REVISIONS AND RETURNS: THE GOTHIC NOVEL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the rise of the Anglophonic Gothic novel in the twenty-first century and the manner in which contemporary authors have revised the mode for a modern reader. Using a metamodern approach, this research examines how modern writers utilise the postmodern concepts of historical re-conceptualism and the historiographic metafictional novel, revising the Gothic novel for a contemporary reader.

This thesis explores six key motifs of Gothic literature: time and narrative, death, ancestry and inheritance, gender identity, religion, and queer representation. A particular focus is given to the illustration of identity in contemporary Gothic novels, both communal and individual, and applies a metamodern understanding to the idea as it represented in modern culture. Each concept is studied in detail with regards to a range of pertinent twenty-first-century Gothic novels, and this research demonstrates the evolution of these motifs from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic works to the present day.

Current studies into contemporary Gothic have been aimed towards the genre's incorporation into a variety of media – its appearance and use in film, television, fashion, and music to name a few areas – rather than a particular focus on literary studies. A range of texts from the last twenty years has been selected for analysis, varying from those that emulate a more traditional Gothic setting to those that experiment with genre hybridisation. This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by focusing specifically on the Gothic novel in the twenty-first century.

Contents

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A Note on the Texts

All quotations, names, and other information from the texts used in this thesis have been diplomatically copied with regards to spelling, grammar, and presentation.

Introduction

Revising the Gothic Novel

The Gothic novel is an essential part of Anglophonic literary history and has been part of the constant evolution of literature since the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. In *Contemporary Gothic* (2006), Catherine Spooner remarks that, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, 'Gothic motifs, narrative structures or images may arise in a variety of contexts – from pop music to advertising – that may not otherwise seem Gothic in any straightforward sense'.[1] As a cultural movement, the Gothic has always been hybridised; that is to say, it is a mode that has often been combined with other genres – for example science-fiction and crime – and can be found in a variety of media, including but not limited to visual art, architecture and, of course, literature. Yet in terms of contemporary studies of the genre, there is a greater awareness of hybridity with other genres – not just crime and science-fiction, but also utopian and dystopian fiction for instance – and its appearance in multiple formats, such as film, music, and fashion. Spooner states:

> [t]he form has changed over the course of the last 200 years […] has spanned other genres […] has interacted with literary movements, social pressures and historical conditions to become a more diverse, loosely defined set of narrative conventions and literary tropes.[2]

In spite of the Gothic's incorporation into many of the more modern forms of media, it is important to note the conspicuous trend of the Gothic *novel* in the twenty-first century.

This thesis will explore the relationship between the twenty-first-century Gothic novel and metamodernism, demonstrating the revision of the genre in line with the importance of historiographic metafiction and historical re-conceptualism. This thesis will utilise such postmodern concepts as mentioned above in order to cover a range of topics closely related to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

[1] Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006) p.26
[2] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.26

Gothic mode, illustrating the adaptation of such motifs in twenty-first-century Anglophonic Gothic via the exploratory nature of the metamodern approach.

Although the origins of the Gothic are an often-debated point of Gothic studies, the first Gothic novel is usually identified as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, first published in 1764, which posed as a translated manuscript found in the archives of an old English Catholic family. However, with its reprint in 1765, Walpole attached a second preface to the text, acknowledging that the narrative was one of his own devising.[3] From the second publication of *Otranto*, the question of authenticity has been considered in line with the Gothic mode. A romance published during the Enlightenment era, the genre continued in popularity through to the age of realism. As a result of its extreme depictions, the Gothic mode was often criticised for its use of the grotesque and its exploitation of the fictional. Since the late eighteenth century, as discussed by Spooner in *Contemporary Gothic*, there has been a long tradition of the fictionalisation of history, which will be discussed in greater depth below.

Following Walpole, the Gothic has been utilised by many authors of the eighteenth century – Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis being just a few of note – and continued in popularity in the nineteenth century. Many authors of the 1800s published Gothic novels, some of the more famous being *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin, through to *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker. Whilst there are a great many Gothic novels throughout the nineteenth century, the popularity of the genre slowly waned through the Victorian period, giving way to more popular historical fiction. Indeed, by the 1850s, at the time of Elizabeth Gaskell's Gothic short stories, the mode continued to be considered "low brow", meant to entertain the lower classes and a less sophisticated form of reading.

Despite its waning popularity by the *fin de siècle*, the Gothic was still in use in the twentieth century, with the works of writers such as Daphne du Maurier, Angela Carter, and Anne Rice being classified under the genre, and authors such as

[3] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p.9

Stephen King applying Gothic elements to horror novels. The 1990s saw a surge in the Gothic in other formats – music, film, television, and fashion – illustrating the various methods in which the genre was being consumed. Nevertheless, despite the use of "gothic" as more of an adjective than a categorical noun in the late twentieth century and twenty-first century, this thesis will argue that the Gothic novel has returned as a distinct genre, even as some Gothic texts continue to be hybridised with other genre elements.

Following on from the postmodern approach of the late 1900s, the Gothic now utilises some aspects of postmodernism alongside the metamodernism of the current century. The term metamodernism was first coined in 1975 by the writer Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, as a means of describing the emerging cultural trends in American literature. However, it became a more prevalent cultural philosophy in the mid-2000s, and metamodernism is now often associated with the "Age of the Internet", just as modernism coincided with the "Age of the Radio" and postmodernism, the "Age of Television". Metamodernism picked up momentum as a cultural movement, and a step forward from the post-postmodernist theoretical approach in the humanities, in 2010 with Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's publication of 'Notes on metamodernism'. Vermeulen and van den Akker, both leading theorists in metamodernism, have described it as the movement 'between' the modern and the postmodern, 'a pendulum swinging between […] innumerable poles'.[4] Rather than taking the meaning of the prefix "meta" to mean reflective, Vermeulen and van den Akker take their "meta" from Plato's *metaxy*, meaning that this theory is a movement both between the opposing states as well as beyond them. Since this publication, several articles and texts have been produced on metamodernism as the future of theory, such as the edited collection *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism* (2017), and Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm's *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory* (2021), although it is still a developing approach in literary studies.

[4] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2.1 (2010) pp.1-14 [p.6]

Vermeulen and van den Akker concisely present metamodernism as the next stage of theoretical thinking, but not one that entirely obliterates the theories which precede it. Rather, it 'oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity'.[5] In an interview with *TANK* magazine, Vermeulen clarifies this statement, noting that 'metamodernism is not so much a philosophy—which implies a closed ontology—as it is an attempt at a vernacular […] a sort of open source document, that might contextualise and explain what is going on around us, in political economy as much as in the arts'.[6] This approach to cultural theory echoes the sentiments of the twenty-first-century Gothic novel, making it the most appropriate term to apply to this genre. The hybridisation of the Gothic in the contemporary era generates the need for the application of a hybridised literary theory, one that understands the continuous shift between modern and postmodern approaches whilst simultaneously experimenting with new concepts and social commentaries.

Each text used in this thesis can be categorised as a Gothic novel, with some written in a more experimental style than others, but each offers commentary on a particular cultural concern of the twenty-first century that has been linked to social issues from a previous era. As argued by Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, metamodernism 'should not be thought of as a pervasive zeitgeist' but instead should be 'conceived as a kind of philosophical therapeutics that leads through the disintegration of concepts and deconstructive vigilance to a kind of reconstructive capability directed at multi-species flourishing'.[7] From the ashes of postmodern nihilism, Storm considers a metamodern possibility to reconcile the past with the present through this new theoretical approach, one easily applied to contemporary

[5] Vermeulen and Akker, 'Notes on metamodernism', p.5-6
[6] 'TANK Magazine interviews: Timotheus Vermeulen', < http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/02/23/tank-interviews-timotheus-vermeulen-about-metamodernism/> [Accessed 16th March 2022]
[7] Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2021) p.17 & 25

literary studies, particularly in relation to the rise of the twenty-first-century Gothic novel.

In terms of the application of metamodernism to literary studies, one key article which has discussed this is David James and Urmila Seshagiri's 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Revolution and Continuity' (2014). James and Seshagiri state that 'metamodernist writing incorporates and adapts, reactivates and complicates the aesthetic prerogatives of an earlier cultural moment'.[8] This article is written with Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodern 'pendulum' swinging towards the modernist era, as James and Seshagiri explore the twenty-first-century's regeneration of modernism in the works of Tom McCarthy. This thesis will be moving the 'pendulum' back towards, as well as beyond, postmodernism and considering the influence of certain postmodernist elements on the reinvention of the Gothic novel over the last twenty years.

Published in 2021, Antony Rowland demonstrates the relationship between literary studies and metamodernism through his text, *Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry*. Rowland writes that metamodernism allows for contemporary writers to consider 'issues of representation, reconstruction and myth, as theories of postmodernism appeared less able to engage with postmillennial developments in history and culture' and to 'reembrace concepts such as truth, progress and grand narratives'.[9] Whilst Rowland is discussing poetry, this same concept can be applied to the modern Gothic novel, particularly in terms of the representation of identity.

Georg Lukács states in *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (1920), the 'novel tells the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving

[8] David James & Urmila Seshagiri, 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Revolution and Continuity', *PMLA*, 129.1 (2014) pp.87-100 [p.93]
[9] Antony Rowland, *Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p.2

itself, to find its own essence'.[10] At both a communal and individual level, the subject of identity has been a key repeated theme in Gothic literature, demonstrated by the remarks of the title character of Oscar Wilde's Gothic novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890): 'I am tired of myself to-night. I should like to be somebody else'.[11] The concept of identity has gained a more prominent role in the last twenty years of Gothic novels. Where postmodernism allowed for characters to become aware of the multiplicities of culture and identity and to understand the concept of social constructs, this often led to the identities of such characters fracturing under the pressure of this knowledge. As such, when left with the broken façade created by external social expectation, few postmodern characters are able to sustain a personal identity once the multiplicity of truth is exposed, resulting in postmodern nihilism. Metamodernism, however, accepts the fragmentation of identities and attempts to rebuild the individual with the understanding that various multiplicities can be fitted together to create something new. Nevertheless, as seen in the Gothic novels in this thesis, this is an experimental format for reconstructing and representing both society and the individual, and is not always successfully fulfilled by characters, leading to their social removal or even death if Western culture is not able to allow such developments.

As Spooner states, 'Gothic has always been pre-eminently concerned with history […] Gothic arose in the eighteenth century as one means to explore the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of the modern subject's separation from the past'.[12] In *Contemporary Gothic*, Spooner discusses the continued tradition of 'fake histories' as an element integral to the creation of an authentic Gothic text – if a Gothic text can ever claim to be authentic.[13] This thesis will determine that the twenty-first-century reinvention of the mode goes further than creating fake histories by exploring the idea that history itself is a construct created and crafted

[10] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971) p.89
[11] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2011) p.130
[12] Catherine Spooner, 'Introduction: A History of Gothic Studies in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries' in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume III: Gothic in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) pp.1-21 [p.1]
[13] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.38

to suit the perspective of the hegemonic culture of each time period. Several of these texts depict previously unexplored areas and outlooks of the past. The twenty-first-century Gothic's obsession with evoking the past often sees the mode combined with historical fiction, as it has always done in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with authors such as Walpole, Radcliffe, and Reeve setting their novels in distant memory, family history, or as lost historical manuscripts. This also encompasses the postmodern form of the historiographic metafictional novel – postmodern novels that utilise historiography for self-reflexive writing – in order to understand past events and past truths in terms of their relativity to specific times and cultures.

This thesis will also demonstrate that twenty-first-century Gothic maintains the literary tradition of providing responsive social commentary, with the mode now taking a more metamodern viewpoint when commenting via the postmodern idea of historical re-conceptualism: the revisiting and retelling of historical events through various perspectives. As Steven Bruhm notes in his essay 'Contemporary Gothic: why we need it' (2002), 'we *crave*' not only the thrill of being terrified and the perverse pleasure of horror, but the ability to reinvent history as a means of controlling and understanding the present.[14] Twenty-first-century Gothic utilises the postmodern concept of re-conceptualism alongside historiographic metafiction to allow this. As Patricia Waugh states in her text on metafiction, 'such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text'.[15] In this form, amalgamated with traditional Gothic tropes, the genre allows us to explore the abstract and abnormal – magick, monsters, and extreme versions of ourselves and our societies – in the hope of finding the multiplicity of truths hidden in culture's repressed history.

Alongside this predilection for history, the selected novels also contain traditional Gothic aspects, including – but not limited to – a haunted setting, an

[14] Steven Bruhm, 'The contemporary Gothic: why we need it' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hodge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp.259-276 [p.274]
[15] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984) p.2

unreliable narrator, a supernatural or monstrous entity, and some format of trauma or abjection that is depicted through past revelations, hallucinations or the uncanny.[16] One particular motif found in the Gothic that all the chosen contemporary texts contain is the appearance or suggestion of the supernatural. This thesis focuses specifically on the use of the supernatural and unnatural phenomena – displayed in forms of supernatural creatures and monsters, acts of witchcraft, and prophecies, to name a few – as they are employed to unsettle and unnerve the reader in the twenty-first century incarnation of the genre. The supernatural is significant in the Gothic's use of abstract and absurd representation in the contemporary age as, due to modern science and technology, a great many discoveries have been made and that which was previously unknowable to our predecessors has become quantifiable and accessible. This thesis illustrates Spooner's claim that the 'Gothic is mutable and can fulfil the cultural needs of the time' as well as appealing to a twenty-first-century audience by performing the 'contemporary lust for spectacle and sensation'.[17] The supernatural makes an excellent signifier in the modern era, representing the phenomena we cannot uncover with science.

According to Dennis Waskul and Marc Eaton, in the twenty-first century, the supernatural has come to 'represent our worst fears in an age of terrorism, global warming, and other large-scale changes that threaten to destabilise or destroy life as we know it'.[18] This thesis will consider how the Gothic genre, in its contemporary form, deals with both its relationship to the past and its purpose in the present, particularly with reference to issues such as religion, mental health, familial relationships, gender and sexuality, and societal expectations on the individual's role in society. The contemporary Gothic novel returns to the form of the grand narrative, utilising the previously mentioned issues to illustrate the socio-political extremes of the twenty-first century. The traditional use of grand narratives, to investigate historical events and larger experiences of society and humanity, has

[16] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwells Publishing Ltd, 2004)
[17] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.156
[18] Dennis Waskul and Marc Eaton, *The Supernatural in Society, Culture, and History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018) pp.1-17 [p.3]

slowly been replaced in postmodernism with the local, specifically focused narratives. However, metamodern Gothic literature of the twenty-first century demonstrates a return to these grand narratives which explore, acknowledge, and legitimise societies, providing a space for minorities and those cultures previously considered 'other'. Although the early Gothic was criticised for its lack of realism and exploitation of fiction to scare the reader, James M. Keech notes that it has often been used as 'a means of evoking a response, both emotional and moral, to those aspects of life which we fear, or ethically should fear, most'.[19] This tradition of response has continued into the twenty-first century, reacting to the current cultural and socio-political environment. As Maria Beville states, the 'relationship of the Gothic to memory and its contested past is multi-faceted and is worth exploring, not only in terms of its importance to literary representation, but to the invention of collective memory in cultural narratives as well'.[20] Through a metamodern combination of Gothic extremism, post-irony, and historical literature, the twenty-first-century version of the mode is able to consider the multiplicity of truths that make up the past and how such multiplicities have influenced contemporary cultures.

The theoretical approach to twenty-first-century Gothic has been developed over the last two decades, altering between psychoanalytical and historicist perspectives – as Cherry, Howell, and Ruddell ask: 'does the cultural text bespeak the world within or without?' – to consider many other theoretical interpretations.[21] In her work, *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2009), Beville writes that 'Gothic-postmodernist works do not merely supply entertainment value. They can and should be acknowledged as eagerly adept literary explorations of ontology, epistemology and selfhood'. [22]

[19] James M. Keech, 'The Survival of the Gothic Response', *Studies in the Novel*, 6.2 (1974) pp.130-144 [p.141]
[20] Maria Beville, 'Gothic Memory and the Contested Past: Framing Terror' in *The Gothic and the Everyday: Living Gothic*, ed. by Lorna Piatta-Farnell and Maria Beville (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp.52-68 [p.52]
[21] Brigid Cherry, Peter Howell & Caroline Ruddell, *Twenty-First-Century Gothic* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) p.2
[22] Maria Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (New York: Rodopi, 2009) p.56

Beville's statement applies also to metamodern texts such as Jeanette Winterson's 2019 novel, *Frankissstein*, which comically revisits Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for a modern audience through the consideration of individualism and identity in terms of gender and transhumanism. This engagement with such relevant socio-political climates as Brexit and the increased interest in the transgender rights movements, illustrates the metamodern nature of the contemporary Gothic novel. Writers are moving between the old concepts of modernism and post-modernism as well as beyond them, reflecting on past events in order to explore the current cultural environment.

Beville's argument is supported by Joakim Wrethed's later assessment of postmodernism and the Gothic in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic* (2020). Wrethed examines the relationship between postmodernism and contemporary Gothic literature, focusing on Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000). Wrethed writes on similarities between the Gothic and the postmodern, stating that 'what unites these two aspects are problematisations of a set of Enlightenment convictions: the stability of self, the reliability of language and perception, the possibility of science and truth'.[23] This thesis will illustrate the extent to which Wrethed's statement is valid when we move beyond postmodernism and the era of nihilism, into metamodernism which allows for the stability of multiple truths. The shift from postmodernism to metamodernism comes with both a progression in thought and a return to past literary formats. The renewal of the grand narrative allows for large-scale consideration of those subjects that have global impact – environmental crises, extreme political shifts, racial and class issues, as well as gender and sexuality concerns. But the application of metamodernism demonstrates a post-irony progress, leaving behind the satire of the postmodern to discuss and explore such issues with a commitment to the *gravitas* of the subject matter. This thesis will illustrate the shifting socio-political climate and the manner in which the Gothic now utilises the abstract and the

[23] Joakim Wrethed, 'The Postmodern Genre' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) pp.1671-1693 [p.1687]

monstrous to explore truth and identity, rather than as parodies and figures of mockery.

An emerging area of academic study, there have been few publications on twenty-first-century Gothic in the last twenty years. Spooner has published two works on the Gothic in the twenty-first century: the aforementioned *Contemporary Gothic* and, published a decade later, *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017). Both texts refer to a few novels written in the twenty-first century but also examine many other forms of media. *Contemporary Gothic*, published only six years after the millennium, focuses mainly on the late twentieth-century. It considers the ongoing effect of the Gothic genre in 1990s pop culture, examining television shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the films of Tim Burton, as well as the aesthetic and music of artists like Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and Marilyn Manson. In this text, Spooner demonstrates the continued use of the Gothic mode in modern society and its ability to adapt to multiple socio-political contexts. *Post-Millennial Gothic* is able to explore fifteen years of twenty-first-century Gothic as it is depicted in various forms. In this later book, Spooner considers a wide range of transmedia Gothic, including the *Twilight* novels and their movie adaptations, Tim Burton's twenty-first-century works, and the influence of the Gothic on contemporary fashion to name a few. *Post-Millennial Gothic* continues to illustrate Spooner's aim in *Contemporary Gothic*, identifying and examining the place of the Gothic genre in contemporary society and its ability to translate itself across multiple forms of media and art. Both of Spooner's texts, although they include some literary references, are an amalgamation of multiple media, looking at film, television, music, fashion, and advertising as well as some literature.

Twenty-First-Century Gothic (2010) edited by Brigid Cherry, Peter Howell, and Caroline Ruddell, explores the impact of the Gothic on the multimedia formats of the mode found in the first ten years after the millennium. This is seen in various chapters on body horror, transhuman studies, and fan culture surrounding popular contemporary Gothic media. The essays in this collection also apply twenty-first-century perspectives to earlier texts, for example, Margaret Bethray's essay on

Gothic and medicine in Sylvia Plath's poem 'The Hanging Man' (1965). Cherry, Howell, and Ruddell clarify the cultural inheritance of the Gothic in the twenty-first century and how the 'ownership of Gothic discourse is in the hands of the reader or the viewer', illustrating the role the genre still plays in examining contemporary cultural concerns.[24]

In 2011, Danel Olson published *21st-Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels since 2000*, the only current publication that exclusively focuses on the Gothic novel in the twenty-first century. Spanning ten years, this text is a collection of fifty-three essays, each covering a different novel that has been classified as Gothic. From Margaret Atwood and Susanna Clarke, Neil Gaiman and Chuck Palahniuk, the Gothic texts included in this collection demonstrate the continued use and adaptation of traditional Gothic elements in modern literature. The collection illustrates a wide range of texts and subjects that have been used by contemporary writers to comment on the socio-political culture they were produced in. This thesis will continue the work began in Olson's text, expanding upon the popularity of the Gothic novel in the present day by examining more recently published works.

Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural (2012) by Victoria Nelson is also a text worthy of note in this thesis. An examination of both twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, film, and media, it demonstrates the position in which the Gothic is situated in contemporary culture. Nelson focuses on a Western, particularly American, post-millennium perspective of the genre, exploring the works of authors from Dan Brown to Stephanie Meyer to examine the relationship between the supernatural and the spiritual. In this text, Nelson observes how contemporary Gothic does not necessarily follow the conventions laid out by traditional Gothic texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century but rather subverts and reinvents the rules of the genre to suit the evolving socio-political landscape. This thesis will follow in Nelson's consideration and explore the manner in which the Gothic is revived and redesigned for contemporary concerns.

[24] Cherry, Howell & Ruddell, *Twenty-First-Century Gothic*, p.5

The Gothic World (2013) edited by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend, charts the evolution of culture through a Gothic lens, considering the larger notions of history, space, and time through the genre. The essays in the collection explore how the Gothic has permeated global culture, ranging from discussion on British nationalism and colonialism, architecture and geography, through to art, aesthetics and cyberspace. In exploring 300 years of the mode, for Byron and Townshend, the contemporary Gothic novel is one aspect of an overall consideration of the Gothic's continuing influence in many aspects of culture, from the very beginning of the genre to the current day.

Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion (2019) edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes directly analyses twenty-first-century Gothic in multimedia depictions. In the introduction of this essay collection, Wester and Aldana Reyes emphasise the Gothic's transmedia evolution as well as its hybridisation, stating that the 'only price the Gothic has had to pay for its longevity has been a loss of specificity'.[25] Throughout the collection, the Gothic is considered through various media and methodological lenses, contemplating film, television and digital technologies as well as literature, and analysing postcolonial, ecocritical and postfeminist approaches to the contemporary format of the genre. Combined, Wester and Aldana Reyes' text offers not just a transmedia but a transnational understanding of the modern Gothic.

Clive Bloom's previously mentioned *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic* (2020) is a detailed compilation of essays, exploring the Gothic from 1918 to the present day as it has developed over the course of a century. Much like Spooner's *Contemporary Gothic*, it examines Gothic in all its forms, and similarly to Wester and Aldana Reyes' collection, it expands into international considerations of Gothic, ranging from South American to Asian Gothic. The majority of this collection explores a wide range of the Gothic since the early twentieth century, considering the influence of the genre in several areas of pop culture, for example television shows such as *Game of Thrones* and *Doctor*

[25] Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Twenty-First Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019) p.2

Who. Whilst there is more attention on literature in this text, exploring the works of Stephen King and the rise in young-adult Gothic fiction, than those previously mentioned, it is again the Gothic fiction of the twenty-first century that is limited in its examination, with its focus remaining on twentieth-century texts.

The latest volume of work on twenty-first-century Gothic literature is *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume 3: Gothic in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (2021). Edited by Catherine Spooner and Dale Townshend, this essay collection, similarly to Bloom's, tracks the evolution of the Gothic through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first as it adapts to new forms of media and consumerism. A greater range of twenty-first-century literature is analysed in this volume, from postcolonial and queer literature to East Asian and apocalyptic fiction. This volume also brings further attention to Gothic film and television, continuing the consideration of Gothic as a transmedia mode. Contrasting these previous texts on twenty-first-century Gothic, this thesis is unique in that it keeps the novel as the central focus for the Gothic in the modern day. These previous studies have clearly demonstrated the presence of the Gothic in film, television, and other formats, but it is also correct to note that there is a great deal more literature to consider than has been featured in these works. It is the aim of this thesis to illustrate, in particular, the prevalence of the Gothic *novel* in the twenty-first century through an exploration of six of the core elements of the Gothic.

The first chapter, 'Spinning the Hourglass: Unresolved Narratives in Contemporary Gothic', will demonstrate the effects of generational trauma on the narratological structure of twenty-first-century Gothic. Through the depictions of family loss and the supernatural in Dale Bailey's *In The Night Wood* (2019) and *The Silent Companions* (2017) by Laura Purcell, and the use of a pandemic told in present tense in *The Dreamers* (2019) by Karen Thompson Walker, this chapter illustrates that time in twenty-first-century Gothic is shown as a cyclical structure, moving on from early Gothic's tradition of resolution at the end of the narrative, instead focusing on ambiguous endings.

Chapter Two, 'Examining the Corpse: Exploring Life and Death in the Neo-Victorian Gothic Novel', considers the sensational depictions of death and of

various beliefs surrounding the afterlife, and will illustrate the evolution of neo-Victorian Gothic literature in the last twenty years. This is shown through the superstitions and pagan idolatry in the narrative of *Once Upon a River* (2018) by Diane Setterfield, the battle between science and mysticism in John Harwood's *The Séance* (2008), and finally in *Opium and Absinthe* (2020) by Lydia Kang, which explores the influence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in America and the effect of opioids on the eighteenth-century understanding of mortality.

The third chapter, 'Uprooting the Ancestors: Eco-Gothic and Male Identity', will analyse the issues surrounding culturally inherited masculinity in the twenty-first century by exploring the depiction of male characters in the Gothic novel, an issue the genre has been concerned with since Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. This will be demonstrated in the case of the archetypal Victorian male patriarch and the issue of class in Michelle Paver's *Wakenhyrst* (2019), the conflicting human and bestial male figures in *The Magdalena Curse* (2009) by F. G. Cottam, and finally *The Only Good Indians* (2020) by Stephen Graham Jones which illustrates the concerns facing Native American males in contemporary white-American society. The discussion of masculinity will be linked to the concept of the ancestral curse, the entrapping nature of inheritance, and man's relationship with the natural world, exploring how male identities are formed and attempt to rebel against traditional patriarchal conventions.

The fourth chapter, 'Rewriting the Stories: Modern Adult Gothic Fairy Tales and Folklore', will examine the recreation of cultural stories in various formats and the manner in which they depict female characters as evolved from early Gothic writers such as Ann Radcliffe. *White is for Witching* (2009) by Helen Oyeyemi utilises Caribbean folklore alongside the fairy tale of *Snow White* to explore interracial relationships between women, whilst Wray Delaney's *The Beauty of the Wolf* (2019) adapts French fairy tales and the superstitious culture of Elizabethan England to comment on female performativity. *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by A. G. Slatter creates its own folklore – with some basis in Gaelic legends – in order to examine the role of the matriarch and the position of women in power. Chapter Four will discuss the depiction of women and gender boundaries in contemporary

Gothic novels, demonstrating the many cultural issues around the performative aspects of gender.

Chapter Five, 'Challenging the Faith: Western Theology in Contemporary Gothic', will consider the relationship between witchcraft and religion, and the significance of the two in the Gothic since late eighteenth-century concerns around Catholicism and paganism. Through the depiction of the Lancashire August Assizes of 1612 in *The Daylight Gate* (2012) by Jeanette Winterson, the persecution of seventeenth-century Icelandic paganism in *The Glass Woman* (2019) by Caroline Lea, and the death of religion as shown in Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (2014), this chapter will exemplify the Gothic's representation of the twenty-first-century state of faith and the multi-faceted "truth" of Anglophonic religion, examining its relevance in contemporary times.

The final chapter, 'Exploring the Space: LGBTQ+ Protagonists in Twenty-First-Century Gothic', will look at how – in comparison to the depiction of sexual transgression in both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novels – contemporary Gothic treats LGBTQ+ figures: not as villainous or monstrous but misunderstood and under-represented. With a particular focus on lesbian figures, Kiran Millwood Hargrave's origin story for Dracula's brides in *The Deathless Girls* (2019), the portrayal of a lesbian relationship during World War II in *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* (2020) by Jane Healey, and selected stories from Kirsty Logan's short story collection, *Things We Say in the Dark* (2019) will be the central focus of this chapter. Logan's collection of short stories has been included in this thesis as the short story format is a key part of Gothic literature, which will be discussed further in the chapter. The 1900s saw the popular circulation of penny dreadfuls as well as the publication of short narratives by Elizabeth Gaskell, Sheridan Le Fanu, Edgar Allan Poe, and other such Gothic writers. Despite the constantly shifting cultural attitudes towards homosexuality, the use of private spaces is still a key element in the Gothic novel for the depiction of non-heteronormativity, as these contemporary Gothic novels illustrate.

The selected texts are a tightly focused collection of contemporary Gothic novels that have been published during and since 2008, a time of extreme shifts in

Western culture. The changing political landscape of the 2008 US election, the economic recession and the social and political extremes seen in Western society, particularly surrounding the continuous progression and regression of women's rights, LGBTQ+ acceptance, classism, and systemic racism, provide ample subject for the contemporary grand narrative of the Gothic novel. Whilst some contemporary Gothic writers have published modern rewrites of well-known Gothic works – *Melmoth* (2018) by Sarah Perry and *My Name is Monster* (2019) by Katie Hale for instance – the chosen authors have all produced new narratives written in the Gothic form. In this sense, the writers in this thesis can also be considered peripheral as well as experimental with the hybridised version of the Gothic. Rather than expanding the consideration of the Gothic through transmedia, this dissertation extends the discussion of literary texts and explores those whose works which have yet to be fully demonstrated as belonging to the Gothic when compared to more candidly marketed authors such as Sarah Waters or Neil Gaiman. Although the Gothic is a globalised genre in the twenty-first century, as Glennis Byron states in the introduction to *Globalgothic* (2013), the 'dead travel fast and, in our contemporary globalised world, so too does the gothic', the writers of the selected novels all fall under the category of Anglophonic Gothic: a mixture of British, American, and Australian authors.[26] The roots of these texts come from the traditional British Gothic but have been developed in conjunction with other common elements of American and Australian Gothic, as well as Postcolonial Gothic. Rather than being limited to texts from one particular nationality, this thesis will examine some instances of Anglophonic Gothic due to the cross-national influence the mode has had over the centuries.

Overall, this thesis will demonstrate that there is a viable and discernible return to the Gothic *novel* in the twenty-first century, which demonstrates a clear sense of literary inheritance from earlier key Gothic novels, both in style and form as well as in the concerns of its era which it explores. It will investigate twenty-first-century Gothic writers and their use of the grand narrative and responsive social

[26] Glennis Byron, 'Introduction' in *Globalgothic*, ed. by Glennis Byron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) pp.1-10 [p.1]

commentary, through the depiction of extreme events and characters, as is stereotypical and expected of Gothic fiction, whilst also examining the modification and experimentation of the genre to suit a modern audience. The evolution from the postmodern to the metamodern will be seen in the representation of post-irony, the use of the monstrous and the abstract as extremes of metaphorical importance rather than as elements of entertainment only. The central theme of identity, both communal and individual, will be investigated in each chapter as it is represented in the modern era. Each chapter will consider the metamodern nature of twenty-first-century Gothic, as well as identifying and analysing the postmodern aspects of historical re-conceptualisation and historiographic metafiction that have been reconvened for use in the mode's contemporary literary realisation.

Chapter One

Spinning the Hourglass: Unresolved Time in Contemporary Gothic

Time and narrative flow have always been two key concepts of the Gothic genre: central to many works in the genre are historical settings, the passage of time, and the upsetting of its linear progression as it is often linked to generational questions. In his discussion of generations and different time periods, Fred Botting notes in *Gothic* (1995):

> [g]enerations are subject to the crossing of temporal lines: an ancestor's crime threatens a family's status; immature desires upset social mores; an old misdeed tarnishes paternal respectability. In seeing one time and its values cross into another, both periods are disturbed.[1]

Horace Walpole famously set *The Castle of Otranto* in a time long-passed, claiming that the manuscript 'was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England'.[2] He goes on to state that the time-stamp for the narrative 'must have been between 1095, the æra [*sic*] of the first crusade, and 1243'.[3] The use of past time as a setting in the early Gothic has continued into the twenty-first century, as seen in the first two novels in this chapter and several others throughout the thesis. *The Castle of Otranto* also set the precedent for resolution at the end of the Gothic narrative, a desire to reach the happy ending that is expected in a romance, often seen as a Walpolean approach when mimicked in later works. However, this element is not as frequently achieved in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel, the metamodern awareness of the fictionality of happy and finite endings preventing the author from allowing their characters such resolutions, as demonstrated in this chapter. This illustrates the metamodern evolution of representing grand narratives: applying and modifying traditional literary formats for modern audiences and concerns. The hauntings caused by time in these texts demonstrate the post-irony *gravitas* of the metamodern Gothic novel.

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[1] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.3
[2] Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p.5
[3] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, p.5

One of the most important elements of Walpole's time-stamp is the air of uncertainty surrounding the exact framing of the text. In doing this, Walpole is able to create a disturbing element to the novel through the use of the uncanny. In his 1919 essay, Sigmund Freud defined the uncanny as 'that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar'.[4] When read as uncanny, temporality becomes an intrinsic property of Gothic literature – especially in its contemporary form – as it haunts the characters. Although hauntings are commonly identified with spectral figures, when the past collides with the present and events that should have concluded are repeated, recreating themselves and creating hauntings, they do not necessarily need to be represented by ghosts as the repetitive nature of the past is terrifying enough.

As Richard S. Albright writes, time in Gothic novels is often linked to the 'issue of identity, where that identity is figured in terms of one's relation to past generations'.[5] One particularly prominent example of this in early Gothic is Ann Radcliffe and her exploration of identity in Gothic narratives. Usually shown through secrets that connect the past to the present, in order to restore linear progression and firmly establish identities, the issue of the past must be resolved by the present-day characters. Joakim Wrethed observes that, in his discussion of Mark Z. Danielewski's experimental, postmodern Gothic text *House of Leaves* (2000), the 'novel does not even content itself with levelling any possible hierarchy of narratives and narrators […] in places [it] obliterates the distinction between the narrative's represented level and the temporality of the reading'.[6] Not only the narrative but also the physical presentation of Danielewski's novel lends itself to the distortion of temporality through its structure. What Wrethed recognises in Danielewski's text can also be found in many metamodern twenty-first-century Gothic novels: this thesis will demonstrate the fragile construct and unresolvable

[4] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth, 1919), pp. 217–256 [p. 219]
[5] Richard S. Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2009) p.15
[6] Joakim Wrethed, 'The Postmodern Genre' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) pp.1671-1693 [p.1679]

nature of time, and the Gothic's ability to cause disorder in temporality in order to examine social and cultural constructs.

