew’s names.

The “Spam” sketch is a good example of Python’s use of the uncanny and how the sketches can be mingled into one another and again the conventions of television are mocked with the end credits presented in this fashion. Though “Dead Parrot” and “Spam” – two examples of Monty Python’s most popular sketches – do not outrightly lampoon class and authority they are
strong depictions of Python using the uncanny to instil a comedic experience which is uncomfortably strange. Already by Episode Two, the Python team were beginning to tackle class and authority head-on with sketches such as “The Wacky Queen” and “Working Class Playwright” which are described below. Despite “The Spanish Inquisition” (Episode 15) sketch poking fun at Catholics and history it was in the previous episode, which introduced TV viewers to a sketch which is perhaps one most synonymous with the Python trait of uncanny humour, especially when related to class and authority, namely “Ministry of Silly Walks” (Episode 14). The sketch involves John Cleese as a bowler hatted Civil Servant who works in a fictitious ministry responsible for developing silly walks through applications for financial grants. Throughout the sketch Cleese walks in a variety of silly ways. The sketch was filmed in populated areas and passers-by can be seen looking on in bemusement at Cleese’s uncanny walk (Wilmut 207). In the sketch Palin is waiting in the office at the ministry where he wishes to apply for a grant to develop his silly walk – which currently is not silly enough. The sketch is funny, but it is also simplistic in its nature which makes it extremely likeable and a very effective satirical sketch because of Cleese dressed as a city gent/civil servant type figure, who happens to have a very uncanny walk. The sketch escalates in the Python trait by veering off to the Anglo-French silly walk which includes a demonstration by the Jabberwock-Frenchmen of “La Grande Marche Futile Francaise.”

When watching Monty Python’s Flying Circus the TV viewer experiences feelings and sensations of uncertainty especially when the sketches veer off at alternative tangents and, therefore, what the viewer experiences is never quite what was being experienced at the start of a sketch. The functioning of the uncanny can be extended upon further when it is accounted for as being “a crisis of the proper” (Royle 1). Therefore, the proper must be critically disturbed in order for it to be considered uncanny.

Python was all about critically disturbing the proper and creating for the viewer something akin to a crisis, largely an uncanny experience. Python was particularly acute at using the uncanny when satirising class and authority. Yet, the social class system had already been previously mocked, for example, in the earlier “Class Sketch” from The Frost Report nothing like the kind of bizarre mockery that Python introduced was being presented on British television screens until Flying Circus’ satirising of class and authority. Sketches such as “Wacky Queen” (Episode 2) and “Working Class Playwright” (Episode 2) from Series 1: Sex and Violence are particularly worth mentioning and these two sketches are included together because
they blend into each other in the show. The “Wacky Queen” sketch enters a world which again appears apparently familiar as an archive film of Queen Victoria walking in the gardens with Prime Minister William Gladstone at Osborne Show. The film is supposed to depict “a rare glimpse into the private world of a woman who ruled half of the earth.” But the running commentary is provided by Michael Palin as Alfred Lord Tennyson who speaks in a jolly American accent, which creates an uncanny atmosphere. When the film continues, it is clear that the historical representations of Queen Victoria and Gladstone have been tampered with as the silent film speeds up and starts to resemble an early chase scene (Landy 41). The Queen repeatedly nudges Gladstone in the ribs and lifts up her frock to walk around in a wacky style. The Tennyson commentary announces: “And when these two way-out wacky characters get together there’s fun-a-plenty.” They approach a gardener with a water hose and the Queen gets Gladstone to hold the hose which she then switches off only to switch back on again when he points it at his own face. When Gladstone realises that Queen Victoria did this he proceeds to chase her around the garden to music reminiscent of chase scenes akin to Buster Keaton films. We next encounter Queen Victoria white-washing a fence and Gladstone is walking towards the fence. As Gladstone walks to the end of the fence the inevitable happens and he is painted head to toe by the Queen, but Gladstone becomes infuriated and picks up the bucket of paint pouring it over the Queen’s head and leaving the bucket there. The Queen retaliates by kicking him and he proceeds to fall through the fence. Finally, Queen Victoria and Gladstone appear to be in a more serene setting when sat for tea and cakes until the Queen decides to stick one of the cakes in Gladstone’s face. Gladstone appears to follow suit but the film freezes and then a picture of Gladstone’s attempt to throw a cake in the Queen’s face is seen on top of a mantelpiece in a sitting room which is the location for the next sketch: “Working Class Playwright.”

The satire moves from mocking the historical figures of authority to poking fun at the British class system. Where the sitting room we as viewers are now looking at resembles a working class terraced house with characters suitably attired to their social ranking and visibly living as if they were part of the working class. Again what appears to be familiar and in its proper place is soon to be unearthed as not what is expected. The apparent working class characters are strangely out of place as the world constructed on British social class norms is turned upside down. In this single sketch, Python explores the friction between father and son, between the working class and the cultural connoisseur, between city and country:
DAD (Chapman): Aye, 'ampstead wasn't good enough for you, was it? [...] you had to go poncing off to Barnsley, you and yer coal-mining friends. (spits)
KEN (Idle): Coal-mining is a wonderful thing father, but it's something you'll never understand. Just look at you!
MUM (Jones): Oh Ken! Be careful! You know what he's like after a few novels.
DAD: Oh come on lad! Come on, out wi' it! What's wrong wi' me? [...] yer tit!
KEN: I'll tell you what's wrong with you. Your head's addled with novels and poems, you come home every evening reading of Chateau La Tour. ("Working Class Playwright" Monty Python's Flying Circus Episode 12)

All the social positions are reversed in this sketch and add a new twist to Python's uncanny representations that deal with class and authority and between London and the north. Python's depictions do not single out specific strands of class and authority; instead, all are swallowed whole from monarchs to city gents to country bumpkins. When the upper-classes are portrayed they are often as bumbling and mumbling idiots or, as Python refers to them, "twits." There is one particular sketch which emphasises Python's treatment of the upper classes most unambiguously, which is called "The Upper Class Twit of the Year" (Episode 12). Python debases figures of a higher class who hold greater authority. Those who are kingly in society are treated as wacky figures, i.e. “The Wacky Queen” sketch mentioned above or even worse they are depict as mentally-challenged as the upper classes are in “The Upper Class Twit of the Year.” The upper classes are represented as supremely silly and misunderstood by the viewers because their language output is barely recognizable which is used throughout most of Python's work in relation to the upper-classes. This is especially emphasised in “The Idiot in Rural Society” (Episode 20) sketch when City-Gent like characters speak in an incomprehensible manner. “The Upper Class Twit of the Year” sketch is shot on film and features John Cleese as the narrator who provides a voiceover as several exaggerated upper-class twits take part in a contest testing their intellectual abilities. They are all dressed similarly in upper-class country gent clothes and all behave similarly as twits. They bear names like Vivian Smith Smythe-Simon, Simon-Zinc-Trumpet-Harris, “who is married to a very attractive table lamp,” and Gervaise Brook Hampster. All of the twits have receding jaws and faulty-looking teeth. The upper-class twits are being mocked for their sheer uselessness in society as the obstacles all prove challenging to complete. At the starting line of the contest none of them even respond to the starter’s pistol which leaves the judge to explain the concept to them. When the gun is re-fired they move off in different directions. The first obstacle involves walking in a straight line but most of
them fall over, next they attempt to leap over a stack of three matchbox-
es which also proves problematic. When they arrive at an obstacle called “Kicking a Beggar” they all manage to be able to do this fairly well except for Olivier St. John-Mollusc, Harrow and the Guards, who was “thought to be this year’s outstanding twit” but has “a little trouble with his old brain injury.” Cleese as voiceover describes him as having no “sort of sensory apparatus.” Then they must use a car to run over a photograph of an old woman, and insult a waiter (the twit known as Olivier manages to run himself over and is described as a “great twit!”). Once they have managed to walk under a bar of wood suspended above them they have to use shotguns to shoot rabbits which have been staked to the ground and each manages to miss the fixed rabbit. After attempting to remove a bra from a shop window mannequin they all approach the final obstacle which is a table with five revolvers on it. The eventual winner is the twit who can shoot himself the most effectively. The last fragment of this sketch is a shot of three coffins draped with medals on an Olympic style victory stand. Python effectively kill off their object of scorn the upper-class twits.

**Concluding Remarks**

Monty Python created sketches which were completely different and if the uncanny is “the opposite of what is familiar” then Python takes familiar figures of class and authority and makes them uncomfortably strange and unbecoming. As Royle’s observations note that the uncanny is “a crisis of the proper” then Python’s interpretations of class and authority create a crisis which is one of repulsiveness and unease. The proper is disturbed in most bizarre and uncanny ways in *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* and all elements of society experience a levelling effect because Python attacked all (Larsen 44). Even the very format and construct of their shows are completed in an uncanny way which is a show that lacks a harmony of parts. The satirising of class and authority appears frequently as one of the most common traits in their sketches. The Monty Python team were influenced by and able to fashion their craft whilst working on shows such as *The Frost Report* and *At Last the 1948 Show*. It was their own frustrations of minimal scripts and punchlines on these television shows along with a marked confidence during this period in British satire and mockery that enabled Python to produce *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* and take interpretations of class and authority to its most uncanny lengths.
Works Cited


Edward Abbey Speaks: The Uncanny in *Desert Solitaire*

A nature writer, who, in fact, disagreed with this classification (Abbey *The Journey*... xiii), Edward Abbey penned his non-fictional works and novels in order “to alarm and disorient his readers” (Slovic 93). It is not surprising, then, that *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Abbey’s account of his experience as a ranger in Utah’s Arches National Monument (now Arches National Park), abounds in many stories that could appear strange to all depicted by Huckleberry Finn as “sivilized.” In the words of James Bishop Jr., Abbey’s 1968 travelogue, the cornerstone of American twentieth-century nature writing, “is a spicy, complex work, containing enough contradictions to provide a lifetime of challenge for any psychologist” (151). Therefore, it seems worthwhile to attempt to answer the question whether Abbey’s ideas and opinions conveyed in *Desert Solitaire* turn out to be weird to the twenty-first-century reader, or perhaps, we the civilised, are bizarre by regarding them as strange.

From the first pages of *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey’s attitude to humankind fills us with perplexity. The controversy surrounds his definition of humanism, which, in fact, discloses the very antithesis of what the civilised are bound to regard as the humane. By curious paradox, in his tour de force, Abbey nicknames himself “a desert rat” (*Desert*... 298) and, at the same time, affirms: “I prefer not to kill animals. I’m a humanist. I’d rather kill a *man* than a snake” (20). As James McClintock claims, the declaration represents a clear reference to a poem “Hurt Hawks” by Robinson Jeffers (McClintock 76), in
which the poet makes a similar announcement, namely “I’d sooner, except
the penalties, kill a man than a hawk” (Jeffers Selected… 35). Apparently,
Abbey’s statement evokes Jeffers’s philosophy of inhumanism, spelled out
by California’s poet as a shift “from man to what is not man” (Jeffers “Preface” 722). Still, Jeffers’s poetic tone conveys seriousness and tragedy whereas
Abbey, speaking in earnest, too, undeniably mingles his disillusionment in
regard to mankind with humour, regardless of how ironic, sardonic, or even
raw his comic remarks happen to be (Durczak 185; Slovic 103). For instance,
after conversing with a German tourist who did not hide his anti-Semitic
views, Abbey has an inclination to murder the “comical Nazi” (Abbey Desert… 332), as he refers to the traveller. However, he finally dismisses the idea
of killing the man, the reason being that he has not yet visited main American
tourist attractions: “I could have opened his skull with a bottle of his own
Lowenbrau [German beer], and was powerfully tempted. Maybe I would
have done it, too, but fatigue set in, and besides I didn’t have the heart – after
all he hadn’t seen the Arches yet or even the Grand Canyon” (332).

Abbey’s immensely strong aversion to humankind, sometimes even
combined with unjustified hostility toward those met by accident, results
in his escape from society, its structures, social pressures and consumerism.
Floating away from civilisation into the wilderness, down the Colorado
river in a rubber boat, Abbey feels extremely contented with the prospect
of separation from humanity en masse, whose representative, a stranger
waving goodbye to them from afar, is called by Abbey the “hollering idiot
on the shore” with no particular reason (Desert… 192-193). Cognizant of
the fact that the open manifestation of his inhumanism is likely to be re-
garded as a departure from the norm, the author of Desert Solitaire invokes
legitimate literary authorities to prove to us, and to himself, that his case is
not an isolated one. To justify persuasively his antagonism, one voice does
not seem to Abbey to be sufficient evidence; therefore, he cites Hamlet’s
words, “man delights not me: no, nor woman neither” (Shakespeare 506;
qtd. in Abbey Desert… 192), a fragment of Walter Alexander Raleigh’s short
poem “Wishes of an Elderly Man” (1923), “I wish I loved the Human Race
/ I wish I loved its silly face” (Raleigh 621; qtd. in Abbey Desert… 192),
and the final lines of Jeffers’s verse “Shine, Perishing Republic” (1924), “be
in nothing so moderate as in love of man” (Jeffers Selected… 22; qtd. in
Abbey Desert… 192). As partially hinted by the aforementioned citations
and the very title of the travelogue, Desert Solitaire, Abbey’s freely chosen
solitude, his preference for the state of being remote from a community, not
necessarily denotes antipathy to an individual, but rather his lack of consent
to a mode of existence constantly imposed on him by “Megalomania, U.S.A.” (Desert… 331), i.e., the American progressive society, which in fact, according to Abbey, is destructive in pursuit of development, comfort, economic growth and even traditional social mores:

My God! I’m thinking, what incredible shit we put up with most of our lives - the domestic routine (same old wife every night), the stupid and useless and degrading jobs, the insufferable arrogance of elected officials, the crafty cheating and the slimy advertising of the businessmen, the tedious wars in which we kill our buddies instead of our real enemies back home in the capital, the foul, diseased and hideous cities and towns we live in, the constant petty tyranny of automatic washers and automobiles and TV machines and telephones-! ah Christ!, I’m thinking, at the same time that I’m waving goodbye to that hollering idiot on the shore, what intolerable garbage and what utterly useless crap we bury ourselves in day by day, while patiently enduring at the same time the creeping strangulation of the clean white collar and the rich but modest four-in-hand garrote! (Desert… 193)

With an absolute certainty, in the above-cited passage, any reader would find at least one issue open to dispute. Neither may we agree with Ann Ronald that, while studying the passage, one “breathes again the fresh air of Abbey’s prose” (71), no matter if we view his direct form of expression as appealing or offensive. Still, it is hard to reject Abbey’s line of reasoning in regard to politicians who declare wars in which common soldiers have to endanger their lives in combat. His statement appears to be timeless whether we bear in mind the 1960s pointless involvement of American troops in the Vietnam War Abbey observed or a memorable scene in Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004), in which several Congressmen are unwilling to continue a conversation when confronted with Moore’s suggestion of persuading their own children to enlist in the army in the first place to fight in Iraq. To return to the quote from Desert Solitaire, by impersonating the disobedient Huckleberry Finn (Levin 222), who disagrees with the Widow Douglas, the embodiment of civilisation, Abbey forcefully makes us stop to wonder how many technological inventions and other blessings of modern existence are, in fact, our curse, or rather, whether we are able to use them wisely, again speaking the minds of the timid civilized “in crude words chosen carefully to shock, to electrify, to jar, to prod” the ossified public opinion (Ronald 71).

Mentioned in different chapters of the travelogue, Abbey’s calling to significantly influence the demographic situation of the United States in order to decrease the number of American citizens constitutes the continuation of the philosophy of inhumanism he supports. First of all, the desert anarchist,
as Bishop refers to Abbey, advocates the necessity of reducing population growth, because, in his opinion, on the whole, it is a workable solution to economic problems, the proposal too controversial to submit and discuss by ecologists of the time (Durczak 179). With a balanced food chain in mind, Abbey controversially asserts that “we need coyotes more than we need, let us say, more people, of whom we have already an extravagant surplus” (Desert... 262). Secondly, according to Abbey, no measures to impose constraints on sexual reproduction signal an attempt to implement the totalitarian system on the part of the US administration (164). And the reason for this is that “large masses of people are more easily manipulated and dominated than scattered individuals,” Abbey claims (165), which is hard to disagree with, especially in the context of the Patriot Act of 2001. In his later collection of essays, One Life at a Time Please (1988), Abbey tries to speculate what population would be suitable for the States, decreasing numbers while listing the desirable figures: “About one hundred million? Fifty million? Ten million?” (65), which sounded grossly unreasonable in 1988, when One Life at a Time Please was published, and the US national population reached over 240 million (“Historical National Population Estimates”). His suggestion turns out to be even more unrealistic nowadays, with the US population projection for 2050 estimated at almost 420 million by the US Census Bureau (“Projected Population of the United States”). To return to the issue of the US overpopulation touched upon in Desert Solitaire, Abbey is also alarmed by the growing number of the Navaho tribe, which, to his mind, stems from medical progress introduced to the Native Americans by the white race. Marked by controversy, his disputable anxiety over the overcrowding in his homeland again makes us stop and think when we read further, in regard to the then unfavourable economic situation of the Navaho nation, that “to be poor is bad enough; to be poor and multiplying is worse” (Abbey Desert... 129). On the other hand, the reader may accuse Abbey of proclaiming the supremacy of the white race in the United States if one keeps in mind that he himself fathered five children, being wedded five times (Scheese 108).

Beyond any doubt, it is not surprising that Abbey, an environmental activist, protests against any acts of human interference in nature, albeit some of his proposals to protect recreational areas turn out to be strongly contestable. Abbey would like to prohibit cars from entering American national parks, considered to be “holy places,” and the reason being that people do not drive into churches or other national heritage sites, they should refrain from using motor vehicles in the sanctuaries of nature (Desert... 65). Instead,
visitors may either walk or “ride horses, bicycles, mules, [or] wild pigs” (65). Moreover, Abbey puts forward some restrictions on children and the elderly, “two pressure groups,” as he calls them (67). Since some infants are too small to ride a bike he recommends that they should simply “wait a few years” to enjoy the experience. With reference to the elderly, who, as he observes, may have problems with mounting a bike, too, Abbey implies that they should stay at home: “after all they had the opportunity to see the country when it was still relatively unspoiled” (67). However, the author softens his tone by adding that a shuttle bus would be an acceptable solution for this social group, not mentioning that it would also be suitable for parents and their offspring. In the United States there are 59 national parks, and they cover over 210 thousand square kilometers (“United States” 13), i.e., over 67% of the total area of Poland. Living in “the only advanced economy in the world that does not guarantee its workers paid vacation” (Ray, Sanes and Schmitt 1), which, if recompensed financially, depends on a contract. Americans, both in the past and now, have neither much time nor money to relish the views their homeland has to offer, to say nothing of foreigners willing to travel overseas to tour the United States. Thus, while taking into account the number and geographical scale of the recreational areas in the States as well as the average amount of time off work, it is hardly possible for American and non-native tourists to visit the majority of the “holy places” in the way Abbey suggests. Consequently, his proposal to ban cars in American national parks is far from being “constructive, practical, [or] sensible” (Abbey Desert… 65), no matter how noble or beneficial to nature it appears to be. Granted that his idealised anti-car campaign is simply impossible to be put into effect, it is worthwhile to underline that the shuttle transportation system, the solution Abbey had advocated in the 1968 Desert Solitaire, was introduced at the Grand Canyon area in the early 1970s, and in Zion National Park in 2000, in order to improve tourist facilities as well as to protect natural environment.

In addition to his peculiar humanism, understood as the openly expressed preference for the nonhuman, in Desert Solitaire, Abbey proclaims himself “earthiest,” which he defines as being “true to the earth” (231). While his declaration obviously signifies his devotion to environmental issues, it must be stressed that it also denotes his strong desire to literally identify with nature. However strange it sounds, Abbey would like to lose some of his anthropological features and melt into nature in order to become one with the surrounding flora and fauna, which is indicated by the vocabulary he opts for. While canoeing down Glen Canyon with his friend Ralph Newcomb, the author of Desert Solitaire gives such a comment:
We are merging, molecules getting mixed. [...] we are both taking on the coloration of river and canyon, our skin as mahogany as the water on the shady side, our clothing coated with silt, our bare feet caked with mud and tough as lizard skin, our whiskers bleached as the sand – even our eyeballs, [...], have taken on a coral-pink, the color of the dunes. And we smell, I suppose, like catfish. (232)

To put it otherwise, Abbey would like to look like a river with all its dirt, or smell like a fish while having whiskers, not a mustache. Yet, it does not mean that he is willing to become the not-man, to cite Jeffers again. In Ronald's opinion, “the ‘solitaire’ of Desert Solitaire differs from the solitude on desert trails in that Ed acknowledges the paradox of his unwillingness to escape permanently” (70). When the peak season ends and his contract of employment terminates, he breathes a sigh of relief that he can leave his beloved Arches and return to the city he generally detests. Tired of his own company and longing for a drink in a local bar in Hoboken, New Jersey, he wants to observe how somebody commits suicide and to hear “the happy laughter of Greater New York's one million illegitimate children” (331). In the introduction to The Journey Home (1977), a collection of essays which came out several years after the publication of Desert Solitaire, Abbey insists on being called the “one who loves unfenced country,” or simply “a ranger,” and adds that “the only higher honor I’ve ever heard of is to be called a man” (xiii); therefore, he does not intend to completely disparage human-kind either in the analysed work or in his other literary compositions.

The writer's yearning for total unification with nature, both in a literal and figurative sense, is also depicted in the chapter entitled “Havasu.” During his five-week escapade in the wilderness, in the Arizona territory belonging to the Havasupai tribe, where he made a sandy cove near the waterfall his temporary home, the desert anarchist wore no clothes and put them on only when going to purchase food products in the Indian village nearby (Abbey Desert... 249). As he informs the reader, straight after reaching the faraway place he calls “Eden” (249), “the first thing I did was to take off my pants. Naturally” (248). In some passages of Desert Solitaire, we may easily perceive that Abbey, following Emerson, continues the tradition of Romanticism and identifies nature with God, as the depicted surroundings bear the hallmarks of divinity. For example, the Escalante River is not only “unknown,” but also “unknowable” (225). Nevertheless, the contact with nature compared to a sexual relation seems to be something rare and uncommon. While expressing his feelings during the rafting in Glen Canyon in the state of Utah, Abbey admits: “We are indeed enjoying a very intimate relation with the river: only a layer of fabric between our bodies and the water” (191). Moreover,
the adventure of floating down the river is not only juxtaposed with a dream “as powerful as the erotic dreams of adolescence” (191). Abbey leaves little to imagination when he remarks that the pleasure felt during the rafting is “almost equivalent to that first entrance – from the outside – into the neck of the womb” (191).

The earthiest, well known for his environmental consciousness, Abbey participated in numerous events that aimed to draw people’s attention to green issues. It is perfectly understandable why Abbey protests against what he calls “tourist culture” exemplified by all sorts of rubbish in the places of pristine beauty, left by the species he names “slobivius americanus” (Desert… 238). What is difficult to comprehend is the reason why he does not refrain from rolling a useless tire into the Grand Canyon, which cannot be called eco-sabotage, but rather an anti-ecological act (246). In fact, in The Journey Home, the writer goes even further: “Littering the public highway? Of course I litter the public highway. Every chance I get. After all, it’s not the beer cans that are ugly; it’s the highway that is ugly. Beer cans are beautiful” (158-159). Usually on guard to protect the natural environment, Abbey does not mince his words to call those who etched their names into the Mesozoic rock “imbeciles” (Desert… 46). Nevertheless, in the same travelogue, in one of the final essays of the collection, he seems to have no scruples about engraving some inscription on the bark of an aspen to commemorate his girlfriend and the impressive landscape surrounding him: “May the love I feel at this moment for columbine, girl, tree, symbol, grass, mountain, sky and sun also stay, also grow, never die” (287-288). While bearing in mind Abbey’s lifelong respect for the world of nature, it is equally incomprehensible why he disturbs the natural process of pollination, when, with a blade of grass, he does everything “to annoy” bees in cactus flowers (29). In addition, the earthiest’s hatred for ants appears to be truly bizarre. With open sincerity, Abbey reveals, “I cannot resist the impulse to shove my walking stick into the bowels of their hive and rowel things up. Don’t actually care for ants. Neurotic little pismires. Compared to ants the hairy scorpion is a beast of charm, dignity and tenderness” (31-32), the features the civilised would rather link with a creature different from the arachnid with a venomous sting.

Although incomprehensible in the context of his deep environmental awareness, Abbey’s distaste for ants and his whim to litter the Grand Canyon appear to be innocent when juxtaposed with what he calls “the experiment” (Desert… 42). “A scientist not a sportsman,” as he refers to himself, Abbey kills a rabbit with a stone to prove to himself that he could survive in
wilderness with no weapon (41). The cruelty of the act is undeniable, but strangely enough, after the initial shock, he suffers no remorse for his deed, and instead experiences a moderate feeling of euphoria, “a mild elation” in his own words (41). Abbey comments:

    I continue my walk with a new, augmented cheerfulness which is hard to understand but unmistakable. What the rabbit has lost in energy and spirit seems added, by processes too subtle to fathom, to my own soul. I try but cannot feel any sense of guilt. I examine my soul: white as snow. Check my hands: not a trace of blood. (41)

Besides the increased flow of power the author openly admits to, the act of killing fills the earthiest with a sense of belonging to the surrounding world of nature, the affinity he frequently dreams of and deeply desires:

    No longer do I feel so isolated from the sparse and furtive life around me, a stranger from another world. I have entered into this one. We are kindred all of us, killer and victim, predator and prey, me and the sly coyote, the soaring buzzard, the elegant gopher snake, the trembling cottontail, the foul worms that feed on our entrails, all of them, all of us. Long live diversity, long live the earth! (Abbey Desert… 41-42)

Nonetheless, in the cited fragment, Scott Slovic perceives “a schism between self and world” (97), a clear discrepancy between the human and the allegedly coexisting dwellers of the desert, not the harmoniously established food chain. In the scholar’s opinion, Abbey’s conscious analysis of the experiment as well as his rational decision not to consume the animal most likely afflicted with tularemia make the earthiest isolated from the world he would like so desperately to belong to (Slovic 97). In brief, it is impossible to consider the experiment to be “a complete success,” as Abbey would wish (Desert… 42). His joy over the communion of man and nature is equally false, as it communicates lack of bonds, not the allegedly proved unity (Slovic 97). There are other scholars who in Abbey’s deliberation over the meaning of his deed perceive disunity rather than harmony, but interestingly enough, some of them argue in favour of the author’s line of reasoning. Ronald claims that “the paragraph naturalistically drags reader and narrator alike into the Darwinian world” (69). That is to say, Abbey reminds us that the civilised are part of evolution, part of the food chain, part of the process aiming at the survival of the fittest. According to Bishop, in turn, with the experiment and his critical analysis of it, Abbey aims to show that human nature is replete with paradoxes that people do one thing, but their talk discloses the opposite meaning and, what is more, he himself,
Abbey the anarchist, is not the exception to this rule, which he intends to underline (Bishop 151-152).

As shown before, the desert anarchist rarely speaks highly of an average American tourist, lazy to pick up their own rubbish, but neither does Abbey the traveller act responsibly or wisely, which is visible during one of his rafting trips. With treacherous rapids, boulders below waterline, and sticking-out rocks, the Colorado River is clearly synonymous with grave danger, the life hazard both Abbey and his friend Ralph neglect from the very beginning of their risky escapade, described in the chapter “Down the River.” To cover the distance of about one hundred and fifty miles, they opt for rubber boats, which “seem gaudy, flimsy and much too small” (Abbey Desert… 190). Furthermore, Abbey has no previous experience with this type of vessel, and soon realises that his canoe-type paddle is ill suited to the task of rowing a rubber boat (191). Concerned about the missing life jackets they simply forgot to take, Abbey additionally feels anxious for his travel companion, as Ralph does not appear to be fit enough for the strenuous challenge. As Abbey reveals, “Ralph has only one good leg. He can walk but not hike; he can swim but not very far” (190), which in their situation evidently involves putting two lives in jeopardy, not one. In addition to not having enough provisions to last them until the end of their journey, the only help they can count on is a Utah Texaco road map, whose scale is obviously too small to accurately reflect the topography of the terrain they intend to explore. Conscious of its uselessness, Abbey does not cry his eyes out when the map has been lost, and even jokes that there are no gas stations in the canyon anyway (196). Apparently, the challenge of the river does not satisfy Abbey’s quest for adventures. Again not prepared for possible harsh conditions, he decides to penetrate side canyons with no torch, forced to wait for moonlight to illuminate his way back to their temporary camp. Neither does he bother to take a canteen with him, to say nothing of food itself, and in order to quench his thirst, he puts a pebble in his mouth (229), and later a bit of moist sand to suck any water from it (230). Beyond a reasonable doubt, Abbey teeters on the brink of irrationality, especially if we keep in mind that the raft journey took place in June 1959 (Cahalan 73), and the summer average high temperature of the desert climate in the explored region stays at approximately forty degrees Celsius. However, no one can deny that he is unaware of his eccentric behaviour and life-or-death consequences to which it may lead (Ronald 82). In “The Moon-Eyed Horse,” Abbey’s account of his attempt to track down the horse which escaped its owner and started living in the wild, the desert anarchist asks the animal when he finally finds it: “Are you crazy,
old horse, standing out here in the heat? Don't you have any sense at all?” (Desert… 183). And later, he even pictures the death that could easily be his own: “The Turkey buzzards will get you, Moon-Eye. They’ll smell you dying, they’ll come flapping down on you like foul and dirty kites and roost on your neck and drink your eyeballs while you’re still alive. Yes, they do that” (184).