In this chapter, three texts will be explored in terms of their narrative properties and representations of temporality. This chapter will consider Dale Bailey's *In The Night Wood* (2019) and the consequences of regressing to the past – both how present-day characters look to the past for answers as well as how they utilise it as a means of controlling the future. Bailey's novel reflects the more Walpolean approach to time found in early Gothic works, dealing with generational and personal secrets in order to come to an orderly, if ambiguous, resolution. *The Silent Companions* (2017) by Laura Purcell follows a similar format to *In The Night Wood* in terms of examining regressive temporality. However, Purcell experiments with the linear progression of her novel, jumping between three time periods, and does not follow the traditional trope of resolving the past through the present, forgoing happy endings for ambiguous ones. Where Bailey and Purcell use a more Walpolean structure for their texts, *The Dreamers* (2019) by Karen Thompson Walker utilises the long-standing connection between science-fiction and the Gothic, as seen in such works as *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) by H. G. Wells and Stephen King's *The Tommyknockers* (1987), to offer perhaps the most intriguing demonstration of abstract time. Written in the present tense and set during a pandemic, Walker's novel appears to stop time as the narrative continues, causing staggered disruptions through sleeping and dreams. In a contemporary progression from the early Gothic narratives, these novels offer an extremely metamodern outlook on temporality: neither rhyme nor reason is given to progression, there is no definitive resolution to be found, their ambiguity making time itself the most haunting concept of all.

In The Night Wood

In The Night Wood by Dale Bailey tells the story of the Haydens as they emigrate from the United States to Yorkshire. After the death of Lissa, their daughter, Erin inherits her family's ancestral home, and her husband, Charles, agrees to the move as his academic research is based on the work of his wife's ancestor and architect of the family home: Caedmon Hollow, who is infamous for having murdered his

daughter. As the characters battle guilt, depression and the mysterious figure of the Horned King, Bailey's novel investigates the manner in which time and narrative flow when the recurrent past is constantly haunting the present. The suspension of linear progression is uncanny in Bailey's novel as both the historical past and the more recently suppressed memories of trauma come crashing into the present, forcing the protagonists to seek out and resolve generational and personal secrets in order to return to correct chronological proceedings. As Botting notes, Gothic writers often adopted a more fluctuating perspective on time in their works, 'in which reality, time and consciousness were perceived to be fragmented, transient and in flux' but then reverted to a more recognisably comprehensive and sequential narrative when the past is settled.[7] Bailey's novel recapitulates the approach to time found in early Gothic works, utilising generational and personal secrets through the supernatural and the uncanny daughters of the Hollow family in an attempt to reach an orderly resolution.

Andrea Juranovszky notes that the cyclical nature of the Gothic novel 'causes the evocation of a highly active, even dramatic form of melancholy reverie'.[8] This trope of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century format has been passed down to its modern-day counterparts. Throughout *In The Night Wood*, Charles obsessively remarks upon the repetitive nature of time and the depressing replication of events. His fixation with the image of the 'Ouroboros', the self-consuming snake first depicted in Egyptian iconography, within the novel highlights the almost violent inevitability of human nature as it repeats itself through time, with the past continuously returning in the present whilst the present seeks a grotesque form of comfort in the past.[9] Constantly reiterating the ambiguity of the novel's setting, Charles speculates that time is 'cyclical, life perpetually blooming out of the lees of the past' (59). Charles understands the power of temporality and both the house and the Night Wood's ability to disconnect and rearrange time to

[7] Botting, *Gothic*, p.149

[8] Andrea Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop: A Study on Structures of Circularity in Gothic Fiction', *Inquiries Journal*, 6.5 (2014) < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

[9] Dale Bailey, *In The Night Wood* (London: HarperCollins Ltd, 2019) p.59. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

join it to another event – in his case, the loss of his daughter, Lissa, as it relates to the murder of Caedmon Hollow's daughter.

Charles demonstrates his understanding of his inability to escape past events throughout the novel, constantly feeling their effect on his present condition. This is encapsulated in his stream of consciousness after he tells Silva about his role in the death of his daughter:

> [w]hat if time was a snake that bit its own tail […] or a wheel grinding inexorably around the axis of fate? What if what was had been and will yet be again? What if you lived inside a story and the story had already been written? (183)

The concept of the story within a story – the contemporary format's recreation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic plots and subplots – and Charles' awareness emphasise both the cyclical structure of the novel as well as the sublime aura of the Night Wood as a setting beyond time. This use of the recurrent narrative structure allows the past to enter the present and the topic of generational and personal past secrets to be further explored.

In their attempt to escape their personal past and grief, Charles and Erin enter the setting of the generational past – Hollow House and the Night Wood. As Juranovszky points out in his discussion of Gothic literature, the 'aim of such a temporal confusion is to evoke a disturbing sense of backward-pointing progress, one which allows for a reconsideration as well as a resolution of the past.'[10] Despite moving to England, the American couple fail to separate themselves from their old, tragic narrative, and instead become entwined with family secrets that force them to face their own. This crossing over of narratives allows for a demonstration of each stage of the past and present in Bailey's text and how they intersect with the progression of the narrative structure.

The representation of time in *In The Night Wood*, while Gothic, also draws on fairy tales. As seen in the works of Angela Carter, for example *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) in which the author rewrites various fairy tales

[10] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

with many Gothic motifs, the Gothic and fairy tales have long been grouped together. Linda Kraus Worsley comments on the link between the Gothic and fairy tales, stating that '[f]airy-tale motifs and structures have been seen to inform a wide range of Gothic novels and films ranging from *Jane Eyre* to road slasher movies'.[11] Phrases such as '*Once upon a time*' (8, 75, 169, and 195) are regularly repeated throughout Bailey's novel as both a parody of the fairy tale structure and a comment on the passage of time. This theme of repetition is manifested in the Hollow daughters, all remarkably similar in their appearances. Bailey utilises the Gothic trope of doubling in both the narrative and the characters in order to explore the past's link to the present, emphasising the imagery of the Ouroboros. Bailey's novel is consistently presented in the format of a fairy tale within a fairy tale, a structure further explored in relation to *All the Murmuring Bones* in Chapter Four. Although the phrase '*Once upon a time*' traditionally refers to the past, by maintaining the vagueness of the text's era, the story takes on a timeless quality, as if the narrative could take place at any point, running parallel to events that have happened over the generations of Hollows who have lived at Hollow House.

Bailey emphasises the enduring nature of the fairy tale format in the tale written by Caedmon Hollow, which is told in tandem with the story of Charles and Erin Hayden. The recurrent imagery of a young girl being pursued by a male figure – a common trope in many early Gothic works – in both the fairy tale and the main narrative re-emphasises the secret loss that haunts both the Hollow family and Charles and Erin personally. The fairy tale at play in Bailey's novel is closely linked to the relationship between fathers and daughters, a key Gothic theme that stems from early works such as the aforementioned *The Castle of Otranto* as well as Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). In her text on the importance of the father-daughter relationship as it affects the development of the female identity in society, Sue Sharpe writes that

[11] Linda Kraus Worsley, 'The Horror! Gothic Horror Literature and Fairy Tales: The Case of Der Räuberbräutigam', *Colloquia Germanica*, 42.1 (2009) pp.67-80 [p.67]

> [d]aughters belong to fathers twice over, as children and as females […] Although this is no longer a prevalent concern in British society, it is still tangled up in male attitudes to women.[12]

Sharpe's text reiterates the point that, whilst these traditional values are often set aside in contemporary society, they are still a part of the human psyche, embedded by centuries of practice and tradition. As Diane Hoeveler notes in her discussion of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and family trauma, 'to be a gothic daughter [is to be] traumatized, wounded, and deserted […] in a man's world'.[13] The use of this Gothic fairy tale format provides an abstract manner in which to observe the past and the present side by side, demonstrating the inevitable time loop created by generations of unresolved issues between the fathers and daughters of the Hollow family.

Where Charles uses the fantastic in order to create an escape from his narrative, Erin is forced to deal with her grief more directly, using pharmaceuticals – the discussion of drugs in the Gothic will be explored further in Chapter Two – in order to cope with the incomprehensible loss of her only child. This grief becomes her reality: 'Lissa Hayden was dead. Had been dead for an entire year, would be dead for the entire span of the year to come, and for the year after that, and for all the years of Erin's life, and more' (85). Here, Erin becomes obsessed with linear progression as she sees how she must continue forward through time whereas Lissa's life has stopped, but she cannot bear to leave her daughter behind, continually drawing her image in order to keep her in the present.

Unlike Erin and her dependency on the numbing effect of drugs to escape her narrative, Charles utilises the supernatural to escape, momentarily, the progression of time. In her exploration of sanctuaries and time in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Karen Grumberg notes that the 'gothic setting […] offers potential victims both protection and paralysis by keeping a destructive reality – marked by the passing of time – just beyond its walls'.[14] Where Grumberg discusses the use of

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[12] Sue Sharpe, *Fathers and Daughters* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.85

[13] Diane Hoeveler, 'Fantasy, Trauma, and Gothic Daughters: *Frankenstein* as Therapy', *Prism(s): Essays in Romanticism*, 8 (2000) pp.7-28 [p.8]

[14] Karen Grumberg, 'Gothic Temporalities and Insecure Sanctuaries in Lea Goldberg's *The Lady in the Castle* and Edgar Allen Poe's "Masque of the Red Death"', *Comparative Literature*, 68.4 (2016) pp.408-426 [p.410]

castles as nineteenth-century Gothic settings, this protection and paralysis as created by such settings is also used in twenty-first-century Gothic. Within the Eorl Wood, the forest visible in reality, is the Night Wood, the realm that exists outside of time. When Charles enters the grove at the centre of the Eorl Wood, he finds a sense of peace in the separation from temporality: 'the absolute and eternal present, free of past guilt and future anguish' (139). This removal from the linear progression detaches Charles from the emotive response he is compelled to feel as a result of the personal historical events in his timeline. As the novel progresses and more of the past is revealed to the reader, it becomes clear that the Night Wood becomes a haven for Charles to escape both the secrets of the Hollow family and the trauma of his daughter's death. Juranovszky notes that the recycling of time in Gothic literature is 'not a tool of progress, but that of anti-progress, and what it presents are not mere obstacles in the way of succession, but déjà vu-like events that […] prevent the arrival of the future'.[15] Similarly to the disrupted narratives that will be explored in *The Dreamers*, Charles becomes suspended in an 'eternal present' (141), freeing him of the social constructs of the grieving process he continually denies himself, due to the guilt he feels over the loss of his daughter.

The wildness of the forest – '[t]here were no walls here, only primeval forest: trees and rocks and the eternal return of newborn green' (141) – offers an almost religious rebirth to Charles, as if the possibility of rewriting history, and thus assuaging his guilt, is achievable. This treatment of nature as an escape or sanctuary in which to hide from reality is an early Gothic concept seen in works of Romantic and Gothic writers, for example, William Wordsworth and Ann Radcliffe, which contemporary writers such as Bailey adapt to the twenty-first century. Andrew Smith and William Hughes state that often in the Gothic mode, '[n]ature fails to signify as anything other than a type of blankness which also demonstrates a crisis of representation'.[16] Like the paper on which Erin continually draws her daughter and the Horned King, keeping herself immersed in her grief, the Night Wood is

[15] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]
[16] Andrew Smith and William Hughes, *Ecogothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) p.2

Charles' blank canvas on which, through his avoidance of past grief in order to progress through the present, he attempts to redefine his identity by retreating from his own temporality.

In keeping with Juranovszky's definition of recycled time as 'anti-progress', Charles regresses into a childlike state when he enters the supernatural Night Wood that is hidden within the Eorl Wood:

> [l]ike a child in an enchanted forest from some half-forgotten tale, he emerged into a beautiful glade of green grass where stood a lone oak, regal and old beyond reckoning. That sense of contentment, of being anchored in the eternal present, once again suffused him. (141)

The constant use of the imagery of the innocent child and the eternalising of the present moment – either in reference to the deceased Hollow daughters or the main character's regression to childhood – supports Botting's statement on time in the Gothic: 'consciousness is considered fleeting; its sense of time and life is accelerated'.[17] By untethering his conscious from reality and allowing time to become an unstructured concept in his mind, Charles finds himself attempting to reverse time in the Night Wood, reverting back to a childish mentality as he looks at the forest as a place of suspended chronology. Here, he can enter a world separate from the reality where his grief and guilt live in the present. This provides him with a perfect mechanism to escape from his sorrow, comparable to his wife's reliance on pharmaceuticals. However, there is a certain irony to Charles' peace in the Night Wood as it is the site of trauma for the Hollow family and its doppelganger daughters.

Despite the sense of wonderment Charles finds in his escape into the Night Wood, he is mindful of the sublime nature of the forest within a forest and the danger that lies in that liminality. The sublimity of nature is a common trait in eco-Gothic, a genre examined in further detail in Chapter Three, that allows for the exploration of man's relationship with the natural world and the dangers it poses. Each time Charles enters the wood, 'he had the sense of stepping into a world

[17] Botting, *Gothic*, p.154

infinitely more ancient, and stranger, than his own' (163). Whilst he is in awe of the Night Wood, he is also cognizant of the dangers of the otherworldly place, referring to it as strange as he is aware – at least subconsciously – that this uncanny place exists within but not as a part of his reality. His fears about his means of escape from his own linear progression are confirmed by a local resident of Yorkshire, Fergus Gill, who tells him:

> [m]y gran used to tell me that there was a forest inside the forest […] a place that was not this place but separated from it, as it were, by a curtain in the air […] You could lift your foot in the Eorl Wood and set it down in the Night Wood, and then […] the curtain might fall closed behind you and you would find yourself, in a manner of speaking, lost. (172-3)

Not unlike the Daylight Gate in Winterson's novella explored in Chapter Five, the Night Wood exists as a place of liminality in time and allows for not only the suspension of time but the ability for time to be lost on a different plane. Gill only continues to confirm Charles' fears when he warns him that '[t]ime does not run in the other wood as time runs in ours' (175). This Gothic doubling of time and events provided by the Night Wood allows for the transgression of temporal boundaries, the past and the present are able to meet as the recurrent secrets of the Hollow family unravel throughout the novel.

When he first enters the Night Wood, Charles is put at peace by its timelessness and revels in the chances of 'possibility yet unmade' (59). However, when events are put into motion at the climax of the novel and he must save Lorna, Silva's daughter, from her own father, Cillian Harris, the 'cosmic wheel turned, and Charles Hayden was afraid' (168). As understood by David Punter and Glennis Byron, what makes repetition within a Gothic text truly Gothic is the 'sense of imminent doom that haunts so many characters […] an added sense of fate […] foreknowledge of their own future'.[18] Charles fears the uncanny repetition of the past, that Cillian will be responsible for his own daughter's death, just as Charles and Caedmon Hollow were for theirs. He also fears time moving forward and being forced to deal with his grief and guilt over Lissa by witnessing the playing out of

[18] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) p.284

events with Lorna and the Horned King. Charles is made to choose his greatest fear: either the repetition of past events and therefore a timeless existence which he cannot escape, or the acceptance of his daughter's death and living with his guilt for the rest of his narrative.

Linked to the timeless setting of the Night Wood is the seemingly timeless figure of Cernunnos, the Horned King. A key feature of many Gothic novels is the representation of objects that lack a voice, often using mythical or fantastical figures to achieve this. By providing such objects with a conscience, the Gothic writer is able to comment on and discuss relevant socio-political issues. In the case of *In The Night Wood*, the pagan god Cernunnos becomes the embodiment of the forest and the natural world. Taken from pagan lore, Cernunnos was the Horned King, a god of the natural world who embodied nature and animals, as well as abundance. The continual cycle of events in the Gothic demonstrates time and repetition to be 'a cosmic force, unleashing itself on a preordained line of endlessness'.[19] The Horned King is a twenty-first-century representation of this, as he attaches himself to the Hollow family, ensuring the death of the daughters at each stage in time and therefore the continued recurrence of events throughout the family's narrative.

In his article, 'Gothic Sublimity' (1985), David B. Morris states that the 'past interpenetrates the present time, as if events were never entirely the unique and unrepeated product of human choices, but rather the replication of an unknown or buried pattern'.[20] Bailey uses the uncanniness of the Horned King to this effect throughout the novel, making this supernatural figure both the inevitable force behind the repeated violent acts of the Hollow family as well as the veil to cover the unresolved past. The first mention of Cernunnos in Bailey's text is in Charles' remembrance of the first time he read Caedmon Hollow's fairy tale as a child, after which he dreamed 'a hallucinatory montage of great trees […] a terrified child, a horned king, his pale horse' (9). This cursory overview of the tale that

[19] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]
[20] David B. Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity', *New Literary History*, 16.2 (1985) pp.299-319 [p.304]

becomes central to Charles' life, illustrates what Morris refers to as the 'replication of an unknown or buried pattern', that the stories and legends of the past continue to influence the present, a concept this thesis will explore further in Chapter Four. Whilst divine figures of mythology were invented to explain the existence of the unexplainable and provided a belief system for many thousands of years, these characters now act as devices for horror films and sensationalist stories, providing entertainment through the imaginative horrors created by these fictional beings and gods.

Whilst used as a sensational figure of horror, Cernunnos is also a representative of the suspension of time throughout *In The Night Wood*. Despite his general dismissal of Cernunnos as nothing more than a fairy tale, Charles does show a certain respect and reverence for the deity when he encounters his image or sees him in the flesh. When exploring the wall that separates the house from the forest, Charles finds a depiction of the god on an iron gate:

> [t]he rust-pocked iron had been wrought into the semblance of a face: cheeks of stylized leaves, narrow eyes, branches curling up like horns to entangle themselves in intimate scrollwork. Cernunnos again, older than Christianity or the Romans who had foisted it upon the Celts, who had held this land for five hundred years before the Romans came. (59)

In her work on Celtic myth, Amanda J. Green notes that, whilst Cernunnos is an important figure as the 'stagantlered [*sic*] god, lord of animals, nature and abundance', there is a little-known about his original Celtic lore.[21] The awe with which Charles treats Cernunnos in the text shows that, at least subconsciously, Charles believes in the eternal nature of the god's power and fears him as much as he respects him, recognising the presence of the past in the modern day through this god-like figure.

Although the figure of the Horned King is supposedly no more than a fairy tale designed to cover the violent sins of the Hollow family, there is an element of the unresolved that continues to surround the Night Wood and Cernunnos' presence in the novel. In Gothic literature, there is often what Christine Berthin

[21] Amanda J. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 2003) p.147

describes as a 'distortion of chronology' as a result of the 'haunting [that] undermines the idea of succession because the ghostly past that inhabits the present taints and blurs its limits'.[22] Cernunnos, as this distortion of chronology, leaves the main characters with a sense of being haunted even after the events of the novel appear to be settled. With the truth of how Caedmon Hollow murdered his own daughter, and Charles accepting that he is responsible for the accidental drowning of his own, made known to the reader, a clear Walpolean resolution of the past could be achieved. Nevertheless, the supernatural depiction of the pagan god haunts Charles for the duration of the novel, fantasy constantly infiltrating reality. Hollow House and the Night Wood encompass this liminality. Partway through the novel, Charles shows an awareness of the deeper connection between man and the supernatural in the space where the two worlds meet, the wall surrounding Hollow House: '[h]e pressed his hand flat against it, half expecting to feel something, the thrum of the secret powers of the earth, ley lines or echoes of Neolithic magic' (57). However, he goes on to dismiss the connection as 'New Age nonsense. He felt nothing' (57) and once more attempts to distance himself from the progression of the narrative as well as the haunting presence of Cernunnos.

In the end, the true identity of Cernunnos is revealed: 'it was no king after all, it was only a man. It was only Cillian Harris, his face broken and pale, and empty of everything but sorrow' (213). The killing of the uncanny figure of Cernunnos, who shares his face with a human character in the novel, demonstrates time's eternal loop and the need to resolve the past in order to restore the present. Just as Juranovszky comments, the 'Gothic narrative is, at its heart, a narrative of breaking the infinite cycle: a desperate attempt on the part of the protagonist to escape from the loop'.[23] Perhaps the most terrifying issue we see Charles and Erin perform after the death of Cernunnos/Cillian is shielding Lorna from the spectacle of her father's death, assuring her '[i]t's okay, Lorna, it's over now' (213). Despite the good intention to shield Lorna from the trauma of seeing her dead father, Charles and

[22] Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p.67

[23] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

Erin also hide the death of Cernunnos and the past. In doing so, a new generation is being made ignorant of the familial secrets that caused the recurrent events. By saving Lorna, Charles and Erin break one cycle of trauma, by shielding the child from loss of her father, but they potentially create a new inevitable recycling of time for the generations to come.

Through the imagery of the eternal present represented by the Night Wood and the figure of the Horned King, *In The Night Wood* is able to consider the effects of regressing to the past. Bailey's twenty-first-century novel reflects the more Walpolean approach to time found in early Gothic works, dealing with both generational and personal secrets as well as hauntings, in order to come to an orderly resolution. However, his approach to the cyclical nature of time and narrative creates a suspension of linear progression and halts the resolution of the past. In doing so, the novel encompasses a more contemporary view of time, that linear progression becomes ambiguous when the past continually haunts the present, and narrative development cannot always easily continue.

The Silent Companions

Laura Purcell's debut novel, *The Silent Companions*, explores the effects of the deconstruction of chronology on the narrative flow of a twenty-first-century Gothic text. Time and space are married concepts in this novel as, although the narrative takes place in three distinct moments of time, two of these are located in the same house, a convergence of the generational trauma discussed above. The majority of the text tells the story of Elsie Bainbridge after she arrives at the family estate of her deceased husband, Rupert, with her cousin-in-law and companion, Sarah, in 1865. Through the journals of Rupert's ancestor, Anne Bainbridge, the ancestral past from 1635 is told in tandem with Elsie's story as she discovers the family secrets and the silent companions – human portraits painted on self-standing wooden boards – that were collected by Anne. However, the present day of this novel is 1866, where Elsie writes the secret events of the previous year in a journal at the mental asylum where she is detained. Although Elsie is only a marital relative of the Bainbridges, she is still affected by their familial secrets as she is pregnant with her deceased husband's child. As Wrethed notes with Danielewski's *House of*

Leaves, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Purcell also utilises the narrative flow of the text to upset the expected structure of a novel, forcing the protagonists to remember and process the past, both the personal and the generational, as it affects their present.

We are first introduced to the ancestral Bainbridges in passing by a minor character, Mr. Underwood: '[t]here's been a long feud between the village and the family – dating back, I think, all the way to the Civil War. They believe one of our ladies was a witch, or some other silly thing'.[24] While in the recent past, Mr. Underwood dismisses the belief that there is witchcraft in the Bainbridge bloodline as nothing more than peasant superstition, the passages told from Anne's perspective confirm that there is indeed magick in the family. Her husband, Josiah Bainbridge, fondly referred to Anne as '[m]y little prophetess' (124), not partaking in the fear of magick common in the seventeenth century, but rather accepting his wife's powers. The gift of foresight lends itself to the representation of temporality in this novel, as past characters can see the future, either disrupting or ensuring the outcome before it has happened. In this manner, the effect of the generational past on recent memory becomes inevitable, and the present-day narrative will struggle to reach a resolution so long as the past is haunting it.

The generational past is a key element of *The Silent Companions*, where the recurring events are comparable to *In The Night Wood* and the cyclical nature of the Hollow family. However, where the same events continually repeat themselves in Bailey's novel, Purcell uses the past as a more haunting presence by bringing characters of the past into the present day. This is shown through the character of Henrietta Maria (nicknamed Hetta), the mute daughter of Anne in the seventeenth century. Jerrold E. Hogle claims that, in terms of trauma, the Gothic as a whole is 'inherently about deep-seated […] traumas that are intimated and yet masked behind hyperbolic symbols of them'.[25] Through the disruption of the timeline, Purcell is able to achieve the implication of familial trauma hidden behind

[24] Laura Purcell, *The Silent Companions* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018) p.79. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[25] Jerrold E. Hogle. 'History, Trauma and the Gothic in Contemporary Western Fictions' in *The Gothic World*, ed. Glennis Byron & Dale Townshend (London: Routledge, 2014) pp.72-81 [p.73]

supernatural hyperbole. The intertwining of the trauma of Anne and Hetta's timeline with Elsie's allows for the unresolved past to come to light and therefore suspend the progress of the present-day narrative.

Anne's witchcraft is the main cause of the Bainbridge's generational secrets and therefore the distortion of their family's chronology. In 1635, Anne and her husband exclude Hetta from the royal visit due to her disability as a mute, leading her to murder the household. Anne's following act of murder-suicide then creates the haunting of the silent companions that interfere with the narrative flow and progression of the present day. Unlike the Device and Chattox families in Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, who use witchcraft to protect themselves and exact revenge on the patriarchy, there is no malice in Anne's magick. However, her witchcraft unintentionally creates 'a monster' when she realises that Hetta has murdered the household. Whilst Josiah is referencing the diamond necklace that he gifts to Anne for the king's visit – '[t]his will go down to our descendants […] Every great family needs an heirloom' (124) – Anne's trepidation can be considered a prophecy of the cursed and broken heritage that seems to haunt the Bainbridge family in the form of the silent companions.

Anne's use of witchcraft is best seen in her youngest child and only daughter, Hetta, whom she used magick to conceive, beginning the secrets of the generational past that haunt Elsie throughout the novel. In extracts of her journal, which is discovered and read by Sarah, Anne's mad desire for a daughter is manifested in her use of witchcraft and the use of a 'tisane brewed under a full moon' (104) to ensure a pregnancy. The haunting familial secrets in *The Silent Companions* relate back to Anne's despair and yearning for a daughter after the loss of her sister. The reader learns that Anne claims Hetta 'is a miracle! The midwives said I would never bear another child' (140). Despite this, many characters in the seventeenth-century narrative consider the girl to be possessed by a demon due to the fact that she was mute. Anne believes her husband blames her for this, stating that 'it is my fault that Hetta's tongue did not grow. My womb failed to nurture a complete child. There was something lacking; either in me, or the mixture' (140). The trauma of motherhood and labour that both Anne and Elsie feel, represents the

cyclical nature of life and rebirth, reflecting the enforced return of the traumatic events throughout the novel.

Although she succeeds in producing a daughter, the child is born deformed as she lacks a functional tongue. Anne notes her thoughts in a journal, with Purcell revealing extracts throughout the text to the reader, in which she writes of her fears that she "played God" and has caused harm, though she is unsure of what that harm is until the end of her journal entries. Several times in the novel, Anne refers to 'the mixture' and notes that '[i]t was *I* who scorched my fingertips with witchcraft; I who mixed the draught and took God's power into my own hands' (185). When she realises that Hetta is responsible for the deaths of all the servants, her worst fears are realised: '[t]hrough my potions and spells, I called forth something wicked. I *created* her. I am worse than a witch' (305). By allowing her obsession to fuel her witchcraft into creating Hetta, Anne accidentally curses her family, resulting in the trauma being passed down through the companions to Elsie and Sarah, their minds also affected by the malady.

Women in early modern times were often accused of witchcraft for using medicinal herbs, as the practice of female healers was considered unnatural or even satanic. Those who performed such a role were, according to Paula McBride, considered 'cunning folk, practitioners of folk medicine and healing […] prescribing charms, undertaking cursing and helping people with their problems and illnesses', which repeatedly lead to their persecution by patriarchal authorities for violating the religious and social customs of the seventeenth century, a topic discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.[26] Although they could not hold the profession of a doctor, it was considered acceptable to be a midwife and care for pregnant women and children. However, even midwives could be treated as unnatural for their medical knowledge and use of medicinal herbs, causing many to exist at the margins of society. For daring to take on the role traditionally belonging to men by developing a profession, female healers often worked in secret. By carrying out acts of healing and other banned practices in the seventeenth century, Anne is creating

[26] Paula McBride, 'Witchcraft in the East Midlands 1517-1642', *Midland History*, 44.2 (2019) pp.222-237 [p.226]

a generational secret as the outcome of her witchcraft is Hetta's spirit which possesses, supernaturally, the silent companions in the nineteenth century.

Generational secrets may be caused intentionally by ancestors, triggering a ripple effect down their bloodline to their descendants – as demonstrated in *In The Night Wood* and the deal between Cernunnos and the Hollow patriarchs sacrificing their daughters – and yet the disruption of the present narrative can be caused unintentionally by someone in the past: the sins of the father being reflected on the descendants is a common motif in early Gothic, most notably in *The Castle of Otranto*. *The Silent Companions* narrates the impact of the creation of an accidental secret by Anne, as, although there is no direct blood link between herself and Elsie, there is a genetic link between Anne and Elsie's unborn child, binding the Victorian protagonist to the secrets of the Bainbridge's Caroline ancestors and causing the hauntings to enact themselves upon the mother. Anne's anguish-filled desire to bear a daughter and to continue to fulfil her role as a wife is an issue that has been unwittingly passed onto Elsie. From early on in the novel, the reader is aware that Elsie has no desire to become a mother – after falling from her carriage, she notes that '[s]he wasn't hurt – she had no concerns for the baby' (14). Her unwillingness to become a mother is continued throughout the novel, the traumas of her own childhood emphasised after seeing the nursery in The Bridge: 'for Elsie there was nothing but fear […] Fear *of* the baby' (66). However, having no choice but to carry her child, the never-ending cycle of motherhood and childbearing becomes an analogy for the rebirth of trauma and secrets into the next generation.

Whilst *In The Night Wood* utilises the Hollow daughters as a form of doubling, commenting on their uncannily similar appearances, Purcell's *The Silent Companions* offers a different approach to the concept of the double. Rather than human doppelgangers, Purcell employs inanimate objects as uncanny in their appearance to the living, used in a similar manner as the painting in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Purcell introduces the reader to the dummy board figures – wooden companions, of which one haunts Elsie with its terrifying likeness to her childhood self. Companions were a Dutch invention, self-standing wooden boards painted with human portraits, a form of interior decoration that has become

unfashionable over the centuries, though they were possibly created as a decorative joke. Clive Edwards speculates on their possible uses:

> [d]ummy boards […] have been described as Aunt Sallies for husbands to beat their wives vicariously, targets for firing practice, burglary protection for vacant houses, doorstops, fire screens […] and, the most likely interpretation, as "silent companions" or presences in empty spaces.[27]

As Edwards states, the most likely use for the companions was that they may have been designed to create a warming presence for household guests, filling spacious rooms, or acting as sentinels of a vacant house. However, Purcell turns her silent companions to more sinister, Gothic purposes.

The first companion Elsie encounters is designed to look like a young girl, an uncanny likeness of the protagonist when she was a child: '[s]he was staring into the face of the child she had been: the girl with her youth ripped out' (71). This doppelganger haunts Elsie throughout the novel, until she is finally able to admit the sins of her childhood – killing her abusive father and smothering her ailing and mad mother, all to protect her brother, Jolyon, from suffering the same abuses she had. However, Sarah sees the doppelgänger as a likeness of her deceased cousin Rupert, causing Elsie's fear of the child growing inside her and her impending motherhood to come to the forefront: '[*s*]*he looks like me and Rupert*. Her heart seized. Was this what her baby would look like?' (72). Motherhood and the trauma of childbirth is often depicted in Gothic fiction alongside representation of the female body: 'motherhood requires a self-sacrifice that erodes identity, even while what is horrifying is the child's sense of developing and asserting identity […] the mother and child are frozen in a potentially self-destructive relationship'.[28] The relationship between Elsie and her unborn child represents her fear of the recurrence of the past in her child if the child looks like her; the endless continuation of the unresolved past.

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[27] Clive Edwards, 'Dummy Board Figures as Images of Amusement and Deception in Interiors, 1660-1800', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 10.1 (2002-2003) pp.74-97 [p.74]

[28] Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.9

The Silent Companions also combines the doppelgangers this chapter has explored in *In The Night Wood* with the notion of trauma memory, as Juranovszky examines in his article: 'Gothic temporal loops play a key part in the genre's endeavors to establish literary sites of trauma reenactment'.[29] Upon Hetta's death, the companion in the form of the young girl soaked in her blood, and when they 'absorbed it […] The evil moved into them' (310). Juranovszky observes that 'transformation is especially likely to emerge once, within the Gothic tale, the subject engages in any kind of an escape plan to subvert the trancelike trap of endless repetitions'.[30] However, Purcell turns the transformation back on her protagonist, using the transference of the generational secrets from Anne and Hetta to the wooden figurines in order to keep Elsie trapped in the distorted chronology and halt any progress she makes in confronting her personal past.

Where the Hollow daughters are reborn in exact images of each other to highlight the cyclical inevitability of their fates at the hands of their generational secrets, the companions of Purcell's text are carrying Hetta's past trauma for her. Holding onto the memory of the suffering they witnessed and bringing it forward into the present day, the companions continue to distort the narrative's chronology to allow the past, represented by Hetta's spirit, to gain control of the present. The curse of the companions is achieved, as Sarah receives a splinter from Hetta's companion which she cannot remove, embedding the past in her very skin rather than just her ancestry. This further emphasises that renewal and recycling of trauma memory as an eternal time loop, constantly returning in order to influence the lives of the present-day descendants. The spectral presence of the past in the present-day narrative as dictated by inheritance in twenty-first-century Gothic is a concept adapted from canonical texts – consider the giant ghost of *The Castle of Otranto* – demonstrating the issues of establishing an identity, either linked to or purposefully separated from previous generations.

[29] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]
[30] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

Where many of the texts discussed in this thesis examine the link between the generational past and heredities, for example Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* and the inherited trait of *pica* analysed in Chapter Four, *The Silent Companions* deals with another inherited trait: that of female hysteria. Towards the end of the novel, after all the trauma Elsie faces, she reveals the truth of events to her brother Jolyon, but he believes she has been hallucinating due to hysteria: '[y]ou are so brave that I often forget you are a member of the fairer sex. You were not built to withstand these things' (235), expressing the accepted belief of the Victorian era in which the narrative is set. Jolyon is quick to assert that Elsie is more likely to be insane than telling the truth, expressing his fear that she has inherited their mother's madness – 'she was our mother, Elsie, and these things are hereditary' (236). Jolyon chooses to believe that his sister is hereditarily predisposed to madness as, in his mind, her version of the narrative is not explicable or acceptable in his reality.

This perspective is seen in other male characters of Purcell's novel, most eloquently put by Elsie's doctor, Dr. Shepherd: 'it does seem to run in families, I have observed, particularly through the female line. Hysteria – womb to womb. Diseased blood will out' (154-5). Emma Domínguez-Rué states that, it was common in Victorian practice for doctors to warn their female patients about unnatural behaviour and fighting their gender roles: '[a]s women's ovaries presumably controlled their lives and their behavior […] doctors urged mothers to remind their daughters that any deviation from their "natural" and legitimate functions as wives and mothers could ruin their health forever'.[31] Purcell's twenty-first-century reflection on the nineteenth-century ideology of female hysteria as an inherited issue demonstrates the enforcement of the generational past on the present, portraying it as an inevitable recurrence throughout time, with no hope of a resolution.

The Victorian era saw many breakthroughs in the world of medical science, however mental health was an area sorely misunderstood. The general consensus

[31] Emma Domínguez-Rué, 'Madwomen in the Drawing Room: Female Invalidism in Elizabeth Glasgow's Gothic Stories', *Journal of American Studies*, 38.3 (2004) pp.425-438 [p.425]

of the age was that a 'disease of the brain' could be seen in the body and so 'anatomists were always eager to get hold of the corpses of insane young women' in order to further explore issues regarding female insanity.[32] In the exploration of mental health, '[m]edical students examined the breast tissue, fallopian tubes, womb, sexual organs, and brain condition for signs of mental incapacity', reducing the complexity of the female psyche to gender and sex-based issues.[33] Gothic texts of the twenty-first century, including *The Silent Companions*, allegorise female mental health as an issue of the generational past, often emblematic of the mistreatment and devaluing of women by the patriarchy as nothing more than hysterical, as well as providing a comment on the evolution of mental health treatment. The issues surrounding mental health and the inheritance of neurological issues is summarised by Jolyon when he discusses his and Elsie's parents: '[y]ou cannot help it. They are always with us, in our blood, in our very being. Whether we like it or not' (237), offering the perspective that the past will inevitably haunt the present day, and the cyclical nature of events will always affect the descendant.

Purcell's novel not only explores the distortion of the narrative through genetic hauntings and the infiltration of the past via the supernatural, but it also uses Gothic spatiality, particularly in places of suspended time. Similar to the Night Wood in Bailey's text and the house in Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (to be discussed in Chapter Five), the nursery in The Bridge has seemingly been maintained in a pristine condition, as if time froze in this room whilst the rest of the house fell apart from disuse. Elsie discovers the nursery as she explores the house, noting its unspoiled state: '[a] child might have played there only yesterday […] The flower-patterned paper showed no signs of age' (65). However, when she discusses the room with Mrs. Holt, the housekeeper shows her the real state of the nursery which becomes the focal point of the house in which time clashes. Upon unlocking the door once again, Elsie finds that the 'airy, perfectly manicured room had

[32] Elizabeth T. Hurren, ''Abnormalities and deformities': the dissection and interment of the insane poor, 1832-1929', *History of Psychiatry*, 23.1 (2012) pp.65-77 [p.68]
[33] Hurren, ''Abnormalities and deformities': the dissection and interment of the insane poor, 1832-1929', pp.65-77 [p.68]

perished […] The shape of the crib endured, but the delicate draperies were moth-eaten and stained' (82). Both the house and the people within it are unable to let go of the past, haunted by events that took place either decades or centuries ago.

By holding onto past traumas, Purcell's Gothic house acts as a metamodern setting, breaking the boundaries of time, pulling the past into the present and vice versa. In doing so, the temporality of the characters is disrupted, unbalancing their mentality as their personal past and the past of their ancestors amalgamate into one. This is best seen when Elsie and Sarah discover the first silent companion in the attic, mirroring Mrs Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. Elsie immediately fears the figure, not only because it reminds her partially of Rupert, but also because the 'face before her eyes was her own, yet she felt no kinship with it' (71). Whilst the physical presence of the silent companion represents Elsie's fear of the past that haunts the Bainbridge family line and therefore her unborn child, she is more afraid of the appearance of the companion as it forces her to remember her personal history and engage with past traumas. This fear of past trauma hinders the progression of Elsie's narrative until she is able to break the link between herself and the Bainbridges via the burning of The Bridge and the companions at the end of the novel, not unlike the burning of Thornfield Hall in Brontë's text.

By looking back to earlier Female Gothic narratives, Albright discusses the 'protagonist's prolonged suspension between memory and expectation in an extended, "unruptured" present' in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), considering the effect that suspended time has upon the protagonist's reality, much like the 'eternal present' described in Bailey's novel.[34] This concept can be clearly seen in *The Silent Companions*. Elsie is caught between both her personal memory and the generational memory of the Bainbridges – recorded in Anne's journals – causing a lack of progression in her present. The only progress to be seen in her timeline is the maturation of the foetus in her womb, a singular piece of evidence that time is still moving forward. This concept is shared with Walker's

[34] Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, p.32

The Dreamers and the child in Rebecca's womb that continues to develop even whilst Rebecca herself is "frozen" in sleep – a point of discussion later in this chapter.

The freezing of time in the Bainbridge's family house is mirrored in Elsie's time at the asylum where she writes of the year spent at The Bridge. Unable to face her past which has rendered her mute, just as the character of Hetta is made mute by her mother's witchcraft, Elsie is forced to remove herself from the timeline and reimagine the events as a story, writing in the third person, once again breaking the flow of a narrative that is expected to progress in a linear fashion. The breaking of chronology's boundaries is manifested at the end of the novel, when the mute Elsie sees her cousin-in-law, Sarah – now possessed by Hetta's spirit – for the final time and her old companion exclaims that '[a]fter all these years, I have finally found my voice' (359). It appears as though Hetta has used her own witchcraft not only to possess Sarah through the splinter she received from the silent companions, but also to take both Sarah and Elsie's voices for her own. The phrasing of '[a]fter all these years' reminds the reader that it is not just a case of Sarah speaking up about the events that took place at The Bridge, but of Hetta regaining her lost years after being both mute and murdered, transgressing the barriers of time in order to achieve such a feat. This also leads to the inability to resolve the timeline, the past having found a permanent foothold in the protagonist's present, ensuring the recurrence of past trauma and the continued disruption of the narrative.

The Silent Companions, although in many ways a traditionally styled Gothic novel, develops the trope of time and narrative for a twenty-first-century audience, utilising the neo-Victorian style that will be examined further in Chapter Two. The generational past in Purcell's novel is mainly hereditary in nature, prescribing the recycling of the past into the present through the trauma of motherhood and a predisposition to maladies that continually recur through the bloodline. Similarly to *In The Night Wood*, *The Silent Companions* considers regressive temporality and the impact of irresolvable past issues on the present day, as well as the continual resurgence of past traumas. Although Elsie has admitted and confronted her past sins and the traumas formed in her personal past, the generational past trauma is

continued via the possessed Sarah. Through the experimentation of the linear progression within the novel, Purcell does not follow the early Gothic trope of resolving the past with the present but rather follows the metamodern pattern of a lack of resolution, leaving an ambiguous end to the text, in a similar fashion to *The Dreamers*.

The Dreamers

The Gothic and science-fiction have long been associated genres, as Patrick Brantlinger states in his discussion of science-fiction's origins in the Gothic genre: 'the conventions and values of Gothic have carried over into science-fiction […] both repel rational analysis rather than encourage it – they are both evocations of wonder'.[35] A hybridisation of the Gothic genre and science-fiction, *The Dreamers* tells the story of a small town, Santa Lora, in California, that falls prey to a sleeping pandemic. Where *In The Night Wood* and *The Silent Companions* use a more Walpolean Gothic structure to represent time and narrative, Karen Thompson Walker's novel is written in the present tense, covering multiple narratives, in a similar format to nineteenth-century texts such as *Dracula* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). The plot is told by several characters, depicting the wider town's narrative as it succumbs to the unidentifiable sickness. Although the reader sees the progression of the narrative in this novel, there is a suggestion of suspended time, as though Santa Lora has been removed from the contextual worldly timeline itself, creating a haunting isolation at the centre of the narrative. While Bailey focuses on paternal relationships and Purcell on the maternal, Walker examines several varieties of familial structures. Alongside the present tense of the narrative, the creation of these traumas that will affect the generations to come is demonstrated through the uncanniness of the sleeping disease and the use of dreams, disrupting the multiple narratives. Walker's novel experiments with the amalgamation of science-fiction and the Gothic in the twenty-first-century

[35] Patrick Brantlinger, 'The Gothic Origins of Science-Fiction', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 14.1 (1980) pp.30-43 [p.41-42]

metamodern novel, demonstrating an understanding of the unresolvable nature of events that leave lasting effects on multiple generations.

Before fully entering the narrative of Santa Lora, Walker sets the scene in the first chapter through a reflection on the past. The opening of the novel focuses on 'the sleep' as if it is a character all of its own, noting that '[i]t's an old idea, a poison in the ether, a danger carried in by the wind […] It arrives like weather, or like smoke, some say later, but no one can locate any fire'.[36] Much like the Horned King in Bailey's novel, the sleep is presented as an eternal entity, forever present throughout history and therefore timeless. Walker observes that the sleep is recorded throughout various points in history: '[i]n certain letters from earlier centuries, you may find the occasional reference – decades apart – to a strange kind of slumber, a mysterious, persistent sleep' (3). These mentions of history occur mainly at the beginning of the novel, with continuous references to philosophies of time made throughout. In doing so, Walker creates a haunting element to the representation of time, emphasising the repetition of events – '[t]his time, it starts at the college' (4) – and the disturbing paralysis of time that is to come in *The Dreamers*. The present tense throughout this novel allows the reader to become fully immersed in the plot, affecting the manner in which time flows throughout the text. Unlike the past tense of *In The Night Wood* and *The Silent Companions*, which exhibit the haunting nature of past events, the use of present tense in *The Dreamers* demonstrates how the creation of trauma generates hauntings that will continue into the future.

Walker adopts a similar approach to Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) – the story of a plague survivor set in the twenty-first century, and the first 'pandemic' novel. Hugh J. Luke Jr. writes that 'Mary Shelley presents us with a pattern of life beginning in alienation, temporarily achieving a sense of union, and then returning to an intensified isolation'.[37] Through the character of Mei, Walker explores the effects of alienation and isolation in congruence with the passage of

[36] Karen Thompson Walker, *The Dreamers* (London: Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 2019) p.3. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[37] Hugh J. Luke Jr., '*The Last Man*: Mary Shelley's Myth of the Solitary', *Prairie Schooner*, 39.4 (1965-66) pp.316-327 [p.325-6]

time. Mei begins in a state of isolation, alienated by the other college students as they fear her as the source of the contagion. Her roommate, Kara, is the first to fall prey to the sleeping disease, when Mei 'finds Kara still lying where she left her that morning, her body curled toward the wall in the top bunk, her black boots still protruding from the sheets' (7). Although the students want to tell Mei '[s]he shouldn't blame herself, they all agree […] But they stay where they are' (10), keeping her isolated from the rest of her peers. As the first case, Kara's sleep is dwelt on by the author, particularly in terms of the flow of time. Walker observes that 'women labor while the girl sleeps. Babies are born while she sleeps. She sleeps while an old man dies […] an expected death' (8), using the natural progressions of life in the hospital to highlight the unnatural state of Kara.

Although the novel is written in the present tense, with the reader witnessing events as they happen, the novel returns itself to the significant element of suspension and isolation that encapsulates the town and the individual characters: 'as if this patch of wooded earth has been cut loose from the rest of the world, and from all its rules of cause and consequence' (177). However, the foetus in Rebecca's womb, the representation of which will be examined in detail below, is mentioned at various intervals throughout the text and survives as a reminder that the suspension is only an illusion, that time continues to move forward. Walker summarises this point, stating that – in opposition to the poison clock of Henry's dream – 'while the world watches the continuing coverage of the Santa Lora sickness, the small developments of one minute human being go on unfolding at a perfectly predictable rate, like the intricate ticking of the most delicate clock on earth' (245), confirming the progression of the narrative even if it moves at a rate imperceptible to the characters.

This consideration of the flow of time and what is considered the normal linear progression of the human narrative is repeated throughout the novel, though particularly through the character of Mei. In her isolation, she thinks that '[a]lready she can hear her older self telling this story one day, years into the future, the terrible thing that happened when she was young […] The whole event is racing away toward the past' (20). This awareness of the future, whilst entrapped in the

present, emphasises the unnatural suspension of time in *The Dreamers*. Mei becomes even further isolated when she eventually falls prey to the sleep at the end. Throughout the text, many characters are led to believe she is immune to the disease, or may have been the source, but before the narrative ends, Mei succumbs to the sleep and its alienating effects. The sleep becomes a kind of Gothic space, not unlike the haunted house as seen in *The Silent Companions*, a place in which time is paralysed. As she sleeps, the reader is aware that she is still semi-conscious, cognizant of the waking world but unable to interact with it: '[i]t is not at all how she imagined it would be, this sleep: a twilight more than a night. The waking world is somehow seeping through' (240). Mei recognises the liminality of the dreams as she is 'aware of certain gaps. She has lost hold of the passage of time. Each moment floats alone, disconnected from any other' (241), achieving the sense of intensified isolation discussed by Luke Jr. in his examination of Shelley's *The Last Man*. By creating this disassociation between Mei and the passage of time, Walker generates the traditionally Gothic element of haunted and suspended time, resulting in an atmosphere of irresolution for both her familial trauma and the narrative.

Agnes Andeweg and Sue Zlosnik write of Gothic families that, in both 'contesting and reinforcing notions of the nuclear family, Gothic fiction may offer figurations of alternative kinship ties'.[38] Walker demonstrates how, in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel, the external context can expose the internal disruption of the nuclear family model. Whilst trapped in her dorm, Mei notes that her mother calls too often and 'her voice, like that, so urgent, so thin, brings the opposite of comfort, like the constant touching of a tooth when it's sore' (50). From the moment her family is introduced to the reader, there is an obvious, pre-existing distance between Mei and her mother, exacerbated by the quarantine. She also realises that, when her mother tells Mei she loves her, 'there is a stiffness to it. They are not the kind of family who says it out loud. The words feel extreme between them, a registering of danger more than tenderness' (50). As the narrative progresses and she is exposed further to the sleeping disease, Mei 'keeps forgetting

[38] Agnes Andeweg and Sue Zlosnik, 'Introduction' in *Gothic Kinship*, ed. by Agnes Andeweg and Sue Zlosnik (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) pp.1-11 [p.2]

to charge her phone. She keeps forgetting to call her parents […] Time here is as slippery as it is in a dream' (202). Building on an already strained relationship, Mei and her mother represent the effect of social trauma on the nuclear family.

The use of hesitation is a common element of Gothic fiction, as it allows for the building of tension where time is suspended in a setting removed from narratological progress. In his examination of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Albright writes on the concept of time and hesitation in eighteenth-century Gothic, and its effect on the narrative flow:

> [w]e think of hesitation as occupying only a moment, but moments are richly and thickly prolonged in *Udolpho*. We remain suspended in the momentary realm between the uncanny and the marvelous as mysteries remain unresolved. The hesitations, in a curious way, "propel" the narrative, but not linearly. They instead make suspensions productive.[39]

The three novels in this chapter apply instances of hesitation in different ways. Where *The Mysteries of Udolpho* depicts momentary hesitations, *In The Night Wood* uses the idea of the 'eternal present' in the Night Wood to prolong the reluctance of Charles and Erin in accepting the presence of the Horned King. As they hesitate to accept their hallucinations, the reader learns more of the past and its effect on the stagnating present, in which the Haydens refuse to move forward through time without their daughter. Similarly, *The Silent Companions* uses Elsie's repressed memories of her childhood to allow the supernatural to progress in her narrative, bringing the past into the present-day version of the family home, and further ensuring its irresolution. Although hesitancy is a feature of the first two texts in this chapter, Walker's entire novel hinges on an atmosphere of hesitation in each setting and perspective, with none of the characters understanding what is happening around them or how to resolve it, creating a permanent state of uncertainty. In doing so, similarly to Albright's suggestions on *Udolpho*, time moves, but not in a linear fashion. Individual timelines appear to move at varying speeds, elevating that which they signify separately before reaching a whole at the end of the novel. This is encapsulated in the dreams created by the sleeping disease.

[39] Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, p.59

The science-fiction element of this Gothic novel is highlighted in the several dreams discussed throughout, with only a few discussed in detail. The first dream closely examined is that of Nathaniel, the biology professor at Santa Lora college. He dreams of himself and his partner, Henry: 'he and Henry are thirty years younger […] Henry is searching for: some kind of poison […] Nathaniel has a sudden certainty that the poison is hidden inside the grandfather clock that ticks in the corner' (111). Time in the dreams created by the sleep becomes increasingly abstract, muddled between the past and the present. At first, the purpose of the poison seems to be to save Henry from the future – his life in the care home due to his mental and physical debilitation, trapped inside his body as the narrative moves on without him. Botting suggests that Gothic narratives 'preserve older traditions […] dominated by values of family, domesticity and virtuous sentimentalism'.[40] Although this statement is written in light of the preservation of heteronormative familial expectations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature, it can be applied, in part, to the twenty-first-century novel. As a metamodern novel, *The Dreamers*, still focusing on the importance of family, has moved beyond the postmodern presentation of non-heteronormative families. Rather than displaying these family units as different from the norm and in need of celebrating, metamodern novels accept queerness as an ingrained, natural part of society without the necessity to focus on homosexual relationship as unique. As such, Nathaniel and Henry's family unit is vulnerable to the same concerns as the others in *The Dreamers*, with Nathaniel's surety that the poison is hidden in the clock emphasising the idea that time itself is a poison: despite attempts to forestall its passing, time continues on no matter the context, and the past continues to infiltrate present narratives, disrupting familial relationships and creating new traumas.

From a scientific perspective, the dreams of the sleepers fascinate the medical characters in the novel. The inclusion of medicine and psychology in the Gothic is a common occurrence, adapted from Victorian Gothic works such as Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Green Tea' (1872) and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*

[40] Botting, *Gothic*, p.4

(1894) which dealt with the many cultural anxieties surrounding the advancing practices of medical science. In his discussion of Gothic dreams and time, Blair Ian Speakman states that 'dreams in Gothic texts are often spaces where the past and future are highly contested, and are an extreme form of solitude outside of time'.[41] The complexity of the dreams and the fervour with which the patients believe them to be truth confounds both the staff at the hospital and the timeline of the narrative in *The Dreamers*. Catherine, a psychiatric specialist brought to Santa Lora to help solve the mystery of the sleep, tells the first boy to awaken that he has been sleeping in the hospital for four days, but he appears sceptical, telling her '[i]t's been a lot longer than that […] It's been a long time since I was here' (82). Catherine notes that the boy does not show the usual signs of being confused or believing some strange delusion, that '[t]his boy's words hum with a strange confidence' (82) as if he can only be speaking the truth. However, before the truth of what he went through under the influence of the sleep can be discovered, the boy commits suicide, jumping from the hospital window.

When Catherine reads the recollections of another of the sleep's victims, 'his writings are marked by delusion and confusion, and in particular, a conviction that he has been asleep for much longer than five weeks' (250). These multiple and varying timelines spoken of within the confines of the novel's narrative create several layers of suspense in *The Dreamers*. With each new revelation about the sleep, a new hesitance is established, keeping the mystery unresolved. But, in spite of this uncertainty, the dreams that confound the characters – 'Rebecca's doctors find the intricacy of her delusion uncanny; whole decades persist in her mind, a whole life' (294) – propel the narrative, allowing the plot to move forward, although abstractly. The dreams produced by the sleep act as parallel universes, completely altering the understanding of narrative flow in *The Dreamers,* and causing multiple disruptions throughout the novel.

[41] Blair Ian Speakman, '"Poor creature, trapped in existential solitude forever": Gothic Dreams of the Uncanny, Repetition, Temporal Loops, and the Double in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*', *M/C Journal*, 23.1 (2020) <https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1642> [Accessed 24th March 2022]

The use of medical characters and concepts in *The Dreamers* lends itself to the human desire to understand the inner workings of the body and the brain to the fullest extent – a notion often depicted in canonical Gothic literature, most notably *Frankenstein* and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The Gothic scientific trope, demonstrated in the previously mentioned texts as well as the Sheridan Le Fanu's figure of Dr Hesselius and Bram Stoker's Dr Van Helsing, is one that has continued into the twenty-first century and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two. Walker considers the connection between time and science:

> [t]here is no one part of the brain in charge of keeping track of time. In the conscious brain, the system of timekeeping is loose and diffuse and subject to distortions of various kinds: love, for example, and grief, and youth. In the mind, time dilates, and time contracts. Different days travel at different rates. (244)

The Dreamers demonstrates the abstract nature of time in the context of the human life cycle, further reminding the reader that time is a cultural construct, not necessarily an absolute, and may be explored in terms of psychoanalysis and philosophy as well as science.

Michelle A. Massé, writing on repetition in the Gothic, notes that the reiteration of trauma is often characterised as if the individual is 'waking from a dream of trauma to find it re-presented in the real world'.[42] Walker's use of science-fiction alongside the Gothic allows for the discussion of trauma as seen in Catherine's patients, where the scientific meets the supernatural. Just as the Hollow daughters and the silent companions appear uncanny in the first two texts in this chapter, the dreams create uncanny lives for the victims, who cannot differentiate between which is real: the dream or reality. Walker writes that 'some might say, dreams are like religion – a force that exists outside the realm of science' (59), contradicting Catherine and the other medical experts in the novel who believe there is a scientific explanation. As the reader witnesses, 'Catherine is as shocked as the sleep specialists are by what she sees on those screens. These are not the brains of ordinary sleepers. These are not the brains of the comatose. These

[42] Michelle A. Massé, 'Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors and Things That Go Bump In the Night', *Signs*, 15.4 (1990) pp.679-709 [p.685]

brains are extraordinarily busy' (60), the unnatural nature of the sleep remaining a mystery to these characters. The unnaturalness of the patients' behaviour and the uncanniness of the dreams lend themselves to the re-presenting of trauma in reality, as Massé states.

Dani Cavallaro notes in her discussion of Gothic literature and Sigmund Freud's understanding of trauma re-enactment, repetition is seen as 'an attempt to bind […] energies and reach a state of balance or even entropy. At the same time, repetitive behavior points to a desire to compensate for a deep-seated sense of lack'.[43] Walker contemplates the effect of time and dreams on, not only the representation of the past, but also the future: '[t]o those who believe in the fixed meanings of dreams, the loss of teeth is significant, symbolic of anxiety or fear. They would say that the dream presaged what will happen in the morning and maybe everything that happens after that' (68). The sleeping characters emphasise Cavallaro's notion of a deep-seated sense of lack due to the loss of time they believe they have already lived. These characters, now awake in reality will repeat the life they had in their dreams in an attempt to compensate for their loss. As Catherine remarks, '[o]ften, the comatose have the feeling afterward that they have been unconscious for only a short time, a few hours, maybe, or a single night. It can be traumatic to learn how much time has passed' (249). Walker uses the confusion of the surviving patients to depict the desire to compensate for that which is missing or stolen by the dreams, whole lives lost in parallel worlds that can never be recovered.

Mei's dream, once she has fallen into the sleep, offers the closest to a revelation for what the dreamers see once the disease has taken hold. As she sleeps, the reader is invited into her subconscious, exploring her timeline in a cyclical manner:

> [s]he is sometimes a child again, walking on the beach with her parents or helping her grandmother with the cooking, while her grandmother tells stories she only half understands in Chinese. But

[43] Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2002) p.68

> sometimes, instead, Mei is the grandmother, retelling those stories to her own grandchild. (242)

Mei's dream demonstrates the 'deep-seated sense of lack' that Cavallaro notes is rooted in Gothic literature and its depictions of trauma. Mei dreams of an entire life cycle but, due to the trauma of the sleep, is trapped in a different cycle, built on irresolution. This circular hesitation – similar to Charles' image of the Ouroboros in *In The Night Wood* – also promotes the unnatural suspension of the narrative caused by the sleep whilst simultaneously propelling the plot.

As Albright suggests of early Gothic literature, the 'experience of reading a tale, or a tattered manuscript, stretches the characters' nerves […] as if the prolonged suspension in the realm of the fantastic […] can affect their own "reality"'.[44] This concept can be applied to the dreams depicted in *The Dreamers*, where the sleep and the lives the characters live whilst under its influence, alter their perspective on reality. One of the professors at the university, Ben, becomes aware that '[w]hatever it is, these are not normal dreams. They contain, somehow, the heft of lived life. It's hard to explain, but there's a sensation that these experiences are real, as real as anything in his waking life' (217). Similarly to Mei, Ben is a slow victim of the disease, therefore able to witness the effect of the sleep on others, before feeling those effects himself. He is able to see how reality is warped by the unnatural nature of the dreams – 'this is when a certain strange sensation begins to come over him – that these dreams are somehow glimpses of days yet to come' (218) – and their capacity to distort the flow of time, confusing the past, present, and future.

As more of the sleep victims awaken and show signs of trauma from the effect of their dreams, the reader begins to note the similarities these dreams hold to nightmares. Maximillian E. Novak writes that 'if the Gothic might be thought of as being close to the literature of fantasy and dream, it is the world of nightmare to which we must address ourselves'.[45] From this perspective, the dreams in Walker's novel become more sinister in their purpose, as their irresolvable nature and the

[44] Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, p.49
[45] Maximillian E. Novak, 'Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 13.1 (1979) pp.50-67 [p.65]

loss the victims experience upon waking creates trauma in the characters. As Ben concludes, '[t]ime: that's what the dream is really about. There is so much time in this dream, endless hours to spend however they like. An intense feeling of leisure' (219), as the characters are suspended in the present between memory and the possibilities of the future. *The Dreamers* generates multiple potential narratives that cannot be resolved, and the truth of each cannot be determined, creating the possibility of future generational trauma in the families that survive.

As we see with the pregnant Elsie in *The Silent Companions*, the main marker of time's continued progress in Walker's novel is the development of the foetus Rebecca carries as she sleeps. Albright emphasises the importance of enclosed spaces in congruence with time in his examination of Emily's relationship with the castle in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* – remarking that this fights against the oppressive enclosure usually associated with material space by critics – and likens it to the maternal womb which is 'a better analogy here, because the womb is about both space and time. It is productive; it ripens the foetus that "takes on flesh"'.[46] Walker depicts this concept literally in the growing foetus in Rebecca's womb, a constant reminder of the 'ripening' of time and that the suspension is only an illusion.

Rebecca's sleep and the growth of the child represents the temporal concept of protention: the moment that has yet to be perceived and the anticipation of what is expected to follow, similar to the hesitations previously explored in this chapter. Rebecca's child encompasses Albright's analogy of the womb as a productive space in which time progresses. Walker writes that, for the foetus, '[o]nly one thing is needed now: time' (139). In his examination of familial relationships in *Dracula*, Botting notes that the 'absence of family underlines the nostalgia for the family that is literalised by the birth of a child at the end'.[47] The foetus, born during the sleep to a mother who will be traumatised upon awakening by the sense of lack as discussed by Cavallaro previously, represents the irresolvable nature of events and the continuing effects of the past on the present

[46] Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, p.57
[47] Botting, *Gothic*, p.100

and future of family units. Whilst the novel ends before the narrative of the child is completed, the reader is aware that the child will be embedded within the generational trauma caused by the events of the novel, the ambiguity of its life left open to interpretation by the reader.

In Sara and Libby, the daughters of a conspiracy theorist preparing for the apocalypse when the disease hits, the reader witnesses the trauma as it is created. Although Juranovszky states that the Gothic depicts trauma as an 'ever-present state originating from one's oppressed identity or as a traumatic past event', *The Dreamers* demonstrates how the traumatic events themselves can be represented through these two young female characters.[48] Sara considers how she 'is used to not sleeping. She is a dreamer of bad dreams, dreams that keep her mind moving for hours – an afterglow' (36). This dreadful anticipation of what may come creates a suspension of time as the use of the present tense in the narrative depicts Sara waiting for the arrival of the next moment, simultaneously fearing and awaiting what it may bring.

Whilst the majority of the girls' trauma is being created in the present, there is an element of past generational trauma that influences their reaction to the current situation they find themselves in. Although too young to remember the trauma, Libby is affected by the absence of her mother who died prior to the beginning of the novel. Trying to fix the ceramic birds that once belonged to their mother, Libby 'spends all day trying to glue them back together' (227), as if she can continue upholding the façade of a functioning traditional family unit, despite the trauma created by her mother's death. Nevertheless, Walker reminds the reader that 'time moves in only the one direction. Not everything that breaks can be repaired' (227), a reminder of the Gothic notion that, despite the interference of the past in the present, trauma cannot be undone, only carried forward. Reminiscent of the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), Walker describes how 'Libby picks at the wallpaper while they listen. You can see the different layers of it, like tree rings, the velvety green paisley from when

[48] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

this house was new, and then all the later sheets on top of that' (77), suggestive of the palimpsestic style of Gothic manuscripts. The wallpaper represents the generational past of their family, acting as layers of trauma placed on top each other, building up until they fall apart around the present-day family members.

In a similar fashion to the natural process of the growing foetus in Rebecca's womb, Sara's body is a reminder of the persistent movement of time and that not all linear progression has been suspended. Upon realising she is having her first period, that her body's personal chronology is continuing while the world around her is frozen, 'all Sara can feel at this moment is a vague sense of an animal indifference in the universe, how everything in nature is just as relentless as a virus, replicating itself again and again' (168). Sara is being traumatised, not just by the unnatural events taking place in her hometown, but also by the natural events within her own body – the impact of societal expectations on the female body will be explored further in Chapter Four. The progression of herself into the next stage of life reminds Sara of the unrelenting nature of time and the illusion that, even though they appear trapped in an isolated, timeless quarantine, life is continuing without their consent. Just as Charles and Erin reassure Lorna at the end of *In The Night Wood*, Sara assures Libby that '[i]t'll be okay […] I think everything's going to be fine' (36) without being able to prove this. Although the sleep is an event being re-enacted throughout time, its presence in the current narrative creates new personal traumas for each surviving character as the novel progresses.

Like the foetus in Rebecca's womb and the growth of Sara's body from childhood to womanhood, the 'thickening' of time is seen in Ben and Annie's newborn. As they try to escape the town with their infant daughter, Ben and Annie discuss their child with a stranger who tells them to enjoy their daughter's childhood, warning them that 'you won't believe how fast it goes' (133). Ben considers the stranger's words, noting that 'it doesn't need to be said, how efficiently an infant proves the relentlessness of time' (133). However, when Ben finds the baby taken by the sleep,

> [t]here is a reason that time seems to slow down in moments like these, a neurological process, discovered through experiment: in

> times of shock, the brain works faster – it takes more in and so, some might say that this – the increased rate at which his neurons are firing – makes these first few seconds even more excruciating than they might otherwise be. (223)

Although the growth of the child serves as a consistent reminder that time is moving forward, Ben's narrative is thrown into momentary suspension at the shock of his daughter being entrapped by the disease. The concept of continuous development that the baby represents is disrupted by the unnatural sleep, rocking the foundations of linear progression.

At the end of the novel, when the sleep leaves the town of Santa Lora, having killed some and released others, Ben summarises his new perspective on time as he contemplates his daughter's future, observing that the 'more time that passes, what begins to seem uncanny to Ben is the fact that all the days ahead are such a darkness, that all of us move through our hours as if blindfolded, never knowing what will happen next' (298). Whilst novels such as *In The Night Wood* and *The Silent Companions* look back at past familial relationships and their effect on those in the present day, *The Dreamers* encapsulates the concept of protention, this fearful anticipation of what will happen next, considering how future generations will be affected by present traumas, and if the dreadful recycling of past events must occur. The premise of time in the novel is summarised by Akil, Sara's classmate who was struck with the sickness. He tells Sara that 'I know that it all already happened […] I know that. But that's not how it feels. It feels like it's all coming up ahead, and always will be, around and around again' (286). Unlike the previous first two novels explored in this chapter, there is no real attempt by the author to resolve events. The sleep simply departs Santa Lora, leaving unresolved destruction in its wake and demonstrating the haunting isolation that is created by trauma, as well as the fragility of the constructs of both family and time.

Conclusion

The revision of the Gothic novel in the twenty-first century, and its return to the style of the grand narrative, is as inevitable as the past's resurgence in texts of this mode, as the 'genre itself progresses in a looping pattern, periodically reviving itself

and returning to its previous concerns whose resolution seems to call for constant and numerous reiterations'.[49] The three texts examined in this chapter adapt the use of time and narrative in early Gothic literature to the twenty-first-century, exploring the repercussions of the past's repetition in the present-day. The post-irony application of hauntings and monstrous spectres allows the writers to comment on current cultural concerns surrounding trauma, metal health, and familial relationships as they are entwined in the concept of temporality. *In The Night Wood* offers the most Walpolean recreation of generational past trauma being reiterated in the modern day. Through the use of the supernatural figure of the Horned King and the eternal imagery of the Night Wood, Bailey is able to depict the cyclical nature of time, halting future progression before resolving the issues of the past to continue moving along the timeline. *The Silent Companions* offers a similar style of narrative flow, jumping between the past and the present to demonstrate the disruption to progress. Personal trauma is considered more deeply in Purcell's novel, creating stronger links between the individual and generational trauma. Unlike Bailey's text, there is only a partial resolution with some elements of the past left to continue into the future. Finally, *The Dreamers*, utilising the genre of science-fiction as well as the Gothic, depicts the haunting isolation that is created by trauma and the fragility of the construct of time, providing neither an answer to the mystery of the sleep or a reprieve from the trauma its characters have faced. Instead, Walker encapsulates the fearful anticipation of what will happen next whilst simultaneously dreading the recycling of past events. Following on from this chapter's discussion of narrative flow and time, Chapter Two will examine the finiteness of time, illustrating the role of death and the concept of the afterlife as part of the contemporary Gothic narrative.

[49] Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop', < http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=898> [Accessed 7th July 2021]

Chapter Two

Examining the Corpse: Life and Death in the Neo-Victorian Gothic Novel

While Chapter One focused on the timeless nature of the Gothic narrative and the irresolution of such plots, Chapter Two considers the events that occur at the close of a character's narrative. The relationship between life and death, as depicted in the Gothic novel, has often involved the devices of science and the supernatural. Writing on Victorian Gothic, Andrew Smith states that the Gothic typically 'explores how death shapes the subject's sense of what it means to be a person'.[1] In the twenty-first century, the Victorian sense of the macabre is utilised in the Gothic novel to explore the importance of mortality to the genre. Whilst death is an expectation, in Gothic literature it is often horrifically depicted, overwhelming rationality, and becomes sublime due to the terror and awe it inspires.

In the twenty-first century, there are less limitations on access to knowledge than in the Victorian era, no matter an individual's class, gender, or race, except in resolving the issue of death and what comes after. As Carol Margaret Davison notes:

> [d]eath serves as the quintessential emblem of the Freudian uncanny in the Gothic; while being "of the home" and familiar, it also remains secret, concealed, and unfamiliar, a reality that has become, like mourning, "obscene and awkward".[2]

The metamodern form of the Gothic explores historical representations of death and the afterlife in terms of various cultural issues: religion, superstition, science, and morality for instance. The use of the grand narrative and the post-irony approach of metamodernism illustrates how the return of the dead in various forms can also signal the return of that which has been repressed or omitted from history, as demonstrated in the three texts explored in this chapter.