It is undeniable that, for the majority of the civilised, the above-mentioned glaring errors exemplify sheer irresponsibility, not to say stupidity. However, it is equally true that not only is Abbey acutely aware of the schoolboy’s mistakes, but he is also willing to make them, which appears to be strange. In Desert Solitaire, we read: “Actually our ignorance and carelessness are more deliberate than accidental; we are entering Glen Canyon without having learned much about it beforehand because we wish to see it as Powell and his party had seen it, not knowing what to expect, making anew the discoveries of others” (194-195). In the cited passage, plainly conspicuous is Abbey’s deep admiration for Major John Wesley Powell (1834-1902), the first known person, after Native Americans and a few anonymous trappers as the desert anarchist highlights, to explore the canyons of the Colorado, Grand and Green rivers (Abbey The Journey… 189-190). Yet, the reason for Abbey’s rediscovery of the place is not only his wish to marvel at the beauty of the spot in the eyes of his predecessor or to let himself be surprised by the views he could read about. If we refer to one of the passages in Desert Solitaire devoted to the canyon exploration by the nineteenth-century explorer, it is possible to notice that the comments passed by Abbey touch upon a series of unfortunate events and immense hardships Powell’s team had to endure: weather extremes, problems with their boats and food, and “the ever-present possibility that around the next bend of the canyon they might encounter hazards worse than any they had so far overcome” (Abbey Desert… 210). Apart from the unexpected perils, Abbey also underlines that Powell experienced the Grand Canyon as a “scene of much physical and mental suffering for himself and his men,” yet it did not prevent him from admiring its unmeasurable beauty (210). By quoting the selected pieces of Powell’s account, The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons (1875), Abbey forcefully implies that the toil to proceed further and further is, in fact, necessary to fully appreciate the sublime of nature. In his deliberation over the beauty of Rainbow Bridge in Utah, one of the world’s largest natural bridges, he notes that the wonders of nature emerge as less beautiful if they become easily accessed. The effect of this is that the marvels lose the aura of exquisiteness, turning into another checked-off tourist attraction in travellers’ itineraries (Abbey Desert… 241-242).
In the context of Abbey’s comments on Powell and on Rainbow Bridge, we can conclude that Abbey’s carelessness that may seem strange or even silly to the civilised is his conscious choice to let danger be part of his existence. He desirably exposes himself to possible grave risks, dicing with death, which, paradoxically, can always result in the loss of life cherished by him so preciously. The question remains: why does he gamble with fate? As a matter of fact, Abbey sets off in quest of hazard because only with the element of danger, he is able to create his own paradise on earth, whose vision surprises the reader, too. The author of Desert Solitaire does not imagine the possible earthly Eden to be a place of bliss and felicity, full of peace and quiet. Quite the contrary, his vision of Arcadia represents the combination of heaven and hell:

When I write ‘paradise’ I mean not only apple trees and golden women but also scorpions and tarantulas and flies, rattlesnakes and Gila monsters, sandstorms, volcanoes and earthquakes, bacteria and bear, cactus, yucca, bladderweed, ocotillo and mesquite, flash floods and quicksand, and yes – disease and death and the rotting of the flesh. (Abbey Desert… 208)

Thus, with his definition of paradise in mind, it is easier for the reader to understand why, as a park ranger, he prefers to allow tourists to lose their way or to be devoured by a bear, which he regards as “the right and privilege of any free American” (69).

In his later writings, in an essay “A Walk in the Desert Hills,” we also find another answer to the question why he enjoys playing with death:

Why? Well, it’s the need, I guess, for some sort of authentic experience. (My hip joint hurts.) As opposed to the merely synthetic experience of books, movies, TV, regular urban living. (My neck hurts.) To meet my God, my Maker, once again, face to face, beneath my feet, beyond my arms, above my head. (Will there be water at Cabeza Tank?). (Abbey Beyond… 14)

That is to say, Abbey needs danger as it ensures authenticity of existence; it confirms that we live since “to be alive is to take risks; to be always safe and secure is death” (The Journey… 230). In the introduction to The Journey Home, one can discover that the need, rational or irrational to some, naturally springs from Abbey’s personality: “I am – really am – an extremist, one who lives and loves by choice far out on the very verge of things, on the edge of the abyss, where this world falls off into the depths of another” (xiv). Yet, as Don Scheese notes acutely, the risk-loving earthiest-extremist consciously refrains from the final jump over the gorge separating the world of the civilised from wilderness (111). In the last pages of Desert Solitaire, Abbey
himself explains to us why: “Balance, that’s the secret. Moderate extremism. The best of both worlds. Unlike Thoreau who insisted on one world at a time I am attempting to make the best of two” (331), which apparently epitomises a rationally made decision indicative of the civilised.

Besides his unconventional way of thinking coupled with his unique behaviour, Abbey, in the 1968 travelogue, presents the desert of the American Southwest as marked by weirdness and oddity. In the chapter on plants and animals characteristic of the wasteland, the nature writer considers the austerity of this landform to be the graphic illustration of idiosyncrasy observable in the world:

Strolling on, it seems to me that the strangeness and wonder of existence are emphasized here, in the desert, by the comparative sparsity of the flora and fauna: life not crowded upon life as in other places but scattered abroad in sparseness and simplicity, with a generous gift of space for each herb and bush and tree, each stem of grass, so that the living organism stands out bold and brave and vivid against the lifeless sand and barren rock. (Abbey Desert… 31)

In the same essay, Abbey also claims that “the yucca is as beautiful as it is strange,” ascribing the feature of weirdness not only to the appearance of the shrub but also to its reproductive process (30). What Abbey regards as bizarre in its propagation is a perfect symbiosis of the yucca and the pronuba moth (the yucca flower provides the insect an excellent habitat to lay its eggs whereas the moth is necessary for the plant’s pollination), crucial to both species to grow and survive in harsh environmental conditions. If we compare the above-cited passages, we can easily infer that the strangeness attributed by Abbey to the desert of the American Southwest amounts to his sheer amazement over the high adaptability of animals and plants to this inhospitable terrain. In addition to the mentioned severity and simplicity that vividly evoke Thoreau, in the former passage Abbey underlines the opposition between vitality and inanimateness, life and death, the paradoxically balanced antagonism conspicuous in his definition of paradise quoted above.

To the Desert Solitaire reader’s great astonishment, Abbey appears to be biased in favour of the members of the controversial Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, better known as Mormons. Full of praise for early Mormon communities, he appreciates their close cooperation, solidarity and equality regardless of social position, fair distribution of wealth, which in some cases was and is certainly justifiable (Abbey Desert… 295-296). With reference to the San Juan Expedition (also called the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition), undertaken to establish a new settlement, Abbey aptly admires the survival skills of determined Mormon pioneers, who in the late 1870s
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widened a narrow crevice in an almost four-hundred-metre-high cliff in order to enable over two hundred people, livestock and eighty wagons to descent into the canyon, cross the Colorado river and ascend the rim on the other side of the gorge (Desert… 228-229; Crabtree). It is also believable that the Mormons Abbey had met turned out to be “not very interesting, perhaps, but good to know, good to have as friends and neighbors” (Desert… 297). Be that as it may, in Desert Solitaire, Abbey does not seem to notice why controversy surrounds Mormonism. Although cognizant of the doctrine of polygamy, still upheld by some Mormon communities even if officially abandoned in the 1890s, he does not treat the issue seriously, perceiving it as the example of Mormons’ “fortitude” (Abbey Desert… 295). He does not acknowledge that some factions of the LDS Church perform baptism for the dead, advocate objectification of children and women, and arrange marriages between mature men and teenage girls, as shown in a documentary Sons of Perdition (2010), directed by ex-Mormons Tyler Measom and Jennilyn Merten, and premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City. Fortunately, the biased picture of Mormonism presented in Desert Solitaire is not Abbey’s last comment on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In his fictional work entitled The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975), one of the characters is “a jack Mormon” (Chapter III), which either denotes a non-Mormon living among LDS members or a Mormon who clearly dissociates himself from the practices of the Church. Abbey’s jack Mormon no longer pays tithes, which means donating 10% of an annual income to the congregation authorities. Moreover, the legal name of the protagonist is Joseph Fielding Smith, nicknamed “Seldom Seen,” which is a direct allusion to the founder of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, and his hardly believable story on its establishment.

Replete with viewpoints that many of the civilised would disagree about, Desert Solitaire makes one wonder who looms out of the thought-provoking fragments and what message he conveys to us. Without doubt, while reading Abbey’s 1968 travel account, we encounter an inhumane humanist who, in his thoughts, prefers to slay a man than a snake, but instead kills a rabbit. We clash with an insensitive earthiest who would like to be one with nature but desecrates it with rubbish. We come across an irresponsible traveller who takes risky steps to appreciate the marvels of the world. In short, we meet a walking contradiction, who, by using himself as an example, intends to remind us that we are not always logical, rational, responsible, human or humane, as we claim to be. We meet the desert anarchist who would like to dethrone the human race from a privileged position. In Desert Solitaire,
Abbey concludes: “Turning Plato and Hegel on their heads I sometimes choose to think, no doubt perversely, that man is a dream, thought an illusion, and only rock is real. Rock and sun” (243-244). The thought had to reverberate in his mind throughout his life, as he decided to reprint it in his last book A Voice Crying in the Wilderness (1989), adding the following words: “belief? What do I believe in? I believe in sun. In rock. In the dogma of the sun and the doctrine of the rock. I believe in blood, fire, woman, rivers, eagles, storms, drums, flutes, banjos and broom-tailed horses” (Abbey, qtd. in Bishop vii). Indeed, he must have given credence to them very strongly, because when in 1987 he was granted the Creative Achievement Award by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the desert rat simply declined the distinction. As Elizabeth H. Oakes claims, he said he could not accept the honour since he had been planning to paddle down one of the rivers in Idaho the week of the award ceremony (1).

Works Cited


Reversing the “Self” and “Other”:  
Humour and Horror in Bernardine Evaristo’s  
*Blonde Roots*

Written by Bernardine Evaristo, *Blonde Roots* (2009) depicts the life and experiences of a white “Europane” slave and her black “Aphrikan” masters. She “focuses new attention on a period of history that was horrifyingly real” (Pruszkowski); in other words, it is a humorous work and actually serious at the same time since it mocks the real and painful situations in history. Toplu states that

Utilizing diverse narrative techniques such as modern discourse full of anachronisms, bitter satire lightly covered with humour and an entire reversal of spatial, temporal and factual history, Evaristo reverses the conception of race, highlighting instead the persecution committed on humankind by slavery. (45-46)

Bernardine Evaristo deconstructs the image of the “other” by replacing that image with the “self.” Considering the colonial discourse, she challenges our perception of race by reversing “the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (Loomba 47). It is significant to note that Evaristo uses humour and irony to deconstruct the image of the black slave and the white master belonging to the colonial discourse. For instance, it is regarded “familiar” when a situation about a black slave is mentioned, since the “image” exists in our mind; however, it is considered humorous and “strange” when one confronts a white slave, because that image does not exist in our mind. Therefore, reversing the slave-master image in *Blonde Roots* is a tool used to shock the reader and make him/her aware of the seriousness and absurdity of the colonial discourse.
The concepts of “self” and “other,” belonging and unbelonging, home and homelessness, when defined in relation to the “uncanny,” will be helpful to analyse the novel in terms of the parody it represents. Ravenscroft states that “Freud’s famous example where he shows that the meanings of homely and its opposite fold into each other is a very rich one for thinking about a postcolonial nation where home and homelessness, belonging and unbelonging have become newly uncertain” (81). This sense of “home” belonging to the colonial discourse is parodied in Evaristo’s work because the homely and strange slip into each other, which makes the reader question the “familiar” and “alien.” Freud states that “the unheimlich is what was once heimlich, homelike, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression” (15). In this respect the Western “self” that was once “familiar” becomes the “other” and “unheimlich” in the fictional world of Blonde Roots. In other words, the white master becomes the white slave in the novels which confuses the reader. This creates an uncanny feeling because the “familiar” and “alien” slip into each other in this novel. So, the uncanny feeling created by reversing the “self” and “other” reflects the parody of racism in Blonde Roots, which represents the view that the powerful race or nation is the one who constructs the “other”; in other words, it is the one who controls and defines the norms in society.

The irony used in Blonde Roots associated with the physical appearance of the “alien” represents the idea that reversing the “self” and “other” results in an uncanny feeling that reflects the parody of racism. Considering the colonial discourse, the physical appearance of the “other” is inferior to the physical appearance of the “self”; for instance, the “non-Europeans are described as ‘pagan’ and ‘exotic’” (New 107) in the colonial discourse. Cohen asserts that the “other” is perceived as a “monster” whose body incorporates fear, desire and anxiety, which gives him an uncanny independence (4). He states that “the readers of the history of the West have been mainly European and male, women (she) and nonwhites (them!) have found themselves repeatedly transformed into monsters” (15). This represents the idea that the powerful race or gender associates the appearance of the “other” to negative connotations which belong to “monsters.” It is clear that the nonwhites were perceived as “monsters” or as the “alien” in the colonial discourse; however, Evaristo deconstructs this image in Blonde Roots, in which white people are regarded as the “unfamiliar” in terms of their appearance. For instance, white “Europane” women want “nose flattening” (Evaristo 30), “perms” (30), “chicken hormones to pump up their breasts and behinds” (32) and one of them is “rubbing ochre into her skin to darken its pigment” (16) to look like black women because blonde women are considered as “ugly as sin” (31).
Furthermore, Doris, the white “Europane” slave, “hated to come face to face with such wholesome Aphrikan youth, beauty and wealth” (69) since blondes are “labelled inferior” (32). Thus, the familiar Western beauty becomes the “ugly monster” while the “monster” becomes the representation of the standards of beauty; thus, the “homely” and “ unhomely” slip into each other which creates an uncanny feeling. As a result, the idea that the powerful race defines the beauty norms of the “self” and “other” is reflected through the displacement of these binary oppositions in Blonde Roots.

Another aspect to create an uncanny feeling by reversing the Western “self” and non-Western “other” is culture. The culture and lifestyle of the non-Western “other” is perceived as inferior since the colonial discourse includes the idea that “colonial people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual, and lazy, Europe is civilization itself” (Loomba 47). These binary oppositions help the Western self to define the non-Western other; thus, the oppositions reflect the idea that the other is considered as the unfamiliar. It is asserted in The Gothic that “through difference, whether in appearance or behavior, monsters function to define and construct the politics of ‘normal’” (Punter 263), so it is evident that the familiar needs the monster or the other to define itself. Evaristo parodies this act of definition through reflecting the “Europane” culture in the fictional world of the novel as strange and unheimlich by adding humour and horror to her representation. For instance, humour is recognised in the advertisement that includes the belief that there are only “600 True Gods” (Evaristo 153). Moreover, humour is also noticed when the Ambossans try to “convert Europane natives to Voodoo” (159) and when cabbage is described as “exotic Europane food” (30). Furthermore, Evaristo parodies the minstrel shows, for the minstrel shows in the novel feature “Ambossan performers as whiteface minstrels, faces smeared with chalk, lips thinned down to a red slit” (43). Thus, the humour in the novel reflects the horrors of the realities of the postcolonial discourse. Because the “uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind” (Freud 13), the uncanny in the novel is the result of the transformation of the familiar Western culture into the unfamiliar. So, the humorous “horror” (Evaristo 136) uttered by a black “Aphrikan” slave master in Blonde Roots reflects the familiar horrors of colonialism. By blurring the real and the fantastic Evaristo succeeds in making the reader aware of the realities of colonial discourse.

The language of the other supports also the idea that the displacement of the familiar and alien reflect the horrors of colonialism. Because the “Orient
has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea personality, experience” (Said 87), the language of the other is automatically defined as inferior to the language of the Western self. The situation is reversed in *Blonde Roots*, so the language of white “Europane” people is regarded inferior in the novel. For instance, people from “Europa” (Evaristo 118) have “a nonsensical language or languages; so unintelligible, in fact, that it has not yet been verified by linguistic exerts whether Europa possesses one language, classified as Mumble-Jumble, several languages, or merely one language with several dialects” (120). However, we observe from the white “Europane” slave Doris’s point of view that the Ambossans called them tribes, but that each of them have actually their “own language and funny old customs” (7), so the European sensical language becomes the “Europane” non-sensical language. As a result, Bhabha’s statement that each representation of the other in colonial discourse is made on the basis of racial origin (70) supports the aspect that the inferiority of the language of the other is a constructed idea. By replacing the inferior and superior languages the novel creates an uncanny feeling, which can be related to Masschelein’s description that anxiety caused by xenophobia related to the opposition of the familiar and alien and blurring the boundaries between these two is considered as frightening (137). In short, reversing the characteristics of the language of the self and other is significant in the novel for it reflects that racial inferiorities are constructions of colonialism.

The uncanny experience is also depicted in the aspects of science in the novel. During the colonial period racial science proved that “black, brown, or yellow people would always be different and inferior to white” (Hall 30); as a result, the non-Western was perceived monstrous and less human-like. Placing the native in the position of the monster and the animal is one of the aims of colonialism because, as Punter states in *Postcolonial Imaginings*, to exploit the land colonisers had “to pretend that the land that is so obviously and ubiquitously populated is in fact empty of human life” (146). However, Evaristo turns the assumptions of racial science upside down; for instance, the “Negro is biologically superior to the other two types” (119) according to the racial “science” in *Blonde Roots*. Furthermore, white people classified as the Caucasoid are placed “to the bottom end of the scale of Humankind” (119), since people who belong to this race have smaller brains than the Negro, which is a parody of the racial science in the colonial period. The Western self becomes the less human-like in the novel, so he/she is perceived as an inanimate being. According to Jentsch, “among all the physical uncertainties that can become a cause for the [uncanny] feeling to arise,
there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate” (8). The “Europane” other in the novel, who is actually the European self in reality, is perceived as less human-like. For instance, Doris states that the Ambossans – black people – convinced themselves that white people “do not feel as they do” (Evaristo 25), and a black boy pokes Doris with a stick as if she were “some strange, possibly dangerous, new animal he’d just discovered” (168). Furthermore, the transport of the white slaves is seen as a transport of objects included in the cargo (147) and not as a transport of humans. So, the uncanniness is the result of turning the self into the less human-like, which is a parody of colonialism created by blending the funny scientific facts of racial science in the novel with horrific scientific facts of racial science in the colonial period.

The place where the alien and familiar live is another aspect reversed in *Blonde Roots* to represent the horrors of the colonialism. The colonised non-Western alien living in uncivilised areas becomes the colonist, while Europeans who live in civilised places become the colonised aliens in the novel. So, “Evaristo’s redrawing the boundaries of nations and replacing the continents signifies the elusiveness of space, besides dislocating the reader’s spatial and national assumptions” (Toplu 47). For instance, the white “Europane” people live in the “Vanilla Suburbs” (Evaristo 29), while the black “Aphrikan” masters live in the “Chocolate Cities” (29); thus, the colonial effect in reality is turned upside down in the novel, which creates an uncanny feeling. The reason for this is that “an ‘uncanny’ experience,” Gelder and Jacobs say, “may occur when one’s home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has to experience, in other words, of being in place and ‘out of place’ simultaneously” (qtd. in Ravenscroft 86). Thus, the Western self feels out of place in the fictional world of the novel both metaphorically and physically for it turns into the other whose living place is regarded as the “jungle” (Evaristo 131), in which the superior Negro “had gone quite native” (128). So, the aspect that black masters who “penetrated deeper into the dark heart of Europa” (131) into the “Heart of Greyness” (129) is clearly a parody of colonialism represented in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. As a result, the home of the Western self turns into the home of the Western other in the novel.

In conclusion, Evaristo reverses the binary oppositions in *Blonde Roots* to reflect the construction and representation of the other in the colonial discourse. The familiar self, associated to the colonial discourse, becomes the unfamiliar other, which is reflected through the aspects of body, culture,
language, science and place. As a result, the reader experiences an uncanny feeling since the experience which was once homely becomes unhomely. This uncanny feeling is the result of the blurring of the familiar and unfamiliar since “the uncanny is the name of this experience of double perception of any space which is at once familiar and strange, safe and threatening, ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’” (Nayar 89). Evaristo achieves to create an uncanny feeling by making the Western self feel out of place and by displacing the familiar and unfamiliar. The parody of the novel includes the aspect that the humour of this displacement refers to the horrors of colonialism. So, the uncanny experience reflects the construction of the other, which represents the idea that the powerful race or nation is the one that defines the self and other.

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“Devourers of Men’s Flesh”: The Uncanny Representations of Irish Cannibalism in the Elizabethan Era

Cannibalism is one of the darkest taboos in human existence; one of the most unsettling and shocking things that human beings can do to each other. Contrary to popular belief, anthropophagy has not only been performed by primitive tribes during the Stone-Age but, as Sumner asserts, “Cannibalism is one of the primordial mores. It dates from the earliest existence of man on earth. It may reasonably be believed to be a custom which all people have practiced” (qtd. in Petrinovich 1).

Among the known adherents of such ritual feasting were Aztecs, Anglo-Saxons, Chinese, Celts, Romans, Scandinavians or Spaniards to mention only a few. The anthropophagic acts have not only been enacted but also represented in literature and popular culture, hence indicating human’s interest or even obsession with the topic.

For years, the issues concerning cannibalism were described from the Western European perspective. Cannibalism has been viewed as one of the signifiers of clear-cut dichotomy between civilisation and barbarism, an opposition which once established was treated as a reliable source of information about the nations in question. In recent years, abundant critical analyses of cannibalism have regarded it as only a product of the European imagination, a prism through which the oppressors were able to justify colonisation. Although such an interpretation might seem simplistic since anthropophagy has existed in many cultures, it has to be emphasised that it served as a vehicle of power in imperial narrative. Interestingly enough,
the Irish, regarded as white Westerners, have been portrayed as cannibals, who turned to the consumption of human flesh either due to rituals or hunger. Although some scholars fail to place Ireland within the postcolonial theory for the representations of Ireland and its people have been constructed mainly in the West, it may be asserted that the explanation of depiction of Irish cannibalism in colonial terms seems to be the only proper framework for understanding its complexity. Hence, the aim of this essay is not to analyse the reality of cannibalism in Ireland as social practice but rather its existence within the (post)colonial discourse. An attempt will be made, therefore, to disclose the representations of Irish cannibals and cannibalism during the Elizabethan Era in historical and travel accounts, placing them within the social and historical context.

As a rule, anthropologists call flesh eating anthropophagy from the Greek *anthropos* (man) and *phagein* (eat), the word cannibal is rooted in the conquest of the Americas. As Frank Lestringant, the prominent writer on cannibalism, asserts the word cannibal comes from the *caniba* (a corruption of *cariba*, the name the Caribbean Indians of the Lesser Antilles gave to themselves), which when used by the neighbouring, peace-loving Arawak started to carry a negative meaning of barbarity (in Petrinovich 4). The stories concerning the consumption of human flesh have been around much longer than the term itself which emerges in the European discourse with the voyages of Christopher Columbus. According to Lestringant, Columbus should be accredited not only for the discovery of America but also for his use of the word cannibal, which appears in his entry on 23 November 1492:

> they said that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called ‘Canibals.’ Of these last they showed great fear, and when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, he says, because these people ate them and because they are very warlike. (qtd. in Motohashi 84)

Therefore, Motohashi argues in “The Discourse of Cannibalism in Early Modern Writing” that “[i]t is a paradox that ‘Canibals,’ a vernacular word orally apprehended by Columbus, became one of the most powerful terms in the written literature of conquest” (85). It emerged within a European imperialist discourse as a trope objectifying the other as a savage. Furthermore, in his Introduction to *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge 1998), Peter Hulme claims that we should make a distinction between anthropophagy which “should remain as the general term” and cannibalism which should be reserved “for the ideology that constitutes itself around
an obsession with anthropophagy” (Barker, Hulme and Iversen 4); adding
that it “needs to be understood as a topic within the dialogue between Europe
and its others, and therefore within the context of the colonial world” (5).
Thus, after Hulme, cannibalism should be treated as a European discourse
about the other rather than as a neutral term signifying the actual examples
of anthropophagy.

It seems that the most basic division of anthropophagy is that between
ritual and famine cannibalism (Sugg 114). Whereas the latter is forced by
the survival matters under conditions of extreme starvation occurring
during famine, military siege or a shipwreck (Lindenbaum 477), the former,
culturally driven, can be further divided into endocannibalism, involving
eating the flesh of someone from within the group, and exocannibalism,
eating someone from outside the group (478). As Lindenbaum further
explains, “endocannibalism usually occurs in the form of funerary or mor-
tuary consumption, in which all or part of the body is ingested as an act of
affection or for group renewal and reproduction,” whereas exocannibalism
is performed “as an act of aggression, often in the context of warfare” (478).
We shall now concentrate on survival and mortuary cannibalism as offering
a plausible explanation of the phenomenon of Irish man-eating.

The references to Irish as cannibals date back to the Roman times, when
for instance Strabo, Greek geographer and historian, paints an unflattering
portrait of Ireland which he calls ‘Ierne’ inhabited by man-eaters:

Besides some small islands round about Britain, there is also a large island, Ierne,
which stretches parallel to Britain on the north, its breadth being greater than
its length. Concerning this island I have nothing certain to tell, except that its
inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, since they are man-eaters as well
as heavy eaters, and since, further, they count it an honourable thing, when
their fathers die, to devour them, and openly to have intercourse, not only with
the other women, but also with their mothers and sisters; but I am saying this
only with the understanding that I have no trustworthy witnesses for it; and yet,
as for the matter of man-eating, that is said to be a custom of the Scythians also,
and, in cases of necessity forced by sieges, the Celti, the Iberians, and several
other peoples are said to have practised it. (Strabo 4.5.4)

Although Strabo admits that his sources are neither certain nor trust-
worthy, he accuses the Irish of eating human flesh. However, he notes that
the custom of ‘man-eating’ is not only restricted to the Irish as also such
cultures as the Scynthians or the Iberians turn to cannibalism in cases of
sieges. Furthermore, he emphasises another savage activity – incest, which
has often been associated with cannibalism. According to Arens, the author
of *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology & Anthropophagy*, there are two reasons for the cannibalism-incest equation: firstly, both indicate a lack of culture; secondly, in many cultures there is “a symbolic equation between sex and eating” (146). Hence, the Irish who indulge in the incestuous behaviour and bestiality are placed beyond social and cultural boundaries of the Ancient Europeans. Incest and cannibalism are an indication of their moral corruption and the marker of the clear-cut dichotomy between civilisation and barbarity, the binary opposition which occupies a major place in the colonial theory.

Interestingly enough, Strabo’s dubious description contributes to the imperial discourse and becomes a valuable source of information for the Elizabethan historians and writers who often refer to this passage when depicting the Irish. For example, in his *History of Ireland* (1571), Edmund Campion presents an important contribution to the prevalence of Strabo’s disdain for the presumed Irish dietary customs. He writes, “The Irishe were great gluttons, eaters of man’s flesh, and counted it honourable for parents to be eaten up of their children” (qtd. in Noble 113). By referring to Strabo’s account, Campion enforces the savagery of the Irish within a European imperialist discourse. The same is achieved by William Camden in *The Description of Britain*, where he asserts that “The Scots were reputed for the most Scithian-like and barbarous nation […]. For both Diodorus […] and Strabo […] do seem to speake of a parcel of the Irish nation that should inhabit Britain in their time were giuen to the eating of man’s flesh, and therefore called Anthropophagy” (qtd. in Motohashi 83). Hence, it seems obvious that Strabo’s extract had a certain appeal for the imagination of the Elizabethans since it ascertained the superiority of Britons over the Irish.