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[1] Andrew Smith, 'Victorian Gothic Death' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) pp.156-168 [p.168]
[2] Carol Margaret Davison, 'Introduction: the corpse in the closet: the Gothic, death, and modernity' in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. by Carol Margaret Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) pp.1-18 [p.2]

Often, these cultural concerns are explored in neo-Victorian literature due to the scientific practices of the Victorian era which created conflict with the religious practices of the period, as well as the ethics around the examination of the dead. Over the last two decades, many films, television shows and novels have highlighted this pop culture trend: *Crimson Peak* (2015) directed by Guillermo del Toro, Showtime's *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), and *The Observations* (2006) by Jane Harris are just three such examples. As Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss note in the introduction to *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (2014), it is Western culture's continued '"collective imagination" [that] keeps appropriating the Victorian age, and keeps turning it into a contemporary phenomenon (or phantom) that takes up our twenty-first-century convictions and concerns'.[3] Just as the first chapter of this thesis focuses on time and narrative, Chapter Two examines time through a particular emphasis on the twenty-first-century fascination with specific historical eras and the multiplicity of unexplored perspectives from the Victorian age.

This chapter will explore the representation of death in twenty-first-century neo-Victorian Gothic texts, examining the sensational depictions of different beliefs surrounding the afterlife, as well as illustrating, through a metamodern lens, the evolution of the neo-Victorian Gothic novel in the last two decades. Through the superstitions and pagan idolatry in the narrative of *Once Upon a River* (2018) by Diane Setterfield, the border between life and death as depicted through storytelling and folklore will be the focus of the first section of this chapter. John Harwood's *The Séance* (2008) demonstrates the battle between science and mysticism as it pertains to representations of spiritualism and death in contemporary fiction. *Opium and Absinthe* (2020) by Lydia Kang, where the influence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in America illustrates the fine line between science and the supernatural in the late nineteenth century, will examine the morality that surrounds death in conjunction with science. It will also demonstrate the human fixation with the supernatural in order to cope with and understand the

[3] Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, 'Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions' in *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*, ed. by Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss (London: Routledge, 2014) pp.1-17 [p.15]

process of death. This chapter will look at the twenty-first century use of the dead as a device for discussing the finite nature of life and the obsessive patterns in which Western culture seeks answers to the concept of the afterlife.

Once Upon a River

Diane Setterfield's third novel, *Once Upon A River*, tells the story of the people who inhabit the villages along the river Thames in the late 1800s. Over the course of a year, the tale of an unidentifiable young girl, found drowned in the river but mysteriously alive a few hours later, is recounted as her identity affects the lives of the three families she may belong to, as well as many others involved. The girl is given three names during the narrative: Amelia, the kidnapped daughter of the Vaughans, Alice, the missing granddaughter of a farming family, and Anne, the long-lost sister of the parson's housekeeper, each an attempt to ground her in the world of the living. The multiple narrators of *Once Upon a River* demonstrate the unreliable nature of the narrative, emphasising the mystery around the figure of the child and her "undeath". Throughout the novel, the concept of death is called into question on multiple occasions with characters examining where the boundary between life and the afterlife exists, and whether it is possible to step both ways between the two as the child seemingly does when she awakens. Death itself becomes personified in Setterfield's text, through various devices, such as the legend of the ferryman. This chapter will discuss the exploration of death through the local folklore and beliefs of those who live on the Thames in juxtaposition to the early scientific understanding of the era.

The nameless girl around whom *Once Upon A River* is centred is first introduced to the reader when her corpse is brought into The Swan, a pub in the village of Radcot. When she is first seen by the locals of The Swan, she is mistaken for a ventriloquist's doll: 'a large puppet, with waxen face and limbs and slickly painted hair'.[4] From the moment she appears, the young girl is considered otherworldly. Her flaw is not that she does not look at all human, but rather she is too perfectly

[4] Diane Setterfield, *Once Upon A River* (London: Doubleday, 2018) p.9. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

formed. The local nurse, Rita Sunday, notes upon examining her that 'death had left no mark on her was strange enough, but nor had life, and that, in Rita's experience, was unique' (25). Throughout the course of the novel, Rita shows herself to be well-versed in the most modern sciences and medicines of the time. Setterfield utilises Rita's position as a female medical practitioner in the late nineteenth century to refract twenty-first century views back onto the Victorian era as, even though women could gain an education and become doctors in the era, it was not commonplace. Unlike the patrons of The Swan who find the child fascinating for the stories they can impose upon her "undead" body, it is Rita's confusion and inability to reconcile the miracle of the child's revival with her logical mind that is the source of discomfort in the contemporary reader. The nurse's uncertainty is only further exacerbated by those in The Swan who speculate on the child's identity.

The uneasiness that Rita feels when examining the body of the girl is maintained when she is alive again, her uncanny and ethereal appearance affecting the nurse. As characters offer different explanations as to whom the girl could be, some spend their time considering *what* she could be. This includes one suggestion that she is in fact a changeling – a commonly believed folk legend of human children being replaced with the offspring of fairies, looking almost exact in their replication, except for the air of the supernatural that surrounds them. In his text on fairies, Richard Sugg comments on the purpose of 'changeling beliefs' in a time before advanced medical knowledge and how it 'gave an otherwise frighteningly arbitrary condition a *meaning* – a known and accepted place within a shared framework of explanation'.[5] Rita and Margot – the landlady of The Swan – consider this theory as Margot briefly believed her youngest child and only son, who is depicted as intellectually disabled, was a changeling at birth, before accepting that he was in fact her child. They compare the little girl to him but Margot reasons '[s]he's not like Jonathan, is she? […] She's different in some other way' (111). This explanation clarifies the child's existence and seemingly otherworldly ability to survive drowning. Although her supernatural appearance is discussed at various points throughout the novel, it is often dismissed as an exaggeration of the stories

[5] Richard Sugg, *Fairies: A Dangerous History* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2018) p.105

surrounding her sudden presence, as the locals wish to rationalise and refute the improbability of the paranormal existing in a scientific world.

Cultural concerns of the Victorian era regarding Darwin's theory of evolution have often been included in the Gothic, such as Le Fanu's short story, 'Green Tea', in which a reverend is haunted by a talking monkey, and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* which depicts vivisected animals who have been given the ability to walk and talk like humans. When speculating on how the unknown child could have survived drowning in the Thames, the patrons of The Swan consider the "new" theory of Darwinism. The customers mock Darwin's theory of evolution, 'this fellow […] he reckons, I'm telling you – that humans, like you and me, are a kind of monkey!' (284), unable to comprehend the theoretical concept that is widely considered to be factual for Setterfield's twenty-first-century readers. Setterfield depicts the scepticism that Darwin's texts, *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), were met with at the time of their publications. Indeed, one review by J. R. Leifchild noted that the British-Victorian scientific community 'confess some doubt and some uneasiness here […] We cannot say that this is easy doctrine' – a sentiment reflected by the more uneducated characters in the novel.[6] By using a Victorian setting in this text, Setterfield is able to reflect on the evolution of scientific knowledge of life. This further emphasises the mysticism around death and the afterlife with which the Gothic novel deals.

Rita later gives thought and credence to the laymen's mockery of Darwinism – 'men once had tails and fins and lived beneath the water!' (284) – as it offers her a logical explanation for the impossible event she witnessed. The consideration of the effect of Darwinism allows Setterfield to represent the argument between mysticism and science in the late 1800s in a manner accessible to the contemporary reader. In his text on Darwinism and its effect on modern culture, Paul Crook notes that Darwin's contemporaries disliked his theory for multiple reasons, one in

[6] J. R. Leifchild, 'On the origin of species', *The Atheneaum*, no.1673 (1859) pp.659-660 [p.659]

particular being that it meant '[h]uman beings […] were seen to be little better than the animals, which were assumed to be unreasoning and motivated by simple primal instincts, aggressive and territorial'.[7] In classing humans alongside animals, Darwin negated the higher status bestowed upon man by God; this in turn created further unrest as Darwin's theory could be proven with physical evidence unlike the presence of God, which requires blind faith in the unknowable. As will be seen in the texts that debate the conflict between religion and magick in Chapter Five, Setterfield makes use of the concept of death in her Gothic novel to depict Darwinism versus mysticism. An argument that continues to this day, Setterfield utilises her medical protagonist to consider the impact of the dispute on the cultural issues in both the Victorian and modern eras. Although Rita is able to uncover a practical answer to the child's absent pulse, the child is still viewed as a product of the supernatural, such as a changeling, or a missing link in the evolutionary chain. Similarly to the novels examined in Chapter One, the girl's narrative remains unresolved over the course of the novel, with the child vanishing before the truth of her identity or origins are fully determined.

Closely linked to the mysterious child is the story of Quietly the ferryman, which is referred to several times by numerous characters throughout *Once Upon A River*. Like many contemporary Gothic authors who adapt fairy tales and folklore, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, Setterfield utilises the method of adaptation and adoption with the character of Quietly. Quietly is depicted as 'a gaunt and elongated figure, manipulating his pole so masterfully that his punt seemed to glide as if powered by an otherworldly force' (30). This physical description, alongside his history, is reminiscent of the Greco-Roman myth of Charon the psychopomp on the river Styx. Rita relays the local legend to Mr. Daunt when she tells him that many of the locals believe he was saved by the ferryman. Since trading his life for his daughter's, Quietly has ferried himself along the Thames and '[f]or all eternity he must watch over the river', rescuing those who are not yet marked for death and 'if it *is* their time, he sees them safely to that other place' (138, emphasis in original),

[7] Paul Crook, *Darwinism, War and History: The Debate over the Biology of War from the 'Origin of Species' to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.7

such as was Charon's role in the underworld of Greek mythology. According to James Uden, the Gothic's origins in the Enlightenment era stemmed from 'an attempt to wrestle with classical antiquity's persistent power'.[8] Although not all Romantic-era Gothic reacted against classical influences, for example John Keats' 'Lamia' (1820), this anti-classical movement reduced Greco-Roman influences to 'ghosts of an earlier era'.[9] Rather than reacting against the classical influence, twenty-first-century Gothic literature has embraced and adapted the style for its own purposes.

Although it can be argued that Setterfield adapted the character of Quietly from the Charon of mythology, there are a great many differences between the two figures. Very little is known of Charon with very few written records still surviving, not unlike the character of Cernunnos adapted by Bailey for *In The Night Wood*. All that is known is his genealogy in the Greco-Roman pantheon and various descriptions given by authors such as Virgil, Lucian and Seneca. One of the most well-known depictions of the psychopomp is in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (c.1308-1320), which drew on Virgil's portrayal. However little we know of the figure of Charon, he was highly venerated in Ancient Greek culture as '[b]efore the body was borne to earth, pious relatives placed in the dead man's mouth a coin to pay the boatman, lest he should strand his fares on the hither side'.[10] This reverence for the psychopomp depicts the importance of death and the afterlife to the living, a trait which has been continued and evolved into different traditions over the centuries, including the Gothic.

Setterfield employs certain elements of Charon whilst also creating a fuller character in her presentation of Quietly, by offering a backstory, as well as her characters' respect for the legend, as reason for the folklore that was widely believed by the people on the River Thames. Twenty-first-century Gothic writers continue to demonstrate the reflective tradition of early Gothic works and are often influenced by various writings and literature from the past, looking to historical

[8] James Uden, *Spectres of Antiquity: Classical Literature and the Gothic, 1740-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) p.3
[9] Uden, *Spectres of Antiquity*, p.4
[10] Jane E. Harrison, 'Greek Myths in Art – IV', *The Magazine of Art* (1883) pp.366-371 [p.370]

events to provide current social commentary and highlight the multiplicity of truths. One particular influence would be Charles Dickens who, although not classified as a Gothic writer, was influenced by and included various motifs of the genre in his Victorian novels. The character of Gaffer Hexham from *Our Mutual Friend* (1864), a pickpocket, pulls dead bodies from the Thames, taking money and valuables from the corpses in the fashion of an economic vampire. He asks '[w]hat world does a dead man belong to? T'other world. What world does money belong to? This world'.[11] Whilst Dickens utilises death and the river to comment on poverty and class issues of the Victorian era, Setterfield takes a more mystical approach to the topic. As Catherine Spooner notes in her discussion of revivals and the Gothic in contemporary culture, 'revivals seldom take exactly the same shape they possessed before […] contemporary Gothic discourses can be viewed as relating to an earlier Gothic tradition while expressing at times an entirely different range of cultural agendas'.[12] In this regard, Setterfield has not necessarily appropriated the myth of Charon, but rather acknowledged it by re-inventing its premise to suit her text's narrative. Quietly's story causes both Rita and the reader to consider the link between life and death, and the purpose of its depiction in contemporary Gothic literature. Whilst Charon fulfils his role as a simple ferryman, guiding souls to the underworld, Quietly plays a more significant part on the border between life and death, deciding an individual's fate at the moment of their drowning. Rita's character is often conflicted between her medical training and the ingrained traditional Christian beliefs of Victorian England, but her scientifically inclined mind continuously questions what she was taught.

Smith notes in 'Victorian Gothic Death', via a discussion of Edgar Allan Poe's *Mesmeric Revelation* (1844), that it is through death 'in which mind finds its home within the mind of God. Death is thus not about the body, it is about a new moment of transition in which the self discovers its immortality'.[13] Smith's observations on the role of death in Victorian Gothic literature can be found reflected in the neo-Victorian characters of contemporary Gothic authors. Similarly to the ghosts of

[11] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1997) p.6
[12] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.11-12
[13] Smith, 'Victorian Gothic Death', p.158

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature, Rita views Quietly's supernatural state as a punishment, forced to travel the Thames in a state of eternal torment. This is seen when Mr. Daunt comments on how the ferryman's legend makes for a good tale. Rita counter-argues against the photographer, noting that it 'cost him more than that […] It cost him his death too. There is no eternal rest for Quietly, he must exist for ever between the states, policing its border' (139). The eternal image of Quietly is mirrored in the undead child whom Jonathan offers a blasphemous opinion of when he tells the parson that 'it is the same story! All over again! Just like Jesus!' (45). To claim divine immortality for another human was considered a great sin, however, the parson allows Jonathan to make outlandish statements as the boy is considered a simpleton by the villagers.

The issue of belief in an afterlife and the accepted understanding of it is challenged in the climax of the novel with the death of Jonathan's father, Joe Bliss, whom, although not a Radcot local, has a long familial history with the River Thames. When the nameless child goes missing, Jonathan tells the inhabitants of The Swan that he was the last one to see her: 'Father died and he was waiting for Quietly, and Quietly came […] there she was. In the punt' (399). All the characters are quick to dismiss Jonathan's account of events, scolding him for telling stories until those who know him best point out that 'Jonathan can't tell stories'(400). The truth of the supernatural status of Quietly and daughter brings the reader back to the theory proposed by Margot: that the child is a changeling. This is illustrated in the moment when Mr. Vaughan confesses that the child – referred to as Amelia at this point in the novel, the name of the Vaughan's kidnapped daughter – cannot be his child as the real Amelia is dead. He admits to himself that he 'had come at last to the place he had avoided for so long' (306), only able to reveal the truth after the girl has brought comfort to himself and his wife. Setterfield utilises the concept of the changeling and its function in replacing the human child with a similar enough lookalike that it is accepted by the family, but it is never quite able truly to belong due its otherworldliness.

The concept of the changeling shares similarities with the doppelganger often used in Gothic fiction, as explored in the Hollow daughters of *In The Night Wood*

and the companions in *The Silent Companions*. The child in *Once Upon A River* is used in a similar fashion and under each identity she is given – Amelia, Alice, and Anne – she is depicted as uncanny, not able completely to encompass the roles given to her. Constantly drawn to the river – '[s]he is born to it. She is in her element' (162) – the child fulfils her own role, outside of society's limitations, on the border of life and death, just as her father has. Rather than an allegory of wickedness as fairies and changelings are often used for in folklore, Setterfield remodels this changeling child to offer the grieving families an outlet through which to channel their grief as they process it. By seeing what is not there, the child allows people, such as the Vaughans to deal with the most irreconcilable of events – that of the loss of a child. Helena comments that the child 'brought me back to life, and brought me back to Anthony […] She changed us' (328-9), emphasising both the changeling's positive purpose in impersonating the dead and lost, and the twenty-first-century author's ability to adapt the purpose of the changeling from its traditional use.

Where the mystic figure of the child represents the supernatural influence on Victorian culture, the influence of nineteenth-century scientific practices is embodied in the figure of Mrs. Constantine, who acts as a conduit for grieving parents and families: 'whatever it was this Mrs. Constantine did, it worked, whether you believed in it or not' (73). Seeking solace for his wife on the matter of their abducted daughter, Amelia, Mr. Vaughan tells the alleged medium 'I want you to tell my wife that our daughter is dead […] Do messages, voices. Do the thing with smoke and mirrors, if you are set up for it' (80), so that his wife, Helena, can finally grieve their lost daughter. When he returns for the second time, Mr. Vaughan finds himself inexplicably revealing the truth to the woman who is a virtual stranger: that he did in fact find the body of his daughter when she went missing two years prior to the events in the novel but, in his grief, set her body back into the river and pretended she was still missing.

Where Setterfield uses Rita to explore the realm of physical sciences, she employs another character to demonstrate Victorian understandings of psychology. Mrs. Constantine tells Mr. Vaughan that she and her husband had studied this 'new

science' in America and notes that 'you won't go far wrong thinking of it as the science of human emotion' (311). Stephen Frosh notes in his discussion of the culture of psychoanalysis that, in the late 1800s, it was closely associated with mysticism and spiritualism in Britain: '[p]sychoanalysis grew up in the crucible of Europe; it had very specific origins in the scientific culture of the late nineteenth century alongside the then-current fascination with various branches of occultism', noting that, although it is now considered the origin of modern psychology, it was frequently treated on the same standing as other pseudo-sciences.[14] Setterfield's use of psychology in the early stages of its professional development, hidden under the smoke and mirrors of séances, depicts not only traditional Victorian views of mental health but also the social concerns of the twenty-first century, a concept also seen in Lydia Kang's *Opium and Absinthe* in the last section of this chapter. Both Setterfield and Kang observe the perilous position of mental health issues in modern society, despite the progress made over the last 140 years, psychological issues are still denied the same medical weight as physical health problems, an issue commonly discussed in modern culture.

Mr. Vaughan's trauma has caused what a modern reader can recognise as dissociation from a traumatic event and consequential post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of discovering his child's corpse. Although in the twenty-first century the reader understands the reasoning behind Mr. Vaughan's actions, it is harder still to comprehend the emotion behind such an indescribable loss as that of a child. Setterfield uses the setting to her advantage, combining the science with the mysticism of the Victorian age to build the imagery around Mr. Vaughan's grief. He notes that Mrs. Constantine is not what he expected and that she is no charlatan because she does 'bring back the dead, but not in that way' (311). As seen in the texts explored in Chapter One, *Once Upon a River* also considers the flow of time and the effect of the past, as it relates to the concept of death. Mrs. Constantine explains the science as best she can, remarking that '[d]eath and memory are meant to work together. Sometimes something gets stuck and then people need a

[14] Stephen Frosh, 'The Freudian Century' in *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014) pp.16-33 [p.16-17]

guide or a companion in grief' (311), separating her representation of death from both the supernatural undead and the spiritualists.

Alongside these human representations of the concepts of death and the afterlife, runs the River Thames, a constant character throughout the entire novel. Rivers are often employed as focal points in narratives. The Gothic has often incorporated rivers in its many forms, for example the 1813 painting 'Gothic Cathedral by a River' by Karl Friedrich Schrinkel, and in the works of nineteenth-century authors such as William Wordsworth's Romantic sonnets on the River Duddon (1804-1820) and in classic Victorian novels. Charles Dickens, for instance, utilises the Thames marshes to a particularly Gothic effect in *Great Expectations* (1861). Rivers continue to be of great literary interest in contemporary times, as demonstrated by C. J. Cooke's *The Nesting* (2020), which uses the fjords and rivers of Norway as a focal point of its Gothic narrative. The very first introduction to the river in Setterfield's novel immediately unsettles the reader: 'the stretch of liquid blackness […] shifting and undulating, darkly illuminated by some energy of its own making' (4). Setterfield instantly implies the notion that this river is sentient, that it is as alive as the human characters of her novel.

By setting the novel in the villages along the River Thames, the text is set in the presence of death. The river, although a source of life and livelihood to many of the characters, is also a cautionary tale of untimely death, as Rita notes that '[e]very year the river helps herself to a few lives' (22). Much like Quietly the ferryman adopting features from the Greco-Roman figure of Charon, Setterfield allegorises the Thames with that of the rivers Styx and Lethe, the main Greek rivers of the dead and forgetfulness. Over the course of the text, the river is constantly represented as the doorway to the afterlife. This is magnified by the folk legends and stories told by the patrons and owners of The Swan at Radcot as they constantly refer to the river in their tales. Even Rita, the most likely character to be ruled by her reasoning, remarks that Quietly fetched his daughter back '[f]rom that place on the other side of the river' (138), referencing the afterlife.

Again, Setterfield adopts characteristics of mythology and uses them to her advantage, turning the well-known Greco-Roman underworld to her devices and

creating further folk legends. This is seen when Helena Vaughan – similarly named to the character Helen Vaughan of Andrew Machen's 1894 novella, *The Great God Pan* – recalls her aunt telling her that beneath the surface of the Thames are 'Goblins living under the river in their own goblin world' (69) as a warning in an attempt to stop Helena from getting too close to the river. Helena's aunt expands on the folklore, stating that '[t]here are bubbles, very, very small ones that rise to the surface and pop. Those are the bubbles that carry messages from all the lost children' (69), as if the deceased children are attempting to escape the river of death or provide information on the afterlife, but all that can be carried back are their voices. The idea of communication from the dead will be discussed further in John Harwood's *The Séance* in the next section of this chapter.

The concept of messages from the dead was a common occurrence in the Victorian era via the movement of spiritualism but Setterfield redeploys the idea through the river as the gateway to cross between worlds. The use of mythology and fairy tale is a contradictory viewpoint to the other religious imagery used within the novel. However, Rita, as rationally minded character who was raised in a convent and is therefore influenced by the Christian beliefs of the era, admits that the 'laws of life and death, as she had learnt them, were incomplete. There was more to life, more to death, than medical science had known' (37). By accepting the limitations of her knowledge, Rita exemplifies the metamodern concept of multiple discourses, accepting the potential for the existence of the supernatural or the divine, although she does not differentiate between the two in the matter of an afterlife.

Alongside the river acting as the bridge between worlds, the Thames is also the meeting point of the reader and the characters. Setterfield creates a historiographic metafictional element to the novel by having the narrator address the reader when in the presence of the river. The postmodern concept of historiographic metafiction is one that metamodernism has continued to utilise in the twenty-first century. Linda Hutcheon defines this form of novel as recognising that 'its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking

of the forms and contents of the past'.[15] As secrets of the past are revealed that are only known to a handful of characters, the narrator of Setterfield's novel communicates directly with the reader: 'as secret visitors to this world, as border-crossers between one world and another, there is nothing to prevent us sitting by the river and opening our ears' (224). The notion that stories come from the river and not the human characters, gives the impression that the narrative belongs to the river itself which forces the reader to reconsider the history of the narrative they have read so far. The idea is cemented when Joe tells Rita on his death bed '[t]here will – always be – the river […] There are stories you have never heard on the other side of the river… I can only half remember them when I am this side… Such stories' (283-4). Joe represents the liminality of the river as the only fully living character who seems to be able to cross the river's boundary of life and death, entering 'sinking spells' (7) through which he discovers stories to tell the patrons of their pub. This crossing of boundaries, much like the concept of the séance explored in other neo-Victorian Gothic novels, illustrates the combination of religious faith and superstition that the nineteenth century was known for, the battle between mysticism and science coming to an impasse at the impenetrable realm of death.

Setterfield devotes one particular chapter to the narrator's philosophising on the concepts of rivers and their tributaries. Within the chapter, the narrator considers the path of the river, how it defines its own course whilst simultaneously always deviating from the straightforward route we expect it to take. The narrator then likens the origins of a river to that of a story: '[a] river no more begins at its source than a story begins with the first page' (53). This statement causes the reader to acknowledge their awareness of the book's historiographic metafictional nature and the unstable narrative of history it provides. Intertwined with the metamodern structure of the novel, Setterfield also demonstrates the Victorian discussion of death as, not necessarily the end of the narrative but a new,

[15] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) p.5

unknowable chapter. The narrator compounds this point by emphasising the purpose of the river as the platform on which the novel is told. Setterfield writes:

> [w]e might, in this quiet hour before dawn, leave this river and this long night and trace the tributaries back, not to see their beginnings – mysterious, unknowable things – but, more simply, what they were doing yesterday. (54)

In keeping with the ambiguity of the Gothic genre, the origins of the river are unknowable, acting as an allegory for the narrator to comment on both the origins of the narrative and the origins of history. A genre concerned with the problematic nature of 'origins', Setterfield's Gothic novel uses the narrative of the Thames to remark on its own position in literary history. The river is allegorical of not only the path of the narrative but the path of literary and social history, which as Hutcheon explains, is a human construct, created with biased opinions. The chronology of history is, like the river, presented as one main form, causing the individual to forget all the tributaries and different narratives that feed the main river or chronology of history. *Once Upon A River* falls into the genre of historiographic metafiction as it is both self-reflexive and reclaiming a part of Victorian history to retell events from a lesser-known viewpoint.

Once Upon A River considers the border between life and death as depicted via the supernatural – not ghosts, zombies, or the "undead" but rather folklore and local fairy tales of other cultures, particularly Greco-Roman mythology. Setterfield uses rudimentary science in the form of medical knowledge and photography, to try and reconcile the mysticism of religion and local folk legend with the new phase of modern science, as it was viewed in the Victorian age. She combines fantastical events with logic and rationality to answer those unknowable questions about life and death and the place they meet. Whilst Rita solves the mystery of how the girl survived drowning through her experiments on Mr. Daunt, another takes its place with the question of *why* the girl survived. Whether she was revived because Rita's science says her body withstood the odds or because the personification of death was not ready to claim her, the child's narrative is closed on an ambiguous note, as expected of the contemporary Gothic novel. The supernatural question continues upon the girl's disappearance as to whether or not, as the daughter of Quietly the

ferryman and his successor to the role of psychopomp of the Thames, she can truly die or if she was ever fully alive to start with. In her discussion of ghostly children in contemporary young adult fiction, Michelle J. Smith notes that the 'dead or ghostly child is produced by adult sins or failings in the past'.[16] However, Setterfield is not only exposing past secrets – sinful or otherwise – but uses the supernatural child as an outlet for grief as well as ambiguity, offering at least one explanation for the afterlife with no confirmation of its truth. As is common with the modern Gothic novel, the reader is left with all these unsettling questions as the narrator tells us to return to our own rivers and therefore, our own versions of history.

The Séance

The setting of Australian author John Harwood's novel, *The Séance*, is that of late Victorian England. Demonstrating the influence of postmodernism on the metamodern novel, like Setterfield's text, Harwood depicts marginalised characters that have been removed from the centre of society as well as those that choose to isolate themselves. Constance Langton, after the death of her parents, inherits Wraxford Hall, a supposedly haunted mansion in Suffolk, and the history of her mother's family, the Wraxfords. Using unreliable narration in the same manner as *Once Upon a River* and *Opium and Absinthe*, the novel is told in six parts through three narrators. The events surrounding the mysterious deaths and disappearances of the Wraxford family from 20 years prior to Constance's narrative are pieced together through various accounts about the protagonist's relative, Nell Wraxford, and her husband, Magnus. The supernatural connection between the two women is examined as both are able to communicate with spirits, despite the narrative's ambiguous representation on the authenticity of spiritualism. The concept of spiritualism and the act of communicating with the dead are ever-present in the novel as the concept of the afterlife is brought into question by both science and religion. Whilst Setterfield's work illustrates the contemporary interest in the influence of both science and folklore on Victorian culture, Harwood focuses more

[16] Michelle J. Smith, 'Dead and ghostly children in contemporary literature for young people' in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. by Carol Margaret Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) pp.191-203 [p.201]

on the scientific curiosity behind the idea of mediums and their ability to see and speak to the dead. Neo-Victorian and supernatural-historical works such as *The Quickening* (2020) by Rhiannon Ward and Laura Purcell's *The Shape of Darkness* (2021), use spiritualism as a prominent tool in many formats, allowing for a more metamodern insight into Victorian ideals, encompassing a postmodern structure through the multiplicity of truths. *The Séance* considers science and the various practices of Victorian scientists, particularly those in conflict with others for employing the supernatural in the form of psychics and mediums. Throughout this thesis, authenticity in terms of history and narrative is continually questioned, with this section debating the fraudulent nature of spiritualism as depicted by Harwood, alongside the scientific interest that prevails through the text.

Harwood recognises the fraudulent nature of spiritualism and spirit mediums as they were felt by many in the time of the novel's setting. By introducing the novel with an extract from the anonymously published *Revelations of a Spirit Medium* (1891), the reader is immediately warned of the false nature of séances before the first is even depicted in the novel. By explaining how mediums defrauded their customers – '[t]o manifest a spirit, take twenty yards of fine silk veiling, at least two yards wide and very gauzy' – scepticism is ingrained into the narration from the very beginning.[17] Harwood clearly differentiates between the true and fraudulent spiritualists in his text.

Constance's first encounter with spiritualism is the medium Mrs. Veasey, who believes she was once truly able to communicate with the dead and it is her purpose to bring comfort to others through her gift. Constance and Mrs. Veasey discuss the reality of spiritualism and what it is like to be possessed by a spirit, Mrs. Veasey explaining it as such: '[y]ou feel… taken up… they are so strong, sometimes, you think they will shake you to pieces […] When I was young, like you, I was filled with their light… now they hardly come to me at all' (19). Louisa Hadley recognises the purpose of spiritualism in neo-Victorian literature as a 'medium through which to examine the relationship between the present and the past and the role of facts

[17] John Harwood, *The Séance* (London: Vintage, 2008) p.vii. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

and imagination in historical narratives', particularly in terms of the representation of women and gender ideologies.[18] The depiction of women in Gothic novels is of particular interest to twenty-first-century narratives as it allows for the consideration of the evolution of social structures surrounding characters that have often been marginalised by history.

As Jeanette King notes, contemporary writers of neo-Victorian novels 'recognize that the ambivalence surrounding female mediumship is symptomatic of the contradictions arising out of both religious and scientific discourse about gender in this period'.[19] Mrs. Veasey simultaneously represents the Victorian image of a working-class woman able to survive outside the bounds of patriarchal society, as well as the neo-Victorian question of whether the deception practised by fraudulent spiritualists was ever morally acceptable. Mrs. Veasey asks of Constance, 'how can it be wrong to bring comfort to them that mourn?' (19). As seen in the figure of Mrs. Constantine in *Once Upon A River*, this question forces the reader to consider that, whilst the supernatural may not exist, the belief that it does could provide comfort and hope to those processing the most irreconcilable form of grief: the loss of a loved one. In light of the historical context, where science and the supernatural were in conflict in Victorian culture, the reader is made aware of the belief systems of the nineteenth century and its exploration of what are now considered unenlightened practices. As seen in many Gothic texts since Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, it is a common method in this genre to locate stories in the past and what would be perceived as unenlightened times, in order to emphasise the progress of culture and society.

In the hopes of bringing her mother comfort over the death of her youngest daughter, Constance encounters Miss. Carver, the fraudulent spiritualist. Constance notes that, unlike Miss. Carver, Mrs. Veasey 'disapproved of manifestations: the use of the cabinet, she would declare in righteous tones, was a sure sign of trickery' (24). Although Mrs. Veasey is herself committing fraud, she believes it is her duty to

[18] Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narratives: The Victorians and Us* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p.89
[19] Jeanette King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p.93

protect the grieving from those who would more theatrically and obviously deceive them. At the first manifestation séance, Constance's witnesses the trick: 'I became aware of a faint glow in the direction of the cabinet. It brightened into a luminous halo [...] and seemed to unfurl downward into the figure of a woman, veiled in draperies of light' (25). The purpose of such séances in Victorian times was not only to provide comfort for the grieving, but also to provide hope; that there is proof of an afterlife and that one's loved one is safe in a Christian heaven. This hope, however, causes her mother to commit suicide – '[t]here was an empty bottle of laudanum upon the night-table beside her, and a note which read, "Forgive me – I could not wait"' (31) – leaving Constance in order to be with her deceased daughter.

In a similar fashion to the incorporation of the myth of Charon in *Once Upon a River*, Harwood employs Greco-Roman mythology through Constance and her beliefs in the afterlife. As a child, Constance is taken with the notion that the dead are beside the living and incorporates it into her personal faith: 'that the spirits of the dead were all around us, separated only by the thinnest of veils, became part of my private mythology, along with the gods and goddesses of the Underworld' (12). She defies traditional expectations of Victorian culture by not fully upholding traditional Christian values, questioning them from a young age. However, Constance struggles to hold onto the belief system she has developed for herself, as her faith evolves alongside the narrative and it becomes clear that she does not truly believe in her own ability to communicate with spirits – 'the more I practiced, the less I believed in anything like the realm of spirits we invoked with such assurance' (23). This struggle with faith, a Gothic motif which is explored further in Chapter Five, illustrates the issues of ethics surrounding spiritualism and whether such deceptions can be acceptable in society if they provide comfort for those in mourning. The paradox of Constance's beliefs is made manifest when she witnesses first-hand the uncovering of Miss. Carver's deception.

Alongside the practises of spiritualism, Harwood also represents the Victorian scientific community that opposed such pseudo-sciences. The Society for

Psychical Research – a parapsychological organisation, founded in 1882, cites its own history thus:

> [i]n January 1882, a conference was held in London to discuss the viability of setting up an organisation to carry out formal scientific research into these matters. The following month the SPR was founded, the first learned society of its kind, with the purpose of investigating mesmeric, psychical and "spiritualist" phenomena in a purely scientific spirit.[20]

As the fictional representative of the organisation, Mr. Vernon Raphael exposes Miss. Carver by grabbing her suspended body in front of her customers. With the illusion broken due to the 'stays and drawers […] plainly visibly beneath diaphanous layers of what appeared to be butter muslin' (26), the reader would expect Miss. Carver's career to be over but instead, the other attendees of the séance rush to her defence. To Constance's 'astonishment several of the men seized Vernon Raphael instead, calling his intervention an outrage and a violation and a damned disgrace' (26), proving the power of blind faith when faced with the irreconcilable nature of grief and death.

After the exposure of Miss. Carver, Constance asks Mr. Raphael '[d]o you think, Mr Raphael, that all spirit mediums are cheats?' (27), in the hopes of discovering more manifestation mediums. Spiritualism continues to be a much-contested practice of the nineteenth century due to its ethical ramifications. Hadley states that due to the 'high mortality rate in Victorian Britain, particularly among the young, it is not surprising that spiritualism became popular as a way of offering solace and consolation to the bereaved'.[21] Mr. Raphael maintains he is a sceptic but notes that the uncovering of frauds and their ability to reclaim their reputation and keep sitters is all part of a game that he enjoys playing with the spiritualist community. Where Rita in *Once Upon a River* is willing to admit that there is much in the world that does not fit her scientific rationale, Mr. Raphael is proud of his rational thinking and represents a combination of Victorian scientific curiosity and contemporary scorn at the gullible nature of those in need of supernatural comfort

[20] Society for Psychical Research, <https://www.spr.ac.uk/about/our-history> [Accessed 12th August 2020]
[21] Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narratives*, p.92

in order to cope with their grief. His presence in Harwood's neo-Victorian Gothic novel represents the expression of the author's twenty-first-century awareness in an, as previously mentioned, unenlightened historical setting, in order to better understand the value of spiritualism in Victorian England.

Whilst the fraudulent nature of spiritualism and spirit mediums is an area debated throughout the novel – particularly in Constance's narratives – there is still an element of doubt placed upon the reader as to whether there is a chance that communication with the dead is possible. Although Constance, for the most part, fakes her trances, there are times where she cannot tell if she is faking her possession, or her clairvoyance is real. This is emphasised when, at a séance hosted by Mrs. Veasey, Constance 'became aware of a faint buzzing vibration running up my arms and through my body […] it seemed to me that words were welling up in my throat, threatening to choke me if I did not speak' (21). In a similar fashion to those other protagonists haunted by a spectral or supernatural presence – for instance, Chapter One's Charles and Cernunnos from *In The Night Wood* and Edmund and his demon in *Wakenhyrst*, as will be discussed in Chapter Three – Constance would prefer to deny their existence, but she cannot refute the presence of the dead around her, feeling what she cannot see. Twenty-first-century neo-Victorian Gothic novels demonstrate the issue of the multiplicity of truths that metamodernism has inherited from postmodernity. With different factions of faith and varying practices surrounding the concept of the afterlife, contemporary novels such as Harwood's can reflect on the concerns at the heart of Victorian culture that have continued into the modern day: in particular, the need to believe in something more than what can be seen is overruled by the rational mind.

John Glendening reflects on the purpose of spiritualism in the latter half of the nineteenth century and how it was a 'sort of substitute or supplemental religion reacting against the scientific rationalism and materialism that helped call Christian dogma into question'.[22] Although knowing that spirit mediums are frauds, Constance sympathises with Mrs. Veasey who 'I suspect that like me […] had had

[22] John Glendening, *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels: Eye of the Ichthyosaur* (New York: Routledge, 2013) p.19

glimpses of a power, fleeting and uncertain, coming upon one when you least expected it' (23). In the final pages of the novel, Constance meets Nell Wraxford and discusses their clairvoyant abilities. Nell replies that she remembers the fall that caused her first vision: 'thinking that it had opened a crack in my mind, just enough to let in glimpses of a world beyond – a world I never wanted to see. And then the rift closed again' (291). In a similar fashion to Constance, Nell does not appear to hold with the traditional Christian values usually depicted in Victorian England – that the living cannot know and interact with the dead, that knowledge of the afterlife belongs to God alone. Under the influence of a combination of scientific knowledge and awareness of the supernatural's potential existence, these characters have both begun to develop beliefs beyond the scope of – and in reaction to – their historical context, taking on the role of representing a more contemporary view of death, science, and mysticism.

Nell Wraxford is the only character in *The Séance* who appears truly to believe in the presence of the supernatural and the power of clairvoyance, her faith only wavering once or twice. She first realises her power as a medium when she is visited by the spirit of her grandmother:

> [t]he chair creaked as she settled herself in it, smiled at me and took up her work, just as if she had only been gone five minutes, rather than resting in Kensal Green cemetery for the past fifteen years. (90)

Although the reader is unsettled by this vision, Nell reacts with a certain calm to the strange presence, as though the spirit of her grandmother is anticipated. There is an expectancy for the supernatural to be present in order to demonstrate the ability of clairvoyants to speak with the dead and discover more about the afterlife. Harwood depicts a constant battle throughout the novel between science and the supernatural. Those characters who believe, such as Mrs. Veasey, Constance, and Nell Wraxford, know that their abilities are not what others claim them to be and do not always consider them a gift – a point Nell makes clear when she realises that she foresaw the death of her fiancé, Edward Ravenscroft, before she ever met him. Although Mr. Raphael appears to oppose these women due to his complete disbelief in the powers of spirit mediums, each female figure illustrates the notion of danger represented in the supernatural. Having witnessed the lengths those who

are grieving will go to, a particular example being made by Harwood in Constance's suicidal mother, these characters illustrate the understanding of the perils of pseudo-science, where fact and fiction become entangled and create unnatural versions of reality. The twenty-first-century neo-Victorian Gothic novel allows the reader to consider the multiplicity of these unenlightened beliefs and their impact on nineteenth-century culture as well as modern understandings of death and the afterlife.

The Victorian period was an age of many discoveries, particularly those of a scientific and medical nature. Many fields of medicine were explored and many more debunked as false avenues of study. Magnus Wraxford, the husband of Nell and therefore a distant relative of Constance, represents those "mountebanks" who used new-fangled sciences and put forth the impression that they could cure illnesses through parapsychology and other fraudulent means – no better than the spirit mediums they disavowed. Glendening remarks that the appearance of such pseudo-sciences 'lend, especially in contrast to today's beliefs, dramatic and often humorous possibilities to neo-Victorian fiction, spicing up and serving as counterpoint to the stodginess often associated with Victorians'.[23] Through John Montague's journal, the reader learns that Magnus Wraxford is a physician who experiments with different medical techniques, practicing 'mesmerism, of which as you know there is a great deal of suspicion amongst the established practitioners. Claims to be able to cure heart disease, among other illness, through mesmeric treatment' (56). Despite Harwood contextualising Magnus' work in an era where experimentation with different forms of science was the norm, Magnus' profession is treated with an air of apprehension due to the disbelief of many within the medical profession.

On the practice of mesmerism, Kelly Hurley notes that '[m]esmerism was practised in Great Britain for therapeutic reasons, as an experimental discipline that might further the advancement of knowledge about the human mental apparatus,

[23] Glendening, *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels*, p.102

and as a form of popular entertainment'.[24] Mesmerism is a feature on many later nineteenth-century Gothic works, most notably in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) in which the titular character uses the practice on its victims in order to take control of them. Depicted as an enthusiastic advocate for the practice, Magnus explains the limited view of mesmerism:

> we do not know *how* the mind influences the body; we can speak of electrobiological influence or ideomotor force, but these are mere labels applied to a mystery. I can see the improvement; my patients can feel the benefit of the treatment, but to a sceptic it is mere spontaneous healing. (71)

Magnus' choice in speciality lends him more of the appearance of a hypnotist and entertainer to the contemporary reader as the practice of pseudo-sciences such as mesmerism have been debunked to merely entertainment value in the modern world.

In Mr. Raphael, Constance sees a mirror image of the Magnus Wraxford she reads about in John Montague and Nell Wraxford's writings. Both men represent the obsessive practical need to discover more about the afterlife. Nevertheless, even though they are both men of science, they see the reconciliation between learned thinking and superstition from different points of view. Where Mr. Raphael seeks only to debunk spiritualism, using science to prove its falsehood, Magnus had designed a scientific experiment to prove the efficacy of spiritualism for his own monetary gain. As a man of science, he used the same tricks as the spirit mediums so abhorred by the scientific community in order to give his own pseudo-science credence.

Magnus plays on others' fear and superstitions – even going so far as to play on folk legends surrounding his own family: '[p]eople in these parts firmly believe that the Hall is haunted, and your uncle a necromancer' (57). Speaking to John Montague, Magnus states that he discovered a manuscript and transcribed the following from it: 'a Man who could command the Power of *Lightning* would be as the Avenging Angel upon that Dreadful Day […] and have Dominion over the Souls

[24] Kelly Hurley, 'Science and the Gothic' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) pp.170-185 [p.174]

of the Living and the Dead' (66-7). Magnus understands the fear of death that holds all individuals in thrall, in direct opposition to the blasphemy of man playing at being God. Therefore, he clearly creates an atmosphere of religious turmoil in order to scare John Montague into believing Magnus' story. The effect of fear in Gothic allows contemporary writers to reflect on the limited knowledge of the Victorians in comparison to the modern-day reader, as the conduction of lightning and the discovery of electricity would be a new phenomenon to Harwood's characters, once more demonstrating the cultural anxieties surrounding scientific practices in the nineteenth century.

Magnus embodies the burning question of the Victorian scientific age, alongside the logical reality of contemporary society: 'whether or not we can survive death […] and if so in what form, is surely the greatest question of the day […] one undeniable instance of communication from beyond would establish the truth once and for all' (115). Whilst various Christian religious beliefs are still the basis for many contemporary Western cultures, science is the leading foundation of knowledge about the human body and therefore of what happens to life once it is over. This contemporary view is demonstrated through the character of George Woodward. The new scientific discoveries of their time are creating doubts in the pastor's belief system and that he 'has read Lyell, and Renan, and the *Vestiges*, as well as Darwin, and has begun to wonder what, if anything, can be saved for belief' (98-9). By reading the controversial works of the scientists and philosophers of the time, George appears to have been attempting to marry religion and science, not just for his own sake, but for the sake of his religious community, which he feels is being left behind as rational knowledge becomes the order of the day over theology. Glendening notes that, '[f]iction and historiography often present Victorian occultism as contrary or threatening to traditional religion, but it shared the fate of Christianity in twentieth-century Britain', demonstrating how both traditional formats of religion as well as the reactionary movement of spiritualism were being forced aside to make room for science and its new following.[25] However, the reality of life is often circumvented by the human desire to believe,

[25] Glendening, *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels*, p.19

even if that belief is as irrational as spiritualism is depicted to be in twenty-first-century Gothic novels.

The Séance, through its various narrators and the exploration of pseudo-scientific experiments, considers the impact of the Victorian obsession with the dead upon the twenty-first-century Gothic novel. Popular among many Victorians, communicating with the dead in the nineteenth century was meant to help the bereaved deal with guilt, grief, and the hope of a potential afterlife. Just as with Rita's experiments in *Once Upon a River*, Harwood's use of science in the forms of pseudo-science, false experiments, and parapsychology depicts how the Victorian era was a time of exploration and discovery but also ignorance – either in the form of blind faith, as seen with the sitters at the séances and with the religious figures, or in the characters who lack correct scientific knowledge. No matter their position on the subject, each character in the novel attempts to present evidence bolstering their belief system and see it either destroyed by another, or they choose to continue in their falseness as they will not and cannot be separated from that which brings them comfort. Rather than simply depicting the historical fact that spiritualism was a movement based on fraud and the monetary gain of certain individuals, *The Séance* utilises metamodernism alongside the Gothic to offer multiple views on the subject of communicating with the dead. The twenty-first century is an age of advanced scientific understanding and yet, at the end of the novel, there is hope for the characters that there is some truth to the concept of spiritualism as it offers a chance for more than the evidence science provides.

Opium and Absinthe

Set in *fin-de-siècle* New York, Lydia Kang's American Gothic novel, *Opium and Absinthe* follows the grieving process of Tillie Pembroke, whose sister appears to have been murdered by a vampire. Recovering from an injury, Tillie is an unreliable narrator, being opioid-dependent, she spends her days dosing herself with laudanum, absinthe and, later on, morphine and heroin, as she searches for her sister's killer. As she searches for evidence of the existence of vampires, Tillie deals with the social expectations of her upper-class family, her growing addiction, and the impact of medical anxieties on American culture. The influence of British culture

on America in the late 1800s is represented through Tillie's views on the 1899 US publication of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and illustrates the metamodern practice of playing with fiction, rewriting history and the narrative to depict marginalised areas of the past. The obsession with vampires that Tillie refuses to relinquish is only aided by the distorted reality she chooses to believe in as she imbibes different forms of opiates.

Where Setterfield's characters believe in the folklore around them as truth and Harwood's seek to debunk the supernatural through scientific discovery, Kang's leading character actively seeks to prove the existence of the fantastic, in order to explain the inexplicable: the two puncture wounds on her sister's neck where she was drained of blood. The use of drugs in both Britain and America is a known part of nineteenth-century culture, however Kang represents opioids through the personal experiences of the protagonist, exploring the scientific and growing recreational use of such drugs and the impact upon both the human body and mind. This section will analyse the use of opioids as medicine in America at the turn of the century and the scientific morality surrounding death in *Opium and Absinthe*. It will also examine the manner in which news and stories were distributed and influenced public opinion, as well as the continued effects of Stoker's novel in twenty-first-century Gothic literature. Through this unreliable narrative, Kang illustrates the fascination with death and the afterlife in American neo-Victorian Gothic novels and the culture surrounding the sensationalism of the subject.

The appearance of drugs and the effects upon the individual have been depicted in Gothic novels of the nineteenth century, the most notable representation being Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, published in 1821. Whilst De Quincey's work was an autobiographical account of the effects of laudanum abuse, Kang applies the contextual understanding of the use of laudanum as both medicinal and recreational for the upper classes during the late 1800s to her contemporary text. Tillie experiences the effects for the first time when it is offered to ease the pain of her broken clavicle, noting that 'they had only driven a quarter of a mile when she felt the pain at her shoulder dull a little,

and a soporific cloud settled over her mind'.[26] Although opiates were used for their medicinal value – and are still prescribed to this day, though with more understanding of their dangers – Tillie's dependency on them is exacerbated by the news of her murdered sister, Lucy. She begs her maid for another dose of laudanum as she 'cannot abide being awake' (26) as it means she would have to deal her bereavement. This self-awareness of her grief demonstrates Tillie's metamodern understanding of the implausibility of death and grief, using pharmaceuticals as a distraction, just as Erin does in Bailey's *In The Night Wood*, explored in Chapter One. As she avoids her grief but is still subconsciously consumed by it, Tillie allows the opium tinctures she imbibes to create a false reality around her.

Given her sister's strange death – exsanguinated via two puncture wounds in her neck – Tillie becomes obsessed with the concept of vampires, exacerbated by the publication of Stoker's seminal Gothic novel, *Dracula*, in America in 1899, the year of the narrative's setting. The novel and her own imagination become Tillie's escape: 'between her wretched grief and her foggy hours under the spell of the opium drops, Tillie pulled the copy of *Dracula* from beneath her pillow and read, determined to learn anything that might tell her how Lucy had died' (45). Stoker's fictional work becomes part of the reality constructed by Tillie's intoxicated mind as she cannot bear to believe in any other explanation for Lucy's demise. Despite her opiate-dependent state, she manages to show a level of clarity in limited intervals that demonstrates her need to escape reality in order to cope with the loss of her sister, particularly when she writes to the female journalist, Nellie Bly. In one letter, Tillie states '*[i]t would be easier to blame my dear Lucy's murder on vampires, because somehow it is ever so much harder to know that God's own children are such terrible creatures*' (204). Tillie represents the morbid fascination with murder that has haunted Western culture since the Victorian era and continues to be depicted in the contemporary Gothic novel.

Tillie's altered reality is strengthened even further by the publication of sensationalised news. Although Lucy's death is accounted after its happening, Tillie

[26] Lydia Kang, *Opium and Absinthe* (Seattle: Lake Union Publishing, 2020) p.9. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

and the reader are still able to discover a great many details about the event, emphasising both the grief and fear Tillie feels in relation the potential supernatural involvement. Tillie discovers her sister's death, written in the *World* newspaper under the headline 'Woman Found Dead in Shadow of Metropolitan Museum of Art', sub-headed with 'Vampire-like Punctures Found on Neck' (23). Whilst the newspaper does not at this point in the narrative know the identity of the body, it describes the exsanguination of the corpse 'though no blood was found at the scene' (23), emphasising the idea of supernatural interference. Following a detailed description of the woman's appearance, the newspaper remarks that an 'empty bottle of absinthe was found next to the body' (23). This combination of death and substance abuse sets up the foundations of the narrative, demonstrating Kang's illustration of nineteenth-century New York and its acceptance of violent death in conjunction to drugs. This sensationalising of news as it depicts murder, violence, and drug abuse, illustrates how the twenty-first century mirrors *fin-de-siècle* Victorian culture in its use of news as a source of entertainment.

Before the facts are even given, Tillie and every other reader of the newspaper – as well as the reader of the novel – begin to view the death of Lucy through one particular perspective. Much like the locals creating stories in *Once Upon a River*, the importance of science and its understanding of life is ridiculed by the less knowledgeable, used for entertainment value instead. Where nineteenth-century Gothic fiction utilised sensationalism to entertain its readers, so too had newspapers in nineteenth-century America begun to employ a more scandalous approach to news, as noted by David M. Ryfe: 'the demise of the partisan press actually began with the rise of the penny papers in the 1830s – the ancestors of modern commercial news'.[27] Twenty-first-century Gothic authors utilise Victorian settings in conjunction with sensationalised news in order to emphasise the similarities between the eras and the lack of change in this cultural aspect: the morbid fascination with crime and murder news.

[27] David M. Ryfe, 'News, Culture and Public Life: A Study of 19th-century American Journalism', *Journalism Studies*, 7.1 (2006) pp.60-77 [p.71]

The issue of what is fact and what is fiction becomes a dilemma when it is read in a newspaper as events are expected to be reported as they happen but exaggeration is used, just as with fiction, in order to draw the reader in: '[t]he 1880s saw a new emphasis on diverting readers with conceivably minimal attention spans, so that a focus on crime and iniquity, to be duly deprecated, became the order of the day'.[28] In viewing the effect of the newspaper articles on Tillie and the other characters in the novel, the reader becomes self-reflexive on the manner in which they consume both factual texts such as the news, as well as non-fictional texts such as *Opium and Absinthe*. As noted by Joseph Crawford, the use of terror in Victorian Gothic utilised pre-conceived cultural fears from events such as the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror to create a 'fascination with states of extreme fear and figures of superhuman evil' that allowed Gothic writers to explore socio-political discourse in an abstract manner.[29] This 'literature of terror' also influenced the depiction of news. In the archives, Tillie researches various stories on vampires, noting that it 'didn't take long before she was ensconced in stories of blood and death and the undead themselves' (221), providing further evidence to the reader that newspapers of late nineteenth-century America printed, in equal amounts, fact and fiction.

Following the description in the newspaper article, Tillie provides the reader with a detailed description of Lucy's body once it has been brought to the family home. The appearance of her sister's corpse acts as a catalyst for Tillie's drug abuse, furthering her belief that a vampire is the cause of her sister's death. Tillie first notes Lucy had been placed in 'her wedding dress, of all things, as though Death were her betrothed' (33). Kang's Lucy mirrors the vampiric Lucy of Stoker's novel, who is constantly referred to as a 'white figure' after she has become one of the undead.[30] However, where Lucy Westenra is buried with garlic, a crucifix and finally a stake to the heart, Lucy Pembroke is given the 'tiniest stitch at the corner of her mouth to keep forever silent' (33). The act of stitching the mouth shut

[28] Nicholas Rance, '"Jonathan's Great Knife": *Dracula* Meet Jack the Ripper', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30.2 (2002) pp.439-453 [p.442]
[29] Joseph Crawford, *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Fear in the Age of the Reign of Terror* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p.xi
[30] Bram Stoker, *Dracula and Other Stories* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2013) p.160

finalises the death of Lucy, isolating Tillie from the rest of society as she chooses to search for evidence of vampires in her version of reality, induced by her addiction.

Tillie notes an addition to Lucy's bridal outfit, an attempt to cover the signs of her violent death: '[a]round her neck was a wide band of ivory silk sewn with seed pearls […] Her neck was mottled with bruises. And in the middle of the right side were two puncture wounds' (33). The sight of her sister's mangled body demonstrates the 'proclamation of human fragility', as noted by Steven Bruhm, that is often found on Gothic bodies.[31] A concept that transcends historical setting, human fragility is a central theme in many Gothic works, from the eighteenth century through to the present day. Whilst Setterfield and Harwood attempt to offer an exploration of the mystery of death and its impact on Victorian culture, Kang illustrates a more intimate look at the impact of the fragility of human life via the corpse. This is emphasised by Tillie who, immediately after seeing her sister's body, requests her 'medicine' (34), as she cannot cope with the reality of the situation without the comfort of opium.

Addiction and the Gothic are often found together as they are characterised through excess and transgression, clearly depicted in classic works such as the previously mentioned De Quincey text. As Carol Margaret Davison states, 'given addiction's role as a cultural pathology, its location at the crossroads of desire and anxiety […] it may be said to be a Gothic subject par excellence'.[32] Tillie's opiate habit is fuelled by multiple characters in various manners throughout the novel. Tillie's reliance on the drug is aggravated not just by her sister's death but by her family's seeming indifference to her murder. At the height of her addiction, she admits her reliance on the drug: 'morphine made me feel better. All the time. I was hardly able to think after Lucy died' (281). In twenty-first-century society, although applicable across all classes, drug addiction is often stereotypically represented in

[31] Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) p.xiv
[32] Carol Margaret Davison, 'The Gothic and Addiction: A Mad Tango', *Gothic Studies*, 11.2 (2009) pp.1-8 [p.1]

the lower classes. When considering the history of opium addiction in North America, it is noted that

> the main source of the epidemic was iatrogenic morphine addiction, which coincided with the spread of hypodermic medication during 1870–1895. The model opioid-addicted individual was a native-born white woman with a painful disorder, often of a chronic nature.[33]

In the 1800s, opiate habits were very expensive and therefore the majority of drug addicts or 'morphinomaniacs' (212) were upper-class women who became dependent on the tinctures and injections used for health purposes. Laudanum and other forms of opium was understood to be used regularly by the upper classes in both Britain and America but to be seen to be controlled by the addiction would bring down a family's status. Despite her grandmother's disapproval, Tillie is still able to procure drugs from her doctor, and later, her upper-class friends and fiancé become her suppliers. The continued fascination with depicting drug culture in neo-Victorian Gothic novels is summarised by Davison and the modern-day need to categorise addiction at every level: '[e]ver eager for a fix, we continue to carry our addictions over into our technologies: alongside hits of e-heroin from the internet, we are offered virtual drug-taking options in some video games that change the pace and ambience of the game'.[34] Once more, Kang utilises the Victorian drug culture to allow for reflection on the evolution of Western civilisation in terms of influence of addiction on human fragility as discussed above.

Emphasising the impact of grief on the abuse of drugs, Kang illustrates the various misconducts in the medicinal application of opioids. When she enters a rehabilitation facility after her morphine addiction reaches its climax, Tillie is visited by both her journalist friend, Ian, and her sister's former fiancé, James Cutter, who has become her own fiancé after Lucy's death. Whilst Ian tries to help her rehabilitate, noting that '[o]piates are for broken bones, not broken hearts' (281), James brings her a new medicine to help her with her opium withdrawal: heroin. Although the modern reader knows heroin to be a Class A drug with severe effects

[33] Andrew Kolodny, David T. Courtwright, Catherine S. Hwang, Peter Kreiner, John L. Eadie, Thomas W. Clark and G. Caleb Alexander, 'The Prescription Opioid and Heroin Crisis: A Public Health Approach to an Epidemic of Addiction', *The Annual Review of Health*, 36 (2015) pp.559-74 [p.561]
[34] Davison, 'The Gothic and Addiction: A Mad Tango', p.6

on the body, it was originally marketed as a sedative for coughs. Kang introduces a level of narrative irony to the text as, despite her vast scientific and medical knowledge, Tillie is unaware that heroin is an opioid, taking the pills in the hopes of being released from the Keeley Institute, and she once again enjoys the sensation they provide: '[n]ot only did the pills keep the pain at bay, but she felt impervious. The tablets wiped away all bitterness, regret, and anger that had ever existed' (292). Much like the spiritualists in Harwood's *The Séance*, Tillie is a victim of her own self-deception, using opium to cope with the irreconcilable notion of Lucy's death. By examining the opioid crisis in *fin-de-siècle* America, Kang directs the reader to remember the prescription opioid crisis that is still ongoing in the twenty-first century, demonstrating the metamodern Gothic novel's ability to mirror past and present events as a means of understanding current socio-political issues.

The supposed presence of the supernatural in *Opium and Absinthe* is created by the misapplication of medical knowledge by various characters. The other miscalculation of the medical profession is the marriage between the supernatural and science, not unlike the application of science to spiritualism in the previously discussed *The Séance*. In a manner similar to the early Gothic writers, the supernatural's presence in Kang's narrative is explained. Tillie discovers that her sister's death, and that of three others, was caused by Mrs. Erikkson, the wife of the Pembroke's family doctor, who has been murdering survivors of various infections, in an attempt to inoculate her ailing son, Tom. She tells Tillie 'Tom is all I have. We lost the first child, and I shan't lose the second' (352). Believing that her practices are acceptable as they are medical, Mrs. Erikkson depicts a form of what is now known as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Where Tillie allows her grief for her sister to consume her and deny reality, Mrs. Erikkson demonstrates a disturbing rationality for her grief, believing she can conquer death for her son.

William Hughes states that, in the evolution of the Gothic antagonist, the 'Satanic, theologically informed tempter of the first phase of the genre is in many respects eclipsed in Victorian medical Gothic by the astute but irresponsible secular

medical practitioner'.[35] Mrs. Erikkson, for all the medical knowledge she has acquired working with her husband, appears to have also been taken in with the fantastical stories depicted in the news, just as Tillie had been. Mrs. Erikkson understands the medical importance of blood, explaining to Tillie that '[a]fter certain sicknesses it protects people from getting sick. And it will protect my Tom too. My harvests have nourished him' (352). Mrs. Erikkson is discussing the discovery of antibodies in human blood, a term first used in 1891 by the German scientist, Paul Ehrlich. Her understanding of this medical practice, although poorly applied to physical medicine, demonstrates the nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding infectious disease and death, with high mortality rates increasing alongside rapid industrialisation.

Kang utilises these social concerns to emphasise her representation of death and the powerful effect it has in creating fear among Western culture. Whilst she is correct in theory on the abilities of human blood to protect and prevent against illnesses it has already encountered, Mrs. Erikkson's application of the concept is based in supernatural folk legend. When examining the use of Victorian medicine in Gothic literature, William Hughes remarks upon the parallel between the act of a vampire biting its victims and medical injections: 'the process of sanguine extraction is also one of injection, the surface of the skin being necessarily ruptured by the bite of the revenant […] the matter of contamination – in a pathological as well as a sexual sense – is ever present'.[36] Vampirism is another device through which Gothic literature represents the medical fear of infections of the blood and body. This motif had continued in popularity through to the twenty-first century as various epidemics across the centuries, such as influenza and AIDS, Zika virus, and coronavirus, have caused a widespread fear of disease, not just in Western society but globally.

Neo-Victorian Gothic texts such as Kang's have adapted this fear to present not only the fear of infection but also the misuse of medical knowledge and the

[35] William Hughes, 'Victorian Medicine and the Gothic' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) pp.186-201 [p.188]
[36] Hughes, 'Victorian Medicine and the Gothic', p.194

abuse of its application. Tillie's research uncovered several news stories in which the bodies of the "undead" were burnt and their ashes ingested 'so that their "essence" could be consumed by the living to save them' (221). Where Tillie sought out the supernatural to provide an explanation for the tragic and untimely death of her sister, Mrs. Erikkson sought to prevent death, consumed by the loss of her first child and so attempting to prevent the same happening to her second. Kang utilises the character of Mrs. Erikkson to create a debate on the morality of science, not dissimilar to the examination of pseudo-sciences and spirituality in *The Séance*, where the two are deployed to bring comfort and answers to the living. The Victorian context of Kang's novel mirrors the modern age in terms of the ethical debates surrounding scientific experimentation for the betterment of the many. *Opium and Absinthe* takes this to the extreme through the depiction of murder in order to emphasise the continuing nature of the ethical dispute of scientific experimentation as it pertains the fragility of the human body, vividly demonstrated by the corpse of Lucy.

Opium and Absinthe uses the fantastic and the supernatural as a means to explain unexpected death, and as an escape mechanism to avoid dealing with unresolved grief and guilt, just Charles uses the 'eternal present' of the Night Wood to suspend time and therefore grief, as discussed in Chapter One. The abuse of opium was a common practice in the upper classes of America but is also seen in a more generalised manner in the twenty-first century. Kang develops this parallel between the two time periods, creating a link between the reader and Tillie in the way in which they consume fiction. To escape reality as depicted in the character of Tillie who obsesses over Stoker's novel, neo-Victorian literature causes self-reflection in the reader as to how they use fiction as a coping mechanism, inviting the supernatural into reality to make sense of the inexplicable. Science in the form of medical curiosity is prevalent throughout the text but, much like Harwood's novel, it does not prove the existence of the supernatural but rather debunks it in place of the more logical evidence science provides. *Opium and Absinthe* explores the morality that surrounds death when it is presented in the form of murder and questions the justification of death for the purpose of scientific progress.

Nevertheless, medical knowledge is seen to be both abused as well as incomplete in *Opium and Absinthe*, as its narrative highlights the age of discovery in which those of the medical profession were still learning the true consequences of their treatments.

Conclusion

The popularity of the neo-Victorian novel allows for its hybridisation with the Gothic, bringing the mode into the twenty-first century. As with the earlier Gothic's return to the past, so too does the contemporary Gothic novel awaken the past as well as the dead. In doing so, the metamodern format of the Gothic novel is able to use the abstract notions surrounding death in a post-ironic manner and investigate current social issues in order to consider the ways in which they are mirrored by the past. All three novels are set in the latter half of the nineteenth century but their differences in location and the characters' social classes emphasise their breadth of new knowledge on subjects such as science, death and the supernatural. Death and science are popular subjects of note, often aligned with interest in Victorian traditions to do with death, for example spiritualism and medical curiosity with the human body. Death – particularly murder – was sensationalised and commercialised by newspapers in the age when media as it is known today was founded. The influence of the more immediate circulation of news can be seen in Kang's *Opium and Absinthe*, which emphasises the nineteenth-century surge in reporting news in a manner that increases the entertainment value and sensationalism of horrific events. This approach is expected in *Once Upon A River* and *The Séance* where unreliable narrators rely on folk legend and stories of the fantastic to explain the unknown. In particular, Harwood's narrative clearly depicts the paradox of the Victorian age - the time where science and superstition meet, pushing against one another for influence over the way individuals view and understand the world around them.

The twenty-first-century neo-Victorian Gothic novel appreciates Victorian, Gothic, and Romantic literature whilst simultaneously critiquing and pulling the culture apart. In examining these three texts, we can see the impact of British Victorian culture on Anglophonic Gothic fiction, particularly American literature.

Whilst Setterfield is an English author depicting a narrative set in England, Harwood is an Australian writing a British-set Gothic novel, and Kang is an American writing an American novel which considers the cultural influence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* on her characters' lives. All three authors develop their narratives in congruence with historical events but provide different approaches to context, offering up marginalised perspectives from history and providing the reader with alternative views of Victorian culture. By exploring the boundaries between life and death via science and the supernatural, these neo-Victorian Gothic texts offer the reader the ability to examine the influence of the late nineteenth century on the modern day more closely, in particular in the understanding of the afterlife as it is depicted in Gothic literature. This chapter's exploration of the nature of life and death leads into Chapter Three and the examination of man's relationship with the natural world and its correlation to male identity.

Chapter Three

Uprooting the Ancestors: Eco-Gothic and Male Identity

Studies of the Gothic from the perspective of gender have often been primarily focused on female and queer identities, as well as non-normative masculinity. Discussions of heteronormative male identities frequently take place in terms of its detrimental effect to femininity and the non-normative. This chapter will explore the relationship between contemporary male identities and the outdated ideals of masculinity expected by the patriarchal Western society. The relationship between male identities and their representation in the Gothic stems from the earlier works that have been catalogued as Male Gothic. There is little critical literature on the Male Gothic as a category, other than as a contrast to the Female Gothic set out by Ellen Moers in the 1970s, but as Glennis Byron and David Punter note:

> male Gothic […] primarily focuses on questions of identity, and on the male protagonist's transgression of social taboos. It involves the confrontation of some isolated overreacher with various social institutions, including the law, the church, and the family.[1]

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, texts of a metamodern structure often investigate the shifting socio-political climate in a post-ironic fashion. However, whilst the question of identity is still relevant to the metamodern Gothic, it is less clearly focused on social conformity and transgressions, and more a consideration of the individual's identity, which may be influenced by social context but should still be able to stand alone as an individual. These cultural concerns are represented in abstract, typically supernatural, elements in order to explore truth and identity which will be demonstrated by the texts in this chapter.

The concept of identity, as it is discussed in this thesis, has become altogether more convoluted as metamodernism indicates. In her discussion of gender in Victorian Gothic fiction, Carol Margaret Davison notes that, whilst the Victorian period was the era in which gender roles became increasingly distinguished, the 'hegemonic middle-class Victorian agenda to retain a sense of

[1] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwells Publishing Ltd, 2004) p.278

separate gendered spheres faced ever-increasing challenges as the century progressed'.[2] With the evolution of society and the mixing of various cultures, individual identities, as they are represented by male and female Gothic characters, can no longer be limited to a particular set of archetypes set out by the traditional structure of the novel.

A common term in the discussion of male identities in the twenty-first century is "toxic masculinity". Terry A. Kupers defines this phrase as the masculine 'need to aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities in men'.[3] However, this one-dimensional consideration of male identity has been a point of controversy in recent literary studies. Alex Hobbs notes that the rising interest in men's studies 'aims to correct the notion that all men can be represented by the historical few who are recorded for their exploits in politics, war, or other stereotypic and historically masculine pursuits'.[4] This thesis will consider a metamodern approach to men's studies as it examines multiple representations of masculine identity in contemporary Gothic novels. Donna Heiland claims that Gothic texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries 'are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going'.[5] The Gothic novel has evolved in the twenty-first century, considering not only how the patriarchy can be disrupted by the female figures it hinders, but how it is damaging to male identities as well. This is shown, not just in books pertaining to feminist figures and their ability to overthrow the patriarchy, but in male characters, uncomfortable with the identities constructed for them by hegemonic masculine cultures.