Although, as can be seen, the derogatory stereotype of the Irish was present before the sixteenth century, it was not until the Elizabethan era that the justifications for the colonisation of Ireland were produced in abundance. Not only was the inferiority of the English neighbours reflected in the historical accounts but also at the level of culture. During Elizabeth I’s reign, Ireland was subjugated through the series of effective confiscations of land owned by Irish Catholics and colonised by settlers from England and Scotland. English rulers sought to dominate and assimilate the island as part of their kingdom, while the Irish tried to resist in order to maintain their independence. Consequently, the uprisings of the Irish in the sixteenth century, which took place on regular basis, were not regarded as a reaction to English exploitation, but as “the Irish dislike of order, tranquility, and industry and their proclivity for violence and rebellion” (Hickman 25). It
was the delight in cruel actions that prevented them from appreciating of
the numerous benefits offered by the English. In order to justify the colonial
quest, the English had to incorporate a number of negative representations
of the Irish in their texts. As Edward Said contends, the formation of the oth-
er involves an effort to create a strong division between the colonisers and
the colonised. The oppressor always thinks in binary opposition of super-
ior/inferior, strong/weak, intelligent/foolish, male/female and so forth (in
Lengel 7). In order to reduce the tension the colonisers decided to remove
the colonised people from the realm of the moral code of the imperial cen-
tre. Thus, the motif of cannibalism serves as a very useful tool to dehumanise
the colonised since it places them outside some higher moral norms. In 1610,
Barnaby Rich, an English writer and a soldier who served in Ireland, writes
in his book entitled *A New Description of Ireland*:

> The time hath been, when they lived like *Barbarians*, in woods, in bogs, and
> in desolate places, without politic law, or civil government, neither embracing
> religion, law or mutual love. That which is hateful to all the world besides is only
> beloved and embraced by the Irish, I mean civil wars and domestical dissensions.
> The wild *Scythians*, do forbear to be cruel the one against the other. The *Can-
> nibals*, devourers of men’s flesh, do learn to be fierce amongst themselves, but
> the *Irish*, without all respect, are ever more cruel to their very neighbours. (qtd.
> in Curtis 18)

Rich classifies the Irish among the barbarians, asserting that the Irish
are even worse, more brutal and bloodier than Scythians or Cannibals. As
a result, we receive a beast, not a human, which is so loathsome that does not
even deserve to be compared to cannibals. Similar views concerning the Irish
are expressed by Edmund Spenser, the author of *A View of the Present State
of Ireland*, written in the late 1500s, but not published until 1633:

> Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon
> their hands for their legs could not bear them, they looked like anatomies of
> death, they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves, they did eat the dead
> Carrions, happy where they could find them; yea and one another soon after, in
> so much as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves. (qtd.
> in O’Brien 36)

Spenser’s account portrays the Irish who are forced to cannibalism due to
starvation. Spenser spent most of his adult life as a planter in Ireland, where
the uprisings against the English took place on a frequent basis. The rivolts
were associated not with the fighting for freedom, but with the backward-
ness, ignorance and delight in cruel acts which made the Irish unable to
appreciate the English civilising mission. Spenser witnessed the Desmond rebellion of 1579-1583 and realised that famine itself could be an effective weapon to defeat the Irish. Through his character, Irenaeus, Spenser not only attributes the derogatory characteristics to the Irish calling them “blasphemers, common ravishers of woemen, and murtherers of children,” but also proposes applying harsh tactics for pacification of the island (Spenser and Todd 525). He goes as far as to assert that all the Irish should be killed by starvation since famine will make the rebels “consume themselves, and devour one another” (535). Earlier in the View, Spenser refers to another instance of cannibalism – this time not famine-induced, but customary in nature:

at the execution of a notable traitor at Limerick called Murough O’Brien, I saw an old woman, which was his foster-mother take up his head, whilst he was quartered, and sucked up all the blood ran thereout, saying, that the earth was not worthy to drink it; and therewith also steeped her face and breast, and tore her hair, crying out and shrieking most terribly. (Spenser 498)

Spenser’s description has a lot in common with the one represented by Strabo. In both cases, the Irish devour their relatives since they see this act as a righteous way to treat their perished kin: “they count it an honorable thing, when their fathers die, to devour them” (Strabo 4.5.4) and “sucked up all the blood […] that the earth was not worthy to drink it” (Spenser 498). An interesting explanation of ritual cannibalism can be supplied by psychoanalysis. According to Freud, “by absorbing parts of the body of a persona through the act of eating we also come to possess the properties which belong to that person” (107). As Kilgour explains in From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation, for Freud cannibalism seems to mark the division between self and other as it can be illustrated by the relationship between mother and child. When the eater and the eaten become divided, the child realises that what it had treated as part of itself now becomes separate: “what was once inside becomes detached and outside, the familiar becomes strange, the canny uncanny” (Kilgour 12). Therefore, what is at stake in Freud’s interpretation of cannibalism is the concept of self and other, which is at the core of the postcolonial critical theory. Although this particular example of Spenser’s description of cannibalism does not show the Irish as savages since the foster mother’s act expresses grief and not violence, together with previous passages from the View, it becomes a crucial part of imperial discourse which reinforces the negative image of the Irish cannibal.
The reference to Irish cannibalistic act induced by famine can also be found in Fynes Moryson’s *Itinerary*, in which he describes the effects of Tyrone’s rebellion. The commanders

saw a most horrible Spectacle of three Children […] all eating and gnawing with their Teeth the Entrails of their mother, upon whose flesh they had fed 20 Days past, and having eaten all from the Feet upward to the bare Bones, roasting it continually by a slow Fire, were now come to the eating of her said Entrails in like sort roasted, yet not divided from the Body, being as yet raw. (qtd. in Palmer 60)

Although the portrayal of famine induced cannibalism may seem very realistic, William Chester Jordan, historian of the Great Northern European Famine of the early fourteenth century, asserts that “to make a famine real, narratively speaking, the chronicler had to include cannibalism in the story” (149). Hence, Moryson could have included reference to survival cannibalism in order to show the stark conditions during famine and to make it seem more realistic to the reader. Although this passage may seem to be sympathetic in tone, further on in his *Itinerary* Moryson describes some witch-figures who kill and eat young children in some parts of Newry. In order to attract young children who bring out their cattle in the cold mornings, the hugis make fire in the fields (Moryson 283). Obviously, Moryson draws on the association between cannibalism and witchcraft which was well established within the European discourse. Hence, the association between witchcraft, incest and cannibalism emerges as an important part in Western construction of the barbaric “other,” who is placed beyond the borders of civilisation. Although the constructions of Irish cannibalism were cherished in the succeeding years, they did not go unchallenged. In the seventeenth century, one of the Irish historians, Geoffrey Keating, attempted to counteract existing cannibal representations of the Irish by presenting his standpoint:

There are some ancient authors who misrepresent the Irish, particularly Strabo, who asserts in his third book, that the Irish live upon human flesh. I answer to that Strabo must mistake in thus asserting the Irish to be cannibals, for in our ancient records, we do not read of any one who was accustomed to eat human flesh, except Eihne daughter to Crífháin Mac Eanna Cinseala, king of Leinster, who was nursed in Deisies in Munster, and fed on the flesh of children, in hopes of her sooner arriving at maturity. (xv)

Despite the fact that Keating refers to a solitary instance of Irish cannibalism during the pagan times, he insists that it is not the evidence that could prove the existence of customary cannibalism among the Irish (xvii). He stresses that the ancient writers were mistaken in their accounts of
the Irish cannibalism since there was no information available in the texts which could prove such an occurrence.

Furthermore, reaching beyond the Elizabethan era in the debate on discourse of Irish cannibalism, we cannot disregard Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal.” The text, published in 1792, occupies a significant but ambiguous position. Even though Swift was born a member of the Anglo-Irish ruling class, he is considered an Irish national hero. His attitude to Ireland seems, therefore, ambivalent, but, throughout his later life, he expressed a strong support for Irish cause. Swift’s pamphlet, which reads in its full title, “A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents, or the Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public,” is a response to stark conditions in Ireland where in the eighteenth century there was a great problem with poverty and overpopulation within lower classes. The tract is an ironical suggestion to “find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the common-wealth” (Swift 89). The persona of the projector in “A Modest Proposal” believes that there would be no objection to his proposal (90) adding that he has “been assured by a very knowing American […] that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, baked, or boiled” (90). Basing on this fact, he proposes that 100,000 children at the age of one are to be fattened and then sold as a culinary delicacy to the English (90-91). Although Swift is clearly not suggesting that the people of Ireland actually eat their children, he does criticise the domestic values among the Irish whose “children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages” (90). Hence, this quotation obviously draws on the long-standing negative perception among the English and the Anglo-Irish ruling classes of the Irish as savage people. Furthermore, the projector asserts that “this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children” (91). It seems, indeed, that, by using the metaphor of cannibalism, Swift accuses and criticises the landowners’ exploitation of the peasants. This line of reasoning leads to a conclusion that, in “A Modest Proposal,” Swift reverses the stereotype of the Irish as cannibals and attacks primarily the cannibalistic desires of England. What we have to admit is that Swift’s satirical use of cannibal discourse with its exaggerated version of consuming infants unsettles even the contemporary reader.

Taking all the examples into account, the conclusion naturally springing to mind is that whether implied or explicitly stated, accusations concerning
Irish cannibalism reinforced the image of bestial Irish people who are forced to uncivilised dietary practices. Even though the foreign writers and chroniclers may be sympathetic, as in the case of hunger induced cannibalism, pity seems to be accompanied by disgust and hostility. In the process of associating human flesh eating with witchcraft and incest we receive the harsh portrayal of Irish barbarity. By concentrating on the representations of Irish cannibals and cannibalism in the Elizabethan era, and not on the relation between those images and the presumed ‘truth’ of the represented, we attempted to analyse the role that the figure of the cannibal played in the development of European rhetoric of otherness. Detailed descriptions of the bizarre Irish diet by Moryson, Rich, or Spenser function as disturbing accounts of difference due to their emphasis on the Irish who are capable of the most extreme form of uncivilised practice – cannibalism. The principal intention of their texts is the employment of cannibal trope in order to mark Irish inferiority and degradation. The strong contrast is established between the civilised Britons and primitive Irish, between what is familiar and what is bizarre, ordinary and outlandish, canny and uncanny. These constructions are deeply entangled in the binary oppositions that define cultural otherness. Although as it has been already mentioned, some of these accounts portray the Irish as reduced to survival cannibalism due to famine, the overwhelming effect of such material is the endorsement of English perception of the Irish as capable of savagery. Therefore, the word cannibal, which is a metaphor for barbarism, plays a significant role in the colonial discourse as a signifier of the other and in the moral justification for imperial rule. On the other hand, it needs to be reiterated that the derogatory image of Irish cannibal perpetuated by the English did not go unchallenged since the Irish attempted to counteract those representations in the later eras by presenting their standpoint and reversing the stereotype in which they attack the cannibalistic desires of England. To show how the Irish perceived English hypocrisy concerning cannibalism, I will finish off with the recipe from *Spectator* (March 1848):

Crimped Celts, with sauce a la Cromwell

Take a few dozen Celts, the wilder the better, put them into as small and enclosure as you have, notch them all over, neatly, with a sharp sword or cutlass. Be careful not to kill any before you have them done. If one should die, throw it aside. When all crimped, place them before a steady fire of musketry and dish them all as quickly as possible. This mode requires a light and steady hand. (qtd. in Smart 67)
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THE BIZARRE
The Bizarre Bazaar, or on “Going into Hethen Cuntre” in Medieval and Nineteenth Century Romances

It comes as no surprise that travel accounts of the East appealed to medieval people’s interests in the wonders of nature. Monstrous races and fabulous animals were as real as domestic ones; those unusual, allegedly spotted in the fringes of human habitat by those who dared to venture into the margins of the flat earth. According to St. Augustine, *monstra* is related to *monstrare* (to demonstrate), while Isidore of Seville links the word with *monere* (to warn) (Mittman 105). Medieval writers such as Ranulf Higden (1280-1364) and his translator John of Trevisa (1342-1402) or Gerald of Wales (c. 1146-1223) believed that marvelous beings inhabit the edge of the world, as if Nature had greater freedom to play with creation there, than in the center (Daston and Park 25).¹ The Monstrous Races – be they physically or morally horrible³ demonstrate and warn us about our own vulnerability

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¹ *Guy of Warwick* (ll. 7399).

² Dragons and tame lions are presented on a par with giants and superheroes in medieval romances. Like Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, the King of England in Winchester complains that “A beste ys comen to the lande:/Ther may no man agenste hym stande./He ys comyn from Yrelande” (ll. 6817-6819). I will not comment on the negative portrait of the Irish, undoubtedly influenced by the accounts of Ireland such as that of Gerald of Wales, who shows Ireland as a place in which a healthy climate is mixed with a poisonous earth (Gerald of Wales 51, 55), and in which monsters are to be found (72-58).

³ Strickland maintains that the Monstrous Races exhibited various degrees of strangeness, that is physical deformities, which was a sign of “their spatial marginalization” (Strickland 59).
to deformation. As has been shown by Michael Camille and Asa Simon Mittman, the marginal monsters were “ever ready to burst into the world of the western Europeans” (Mittman 92). Medieval fascination with *natura mirante* and the avowed belief that the existence of all living beings described in written texts is part of the divine plan, led to the creation of the “climactic theory,” which aided in the analysis of race and, of what we today call, ethnicity. Any “abnormality” was read through the amalgamation of physiognomy as well as climatic and astrological theories offering extremely rich and multicolored images of people living beyond the limits of the civilized world. The boundaries, however, were not “a contact zone,” but the zones of excess, containing the elements which Western culture wanted to “banish.”

As has been frequently noted, the margins of civilisation fascinated medieval theologians, pilgrims, as well as scholars. While in the Middle Ages the dominant sciences were theology and ethics, in the nineteenth century it was history, proto-anthropology and archeology that thrived on the outlandish and the bizarre. Both medieval and the Victorian travelers and explorers endeavored to catalogue and describe the hitherto undiscovered, they wrote for audiences hungry for the outlandish experience that offered them “true fiction” in the case of the medieval Saracen romance of *Guy of Warwick*

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4 Texts such as *Mandeville’s Travels* or *The Wonders of the East* provide us with compelling accounts of the awe-inspiring peoples and places in medieval culture, for more, see Williams, Kearney. Richard Halliburton’s *Marvels of the East* (1938) is strangely reminiscent of Catalani Jordanus, Bishop of Columbus (2005). *Mirabilia Descripta. The Wonders of the East* (1863, c. 1330).

5 Antipodes, after all, meant the lands and people located on the opposite side of the world, where they “will tread the ground as well as we and above their heads will always see the sky. Have no fear that they will fall off the earth into the sky, for nothing can ever fall upwards. If for us *down* is the earth and *up* is the sky – to affirm it is to be jesting – then for those people as well *up* will be what they see above them, and there is no danger of their falling upwards” (Macrobius in Stahl 204). Macrobius, however, does not list any monsters to be found in the torrid zones of the earth.

6 One should recall here the Roman custom of banishing and relegation. A person relegated from Rome to the outskirts of the empire (the civilized world) was not deprived of all his possessions, and therefore could plead with Caesar to be returned to the capital. Such was the case of Ovid, relegated to Pontus and writing letters “ex Ponto,” although in reality he was banished with no possibility of ever returning to Rome. In this way, the most urbane of the empire poets, was sentenced to live his life amongst the uncivilized barbarians, whose language he did not understand. For a literary depiction of the story, see David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life* (1978). In the Middle Ages as well as in the post medieval periods the rejected groups were only part of the pattern of “the persecuting society,” with heretics and lepers forming yet another caste of outsiders.
and romance(d) travelogue in the case of Richard Burton’s *First Steps in East Africa*. What follows is the analysis of the constructions of the bizarre through physiological oddities and wanderlust. While the medieval text is recurrently preoccupied with the monstrosity of the Muslim Other, Burton’s narrative aspires to provide an account of strange people and places. In contemporary culture, the figures on the margins of medieval manuscripts (comparable to the Victorian colonized subjects relegated to the borderlines or “dusklands” – to use John Coetzee’s expression – of the empire), are of primary scholarly interest, as we, literally and metaphorically we move from the center to the periphery. Likewise, what the text below fails to explain in more detail finds its way into the footnotes and sidelines of the paper.

**On Being (non)-Human**

In her work on the position of animals and humans in medieval literature, Dorothy Yamamoto notices that human beings always see themselves in contrast and comparison to nature constantly “remaking it in our own image” (13). In consequence the borders of our two “worlds” are left undefined and porous. Medieval manuscripts depict animals whose images are used not only for educational purposes but also to enhance as well as degrade one’s status: pure bred animals were unalterably associated with moral and physical cleanliness, whereas hybrids evoked derision and disgust. Using Biblical analogies and mixing the fantastic and the mundane, medieval Bestiaries set the tone for the ways of reading nature for centuries to come. Reason alone placed man above the animals, yet not all races were equally endowè. Apart from the Jews, the Monstrous Races – as they were undisputedly considered in (medieval) life – occupied an ambiguous space between the human and the animal and inhabited the land known as “Ynde” where one finds “Satyri and oþer dyuers men grisliche wonderliche i-schape” (Babington 81). Some

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7 Moore outlines the formation of the persecuting society, in the period 950-1250, which adds to our understanding of the multifarious nature of persecution in the Middle Ages. He outlines the emergence of anti-semitism but also refers to the sins of the flesh, of homosexuals (sodomites) and prostitutes as the most marginalized groups of Christian society.

8 “Just as animals unconsciously echo truths about the scheme of creation in their bodies and in their behaviour, so their instinctive methods of organizing themselves communally have implications for human society” (Yamamoto 20).

9 As Yamamoto reveals, “[t]welfth-century theologians debated whether Jews might not be animals rather than humans, since their rejection of Christ showed that they lacked the faculty of reason” (13).
“haþ hedes as it were houndes” [the parallel fifteenth century anonymous translation calls them Cynocephali], others “haueþ no mouth, and lyueþ by odour and smelles, and beþ i-cloþed in mosse and hery tuftes þat groweþ out of treen” (83). The authoritative tone of enumeration and description turned the text into an important, albeit pseudo-scientific source which, however unintentionally, assured an ongoing popularity of anomalies. As Strickland notices:

Monstrous Races, with their deformed bodies, strange dwellings, barbaric habits, and sinful behaviors provided the basic template for later medieval Christian representations of the rejected, non-Christian group […] In the medieval imagination, Monstrous Races, black Africans, Jews, Muslims, and Mongols shared many of the same physical, moral, and behavioural characteristics. Once their theological associations with sin and vice were firmly established, the Monstrous Races conveyed Christian ideas about evil that also informed representations of the living enemies of Christendom. (59)

Higden and Trevisa’s Polychronicon argued that men of Africa are adversely affected by the heat of the sun, which discolours their bodies and weakens their spirit. Europe produces “men huger and gretter of body my3ti-er of strengbe, hardier and bolder of herte, and fairer of schap…” (Babington 51-53), the men of Africa are “schort of body, blak of skyn, crips of heer,” and “coward of herte” (53). Owing to the effects of climatic severity, regions beyond the limits were believed to be populated only by very primitive and savage tribes (Strickland 30).¹⁰ Such claims were augmented by the belief in the existence of the vicious tribes of Gog and Magog,¹¹ whose enclosing with pillars of murmure so as to prevent their infiltration into the idealized Christendom, features in the medieval romance of Alexander, and is also described by John Mandeville.¹² It is by all means true that “the idea of

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¹⁰ One of the most recognized and accepted texts was Macrobius’s The Commentary on The Dream of Scipio (1990), written in the first half of the fifth century, which offered the classic division into the climactic zones: “The northern and southern extremities are frozen with perpetual cold, two belts so to speak, that go around the earth but are small since they encircle the extremities. Neither zone affords habitation, for their icy torpor withholds life from animals and vegetation; animal life thrives upon the same climate that sustains plant life. The belt in the middle and consequently the greatest, scorched by an incessant blast of heat, occupies an area more extensive in breadth and circumference, and is uninhabited because of the raging heat” (Macrobius in Stahl 201-202).

¹¹ The story of Gog and Magog adjoins the account of Prester John’s Christian Kingdom, which stirred medieval imagination, giving Christians a hope to regain the lost Jerusalem.

¹² Cohen offers a picture dated 1859 of the giant of Guildhall, known as Gogmag (Monster Theory 30).
European identity as a superior one” could only develop “in comparison with all the non-European peoples and culture” (Said 3, 7). According to Strickland, the belief “that physiognomical analysis enabled the observer to view the form of an individual’s body as an outward ‘mirror’ of inner character” originated in the medical writings of the father of medicine Hippocrates (450 BC-370 BC), and it was further developed in Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Physiognomica* (Strickland 37). Most probably, this theory was transported to the Middle Ages through the famous compilation of pronouncements *Secreta Secretorum*. In the fifteenth century version of the work, physiognomy is “a necessarie scyence to knowe the Maners of men” (Steele 216). The discipline itself is characterized in the following way:

_Hysonomye is a science to deme the condycions or vertues and maneres of Pepill, aftyr the toknesse or syngnesse that apperyth in facione or makynge of body, and namely of visage and of the voyce and of the coloure. One lyght manere and general of Phisnomye is to deme vertues and maneris of man aftyr the conpleccion._

(Steele 219)

Such prescriptions to judge people by their appearance and guidance as to how to interpret certain traits of human physiognomy buttressed the numerous representations of Saracen monstrosity. Inhabiting one of the torrid climate regions the Saracens were classified as rather grotesque savages demonstrably atrocious and comic.

Exoticising the unfamiliar is by no means restricted to the Orient proper, so to say, for the medieval mind the Gerald of Wales’ version of Ireland seemed to be equally alien. What is more, freaks of nature shown in town squares or in the circus occupied the medieval imagination and became part of the popular culture of the post-medieval period. Madmen, but even more so, the Wildmen\(^\text{13}\) have long been part of European culture. Likewise,

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\(^{13}\) Hayden White also notices that Montaigne talks about what we deem “wild fruit,” which in fact nature produces in its own course. He points to the fact that “by the end of the Middle Ages, the Wild Man has become endowed with two distinct personalities, each consonant with one of the possible attitudes men might assume with respect to society and nature. If one looked upon nature as a horrible world of struggle, as animal nature, and society as a condition which, for all its shortcomings, was still preferable to the natural state, then he would continue to view the Wild Man as the antitype of the desirable humanity, as a warning of what men would fall into if they definitively rejected society and its norms” (White 173). White argues that the notion of the Wild man stands over against and undercut the notion of the noble savage. The noble savage represents a contradiction in terms as the idea of nobility stands in opposition both to barbarity and civility. Like Rousseau, White uses the term to expose (what Rousseau was attacking) the European system of privilege, inherited power and oppression.
the European Northeast seems to have acquired a fair share of negative stereotyping, as communist countries, now “former” communist countries, were always perceived as “outlandish,” characterised by inscribed the dark, grey poverty of Orwellian *Nineteen Eighty Four*-like depravation. And in Poland have remained stereotyped by that image (I am tempted to say “solidified in amber,” for those who are familiar with the *Fringe* series). As immigrants to the more affluent countries of the West, in English literature and culture, we are repeatedly depicted as plumbers, builders, cleaners and prostitutes. We are, continually, “Children of a Lesser God.” Therefore, coming from the tribe of “Slavs” or “slaves,” I feel entitled to write about the “barbarians” who colonise the medieval and Victorian visions of “out there” because in today’s world, we are “the other Orientals.”

**Little Learning Is … a Good Thing**

Before the discovery of America, the world was commonly represented through tripartite division, and its known continents bestowed to the three sons of Noah after the flood: Asia – the largest continent went to Shem (1/2), Europe to Japheth, and Africa to Ham, the latter two regions equal in size and each corresponding to 1/4 of the Earth. Such knowledge is imparted, among others, by William Caxton in his *Mirror of the World* (1480). The medieval vision of the world was encoded in the so-called mappaemundi, with Jerusalem as its centre. In the world map of Hertford cathedral (c. 1300), the Mediterranean is the most obvious feature, it is enclosed at the bottom of the map by the Pillars of Hercules. The Straits of Gibraltar “were considered to be the boundary of the known world. The Red Sea and Persian Gulf are

Conversely, as he says “[t]he ignoble savage idea is used to justify slave trade” (White 191). According to White, the concept was created not to “redeem the savage” but to “belabor nobility.” He claims that as the wild man has become fetishized into the rather oxymoronic “noble savage” through the encounters between the Europeans and the New World, he is later ascribed superhuman – that is noble powers which, in fact, in the ultimate stage of this paradox implicates that humanity is in a way also wild (White 186).

14 Dir. Randa Haines. 1986.

15 Ham represents the primordial passions of the Jews and heretics, which disturb the peace of the holy. Ham’s progeny can be understood allegorically, as Hrabanus does, or literally, as in Isidore’s account of the predominant distribution of Ham’s offspring in the southern continent of Africa (Akbari 40). This information is imparted by Ranulph Higden and his translator John of Trevisa (Akbari 47-49). It is of course not coincidental that one of the first printed versions of the text comes from the nineteenth century.
vividly red with a large, amorphous island of Ceylon at the foot of the Arabian peninsula” (Labarge 11). At the top centre of the great continent of Asia one could find the earthly paradise; other diverse lands and creatures are located below. This was the world medieval travellers, crusaders, merchants and pilgrims longed to see. Their journeys, be they *voyages imaginaire*, like Mandeville’s or real like Geoffrey’s of Villehardouin, were inscribed in Western philosophy not only as a geographic and cultural process but as a metaphor for enabling the movement of thought itself. Following the period of the failed Crusades, the idea of a voyage to the Holy Land, and thus to “hethen cuntre,” was frequently conflated with a mini military campaign, and as numerous romances such as *Sir Isumbras* or *Gowther* show, close proximity of the barbarians guaranteed conflict, solved only by fighting. Despite clerical opposition to war in general, holy war – and crusades were seen as such – was an admirable endeavour, as was taking up arms against the Saracen “invader,” even though that the battles took place in Saracen territories, Christian holy war was deemed defensive. Before his defense of Constantinople, Guy of Warwick boosts up the morale of his men by saying: “And with strenckyþ of owre hondys/Defende owre goodys and and owre londys. /They haue slayne owre frendys dere:/Loke, that we be vengyd here” (ll. 3267-3270). In the medieval mind, Outremer was, after all, Christian, even if temporarily in heathen hands. The need for protection legitimized aggression. Tyerman argues that Christian holy war in “pursuit of the doctrines of peace” was a “conceptual oxymoron” (Tyerman 66, 64). Decimation of the forces of the (barbarous) enemy had been one of the great Christian fantasies, reenacting, or better, reversing in literature the (mis)fortunes of the Crusades, and turning that failure into a moral victory. The certainty that God was on the Christian side was, of course, one of the great medieval pillars of faith. There was no place for theological questioning. The ideology of moral monstrosity and religious disparity were enough to justify a preemptive war that required incontestable acceptance of the bloodthirstiness of the Saracens.

Curiosity was also considered sinful if it were not the reason for a pilgrimage. The Church promoted pilgrimages to faraway holy places as a way to

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16 The famous theological Pilgrimage of the lyf of Manhode was read alongside the fictional John Mandeville’s Travels.

17 Guy’s call to arms in fact recalls Pope Urban II’s justification and aim of the First Crusade as “… the freeing of the eastern Churches, especially the Church of Jerusalem from the savagery and the tyranny of the Muslims” (Riley-Smith 6).
heal the soul, concurrently trying to institutionalise and regulate them.\textsuperscript{18} Although, as Richard Newhauser claims, the medieval idea of the sin of curiosity is difficult to grasp, as it was never part of the seven Capital Sins, a closer look reveals an interesting characteristic of medieval moral doctrines (559-560). By the tenth century, \textit{curiositas} appeared on the lists of sins to be confessed (560).\textsuperscript{19} In medieval philosophical thought the problem of knowing too much and too little was under constant scrutiny. True wisdom could only be attained through faith. Too much rather than too little learning – contrary to the later famous saying by Alexander Pope – could be a dangerous thing. Tertullian, for example, talks about the evil \textit{curiositas} of heretics, who “were driven to seek forbidden knowledge” (Newhauser 101).\textsuperscript{20} Thus, while for the medieval mind, the good albeit limited enquiry is permissible,\textsuperscript{21} during the Victorian period, the ideology of progress and exploration

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\textsuperscript{18} Davis quotes canon 45 of the Council of Chalons (A.D. 813), which condemns numerous categories of so-called pilgrims: Clerks who think they can purge their sins by going on a pilgrimage and at the same time escape from their pastoral duties, laity who think they can sin with impunity simply by frequenting such places of prayer, powerful folk who exact payment from the rest of the company en route under pretense of protecting them, and finally poor folk whose sole motive is to have better opportunities for begging (Davies 12-13). One has to remember that each time Margery Kempe wanted to travel she needed a consent from her confessor.

\textsuperscript{19} Newhauser quotes Hincmar, archbishop of Reims who in the mid-ninth century warned that “there are some who do not count the vice of \textit{curiositas} among the more severe sins, but they are deceived” (Newhauser 560).

\textsuperscript{20} The figure of the arch-sinner, Faustus, is born out of such convictions. Faustus was driven by his inordinate desire for knowledge and power, and guilty of lack of humility. On the other end of such extreme are “Fools of God” who were happy in their ignorance. Yet Julian of Norwich’s “even cristen” (fellow Christians) would profit from their knowledge of God. Concurrently, Margery Kempe as well as Chaucer’s pilgrims could be seen as committing the sin of curiosity. Whereas Kempe constantly tries to liberate herself from such a presumed sin. Chaucer does not entirely absolves his characters of the transgression. Neither of them mention the issue of money necessary for travelling, which should be earned by one’s own hands, never illegally, and spent to maintain oneself to give alms or help fellow pilgrims.

\textsuperscript{21} “The Western Church had always stressed that sin was, to one degree or another, the result of the misguided will of the sinner and not that it depended largely on forces outside the individual” (Newhauser 574). Newhauser, for example, examines the issues of lust as related to perception (113), he later quotes a fragment from Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} in which Augustine talks about freak shows which arouse curiosity (117). Newhauser brings out the discussion of sin by Bernard of Clairvaux in whose writings, the sin of curiosity is one of the dangerous temptations for the monks. Bernard saw Satan as too inquisitive; that sin was passed on to Eve. More than in Augustine’s writings, Bernard’s views reflect the need for monastic humility and austerity (Newhauser 80).
stimulates interest in visiting the Holy Land, the re-discovery of the Biblical sites fuelled by the earlier archeological discoveries. The Victorians valued educational aspects of travel, yet, not unlike in contemporary science fiction movies from *Space 1999* to *Avatar* (directed by James Cameron 2009), they saw the world as ripe for further colonisation. The pious motivation behind the crusades, as well as the pilgrimages, was not to see foreign lands but to atone for one’s sins. It was curiosity, however, that drew countless multitudes to the scorching sun of Arabia and Northern Africa.

**Guy of Warwick’s Tristes Tropiques**

*Triste Tropiques* means “sad tropics” or “the sadness of the tropics,” a melancholy which is mixed with tragedy. Although the medieval romance of *Guy of Warwick* is not a tragedy, and is closest to hagiography, the tropics, or in this case, the Holy Land, are associated, albeit metaphorically, with melancholy and loss. According to Hibbard, *Guy of Warwick* fame “lasted long after the Middle Ages” (137). It is one of the longest romances, labelled by Mehl as “the novel in verse” (1968). The story contains all possible elements of romance including dubbing, tournaments, European baronial

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22 I would like to thank Ms Marta Frątczak for alerting me to the last chapter of *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) concerning Islam. The book is a travelogue of Levi-Strauss’s voyage to the Caribbean, South America and Asia, and even though the famous anthropologist sneers at the genre he nevertheless adheres to its demands.

23 The first part, thus, answers to the definition of romance, which is a story of adventure, love, chivalry and the marvelous, the second is more akin to hagiography.

24 Hibbard discusses a number of different versions of the manuscript (129). In *The Middle English Mirror*, the anonymous author mentions “Gy of Warerwyck” (1) as one of the popular romances which the lady to whom the Mirror is dedicated likes a little too much.

25 The narrative is markedly divided into two parts, the first one in which Guy goes into the world to become the best knight in the world, the prize for which is his beloved Felice, the daughter of his Lord, and the second in which he faces even greater devil-like enemies, this time the prize is heavenly bliss and, in the end, assumed sanctity. Felice, who has waited for Guy for quite a long time at first suspects that he has someone else (how modern) and suggests building an abbey to atone for his real or imagined sins. Yet, nothing on a small scale is enough for Guy, who embarks on self-imposed exile.

26 After the dubbing ceremony, in Felice’s view, Guy is not a full-fledged knight yet, and she insists: “Goo and do thy cheualrye/And þen þou schalt lye me bye” (ll. 441-442), which is hardly a mere indirect promise of love. Guy has to leave Warwick again to win even more reputation for himself, and then, as Felice promises, “…þer ys no bettur vundur hevyn,/All my loue thou schalt haue” (ll. 816-817). Guy, like other young men, thinks
conflicts, defeats of dragons, decapitating of sultans, and victorious combats; in the second part of the narrative, the East – the epitome of the sinful World – becomes the site of repentance. Happy domesticity is obviously not a major “turn-on” for Guy who, a month after his wedding (during which he manages to beget a son, thereby fulfilling his role as the heir of Warwick), announces: “All thys worlde y wyll forsake/And penaunce for my synnes take” (ll. 7179-7180). Guy’s military exploits are a literary example of Christian fantasies: by defeating the Saracen army in the first part, and the Saracen/African giants in the second, he manages to help Christians (Jonas and his family and then the English people and King Athelstan), thereby averting the threat of Islam.

And the threat, as we know is very real in the story, amplified by a number of myths about the savagery of the Saracens who are repeatedly portrayed in the guise of their religious and bodily alterity; they are the consistently black devils. Accordingly, the merchants who tell Guy about the besieged

that the woman of his dreams is all he wants from life. He sets out to become the most illustrious knight in the world: “For to wynne hym preysyne.