Where Chapter Two looks at the nature of human life and its beliefs concerning death, this chapter's discussion of male identity in twenty-first-century

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[2] Carol Margaret Davison, 'The Victorian Gothic and Gender' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) pp.124-141 [p.126]

[3] Terry A. Kupers, 'Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61.6 (2005) pp.713-724 [p.713]

[4] Alex Hobbs, 'Masculinity Studies and Literature', *Literature Compass*, 10.4 (2013) pp.383-395 [p.384]

[5] Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.11

Gothic novels will be considered in relation to the use of setting and the natural world, a key relationship in the contemporary eco-political climate that the chosen texts were written in. This will be examined in terms of the instability of masculinity, as Cynthia Hendershot states in her exploration of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic male figures: 'masculinity as a masquerade may be articulated through Gothic texts, which frequently reveal the fragility of traditional manhood […] the Gothic continually reveals the gulf between the actual male subject and the myth of masculinity'.[6] The anxiety that encompasses the relationship between masculinity and nature, and the desire for man to dominate the natural world, will be at the centre of this chapter, examining how different Gothic male characters fight or work with nature, and the consequences upon their male identities of their actions against the natural world.

Michelle Paver's *Wakenhyrst* (2019) considers several male characters and their relationships with the Suffolk fens – ranging from those who wish completely to dominate the landscape and those who fully submit to it. This text utilises class status to reflect on the relationship between nature and the Victorian Gothic male figure in the twenty-first century, as well as the limitations of holding onto outdated standards of masculinity. The section on *Wakenhyrst* will then lead into the analysis of *The Magdalena Curse* (2009) by F. G. Cottam. Cottam's modern-set text offers a complex consideration of the representation of twenty-first-century Gothic male characters. This novel examines male identity as the protagonist tries to correct his past sins against nature whilst simultaneously battling that which is unnatural: the mutated wolf-men, whose existence conflicts with both the laws of humanity and nature. Multiple aspects of masculinity are depicted in this novel – the soldier, the father, the child, and the beast – in order to find a balance between the traditional and the postmodern image of the Gothic male in a contemporary context. Lastly, Stephen Graham Jones' Gothic horror novel, *The Only Good Indians* (2020) depicts how the image of the Gothic male has evolved from canonical texts to the twenty-first century and postcolonial Gothic. Whilst Paver's British Gothic

[6] Cynthia Hendershot, *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) p.4

novel considers the social concern of class, this is transmogrified into American Gothic and the social issue of race. Through Native American men and their relationship with the natural world, the rift between their traditional heritage and the dominant white culture of the US, Jones offers a metamodern consideration of male identity and its relationship to nature in the contemporary Gothic novel.

Wakenhyrst

Michelle Paver's *Wakenhyrst* tells the story of Maud and her father, Edmund Stearne, an upper-class family who live in the Suffolk fens during the early 1900s. From the 1960's newspaper article at the beginning of the text, the reader is aware of the end of Edmund's narrative: that he committed murder, claiming that he did no wrong, and his daughter who is self-imprisoned in the family home, Wake's End, has kept silent on her father's crimes for the last sixty years. The majority of the novel is split between Maud's perspective as she uncovers the truth of her father's secrets through extracts of his private journals, revealing that Edmund was involved in the death of his sister as a child. This section of the chapter will focus on the relationship between the novel's setting – a small, traditional village with their home built on the outskirts of the Suffolk fens – and the male characters of *Wakenhyrst*. Over the course of the novel, Edmund believes he is being haunted by a demon of the fens that he released from a church painting. This chapter is mostly concerned with Edmund and his deteriorating sanity as he battles against nature. Cursed by his daughter, the demon, and the fens themselves, Edmund represents the negative effects of his constrictive male identity and the perceived need to dominate nature – unlike the lower-class figure of Jubal Rede, the local hermit – that coincide with the hegemonic standards of early twentieth-century manhood, denying any characteristics that would make him appear less masculine in the context of his narrative.

Kari J. Winter writes that 'male Gothic novelists from the 1790s to the 1860s lingered over horrible spectacles of sexual violence, gore, and death, locating evil in

the "other" – women, Catholics, Jews, and ultimately the devil'.[7] Paver utilises this stereotype of the evil "other" in her novel, via the male antagonist and his belief that he is being haunted by a demon from the fens. Edmund obsessively attempts to find evil in other objects – particularly natural ones – in order to cope with the sins of his past. Edmund's demon is depicted at the beginning of the novel in the paintings produced before his death in an asylum: '[a]ll three are untitled and share the same mysterious design […] a vortex of otherworldly creatures. They're the stuff of nightmares, painted in such obsessive detail they could be alive. Grotesque, bewitching, even evil'.[8] Throughout the novel, Edmund is neurotic in his attempts to locate evil in other objects, particularly the fens which surround his family home. Maud notes that, for as long she could remember, 'Father hated the fen. He forbade Richard and Maud to cross the foot-bridge and venture in, and all the windows overlooking it […] had to be kept shut always' (20). Although Maud has no context at this point in which to establish her father's hatred of the landscape, the reader begins to see how Edmund locates evil in "other" objects due to his fear of the past and, in the case of the fens, the supernatural power they appear to hold over him.

In his discussion of folklore, Dan Ben-Amos notes that, 'an outgrowth of the human experience with nature, folklore itself was thought to be a natural expression of man before city, commerce, civilization, and culture contaminated the purity of his life'.[9] As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis, folklore is often used in twenty-first-century Gothic novels, and *Wakenhyrst* is no exception. The fens which dominate the setting of this text, are often spoken of in conjunction with the supernatural creatures that supposedly haunt it: 'ferishes and hobby-lanterns [folkloric creatures] ull hook you in to a miry death' (20). Not only is the folklore of the fens a form of expression, as Ben-Amos writes, but it is also a form of control over those who live in the landscape. The use of stories and

[7] Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992) p.21
[8] Michelle Paver, *Wakenhyrst* (London: Head of Zeus Ltd, 2019) p.6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[9] Dan Ben-Amos, 'The Idea of Folklore: An Essay' in *Studies in Aggadah and Jewish Folklore*, ed. by I. Ben-Ami & J. Dan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983) pp.11-17 [p.11]

supernatural creatures are a means of manipulating the relationship between man and nature, creating both fear and respect for the power of the environment. The landscape that surrounds the Stearne family home remains a point of contention throughout the novel, as Edmund continuously fights its encroachment upon the house whilst Maud welcomes it. The reader is consistently reminded that the 'Mere was utterly forbidden, the haunt of ferishes and will-o'-the-wisps that dragged you to a miry death. And yet Maud felt drawn to the edge' (47). Paver underlines the alluring nature of the environment for Maud, revering the "otherness" that her father abhors about the natural world.

Although the novel was written in the twenty-first century, the Edwardian setting allows Edmund to maintain several of the more traditional aspects of Victorian Gothic masculinity, compared to the other males examined in *Wakenhyrst* and those in the second and third texts in this chapter. According to Davison, the male figure in Victorian culture was depicted as the social norm and 'manliness became increasingly and inextricably bound up with the concept of self-control, with femaleness raising the spectre of hysteria'.[10] Edmund's obsession with self-control and maintaining patriarchal power is reminiscent of, as Ruth Bienstock Anolik writes, the 'vigilant policing of masculinity, as legitimated by spousal and paternal roles […] failure in either realm was a threat, both to social "order" and to the ontological foundation of masculine subjectivity'.[11] Edmund's 'vigilant policing' is seen through his treatment of various characters, not just through Maud and his wife – Maman – but also the general household of Wake's End.

At the beginning of the novel, Maud remembers how the house was governed by two sets of rules: '[o]ne sort belonged to the lower orders: it was called superstition and Father detested it […] The other rules were Father's – and much stronger, as he had God on his side' (24). The use of religion over the superstitious lower classes in Edmund's home parallels man's dominance of nature. Maud is caught between two cultures, the superstitious, pagan world of the Suffolk

[10] Davison, 'The Victorian Gothic and Gender', p.125
[11] Ruth Bienstock Anolik, *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007) p.132

fens and the locals who cling to the old traditions tied to nature, and the rules of her Christian father. Edmund uses the traditional domestic space of the family home to establish his dominance as a Gothic male by controlling his immediate surroundings and social group. Nevertheless, although Edmund limits the movements of his household with his various rules, he also falls prey to the folktales and common rituals that ruled his childhood.

Throughout *Wakenhyrst*, there is a great deal of religious and supernatural conflict, a concept explored in greater depth in Chapter Five of this thesis. Despite his strong Christian faith and belief that he is destined for greatness through God, Edmund carries out certain ritual practices of superstition that belong to the local culture of the fens. Maud is aware of this when she sees 'Father's childhood memento hanging from the bedpost. It was a flint with a hole in it: what villagers called a hagstone' (67). This reliance on an old, superstitious belief allows Maud to understand her father further: 'if losing the hagstone could upset him so much, he must believe in its power […] He truly believed that it kept him from harm' (69). This use of a symbol of natural magick juxtaposes Edmund's Christian zeal in dealing with the superstitions of the other characters of *Wakenhyrst*. Edmund presents himself as a stereotypical Gothic male – dominant, constantly in control, empowered by his belief in and knowledge of a Christian God, an archetype that will be explored in the character of Jón from *The Glass Woman* in Chapter Five – which has been the central aspect of his masculine identity. However, Maud is able to uncover that his façade is built on childhood pagan fears and belief in the power of nature, which not only demonstrates that his external identity is a lie, but also provides a basis for Maud's curse and the progression of the narrative.

There are several dynamics between nature and masculinity to explore in *Wakenhyrst*, which demonstrate not only Edmund's locating of evil in the "other", rather than facing the truth of his own sins, but also other versions of the male identity as they interact with the natural world. In her examination of eighteenth-century social norms, Terry Castle notes that

> [the] Western image of masculinity has altered strikingly over the past two centuries, gradually absorbing many once exclusively

> feminine modes of experience. Characteristics once seen as belonging only to women — moodiness, heightened sensitivity, susceptibility to hysteria, and so on — have come increasingly to be perceived as belonging to both sexes.[12]

Although these characteristics are usually considered as negative in relation to both the male and female sex, Castle notes that they have also been used progressively to explore further the personal life of men and to provide expansion on the discussion of male private spaces. By utilising the novel's turn-of-the-century setting and these characteristics in the staunchly Victorian Edmund, Paver demonstrates the issues of shifting social gender norms when met with the rigid structure of masculinity from previous eras. These emotions that are, by Victorian standards, more effeminate, are often related to the consequences of Edmund's treatment of the natural world.

As Edmund gives in to the belief that he is being tormented by a real demon, the past is slowly revealed to both Maud and the reader. When Maud investigates Edmund's sin, '[s]he was startled to discover it had involved a drowning, particularly as he had only been twelve years old at the time' (180). Jarlath Killeen, in his examination of masculinity in nineteenth-century Gothic literature, notes that

> [a]dult masculinity was configured as promiscuous and immoral, atavistic and monstrous. The male child was believed to be spared these desires until they were foisted upon him by Nature during his pubescent bodily transformation. The translation from boyhood to manhood constituted a sexual fall into immorality.[13]

Edmund's transition from boyhood to adult masculinity began with his sin: the death of his sister Lily. Playing in the fens, Edmund's first monstrous desire is seen when he 'started badgering his sister to take off her clothes like the princess in the story' (219). Lying naked in the boat, Lily's body becomes the focus of Edmund's potent desire for the female body – this is then refocused on more socially acceptable relationships with Maman and (after her death in childbirth) Ivy the housemaid.

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[12] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.34

[13] Jarlath Killeen, *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1825-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009) p.83

Despite the sexual connotations of pleading with his sister to undress, Edmund's main sin does not refer to the immorality of incestuous desire. In the end, instead of Edmund admitting his wrongdoing, it is Jubal Rede, having witnessed the accident that killed Lily, who recounts the events to Maud. He notes that '[e]ither he hadn't tied the knot aright, or else the rope was rotten through, but the next thing anyone knew, the boat was drifting out towards the middle of the Mere and Miss Lily was in a rage and shouting for help' (220). However, despite Jubal's belief that Edmund had gone for help, he returned to the Mere the next day where he saw 'three men dredging the Lode with glaves' (221). Jubal attempts to give Edmund the benefit of the doubt, telling himself that 'Master Eddie was bound to lead them to the Mere. But Master Eddie never did. Master Eddie kept as quiet as the grave' (222). As a traditional Gothic male, holding up the archetypes of patriarchal order at any cost, Edmund becomes truly villainous in the eyes of his daughter and the reader when they learn that he kept Lily's disappearance a secret to avoid blame for her endangerment. As Anolik states

> applications of the term "monstrous" to men were used to signal their "horrifying unnaturalness"—meaning that these men either lack the particular cultural signifiers of masculinity at play in that historic moment, or have embraced them to excess.[14]

Edmund is – to the twenty-first-century reader – an extreme male, upholding all the stereotypes that now have negative connotations. To combat any "effeminate" characteristics he cannot allow himself to accept, Edmund becomes the abusive and controlling brother, husband, and father who is violent to his family, going to the extremes of toxic masculinity and becoming monstrous. His befoulment of nature and therefore his detachment from it is caused, not only by his role in his sister's death, but also in his killing of Jubal and Clem (the gardener and Maud's love interest), both of whom he believed were the fen-demon.

With the truth of his past exposed, it becomes clear to the reader why Edmund fears both the fens and the demon, as he views them both as sentient beings with supposed knowledge of his sins. His fear of their supernatural power is

[14] Anolik, *Horrifying Sex*, p.124

so extreme that he recalls 'I also experienced a profound reluctance to pass near the well. I used to feel the same thing when I was a boy. I used to avoid peering into it, for I dreaded seeing my reflection in the water' (200). In order to reconcile himself with the death of his sister, Edmund embraces his traditional Gothic masculine identity to excess, becoming, as Anolik writes, 'a demonstration of what manliness is not'.[15] His desire to destroy the fens is an excessive reaction to his fear of nature, as Tom J. Hillard states that 'such a sentiment, consciously or not, may lie at the heart of Western culture's long-held desire to alter, change and even destroy those aspects of our environments that (seem to) threaten us'.[16] Edmund's strict rules over the household and his attempts to control nature demonstrate his desire to cower from his past and deny responsibility for his sister's death, enforcing the idea that he has failed to uphold the twenty-first-century ideal of masculine identity – one who can accept the "effeminate" aspects that Edmund so vehemently denies.

Edmund's changing gender norms are not only a result of his role in his sister's death, but also his relationship with the local environment, represented by both the setting and the painting in the church, The Doom. The Doom has a particularly "effeminising" effect on Edmund, making him appear irrational, paranoid, and prone to hallucinations. Through his own outdated – by twenty-first-century standards – rules of patriarchal social order, Edmund should not display any of these characteristics and must remain the stoic, rational, and domineering Victorian Gothic male. The Doom and its fen demons haunt Edmund throughout the novel, unravelling his carefully curated façade. When Edmund first encounters The Doom, it is after the chancel arch has been stripped from the church and he sees the painting hidden beneath the whitewash. It is the demon that catches his attention: '[t]hat was when I saw it. An eye in the grass, peering at me. For an instant my heart misgave me and I had the strangest sensation of *guilt*; as if I'd been caught committing some crime' (106). Edmund's sins against nature in his attempts to dominate it, and his befoulment of the natural world where he has

[15] Anolik, *Horrifying Sex*, p.124
[16] Tom J. Hillard, 'From Salem witch to *Blair Witch*: the Puritan influence on American Gothic nature' in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith & William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) pp.103-119 [p.105]

polluted it with his sins, causes nature to fight back through the supernatural. Edmund demonstrates Castle's blurring of the gender boundaries through his heightened sensitivity to the supernatural, despite his attempts to control his irrationality. The demon in the painting causes Edmund to become more emotional, although he does not seem to understand what he supposed to be guilty of, deceiving himself of the truth of his past.

The demon in The Doom and the fens themselves become interchangeable sources for Edmund's insanity, with him often viewing one as a product of the other. When he first sees the demon in the painting, Edmund notes that the 'head was a swampy green and covered in spikes or perhaps scales, those at the top being outlined in red, as if lit from behind by flames' (107). The creature is consistently described in a similar fashion to the fen: swampy, green, mysterious. He notes the 'pronounced *local* flavour' of the painting and how it contains a 'whiff of the fen […] Its demons attack their victims with the hooked prongs of eel glaves, and the tiny black imps weighing down the scales have the bulbous eyes of toads' (146). As Hillard notes in his discussion of Gothic nature in American literature, 'there has been a steady move towards serious and sustained study of cultural representations of anxiety, fear and even hatred directed at "nature"'.[17] Edmund is a perfect representative of this notion as he fixates on the fen-devil which 'leered from its corner. It knows all about me. It knows everything. It is a creature of the swamp and it squats among the reeds, mocking and obscene' (262) every time he is confronted with the painting.

The twenty-first-century interest in ecocriticism stems not just from the current eco-political crises but also the history of ecophobia entrenched in Western culture. Hillard notes the 'long-held desire to alter, change and even destroy those aspects of our environments that (seem to) threaten us'.[18] Paver utilises the generational relationship of Edmund and Maud to represent the outdated Western desires to control nature as they come into conflict with the more modern need to preserve it. Edmund becomes increasingly paranoid about nature as the novel

[17] Hillard, 'the Puritan influence on American Gothic nature', p.104
[18] Hillard, 'the Puritan influence on American Gothic nature', p.105

progresses, believing the demon knows the truth of his sins, and attempts to destroy the fens in order to maintain his control over his social setting and himself. Nevertheless, no matter how much Edmund attempts to dispel the supernatural, he is continually haunted by a 'shadowy form' in his house, 'at the foot of the stairs begin to crawl towards me. Two eyes stared up at me. They blinked out' (207), forcing him to relinquish his carefully structured masculine identity and give in to the superstitions of the local culture.

While Edmund is the epitome of the traditional Victorian male, fearful of and attempting to dominate nature as means of displaying his masculinity, Paver demonstrates the opposite male identity, as it associates with nature, in the character of Jubal Rede. Representing the contemporary revival of the Romantic notion of man's harmony with the natural world, Jubal lives in a hut on the fens, away from society, and submits to nature rather than attempting to dominate it. By living off the land, Jubal believes he understands the natural world better than any man and any folklore. He illustrates this when discussing magpies – locally known as chatterpies – with Maud: '[s]ome say if you meets a chatterpie you've got to bow down and tell it a greeting. Moonshine. Only thing I opinion true about chatterpies is they're sharp as vinegar, and if one chatters at you from a treetop, you'll see a stranger' (55). Jubal's knowledge of nature puts him in a state of reverence, allowing the environment to become a stable part of his masculine identity, unlike Edmund. However, Paver utilises horror in this Gothic novel to have Edmund destroy Jubal, the representative of nature and that which Edmund wants to dominate. The reader and Maud learn of Edmund's crime when he writes in his journal, 'God has granted me the strength to destroy the demon of the fen', meaning he has drowned Jubal in the fens, believing the local hermit to be possessed by the fen-demon (278). Jubal's murder mirrors Edmund's continued dominance of the natural world and his desire to uphold his Victorian masculinity.

Similarly to Castle, Ellen Brinks notes that 'a male subject can be inhabited, displaced, or self-alienated, even temporarily, by uncanny forces that unleash,

precipitate, or coincide with effeminizing effects'.[19] Edmund reacts violently against the supernatural presence of The Doom and its demon which causes the feminine attributes listed by Castle to manifest and confuse his male identity. At the beginning of the novel, Edmund admonishes Maud for fainting in church due to the eerie carvings in the pews. However, Maud observes that, at the unveiling of The Doom, 'Father's face was the colour of bone, and he was staring fixedly at the Doom […] It was something in the bottom right-hand corner that Maud couldn't see' (143). Edmund displays unwanted "female" characteristics through the physical weakness the painting causes in him, emphasising his distress at the supernatural's knowledge of his past. After this episode, Edmund writes in his journal: '[a]s I beheld the Doom, I experienced the same waking dream that I did on first reading of Pyett's sin. The floating hair. And I did distinctly smell meadowsweet' (146), the elements of nature creeping into every aspect of his life. This is the first hint Maud and the reader gain of Edmund's sin and his first acknowledgement of his past.

Edmund's traditional Gothic masculinity is consistently interrupted by the strain the supernatural takes upon his sanity. In an examination of metrosexuality and consumer culture, Margaret C. Ervin notes that masculinity in the twenty-first century 'becomes an act, and the response to the performance is often the argument that men should behave differently, in a manner that calls to mind a "real" man'.[20] Edmund is depicted as prone to hysteria (one of the most recognised "effeminate" traits in the early twentieth century), his hallucinations muddled between the waking and dreaming world, causing the unwanted "effeminisation" he fights throughout the novel. Similarly to E.T.A Hoffmann's protagonist in *The Sandman* (1816), traumatised by the story of the titular character and haunted by the figure throughout the short story, Edmund's rationality is consistently undermined by the painting and the appearance of the fen-demon. Despite his

[19] Ellen Brinks, *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003) p.12

[20] Margaret C. Ervin, 'The Might of the Metrosexual: How a Mere Marketing Tool Challenges Hegemonic Masculinity' in *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st-Century Man in Popular Culture*, ed. by Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011) pp.58-75 [p.71]

earlier attempts to rationalise his own thoughts – 'I wish I knew *why* the Doom alarms me so […] I keep telling myself that *it is only a picture. It can't do me any harm*' (195) – Edmund is constantly plagued with effeminising doubts. These cracks in his pre-scribed male identity are caused by the supernatural elements of nature, a grotesque representation of the natural world emphasising Edmund's fears. Unable to trust his own mind, Edmund's sanity inexplicably slips further and further away, convincing himself of the supernatural nature of the Doom, that '*it isn't merely a painting. It is far more than that*' (229). The stern, God-fearing character the reader is introduced to in the early chapters of the novel has disappeared, leaving a superstitious, hysterical figure in his place.

As mentioned above, Edmund is plagued by dreams of both the demon and his past throughout the novel, making note of them in his journals which Maud then reads. Edmund recalls his first dream: 'I dreamed that it was summer and I was standing at the edge of the Mere – which in itself is remarkable as I haven't been near it since I was a boy' (136). He is constantly reminded of nature no matter how much he attempts to separate himself from it. The reader already knows from Maud that Edmund simultaneously hates and fears the fens that surround Wake's End, however this dream provides the first evidence that Edmund has interacted with the landscape beyond hiding from it. Edmund's fear of the fens and his refusal to engage with it is manifested in the demon that enters both his dreams and his house. Edmund dreams again of the thing in the water: 'I couldn't move, I could only watch it come closer […] I knew that in another moment the hair would part and the thing would see me with its dead white eyes and my heart would burst' (168). His premonition of the being's actions makes it appear that he is familiar with the creature, more so than he is willing to admit. At the revelation of Edmund's past later in the novel, the reader recognises that the creature has taken the shape of Lily in order to emphasise Edmund's sins.

Edmund seeks to place the blame for Lily's death and his failing in saving her on to the "other" in order to separate himself from the sin. Edmund rationalises his guilt away in order to maintain his traditional Gothic masculine identity:

> perhaps its malign influence was also at work years ago when I was a boy. Perhaps when Lily and I made our way to the Mere that day, some vile emanation from the demon trapped behind the Doom poisoned the atmosphere around us, thus clouding my judgement and making me panic and flee. (273)

After learning her father's plans to drain the fen, in hopes of destroying it and the demon, Maud understands that the 'Mere reminds you of your sin. You want it to disappear. Then you can pretend that what you did never happened' (210). His attempts to ensure his sins belong to the evil "other" illustrate Edmund's desperate need to dominate and destroy the fens in order to hide his past. Much like Ambrosio (the villainous monk who sought to blame all his sins on the "other") in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), '[*h*]*e* was the devil in the corner. He left Lily to drown. That was what he could never bring himself to face' (341). Nevertheless, as Maud states at the end of the novel, the demon lay within the man, cementing his role as the archetypal villainous male of Gothic literature.

Although the main curse throughout *Wakenhyrst* is that of the demon which encapsulates Edmund's guilt and faulty masculine identity, there is another curse at play here. Upon learning that her father has killed her magpie, Maud's hatred for him escapes in the form of a curse. Burying her pet bird, she prays to the fen: '[m]ay Father be punished for what he did […] May his secret sin – whatever it is – eat away at him like acid. May he continue to see devils in church. And may his fear of the Doom grow and grow like weeds' (164). Maud uses nature to punish Edmund, using the natural imagery of the weeds to tie her curse to the timeless nature of the fens themselves. In the descriptions of the fens, Paver writes that the 'fen was deep: people said that there were places where you could never touch the bottom. The fen was old: it had endured for thousands of years. Who knew what had haunted it since long before the coming of men?' (305). There is an ancestry beyond the creation of civilisation, stronger than man's lineage.

Edmund continually fights a timeless entity that outweighs his limited notions of masculine identity and inheritance of dominion of nature. Maud understands Edmund's superstitions at this point and uses them to her advantage. She tortures him with eels, knowing his hatred for the creatures as 'Father said eels

were unclean as they fed on dead things' (20). Edmund's disgust at eels comes from his past sin. He remembers in great detail Lily's body being brought into the house:

> [h]er mouth and eyes were netted with weeds and her hair tinged with green. Her body was bluish-grey and obscenely swollen. In places her flesh hung in shreds, like india-rubber, and there was a tattered hole where her belly had been, for the eels had eaten her from the inside. (173)

The memories forced to the surface are, for Edmund, as much a curse as the demon that haunts him, reminding him of his familial failure of responsibility to his sister, ensuring he can never fulfil the true patriarchal role expected of a Victorian Gothic male.

Over the course of the novel, the reader witnesses Edmund's battle with the fen-demon in The Doom and his attempts to hold onto his carefully cultivated identity as a strong, Victorian male, the pinnacle of God-fearing, domineering masculinity that he expects himself to be. His obsessive hatred towards nature and desire to destroy it demonstrates Edmund's fear of the natural world as continuing, unassailable force that cannot be governed by human expectations. Paver grants the reader and Maud hope that Edmund will break away from his outdated masculine identity when he admits that '[l]ast year I gave orders to strip the chancel arch of those whitewashed planks. *All this is my fault*' (261). Nevertheless, despite this being a twenty-first-century Gothic novel, Edmund remains the archetypal Victorian Gothic male: '[a]t the time, I believed that God would save her. That's why I didn't tell anyone where she was […] I finally understand that what happened when I was a boy *was not my fault*. I didn't kill Lily. It was the demon' (273). Paver utilises Edmund to uphold (as Anolik terms it) the 'vigilant policing of masculinity'. However, in his attempt to fight the shifting concepts of masculinity, the antagonist reaches a point of excess and becomes the monstrous male, demonstrating the negativity of clinging to the limitations of such an outdated masculine identity that rejects nature as the evil "other". The use of eco-Gothic allows Paver to marry the social issues of gender norms with eco-politics, providing an evolutionary exploration of the relationship between man and nature.

The Magdalena Curse

F. G. Cottam's novel, *The Magdalena Curse* tells the story of Mark Hunter, an SAS veteran, who has moved to the Scottish Highlands with his son after the death of his wife and daughter. Mark enlists the help of a local doctor, Elizabeth Bancroft, when his son, Adam, becomes possessed by the dead. Adam is cursed due to Mark's attempt to kill the witch, Mrs Mallory, in the town of Magdalena, in Bolivia, twelve years ago. Throughout the novel, the narrative swaps between the past and the present, following Mark's journey to save his son from Mrs Mallory and her wolf-men. Depicting black and white magick, *The Magdalena Curse* provides a complex representation of twenty-first-century male characters and their relationship with nature via the figures of Mark, Adam, and the supernatural wolf-men. Where *Wakenhyrst* depicts the issues raised by the obsessive need to dominate nature to display masculine control, the link between the natural world and male identity is shown in Cottam's text to be further convoluted when nature meets the supernatural. *The Magdalena Curse* represents the metamodern attempt to find a balance between the traditional aspects of masculinity – as seen in *Wakenhyrst* – and the more contemporary elements as they interact with the natural world in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel.

In *The Magdalena Curse*, Cottam uses a limited number of characters in order to emphasise the isolating effect of the Scottish Highlands and provide focus on the specific male personae he represents in this novel. Throughout the novel, Mark is depicted in various difficult terrains – the Scottish Highlands, the Bolivian jungles, and the Swiss Alps – dealing with various supernatural occurrences. However, although he deals with and overcomes the challenges of nature in Bolivia and Switzerland as a soldier, Mark chooses to live in the Highlands, finding comfort in the isolation of the landscape in a similar fashion to the characters of Romantic and eighteenth-century Gothic works. Elizabeth, the main female protagonist and Adam's doctor, notes the beauty of the landscape but also the dangers: '[f]og was common in the Highlands […] it clung most tenaciously to the gullies and vales and stream banks, and to the forested land […] she crawled in a kind of limbo along the

road for a while, aware of the steep banks descending sharply to either side'.[21] Where Edmund in *Wakenhyrst* detests and rejects nature after his past encounters with it, Mark chooses to immerse himself and his son in a remote location, surrounded by the natural, untouched environment, neither fighting against or hiding from it. From this comparison, the reader can infer the shifting concepts of masculinity in modern culture, and the changing relationship between man and the natural world.

In his discussion of masculinity in traditional Gothic literature, Andrew Smith notes that, during the fin de siècle, 'men sought to establish new masculine identities which operated beyond the traditional, patriarchal domestic spaces', seeking to expand the male identity into an imperial one, rather than a simple domestic form.[22] Mark Hunter epitomises this Victorian approach to masculinity but with twenty-first-century ideals incorporated. The imperial masculinity is used by Cottam in regard to dominion over nature; as a soldier, Mark encompasses a pre-determined, subservient form of male identity in which he dominates nature for the larger social male identity. He tells Elizabeth '[e]ssentially, I'm a soldier. I follow orders. I hope the people I am obliged to kill are more bad than good. But the justification for the fight is made higher up the chain' (37), illustrating his role in his previous military patriarchal culture. The narrative of Mark's past is built upon the choices he made when wearing his military identity, influencing the world around him and his social position. This is emphasised when he remembers meeting Major Rodriguez and Captain Peterson in Bolivia. He recalls feeling

> relief settle through him, forcing out the acid corrosion of adrenaline, slowing his heart, obliging him to smile back at his new companions. He would be all right with these two. They were good men. Something solid settled in him and he suspected it was nothing more than honest relief. (33)

For Mark, the army functions in a parallel way to the Victorian social class system in *Wakenhyrst*, the ranks of the officers providing a hierarchy similar to the Edmund's

[21] F. G. Cottam, *The Magdalena Curse* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009) p.11-12. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[22] Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the fin-de-siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p.2

class structure in Paver's novel, though the latter is upheld through fear and submission whilst the former, camaraderie sustains. By working with Rodriguez and Peterson, Mark's belief in his identity is reinforced, and that his socially acceptable masculinity will not be cause for immorality or corruption.

Mark's military-influenced masculine identity is thrown into confusion when he is confronted with the two witches, Miss Hall and Mrs Mallory. As Mark recalls the events in Bolivia to Elizabeth, he is reminded of the contrast they hold to his masculinity: where he is all things male and rational, the beings he encountered in Bolivia were female and supernatural. Cottam uses the witches in his novel as a symbol for the different aspects of nature, Elizabeth and Miss Hall being 'more good than bad' and Mrs Mallory being the bad (114). The magicians in *The Magdalena Curse* are all female, and those who actively practice, such as Miss Hall, Mrs Mallory, and Elizabeth's ancestor, are all depicted as slightly inhuman. Mark remembers considering Miss Hall twelve years ago, noting that the light in her eyes seemed 'like the external manifestation of some dark internal energy […] She was a woman, if she was a woman, capable of willing things' (56). The supernatural role of these women allows them to work alongside nature without outright controlling it as traditional Gothic males such as Edmund in Paver's text are desirous to do. It is in the past that Mark's understanding of the sublime nature of these woman began, his wariness and fear of them being what caused him to attempt to kill Mrs Mallory in order to beat her curse.

Mark's masculinity is further put to the test when he must travel across Europe in search of Mrs Mallory to save Adam. Seeking help from Miss Hall in Switzerland, their violent encounter causes Mark to realise that he 'did not feel violated. But he did feel humiliated. And he had felt helpless' (127). Having retired his military identity for his domestic one, Mark struggles to re-embrace that excessively masculine persona required of him in his past. For the most part, Mark's masculinity has softened into a more twenty-first-century style paternal role, where he is both father and mother to Adam, taking on some of those effeminate qualities listed by Castle in the *Wakenhyrst* section of this chapter. For example, Mark becomes heightened in his sensitivity and susceptibility to hysteria as the danger to

Adam's life increases, illustrated when 'he sank to his knees and wept as he had not wept even at the graveside on the awful day when his wife and daughter were buried together […] Adam had gone, and with him had gone the source of his strength' (303). Whilst the portrayal of such strong emotions in the character of Edmund appears unnatural against his Victorian-styled masculinity, the reader is able to sympathise with the modern figure of Mark in his despair. Although Mark is able to "dominate" nature as demonstrated by his scaling the mountain to reach Mrs Mallory's old Nazi stronghold, he is shown to be weaker when faced with the supernatural servants of nature. This is further enforced when, before beginning his climb up the mountain, Mark buys a combat knife as protection against Mrs Mallory. It is only after he has paid for it that he realises that it 'felt like sixty euros' worth of macho folly after the rag doll an enfeebled Miss Hall had been able to make of him' (147), in a stereotypical masculine display of using weaponry as phallic symbols. Despite his ability to overcome the elements and the environment of the Swiss mountains, Mark quickly realises the futility in this gesture when battling the supernaturally empowered figure of Mrs Mallory.

With the narrative mostly told from the perspective of the local doctor, Elizabeth, the first male character described in great detail is Mark's son, ten-year-old Adam. The first time Elizabeth sees Adam she notes that he was 'neither cute nor angelic nor exotic. He was simply the most beautiful boy Elizabeth had ever seen' (4). The image of the innocent boy on the edge of manhood is a common trope in Gothic literature, for example the character of Miles from Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Through Freudian readings of James' novella, there is an ambiguity to Miles and his position as both an innocent child and one who is potentially being sexually corrupted by the governess.[23] The concept of the beautiful/innocent male child has translated into the twenty-first century along with the question of masculinity. Adam represents the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, his beauty setting him up to be either the pinnacle of virtuous masculinity or a space to be corrupted into a monstrous masculine

[23] Thomas J. Bontly, 'Henry James's 'General Vision of Evil' in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 9.4 (1969) pp.721-735

identity. This is further demonstrated in his dreams of the wolf-men discussed in detail later in this section. Adam tells Mark and Elizabeth that 'I dreamed something was trying to get into our house in the darkness. It was a wild animal. It was a wolf, I think. But it was massive, the size of a horse' (20). In his dream, this creature represents the corrupting influence of society that, if allowed in, will alter Adam's masculine identity. Metamodernism allows for twenty-first-century male characters to explore the various fragments of social identity and choose which elements to incorporate into their individual identity, but this can only be successful if external, overpowering influences are hindered from imprinting certain cultural expectations of what it means to be male.

For the majority of the novel, Adam is the beautiful child Elizabeth meets in the first chapter. However, his identity is compromised by the curse his father received in Bolivia. Mark states outright to Elizabeth that 'Adam is possessed. He is the victim of a curse. I incurred it twelve years ago in Bolivia. It was pledged that my progeny would commune with the dead' (18). Botting's concept of generational trauma, as discussed in Chapter One, is central to the masculine curses at play in *The Magdalena Curse* as, although Adam's masculine identity is still under construction, Mark's past actions negatively affect Adam's present. In Cottam's text, Adam is paying for Mark's interference in supernatural events beyond his understanding and so, as is common in the Gothic novel, the child must pay for the sins of the father, creating the generational trauma the genre is known to depict. As a result of Mark's pre-scribed masculine identity, Adam's identity as it links to nature is in danger of being corrupted – just as Edmund's relationship with nature is in *Wakenhyrst* – before he is able to become aware of the surrounding cultural context and, as metamodernism suggests, acknowledge and choose which social elements he wants to influence his identity.

Cottam alludes to the influence of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through the stereotypical image of tainted childhood as depicted in Adam, but with a slightly different approach. Where Dorian chooses his corruption, Adam's is foisted upon him, in the form of his possession by the dead. After Adam's first dream-like state, Elizabeth remarks on the boy's ability to speak fluent Russian.

However, Mark confesses that Adam 'doesn't speak a word of Russian […] In a few hours, he won't remember a single syllable' (8). Killeen claims that Dorian Gray is the 'penetrated, martyred, eroticised adolescent boy […] at the centre of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a version of arrested masculinity that is both childlike and experienced, innocent and erotic, pure and corrupting'.[24] Dorian's deal for eternal youth allows him to exist between the realms of boyhood and adulthood, creating this image of the corrupted youth. Elizabeth becomes more aware of Adam's curse after she witnesses his possession: '[h]is mouth was stretched in a pantomimic leer. His long hair had been twisted into two careful plaits and there was a look of cunning and wariness in his eyes so dismaying on the face of a ten-year-old child' (23). This demonstrates that, at least on a physical level, Adam's identity is being corrupted. However, this corruption is ended when, as Mark tells Elizabeth at the end of the novel, having saved Adam from Mrs Mallory, despite his injuries, he does not want her to use her 'bone magic' to heal him. Mark states that his pain is 'my penance for Magdalena, for what I did, for what I've put Adam through' (320), understanding the curse is a result of his previous, flawed masculine identity and his interference with nature.

Although the dead are a major factor in corrupting Adam's male identity – '[t]he dreams scare him but he wakes from them lucid and with only a vague conscious memory of what he dreamed. But they leave something for a few hours. They leave a residue' (6-7) – it is the choices of his father, Mark, that have mostly influenced its construction. This issue in Adam is created by the warring male identities in Mark himself – the father and the soldier. Over the course of *The Magdalena Curse*, Mark is torn between his past identity as an SAS operative and his current role as Adam's father and protector. It is noted in the narrative that '[h]uman beings are resilient creatures and Mark Hunter was a particularly resilient example of the breed' (66), this particular trait emphasising Mark's ability to amalgamate his two conflicting identities and maintain his masculinity.

[24] Killeen, *History of the Gothic*, p.77

As mentioned above, the female characters of *The Magdalena Curse* represent the power of nature itself which, in conflict with the hegemonic patriarchal culture that seeks to dominate nature, appear as aggressive and monstrous Gothic female characters. Correspondingly to other female antagonists from earlier Gothic works, most notably Matilda from *The Monk*, figures such as these witches are created to demonstrate what socially acceptable womanhood is *not* and the need for patriarchal social order. Matthew Lewis' Matilda in *The Monk* is the prime example. As Ben P. Robertson states in his study of literary and historical figures named Matilda, '[i]n a culture that expected women to exhibit proper decorum and chaste behaviour, Matildas allowed for the revolutionary expression of feminine sexuality and power, either as victims or as perpetrators of aggression'.[25] For *The Magdalena Curse* in the twenty-first century, both Miss Hall and Mrs Mallory offer a slightly different configuration of feminine power. Rooted in the supernatural, their abilities manifest differently – while both are aggressive in their actions, it is mainly Mrs Mallory whose intent is malicious.

Mark, as the main figure of masculinity in this novel, is continuously confused as to whether he should be awed by or fearful of these women, appreciating their power but aware that it does not belong in his society and is, to an extent, in nature. As an outcast in the natural world as well as hegemonic society, Mrs Mallory uses her abilities against the patriarchy, best shown in the curse laid on Captain Peterson. After the death of Rodriguez and leaving the military, Mark learns that Peterson has died due to the curse. Rather than fear Mrs Mallory as Mark does, Peterson 'had disobeyed the witch's command to steer clear of the sea. Of course he had. He would never have obeyed it. He had not been that sort of man. He had defied the curse and paid with his life' (67). Mrs Mallory assumes a pseudo-masculinity through which she can dominate both man and nature via her use of supernatural mutations. Peterson attempted to overpower the feminine sublimity of Mrs Mallory with his masculine desire to live as he chooses. Nevertheless, Peterson's death is inevitable: it is necessary in order to give

[25] Ben P. Robertson, 'In The Name of Matilda: Feminine Transgression and Romantic Conceit', *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 53.3 (2013) pp.169-201 [p.187-8]

emphasis to Mrs Mallory's role of aggressor, reinforcing the unnatural state of her pseudo-masculinity, and so make the foundations of Mark's male identity break down.

Mrs Mallory is a particularly ambiguous character, her supernatural abilities creating an awe-inspiring and yet terrifying effect on the protagonists of *The Magdalena Curse*. A large part of this is also caused by her androgynous appearance, as noted by Mark in the first encounter: 'Mrs Mallory was as slender as Miss Hall had been obese […] The Zippo [cigarette lighter] seemed incongruously masculine. This was because everything else about her seemed almost vampishly feminine' (72). Much like Matilda in *The Monk*, Mrs Mallory exploits both her ability to act as a seductive female and as a dominating, powerful man. In her examination of the Gothic and gender, Heiland writes that 'in a world defined by sensibility and sentimentality […] "equivocation" may not be such a bad thing if what it does is disrupt the binary gender system that defines patriarchal culture'.[26] However, Mrs Mallory is utilised in much the same manner as an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Gothic female who transgresses gender norms in that her gender ambiguity makes her dangerous and untethered from the world. Cottam confirms this in his descriptions of Mrs Mallory as a non-human: 'whoever or whatever she was, must be a creature of infinite cruelty and spite' (80). Rather than an example of modern female power, her masculine qualities are allowed because she is otherworldly, but she is not allowed to maintain a position of permanence in culture, demonstrating the limitations still facing masculinised women in the twenty-first century.

Mrs Mallory is closely entwined to the concept of masculine identities and employs black magick to pervert nature as a means of corruption throughout *The Magdalena Curse*. Over the course of the novel, the depiction of wolf-men – '[n]either wolf nor man but both in some horrid collusion of breed' (243) – is often presented in connection to the figure of the witch. These perversions of nature haunt the novel's protagonists, tempting Elizabeth in the pursuit of dark magick like her ancestor, and aweing Adam and Mark with their sublime and supernatural

[26] Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction*, p.12

qualities that are corrupted with their animalistic visage. Adam tells his father and Elizabeth that he dreamt of Mrs Mallory's home and the 'thing she lived with. It sat on a sort of throne. It was dressed as a man but it was bigger than a man and very frightening to look at. Mrs Mallory spoke to it as though it was alive but it never moved or replied […] Adam did not think he could have endured it if it had' (210). The monstrous wolf-man in Adam's dream links to the depictions of werewolves in the Gothic, because Killeen states, the 'image of the beast within the man, of masculinity as an expression of primordial savagery, finds clear articulation in the tradition of the werewolf'.[27] This is an idea that has translated through the years, into the twenty-first century, where toxic masculinity is still considered a threat to the development of modern Western culture.

The wolf-men of Cottam's novel are depicted as timeless beings – much like the fens of *Wakenhyrst*, which are often treated as sentient – found at various points of history in the narrative. They are chronicled in numerous depictions throughout time, their visage kept as a record of their unnatural existence. The reader first encounters the image of the wolf-men on the tapestries inside the canvas cathedral in Bolivia. The tapestries contained figures which were 'neither human nor animal but at some subtle and unnerving stage in between. They had uneasy expressions. To Hunter's eyes, their features combined the cunning found in humankind with the primal malevolence of predatory beasts' (55). Cottam's wolf-men are reminiscent of the vivisected Beast Folk depicted in Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. With their anthropomorphic features and ability to understand human constructs of culture and society, the Beast Folk traumatise Wells' protagonist, Prendick, with their perversion of human society. Mark's wariness of the creatures in *The Magdalena Curse* comes from the same terrifying and yet awe-inspiring unnaturalness of their image, a haunting caricature of the natural world. Just as Mrs Mallory displays supernatural abilities that should not belong to one who appears human, these creatures display a level of humanity that does not belong to them. Mark recalls how the pictures 'described sly, anarchic angles and structures. They mocked reason. They defied proof' (55), as they corrupt both the

[27] Killeen, *History of the Gothic*, p.80

expected format of masculine identity, one that hides the primal, animalistic desires, and the natural figure of the wolf.

It is not only Adam's inheritance of Mark's sins that is of interest in Cottam's novel, but also Elizabeth's ancestry. In her family's wooden carving, the only item to have survived after her ancestor was burned as a witch, Elizabeth notes that, 'though they possessed some anthropomorphic character and handled their cutlery with apparent ease, the guests at the table were more beast than human being' (90). This motif is repeated when, during his search for Mrs Mallory, Mark comes across an abandoned Nazi stronghold and finds books containing images similar to those on Miss Hall's tapestries and Elizabeth's oak relief. The scenes of trial and torture contained characters of a 'lupine breed [who] played the prosecutors and the torturers. The victims were all people' (160). This grotesque depiction of humans being victimised by the wolf-men creates a fear in Mark who, at this point of the novel, is returning to his stoic, military-based masculine identity in order to save his son by killing Mrs Mallory. The depictions in the book represent a Darwinian fear of evolution through Mrs Mallory's desire to destroy the ancestral links between man and nature. They also represent the primal, excessive element of masculinity overpowering and eliminating the rationalised, balanced male identity of the twenty-first century, that which has learnt to compromise the masculine and feminine effects in a more progressive society that is attempting to return to its harmonious relationship with the natural world.

Cottam continues to explore the horrifying effect of the wolf-men throughout *The Magdalena Curse*, bringing the creatures out of the drawn images and into real life and into a real threat to both man and nature. As Killeen states, it is in the figure of the werewolf that 'suppressed desires find release in lupine transformation, an idea whose time had clearly come in the nineteenth century, where masculinity was considered such a threat'.[28] However, the wolf-men in Cottam's text, are depicted as more evolved than the traditional werewolf. According to the account of the witchfinder who killed Elizabeth's ancestor, the

[28] Killeen, *History of the Gothic*, p.80

witch had a companion: '[*a*] *wolf clothed as a man and standing upright in the abject mockery of a man* […] *She converses with it. It offers her counsel*' (190). This wolf, alongside others depicted in the novel, supposedly displays a higher level of intelligence, able to communicate with their witch companions. In doing so, they become more perverse in their representation of both nature and masculinity, utilising human intelligence alongside bestial desire to further corrupt the notion of a balanced male identity.

The perversion that is the wolf-men is further shown when Elizabeth realises their purpose. The doctor questions their existence: '[t]hey're not really wolves and they're not really men either, are they? They're the creatures depicted in that carved panel I burned. They're like some evolutionary step that might have been taken had the world taken a darker turn than it has' (261). The purpose of the creatures is never truly revealed to the reader, only Mrs Mallory's words – 'my curse makes the world, to me, a more interesting place' (73) – are given as explanation for all her actions in the novel. This lack of clarification around the antagonist's actions illustrates the metamodern approach to ambiguity. Much like the narrative of *The Dreamers*, examined in Chapter One, there is no definitive reasoning behind the actions of Mrs Mallory, just as there is none behind the supernatural sleep. This unsettling ambiguity is common in twenty-first-century Gothic novels as they understand that not all multiplicities can be definitively identified and not all events can be understood in concrete terms.

The Magdalena Curse presents various juxtaposed images of masculinity and nature in the twenty-first century, as well as depictions of it from eras past in order to demonstrate the evolution of masculine identities. It is through the curse laid by a supernatural female, allegorical of the power of nature, onto a flawed male that the reader can examine the issues still found in postmodern culture. Adam, as a young boy not yet ready to transition from childhood to adulthood, is the prime example of corrupting social influences on growing identities. As Mark tells Elizabeth about Bolivia, '[t]here was white as well as black magic in that place. A kind of conflict was being waged there' (18), referring not only to the literal supernatural events but the continuous conflict throughout the novel as Mark

struggles to understand whether he is fighting or aiding nature in the destruction of Mrs Mallory and the wolf-men. An unnatural occurrence in nature, the wolf-men epitomise the abominations caused by Mrs Mallory's interference in the natural world. However, the reader questions whose role is more meddling – the witch or the soldier. Overall, Cottam's novel allows for the exploration of the relationship between nature and the contemporary male identity in a postmodern setting as, through the characters of Mark and Adam, it attempts to find a balance between the limitations of traditional Gothic male attributes and contemporary, more progressive characteristics, that allow for expansion to the definition of masculinity across multiple cultures, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

The Only Good Indians

Whereas Paver uses the Victorian class system and Cottam applies military rankings to explore the relationship between man and the natural world, and the male desire to dominate, *The Only Good Indians*, an American twenty-first-century Gothic novel, transmogrifies the issues of the class system in British Gothic into social concerns surrounding race in American Gothic. The depiction of race has long been an explored social concern in the Gothic genre, seen in works such as Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) and *Zastrozzi* (1810) by Percy Bysshe Shelley. This has continued into the modern era, where indigenous texts are gaining academic interest as part of twenty-first-century Gothic studies. Stephen Graham Jones' horror novel portrays the dilemma of the Native American male in twenty-first-century America. Through the lives of Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass – all connected through the killing of a herd of elk, including a pregnant elk cow, twenty years earlier – *The Only Good Indians* charts their progress as they attempt to find their identity in relation to nature in contemporary culture. The men are all haunted by an elk throughout the novel, mostly in the form of a Crow woman named Shaney, as they attempt to understand and right the events of their past.

As Donnalyn Pompper claims, 'Masculine GRC [Gender Role Conflict] theory researchers have found that learned gender roles are individualized, generational,

and contextualized according to age, masculinity ideology, and ethnicity'.[29] These multiple categorisations are the cause of conflicts in male identities, raising competing questions about the definitions of masculinity as different cultures become more intertwined. Torn between looking like Blackfeet Indians and acting out white-American masculine expectations rather than the indigenous heritage, these characters are cursed by nature for besmirching the expectations of their Native American lineage as it links to the natural world. Jones depicts how the image of the Gothic male, in relation to nature, has evolved from canonical texts, not just through the centuries to the twenty-first century, but also through to different cultures that have dealt with the corruption of their own expectations of masculinity by colonisation.

In her study of masculinity and the Gothic, Hendershot states that the 'Gothic exposes the others within and without that give the lie to the notion of such a category as stable masculinity'.[30] Hendershot's statement, although referring to traditional Gothic literature, can be aptly applied to the depictions of masculinity and its fragility in the face of Native American traditions as they relate to nature in Jones' novel. Ricky, Lewis, Cass, and Gabe are torn between the beliefs placed upon them by modern-day white American society and the traditional expectations of their Native American culture. At the beginning of the novel, this is immediately illustrated by Ricky's life away from the reservation and therefore his link to the natural world. Working in North Dakota, Ricky notes that on the drilling crew '[b]ecause he was the only Indian, he was Chief'.[31] Within the first few lines of the novel, Jones summarises the racial stereotypes inherent in American culture, reducing Ricky to an outdated moniker meant to summarise his position as an Indian male in white-American society.

Ricky's narrative is filled with such stereotypes of the position of the indigenous man in white culture. This is best shown as Ricky exits the bar to see a

[29] Donnalyn Pompper, 'Masculinities, the Metrosexual, and Media Images: Across Dimensions of Age and Ethnicity', *Sex Roles*, 63 (2010) pp.682-696 [p.683]
[30] Hendershot, *The Animal Within*, p.1
[31] Stephen Graham Jones, *The Only Good Indians* (London: Titan Books, 2020) p.1. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

queue of white men waiting to be admitted. Ricky remarks that '[o]nly stupid Indians brush past a bunch of hard-handed white dudes, each of them sure that seat you had in the bar, it should, by right, be theirs' (6). This division epitomises both the fragility of masculinity in contemporary American culture, and the aggression between indigenous and white male identities, only held in place by traditional racial stereotypes; that the white male should supersede the Native American male in all things, and so the indigenous are never allowed truly to belong in white-American culture, only granted positions with express permission of the controlling group. Jones also uses Ricky's short narrative to emphasise that this divide does not just exist between white American and Native Americans. Ricky realises that, at the bar, there was 'another Indian, Dakota probably […] He'd acknowledged Ricky and Ricky nodded back, but there was as much distance between the two of them as there was between Ricky and his crew' (4). The differences between the various indigenous cultures found in America create rifts between Native American tribes just as clearly as the separation from white-American culture, emphasising Ricky's isolation in his masculine identity.

Following Ricky's death, Lewis takes over the narrative of *The Only Good Indians*. The only other member of the four men to have left the reservation, Lewis disassociates from his heritage by attempting fully to assimilate to white-American society. However, Lewis quickly comes to recognise that, despite how hard he has tried to forget, he cannot remove himself fully from his heritage. This is shown when, on the phone to Cass, he realises that his voice, 'smoothed down flat from only ever talking to white people, rises like it never even left. It feels unfamiliar in his mouth, in his ears, and he wonders if he's faking it somehow' (24). In his discussion of the work of Ambrose Bierce, Kevin Corstorphine states that the 'figure of the Native American looms large in any discussion of wilderness in early American fiction, being associated consistently with savagery and nature in the Gothic', a stereotype Lewis has attempted to remove from himself.[32] Nevertheless, there is a note of jealousy to Lewis' stream-of-consciousness as he comments that

[32] Kevin Corstorphine, ''The blank darkness outside': Ambrose Bierce and wilderness Gothic at the end of the frontier' in *EcoGothic*, ed.by Andrew Smith & William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) pp.120-133 [p.122]

Cass still speaks in his 'reservation accent [which is] a singsong kind of pure Lewis hadn't heard for he doesn't know how long' (24). It is at this point in *The Only Good Indians* that the reader begins to see the disassociating effect that attempted assimilation into white culture has on the Native American masculine identity.

Angela Elisa Schoch/Davidson [*sic*] claims that 'Indigenous gothic texts often align with the subjectivities of Indian characters forced to interact with mainstream, or Euro-American, culture; different moral and epistemological outlooks make re-establishing the "psychical norms" challenging, if not impossible'.[33] Lewis and his paradoxical identity, caught between the white society he lives in and the indigenous past he gave up, upholds Schoch/Davidson's statement, his regret over his attempted assimilation into white culture shown in the headlines he imagines would summarise his life. The reader sees Lewis' shame in removing himself from Blackfeet tradition in the fictional headline 'INDIAN MAN HAS NO ROOTS, THINKS HE'S STILL INDIAN IF HE TALKS LIKE AN INDIAN' (25). It is with this guilt of his broken identity that Lewis comes to understand why he is the one to be haunted by the spirit of the elk, that '[m]aybe that's the answer for why this is starting with him, not Gabe or Cass: because he was the first to leave' (100) the reservation and the traditional life, and all the natural rituals, of a Native American.

Lewis' assimilation into white-American society is progressed by his marriage to Peta, a white woman. Rather than being 'forced' to interact with mainstream culture, as Schoch/Davidson writes, Lewis chooses to assimilate himself and gain a place of permanence in white culture through marriage. However, his relationship with Peta is another source of guilt, summarised by a different headline in his mind: 'FULLBLOOD BETRAYS EVERY DEAD INDIAN BEFORE HIM' (46). Where both early and contemporary Gothic works explore the past to discuss issues of ancestry and heritage, as seen in Chapter One, Jones utilises the function of inheritance in the Gothic to examine the future of Native American lineages. With neither himself nor his wife desiring children, Lewis lives with the 'guilt of having some pristine Native swimmers […] but never pushing them downstream, meaning

[33] Angela Elisa Schoch/Davidson, 'Indigenous Alterations' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) pp.232-261 [p.233]

the few of his ancestors who made it through raids and plagues […] those Indians may as well have just stood up into that big Gatling gun of history' (46). The reference to the Gatling gun illustrates Lewis' understanding of the mechanisation of colonialism, and the effect of industrialisation upon Native American culture, creating an even larger divide between the natural world and the descendants of earlier indigenous people. He is also aware of the unlikely success of a mixed-race marriage, remarking upon Peta's death that their ten years together was a 'pretty good run, isn't it? For an Indian and a white woman, especially when she outclassed him so much, and when he had all the usual baggage' (145). Lewis, despite literally running from it, understands the importance of his heritage and that it continues to exist only in a limited capacity due to colonisation.

Furthering his continued separation from white culture, Lewis attempts to hold onto his assimilated position - 'I didn't really grow up traditional' (58) – nevertheless, Shaney calls him out on his regression, stating '[t]hink tradition found you just the same' (59). As Lewis' narrative begins to reach its climax, his inability to understand the supernatural events around him overwhelms him, causing him to vomit in the kitchen sink before giving himself a pep talk: '"You're doing great […] You're completely ready, Blackfeet." It's the first time he's ever called himself that' (124). Lewis has finally been able to accept his heritage once again, making peace with his role in the elk massacre that led to his departure from tradition. In a perverse amalgamation of Native and white-American masculine identity, Lewis "kills" Shaney in his garage, causing her hair to get trapped in his motorcycle: 'after her neck breaks, the top of her head scalps off and her forehead tilts loosely down into the rear wheel' (135), not only recreating the Indian war tradition of scalping enemies through the use of modern American machinery but paradoxically killing Shaney, the manifestation of nature, with modern technology and demonstrating the corrupting influence that white-American culture has had upon indigenous cultures.

With the death of Lewis, the narrative of *The Only Good Indians* transitions to Gabe and Cass as they perform a sweat ritual with young Blackfeet man, Nate. Where Ricky and Lewis dealt with their identity crises by running from the isolation

of the reservation (separation from other cultures and wider society) to the isolating effect of white culture (separation from their heritage and racial segregation from white society), Cass and Gabe found other means of escape. Schoch/Davidson's statement - the 'irreversibility of colonial contact forces Indigenous peoples into a constant state of liminality and negotiation' – rings true in both these men but with vastly different results.[34] Gabe, rather than assimilate to white culture, embraces the mocking stereotypes white-America has placed on Native American culture and its traditions. Gabe laughs about the fact that he uses his money to fuel his alcohol addiction, that it is '*poof*, Indian magic, don't even need any eagle feather fans or a hawk screeching, just look away long enough for it to happen' (177). As a result of his actions in the past, Gabe is forbidden from the most masculine tradition of the Blackfeet tribe: hunting. Removed from an essential element of his indigenous male persona, and aware of the fact that he cannot assimilate to white culture as Lewis tried, Gabe copes with living in a liminal space by becoming the most grotesque mockery of a Native American he can be, acting out the expectations of white culture whilst still living on the reservation.

Hiding from his heritage in this liminal space, however, only gets Gabe so far. After killing Cass and his girlfriend, Jo, at the sweat, Gabe picks up his father's old gun, noting that 'he can be another statistic, he can make it so the pamphlets are right about Indian suicide rates, can't he?' (279). Still clinging to the mock identity he has been wearing, Gabe realises that there is no longer a liminal space left for him to exist in after these events. Unlike successful metamodern identities, Gabe is not able to piece together the different elements of traditional Native American masculinity and twenty-first-century Western masculinity, leaving him untethered from society. It is with this knowledge that Gabe takes dead-Cassidy's hand and puts his finger on the trigger, telling the Elk Head Woman that 'he's avenging her, like. It's an Indian thing' (287), in one final attempt to return to his native roots, making his last act one from his true Native American male identity.

[34] Schoch/Davidson, 'Indigenous Alterations', p.253

Where Gabe became the perverted expectation, from a white-American perspective, of a "savage" Native American as Corstorphine terms it, Cass decides to return, as far as he can, back to the traditions of the Blackfeet tribe. Jones describes Cass' home:

> [f]or miles around, there's just yellow grass and crusty snow […] The only thing keeping this from being 1800 or all the centuries before are the utility poles hitching the power cable out to the camper. Well, he supposes the camper's not very pre-white people. (182)

Cass' lifestyle is a clear juxtaposition to Lewis'; rather than running from indigenous culture and towards white-American society, he reversed the process. However, there is an element of hypocrisy to Cass and his chosen identity. Like Lewis, Cass has entered into a relationship with a white woman. When Cass and Jo began their relationship, 'he was still trying to prove to that he was a Real Indian. Exhibit one: I ride my own horses on the same land my ancestors did' (183). Cass utilises such acts as horse-riding and living on the outskirts as a way to assert his position as a Native American man, rather than assimilating to white American expectations. This allows him to believe that his masculinity is different and superior to others due to his indigenous heritage and closer relationship to nature.

Witnessing the confusion of Cass and Gabe as they struggle with the postmodern concept of self-constructed identities, is Nate Yellow-Tail, a teenage Blackfeet Indian. Unlike the older men in this novel, the teenager does not appear to struggle with his identity to the degree that they do. Nate remembers when he was a child, 'he had three braids, was still being groomed to be an All-Star Indian. Before he started being who he really was' (256), already aware at a young age that his identity had previously been constructed for him by the social expectations of his indigenous culture. However, the negative impact of Nate's postmodern outlook on identity is the loss of his connection the natural world and his ignorance of the power of nature. Nate's perspective on his heritage is only exacerbated when, during the sweat, Gabe asks Nate if he's cured yet. The younger man replies, '[o]f what? […] Being Indian?' (238). Nate appears to view his race as a disease or curse, a part of his identity that he wishes he could escape but knows he never will, due to his outward appearance, no matter how he structures his identity, and therefore he

is punished by the Elk-Woman as well as Cass and Gabe, although his crime is not directly related to her.

In her discussion of Maori culture, Schoch/Davidson notes that the 'creatures, hauntings, and possessions […] are not cast aside as aberrant forces worthy of gothicisation; they are seen as a part of the chain that ties the Maori to the land, defining their identity in a profound way'.[35] A similar approach to the relationship between nature and the Blackfeet tribe is taken in Jones' novel. The first representation of the spirits linked to Blackfeet culture in *The Only Good Indians* is at the point of Ricky's death, when he sees 'a great herd of elk, waiting, blocking him in, and there was a great herd pressing in behind him, too, a herd of men' (13). The use of elk, animals that provide sustenance and many other uses to the tribe, as the cause of Ricky's death demonstrates the injustice the men have done, not just to their own identities but to the traditions of their culture. As Schoch/Davidson notes, these animals represent the 'chain' that ties Jones' Native American characters to the natural world. The Elk-Woman is reminiscent of the Horned King discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, a timeless representation of the unsettling power of nature and repetition of ancestry as it binds identity to the natural world.

The link between the elk and the Blackfeet culture is what drives the supernatural representation of the massacred creatures throughout the text. As Hillard claims, as a growing civilisation, Western society 'may harbour a desire to severely alter, if not outright destroy, some of our natural resources – because to do so is, paradoxically, to survive'.[36] Although Native American tradition dictates using resources from the land to survive, this excessive use of hunting becomes instead a form of exploitation of nature's resources, emulating the exploitation by white-American culture of the environment. Lewis in particular is haunted by the image of the pregnant elk he killed ten years ago: '[l]ying on her side through the blurry clock hands of the fan is a young cow elk. Lewis can tell she's young just from her body size […] And Lewis knows for sure she's dead. He knows because, ten

[35] Schoch/Davidson, 'Indigenous Alterations', p.239-40
[36] Hillard, 'the Puritan influence on American Gothic nature', p.105

years ago, he was the one who made her that way' (20). The haunting of Lewis by the elk illustrates repression of not just his past but his native identity. Having left the reservation, Lewis has, as previously stated, attempted to separate himself from his Blackfeet masculine identity before coming to the conclusion that, no matter how hard he may try, he cannot remove himself from his lineage.

Much like *Wakenhyrst* and Edmund's torment by the fen-demon, the Elk-Woman is a haunting figure in her own right. The spirit of the elk first happens as hallucinations appearing on Lewis' sofa before taking the form of Shaney, a Crow woman concealing the elk's spirit form. However, there are instances throughout the narrative where she begins to show her true self, for instance, when Lewis sees a 'woman with a head that's not human. It's too heavy, too long' (51). At this point, the spirit is unidentifiable, but she quickly develops more elk-like attributes: '[s]tanding out there in the yellow grass is a woman with an elk head' (98). Shaney allows her human body to bear the evidence of the violence done to her by Lewis, showing the scars of the butchered elk cow – '[i]t's a long ragged scar up and down, not side to side and low like a C-section. It's an open-heart-surgery scar, just, too low for the heart, and with an ugly, uneven ridge of scar tissue' (56). By taking on the form of the elk, Shaney reminds Lewis of the manner in which he has corrupted his native identity.

This second realisation comes when Lewis questions the elk he killed, asking 'what if every great once in a while an elk *is* special, right? What if there are wheels within wheels up there on the mountain, where ceremony used to take place?' (105-6). Having killed Shaney, and watched Peta die when he could have saved her before cutting a living elk calf from his wife's stomach, Lewis goes on the run, believing the calf is his salvation:

> [h]e just has to get her home, to land she knows, to grass she remembers […] And then it'll all be over. Indian stories always hoop back on themselves like that, don't they? At least the good ones do. (148)

This haunting demonstrates how the men, especially Lewis, are not being punished just for killing a pregnant elk cow, they are being punished for transgressing the

boundaries of tradition and for denying their identities as Native American men. Much like the timeless fens of Paver's novel and the wolf-men of *The Magdalena Curse*, the spirits of nature, represented by the elk in Jones' text, are an eternal symbol of Native American's ancestral link to the natural world and a reminder of their need to respect and revere it. It is only at the end of each of their narratives that the individuals of *The Only Good Indians* return or attempt to return to their roots.

Schoch/Davidson summarises the purpose of the Gothic narrative thus:

> [t]he final pages of Euro-American gothic narratives […] tend to reinforce culturally prescriptive morality […] in the works of the Indigenous Gothic this is problematised; Indigenous characters, whose moral and spiritual understandings are at odds with the Euro-American world that they are forced to negotiate, struggle to "return" to a state of psychical normalcy.[37]

This issue of conflicting moral and spiritual understandings of the natural world is seen in all three texts examined in this chapter. However, the racial divide presented in Jones' novel demonstrates this concern to a more extreme state. The end of *The Only Good Indians* is told from the perspective of Gabe's daughter Denorah who, like Adam in Cottam's novel, is expected to pay for the sins of her father. By ending the novel from the perspective of Denorah, Jones illustrates the significance of metamodernism on new generations who are more easily able to create identities from elements of traditional expectations and amalgamate them with other cultures. A basketball player, Denorah struggles with that liminal space between white and indigenous culture, trying to pinpoint her identity through her sport. This is emphasised when she recalls the racial remarks she is used to hearing when playing for her high school: 'the kind of bullshit Indian teams always get hurled at them […] *The only good Indian is a dead Indian*' (200). However, unlike the male characters of Jones' novel, Denorah is not restricted by shame or guilt about her heritage. Instead, she embraces her lineage, using it to fuel herself – '[t]his win isn't just for pride […] It's for her tribe, her people, it's for every Blackfeet from before, and after' (306) – in her one-on-one game with Shaney.

[37] Schoch/Davidson, 'Indigenous Alterations', p.252

It is when she is running from Shaney's transfiguring body in the final pages of the book that Denorah comes across the mass elk grave at Duck Lake that her father and his friends are responsible for. As the last member of his bloodline, she attempts to right his wrongdoing, speaking to the grave: '"I'm sorry," Denorah says to the elk rib she's touching […] She can lie down here with them, can't she? If they'll have her' (344). These finals scenes also demonstrate the significance of the narrative ending from a female perspective as Denorah can continue the Native American bloodline and teach her descendants to respect nature and those native traditions that will not compromise identities. Through the actions of her father, and now her stepfather who has come to save her from Shaney, Denorah realises the imbalance between Blackfeet traditions that uphold their masculine identities, and the natural world. She observes 'that both her fathers have stood at the top of this slope behind a rifle, and the elk have *always* been down here […] it *has* to stop' (347), her survival only granted by the spirit reuniting with her dead calf and Denorah's apology on behalf of Gabe's actions against nature and their heritage. Denorah's statement does not seek to uproot her indigenous heritage and remove it from her identity, rather, she believes it is time to question the outdated stereotypes of Blackfeet tradition, those that stop them from living in peace with nature and safely in their reservations and independent of white culture if they wish to.

Where the male characters of *The Only Good Indians* must die for their irreversible corruption of their masculine identities and sins against nature, Denorah lives on, presented as a cautionary tale of what happens when one questions their indigenous heritage or neglects the rites and rituals of tradition, all while counterbalancing this against the influence of white-American culture. This is summarised in the final lines of the novel as, after the Elk Head Woman has followed Denorah to the elk grave with the intention of killing her, the creature collapses on the ground and 'her right leg kicks through its human skin, is coarse brown hair underneath […] An elk cow stands up from the snow and lowers her face to her calf' (349). The '"return" to psychical normalcy', as termed by Schoch/Davidson is partially completed by the elk spirit returning to her natural

habitat and the deaths of Ricky, Lewis, Cass, and Gabe atoning for their befoulment of nature. *The Only Good Indians* further represents the hostility of masculinity towards the natural world, emphasising this point by having Denorah be the only survivor of the Elk Head Woman. However, the struggle for Denorah will continue, her own identity scarred, not only by the actions of those men who brought a curse upon their families through their corrupted masculine identities, but also by witnessing the power of nature and her ancestral links to the natural world.