In Almayn and in Lombardye,/Yn Frawnce and in Normandye -/There was no jousting in þat londe,/But Gye had the bettur honde” (ll. 744-748). In the words of Robert of Brunne: “Many tymes, for wymmen sake/knyghteys tournamentys make” (ll. 4605-4606). The lady then sends them “sum pryuy present,” but in fact the knight is sent with a sinful rather than godly cause. The author then lists all the sins the participants are guilty of, most notably pride, hate, envy, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, only to conclude that “lechery makþ hem alle to begynne/pese wymmen are partyners of þere synne” (ll. 4629-4630). I do not think Guy ever sees his beloved and long awaited for Felice in this light, although she plays here devil’s advocate, unwittingly pushing him into the reality of fame and vainglory.

The Book of Vices and Virtues, among other works, announces that there are two types of good life: the life in the world but keeping apart from great sins, and in addition, “do penanunce, 3eue almesse, holde þe comandements of God and holy chirche” (Lauren 162), on the other hand, there is the other good life the author deems more profitable, as there is not better “tresour” than the love of God, the life that despises the world “þe world anoieþ for þe periles and synnes and sorwes…” (162), and that is the ultimate reward Guy seeks at the end of his life.

The Saracen King Triamur, who promises to free Jonas, his sons and the Christian prisoners wishes Guy “…’Mahownde þe helpe and Termagawnte” (l. 7852). Guy, indignantly rejects the idols and replies “Ney but Mary sone,/That for vs on rode was done:/ He may me helpe for hys mercye./Syr kyng, y sey, that ys no lye/But that Mahownde haþ no poste/To helpe nodur the nor me” (ll. 7853-7858). It is the second time that Guy preaches the message of Christianity with no restraint and fear of offending the heathen ruler. Regardless, Triamour accedes that one should pray to whichever God is best: “Thy god for the loue of the/Schall haue also þe loue of me. The crystyn men, that ya haue tane,/Schall be delyurde euery man” (ll. 7863-7865). Here is clearly the potential for creating a more destabilizing situation, which is in a way reminiscent of the attitude to the Christian religion shown by the Sultan in The King of Tars. For both of
The Bizarre Bazaar, or on “Going into Hethen Cuntre”...

emperor Ernis identify the Sultan as pagan and barbaric, the very opposite of any Christian king. Medieval Christians believed that the Saracens prayed to their pagan trinity of Muhammad, Terragan and Apollo, in itself a perversion of the Christian Trinity. Allah, as we know, is usually not mentioned. The threat of the Muslim invasion is thus emphasised in the imagined portrait of the Sultan, who, determined to lay siege to Constantinople: “sware be hys crowne,/be Apolyon and be Mahowne,/That he schall neuyr wele be,/Or he haue tane that cyte” (ll. 3009-3012). Guy frequently learns the news about European warfare from the itinerant merchants. The presence and importance of merchants in medieval culture is quite evident, yet throughout the period they continue to occupy a rather ambivalent space as anything that had to do with money was almost immediately denigrated. Trade, as was perceived back then, was only one step away from usury and usurers, who in *Hanglyng Synne* are seen “as wykked þey are as sarasyns” (l. 5554).

Guy warns the Emperor that: “We schall be beseged with oost vnryde/Abowte þe cyte on euery syde,/Wyth sarasyns bothe black [dark] and kene

the characters it is the God who can do more, which is more important. Hopkins claims that, in a way, Guy never stops being a (good) knight, but after his penance has begun he simply shuns fame (78) and so the integration of chivalry and penitence is complete.

Guy learns of an even greater and more dangerous war from the merchants: “Fro Constantinype, the nobull londe./We be marchyndys of that cyte,/That fro that cuntre chaced bee./The ryche sowdan of Sysane [probably Sarasine] (/To honowre god wyll he not payne),/xv kyngys of hethynesse/And sixty amerals more and lesse,/That haue besieged the emprerowre/Wyth mony knyghtys and grete socowre./There ys not lefte in that cuntre/Castell, towre nor cyte,/Buy hyt ys brente and stroyed all;/And the emperowre and hys men all,/To Constantyne he ys wende” (ll. 2726-2739). This is how Guy learns that the Emperor of Constantinople is besieged by an obviously evil and ill-meaning Sultan, and how he becomes a mercenary. As befits the besieged emperor, Ernis complains that: “The sarasyns haue beset me/And lefte me nothur towne nor cyte,/But oonly thy, þat we are ynne./Some þey stroye and some þey brene./They slewe my men on a day/Thretty Thousande, for soþe to say./Now y prey the for mary sone/And for the rode he was on done,/That thou helpe to venge me/And make my londe recoueryd to bee” (ll. 2791-2800).

One of the first scholarly works on the rise of the Saracens is Simon Ockley’s (1678-1720) *The History of the Saracens* written between 1708-1718.

Pilgrimage and trade were two purposes which made medieval people travel, and thus gain firsthand experience of the world. Bartlett claims that contacts between the West and Byzantium were expanded because of the pilgrims as the land routes across Asia Minor were relatively safe. Occasionally problems occurred when, for example, the Byzantine Emperor imposed taxes on the pilgrim traffic in the eleventh century (Bartlett *The Natural...* 13-15). Traders who traveled through many countries were a good (and usually the only) source of information. Besides the traffic of relics from Constantinople, the city was a central point in the trade of cloth and spices.
[bold, brave sharp]/Wyth full grete force, as y wene [to expect, to hope]” (ll. 3225-3228). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reads the images of the Saracens in romances as simplification of the inherent complexities of individual and national identity. The romance writers bifurcate good and evil, applying all too easily categorization of race and nation (Cohen Of Giants… 133). Notwithstanding, such exemplifications were appreciated by medieval audiences, who were not interested in shades of grey but demanded clear and unproblematic definitions of enemies. Cohen assumes that

[p]rottracted, messy nearby wars in Ireland, Spain, and especially France spurred the English romancers to dream of a time when self-identity was easy to assert, because the enemy was wholly Other (dark skin, incomprehensible language, pagan culture) and therefore an unproblematic body to define oneself against. (Of Giants… 133)

Even though in all Saracen romances the malevolent Sultans speak perfect Middle English, their paganism and wild uncontrollable passions make them less than human. Guy is convinced (or rather speculates) that “He [the sultan – L. S.] hath sworne by Apollyyne/That all schall dye, þat be þerynne” (ll. 3225-3234). And when the supposed conquest of Constantinople does not come too easily, all because of Guy, of course, the said Sultan is really angry, and orders his idols to be brought: “A, goddys, he seyde, ‘ye are false:/ The deuyll yow honge be the hals” (ll. 3429-3430). Feeling abandoned by his Gods, the Sultan: “toke a staffe of appulle tre/And bate hys goddys all three” (ll. 3435-3436), each and every confession manual discusses wreath as de-meaning human character. Roger Bacon sees “anger” “contrary to all human nature. His description of man’s humanity is that he is an animal kindly by nature” (Bacon 685). Predictably, in contrast to the Sultan, the Christian Emperor wants to end the war and decide the fate of the conflict by a single combat. This is how tournament ideology permeated the philosophy of war.

Hearing about the Emperor’s proposal from Guy, who is the Christian messenger and already famous amongst the Saracens, the Sultan behaves in a rather un-chivalric by manner giving orders to kill Guy, but Guy keeps his cool, and in the manner of all-time-universal-soldier John Rambo,

32 and finally “dud þem sone owte caste” (l. 3442).
33 The Saracens recognise the knight whom: “Man calle hym Gye of Warwyke” (l. 3002). Guy, therefore, has fulfilled his task of becoming the best knight in the world, and is now seen as “the erle of great renowne” (l. 2783). The Greek Emperor addresses him as “Gye of Warwyck” (l. 2875), stressing that “In all the worlde ys non þe lyke” (ll. 2784-2786). The famed Guy is asked for “helpe and counsayle” (l. 2790).
approaches the Sultan and cuts his head off: “He smote the sowdan with hys sworde, /That the hedde trendyld on þe borde/The hedde he toke in hys honde” (ll. 3711-3713) and decides to display the Sultan’s head as a warning for all other enemies: “A pyller of marbull grett and graye/Aboue he set a hedde of brasse,/In that the sowdans hed was” (ll. 3826-3828); the shocking view has the purpose of evoking fear and unites the Christians against the enemy. Kaeuper shows how closely violence was related to chivalry (1999).

Suffice it to say that finding out about this horrifying dragon, Guy undertakes an impossible task as even though he arrives with two hundred men, he faces the dragon alone. After a rather lengthy description of a fight, as is expected Guy wins: “The hedde of soone he schare./To the kynge a man hyt bare” (ll. 6959-6960) and brings the head to the king at York and again all rejoice. “At 3orke the hed was hangyd þan:/Thereon lokyd many a man” (ll. 5965-5955). The head is there for the public to see, and thus becomes a token of Guy’s extraordinary aptitude. It is a visible sign of Guy’s martial glory, a reminder to the audience of why Guy went into the world.

Violence is not one of the “sins” disparaged in medieval confession manuals, and as Fumagalli claims, became associated with nobility whose main profession was fighting. “[T]he Church defined them as ordo pugnatorum, the order of soldiers” (Newhauser 42). “Richard Coer de Lyon, one of the more sadistic of the romances, shows a fascination with war machinery and its use – catapults, arbalestes, morganels. In the Sowdon of Babylon a character is decapitated by a portcullis, and there is a description of Neymes killing one of the Saracens with a burning brand” (Ramsey 86). “When Richard Coer de Lyon prepares at one point to behead 60,000 Saracens for concealing the whereabouts of the cross, an angel appears before him saying, ‘Seynyour, tues, tuez’” (Ramsey 87).

Guy learns “Hyt ys the admyrall Coldran,/A cosyn of the ryche sowdan./He ys grete, hye and longe:/In all þys worlde ys none so stronge” (ll. 2819-2822). We don’t know how this person knew the admiral whose title is characteristically European rather than Muslim. Such identification, however, responds to the need of the romance to have the hero’s opponents as men of rank and nobility. “These enemies gain power solely through their association with men of rank: the foresters and seneschals would not be threats if they did not have the protection or authority of the king. Other opponents are symbolic of the king…” (Ramsey 49). Guy killed Syr Tébawde, another Saracen: “Then came for the Aulart,/A bolde sarasyn, with a darte:/Syr Gylmyn he brought to grownde/And gaue hym the detheys wownde” (ll. 2879-2882). The Saracen enemy is usually unnamed. Like all superheroes, Guy is pursued by many Saracens, and habitually, “[m]any of them hath he slayne” (l. 3728), but he returns to his camp with the head of Coldran. Again as in the case of Coldran, the head of the dead enemy evokes a lot of joy. “When þey sawe þe hed than,/Moche yoye made many a man” (ll. 3905-3806). Priests are singing, bells are ringing, there is wide-ranging elation, and the Emperor himself weeps the tears of joy and “[a]n hundurd sythe he hym kyste” (l. 3821). The Emperor’s kiss, being the sign of friendship, betrays a not an unhealthy passion. After all, Guy helped him to regain what was his (“þe warre was broght to endynge” [l. 3824]) and humble the barbarians. The Christian struggles, unalterably, linked battles against enslavement with assumed paganism of the enemy.
While Guy’s initial motives were secular, his return to the Holy Land fuses the military and the penitential aspects of such a journey, as now he thinks about himself as a pilgrim but remains, albeit in a good cause, a soldier. In the Holy Land, Guy, the peregrine, meets another Christian “pore pylgryme” (l. 7404), Earl Jonas who, as was customary, tells Guy his long and twisted story, the moral of which is that he has to find a knight who would take his place in a single combat with Amoraunt, referred to specifically as “the gyawnt” (l. 7951). The giant, clearly a representative of the Monstrous Races, as could be suspected “Comyn he ys fro the lande of Ynde,/A stronger man may no man fynde./He ys black, as any pyck [wood tar]” (ll. 7577-7579). What is more: “Hys breste brode, hys body grete:/He ys more, then a nete” (ll. 7577-7584), “He ys two fote and more/Hyer, then any, that was þore” (ll. 7582-7583). No wonder there is no one “That durst stande a stroke of hys hande” (l. 7584). Being huge and black and (d)evil like, Armoraunt is decidedly other than European not only because of his religion but because of his race. The hateful portrait of the Saracen is quite typical. The enormous posture and strength of the giant are offered here to strengthen the David and Goliath model and better reflect Guy’s future glory. Both champions are armed with pagan weapons which function in the story as traces of chivalric heritage: Guy faces his adversary with a helmet “Hyt was Alysawndurs, þe kynge” (l. 7921) and the sword of Hector “Ector hyt oght, y vnderstande” (l. 7926), while Amoraunt is armed with the sword of Hercules – “Hyt was Arcules swyrde” (l. 7977). When Guy glances at his opponent a terrified cry escapes his lips: “3ondur ys þe deuell and no man” (l. 7960). Armoraunt is, like all other Saracens, predictably treacherous, as he gains advantage attacking Guy during a break from fighting when they both were supposed to have a drink. To quote Hanif Kureishi’s unpublished essay: “Unsurprisingly, we are still people who love to hate, and are much bothered by what we imagine to be others’ pleasure.”

38 Whetter claims that Guy is depicted here as “the defender of Christendom,” but in fact he is championing for the Sultan and not for a Christian king, which “also confuses the supposed distinction between Christian and Saracen” (108). Jonas and his fifteen sons fought the Saracens who had besieged Jerusalem. The former lost the war, and were taken prisoner by King Triamour. They spent twelve years in Triamour’s dungeons. To make matters worse for poor Jonas, King Triamour’s son Fabour, slew Sadok, the son of the Sultan, over a game of chess. The vengeful Sultan declared that either Triamour fight himself or finds a champion to take his place.

39 “He was blake as any piche” (Caius Ms, l. 7759). “He seme as if it were a fende/þat comen were out of helle” (Auchinleck Ms, 62).
The scene of arming the knight in preparation for the fight with yet another fearsome figure Collebrond, mirrors Guy’s earlier fight with Amoraunt. Collebrond, a gigantic African champion, is feared by the English and King Athelstan and even by Guy: “Gye was then sore adradde” (l. 10250), which, however does not prevent him from showing a rather obvious sense of superiority and revulsion towards his opponent. The portrayal of Collebrond is a continuation of the racist tendencies which dominate the Saracen romances. He is yet another black devil of gargantuan proportions whose death is a narrative necessity. For Guy the only good Saracen is a dead one.40 In the words of Hanif Kureishi, “What sustains racial insults might be the wish for unstained whiteness, for purity and a healthy world in which the intrusions of others’ gratification don’t exist” (by permission of the author: “Please quote – would be delighted and flattered,” email of 14 Sept. 2014).41

Al-ifranj among the Believers,42 or Victorian Quest Romance(d)

Unlike earlier travellers who were driven by the hunger to know the world, and whose travels led to the discovery, or rather creation, of ancient mirabilia, late eighteenth and nineteenth century explorers were interested in the pre-Christian and Christian past, their concern instrumental to the rise of the modern discipline of archeology. The discovery of the Rosetta stone, initial expeditions along the Nile, as well as numerous voyages to Arabia mark the nineteenth century as the Age of Exploration. Yet, theirs was never a benign admiration. Victorian gentlemen examined the lands beyond Europe to have them catalogued and conquered. The intent of advancing those supposedly “stuck in the lower stages of civilization” was tantamount to their subjugation. Sir Henry Morton Stanley (b. John Rowlands 1841-1904), Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890) and Charles Montagu Doughty (1843-1926) were knights errand (or perhaps errant) in their pursuits and, similar to their medieval predecessors, were devoted to their own versions of

40 Such ideological markers would comply, at least to an extent, with Edward Said’s claims that Islam was always perceived as a militant threat to European Christianity (1995).
41 And more: “But there is another sense in which the racist never wants the pleasures of persecution to end.” “To Sir with Love”
42 Al-ifranj means the Francs, in general, this term referred to Christians. Among the Believers is of course the title of V.S. Naipaul’s travelogue, whose full title is Among the Believers. An Islamic Journey (2003), originally published in 1981.
the Holy Grail.\textsuperscript{43} If travel narrative can be called a displaced romance, then, they, like \textit{Guy of Warwick}, are also placed in the liminal position between home and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{44} The literary rendition of Victorian travels, testifying to the on-going popularity of such accounts, is best realized in the so-called Victorian quest romance or Victorian travel romance. Works such as Henry Rider Haggard’s African stories (\textit{King Solomon’s Mines} ([1995], \textit{She} [1887]) as well as Arthur Conan Doyle’s \textit{The Lost World} (1912) were written to celebrate male bonding, courage and prowess; in short, old-time heroic masculinity. It is no coincidence that the heyday of Victorian quest romance coincides with the burgeoning of the late nineteenth century “new woman” fiction. Such narratives were set in faraway localities, in the remote parts of the globe where European women were not welcome and described male exploratory (and sexual) adventures, in which the conquered land is as malleable as the seduced native women, who then conveniently die in order not to disturb the ideology of miscegenation.\textsuperscript{45} Similar to the medieval romances, the integral part of Victorian travel narrative is always an account of bravery against adversity and the nobility, honor, resourcefulness and intelligence of the “white man.”

Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) was a British geographer, explorer, translator and writer. He wrote a number of travelogues of his explorations within Asia and Africa. In his accounts, he exhibited an extraordinary knowledge of languages and cultures.\textsuperscript{46} When he embarked on

\textsuperscript{43} “Displaced,” because the quest elements are translated from the fantastical realm of pure romance or myth into a reality that is usually more mundane than the world we encounter in romance” (Lévi-Strauss 17).

\textsuperscript{44} The literary predecessors of the Victorian quest romance are both the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages, revived, among others, in Lord Alfred Tennyson’s \textit{Idylls of the King} (1859-1885) as well as nineteenth-century travel accounts.

\textsuperscript{45} It is interesting to notice what Claude Levi-Strauss writes in his travelogue \textit{Tristes Tropiques} originally published in 1955: “If the West traces its internal tensions back to their source, it will see that Islam, by coming between Buddhism and Christianity, Islamized us at the time when the West, by taking part in the crusades, was involved in opposing it and therefore came to resemble it, instead of undergoing – had Islam never come into being – a slow process of osmosis with Buddhism, which would have Christianized us still further, and would have made us all the more Christian in that we would have gone back beyond Christianity itself. It was then that the West lost the opportunity of remaining female” (409).

\textsuperscript{46} Being the connoisseur of the Oriental cultures, he knew and was full of appreciation of a number of Arab inventions, including the compass (Burton \textit{First… I 3}). He also talks about weapons (31-34), descriptions of various items of clothing, and armor is quite frequent in Burton’s narratives.
the expedition to Somaliland, Harar was a city so well guarded so that no white men would enter it. Burton offers quite a detailed geographical description: “The ancient capital of Hadiyah, called by the Gallas "Adaray," and by the Arabs and ourselves “Harar," lies, according to my dead reckoning, 220° S.W. of, and 175 statute miles from Zayla – 257° W. of, and 219 miles distant from Berberah” (First… II 1). 

Learned as he was, Burton is the epitome of Said’s “Orientalist enthusiast” – which is not a compliment – as Said accuses him of the “imperial gaze,” of grounding his work in “Oriental legend and experience” (Said 51). Burton’s *First Footsteps in East Africa, or An exploration of Harar* was published in 1856. True to its genre, the book was also equipped with a map, which shows Burton’s route to Harar and a number of drawings of people and places he saw.

Mary Louise Pratt argues that descriptions of landscapes are part of the “Victorian discovery rhetoric” which validates the achievements of the explorer. As the landscape is aestheticized, “[t]he sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, symmetries […]. It is important to note that within the text’s own terms the esthetic pleasure of the sight singlehandedly constitutes the value and significance of the journey” (Pratt 200). Burton frequently comments on both the weather and landscape: “[t]he air was fresh and clear, and the night breeze was delicious after the steamy breath of day” (First… I 99). Since most of his readers would not have seen what he saw, he is indeed in charge of the (re)presentation.

In Said’s view, Victorian travelogue is a simulacrum, a mellowed imitation of what the real Orient “might be thought to look like” (Said 88), and in that respect Burton is no different from the romance writers, yet he is much more aware,

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47 Burton frequently mixes admiration and dislike, as he does in the following fragment: “…we found the remains of a small building about eight yards square divided into two compartments. It is apparently a Mosque: one portion, the sole of which is raised, shows traces of the prayer niche; the other might have contained the tomb of some saint now obsolete, or might have been a fort to protect a neighbouring tank. The walls are of rubble masonry and mud, revetted with a coating of cement hard as stone, and mixed with small round pebbles” (First… II 80).

48 “Crudely, then, discovery in this context consisted of a gesture of converting local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms and relations of power. To put the matter this way is, of course, to set aside rather aggressively what actually constituted heroic dimension of this kind of discovery, namely the overcoming of all the geographical, material, logistical, and political barriers to the physical and official presence of Europeans in places such as Central Africa. […] In the end, the act of discovery itself, for which all the untold lives were sacrificed and miseries endured, consisted of what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience—that of seeing” (Pratt 198).
more immersed in the native culture than other travelers. Describing his life in Zayla, Burton reports his visit to the whitewashed dome of Shaykh Ibrahim Abu Zarbay, who travelled to Harar “about A.D. 1430, converted many to Al-Islam, and left there an honoured memory” (First… I 54). He discusses customs and food:

About 11 a.m., when the fresh water arrives from the Hissi or wells, the Hajj sends us dinner, mutton stews of exceeding greasiness, boiled rice, maize cakes, sometimes fish, and generally curds or milk [all of that is comparable to the supreme English cuisine]. We all sit round a primitive for of the Round Table, and I doubt that King Arthur’s knights ever proved doughtier trenchmen than do my companions. We then rise to pipes and coffee, after which excluding visitors, my attendants apply themselves to a siesta, I to my journal and studies.” (Burton First… I 29)

Burton, who also translated the Arabian Nights the sensuality of which so enraged Rana Kabbani, not only aestheticises what he observes, but also frames his experiences within the literary context: “As the case had become hopeless, a vessel was decried standing straight from Tajorrah, and suddenly as could happen in the Arabian Nights, four fine mules, saddled and bridled, Abyssinian fashion, appeared at the door” (69).

Nature but most notably people and their ways of life fashion the experience either familiar or strange, hence the comparisons of “here” and “there,”

49 As an informed traveller, he gives many historical and geographical details to his readers while describing his excursions near Zayla. He recounts stories and fables dating back to Phoenician times. About A. S. 1500 the Turks conquered Al-Yaman, and the lawless Janissaries “who lived upon the very bowels of commerce” (First… I 49) drove the Arab merchants to the opposite shore.

50 He talks about native games (Burton First… I 29-30).

51 Before they [the Badawin – L. S.] departed, there was a feast after the Homeric fashion. A sheep was “cut,” disemboweled, dismembered, tossed into one of our huge cauldrons, and devoured within the hour: the almost live food was washed down with huge draughts of milk. The feasters resembled Wordsworth’s cows, “forty feeding like one” in the left hand they held the meat to their teeth, and cut off the slice in possession with long daggers perilously close, were their noses longer and their mouths less obtrusive” (Burton First… I 152). He also learned from the Badawin – who, like the Arabs, have a holy horror of towns that “[t]hey will spoil that white skin of thine at Harar!” (Burton First… I 166).

52 Talking about certain African customs, Burton claims that “[a]s usual in Eastern Africa, we did not enter the kraal uninvited, but unloosed and pitched the wigwam under a tree outside. Presently the elders appeared bringing, with soft speeches, sweet water, new mild, fat sheep and goats, for which they demanded a Tobe of Cutch canvas. We passed with them a quiet luxurious day of coffee and pipes, fresh cream and roasted mutton” (First… I 117).
The Bizarre Bazaar, or on “Going into Hethen Cuntre”…

where “there” always signifies the bizarre. Burton, the tourist, comments that in Arabia one should not use boxes for storage, as

the Badawin always believed them to contain treasures. Day after I have been obliged to display the contents [ammunition – L. S.] to crowds of savages, who amused themselves by lifting up the case with loud cries of “Ho!! Ho!! Ho!!” (the popular exclamation of astonishment), and by speculating upon the probably amount of dollars contained therein. (First… I 96)

Equally peculiar are the Moslem laws, even though Burton does not comment on the laws of Harar but his tone reveals his attitude:

When a citizen draws dagger upon another or commits any petty offence, he is bastinadoed in a peculiar manner: two men ply their horsewhips upon his back and breast, and the prince, in whose presence the punishment is carried out, gives the order to stop. Theft is visited with amputation of the hand. The prison is the award of state offenders: it is terrible, because the captive is heavily ironed, lies in a filthy dungeon, and receives no food but what he can obtain from his own family-seldom liberal under such circumstances-or buy or beg from his guards. (First… II 22)

At the same time, he belittles the Beduins (in his spelling Badawins), whose tents he finds outside the gate. The show off of European superiority is at its best here. “Their tents are worse than any gipsy’s, low, smoky, and of the rudest construction. These people are a spectacle of savageness. Their huge heads of shock hair, dyed red and dripping with butter, are garnished with a Firin, or long three-pronged comb, a stick, which acts as scratcher when the owner does not wish to grease his fingers, and sometimes with the ominous ostrich feather, showing that the wearer has ‘killed his man’; a soiled and ragged cotton cloth covers their shoulders, and a similar article is wrapped round their loins. All wear coarse sandals […]. Some of the women would be pretty did they not resemble the men in their scowling, Satanic expression of countenance; they are decidedly en dishabille, but a black skin always appears a garb” (Burton First… I 34-35).

Burton talks about the law: “The Kazi has the administration of the Shariat or religious law: he cannot, however, pronounce sentence without the Governor’s permission; and generally his powers are confined to questions of divorce, alimony, manumission, the wound mulct, and similar cases which come within Koranic jurisdiction. Thus, the religious code is ancillary and often opposed to ‘Al-Jabr’ – ‘the tyranny’ – the popular designation of what we call Civil Law. Yet is Al-Jabr, despite its name, generally preferred by the worldly wise. The Governor contents himself with a moderate bribe, the Kazi is insatiable: the former may possibly allow you to escape unplundered, the latter assuredly will not. This I believe to be the history of religious jurisdiction in most parts of the world” (Burton First… II 88-89).

“On one occasion a party of Arab merchants, not understanding the ‘fun of the thing,’ shot two Somal: the tribe had the justice to acquit the strangers, mulcting them, however, a few yards of cloth for the families of the deceased” (Burton 148). Harar is a commercial town with ivory as a chief good. “The only valuable MS, in the place [of the Shaykh
Victorian rhetoric of progress undeniably relied on strangeness:

They sacrifice she-camels in the month of Sabuh, and keep holy with feasts and bonfires the Dubshid or New Year’s Day. At certain unlucky periods when the moon is in ill-omened asterisms those who die are placed in bundles of matting upon a tree, the idea being that if buried a loss would result to the tribe. Though superstitious, the Somal are not bigoted like the Arabs, with the exception of those who, wishing to become learned, visit Al-Yaman or Al-Hijaz, and catch the complaint. (Burton First… II 80-81)

In an almost Mandevillian manner, yet true to Victorian proto-ethnographic and proto-anthropological ideas, Burton describes the Somalis, “their Origins and Peculiarities”:

The Somal, therefore, by their own traditions, as well as their strongly-marked physical peculiarities, their customs, and their geographical position, may be determined to be a half-caste tribe, an offshoot of the great Galla race, approximated, like the originally Negro-Egyptian, to the Caucasian type by a steady influx of pure Asiatic blood. (First… I 75)

Burton expresses the views prominent in his time and propagated by such known authorities as Arthur de Gobineau who believed in the superiority of the white race. He could not contest the common ancestor to all the races, as he did not want to question the Bible, but, he contended, in his works The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races: With Particular Reference to their Respective Influences in the Civil and Political History of Mankind (1856) and The Inequality of Human Races (1854), as did Higden in the fourteenth century, that the white race is the only one capable of creating an educated culture and forming states. He saw the European civilisation as representing

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Jami who instructed Burton on Sufism] was a fine old copy of the Koran; the Kamus and the Sihah were there, but no means remarkable for beauty or correctness. Books at Harrar are mostly antiques, copyists being exceedingly rare, and the square massive character is more like Cufic with diacritical points, than the graceful modern Naskhi (40).”

55 True to the ethnographic rhetoric, Burton describes a woman’s features: “The head was well formed, and gracefully placed upon a long thin neck and narrow shoulders: the hair, brow, and nose were unexceptionable, there was an arch look in the eyes of het and pear, and a suspicion of African protuberance about the lips, which gave the countenance an exceeding naïveté. Her skin was a warm, rich nut-brown, an especial charm in these regions, and her movements had that grace which suggests perfect symmetry of limb. The poor girl’s costume, a coif for the back hair, a cloth imperfectly covering the bosom, and a petticoat of hides, made no great mystery of forms: equally rude were her ornaments […]. As a tribute to her prettiness I gave her some cloth, tobacco, and a bit of salt, which was rapidly becoming valuable; her husband stood by, and although the preference was marked, he displayed neither anger nor jealousy” (First… I 136-137).
the highest point of development but also capable of preservation and of
perfecting the best aspects of ancient civilisations, especially the ancient
Indo-European culture, which he called “Aryan” (http://en.wikipedia.org/
wiki/Aryan). De Gobineau noticed the inevitability of the mixture of races,
which had already taken place in medieval Spain, but, like Higden, Bacon
and many other medieval thinkers, opted for miscegenation as the only
possible solution to chaos resulting from hybridisation. Characteristically,
he ascribed economic and political unrest in the Europe of his days to
the pollution of races. Burton illustrates similar observations.56

In Harar, Burton’s excitement is mixed with distress, as he and his Arab
companions are treated almost like prisoners. “I was under the roof of
a bigoted prince whose least word was death; amongst a people who detest
foreigners; the only European that had ever passed over their inhospita-
ble threshold, and the fated instrument of their future downfall” (Burton
First… II 209). They were before marshaled by the guard, but Burton felt
relief when he saw the Amir smile. Even though outwardly Islamic, inwardly
– for Burton – Somaliland remained the “hethen cuntre,” always sustaining
investigative inquisitiveness that is rendered through somatic curiosities.

Conclusion

In 1881, a historian David Pryde published a book entitled Great Men of Eu-
ropean History. Pryde begins by listing all the Barbarians invading Europe:

About 375 the Huns appeared in Europe, from the northern plains of Asia. They
were the most terrible of all the barbarians. They had squat figures, large heads,
flat faces, without any beards, and with deep-sunk, bead-like eyes. They devoured
their food before it was half-cooked; and they reveled in plunder, slaughter, and

56 Elsewhere, Burton makes ethnographical observations about Sinaitic clans: “I therefore
believe the Turi Badawin to be an impure race, Syro-Egyptian, whereas their neighbor
the Hijazi is the pure Syrian or Mespotamian” (Burton First… I 147). Burton quotes
Sir John Mandeville, who portrays the Tawarah tribes as “folke fulle of alle evely
condiciouns” (Mandeville 147). In a footnote he adds “The Osmanlis have, as usual,
a semi-religious tradition to account for the superiority of their nation over the Egyp-
tians” (Burton First… I 147). Yet he found the Tawarah still retaining many character-
istics of the Badawi race. The most good-humoured and sociable of men, they delight
in a jest, and may readily be managed by kindness and courtesy. Yet they are passionate,
nice upon points of honour, revengeful, and easily offended, where their peculiar prej-
udices are misunderstood. I have always found them pleasant companions, and deserv-
ing of respect, for their hearts are good, and their courage is beyond a doubt” (Burton
First… I 148).
destruction. In fact, as the writers of that period declare, they resembled immense droves of beasts of prey ramping on their hind-legs. On the approach of these hideous savages a panic seized the nations. Even the Visigoths fled southward, and implored the Romans to admit them within the empire. (27-28)

Coming from the rims of civilisation, the Huns, like the Monstrous Races, are closer to animals than humans. Medieval Saracen romances as well as Victorian travelogues upheld such images in order to justify non-chivalrous violence in the case of the former and colonial oppression, in the case of the latter. By outlining what it meant to be human, the Middle Ages and the Victorian times unwittingly gave us a taste for the grotesque and the bizarre, the ideology of travel lending itself to imperial (white) mythology. Burton’s Somalis and medieval monstrous Saracens have always served as checkpoints to Europeans, offering them comparisons to the civilized reality while at the same time exposing the Europeans to cultural differences. Yet, the very curiosity which encourages travellers to explore the unknown is privy to the same mechanisms of “dissimilation.” We no longer take The Books of Beasts (granting we still produce them) at face value, yet we still like the oriental bazaar with all the bizarre it has to offer.

Works Cited


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57 “White mythologies” is a term I have taken from the title of Robert J.C. Young’s book, see Works Cited.


The Exotic and the Bizarre in Australian Fiction: 
*Maurice Guest* and *Tourmaline*

**Introduction**

The purpose of this essay is to examine, and introduce to a readership which, in all probability, has never heard of them, two remarkable Australian novels, one published in 1908 and the other in 1964. The earlier of these is *Maurice Guest*, by an author who called herself Henry Handel Richardson. The more recent is *Tourmaline* by Randolph Stow. Both, in their own quite separate and distinctive ways, are instances of the unexpected, the exotic and the transgressive; and the second novel, in particular, is a demonstration of the outlandish and bizarre. But first, a brief personal note.

I first read the novel, *Maurice Guest*, as an expatriate among a group of other expatriates from a variety of countries, thrown together in circumstances very similar to those the novel describes. We had abandoned, at least temporarily, our own familiar cultures and environments, and were gathered together on the margin of another. The novel rang very true to me because of that, and because it so astonishingly accurately depicted – as I later came to realise – the kind of hothouse personal and sexual relationships that can develop when one is freed from both the confines and also the support of family and a familiar culture. I had read nothing like it before, and have read very little to equal it since.

Henry Handel Richardson was not the author’s real name, which was Ethel Florence Lindsay Richardson. She was born in Melbourne in 1870, and after her
father’s death when she was nine, her mother became postmistress in various country towns. In fact, my grandmother knew her in the little country town where my own father was born. Ethel was a gifted pianist and tennis player, and was sent to a boarding school in Melbourne. In 1888, her mother took her and her sister to Leipzig to study music, and this gave her the background for the novel. But she claimed that performance made her too nervous, and she gave up dreams of becoming a performer. In 1894 she married a young Scotsman, John George Robertson, whom she had met in Leipzig and lived with him in England until her death in 1946. She returned to Australia only once to do research for her great trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

Why did she choose to publish under a male name? Well, in the early years of the twentieth century a woman stood a better chance of being published and accepted, especially a woman from the antipodes, and with her first novel, if she seemed to be male. Furthermore, a woman who wrote a novel so rawly and explicitly about sexual obsession would have been, in 1908, beyond the margin of respectability. Only a man could get away with that, and preferably a Russian or a Frenchman.

Because of its quite explicit exploration of sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, in its time *Maurice Guest* was both unexpected and deeply transgressive. (In fact, the original version was much more explicit and had to be considerably toned down for it to achieve publication in 1908.) *Maurice Guest* hardly belongs within the tradition of the English novel and much less within the tradition of the Australian novel. It is closer to *Anna Karenina* (1878) than to anything in English, and its account of obsession is reminiscent of Dostoyevsky. Most critics suggest comparisons with *Madame Bovary* (1856), which is a bit off the mark – for one significant reason that will be made clear shortly. Richardson is best known for other works: her charming *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910) often set as a school text, and her great trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917-1929). In *The Getting of Wisdom* she looks at how a country girl from a poor family is ostracised and humiliated by the snobbish daughters of the rich at the boarding school in Melbourne where she (like Ethel) is sent. It also deals with the topic of adolescent lesbianism in the form of the girl’s “crush” on a young female teacher. In *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, based on the life of her own father, she anatomizes in scarifying detail the decay of a man’s mind into insanity. This was not mainstream fiction in the early decades of the last century. Richardson’s relentless probing of the weak stitching between society and the personal psyche, her probing of the places where the fabric fell apart, makes her unique in her time.
Maurice Guest (1908), which was her first novel, does not have such a wide canvas. In fact virtually all the action, except for two very brief pastoral interludes, takes place in Leipzig, and often in one or two rooms. The characters walk in the woods, even go skating when the river is frozen. They walk in the woods to escape the rooms. But it is to the rooms, and usually to one that they return. The result is a novel of almost claustrophobic intensity, with the two main characters locked in a passionate and ultimately destructive relationship unlike anything seen previously in Australian fiction and rarely seen since.

Critics who have written on Maurice Guest have commented extensively on Richardson's familiarity with continental literature and especially German literature. Coming from Australia at the age of eighteen to study music in Germany and then marrying a young Scottish scholar who went on to become Professor of German at London University, this is not surprising. Although Fay Zwicky compares Maurice Guest with Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure (1895), Richardson was really outside of the influence of both English and the nascent Australian fiction. Vincent Buckley, Dorothy Green and Axel Clark have all drawn attention to the influence of non-English sources on her work. Michael Ackland, in his excellent small book on Richardson, looks extensively at the role of such writers as Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the Viennese Otto Weininger in shaping some of the book's male characters, most notably the gifted and ruthless young Polish musician, Schilky, and the ambiguous and homosexual Krafft, but not of Maurice Guest himself. One book that is not mentioned by these critics is Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest, published in 1894-1896, three years before Richardson began working on her novel. Given its popularity, it is inconceivable that Richardson was not familiar with it, and there is a striking similarity that I will come to shortly. Perhaps Carmen Callil, in her Introduction to the 2008 edition of the novel, best spells out the “outsider” quality of the book, its positioning at or beyond the margins of various literary traditions:

Maurice Guest continues […] to be always forgotten, always rediscovered. It belongs to so many countries, and so many cultures and traditions, that it sits easily nowhere except in one quarter: as an unequalled exploration of the consuming power of sexual and emotional love between a man and a woman. (vii)

For those who are not familiar with the novel, its plot can be very briefly summarised. Maurice Guest, a young Englishman, has escaped from the dullness of provincial England, from his family and the impending fate of being a life-long schoolteacher to study music in Leipzig. His great ambition is to
be a great pianist and conductor. But at an early music lesson he encounters a striking Australian woman, Louise Dufreyer, some years his senior. He falls passionately and obsessively in love with her, but she is very much in love with an egotistical but very talented violinist, Schilsky. When Schilsky deserts her and leaves Leipzig, Maurice pursues her relentlessly until she initiates a sexual relationship with him to put him out of his misery and to gain a bit of comfort for herself. But Maurice’s obsessive jealousy turns this into a taut and all-consuming battle between the two until she ultimately and emphatically rejects him. With nothing left to live for, Maurice goes out into the woods and shoots himself.

For a novel of more than six hundred pages, that might not seem much of a plot. Of course, there are other characters, especially the sensible and rather unimaginative and definitely unromantic English woman, Madelaine, who tries to mother Maurice and set him on a more stable course. And there is a somewhat Jamesian episode in which Schilsky seduces a very young and immature American girl called Ephie. (Ephie, with her mother and sister, has to leave Leipzig precipitously: the implication is that she is pregnant.) And there is a brief epilogue in which it is made clear that Schilsky and Louise are together again, most probably married.

But by far the largest part of the book focuses on the tense and fluctuating relationship between Maurice and Louise and the way Maurice’s lack of self-knowledge and radical insecurity turn it toxic and destructive. The result is a kind of microscopic intensity in which their relations change by the minute in the heat of their often angry exchanges. It is hard to find a brief example, but the following will give some idea. Talking of her former lover, Schilsky, she tells Maurice:

‘Do you think it gives me a higher opinion of you, to hear you talk like that about some one I once cared for? How can I find it anything but ungenerous? – Yes, you are right, he was different – in every way. He didn’t know what it meant to be envious of anyone. He was as different from you as day from night.’
Maurice was hurt to the quick. ‘Now I know your real opinion of me! Till now you have been considerate enough to hide it. But tonight I have heard it from your own lips. You despise me!’
‘Well, you drove me to say it,’ she burst out, wounded in her turn. ‘I should never have said it of my own accord – never! […] It’s not the first time you have goaded me into saying something, and then turned round on me for it. You seem to enjoy finding out things you can feel hurt by… You talk as if you worship the ground I walk on: but you can’t let me alone. You are always trying to change me – to make me what you think I ought to be.’ (479)
This passage gets to the heart of how badly and disastrously their relationship has changed; yet, Maurice does not shoot himself until one hundred and fifty pages later. That indicates just how microscopic and unusual the novel’s psychological realism is. Louise’s remarkable insight into how Maurice conducts their relationship is an excellent example of this.

The dire fate of women who stray from the accepted morality of their day was a common motif in nineteenth century art. The most obvious examples in fiction are Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary, but one must not ignore Maggie Tulliver in George Elliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899). In opera one thinks, among many instances, of Carmen, and Violetta in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, which was based on Dumas fils’ novel *La Dame aux camélias*, as well as Massenet’s *Thaïs* based on the novel by Anatole France. In all these works, the woman dies. And while Hester Prynne does not die in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), she pays a terrible price of ostracism and suffering. In Fontane’s novel, Effi Briest dies, too, although she had the strength and courage to leave a destructive relationship and lead an independent life. Effie was strong despite her immaturities and although she dies of consumption – an apparently common way of disposing of women who challenged conventional morality – the novel celebrates her strength in rejecting its confines.

Still, in all these works there seems to be an underlying assumption that a woman cannot flout the morality of her time and get away with it. Sometimes society turns on her, or away from her, as in *Anna Karenina*. Or Fate operates through some other agency, such as a jealous lover (*Carmen*) or illness. It is worth noting that most of these works are by men. Yet, even in Jane Austen’s novels, the silly sister who elopes with the cad gets the horrible marriage she apparently deserves.

And this is where *Maurice Guest* so boldly, even scandalously, rejects this very strong – and very respectable – tradition, and why the comparison with *Madame Bovary* is not really apt. Louise is openly sexual; she makes no secret that she has had more than one sexual partner, even some kind of affair with the homosexual Krafft. This horrifies Maurice and though, in obedience to the practice of the day, this is not made explicit in the novel as it was published, it is implied that she gave Krafft oral sex when he was unable to penetrate her (570). Later Maurice confronts her about it while she is lying in bed:

Louise lay with the back of one hand on her forehead, and watched him from under it. When he had finished, she said: ‘So Heinz has raked up that old story again, has he?’
Maurice had expected – yes, what had he expected? Anger, perhaps or denial, or, it might be, vituperation; only not the almost impartial composure with which she listened to him. For he had not spared her a word.

‘Is that all you’ve got to say?’ he cried, suffocated with doubt. ‘Then you […] you admit it?’

‘Admit it! Maurice! Are you crazy? To wake me up for this! It happened years ago!’ (573)

The mode of the novel might well be psychological realism, but Louise’s attitude is startlingly modern, and the novel as a whole endorses it. Maurice is depicted as weak, obsessive, jealous and not only destructive of others but ultimately self-destructive. Louise, on the other hand, knows herself – both her strengths and her weaknesses – and it is this that gives her the authority eventually to reject him, regardless of what the consequences for him might be.

Begun in 1897 and published in 1908 when Richardson was thirty-eight, the novel’s composition straddles the end of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth. This was also, roughly, the period that saw the transformation of what in English was termed the Victorian era into Modernism. In its psychological realism the novel belongs to the nineteenth century, but in its candid exploration of sexuality, in both its positive and its destructive aspects, it escapes the confines of a Victorian morality and looks forward unmistakably to Modernism and the twentieth century. (One thinks here of D. H. Lawrence.) Its message seems to be that sexuality is such a powerful force that it can be destructive if it is not accompanied by a ruthless honesty and self-knowledge. This is why Maurice dies and, unlike other sexually transgressive women in fiction, Louise lives. Conventional morality has nothing to do with it.

What is indisputable is that this novel was in its time – and maybe is even today – one of the most powerful fictional depictions of passion and obsession in English since Shakespeare. It deserves a much better fate than to be repeatedly forgotten, as Carmen Calill laments.

Randolph Stow

The second of the two books under discussion is the novel *Tourmaline* by the Australian novelist and poet Randolph Stow. Like Henry Handel Richardson, Stow lived most of his life outside Australia and died in England in 2010.

*Tourmaline* (which is also the name of a kind of stone) was Stow’s fourth novel, and it is set in the arid desert landscape of northern Western Australia.
In 1863 a man called Jefferson Stow, Randolph Stow’s great-grand-uncle, published his account of a boat trip he made along the coast there, which he describes in this way:

Still islands, islands, islands. After leaving Cape Bougainville we passed at least 500, of every shape, size, and appearance. [...] Infinitely varied as these islands are – wild and picturesque, grand sometimes almost to sublimity – there is about them all an air of dreariness and gloom. No sign of life appears on their surface; scarcely even a sea bird hovers on their shores. They seem abandoned by Nature to complete and everlasting desolation. (Stow To the Islands v) (from Voyage of the Forlorn Hope, 1865)

The novelist, Randolph Stow, used these words of Jefferson Stow, his great-grandfather’s brother, to preface the revised edition of his third novel, To the Islands (1958), when it was re-issued in 1982. The elder Stow would have been looking, like most early settlers of European origin, for land suitable for farming, most likely for grazing cattle. To someone who had been born in England, the landscape of the north west of Australia would have looked barren, indeed.

In Jefferson Stow’s day, only geologists or gold fossickers looked much deeper into the soil than about one metre. Most people looked at the sky to see whether there would be adequate rain to grow wheat or sustain the stock they hoped to graze. In fact, the Kimberley region did become cattle country. The novelist, Mary Durack, gave an account of life there in the second half of the nineteenth century in her book Kings in Grass Castles (1959). And the 2008 movie, Australia, is set up there and concerns just such a pastoralist enterprise.

But on the 16th November, 1952, another pastoralist, Lang Hancock, was flying along the Turner River when he discovered what turned out to be the largest deposit of iron ore in the world. In 1961 Hancock was able to stake his claim at a site that he named Hope Downs (compare that with Jefferson Stow’s “Forlorn Hope”) and he subsequently became one of Australia’s richest men. Today his daughter, Gina Rinehart, is Australia’s richest person. What we now call “the mineral boom” was born. What used to be considered a worthless desert has been transformed by mining for iron and natural gas in particular, but also diamonds and other minerals into a source of great wealth.

To turn now to the novel, which was written almost one hundred years after Jefferson Stow wrote Voyage of the Forlorn Hope. Stow is one of Australia’s finest and most original novelists who died in 2010 at the age of seventy-four.
In Australia he is probably best known for his novel, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), which is set in the coastal town of Geraldton where he grew up. But two earlier novels are set in that arid, apparently intractable landscape of the north of Western Australia where much of today’s mining and industrial activity is taking place. These are his third novel, *To the Islands* (1958, revised 1982) and *Tourmaline* (1963). In these two novels, the apparently arid and hostile landscape is both a dominant symbol of spiritual aridity and, at least in the first, a possible agent of regeneration.

*Tourmaline* has an introductory note, which reads: “The action of this novel is to be imagined as taking place in the future” (6). When the novel was published in 1963, none of the resources developments mentioned above had as yet even begun. In the novel, Tourmaline was once a thriving goldmining town, somewhere in the remote desert of northern Western Australia. But the gold has run out and, more devastatingly, so has its supply of water. The town has dwindled to a pub, a store, a few houses, a war memorial, a roofless church, a collection of stone ruins and a handful of survivors. The narrator tells us, “It is not a ghost town. It simply lies in a coma” (8).

An old man, known only as the Law, formerly the town’s policeman, narrates the novel. This figure first appears in an unpublished poem that Stow once recorded and sent to his London publisher:

**TOURMALINE**

When I was young and tight of belt  
To rule the world was droving sheep.  
In a shanty town of roaring drunks  
Where the pay was good and the liquor cheap  
I strolled with chink of gaol-house keys  
And scowled a township to its knee.  
When I was young the rocks were rich –  
Where dust is gold who cares how dry?  
The cells were full of millionaires;  
The millionaires were full of rye.  
Yet no-one laughed, and no-one swore  
Before my majesty the law.

But who has stolen my command,  
Who has taken then the gold?  
Some wildness has bereaved the town,  
And I am old, and I am old.  
My tower imprisons only me
Who years ago mislaid the key.
I lie and dream within my cell
That Satan dreamed that he was king –
Of Hell.¹

The poem is quoted in full, firstly, because it does not appear in any collection of Stow’s poetry. Secondly, it aptly encapsulates the desolation of the novel’s setting and its sense of being imprisoned in meaninglessness. This is how the novel opens:

I say we have a bitter heritage, but that is not to run it down. Tourmaline is the estate, and if I call it heritage I do not mean that we are free in it. More truly we are tenants; tenants of shanties rented from the wind, tenants of the sunstruck miles. Nevertheless I do not scorn Tourmaline. Even here there is something to be learned; even groping through the red wind, after the blinds of dust have clattered down, we discover the taste of perfunctory acts of brotherhood: warm, acidic, undemanding, fitting a derelict independence. Furthermore, I am not young. (7)

The tone is forthright and blunt, yet also the vehicle of an irony that balances bitterness and compassion. This extraordinary balance is maintained throughout the whole novel so, consequently, Tourmaline is a novel of great subtlety and power. As Anthony Hassall writes in his excellent study of Stow’s work, Strange Country, in Tourmaline “Stow has explored the country of the soul with a visionary intensity more common in the Russian than in the Australian, or the English novel. But his spare, arid, harsh and yet living desert is unmistakably Australian, and offers a compelling insight into our spiritual malaise” (74).

Tourmaline’s plot is fairly simple. The town is woken from its coma by the arrival of a severely dehydrated and sunburnt stranger who, on his recovery, says he is a diviner. By diviner he means someone who can detect the presence of underground water by walking across the ground equipped with a suitable implement – in his case, a piece of wire shaped into the form of a Y. The wire will dip and wrestle with the diviner’s hands when it detects water.

¹ I am indebted to Penny Sutherland for drawing this poem to my attention. Her copy of it bears the handwritten annotation: “Unpublished poem which leads to Tourmaline. Transcribed from a recording made by R.S. to send to his publisher Jack Curtis [?] and MacDonald, London.” The sequence of poems “From The Testament of Tourmaline” published in A Counterfeit Silence (71-75) is, as its subheading says, “Variations on Themes of the TAO TEH CHING” and less relevant to the novel.
Michael Random (the diviner’s name) detects gold. But the inhabitants of Tourmaline want water. Water here is quite literally the water of life – something obvious in Australia today where so much of the land is arid or rendered infertile by salinity. If the diviner could find water, the former lemon trees, vegetable gardens, sheep and other sources of food, could be brought back and the town could wake from its coma. It could again become a living community, displaying the “perfunctory acts of brotherhood” the Law detects might lie beneath its barren surface. But the diviner can find no water, only gold.

Gradually, almost against his will, Michael becomes the prophet who will lead this lost band of hopefuls into prosperity. The novel powerfully dramatises how a sense of communal brotherhood can be perverted within a community hypnotised by a charismatic figure who serves its desperate need for salvation. But the diviner turns out to be a fraud and also a victim of his own grand delusions. His designation as diviner, with its echoes of divinity, ironically indicates that he is a false prophet. A scar on his chest and back is reminiscent of the wound inflicted on Christ at His crucifixion, but in reality the result, it is suggested, of a suicide attempt. So as Michael bursts out, when he fails to find water, “God’s betrayed me,” the Law concludes, “He was nothing” (163).

But if the diviner is a fraud, he finds willing accomplices in the town’s inhabitants. He summons them all to gatherings in the roofless church, holding them under his sway like the most hypnotic of demagogues, partly by his oratory, partly by a good deal of melodramatic stage management, partly by his maniacal desire to believe in himself, and partly by the townpeople’s own desperation and willingness to believe.

In a climactic scene in the ruined church, Michael transfixes the townpeople, and even, temporarily, the Law, with his pseudo-religious rhetoric. The whole scene is bizarre and eerie in the extreme, with the church bell tolling relentlessly and Michael holding the townspeople hypnotised by the extreme passion of his rhetoric:

‘This is what we pray. Take charge of my life, father. Because it’s too hard – too hard. And I’m close to breaking.’

The diviner’s voice was trembling a little, and his eyes were unfocused.

‘He is peace. He is joy, too. He’s every beauty you ever saw. Everything that ever made you go small and hard, in the heart or in the groin. Fire and stars and flowers and birds. And great lakes and streams of blue water.’

And everyone caught on the word, sighing. Water.

‘There’ll be water. There’ll be a sacrament. A sacrament with water.’ (156)
The narrator is, for a time, moved by the general mood, but what he experiences is something more profound than the hysteria experienced by the other townspeople. He writes:

the diviner, whom they praised, was only a symbol: a symbol for what I believed in, the force and the fire, the reaching unwavering spirit of man like a still flame. There were times, in the tumult of voices and instruments and tireless bell, under the white fire of the stars, when I felt, so surely, the presence of God, that my heart swelled. (155)

But he adds, “I write this, now, as coldly as I can” (155). That hard-edged irony is maintained, even as a kind of private divinity is not denied. For the narrator, the presence of God is not something visited from beyond, as the diviner would have it. There is no sense in the novel that such a God is in any way transcendent, something outside the self to be invoked in the way that the diviner invokes Him. Rather, God – if indeed that is the right name for it – is something found in the heart: “the reaching unwavering spirit of man like a still flame.” As such, it offers a small and barely grasped alternative to the Taoism haltingly enunciated by the storekeeper Tom Spring, whose name has connotations of both water and renewal. Spring tries to articulate his belief in the Tao:

He unveiled his God to me, and his God had names like the nameless, the sum of all, the ground of being. He spoke of the unity of opposites, and of the overwhelming power of inaction. He talked of becoming a stream, to carve out canyons without ceasing always to yield. (148)

But in the rigorous aridity of Tourmaline’s spiritual landscape, he is forced to concede, “That was meaningless to you,” and the Law admits, “Almost” (148). Tom dies soon after, whatever legacy he might have left dying with him.

At the end of the novel the diviner disappears into the desert, presumably to die. The fortnightly supply truck arrives bearing Kestrel, that hawk-like man who used to run the local pub but who temporarily left town, returning with three grotesque companions: “one of them […] had no nose or mouth; only teeth” (164). Kestrel unloads a cargo of mining equipment: the mining boom in Tourmaline will start again, but without the sacrament of water.

So, perhaps Tourmaline can be read as a parable of our times, a warning. The spiritual value that the book’s narrator called God, and which was symbolized in the novel by water, may continue to be ignored or eroded, even as the nation’s mineral wealth continues to be exploited. Randolph Stow’s
narrator’s hard ironic balance may in fact be very relevant today. As he says, “we have a bitter heritage, but that is not to run it down” (7).

**Conclusion**

Both *Maurice Guest* and *Tourmaline* violate taboos, break boundaries; they both explore the exotic, the outlandish, they both shock and are deeply unsettling. And they do this by alerting us to something deep down in us, in our psyche, that is somehow disturbingly familiar. As Freud wrote in his essay, *Das Unheimliche*, “The uncanny,” citing Schelling: “everything is ungeheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (Web). These novels, like much great literature, resonate with that reservoir of secret and hidden prior experience, accumulated since our infancy, experience that is no longer consciously remembered, but not obliterated. This is a further reason why they are two of the finest novels ever written by Australians, deserving of far more recognition and prominence than they are currently receiving.

**Works Cited**


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Sigmund Freud trenchantly argues in his essay “The Uncanny” (1919) that “[t]o many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts” (148). The pioneer of modern psychoanalysis explicates that the feeling of fright, directly corresponding to the sense of the uncanny, may appear when something that has been repressed and removed to the recesses of mind suddenly returns and coerces confrontation (147). The Victorians, living in the “mechanical age,” to use Thomas Carlyle’s term coined in “Signs of the Times” (1829), possessed technology, science and cultivation at their disposal to rationalise and familiarise what had been perceived as uncanny or terrifying by the previous generations. Nonetheless, despite their pervasive need for empirical research and logical explanation, in other words, for “the naturalisation of the supernatural” (2), as the title of Frank Podmore’s book suggests (1908), by and large the subjects of queen Victoria were obsessed (not to say possessed) by the possibility of getting an interactive experience of spectral, spiritual and paranormal phenomena. According to Bown, Burdett and Thurschwell, “[t]he supernatural was both fearful and terrible and ardently desired”; what is more, it was also “investigated” and consequently “debated” (1). The Victorians were capable of acknowledging the failure of their recurrent attempts to conquer their fascination with ghosts, clairvoyants, witchcraft, second-sight, mesmerism, zombies and the like, a fascination which time and again resurrected, producing
the effect of the uncanny, diagnosed later by Freud. An anonymous journalist from the *Illustrated London News* (1853) mockingly observes that “[r]ailroads, steam, and electricity, and the indubitable wonders which they have wrought, have not proved powerful enough to supersede and destroy that strong innate love of the supernatural which seems implanted in the human mind” (“The Mystery…” 481). However, the abiding passion for “the unseen” in nineteenth-century Britain may have stemmed not from the reluctance to be impressed by inventions and discoveries of modern civilization and blind adherence to superannuated modes of thinking; on the contrary, it could signal a growing resistance to the excessive and threatening impact that the Industrial Revolution and scientific progress had on the Victorian frame of mind. The belief in the existence of spiritual realm, beyond the highly mechanised, standardised, industrialised world served as a kind of self-defense mechanism against “the soul-destroying and monotonous conditions of Victorian England” (Botting 122).

There is little doubt that Victorian men, who dominated the public sphere, were most exposed to the corruptive and debilitating influence of the external world. Since women’s purity was secured by their domestic fortresses, and hence taken for granted, it was men who were expected to beware of degrading enticements and pursue both spiritual and physical self-training. As Walter Houghton remarks, “the Christian life became in literal fact a life of constant struggle – both to resist temptation and to master the desires of the ego” (233). Chivalric tradition and Christian ethic manifestly underpinned the Victorian ideals of manliness, and the notion of the gentleman reflected their points of convergence. “The Victorians took gentlemanliness and turned it into ‘manliness’” (Colls 77); therefore, gentlemanliness came to be recognised as one of the most commendable models of masculinity. Courage, generosity, truthfulness, modesty and self-control were among the crucial virtues that defined the gentlemanly code of conduct. It is also important to note that in the middle decades of the nineteenth century the concept pertained more to a man’s character than to his social background or affluence, bringing the moral component of the ideal to the foreground. In addition, the high ethical standards that a true gentleman was to personify should be maintained regardless of the circumstances (Wright 240). Given such an interpretation of the gentlemanly ideal, it may be deduced that even a visitation of a supernatural being should pose no threat to a gentleman’s morals. Indeed, a number of Victorian short stories support this thesis or show that a paranormal experience could trigger a man’s moral revival and retrieval of his (gentle)manliness.
Victorian fiction, which for scholars of literature is explicitly related to realism (Levine 84), by no means remained indifferent to the magnetism of the supernatural. Just like contemporary audience Victorian novelists fluctuated between mirror-like representation of the public and private spheres of human activity accompanied by sound judgement of social and economic malaises and the temptation to add some thrilling, ghastly, obscure features to their descriptions of daily humdrum. Indeed, the Victorian period witnessed a substantial renewal of interest in Gothic literature, a continuing popularity of ghost stories and recurrent use of supernatural elements in a theoretically realistic style of writing. Eve M. Lynch observes that the ghost story “thrived during an age devoted to literary realism and rational control of unwieldy forces” (67). Likewise, Sean Purchase indicates that “Gothic themes and preoccupations also crept into a great deal of Victorian literature” (78-79).

Nineteenth-century tales of the supernatural are saturated with issues critical to the construction of the Victorian consciousness. The genre offers illuminating insights into Victorian conceptualisations of a wide spectrum of notions, ranging from nationality, class distinction, gender relations, sexuality and morality to religious faith and scientific epistemology. A number of writers utilised fantastic figures such as apparitions, evil spirits or revenants to raise questions of moral redemption and masculine identity. The texts selected for the present examination include: “The Haunted Man” (1848) by Charles Dickens, “The Secret Chamber” (1876) by Margaret Oliphant and “The Body Snatcher” (1884) by Robert Louis Stevenson. Notwithstanding some evident differences between these works, they seem to evince the Victorians’ conviction that an encounter with supernatural, which frequently meant malevolent or threatening powers, was a significant test of a man’s moral credibility and (gentle)manly character. It should also be mentioned that the apparition of Freud will return at times to offer plausible explanations of the analysed phenomena.

Dickens’s involvement in collecting and publishing ghost stories, as well as his curiosity about spectral occurrences, constitutes an important part of his literary reputation. His biographer, John Forster, confirms that he had “something of a hankering after them [ghost stories] […] and such was his interest generally in things supernatural that, but for the strong resisting power of his common sense, he might have fallen into the follies of spiritualism” (496). Dickens’s most memorable and celebrated phantoms are depicted in the collection of Christmas Books, to which “The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain” belongs. The plot centres on the mental metamorphosis of a misanthropic chemist, Mr. Redlaw, who leads a solitary, bachelor life,
embittered by the reminiscences of past, suffering rejection, betrayal and loss. When a ghost, very much alike in physiognomy and mood, proposes to erase his memory and lift the burden of remembering misery and hardship, he strikes the deal. However, his gift of forgetfulness is contagious and soon infects almost all the people that he encounters, turning them into callous, insensitive, selfish and spiteful creatures. Terrified at his dehumanising power, he desperately wishes to remove the curse. Finally, it turns out that only Milly Swidger, his servant’s wife, is able to resist his demonic impact and restore charity and compassion among people, thanks to her insurmountable benevolence and deep understanding for human sorrow originating in her own personal tragedy of giving birth to a dead child. Thus Mrs. William, a genuine incarnation of “the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love and domesticity” (Dickens 79), conquers the phantom of melancholy, grievance and dejection that resided in Mr. Redlaw’s mind.

Indeed, it is rather the chemist’s subconscious not any spiritual dimension that the ghost springs from. Dickens was well read in the works of Samuel Hibbert, Samuel Warren or David Brewster, who analysed psychological grounds of illusions and hallucinations (Groth 53). Mr. Redlaw, consumed with resentment at the people who harmed him in the past, lives in a state of self-destructive neurosis, mental and physical estrangement, all of which make his malfunctioning brain susceptible to delusions or even deliria. What is more, according to Owen Davies, melancholiacs were often reported to be plagued with visions, ghosts and devils (140), thus the protagonist becomes an apt illustration of the involuntary external projection of internal emotional states. As the narrator states, the scholar’s phantom is “the animated image of himself dead” (Dickens 19), a fearful, ghostly copy of his inner self or, to use Freud’s expression, “the frightening element […] that has been repressed and now returns” (147). Evidently, the appearance of the ghost signifies Mr. Redlaw’s inability to come to terms with his past, which remains irrepressible despite his persistent attempts to push it away. Dickens introduces the figure of a spectral double, the so-called Doppelgänger, for both therapeutic and moralizing effects. Like a great number of other Victorian ghosts, it can be classified as a purposeful ghost, which comes with a certain intention. By facing the consequences of his innermost need to banish his memories, Mr. Redlaw re-discovers the ennobling, humanising effect of sorrow as demonstrated in Christian tradition. Furthermore, Helen Groth underlines that the tale evinces “Dickens’s insistence on the civilising power of memory, its ability to suppress the chaos of individual desire and to foster social responsibility” (43). Due to the encounter with the ghost,
the chemist opens up his heart to the healing, purifying influence of Milly, a typical Victorian angelic woman, thereby saving his humanity and, more surprisingly, attesting his manliness.

The protagonist’s initial depression, moroseness and deliberate alienation are caused not only by recollections of unhappy experiences, but also by the awareness of his failure as a man. Deserted by parents, abandoned by his fiancée and fooled by his former friend, Longford, with whom she eloped, Mr. Redlaw is unable to develop fully his masculine identity. John Tosh argues that in the Victorian age, “establishing a household […] [was] a crucial stage in winning social recognition as an adult, fully masculine person” (2-3); therefore, the unmarried and childless man’s transition to manhood proves incomplete and disrupted. In addition, his withdrawn, indifferent, self-centred attitude precludes winning social recognition although, as a scientist and teacher, he has a chance to assert his masculine authority in the public area. Only after reviving his emotionality and acknowledging the value Christian ethics can he pursue regeneration of his humanity and masculinity. The forgiveness and generosity Redlaw offers to his wrongdoer, Mr. Longford, confirm that he deserves the status of a Christian gentleman, while the prospect of becoming a father figure to Longford’s son, Edmund, promises eventual fulfilment of a due gender role in society. It seems right to conclude that Dickens used the character of double spectre to prove that Mr. Redlaw is haunted by his “pathologically disrupted memory” (Herron 47) and his impotence to manage his own emotions, not by some mysterious, sinister force. It is the victory over his dark side that exorcises the apparition from his mind, which is also the focus of another Victorian ghost story “The Secret Chamber” by Margaret Oliphant.

Like Dickens, Oliphant intended to publish the story before Christmas, in the December volume of the Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, 1876. In one of her letters to the editor, she confessed that the stimulus to write came from “a discussion of the Glamis Castle mystery, which [she] was a party to”; she also intended to provide “a possible solution of that” (Oliphant The Autobiography 260). There were widespread rumors that the Scottish castle was a residence of a monster, allegedly a deformed son of Thomas Lyon-Bowes, Lord Glamis, locked in a concealed chamber, which was known only to the Earl, his heir and the manager of the estate (Outis 241). Oliphant decided to modify the legend featuring a historical ghost instead of a repulsive monster. Historical or traditional ghosts are the souls of the dead who can consciously interact with the living (Clarke 20). The inhabitant of the mysterious chamber turns out to be the spirit of Earl Robert called the wicked
Earl, a debased ancestor of the present Lord Gowrie, who appears to torment and tempt every young inheritor of the possession on the night of his coming of age. So far no heir has had the courage to oppose his devilish power, falling victim to his malicious tricks and deceptive guidance, which have led to many calamities and disasters in the family’s history. However, when John Randolph, Lord Lindores, grows old enough to encounter the spectre, an unprecedented resistance of the young man and his determination to conquer the daemon undermine the ghost’s previously uncontested ascendancy and bring some hope of restoring peace and redeeming the reputation of the Randolphs’ household. The narrative has an open ending, which does not reveal what methods or means Lord Lindores will use to combat the tempter, highlighting more the heroic act of defiance than its implications.

The unexpected withstander is “a young man of great character and energy, not like the usual Randolph strain […] honest and honourable, but not dull” (Oliphant “The Secret…” 711). Moreover, the fresh Oxford graduate has a huge appetite for public service, social activism and political career. He is an outspoken intellectualist, eager to expand his knowledge and explore the world, including the supernatural sphere, in contrast to his father’s complacent, unpretentious deportment. John’s manly character, as well as his youthful beliefs, are tested when he reaches the age of maturity and gets entitled to enter the secret chamber. The father leaves his son at the malign spirit’s mercy with mounting anxiety and premonition that his heir is about to undergo an irreparable trauma; yet, to his great astonishment, Lord Lindores comes out afoot, safe and sound, though faint and exhausted. Having heard that his son not only refused to give his hand to the spectre but boldly ordered him to “go, in the name of God!” (722), Lord Gowrie kisses his son’s hand and shouts, “God bless you, my boy! […] you are the conqueror!” (725). Like in Dickens’s story, the key to the triumph over dark powers lies in the protagonist’s mind, religious faith and feminine guidance.

The ghost of Earl Robert lures his descendant into subordination in various ways. First, he tries to befriend him to subdue his alertness; next, he manifests his unearthly abilities by reading his thoughts and dragging his body closer, then, like the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he promises wealth and power: “Be on my side and you shall know everything, Lindores. […] You shall have everything – more than dreams can give – if you will be on my side” (720). However, the character does not want to achieve anything by infernal instruments, evidencing thus moral uprightness and manly independence. What is more, young Radolph’s cognitive skills, wit and moral backbone are unaffected by these ghostly manoeuvres. He feels
utter repulsion to the pathetic attempts of a downcast creature stuck between life and death. In “The Uncanny,” Freud argues that “whoever dies becomes the enemy of the survivor intent upon carrying him off with him to share his new existence” (149). It becomes clear that Lord Lindores deciphers perfectly well the phantom’s real aim of finding a companion in his hopeless, rotten and barren existence: “‘Liar!’ he cried in a voice that rang and echoed as in natural air – ‘clinging to miserable life like a worm – like a reptile; promising all things and having nothing, but this den, unvisited by the light of day!’” (Oliphant “The Secret…” 722). However, mental strength is still not enough to score a victory over the malign apparition; he needs to regenerate his faith in God to enhance moral integrity and expel the evil spirit from his home, which should be “the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division” (84), as John Ruskin’s famous illustration underscores. The protagonist expresses the conviction that “an accursed being like that must be less, not more powerful, than we are – with God to back us” (Oliphant “The Secret…” 724). In addition, he realises that it is the Randolphs’ sinfulness and passivity that have fed the daemon over centuries; he makes a confession, “It is our own fault” (724), and undertakes the mission of exposing and combating the phantom as a kind of atonement. It looks as if he followed King James’s stipulations of effective exorcism presented in Daemonologie (1597): “The one is ardent prayer to God, […] The other is the purging of themselves by amendment of life” (60). Lord Lindores turns into a Christian warrior, the Spenserian Red Cross Knight, the defender of faith and morality, determined to carry out his duty until the hellish spirit is defeated. Besides his manly courage and moral decency he has another advantage, namely his mother’s spiritual support. Lady Gowrie is not involved in the affair personally since she is purposely left unaware of the ghoulish nature of the secret chamber resident, but she intuitively perceives how dangerous is John’s task and prays earnestly to God for guidance during the encounter. Her mute assistance may be detected in Lord Lindores’s spontaneous call for God’s help: “[he] cried ‘Help me, God!’ not knowing why” (Oliphant “The Secret…” 721). Furthermore, she shows absolute confidence in her son’s ability to conquer the ghost, entreatig her husband, who regards it rather unlikely, “trust the boy, John” (728). In this way she implicitly augments the heir’s manly and domestic authority over the panic-stricken, weak father. It has been already mentioned that the story does not reveal how the young hero vanquishes the spectre; nevertheless, the narrator does not deny that he eventually succeeds. However, it seems unquestionable that in the secret chamber Lord Lindores passes the test of maturity, moral
credibility and manly character. On the example of the protagonist, Oliphant demonstrates that development of proper mental qualities and moral virtues enables a man to boldly face even the deadliest peril like the temptations of a devilish apparition.

The motif of moral regeneration after meeting a supernatural creature is also introduced in Robert Louis Stevenson's story, “The Body Snatcher.” Like Dickens and Oliphant, he published it in December in the *Pall Mall Christmas “Extra,”* and, like the latter, he based the plot on real people and events. The incidents to which he refers are the murders of William Burke and William Hare who killed sixteen people to sell their corpses to an acclaimed Scottish surgeon, Doctor Robert Knox, as dissection material. Other “resurrection men,” as they were generally called, performed their vile business especially in the 1820s and 1830s, creating great concern among common people and bringing up the burning question of ethical standards in the medical profession (Shultz 69-70). The main characters of Stevenson's story, Fettes and Macfarlane, are students of medicine under a famous anatomist. Mr. K-. Fettes, who gives a retrospective account of the events to a group of friends, was appointed by the teacher to obtain cadavers for class vivisection. His task was to take the bodies, “pay the price” and “ask no questions” (Stevenson 7). He continued the morbid procedure, with no remorse, until one night he recognised a girl, with whom he had flirted just one night before. However, his suspicions that all the corpses were delivered by murderers disappeared, when another assistant, “Wolfe Macfarlane, a high favourite among all the reckless students, clever, dissipated, and unscrupulous to the last degree”(9), appealed to his masculine ego for audacity and toughness, challenging his masculine status by comparing his scruples to the reaction of “old wives” (10). The culmination of his moral downfall came when Fettes agreed to conceal Macfarlane’s homicide of Mr. Gray by giving the murderee to dissection, mesmerised by the prospect of luxury and prominence, similar to that enjoyed by Mr. K-: “Fettes had outlived his terrors and had forgotten his baseness. He began to plume himself upon his courage, and had so arranged the story in his mind that he could look back on these events with an unhealthy pride” (15) – from that moment it becomes clear that nothing can turn him back from the path of corruption, greed and ruthlessness. What is more, he imagines that being cold-blooded and insensitive reinforces his masculinity: “I was an ass till I knew you. You and K- between you, by the Lord Harry! but you’ll make a man of me” (16). Nonetheless, when the degenerate tandem was sent by the doctor to secretly dig up the body of a recently buried farmer’s wife, they got a tremendous
shock for the body came to life and took the shape of Macfarlane’s long-dissected victim.

The revenant created by Stevenson may be categorised as a punitive ghost, which comes to bring its offenders to justice and prick their conscience. Yet, in order to affect the life of sinners, they need to have a conscience. Macfarlane does not give up his abhorrent practices, intent on getting fame and fortune through crime, deceit and violence. He quickly erases from consciousness that uncanny occurrence and becomes “[t]he great rich London doctor” (5). Fettes, in turn, is deeply moved by the apparition and immediately withdraws from the medical trade, settles down in a provincial Scottish town and leads a dull, lethargic life, sometimes brightened by alcohol and vigorous debates at a local pub. Obviously, he treats animation of the corpse as a kind of warning against further degeneration or punishment for the morbid policy that he used to follow in the Edinburgh medical school. In *The History and Reality of Apparitions*, Daniel Defoe describes the co-relation between phantoms and the sense of guilt in the following way: “Conscience, indeed, is a frightful apparition itself, […] it oftentimes haunts the oppressing criminal into restitution. […] conscience makes ghosts walk, and departed souls appear” (101). The fact that Fettes becomes a penitent indicates the presence of human feelings and higher values, which rescue him from making a pact with the devil, contrary to Macfarlane, who becomes a monster in disguise. The Scot realises that there is no justification of murder and scientific progress is no excuse for reducing a human being to a cadaver useful for anatomy lessons. Marta Stoddard Holmes aptly notices that “The Body Snatcher” “dramatizes the difficulty of evolving and enacting an ethical self as a practitioner in an increasingly complex terrain of ethical challenges” (208). Exclusion of painful or bothersome impulses from consciousness is an insufficient method of appeasing one’s conscience because, sooner or later, the repressed element reappears as the uncanny (152). Fettes is visibly paralysed by the uncanny resurrection: he does abandon the immoral stance personified by Macfarlane, but he does nothing to expose the villains and terminate the ignominious business, fearing possible consequences for being an accomplice in crime. It might be said that his penance is incomplete, and his moral sense only partly restored, but another meeting with the doctor, when he manifests his disgust for the celebrated medical man, his bribe and the model of competitive, aggressive masculinity that he embodies, prove that Fettes’s internal transformation is genuine. He gives priority to peaceful conscience over fame, money and professional distinction, which is a mark of moral as well as gentlemanly courage.
In *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys writes that “[t]o be haunted is the on-going process of coming to terms with one’s being” (18). The present examination of uncanny encounters with various sorts of ghosts depicted by Dickens, Oliphant and Stevenson has shown that in Victorian literature apparitions, daemonic spirits or revenants often help to penetrate the remotest recesses of human mind, revealing deficiencies and stimulating self-improvement. Furthermore, the shock that the characters undergo makes them ponder on their moral attitudes and gender identities. No one knows their spiritual strength until it is put on trial in uncanny circumstances. It turns out that it is not a spectre or devil that people should fear most, but their own innermost desires and feelings.

**Works Cited**


When *Hannibal* (2013-), a television series created by Bryan Fuller for NBC was first introduced, many potential viewers probably wondered what novelty can be offered by yet another rendering of the world-famous crime novel series. A serial killer is one of the most potent figures in contemporary popular imagination, with Thomas Harris’s *Silence of the Lambs*, turned into a film in 1991 (dir. Jonathan Demme) at the centre of the genre as its classic. Yet, *Hannibal* is not a typical whodunnit, in a sense that “who has done it” is not its central question. The viewer, unlike the rest of the investigating team in season one, knows perfectly well who’s done it. After all, to any viewer initiated into Western popular culture, the name of Hannibal Lecter is enough to realise that the intelligent, soft-spoken and sophisticated psychologist, played by Mads Mikkelsen, is anything but innocent. Instead, there are other, more burning questions at the core of the series. The first season focuses on an unusual conundrum: which of the murders were done by Hannibal and, ironically and perhaps more annoyingly for the viewers, when the team will realise Hannibal’s real inclinations towards brutal crime? The second season, however, is immersed in doubts raised by Will Graham (Hugh Dancy), the consultant profiler employed by the FBI and focuses on how to prove that Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper. Still, all those questions boil down to one issue, central to the detective and crime fiction since the dawn of the genre – the issue of identity.
While in crime fiction the question is usually treated more literally (who has done it, what the identity of the killer is), in *Hannibal* the problem becomes much more emblematic. Not only is the identity of various many murderers in the series, Hannibal among them, called into question, but so is the identity of the innocent characters, Will being the prominent example. As he is the prime investigator of the story and prone to be identified with by the audience, the doubts are metaphorically extended to the viewers themselves. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the series is to shake the traditional certainties of binary divisions into the innocent versus the criminal or the sane versus the insane. The focus in this essay, however, will be on the connection between the bizarre nature of the murders presented, the issue of identity and the issue of performativity. The bizarre theatre of murder stretches before the viewer's eyes in order to perform the murderer's identity, but also to steal or warp the identity of others; identities are played with, manipulated and rendered unstable by crime and madness.

Although generally the series belongs to the Hannibal Lecter universe, sharing similarities in terms of character names and some elements of the plot to *Hannibal* (2001, dir. Ridley Scott), it is a fresh creation, with its own logic and ambience. The series so far comprises of two seasons, each of thirteen episodes and stands out for its visual sophistication and very unusual depiction of the main protagonist, whom Mikkelsen wanted to present as Satan, a “fallen angel who's enamoured with mankind and ha[s] an affinity for who we are as people, but [i]s definitely not among us – he [i]s other. […] This is Satan at work, tempting someone with the apple of their psyche” (Jeffery). In Season One, we meet Will Graham, a criminal profiler and a consultant for the FBI, whose specialisation is to visualise the crime scene and by identifying with the killer, provide intimate information regarding motives, circumstances and modus operandi. This unusual and arcane gift makes him psychologically vulnerable, and he needs support of a psychologist, a role taken on by Hannibal Lecter. The first case in which they are both invited to work on by agent Jack Crawford is that of missing college girls whose bodies are found mounted on antlers. The season then continues with a long list of bizarre, elaborately cruel and shocking murders: victims drugged and buried alive to become fertilizers for fungi; a young couple murdered and skinned in a way that their stretched skin resembles angel wings; bodies filled with surgical tools or other sharp objects by the Chesapeake Ripper in a recreation of “the Wound Man”; a musician having his throat cut and a cello neck inserted, so that the voice cords can be played like a cello; a totem pole of human bodies stacked together; finally
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a physician killed by Colombian necktie. At the end of Season One, Will, unaware of the fact he is suffering from a neurological condition, encephalitis, is being framed by Hannibal for his murders. Thus, Season Two continues with Will being incarcerated in Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, trying to prove he is not the Chesapeake Ripper, but indeed Hannibal Lecter is. More bizarre murders follow, most prominently a collage of human bodies, in all possible shades of skin, is being made in a silos so that the corpses sawn together resemble a huge iris; a judge’s body is displayed in such a way that he embodies a figure of Themis; a human cadaver is turned into a bee-hive; a body is cut into slices and displayed like a specimen ready for a microscope; a man’s body is turned into a tree, his vital organs removed and replaced with flowers; finally, a female victim is placed in a dead horse’s uterus, with live birds hidden in her own insides, and a man’s body parts are mounted onto a skeleton of a cave bear in the natural museum. Not all of these bizarre murders are committed by Hannibal, but some of them are copied by him, with a difference, mostly that of body parts being removed, as viewers suspect, to be eaten; indeed, a large portion of the series is devoted to footage of Hannibal preparing elegant, lavish feasts, often inviting his co-workers from the FBI to join him, thus making them unaware cannibals.

According to Schechner, “[a]ny action that is framed, presented, high-lighted or displayed is a performance” (2). What is necessary for an action to become a performance is that it is a restored or, in other words, a repeated behaviour (Schechner 28): “[t]he pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions” (Goffman 203). Schechner notes that restored behaviour, be it in art, in play, in ritual or in everyday life, is closely connected to identity (34-35). Indeed, he believes that one of the functions of performance is “to mark or change identity” (46). As such, then, human behaviour, just as a work of art, may be seen as symbolic action to be observed and interpreted; as Geertz said, “[behaviour] must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behaviour – or more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation” (17).

It would be difficult not to notice a connection between these definitions and serial murder, especially in the way it is depicted by popular culture. Perhaps it is because serial killing includes elements of ritual, which is an important aspect of human performance. Serial crime is a repeated (restored) behaviour, often carefully prepared and rehearsed through previous crimes, such as animal cruelty or sexual assault, and it has its own set of rituals: positioning of the body, accompanying scenarios, settings, props or
costumes, etc. Schlesinger et al., for instance, show how varied those rituals, or one could say, “performative actions” are from one case to another. They mention sexual gratification as the reason why serial killers involve in action which is surplus when it comes to the effectiveness of a crime. But it is also often the case that the “signature” of a criminal, as it is called by profilers, could serve a different purpose – the perpetrator wants to boast, to leave a mark, to communicate his twisted message to the onlookers. What is more, the killer wants to establish his or her identity and uniqueness. Butler, when writing about gender performance, defines it as “stylized repetition of acts” (179). Serial killers need repetition of acts (murders) which are stylised, staged and ritualised, but, of course, unlike gender performance, they are extremely unconventional and unacceptable for society.

In Hannibal, this unconventionality and originality is stressed by the aforementioned bizarre quality of the murders. They are messages sent to the profilers and other criminal investigators, revealing the identity of a killer. Of course, this is not the name by which a given killer is known to the world, but a “true” identity hidden behind a thin veneer of normalcy: that of “Minnesota Shrike” or “Chesapeake Ripper,” etc. Will Graham is a skilled interpreter of those messages left by killers; he knows how to read the performance he looks at. Indeed, when Hannibal copies some of the murders in the series, it resembles a game of cluedo: he recreates the murder with a difference to lead the investigation in certain directions. As Will interestingly notes in Episode 7 of Season Two, “It’s a theatre” (“Yakimono”).

The murders, with their outlandish and extreme brutality, become the metonymy for creating one’s identity. The serial killers in the show attempt to establish their own unique identity through their signature bizarre crimes; yet, these are constantly repeated with a twist by Hannibal, who in this way both steals their identity and establishes his own. For a psychopathic killer who is proud of his or her performance, a copycat is an infuriating impostor. Hannibal not only dupes other killers and the investigators, but he also proves his superiority to other murderers by recreating their murders perfectly; if he does diversify or remove a body part, it is premediated and has a hidden purpose, usually a clue for Will Graham. By recreating other murderers’ signature performances, he steals their identities, thus rendering them unstable.

In Hannibal, identity is performative, ambiguous and changeable. This is most interestingly illustrated by Episode 10 of Season One (“Buffet Froid”), where a female victim drowns in her own blood as a result of a bizarre version of Glasgow smile being inflicted on her. Will’s vision of the crime is
undoubtedly Gothic; the murderer seems to be some supernatural, ghostly being. Will soon discovers that the murderess is Georgia Madchen, who suffers from a combination of mental conditions, among them the Cotard delusion (belief in one’s inexistence, death or eternal damnation) (Debruyne et al. 198) and Capgras delusion (the lack of ability to recognise faces, including one’s own and general defamiliarisation) (Silva et al. 4). Thus, Georgia killed her best friend, attempting to peel off her face because she believed her to be a dangerous impostor and herself to be dead. Georgia’s case, therefore, becomes the epitome of an absolute lack of identity and ability to recognise others’ identities. Needless to say, Hannibal uses Georgia’s condition to frame her for the murder of a physician he killed himself, but even though she observed him do it, she could not recognise him due to her condition.

Lecter not only “steals” identities from other serial killers by copying them, but he also manipulates the identities of his victims and, most importantly, of his “friend” Will Graham. Hannibal does not have a ritual for his killings because he replicates others’ killings; he is a chameleon of serial murder. It seems that, unlike in most cases of psychopathic or sexual serial killing, a murder does not satisfy his own psychological or sexual needs, perhaps except the need for ultimate control over others. Yet, his murders are methodical, impersonal and usually done to fulfil another purpose than simply bring pleasure to the killer – he does it to manipulate the investigators or to avoid getting caught. But that is not to say that Hannibal does not have a ritual to perform. His, however, is not the act of killing itself; it is the act of preparing elaborate gourmet dishes of his victims’ body parts and to relish in them, usually in company of his unsuspecting guests. The importance of this ritual is stressed by the unusual beauty and artistry of the shots, accompanied by classical music, where the art of cooking human flesh becomes an unusual performance.

In her book Dinner with a Cannibal, Travis-Henikoff enumerates several different types of cannibalism known to humanity. Besides survival cannibalism, endocannibalism (which is funerary cannibalism, eating one’s dead relatives), exocannibalism (eating one’s enemies), medicinal, ritual and religious cannibalism, she mentions gastronomic cannibalism, which means that “human flesh is dealt with and eaten without ceremony (other than culinary)” (Travis-Henikoff 24). Hannibal Lecter falls in this last category, even though he treats the flesh harvested from his victims with the outmost respect, but he shows the same respect to a rare fish or fowl that appears on his table. There is an unusual quality of the macabre in this treatment of human organs as delicacies and stresses their dehumanisation. Other kinds
of cannibalism also appear in the series. The aforementioned unwilling cannibalism, or ‘benign’ cannibalism as Travis-Henikoff puts it (25) makes Will, Jack and Hannibal’s other guests unaware participants in this chilling culinary performance. In a cruelty resembling the infamous scene of brain being devoured by the unsuspecting donor in Ridley Scott’s *Hannibal*, a similar scene has Lecter feed Abel Gideon, a fellow physician and a serial killer, a stake made of a piece of his own leg (“Futamono”). Even more cruel and macabre is a scene of autophagy (Travis-Henikoff 25), where Hannibal drugs Mason Verger and convinces him to eat his own face, which leaves him mutilated (“Tome-wan”). It seems significant that the part being eaten by Mason is his face, a metonymy for one’s identity, thus Mason becomes yet another character whose identity gets stolen by Hannibal.

When fragments of people’s bodies become food for Hannibal, this also represents a significant shift in the victims’ identity. They are no longer humans but gourmet dishes, embellished with exotic fruit and vegetables. What happens in this culinary ritual is an extreme objectification of the victims. Similarly, Hannibal and other killers in the series create elaborate performances of identity shifts, forcing their victims to “perform” other (inanimate or animalistic) identities. Humans are turned into objects: a musical instrument, a mural, a totem pole, a figure of Themis, or a museum specimen. More often than not, this extreme objectification of human victims shows signs of bizarre, macabre artistry, as if murder was a work of art, and the killers in the series were trying to, as Will says, “serenade” each other (“Fromage”) and impress the investigators with their shocking performances. What is also significant is the fact that the victims in the series are rarely named, and the details of their lives, indeed their identities, are rather insignificant, strengthening the effect of extreme objectification.

Finally, the last element in the series which binds together performativity, the bizarre qualities of the show and the issue of identity is Hannibal’s tendency to manipulate people in his surroundings and to lead them to psychological instability and insanity. Hannibal not only uses brutal physical force or drugs, as in the case of Mason Verger, but he also uses persuasion and the knowledge of his patients’ fears and hopes in order to push them to extremes. He is known to have persuaded his therapist Dr DuMaurier into killing his former patient (allegedly in self-defence, which towards the end of Season Two turns out to be untrue), and he uses hypnosis to make Miriam Lass (an FBI trainee whom he had kidnapped two years before) forget his face and make her believe that it was his colleague, Dr Chilton, who was the Chesapeake Ripper. In this way, as Will puts it, Hannibal “gets into their
heads” and steals, destroys or shifts their identity or their understanding of others’ identities. But the main focus of Hannibal’s interest is Will Graham. Seeing how Will is endowed with a rare gift of empathy with the killers to the extent of temporal identifying with them, Hannibal wants to see if he can make Will enjoy killing and become a serial murderer. Lecter uses traumatic events of the first season, and Will’s brain inflammation which results in memory loss, to convince everyone that Will is the Chesapeake Ripper. After receiving treatment for his encephalitis, Will realises Hannibal’s role in his incarceration, but the deed is done: Season Two starts with Will and Hannibal swapping places. Now, it is Will who is held in a cage, perceived as a psychopath by all his friends and colleagues, while Hannibal takes his place as a profiler and an FBI consultant. Thus, the lines between sanity and insanity, the normal and the abnormal are blurred.

Hannibal’s manipulation of Will’s identity also corresponds to a performative speech act, or illocutionary act, to use J. L. Austin’s theory of performativity. In this theory, Austin described those speech acts which, instead of describing reality, are rather doing what they signify (Loxley 8). Later, Austin developed his theory by dividing speech acts into “locution,” “illocution” and “prelocution.” Locution describes “semantic and referential functions of language,” “illocutionary” dimension is about accomplishing something by uttering certain words and, as long as they are uttered in a customary context and by a person in authority, these utterances “do” what they say they “do”; and “prelocutionary” dimension of utterances describes the consequences of illocutionary speech act (Loxley 18). Thus, when a judge pronounces someone guilty in a court of law, this is an illocutionary performative act. So is in the case of insanity: a pronouncement of abnormality in a patient’s behaviour by a certified physician will render a person insane for everyone around them, performing thus an identity of a madman. In the series, this is exactly what Hannibal does when framing Will for his own murders. Declaring Will to be insane and psychopathic, Hannibal relies on his authority as a psychologist and, in this way, imposes this new identity, one of a serial psychotic killer, onto Will. Hannibal, again, “steals” an identity from his victim, becoming him (an FBI consultant) for a short moment and imposing his own identity (that of a serial killer) onto Will.

The series is thus an interesting study on identity. What is identity, if it can be blurred by madness, stolen, imposed or pretended? This question is made vivid by the shocking performance of the bizarre, the grotesque and the morbid. The show wraps the viewer’s brains round the questions: who is who? Who is good, who is evil? Who is the murderer, who is not? Who is sane,
who is insane? In spite of the shocking ending of Season Two, the show will go on for the third season, which will be shot shortly. It seems that the fans of the show want to see Dr Lecter’s bizarre performance yet once more.

Works Cited


FILMOGRAPHY

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Conspire or Expire? Conspiracy Theory as Postmodern Gothic

In the contemporary Western world, we hardly fear malevolent ghosts in the cemetery and bloody zombies in the marshlands. Although such occult powers and settings continue to animate our “imagination of disaster,” to use Susan Sontag’s expression, present-day Gothic and dystopian narratives are populated with “lone-wolf” terrorists, technological catastrophes, alien invasions, rampant viruses and, last but not least, with conspiracy theories. In the post-Holocaust, post-Cold War and post-9/11 era, conspiracy theories do what “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” did for Edgar Allan Poe’s nineteenth-century audience. And just like old-style Gothic, conspiracy theories have an aesthetic, cognitive as well as political function. Building on the reflections about conspiracy theories by Mark Fenster, Fredric Jameson, Jodi Dean and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, among others, the following pages ask what happens when Gothic tropes are adopted for the purposes of other than blatantly reactionary politics. If the boundary between critical theory and conspiracy theory is also a question of power, can we take conspiracy theories seriously?

The Truth Is Out There!

Whether we turn left or right, in the present-day Western world we find ourselves in a maze of conspiracy theories. American culture, from which most of my examples come, is particularly fertile. Several recent conspiracy
theories concern the Occupy movement and 9/11: for example, in her article “The Shocking Truth About the Crackdown on Occupy,” Naomi Wolf argued that the crackdown on Occupy was a carefully orchestrated event. Tom Hayden summarised Wolf’s theory later in the Nation, in “Why Naomi Wolf’s Occupy Conspiracy Theory Can’t Explain Occupy LA”:

Wolf has written […] that the recent crackdowns on Occupy have been a coordinated conspiracy between local officials, police, the FBI and Homeland Security. As evidence, she points to conference calls between officials and police in eighteen cities that preceded the raids. She claims that a “shocking truth” behind the crackdown is the vested interest of Congress in protecting its own insider stock dealings on Wall Street. In one passage, Wolf accuses the White House of blessing the “war on peaceful citizens.” (Hayden)

9/11 has been explained in a similar manner as the crackdown on Occupy; some believe it was an inside job, both metaphorically (i.e. the U.S. government stood behind it) and literally (there were explosives inside). And there are numerous other ways in which the U.S. government apparently conspires against ordinary American citizens. Water fluoridation continues to be a popular story: the government is said to control the minds of its subjects through fluoridation. (During the Cold War, water fluoridation was interpreted as the communist plot and, of course, as David Seed pointed out, “it is a truism to state that the Cold War was informed by a fear of the international Communist conspiracy” [132]). The U.S. government has also been charged with covering up for the aliens during the Roswell incident, when an object crashed near Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. According to the official story, the object was an air balloon, while conspiracy theorists believe it was a flying saucer filled with alien creatures whose dead bodies were stored in a nearby air-force base, Area 51. Moreover, there may be a reason why the U.S. government would want to cover up for the aliens: in the view of other conspiracy theorists, creatures from outer space have infiltrated the government itself.

Of course, it is not always the U.S. government or the aliens who are to blame. Conspiracy theories abound regarding various secret organizations that range from the Freemasons and the Illuminati to diverse anonymous groups. There are also more abstract conspirators, such as the military-industrial complex or popular culture (e.g., the belief in predictive programming). And there remain popular mysteries that are not conspiracies, such as the Bermuda Triangle, the Loch Ness Monster and numerous forecasts of the impending end of the world. In Harold Camping’s view, the world was to end on 21st May, 2011. That theory failed but – as Harley Schwadron's
cartoon featuring a protester with a banner “The World Already Ended but the Government Hushed It Up” suggests – perhaps the U.S. government was behind it once again. And to conclude here on a similar note, according to the comedian Sean Lock, NASA killed Michael Jackson out of envy and hatred because when “anytime anyone puts Moonwalk into Google or anything, it comes up with him, sliding backwards, with the hat on, and not the billions they spent going up to do the Moonwalk.”

The Gothic Genre

In order to interpret conspiracy theories in a Gothic light, it is necessary to start with a discussion of the Gothic genre and its function in the wider cultural fabric. (Subsequently, of course, I will differentiate among conspiracy theories themselves.) Speaking about American Gothic, Eric Savoy has argued that

[i]f gothic cultural production in the United States has yielded neither a “genre” nor a cohesive “mode” but rather a discursive field in which a metonymic national “self” is undone by the return of its repressed Otherness, then a critical account that attempts to reduce the gothic to an overarching historical consistency—a matter of “essentials” and “accidentals”—will be of limited use. For the gothic coheres, if it can be said to cohere, around poetics (turns and tendencies in the dismantling of the national subject), around narrative structuration, and in its situation of the reader at the border of symbolic dissolution. (Savoy and Martin vii)

Although Savoy’s dynamic understanding of the Gothic corresponds with my own view of the genre, let me depart from a definition offered by Allan Lloyd-Smith. According to him, the Gothic involves

extreme situations, anxiety, darkness, threat, paranoia; exaggerated villains and innocent victims; subterfuge and plots; ancient houses, castles, monasteries, dungeons, crypts and passages, wild scenery, craggy mountains or winding maze-like tracts; stage machinery, hidden trap doors, secret passageways; speaking portraits, ghosts, doubles, and other supernatural-seeming beings; monstrous and grotesque creatures; pain, terror, horror, and sadism. (133)

Comprehensive as it is, this list is more useful when divided into two: a list of feelings that the gothic genre concerns and a list of tropes related to those feelings. I will therefore work with the following two lists:

1. Gothic feelings: anxiety, paranoia, pain, terror, horror;
2. Gothic tropes: extreme situations, darkness, threat, exaggerated villains and innocent victims; subterfuge and plots; ancient houses,
castles, monasteries, dungeons, crypts and passages, wild scenery, craggy mountains or winding maze-like tracts; stage machinery, hidden trap doors, secret passageways; speaking portraits, ghosts, doubles, and other supernatural-seeming beings; monstrous and grotesque creatures; sadism.

**Gothic Feelings**

Anxiety, paranoia, pain, terror and horror – alongside fear, awe and astonishment – are the feelings that the gothic genre represents and generates. Several theorists have discussed these feelings within the framework of the sublime experience, which I find particularly productive for the vistas that such an approach opens. Edmund Burke's mid-eighteenth century treatise, *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, comes to mind as a text that illustrates the link between horror (and similar negative emotions) and the sublime. In Burke's view, we experience the sublime when all “motions are suspended, with some degree of horror,” when

> the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. (Web)

Nevertheless, as David B. Morris pointed out, Burke's conception of the sublime differs from the Romantic sublime in that for Burke the sublime is not hermeneutic and visionary; that is, while the Romantic sublime “involves an experience in which words and images grow radically unstable, where meaning is continually in question, approaching or receding or fixed on a distant horizon, promising new dimensions of insight or (in its abrupt absences) unexpectedly blocking the mind” (299). In Burke's view, the sublime inspires strong emotions but has no cognitive function as it does not “unveil mysteries” (299). Already Immanuel Kant's conception of the sublime is more enriching than that of Burke because, for Kant, the displeasure that arises from being overwhelmed is balanced out by certain pride in the power of reason: as Donald E. Pease put it, for Kant “the sublime turns out to be the means whereby Reason unintentionally realizes its power” (264), or, as Gene Ray argued in *Critique of Judgment*, “the pain of imagination's failure before the power or size of raw nature was compensated for by reason's reflection on its own supersensible dignity and destination. Nature's threat to dominate the human was contained by human capacities of self-admiration” (5).
More recently, Kant’s view of the sublime has been developed into several directions. In postmodern accounts, the experience of the sublime often generates “resources for new forms of intellectual and aesthetic endeavor” (Johnson 119). In *Powers of Horror*, to mention one example, Julia Kristeva discusses the sublime alongside the abject. She begins with the depiction of the experience of abjection:

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva 2)

The experience of abjection – the erasure of boundaries between self/other, the moment of disgust and abhorrence – initially appears separate here from the experience of the sublime, as Kristeva writes elsewhere that the sublime involves joy and pleasure:

> As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers—it has always already triggered—a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where “I” am—delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a something added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here, as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling. A divergence, an impossible bounding. Everything missed, joy—fascination. (12)

Eventually, however, the experience of abjection and the sublime become paired and the latter also “includes an illicit pleasure or joy, which Kristeva associates with Jacques Lacan’s notion of jouissance—an excessive, transgressive pleasure that one experiences as a kind of suffering” (Johnson 127). In Kristeva’s view, the abject and the sublime, therefore, have significant aesthetic and cognitive functions.

My intention here is not to offer a history of the sublime nor to explore the complex ideas of Burke, Kant and Kristeva but rather to highlight the link between the Gothic genre and the experience of the sublime in order to eventually apply some observations about the latter to the former. An important characteristic of the sublime experience that transpires from the above is that although sublime shattering of subjectivity need not be entirely negative, it has a specific dynamics of power. Andrew Smith, who
has explored the connection between the Gothic genre and Burke's treatise, observed that in Burke's account “the sublime is a negative experience because it reinforces feelings of transience (our passing) and insincerity (our smallness)” (12). For Burke, sublime experience was an encounter with a God-like other that was omnipotent, incomprehensible and omnipresent. In sublime experience, the subject is diminished, and behind it all lies, for Burke, the presence of an omnipotent creator who, given these implied links to fear, anxiety, and a terror of death, seems to be an Old Testament God of punishment and damnation. Burke claims that within our conceptions of 'the Deity' (p. 62) we invest God with such an awesome power that ‘we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him’ (p. 63). (A. Smith 11)

Like Smith, Terry Eagleton argued that for Burke, the sublime is a “masochistic affair” because, “[a]s a kind of terror, the sublime crushes us into admiring submission; it thus resembles a coercive rather than a consensual power, engaging our respect” (57). That a sublime experience should be characterised in this way, Eagleton continued, is a result of a social process that started in the eighteenth century, when structures of power became gradually transmuted into structures of feeling, ethical doctrine dissolved into the spontaneous texture of subjective life. Custom, virtue, habit took over from dictat and naked authority, so that the laws which govern subjects were to be felt as directly pleasurable, intuitively enjoyable, aesthetically appropriate. (54-55)

During this process laws were transmuted into feelings, the aesthetics of subordination emerged – and the sublime experience was conceptualised in terms of the subject’s “admiring submission.”

As has already been argued, the Kantian, Romantic and postmodern view of the sublime experience is not merely negative, and Johnson went as far as to propose that postmodern conception of the sublime, “moves away from the association, still operative in Kant’s account, between the experience of the sublime and emotions like awe and respect, instead relating sublimity to more subversive, corporeal and even base affective and ethical registers” (119). Yet, I would argue that the experience continues to involve powerlessness and inadequacy in relation to the sublime; in other words, the relation between the subject and the sublime is never egalitarian or reciprocal. Thus, in his aforementioned study of contemporary cultural scene, Gene Ray could even link the experience of the sublime with that of trauma, arguing that “the feelings nearest to what we now associate with trauma went
by the name of the sublime” (4). It may involve apprehension, pleasure or joy but they are forced on the subject by a supposedly non-changing, overwhelming sublime other.

**Gothic Tropes**

The treatises of Burke, Kant and Kristeva also elaborated on possible causes of the sublime experience. In Burke’s view, the most significant causes of the sublime are obscurity, power, privation, vastness and infinity. Others include magnificence, light (under certain circumstances, when it blinds us), certain colours, certain sounds (sudden, repetitive), certain smells and certain tastes. Burke wrote that anything that is “terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous” (Web). Concrete examples that Burke referred to were certain animals, which “though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds” (Web).

It is, therefore, not necessarily the magnitude but rather one’s position in relation to it: the sublime experience must be overpowering and it must lead to an arrest of the subject’s motion and reasoning faculties.

For Kant, the sublime experience arises primarily in response to the vastness of nature, although he – as well as others after him, such as Arthur Schopenhauer – included among sublime objects magnificent art and architecture, such as Egyptian pyramids (Guyer 114). In Kristeva’s view, the experience of abjection emerges in an encounter with another body, above all a corpse, but also with bodily wounds and fluids, decay and filth. And for Fredric Jameson, to whom I will return further down, the focus shifts to technology and the ineffable late capitalist machinery as a whole.

Of course, the others “capable of raising the ideas of the sublime,” to recall Burke’s words, have oftentimes been real others or abstract tropes have been associated with these real others. As Meg Armstrong pointed out:

*The description of the sublime in terms of culture, race, nation, or gender ought now to be a highly remarkable feature of discussions of aesthetics, particularly to the extent that it suggests that aesthetic discourse was not only integral to the construction of a “self-determining” bourgeois subject, but also that this subject was positioned within growing discourses of difference in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (213)*
Although Armstrong proceeded to argue that there was “a provocative silence on the relation between the sublime and the exotic, and even the most insightful commentaries on the romantic sublime spawned by recent interests in deconstruction have neglected to mention the prevalent association between the sublime and various, embodied, forms of difference” (213), she herself highlighted how “sublime objects or phenomena which are suggestive of things not readily encompassed, conceptualized, or represented, are joined by ‘culturally unintelligible’ bodies and others” (213). In other words, the sublime other has been linked with real other, foreign people: for Burke, for example, with a black female; for Kant, with in his view “sublime nations” such as the Arabs or the Spaniards (Armstrong 214, 224).

Returning now to Gothic writing, we may observe that a story such as Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum” relies on several tropes mentioned by Burke, starting with the obscurity of the cell and the infinity of the pit, and ending with the repetitive sound of the pendulum. Moreover, in other works of Poe, the sublime experience is so frequently evoked by a dead woman (as numerous critics have observed) that Poe may not have been terrified of Germany, as he himself famously asserted, but he was undeniably terrified of women. And Poe was no exception as historically the fear of transience, passing and sublime impotence in the Gothic genre has been linked to various human others objectified by the predominantly white, male authors of Gothic literature. As Lloyd-Smith pointed out,

> Behind the states of fear and horror, and driving through the tissue of reasonable and rational explanations, loom the outlines of real horrors. In early Gothic this was sometimes the reality of the oppression of women, or children, in a patriarchy that denied them rights. In American Gothic, while this remained a major theme, the trauma and guilt of race and slavery, or fear of what was then called miscegenation, also emerges, along with the settlers’ terror of the Indians and the wilderness, and later perhaps some suppressed recognition of Native American genocide. (8)

Suppressed women and children, rebellious lower classes, other races, ethnicities and nations – all these are examples of human others who have been linked with the sublime in Gothic fiction. Some could be seen as specifically American – resulting, for example, from the Native-American genocide – while others emerged alongside the bourgeois subject in general, as David Punter argued in *The Literature of Terror*. So the Gothic tropes have ranged from nature, God, a dead body and technology to real others of different races, classes, religions and ethnicities.
Functions of the Gothic

Just as the sublime, the Gothic has multifaceted aesthetic, cognitive as well as political functions. Recently, as Agnieszka M. Soltysik pointed out, it has been considered primarily in positive terms. Arthur Redding, for example, has emphasised the power of the Gothic to subvert the world of “facile transcendence” and corporate consolation:

Gothic promises no resolution, no assurance that the universe inhabited or the world described come with any moral guarantees that the forces of order, good, or clarity will ever triumph: gothic shatters the fantasy of justice that underwrites so much cultural production and traditionally nourishes the moral bases of social stability, from the Old Testament to national constitutions to Hollywood films. […] These are works that actively dismantle consolation. (279)

At the same time, in Redding’s view, the Gothic has ultimately redemptive aesthetic, cognitive and political functions, as it does, for example, in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, where “[f]rom dread emerges a new language and a new community” (283). A similar point has been made by Charles L. Crow, who highlighted the power of the Gothic to subvert facile American subjectivity and simultaneously lead to its more profound understanding:

The dominant, sanctioned history of the United States has been a narrative of social, economic, and technological progress. […] In contrast to this triumphant story, the Gothic is a counter-narrative, an alternative vision, recording fear, failure, despair, nightmare, crime, disease, and madness. The Gothic is that which is left out, what is excluded, by what W. D. Howells unfortunately once described as the smiling aspects of life that are more typically American. The Gothic thus is the natural medium for expression of our great national failures and crimes, such as the enslavement of Africans and the displacement and destruction of indigenous peoples. The Gothic is also a vehicle for stories of the oppression of women, and indeed for all groups forced to the margins of power by a patriarchal culture. The development of Gothic Studies has paralleled, and contributed to, the feminist movement and the field of women’s studies, and the discovery of significant women authors of the nineteenth century. The Gothic also represented homosexuality obliquely in repressive times, and now directly engages gay culture. Gothic literature is the place where the nightmares of small and private lives have found expression. Indeed, only by studying American Gothic, a literature often of hysterical extremes, violence, obscurity, and the surreal, can one reach a balanced and rational understanding of American culture from colonial times to our present postmodern age. (xviii-xix)
The views of Redding and Crow are convincing although they participate in the aesthetics of subordination. In addition, I would not go as far as to consider the function of the gothic in such ultimately redemptive terms. Redding and Crow argue that the Gothic dismantling of the national and individual self offers an insight into its disturbing crevices, but both insist on an eventually consoling function of the genre; “the paradoxically productive potential of despair” (Redding 18) and a “balanced and rational understanding of American culture” (Crow xix). To argue alongside Kristeva that the sublime opens up aesthetic and cognitive vistas is not the same as to view it as a mere detour on the way to catharsis and cognition. In other words, does not the Gothic represent and generate the sublime that also continues to resist all attempts at incorporating it into the narratives of the (national) self?

More importantly, when Gothic tropes are associated with real suppressed others, the progressive function of the genre is ambiguous. Lloyd-Smith has argued that “[o]ne of the great strengths of the Gothic is its ability to articulate the voice of the ‘other’ within its fancy-dress of disguise of stylized contestations” (8). Yet, there exists much reactionary Gothic and its function is reactionary unless it is a part of a dialectical process in a way that Crow alludes to above. For example, “The Fall of the House of Usher” is an attempt at textual control of women as its only female character, Madeleine, never gets to speak. Following Lloyd-Smith’s logic, it could be argued that suppressed voices of “sublime others” beat behind the wall of the text like the heart of the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and at present there is feminist criticism that gives Madelaine a voice going beyond a shriek from the tomb. In addition, there are parodies of such old-style Gothic, where stereotypes are clearly exposed, if not necessarily transcended (as I will argue below). Nevertheless, without feminist criticism and feminist parodies, “The Fall of the House of Usher” would happily perpetuate the stereotypical association of half-dead women with the sublime. So the only way to consider the Gothic genre subversive as a whole is when it is a part of a dialectical process in which even reactionary Gothic may have a progressive role due to the critique it inspires. But without such criticism, some Gothic texts would maintain their reactionary function. Therefore functions of the Gothic – whether aesthetic, cognitive or political – are ambivalent.

**Internet as a Haunted Castle**

Moving to the contemporary scene in general and conspiracy theories in particular, we may observe that rather than fearing dilapidating castles and
misty marshlands, we worry about raising funds for their preservation, so certain classic Gothic tropes appear outdated. Yet, Mark Edmundson has argued that American culture remains suffused with Gothic tropes:

Gothic is alive not just in Stephen King’s novels and Quentin Tarantino’s films, but in media renderings of the O. J. Simpson case, in our political discourse, in our modes of therapy, on TV news, on talk shows like Oprah, in our discussion of AIDS and of the environment. American culture at large has become suffused with Gothic assumptions, with Gothic characters and plots. (xii)

Some works have the aforementioned satirical edge, which exposes old stereotypes. Authors such as Lynne Tilman or Diane Johnson use common Gothic tropes and structures but not without undermining them at the same time (Becker 72), and the “double voice of irony” in their works keeps the Gothic tradition alive along with its critique:

Postmodern irony, characterised by that ‘double-talking’ structure of complicity and critique ‘incorporating that which it implicitly contests’ works to emphasise the characteristic dynamics of postmodern feminine narratives like the Gothic: the connectedness to a whole web of feminine writing (through repetition of its traditions) and the simultaneous critique of its traps. The most obvious effect of this ironic double voice is, as has been suggested, a change in tone: from the sublime, dark Schauerroman to the comic—albeit no less dark—postmodern Gothic. (Becker 74)

Postmodern Gothic, be it a Tarantino film or a story by Angela Carter, may, therefore, have a higher degree of self-consciousness, even cynicism. But true horror has hardly evacuated out world. Some tropes are new and we are less likely to fear a speaking portrait than a speaking computer. As Lucie Armitt pointed out,

[technology has, surprisingly, provided a willing ally in this process [of modernising the Gothic], as phrases such as ‘the ghost in the machine’, or even the common usage of the term ‘ghosting’, in the sense of the blurring of the focus on a camera lens or television screen, underline. And perhaps there is something increasingly uncanny about inventions such as the telephone, in which disembodied voices visit us in our homes, or fax machines, which uncannily copy, as if in automatic writing, a message sent from hundreds of miles away by a disembodied hand. (148)

Conspiracy theories are a discourse in which the Sothic survives in the contemporary Western world. What evokes fear and horror in these theories at times corresponds with old-style Gothic: a focus on extreme situations (e.g. 9/11), rough scenery, secret plots, isolated dark semi-cryptic places
(e.g. the Roswell incident), elusive and exaggerated characters (e.g. the members of various secret organisations). Above all, the same aesthetics of subordination that we identified when discussing the sublime permeates these theories, except the obscure and omnipotent entities that crush the subject into submission are the government, the CIA or abstract incomprehensible powers such as the military-industrial complex, the Internet or chaos. Sometimes contemporary conspiracy theories also have their satirical and self-conscious edge: a good example is a video-clip with the comic book writer Alan Moore. Although Moore, in fact, explains why he does not believe in conspiracy theories, the clip is full of typical Gothic features. Darkness, hieroglyph-like drawings, an atomic bomb explosion in the background; Moore’s long hair with a hardly visible face and a gloomy low voice that as if comes from the underworld; sombre music – all these clues drive in the main point: fear chaos. Chaos is depicted in this clip as an omnipotent sublime other that reduces the subject to feelings of transience, insignificance and non-agency. So although Moore’s is self-conscious account of conspiracy theories, at the end of the clip, sublime chaos is out there to get us.

The Baby in the Bathwater

As with old-style Gothic, it may be argued that postmodern Gothic, in general, and conspiracy theories, in particular, keep being a first-class ticket to the sublime, and that they have their aesthetic, cognitive and political functions. Jameson has famously argued that “[c]onspiracy […] is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is the degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system” (“Cognitive Mapping” Web). A more elaborated version of this idea appeared in Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, where Jameson suggested that

our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new de-centered global network of the third stage of capital itself. This is a figural process presently best observed in a whole mode of contemporary entertainment literature—one is tempted to characterize it as “high-tech paranoia”—in which the circuits and networks of
some putative global computer hookup are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind. Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt—through the figuration of advanced technology—to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be theorized. (36-37)

Besides Jameson, other critics found certain value in conspiracy theories. Lance de Haven-Smith has argued that the term conspiracy theory is used to cover up real crimes, and Jodi Dean has pointed out that conspiracy theories, which “are in conflict with what is claimed as ‘consensus reality’ or ‘common sense’” (8), may be “helpful tools for coding politics in the virtual realities of the techno-global information age” (144). Moreover, Dean added, “it may also not be possible to carry out political actions without conspiracy theory, without making links so as to create specific political images” (145). When backed-up by sociological research such as that of John Mirowski and Catherine E. Ross, who argued that “social positions characterized by powerlessness and by the threat of victimization and exploitation tend to produce paranoia” (228), one is more likely to take seriously studies such as Barrie Zwicker’s *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-up of 9/11*, which draws on conspiracy theories about 9/11. So is a conspiracy theorist a derogatory title for a critical thinker, as a truism has it? Are conspiracy theories worthwhile cognitive tools and can they be applied to progressive political ends?

Sometimes. Most conspiracy theories presented in the opening section of this article come from “Top Ten Conspiracies” websites, such as those of *Time* and *Telegraph*. *Time*, specifically, includes the following ten:

1. The JFK Assassination
2. 9/11 Cover-Up
3. Area 51 and the Aliens
4. Paul Is Dead
5. Secret Societies Control the World
6. The Moon Landings Were Faked
7. Jesus and Mary Magdalene
8. Holocaust Revisionism
9. The CIA and AIDS
10. The Reptilian Elite

(“Conspiracy Theories” Web)
Telegraph presents a similar hotchpotch, albeit in a different order:

1. September 11, 2001
2. The assassination of John F Kennedy
3. Roswell
4. Nasa faked the moon landings
5. The Illuminati and the New World Order
6. Elvis Presley faked his own death
7. Shakespeare was not Shakespeare
8. Paul McCartney is dead
9. Harold Wilson was a Soviet agent
10. The Aids virus was created in a laboratory

(“The Top 10 Greatest Conspiracy Theories” Web)

The first problem with such “Top Ten Conspiracy Theories” is that to believe Elvis Presley faked (fakes?) his own death is neither critical nor thoughtful, just as there is a difference between a theory about the reptilian elite and the 9/11 cover-up. The term “conspiracy theory” is applied to ideas that are pure fiction but also to ideas that have their feasible aspects; therefore, the term discourages investigation into serious issues that concern, for instance, the corruption of the government or the elusive workings of global capitalism. Convoluted Gothic tropes obstruct what may actually be reasonably learned and changed. To call a theory a conspiracy theory may indeed prevent rather than stimulate cognition and resistance. (By the way, Tom Hayden’s objection to Naomi Wolf’s article about the crackdown on Occupy was not that she would not be right in principle, but that analysing what happened in Los Angeles in terms of a locally focused top-down conspiracy theory was not helpful.)

Granted, conspiracy theories may be progressive disregarding their truth-value, as a voice of the powerless. It is tempting to argue that real poverty, exploitation and victimisation produce paranoia rather than the other way round. Nevertheless, even here we cannot generalise because conspiracy theories flourish high and low. A good contemporary example is The Official Handbook of the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy: The Arguments You Need to Defeat the Loony Left This Election Year by an ultra-conservative New York lawyer, Mark W. Smith. Although the author aims to discredit the “loony left” who believe in conspiracy theories, arguing that the right is reasonable and transparent, Smith is far from devoid of conspiratorial thinking and the entire book, in fact, is a good example of what Richard Hofstadter called the “paranoid style of American politics.”
Moreover, as I have already argued, many tropes in conspiracy theories remain recycled from old-style Gothic. With some stretch of imagination, for example, it could be argued that Elvis Presley plays the same role as Madeline does in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the only difference being that “the object capable of raising the ideas of the sublime,” to recall Burke’s terminology once again, is not a young female but a popular culture icon. But the link between Gothic tropes and real, suppressed others has not been severed, and there are many racist, sexist and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. In his above “study,” Smith perhaps does not fear the left, which he ridicules, but his “objects of fear” are homosexuals, women and illegal aliens, namely the Mexicans and the Muslims, who are depicted in an exaggerated, Gothic manner. So Smith’s paranoid thinking relates to his position on Wall Street and betrays the fears of a rich, white, male and homophobic supremacist. Unless it inspires opposition, it feeds the dominant ideology.

Perhaps the greatest problem is that conspiracy theories have one common feature, namely, once again, the assumption that there is a powerful, non-changing and incomprehensible sublime other that reduces the subject to ignorance and non-agency, which, as I have argued above, is characteristic of the sublime experience within the aesthetics of subordination that underwrites our cultural fabric. One may derive horrific pleasure here from the assurance that in a meaningless world at least nature, popular culture, the government, the reptilians or chaos are transcendental, but such theories help to perpetuate this aesthetics as well. Although I do not feel competent to judge whether “[c]onspiracy theory ultimately fails as a universal theory of power” (Fenster 289), it does not seem that as a strategy, it is not very enabling.

What transpires from the above is merely a warning against dismissing but also romanticising conspiracy theories (as the Gothic in general). They are not only degraded tools of the powerless who are frustrated by the lack of fulfillment, meaning and agency in their lives, but they are also degrading tools of the powerful. Mark Fenster’s words express this point aptly. Conspiracy theory, Fenster argued,

can just as easily be used to promote oppression as it can be made to advance democratic or emancipatory politics—it might be a part of a white supremacist novel, it might raise real questions about historical or present-day efforts by the state or powerful private interests to suppress democracy and oppress minorities, or it might make fantastic, unproven and unprovable allegations. (288)
Conspire or Expire?

To conclude, let me briefly retrace my steps. I have argued that the contemporary world is suffused with the Gothic. Old as well as new Gothic tropes – such as labyrinthine spaces, elusive activities, omniscient occult organisations and rampant (computer) viruses – animate contemporary Gothic in general and conspiracy theories in particular. Although critics nowadays tend to view the Gothic in a favourable light, conspiracy theories from “Top Ten Conspiracy Theories” websites, as well as less well-known examples (such as Naomi Wolf’s explanation of the crackdown on Occupy and Mark W. Smith’s paranoid-style dismissal of the left) have led me to conclude that an aesthetic, cognitive and political function of conspiracy theories is at most ambivalent.

In the dominant aesthetics of subordination, conspiracy theories have an aesthetic (if not simply cathartic) role, but for conspiracy theories to have a cognitive and politically progressive function, distinctions need to be drawn. Some conspiracy theories fuel the dominant capitalist ideology, others are sexist, racist and anti-Semitic. Those theories have no worthwhile cognitive and politically progressive value. Moreover, even though marginal voices that are not reactionary are worth being listened to regardless their truth-value (just because they are testimonies of the oppressed), it cannot be assumed that all conspiracy theories of the powerless lead to knowledge. Some do, and they deserve not being called conspiracy theories at all. But distinguishing between the baby and the bathwater here is not always an easy task because, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued in Touching Feeling, the objective of conspiracy theories is to expose, and this objective can be reached only in certain cases. Otherwise, the hermeneutics of suspicion – to use Paul Ricoeur’s famous term which Sedgwick herself draws attention to – that underwrites conspiracy theories may lead to frustration and thwarted expectations.

There is a point, Sedgwick warned, where energies are wasted on trying to find the truth “out there.” Or as Fenster argued, following Sedgwick, “an unreflective commitment to a paranoid hermeneutic of suspicion […] can lead one to obsess over the hidden and in so doing miss the phenomena and oppression that exist on the surface” (285). We know the world is full of racism, homophobia, religious intolerance and exploitation, we know governments are corrupt, we know we eat poisons in our food, we know people have the capacity to behave worse than the most frightening aliens from outer space. Do we really need another proof? Why put energy into proving
something that is obvious rather than into what Sedgwick calls a “reparative motive” despite the dangers such an approach involves:

The vocabulary for articulating any reader’s reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it’s no wonder few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, has been in the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative motive itself. No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them. (150-151)

At the same time, and this is where my conclusions would differ from those of Fenster but less so, I think, from those of Sedgwick, conspiracy theories, like the hermeneutics of suspicion that drives them, need to remain “one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds” (Sedgwick 126) because, after all, “paranoid exigencies […] are often necessary for nonparanoid knowing and utterance” (129). In other words, “paranoia knows some things well and others poorly” (130), yet, at the same time, we vitally need reparative reading.

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Manipulations in Chemicals and Communications: A Bizarre Blend of Facts and Fiction

Introduction

Words are strange creatures. They customarily follow our conceptual maps of the world but sometimes deviate, wildly. The chasm between word and meaning can be especially wide when, for example, abstractions such as love, hate, power or law (among many others) enter a discussion. Of course, much of the divergence between word and meaning depends upon those in positions of power to modify meanings to suit their aims or perceptions of reality. Such has been the case with words like “law” and “evidence” in the intersecting worlds of legislation and litigation. To illustrate, famed historian and iconoclast, the late Howard Zinn, and co-author, Anthony Arnove, observed, “when in all the nations of the world the rule of law is the darling of the leaders and the plague of the people, we ought to begin to recognize this. We have to transcend these national boundaries in our thinking” (484).

A fitting model for the sort of sickness treated in this discussion, Zinn and Arnove's “plague” metaphor within the context of law, is especially useful to analysis of public communications regarding weaponized chemicals and their persistence in plaguing nature and human beings across national boundaries. This study presents analysis of the great esteem expressed in rhetorical locutions that society’s powerful confer upon the “law,” the meanings assigned to “evidence,” and how these meanings are manipulated to protect a bizarre, if cruel, reality. I ask, more precisely, how corporate public relations literature reflects the legal protections given to corporate entities
by law, even as scientific research and inferences regarding evidence and responsibility can be ignored by these same entities.

Enlisted in my efforts to analyse this reality is the work of Roland Barthes and his exposure of the various mythologies at work in society as reflected in the discourse. Barthes deconstructs the seemingly unnoticed phenomena of the common and routine experience to reveal how “obvious” connotations associated with society’s keywords and concepts are actually components of a carefully constructed reality the powerful prefer and aim to maintain. So, my purpose, like his, is to demythologize, to uncover how elite concepts of law collide with certain uncomfortable truths.

**Background History of Respect for the Law**

It is useful to begin with a brief return to the cradle of Western civilisation when, in the 4th century BCE, Plato observed that, “Where the law is subject to some other authority and has none of its own, the collapse of the state […] is not far off; but if law is the master of the government and the government is its slave, then the situation is full of promise” (qtd. in Black 148). In the Laws, expressed through the voice of the Athenian, we also see that “laws which are not established for the good of the whole state are bogus […], and when they favor particular sections of the community, their authors are not citizens but party men; and people who say those laws have a claim to be obeyed are wasting their breath” (715 b-c). Echoing the sentiments of his philosophical master, Aristotle observed that, “it is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens” (146). Yet, who can be certain in these present times when colossal multinational corporations have effectively purchased access to American political power and the establishment is, in one sense, ruled by private wealth, that “law is the master of government”? What appears certain in word alone, in lieu of deed, is an abiding respect for the noble belief (however naïve) that laws should rule the heart and mind of the government. President Dwight Eisenhower provided some perspective on this kind of steadfast lip-service respect for the law. On May 5, 1958, he reflected on, “The clearest way to show what the rule of law means to us in everyday life is to recall what has happened when there is no rule of law” (60). Yet, having also witnessed America’s insatiable appetite for militarization grow, by the end of his presidency, the former Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, observed in his famous 1961 speech that the military-industrial complex had become a formidable union of defense contractors and the armed forces arrayed against the public interest – a sort of lawless pursuit.
of military might at the expense of new libraries, hospitals, schools and other institutions that served the common good.

Worth noting is Eisenhower’s own hesitation to explicitly use the full name for this “immense military establishment,” which he warned had formed “in the councils of government” (qtd. in Higgs). The nation’s lawmakers themselves, Eisenhower felt – but failed to assert publicly – were central figures in the growth of this “military-industrial-congressional complex.” Thus, there now appears the widespread perception that a symbiotic association has grown among America’s rise to global military preeminence, the emergence of the military-industrial complex, the tumorous growth of the corporate lobby in Washington, and the government’s continued veneration of the conceptual ideal – “rule of law.” Within these domains of political influence, the cozy relationships that have taken hold since Eisenhower’s speech are striking. In the Western world and beyond, this abiding love affair the political establishment has nurtured with the law as a concept appears in routine public displays of affection. The words uttered in a partial but, nonetheless, monotonous list of elites serves to illustrate the depth of this influence on society.

Ronald Reagan famously tied this theme to the concept of Divine Providence when addressing the National Association of Evangelicals, observing that, “Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged” (Web). Elite adoration for this “rule of law” conception still finds a wide range of adherents and applications in the present post-Cold War world. In a post-invasion speech of Iraq, delivered to the U.S. Congress, Tony Blair noted that “[a]nywhere, anytime ordinary people are given the chance to choose, the choice is the same: freedom, not tyranny; democracy, not dictatorship; the rule of law, not the rule of the secret police” (Web).

The year 2005 saw Chief Justice John Roberts allude to another great speech, during his nomination hearings: “President Ronald Reagan used to speak of the Soviet constitution, and he noted that it purported to grant wonderful rights of all sorts to people. But those rights were empty promises, because that system did not have an independent judiciary to uphold the rule of law and enforce those rights” (Web). Not to be outdone by his ideological ally, Justice Samuel Alito observed in his 2006 confirmation hearings that, “A judge can’t have any preferred outcome in any particular case. The judge’s only obligation — and it’s a solemn obligation — is to the rule of law” (qtd. in Babington and Goldstein).

In a public discussion in the same year over the confirmation of Alberto Gonzalez’s nomination to the position of U.S. Attorney General, Senator
Dick Durbin pointed out that, “This debate is about whether, in the age of terrorism, America will continue to be a nation based on the rule of law, or whether we, out of fear, abandon time-tested values” (Web). Leon Panetta lamented in a 2008 Washington Monthly editorial about recent polls on America's growing acceptance of torture: “We either believe in the dignity of the individual, the rule of law, and the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, or we don't. There is no middle ground” (Web).

In her 2009 nomination speech for the Supreme Court, Justice Sonia Sotomayer observed that she believed firmly, “in the rule of law as the foundation for all of our basic rights” (Web). In an interview in the same year, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor observed that, “Commitment to the rule of law provides a basic assurance that people can know what to expect whether what they do is popular or unpopular at the time” (TV). Also in the same year, in an address to the U.S. Congress, Senator Richard Lugar, said that he was “convinced that the majority of American people do understand that we have a moral responsibility to foster the concepts of opportunity, free enterprise, the rule of law, and democracy” (Web). 2010 had President Barack Obama articulating the National Security Strategy: “The rule of law — and our capacity to enforce it — advances our national security and strengthens our leadership” (Web). Further, in a 2012 interview, Jeb Bush responded to Wolf Blitzer's question about immigration reform: “Great countries need to secure their border for national security purposes, for economic purposes and for rule of law purposes” (Web). And, more recently, in an interview regarding immigration issues, Senator Ted Cruz commented in April 2014 that, “the rule of law matters” (Web).

As a common political locution, “rule of law,” we may now understand, matters a great deal. But, does it matter as an applied principle? Certainly, this construction appears countless times in contemporary media. Its consistent repetition by the privileged elite reinforces the idea and, thus, the perception that blind justice is the ultimate arbiter of right. It is to be regarded as the only formulation of objective authority and, thus, the correct one that we are consistently reminded of and, thus, implicitly advised to yield to.

We should note, too, that it is not the rule of kings or queens, or of the Politburo, or the latest dictator, but rather the rule of an abstraction – or so it seems on the surface. This formulation, however intangible, may engender in the minds of listeners positive connotations of old men in dark robes and powdered wigs weighing the scales of blind justice in civil and criminal matters. Yet, in spite of the apparent widespread belief among the privileged that the law is a just force that shapes the lives of citizens in
fair and meaningful ways, two quite different understandings of the concept appear to be in perpetual conflict.

The World Justice Project, “an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to advance the rule of law around the world” (“Who We Are”), serves as fitting departure toward further discussion. Members of the organization define “rule of law” as “a system of rules and rights that enables fair and functioning societies” (“Who We Are”). They define the system as upholding four core principles:

1. The government and its officials and agents as well as individuals and private entities are accountable under the law.
2. The laws are clear, publicized, stable, and just; are applied evenly; and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property.
3. The process by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, fair, and efficient.
4. Justice is delivered timely by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals who are of sufficient number, have adequate resources, and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve. (“Who We Are”)

The question is, are all laws regarding corporations as private entities applied evenly and fairly? When these private entities are complicit ingressions, for example, is justice delivered by independent representatives who reflect the makeup of the community they serve? Glenn Greenwald questioned these concepts of equity and fairness in light of the “oligarch-caused financial crisis that […] spawned extreme levels of sustained suffering around the globe” (Web). The lawmakers, judiciary and the executives of government and business are, in his estimation, part of “an elite class […] free to operate without limits […] imposed by the rule of law or fear of the responses from those harmed by their behavior” (Greenwald). In this day and age of growing globalization, spurred by a widespread uncritical embrace of the “free” marketplace, it is fair to ask how this can be so. History, as usual, offers some useful insights.

Key Definitions

The English word “privilege” has interesting etymological roots. The first part, “privy” comes from the same root as “private” just as “lege” comes from the root “legislate.” The same can be understood from “elite” as the root derives from Old French, which was used to describe someone elected but was, in time, extended from those formally chosen in the social process to those specially selected by God for some particular purpose. “What in theology or
social action had been some kind of formal choice,” notes Raymond Williams, “was […] extended to a process of distinction or discrimination in which ‘elect’ was often indistinguishable from ‘best’ or ‘most important’” (113).

If the common perception of elite privilege, thus, derives from a fundamentally distorted view of democratic principles, it seems reasonable to conclude that the privileged elect may see itself, at times, as too important, too above the law – as makers and interpreters of law – rather than as agents of the public interest. It is worth pondering, since the elect have long practiced the peculiar habit of appealing to the public’s logical sensibilities that law itself remains the only objective and justifiable means of maintaining order, equality and justice.

A Route to Tyranny

Despite the motivations behind preserving this pretense, American legal culture, from the founding of the nation, is riddled with examples of law fashioned as a weapon to water down the power of the popular vote. In order to protect the legal foundations of slavery, for example, the framers of the United States Constitution appeared to choose language that protected their ethical sensibilities from the emotive evocations that the word “enslavement” would call forth:

No person held in Service or Labour in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due. (Article 4. Section 2, Clause 3 [1789])

Indeed, the words “slavery,” “corporation,” and “democracy” do not even appear in the Constitution, yet – since Marbury vs. Madison established the concept of judicial review, granting itself in the estimation of Thomas Jefferson the power to legislate – the privileged elect have used law to weaken democracy while widening the powers of corporations. It turns out, a necessary first step in clarifying the balance of power between the public citizenry and the private corporation was to reaffirm the sanctity of a contract between individuals. So it was in the year 1819 when the Supreme Court decision in Dartmouth College vs. Woodward effectively turned a corporate charter from a government-granted privilege into a contract that cannot be altered by government. To wit, even though the government holds power to commission a corporate charter, this government privilege does not transform the corporation into a civil institution.
This understanding of the separation between the “public” and the “private” having been effectively clarified, it then became necessary for corporations to apprehend the limitations of their own basic Constitutional rights. So, it was argued for the first time, on behalf of the Southern Pacific Railroad, that corporations were persons, an understanding that corporate lawyers had inferred since the 14th Amendment recognized black men (not women) as full citizens. That was 1882, and though the Court did not rule on this notion, it did clarify its position only four years later in another case involving Southern Pacific Railroad: “The Court does not wish to hear argument on the question of whether the 14th Amendment to the Constitution [...] applies to corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does” (Justia).

Corporations, now construed as private persons by the Judiciary, are at this point in need of personalities. How, in society, can or should they behave and interact with other persons, albeit born of human mothers? What are the limitations placed upon them in terms of speech? These questions, and related ones, needed another one hundred and thirty years to flesh out with answers, but key Supreme Court decisions since have certainly helped the modern American corporation self-actualize. As they were, by definition, legal acts undertaken by the law of the land (so to speak), they also formed part of a brilliant creative deception that fundamentally distorted (or degraded) our sense of identity as citizens in society. Jan Edwards and Molly Morgan describe it thus: “We [...] see that corporate personhood is destructive, because it was the pivotal achievement that allowed an artificial entity to obtain the rights of people, thus relegating us to subhuman status” (Web). As this inquiry also aims to examine bizarre and outlandish communications in culture, an underlying aim is to address the linguistic act known as lying. Jörg Meibauer, professor and researcher in experimental pragmatics, observes that, ‘corporation lies’ are very interesting because [we] don’t really know who acts as the liar (the corporation, a spokesperson, some group belonging to the corporation, etc.) Who is responsible? How can a corporation lie be detected? What strategies of lying and deceiving are used? What is the relation between corporation lies and corporation bullshit.¹ Why is it allowed to lie to the public?” (Web).

¹ Harry Frankfurt puts “bullshit” in perspective by observing that, “When an honest man speaks, he says only what he believes to be true; and for the liar, it is correspondingly indispensable that he considers his statements to be false. For the bullshitter, however, all these bets are off: he is neither on the side of the true nor on the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of the honest man and of the liar are, except insofar as they may be pertinent to his interest in getting away with what he says. He does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose” (56).
Beyond leading the public to useful answers that may help us better understand the great powers that have evolved in the incorporated person, Meibauer’s insightful queries may lead even further to questions concerning consciousness and intention.

Have humans created a monstrous sort of god within whom resides many persons who can ponder the implications of poor decisions and choose to speak about them as he or she pleases? What seems clear enough is that we are all, at various levels, interested in lying, as this behaviour underpins so much of our human experience, either as perpetrators or as victims of lies. Lying may be investigated in psychology, linguistics, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, film, and literature, among others and all of which tend to presuppose interactions among authentic human beings. Lies – as they relate to evidence and law – can help us understand much about the exercise of corporate power today and its ability to manage certain uncomfortable facts that may emerge from questionable business practices, transactions or strategies.

It begins with a key 1996 decision overturning a Vermont court’s ruling that all consumer products containing bovine growth hormone (BGH) must be labelled. In later striking down Vermont’s decision, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively reaffirms the rights of corporations, in this case Monsanto, not to speak, since labels warning the public of potential hazards in their dairy products equates to speech. This is the “lie […] by omission” (Yoos 91) enabled by the established powers of our present era. In terms of our understanding the importance of the rule of law, the concealment of evidence that harmful chemicals may be lurking in certain foods in the market is a perfectly legal deception. This is but one among many uncomfortable realities that may be seen in prevailing concepts today as regards the rule of law.

If it were not enough that certain corporations, at present, cannot be compelled by rules of law to label their products alerting people to their potential hazards, corporations also have the right to obscure and/or challenge facts verified by independent scientific inquiry. After all, one could argue, they are persons. As with all other persons, they have an image and important story to maintain with respect to their past, present, and the profits they aspire to in the future. In Monsanto’s case, for example, one can begin to understand portions of the story behind its (his/her?) involvement in the manufacture of other manipulations of nature, such as Agent Orange. Among the so-called rainbow herbicides, Agent Orange (and its unending story) is the most intriguing.

More than 40 years ago, Agent Orange was one of 15 herbicides used by the U.S. military as a defoliant in the Vietnam War to protect and save the lives of U.S. and
allied soldiers. It was a unique mixture of two common herbicides (2,4-D and 2,4,5-T) that had been used separately in the United States since the late 1940s. The government named the mixture “Agent Orange” because of the orange bands painted on containers of the material. (“Agent Orange”)

This narrative portion of the story of Agent Orange harkens back decades ago as the setting spans nearly two generations. From the description we note that Agent Orange, though standing as the grammatical subject, is an object of “use” by a powerful institution (the U.S. military) interested in protecting and saving the lives of people. The positive connotations in “protect” and “save” flood the human conscience and leave no doubt about the intentions (in this particular case) of the government institution that had contracted these companies to devise these chemicals. We note, too, that uses of the chemical constituents predate the Vietnam War by decades. Thus, the appeal to tradition may be more likely to persuade readers that history is on the side of the company that complies with orders to protect and save life. The story continues:

From 1965 to 1969, the former Monsanto Company was one of nine wartime government contractors who manufactured Agent Orange. The government set the specifications for making Agent Orange and determined when, where and how it was used. Agent Orange was only produced for, and used by, the government. (“Agent Orange”)

In keeping with the features of normal human personality, Monsanto, like any other person seeking to transfer accountability, appears to employ the passive voice as a rhetorical move to obfuscate facts over who precisely produced the chemical. Note that it was the “former” Monsanto and not its contemporary incarnation. Like a “former employer” or “former spouse,” the connotations called forth by the adjective create distinct conceptual categories that clearly delineate the past from the present. We learn, too, from this passage that “contractors,” more than being simply profit-driven monsters, are more human-like than we might imagine as “who” (the pronoun representing them) humanizes these entities. Indeed, contractors previously engaged in the manufacture of these toxins appear to underscore the Government’s own apparent willingness to suppress its ethical sensibilities even

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2 In 2005, during litigation proceedings in VAVA v. Dow et al., a brief was submitted to the court that contained an acknowledgement by the U.S. government that officials knew about the dangers of these chemicals as much as (or more than) the manufacturers did, though this awareness was confined to “chloracne and certain forms of liver damage.” The details can be found in VAVA v. Dow Supp. MDL No. 381, 04-C-400 (EDNY); Re: VAVA v. Dow et al, 05-1953-CV (Brief of the United States as Amicus Curiae in Support of Defendants), 7.
as the manufacturers also had, reportedly, known since 1965 that exposure to dioxin was associated with severe liver damage (Burnham) – among other health issues. The contrast between knowledge – decades ago – of the inherent harm these poisons presented to animal cells (and by extension humans) and statements about their purported innocuous qualities today are rather striking. “Research on Agent Orange,” Monsanto says,

has been conducted for decades and continues today. While a causal connection linking Agent Orange to chronic disease in humans has not been established, some governments have decided to provide certain medical benefits to veterans even though there has not been a determination that an individual’s health problem was caused by Agent Orange. (“Agent Orange”)

The use of the passive voice as a rhetorical manoeuvre to emphasise the recipient of the action (Research) draws our attention to the object of scientific inquiry. “Research,” we may understand, “has been conducted,” and, by whom, we are left unsure – that is, if we neglect digging more deeply for the details beyond the narrative developed here. In the second line, the passive again deflects attention away from the researchers who have, over decades of study, uncovered associations between exposure to dioxin and resulting medical maladies. To be clear, this public relations portrayal of the potential damage that Agent Orange is claimed to do reflects countless scientific studies that conclude with more questions than answers.

Complicating efforts to understand the central issue of causal relations is the sheer number of contractors that were involved as well as the number of rainbow herbicides (Agent Orange among them) created and deployed, the highly varied volumes with which they were dispersed, and their bastardized forms (with water or diesel) mixed in theatre. All of these variables, and others, have contributed to the complexities of an already complicated scientific endeavor to verify conclusive cause-and-effect connections. Despite these complications, compelling alternative stories have also developed. Standing in the face of corporate public relations literature is a 2006 article published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, whose authors note that, “Agent Orange is associated with a statistically significant increase in risk of birth defects” (Ngo et al. 1228). Perhaps the most perplexing and troubling aspect of the Agent Orange saga, beyond the results of independent scientific inquiries, is the knowledge that both producers and officials possessed of its dangers as well as the reckless abandon with which these poisonous weapons were evidently deployed.

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3 Dioxin (TCDD) is the unintended highly toxic byproduct of two principal ingredients in Agent Orange, 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D.
Conclusion

In his paper, “Is Agent Orange a Poison? Vietnamese Agent Orange Litigation and the New Paradigm of Poison,” Takeshi Uesugi describes the reasoning behind a 2005 ruling handed down by Judge Jack Weinstein of the Federal District Court in the Eastern District of New York. Uesugi deftly deconstructs some of the central arguments made by Judge Weinstein in his dismissal of the case brought by the Vietnamese plaintiffs and focuses on a particularly “nitpicky distinction [Weinstein makes] between ‘herbicide’ and ‘poison’” (204). Part of the reasoning behind the dismissal, notes Andrew Wells-Dang, hinged upon a “hairsplitting” aspect of the argument. In his summary, Weinstein notes that,

A ‘herbicide’ is an agent used to destroy or inhibit plant growth, while a ‘poison’ is a substance that through its chemical action kills, injures or impairs an animal organism. A highly toxic herbicide may be poisonous and poisons may harm plants. Characterization as both, or as one or the other, depends upon design and degree. (59)

This certainly seems to represent a hair-splitting effort. In spite of it, the distinction drawn here by the judge does not appear to sufficiently separate these two substances into discrete categories. Weinstein’s own words appear, rather, to strengthen the case that the intention to “kill,” “injure,” or “impair” is also built into the meaning of herbicide. Indeed, herbicides are intended to achieve one or more of these purposes. If no one has yet successfully changed the denotation of -cide as a suffix, which means “a killer of,” it follows, then, that herbicides are poisons. The suffix can help form names for categories of poisons that kill various organisms, whether plant or animal. It is used to form the names of acts such as “homicide” (the intentional killing of a human) and chemicals such as “pesticide” (a poison intended to kill pests). Ignoring the denotations of -cide may further suggest to the plaintiffs, or any other concerned party, that intention to protect corporate power was involved in the decision to split the semantic hairs of these words.

Lingering questions over privileged “knowledge” and “intention” during that explosive era of botanical warfare should serve to compel us to retrace and reexamine the rhetorical moves made in courts in efforts to remold the corporation into the image of a legal person with the means to escape the social responsibilities expected of natural citizens. The story of Agent Orange as told by these legal persons holding great power and privilege is but a minute portion of the larger narrative that has developed from the emergence of corporate personhood. In this essay, descriptions of law
used as a defensive weapon for private interests form a bizarre image of the future where these powerful business entities, lacking body and soul, rule the lives of human beings. It was observed, early on, that words are strange creatures. Perhaps it is so because of our own bizarre nature to protect the market-driven system over the humans that give it value. Words merely reflect this utterly strange propensity.

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The idea that man created god in their own image as a projection of the human ego into the surrounding universe largely in order to find explanations for the things unexplainable and unknowable is a commonplace for the readers of Nietzsche and Freud, with which creationists naturally do not agree, believing that God is the beginning and the end of all things (the Alpha and the Omega) or, in a more contemporary view, “God is a concept / by which we measure / our pain” (John Lennon “God” 1970). So God is a spirit, belongs to a spiritual, metaphysical realm, even though some Christians believe in coincidentia oppositorum, i.e, the spirit in a bodily form. 

In the era of overwhelming materialism, we must not, however, get rid of the idea of spirituality, spirit, ghost altogether in the way, for instance, Martin Heidegger did. In his monumental and epoch-making Sein und Zeit (1927), he warns to avoid, to flee, to dodge [Vermeiden] words like spirit [Geist] and its derivatives like geistig, geistlich. To counterpoint Heidegger’s metaphysics, Jacques Derrida opens up his 1987 volume entitled De l’esprit by declaring “I shall speak of ghost [revenant], of flame, and of the ashes” (Of Spirit 1) to ponder over the question of what spirit really is, coming finally to a conclusion that it is fire, flame, burning, conflagration (83). In his polemics with Heidegger, Derrida argues that Geist emerges in an ontological obscurity and is opposed to the thing (Heidegger speaks of dinglische unterbau of man, his thingly nature), to the metaphysical determination of thingness, to the thingification of the subject (15). Spirit, therefore, is evidently not a thing and as such
dodges a clear classification in terms of Western philosophy. A question, then, arises as to the status we may assign to the spiritual, spirit, soul, consciousness, etc. Does the spiritual, geistlich, ghostly classify itself in the same realm as the bodily, the thingly? Do we really have to oppose these two notions, the spiritual and the bodily? Can we think, as if it were, “beyond” these terms?

That man, a bodily, thingly construct, needs a “spiritual,” ghostly, immaterial “supplement” seems evident enough throughout the millennia of human civilisation in the form of a superior being (god/gods) or the immaterial beings (soul, ghosts, spirits, phantoms, etc.), and even the philosopher who famously announced the death of God (“Gott ist tod”) was in the need of the spirit, the ghost:

Thus I invented, when I needed them, the free spirits [die “freien Geister”] too, to whom this heavyhearted-stouthearted [schwermuetig-mutig] book with the title “Human, All Too Human” is dedicated. There are no such “free spirits,” were none – but, as I said, I needed their company at the time, to be of good cheer in the midst of bad things (illness, isolation, foreignness, sloth, inactivity); as brave fellows and specters to chat and laugh with, when one feels like chatting and laughing, and whom one sends to hell when they get boring – as reparation for lacking friends. (Nietzsche 5)

Spirits, as seems clear enough from the cited passage, have to be invented, are the play of the mind and/or imagination or perhaps a want. Nietzsche’s will was to create them and, therefore, his discourse situates him beyond the purely spiritual (existing beyond the will) and the bodily (the material, created ex nihilo). Yet, there is always this danger of madness, unreason, folly of which Foucault wrote extensively (e.g. Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, 1976 [1961]) and Nietzsche fell a victim to. But isn’t an organised religion such a madness, too? Of course, religions have an important social and ideological function to fulfil in any civilisation as, among other things, a tool of exercising power over the unknowable (the spiritual) but also – surprisingly – over the bodily, the material (say, conflicts between monarchs and institutionalised churches or the shameful sales of pardons which led to Martin Luther’s reformation in modern Europe).

**Dreams**

Ghosts visit people in dreams and they have always done so, be it in the Bible or any oral or written literatures, either using symbols or speaking human language and announcing important messages (to flee from Herod or of salvation), but we by and large misunderstand them. As Nietzsche has it:
Misunderstanding dreams. In ages of crude, primordial cultures, man thought he could come to know a second real world in dreams: this is the origin of all metaphysics. Without dreams man would have found no occasion to divide the world. The separation into body and soul is also connected to the oldest views about dreams, as to the assumption of a spiritual apparition [Seelenscheinleib, Nietzsche's neologism, translator's note], that is, the origin of all belief in ghosts, and probably also in gods. “The dead man lives on, because [all italics original] he appears to the living man in dreams.” So man concluded formerly, throughout many thousands of years. (16)

Is Go[o]d Evil?

The structure of our lives, our morality and values has been shaped through the experience of thousands or perhaps tens of thousands of the generations who had lived before us. And maybe, indeed, there is time to reiterate Nietzsche’s renowned questions of 1886: “Cannot all values be overturned? And is Good perhaps Evil? And God only an invention, a nicety of the devil? Is everything perhaps ultimately false? And if we are deceived, are we not for the same reason also deceivers? Must we not be deceivers, too?” (7).

God seems to the dream of utmost happiness of mankind, largely inaccessible to reason, an absolute measure. But there are no absolutes and there is no logic:

Logic, too, rests on assumptions that do not correspond to anything in the real world, on the assumption of the equality of things, the identity of the same thing at different points of time; but this science arose from the opposite belief (that there were indeed such things in the real world). So it is with mathematics [italics original], which would certainly not have originated if it had been known from the beginning that there is no exactly straight line in nature, no real circle, no absolute measure. (19)

The age of relativity, as inaugurated by Nietzsche in the 1880s, calls all in doubt, not only, as we clearly see, mathematics, logic, God, but also – in most recent times – God’s gender. The idea of God as an anthropomorphism, due to patriarchal tradition of Judeo-Christian civilisation, made us believe that God is male and, needless to say, white (paradoxically, even Joshua-turn-Jesus, apparently God’s son, a Semitic type, is represented in most European traditional paintings as a Caucasian, long-hair youth with a moustache and beard). In unorthodox translations of the Bible, however, God is referred to as he/she, which is unacceptable and inconceivable to majority of Christians across the world.
In literary studies, the idea of God is inextricably linked to ideas of truth, presence, beginning and end, meaning: in other words, to logocentrism, the entire system of Western thought that is governed by notions of essential and stable meaning or the Derridian transcendental signified. In this context, the meaning must be fix and stable, which is untrue from the perspective of poststructuralism. When he announced the death of the author (the writer is not the father of the book he has written – all structures have already been there), Barthes reminds us of Nietzsche announcing the death of God, but both these calls seem premature enough since, as for now, it is impossible to reject all fixed structures and rules thus, paradoxically, proving Nietzsche right when he aphoristically stated that we shall not get rid of God until we get rid of grammar, a universal system of rules governing the use of language.

**Religion**

The spectre of God or God as the spectre is present basically everywhere: it functions as an anchor and guarantor of stability and meaningfulness, even though there are very few people who genuinely know what it really means or may mean. As its representation, Western culture is deeply embedded theologically, but religion does it no good since it does not hold, nor has held, any truth:

> “Never, neither indirectly nor directly, neither as a dogma nor as an allegory, has religion yet held any truth [italic original].” For out of fear and need each religion is born, creeping into existence on the byways of reason. Perhaps at one time, when endangered by science, it included some fabricated philosophical theory in its system, so that it could be found there later; but this is a theologian’s trick from the period when a religion is already doubting itself. These tricks of theology, which of course were practiced very early on in Christianity, the religion of the scholarly age, steeped in philosophy, led to that superstition about a sensus allegoricus. Even more, they led to the habit of philosophers […] of treating all feelings which they found in themselves as if they were essential to man in general, and thus the habit of granting their own religious feelings a significant influence on the conceptual structure of their systems. (Nietzsche 79-80)

**What if not God?**

In place of Christian God, whom Karl Marx called “Spectre No. 1” (157), the then liberated nineteenth-century capitalism has reinstated money (or, as he refers to it, “free trade”) with a simple purpose to fulfil the vacuum left
by God's disappearance and, in the name of freedom, the bourgeoisie has used religion and the illusions it offers to unsuspecting minds. In *Communist Manifesto*, we read:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. (Marx 2)

Money has become a god that haunts us, eludes us, deceives us and stifles us. In certain spheres, it is not expected of the interlocutors to speak of money: the question of money is avoided, very much like the question of God, spirits, ghosts, religions, politics. Yet, they do exist in one way or another and the problem is, in Derrida’s language, how to avoid speaking? How to say without saying, how to write without writing, how to use words without using them? Such tasks seem to be unfeasible, just proving our helplessness in the face of the immaterial, and perhaps Heidegger was right when he declared evil (*Das Boese*) to be spiritual (*geistlich*, in Derrida *Of Spirit* 10): we live with *Geist* and we are *geistlich* ourselves even though we are human, all too human.

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