Conclusion

The depiction of male identities in the twenty-first-century eco-Gothic novel offers a multitude of versions for the definition of masculinity, utilising the ambiguous nature of the genre in order to continue the discussion of the Gothic male character from canonical texts to the contemporary. Paver uses the extreme dominance of Edmund's character against Jubal's submission to nature in *Wakenhyrst*, to demonstrate the issues caused by limiting the male identity to those traditional, Victorian aspects – stoic, dominant of the natural world, God-fearing – that have previously made up the Gothic male in canonical texts. *The Magdalena Curse* also depicts the social concerns that surround hegemonic masculinity and nature. However, Cottam attempts to show a balance with more postmodern forms of masculinity in the father-figure of Mark who embraces the maternal role for his son and breaks from his pre-scribed military identity in which he is expected to dominate the landscapes he finds himself in, instead using nature as an aide. This chapter ends with the representation of corrupted masculine identities on both a personal and cultural level as Jones' *The Only Good Indians* illustrates the continued struggle of indigenous men to uphold their cultural expectations in relation to the natural world whilst the invasive white society has separate standards for masculinity and ideals of dominating the environment.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates the socio-ecological issues explored in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel that surround male identities. The metamodern construct of these texts allows for focus on the continually shifting socio-political climate, and the many issues that outdated patriarchal structures can cause to masculinity, damaging the evolution of such identities as they escape the

limitations of traditional expectation. Chapter Four will continue the discussion of gender in contemporary Gothic through the exploration of female identity and performativity in adult Gothic fairy tales and folklore.

Chapter Four

Rewriting the Stories: Modern Adult Gothic Fairy Tales and Folklore

Where Chapter Three explored the depiction of the twenty-first-century male identity in eco-Gothic, this chapter will examine the representation of female identities in contemporary adult Gothic fairy tales. Known for breaking away from classical rules and traditions, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic works are rarely associated with the Greco-Roman format of storytelling, having reacted against and revised the legacy of antiquity. As Chelsea Eddy notes, 'if one analysed a gothic structure by Grecian rules one would find 'nothing but deformity'[cited Clery and Miles, 2000, p.75]'.[1] Gothic authors have become renowned for creating their own mythology; utilising folkloric creatures such as vampires, werewolves, zombies, and repurposing them to fit the mode. Folklore and fairy tales have long been associated with the Gothic genre which has often drawn upon aspects of these narrative structures and repurposed them in a new style. Carina Hart defines Gothic folklore and Gothic fairy tale narratives as two distinct categories:

> Gothic folklore refers to gothic adaptations and appropriations of folkloric figures […] the folkloric figure is placed in a Gothic narrative that may diverge significantly from that of its folk origins. Gothic fairy tale […] tends to subject whole traditional narratives to gothic adaptation, elaborating on the violence, monstrosity and transgression present in the source tale and often altering the fairy tale ending.[2]

Building on Hart's definition, this chapter will explore the use of folklore and fairy tale narrative concepts in twenty-first-century Gothic literature, examining the manner in which they are appropriated and reconstructed in new narratives.

Perhaps the most famous Gothic example of the reinvention of folklore and fairy tales is Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* in which she reimagines various traditional fairy tales through a feminist lens. Folklore, which is classified as

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[1] E. J. Clery and Robert Miles, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820*, cited by Chelsea Eddy, 'Wildlings, White Walkers, and Watchers on the Wall of Northumberland's Borderland' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) pp.1273-1288 [p.1278]

[2] Carina Hart, 'Gothic Folklore and Fairy Tale: Negative Nostalgia', *Gothic Studies*, 22.1 (2020) pp.1-13 [p.3]

a tale based on a belief related to a particular place or community, and fairy tales – fantastical stories usually meant for children that teach socially and culturally correct morality – have long been told through the oral tradition of storytelling before being used as the basis for many literary works, restyled and repurposed depending on the era and culture in which they were written. Similarly to Carter, the metamodern Gothic novel of the twenty-first century utilises the abstract and monstrous aspects of fairy tale and folklore narratives to comment on the socio-political environment in which they are written, demonstrating the return to grand narrative structures through the discussion of universal cultural issues surrounding gender. Contemporary Gothic literature can be seen to simultaneously encompass the traditional style of retelling fairy tales and folklore and to subvert certain archetypes to suit modern culture.

This chapter will consider the development of the role of fairy tales and folklore as social lessons with particular regard for the female gender, as one of the most common ways in which fairy tales are revised. Unlike the "Disneyfied" versions for modern children, fairy tales originally utilised darker, more Gothic themes and traditional stories such as these were often used to condition women to perform a socially constructed identity and uphold societal and cultural expectations. The modern fairy tale in literature is often tailored towards an adult audience, encompassing themes of a more sexual nature, and examining more complex socio-political issues around gender and society. Joseph Abbruscato argues that 'Gothic texts were greatly influenced by the fairy tales, exaggerating, twisting, and emphasizing specific elements'.[3] This chapter will demonstrate that this is still the case in the twenty-first century, which has seen a rise in modern retellings of established folklore and fairy tales and an inversion of their purpose in order to subvert the moral lessons imposed upon females by these traditional forms of storytelling.

[3] Joseph Abbruscato, 'Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales' in *The Gothic Fairy Tale in Young Adult Literature: Essays on Stories from Grimm to Gaiman*, ed. by Joseph Abbruscato and Tanya Jones (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014) pp.1-10 [p.8]

White is for Witching (2009) by Helen Oyeyemi examines the vampiric figure of the soucouyant from Caribbean folklore and considers its role in depicting the effect of colonialism on contemporary multiracial culture. The novel explores the familial and sexual relationships between women of different ethnicities and the impact of folklore on interracial interactions. Through a consideration of gender performativity, as defined by Judith Butler – her text, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) will be examined in closer detail later in the chapter – Wray Delaney's *The Beauty of the Wolf* (2019) provides us with a modern rewrite of the *Beauty and the Beast* narrative, first published by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740. Delaney uses the novel to discuss the reversal and subversion of gender roles against the backdrop of a fantasy Elizabethan England and through the narration of an androgynous male actor and a half-woman, half-beast. Finally, *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021), by A. G. Slatter, engages with a mixture of maritime fairy tales and folklore to discuss the position of women caught between the corrupt power that belongs to their family and their individual morals, whether it enforces or inhibits their roles as women. Where Chapter Three dealt with the issue of the patriarchy and its effect on Gothic male figures, this chapter deals with both the patriarchal system and matrilineal lines as inheritance entraps the female characters. All three of these novels utilise the current popular trope of adult fairy tale narratives, combined with the Gothic genre, to explore the various manners in which female identities are portrayed in the twenty-first century, following the evolution to consider which social concerns on the issue of gender politics are still relevant.

White is For Witching

Alongside the rewriting of fairy tales, folklore is often used in twenty-first-century fiction as a foundation on which to update old legends for a modern audience. Jack Stipes, in his examination of the purpose of fairy tales, states that fairy tales and folklore 'enable us to store, remember, and reproduce the Utopian spirit of the tale and to change it to fit our experiences and desires'.[4] A prominent example of this in

[4] Jack Zipes, 'The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 12.2 (1988) pp.7-31 [p.10]

contemporary Gothic is Helen Oyeyemi's novel *White is for Witching*. Oyeyemi is an established writer whose works have received a variety of critical study, including the Gothic. Often considered as a postcolonial Gothic text, *White is for Witching* tells the story of Miranda Silver, a young white woman with *pica*, living in a sentient house in Dover with her twin brother Eliot, their father, and the guests at their hotel. Throughout the novel, Miranda is haunted by the sentient house which is meant to protect the women in her family from anyone it considers "other". Oyeyemi explores the significance of the folkloric figure of soucouyant as a migrating Caribbean folklore in congruence with this house that consumes people. Oyeyemi utilises metamodernism to reflect back on colonialism in the Gothic, a topic that has been closely explored since the late eighteenth century in texts such as *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), by Florence Marryat. The text explores on both a personal and national level, the relationships between women of different ethnicities and the depiction of colonialism in Caribbean folklore in British Gothic literature.

Whilst there are variations between different legends, the figure of the soucouyant that comes from east Caribbean folklore is usually said to be

> a creature who lives by day as an old woman on the edge of a village and who, by night, strips her wrinkled skin and puts it on a mortar. She then flies in the shape of a fireball through the darkness in search of a victim, seeking out someone whose blood she can suck.[5]

Oyeyemi includes multiple references to the Caribbean myth of the soucouyant throughout the second half of *White is for Witching*. The tale is first introduced to Miranda and the reader by Ore (a Nigerian student who enters into a relationship with Miranda), who was given a book of Caribbean legends by her adoptive parents. Giselle Liza Anatol, in one of the leading works on female vampiric figures and *White is for Witching*, considers Ore's preference 'to remain rooted to a singular cultural space—she chooses complete assimilation' and that she outwardly rejects her Nigerian roots and avoids interaction with other black characters in the

[5] Justin D. Edwards, 'She saw a soucouyant': Locating the globalgothic' in *Globalgothic*, ed. by Glennis Byron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) pp.50-64 [p.54]

novel.[6] This is seen when, whilst at Cambridge University, a member of the Nigerian Society calls out to Ore '[h]ello, my sister!'.[7] Although Ore is aware the man is joking, she 'bridled anyway' (149), unwilling to be forcibly associated with others simply due to their shared racial background. While this resentment of an assumed association can be seen as a result of her being raised by white parents, Ore's obsession with the book of Caribbean folklore can also be read as a result of her adoption by a white couple, with her privately seeking connections to her black heritage in any form she can find.

The relationship between Ore and Miranda mirrors that of the relationship between the soucouyant and her victims. As Ore states, the soucouyant's 'only interaction with other people was consumption. The soucouyant who is not content with her self. She is a double danger – there is the danger of meeting her, and the danger of becoming her' (155). As their relationship progresses, the physical lines between Ore and Miranda become less tangible as Miranda (being the soucouyant) begins to devour Ore as the latter wishes to be consumed (assimilated). Miranda's interactions with black characters, namely Sade the housekeeper and Ore, her sexual partner, are inconsistent as she struggles to differentiate her own emotions from those the cursed house projects onto her. The sentient house, combined with the spirit of Anna Good – Miranda's great-grandmother – force a separation between the lovers and 'Anna's repetition of "The skin. The skin" indicates the source of her anxiety—not a lesbian liaison but an interracial one. It is this black skin she haunts Ore into believing is peeling off'.[8] By haunting Ore as well as Miranda, Anna is enforcing racial segregation in the twenty-first century, depicting the effect of history on contemporary culture and the hindering of interracial relationships.

Ore relays the story of the soucouyant and the girl who killed her to Miranda on the night their relationship begins. Miranda asks for a story about a girl

[6] Giselle Liza Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015) p.214
[7] Helen Oyeyemi, *White is for Witching* (London: Picador, 2010) p.149. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[8] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.213

who is neither 'happy' nor 'good', but 'free', and so Ore recites the folktale about the girl who 'put her arms around the moon and travelled to see things no one else in the village would ever see' (165). Aspasia Stephanou notes in her essay how Oyeyemi had wanted to write a vampire story, but that *White is for Witching* 'is by no means a conventional vampire tale'.[9] Not unlike A. G. Slatter's non-traditional mermaid folklore explored in the third part of this chapter, it is a common practice in the twenty-first-century Gothic narrative to use folkloric figures in updated, non-traditional manners. Rather than a reliance on the European Gothic tradition of the vampire which represented the foreign, invasive "other" in Western culture, '[w]hite is established as the marker of evil, a whiteness that embodies British nationalism'.[10] *White is for Witching* utilises contemporary understandings of the impact of colonialism on Caribbean folklore to represent the subversion of the stereotypical associations with vampirism, and allows for the consideration of a multi-cultural context by using Caribbean folklore instead of European tales.

During Ore's narration, she notes that, as the young girl battles with the soucouyant, she 'cared to protect the lives of the young in the village, and she knew you cannot bargain with a thing inhuman' (166). The soucouyant, similarly to the figure of *la diablesse* which will be discussed later in Chapter Six, has become symbolic of colonialism, representing the British white nationalism that seeks the domination of all other cultures and races from its empire by invading and controlling them. Anatol considers the figure of the soucouyant from this perspective, stating how the 'colonial enterprise' had 'conditioned White British women of all classes to think of themselves as mothers of the nation rather than as sisters in a feminist struggle that might cross bounds of race and class'.[11] Frequently possessed and haunted by her white female ancestors, Miranda is torn between being the girl who cannot fight the inhuman soucouyant and becoming the white vampiric figure herself.

[9] Aspasia Stephanou, 'Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* and the Discourse of Consumption', *Callaloo*, 37.5 (2014) pp.1245-1259 [p.1245]
[10] Stephanou, 'Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* and the Discourse of Consumption', p.1245
[11] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.218

Miranda's role as a soucouyant in *White is for Witching* is symbolised by her genetic eating disorder – *pica*. As Anatol notes, the 'eating disorders might be categorized as perversities of consumption, much in the same way one would identify the vampiric consumption of blood'.[12] The women of the Silver family in Oyeyemi's text suffer from the genetic eating disorder which causes the sufferer to consume inedible objects – in the case of Miranda, she consumes many things including dirt, blue plastic, but mainly chalk: 'she crammed the chalk into her mouth under the covers […] there'd be cramps that twisted her body, pushed her off her seat and laid her on the floor' (23). Obsessively wearing red lipstick – again, emphasising the vampiric nature of her character – Miranda's *pica* has been noted as representing British nationalism, the colours of the objects she eats coinciding with the Union Jack and the chalk she eats correlating to the white cliffs of Dover where she lives, emphasising the postcolonial Gothic subtext of the novel. As Anatol suggests, the consumption of the chalk shows Miranda 'attempting to consume Whiteness and ingest the tangible land of England itself', therefore making herself impervious to the influence of outsiders and non-white "otherness" as she is expected to be by the house and her ancestors.[13] The haunting presence of Miranda's ancestors is centred around food as she dreams of her female family tempting her to eat: Miranda imagines a dining table with 'four places, four people – Lily made one, Miranda made two, for number three was Jennifer, Lily's mother, and the fourth was her GrandAnna' (126). In this sequence, Miranda's relatives tempt with various foods as well as chalk and plastic, in an attempt to establish her position as a Silver woman and a soucouyant.

It is established early in the novel that the *pica* disorder runs through the maternal line of the Silver family, leaving Eliot unaffected. The sentient house lists the various items the Silver women eat – ladybugs, tree branches, pebbles, and acorns, before revealing to Miranda that

> there was another woman, long before you, but related. This woman was thought an animal […] Her way was to drink off her blood, then

[12] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.209
[13] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.210

> bite and suck at the bobbled stubs of her meat. Her appetite was only for herself. This woman was deemed mad. (24)

The sentient house provides the history of the ancestral curse for Miranda, whilst simultaneously ensuring its inevitable fulfilment. The house emphasises the timelessness of the curse, stating that 'I do not know the year, or even how I know this' before speaking directly to Miranda, '[i]t is useful, instructive, comforting to know that you are not alone in your history' (24), emphasising the colonial and Gothic obsession with heritage. Miranda is a new form of Gothic heroine who, rather than discovering her ancestry to establish her identity, is trapped by her lineage. Anatol notes the paradox of the Silver women's inheritance:

> [w]hile knowledge of the past can provide a sense of grounding, connections, and family ties, the sense of legacy indicated by the House seems utterly inescapable—good for those who wish to carry on an assumed birthright of power and privilege but terrifying for those who wish to step outside the path of fate.[14]

Miranda finds herself trapped by her family's whiteness, unable to escape the boundaries set up by British nationalism despite her own personal desires for a relationship with a black woman. Contemporary Gothic literature demonstrates metamodern notions of heritage and its ability to entrap individuals, keeping the past linked to the present.

Before her birth even, Miranda's parents had already decided that 'she and Eliot would take Lily's surname if they were born grey-eyed, and Luc's surname if they were born brown-eyed' (47). In doing so, Miranda belongs to Lily and the lineage of the Silver women, not to her father as the patriarchal British tradition would dictate. In prioritising the matriarchal line, Oyeyemi highlights the early Gothic tradition of focusing on the influence of parental figures, further adapting the twenty-first-century Gothic novel to a modern audience through this focus on the maternal. Miranda questions if her life would be different if she were 'Miranda Dufresne' and how she would live. In questioning her identity as a Silver woman, Miranda is attempting to weaken the link between herself and her white inheritance. However, this desire to escape the generational past is overridden by

[14] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.213

the trauma memory left by her great-grandmother and the cursed house's influence.

As the narrative jumps between Ore and Miranda's perspectives, the reader learns that Ore's fear of Miranda is outweighed by her infatuation with her – a common occurrence with vampiric figures in Gothic literature. The danger of the vampiric figure, as David Punter notes in his discussion of *Dracula*, is the concept of the taboo. Punter writes that although 'taboo sets up certain bounding line and divisions which enable society to function without disruption, Dracula blurs those lines […] by practising a corrupt but superhuman form of love'.[15] As Miranda slowly becomes consumed by her ancestors and inhabits the symbolism of the soucouyant more often, she fantasises about physically consuming Ore, transgressing those societal and cultural boundaries in the manner of a vampire. As their sexual relationship develops, Miranda finds herself desiring Ore in more ways than one, 'smelling her, running her nose over the other girl's body, turning the beginning of a bite into a kiss whenever Ore stirred, laying a trail of glossy red lip prints' (191). Whilst this passage resonates with sexual desire, bloodlust is easily seen beneath the surface, a commonality in Gothic depictions of vampires. This is seen further when Ore dreams of Miranda as a subversive form of the soucouyant: 'I cracked her open like a bad nut with a glutinous shell […] There was another girl inside her, the girl from the photograph' (230). According to Anatol, '[r]ather than describing an inner demon protected by the disguise of frail outer skin, the skin is what confines, constricts, and controls Miranda', depicting how, although she attempts to fight the hold her great-grandmother's spirit has over her, she hides in the shell of her white supremacy, cut off from modern, interracial Britain.[16]

Following in the tradition of Gothic heroines such as the unnamed narrator of James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Miranda becomes increasingly unreliable and unstable in her narrative as she battles with the white supremacist ghost of her grandmother and her own desires to establish a sexual relationship with Ore and a

[15] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 1996) p.21
[16] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.217

familial one with Sade, the Nigerian housekeeper. When Eliot mentions Sade in a conversation, Miranda tells him 'I don't like her […] Oh, I do' (93). Miranda struggles to separate her own thoughts from that of the house which attempts to influence her opinion of Sade based upon her racial qualities. As Miranda fights both the house's influence and her *pica*, she allows herself to bond with Sade, finding comfort in her knowledge of the occult and her understanding of the ancestral spirits that haunt the young Silver woman. Sade sympathises with Miranda's painful connection to her family's past – '[t]hey're calling you, aren't they? […] I know it hurts' (96) – allowing her to recognise an empathetic bond between them, despite their different nationalities.

Miranda proceeds to ask Sade to tell her more about the Nigerian woman's ancestry and the Yoruba culture, exchanging legends on witches and whistles. Speaking on the oral tradition of storytelling in the Caribbean, Al Ramsawack is quoted saying that 'folklore was a way of life. It was a culture. It was a control', referring to the manner in which stories such as the soucouyant were lessons, providing social rules and constructs for Caribbean culture, not unlike the fairy tales of European tradition.[17] There is an element of cultural memory in *White is for Witching* as, although raised by her white adoptive parents from the age of one, Ore is aware that she should fear Miranda and her associations with the soucouyant. Before their relationship is fully established, Ore becomes momentarily wary of Miranda and her unnatural knowledge. Miranda asks Ore about a woman with a covered face, asking if she is her birth mother. Ore fears that 'Miranda was talking about the soucouyant, that this girl looked at me and saw the soucouyant at my shoulder' (161). At this point in the novel, Miranda has yet to become fully assimilated with the role of the soucouyant and so the reader is torn between whether Miranda is desirous of protecting Ore from other soucouyants or keeping her for her own consumption.

[17] Jarula M. I Wegner & Amanda T. McIntyre, '"There was no book to tell you anything about this": Al Ramsawack and the Oral Archive of Caribbean Folklore', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 29.1 (2021) pp.11-25 [p.14]

Whilst Miranda is a significant soucouyant figure throughout the novel, and her battle with her vampiric self - '*Ore is not food. I think I am a monster*' (192) – shows the internalised struggle she faces in breaking free from her great-grandmother's generational white supremacy, she is not the only soucouyant in the text. Comparable to the houses in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, the house in Oyeyemi's novel is sentient, consuming both foreign guests and Silver women, also acts in a similar fashion to the folkloric creature from Caribbean legend. On hearing of the death of her husband in World War II, Anna Good cursed all people she considered foreign – 'Blackies, Germans, killers, dirty… dirty killers' – giving the sentient house what it referred to as its 'task' (118). Anatol recognises that upon Anna's death, '[h]er consciousness merges with the voice of the house, and the two struggle to preserve an impenetrable border' built upon the ideology of white British nationalism and demonstrating the significance of the ancestral home in the Gothic novel, the site of memory and – as discussed in Chapter One – generational trauma, keeping Miranda trapped in the cycle created by her great-grandmother.[18]

As Botting notes, within architecture the 'pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone […] In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house; as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present'.[19] The idea of reappearances through the family home links Anna's curse to the theory of rooted memory, a subject written on by Pierre Nora. Nora writes on the juxtaposition between history and memory, claiming that 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself […] Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects'.[20] This is a significant theme in both postcolonial and Gothic literature, the idea that a space or location holds onto and redistributes the memory of a trauma it has witnessed; a prime example being Toni Morrison's haunted house in *Beloved* (1987) which contains the trauma of Beloved's death at the hands of her mother. Anna Good's

[18] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.212
[19] Botting, *Gothic*, p.2
[20] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, trans. by Marc Roudebush, 26 (1989) pp.7-24 [p.7-9]

curse, carried in the sentient house and bleeding into her female descendants, has a lasting impact on Miranda and her relationships with anyone the house would consider to be foreign or "other".

Despite this, the house as a soucouyant becomes a paradox in itself. Designed to protect the Silver women from outside intrusion, it has also consumed Miranda's ancestors in order to keep them safe. When Ore tells Miranda that the soucouyant is the villain of the story – '[s]he sucks the life out of people' (167) – the parallel between the mythological monster and the house becomes more apparent. The house itself has previously told the memory of its consumption of Jennifer Silver, Lily's mother, to prevent her from leaving: 'Jennifer Silver never did leave home, but she had longed for an unusual life, and she certainly had that' (85). By consuming Jennifer, the house believes it is protecting both her from the outside world, and Anna and Lily from Jennifer's selfishness. Despite Ore's determination to believe that the soucouyant is 'a monster', the house creates a contradiction: villainous in its imprisonment of people and yet protective of the family it considers its own.

Miranda and Ore demonstrate an understanding of the sentient house's purpose in protecting the Silver women. During the nightmare sequence towards the end of the novel, Ore interacts with the girl inside of Miranda's skin. When Ore has split her open, the girl becomes scared of exposure: '"No, no, why did you do this? Put me back in." She gathered the halves of her shed skin and tried to fit them back together across herself' (230). Both this dream version of Miranda and the one from reality cling to the soucouyant, not as a villain representing white supremacy, but a metamodern figure of freedom. For Miranda, the soucouyant represents the ability to change predetermined identities and be liberated from 'hegemonic prescriptions of heteronormative romance, marriage, and childbearing and rearing, and the traditional fairy-tale scripts'.[21] After hearing the story of the soucouyant from Ore, Miranda questions the role of the girl and the monstrous figure. Ore reminds her that '[t]he girl does not get away. It's not a story about her getting

[21] Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature*, p.219

away. She was born free' (166), as Miranda asked for a tale in which the girl was not forced to conform to heteronormative social ideals of obedience and passivity. Miranda believes however that the 'soucouyant gets away, though. Doesn't she count as a girl?' (166) as the monster represents to her an empowering female figure free from cultural constraints. In his discussion of slavery and American Gothic, Jason Haslam refers to the concept of 'freedom or the grave'.[22] In the twenty-first century, the boundaries between the monster and the human are often confused, a common theme in modern Gothic. However, limitations on such characters still exist and where death was a punishment for transgressive female characters such as Matilda from *The Monk*, the grave equates to a form of freedom for Miranda, allowing the house to swallow her and thus removing her non-conforming figure from society.

In Miranda's battle with her eating disorder throughout the novel, Oyeyemi utilises the vampiric soucouyant of Caribbean folklore alongside European fairy tales to demonstrate the protagonist's attempt to conform to societal expectations regarding the female body. Even as the trapped spirits of Miranda's female ancestors attempt to convince her to eat, she is unable to do as they ask, keeping herself bound to the ways of the soucouyant and her *pica* disorder. On the very first page of the novel, Ore notes that Miranda's 'throat is blocked with a slice of apple' (1), her disorder and unusual eating habits silencing her protests against heteronormative society: she will wither and starve just as her ancestors have done before her, becoming one with the house and the past.

Whilst the image of the apple that runs throughout the text links to Christian connotations of the transgressive fruit of Eden, this chapter will prioritise the reference to the original version of *Snow White* (1821) as written by the Brothers Grimm, in which the protagonist was poisoned by an apple. Oyeyemi adopts this aspect of the fairy tale in congruence with Caribbean folklore, the house forcing the growth of poisonous all-season apples throughout the year – half red

[22] Jason Haslam, 'Slavery and American Gothic: The Ghost of the Future' in *American Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) pp.44-59 [p.56]

and half white – as a means to expel unwanted, foreign guests. This is seen in the black couple staying at the house who, upon consumption of the apples, had been 'kept in their bed the past three days, curved around the bed like fitted sheets with their faces crusting over' (139). Although Anna's curse is supposed to be carried out on foreign characters, it is extended to Miranda and her predecessors who consider breaking the boundaries of the house, forcing them to endure the curse as the house undermines its own vow to protect the maternal Silver line.

In passages where it takes control of the narrative, the sentient house reveals how it is intrinsically linked to each Silver woman: 'I can only be as good as they are' (118). In the original fairy tale of *Snow White*, the white side of the apple is harmless, but in Oyeyemi's text it represents 'the bad side' (139), the dangerous part of the fruit. As noted by Stephanou, 'apples are the fruits of death offered to the unwelcome foreigner', emphasising again the role of the house as the white supremacist soucouyant, forcing 'whiteness' on and into black characters in order to assimilate and control them.[23] And yet, Miranda is also forced to choke on the apple as the house only recognises her attempts to break free from white heteronormativity and destroy the boundaries put in place by her ancestor.

Anita Harris Satkunananthan asserts that '[i]t is significant that the two survivors of the house are Yoruba'.[24] Whilst it is the foreignness of the guests that causes the house to attempt to consume them, Sade and Ore's Nigerian ancestry actually protects them from the curse. Satkunananthan continues, stating that due to 'their ability to walk between worlds, both Ore and Sade can see the supernatural "otherfolk"; they can bridge the gap between worlds and survive', just as Miranda's ability to communicate with her maternal ancestors protects her from the house.[25] Their Yoruba roots, although used against them in a society that does not fully embrace them, afford them a level of protection just as the Silver family is protected. Sade's interaction with the house takes places through a mannequin controlled by the house's consciousness. It delivers her an all-seasons apple which

[23] Stephanou, 'Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* and The Discourse of Consumption', p.1248
[24] Anita Harris Satkunananthan, 'Textual Transgressions and Consuming the Self in the Fiction of Helen Oyeyemi and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie', *Hecate*, 37.2 (2011) pp.41-69 [p.49]
[25] Satkunananthan, 'Textual Transgressions and Consuming the Self', p.49

Sade 'bit at the white side – she bit! […] The African with the silent chest chewed, swallowed and opened her mouth for more' (139). In the original fairy tale, the white side of the apple is harmless, but Oyeyemi subverts this element to match the conventions of the soucouyant legend in which white equates to bad. Paradoxically, whilst the reader initially expects to see Sade consumed by the house, she is the only black character able to survive within its walls.

Through the character of Sade, Oyeyemi engages with the socio-political nature of the Gothic to comment of current immigration issues in Britain. Unlike Ore, who initially seeks to assimilate fully to white British culture before running from it at the end of the novel, Sade has carefully crafted a space between the two for herself to exist in. Whilst working in the house for the white Silver family, Sade does not relinquish her Nigerian roots, bringing her culture into the house as a protective barrier between her and the presence of the soucouyants: Miranda and the house. Through her use of occult charms, Nigerian food and other elements of Yoruba culture, Sade finds a space in which she can survive even though she must watch other black characters suffer at the hands of white nationalism. Listening to the radio with Miranda and hearing of the death of multiple immigrants, Sade sarcastically comments on how 'they call Dover the key to England? […] Key to a locked gate, throughout both world wars, and even before' (107). Where Miranda eats the Dover chalk to fully inhabit the land and Ore rejects relationships with other Nigerian characters, Sade maintains an 'us' and 'them' dialogue throughout the novel, remembering her position as a black immigrant and the social constraints that have been forced upon her.

As a postcolonial Gothic novel, *White is for Witching* provides its twenty-first-century audience with a complex exploration of the relationships between women of different ethnicities and the impact of folklore on interracial interactions. The haunting of Miranda by her maternal ancestors represents that ghost of British white nationalism that hangs over the present day, influencing the social constructs of the modern era. Without the house surrounding her, Miranda is able to discern her own feelings for Ore. However, as soon as that relationship enters the sentient space, it is pulled apart by the house and Anna Good's curse, with Ore finding 'an

apple on my pillow. It was white' (205), as the house once more attempts to carry out Anna's curse against foreign figures within its walls. The use of the soucouyant, the vampiric female of Caribbean folklore allows for the representation of black voices from both the past and the present to be heard in contemporary Gothic literature. The split narrative employed by Oyeyemi creates a clashing of cultures and truths designed to cause the reader to question the cultural constructs around them.

The Beauty of the Wolf

The Beauty of the Wolf by Wray Delaney tells the story of a young man, Beau, who is born cursed, his beauty prophesised to fulfil a sorceress's vengeance on his family. As the reader follows his narrative where he explores beauty, sexuality, and magick, they also learn the story of the Beast, Randa, who is half-woman, half-monster. Set in a fantastical version of Elizabethan England, Delaney's novel uses the fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast* as a basis for its exploration into the relationships between sex and gender performance. This text is influenced by many Gothic works that deal with the body and beauty, such as *Frankenstein*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. By subverting traditional fairy tale tropes, *The Beauty of the Wolf* is able to demonstrate twenty-first-century metamodern reversal and subversion of gender roles through the various androgynous and monstrous characters.

As Abbruscato notes of fairy tales, the 'unreal, Gothic, and horrific elements of these tales are essential and necessary for children to relate to the imaginary, fantastic, and magic found in the stories to the world around them'.[26] By providing an identifiable setting for *The Beauty of the Wolf*, Delaney is able to illustrate Abbruscato's statement; the reader is able to relate the fantastical, Gothic elements of the novel to their understanding of gender issues through the setting of the narrative. From early on in the novel, Delaney deals with the concept of time and the perspective the text takes on it: '[t]here is little merit in sticking pins in time, in searching for a date to tie this story to. Suffice to say it is set in an England

[26] Abbruscato, 'Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales', p.2

ruled by a faerie queen'.[27] By using the Elizabethan era as the setting for the narrative, the author is able to employ the representations of gender and sexuality from this time, particularly in the theatre, which allows male characters such as Beau and Gally, as discussed later in this section, the space to explore the feminine elements of their identity. Delaney identifies a time period for her readers to recognise whilst simultaneously ensuring they understand they are experiencing a fantastical version of England in this particular narrative. As Bailey utilises the idea of *In The Night Wood* being set in 'a' time (see Chapter One above), Delaney demonstrates the timeless and fantastical nature of the fairy tale narrative, setting the text in 'an' England – this ability to appropriate and adapt to any historical context is a common feature of the Gothic novel as the range of exemplary texts in this thesis has illustrated.

Clive Bloom considers that there is a 'certain reciprocity between the gothic and the fairy story […] with their journeys into an ambiguous world of forests, witches, woodcutters, wolves and wicked stepmothers'.[28] The connection between the two styles of storytelling has been well established in the respective fields of Gothic and fairy tale studies. Although *The Beauty of the Wolf* contains the use of curses as narrative plots (such as the texts cited above in Chapter Three), it is the use of fairy tale lore and the rewriting of the well-known tale of *Beauty and the Beast* that is of particular interest in this novel. At the very start of the text, the sorceress comments that she has '*no time for sweet, enchanting tales that fool the reader with lies and false promises*' (3), allowing Delaney to ensure that the reader is aware that this narrative will redefine fairy-tale stereotypes.

The Beauty of the Wolf demonstrates how the two modes are amalgamated in the twenty-first century, with adult Gothic fairy tales being a popular form of novel, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter. Delaney's novel offers a metafictional retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, with Randa, the Beast, noting how she listened to her mother's stories 'of a boy who had been cursed with beauty,

[27] Wray Delaney, *The Beauty of the Wolf* (London: HQ, 2019) p.5. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[28] Clive Bloom, *Gothic Histories: The Taste for Terror, 1764 to the Present* (London: Continuum, 2010) p.58

who lived in a house with three turrets […] I listened to her stories with a child's understanding and wondered how beauty could be a curse. A beast like me is a curse but never beauty' (129), not yet aware of the link between this tale and Beau's narrative. As Delaney tells one version of the narrative, various other versions are recounted by the characters, depicting the manner in which fairy tales evolve each time they are retold.

Delaney's novel demonstrates the Gothic's exaggeration and ability to twist aspects of the fairy tale narratives by its reversal of gender roles. Rather than the stereotypical beautiful woman terrorised by the masculine beast, Beau is the beautiful, young man and Randa is the monstrous half-woman, half-beast meant to torment him. Delaney establishes this restructuring of roles with the sorceress's curse at the start of the narrative: '[*a*] *faerie boy will be born to you whose beauty will be your death*' (10). Not only does *The Beauty of the Wolf* deal with the concept of reversed gender roles but also disrupts social norms on bodily appearances. Beau's beauty is consistently referred to as a curse or a monstrosity throughout the novel – '[o]h beauty, what a beast you make' (69) – once more ensuring the reader understands that this is not a conventional fairy tale. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Abbruscato stated it is common for Gothic literature to twist classic fairy tale elements, and adult Gothic fairy tales of the twenty-first century particularly engage with the merging of the "self" and "other", as well as the human and monster in order to explore societal issues of bodily expectations.

The questioning of the concept of beauty as a strictly feminine ideal is a key aspect of *The Beauty of the Wolf*, demonstrated over the course of the novel by Beau's exploration of his appearance and his attraction to those who do not conform to heteronormative standards of beauty, similarly to the character of Dorian Gray and his investigation of aesthetics and sexuality. As a theatrical genre, the performativity of its characters is central to the Gothic as it demonstrates the absurd nature of prescribed gender stereotypes in order to conform to society. In her seminal work on gender identity, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler defines performativity as a 'collective agreement to

perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions'.[29] The concept of performing genders is illustrated when Beau's father, the Earl of Rodermere, tells him '[y]ou will stay here and learn to be a man, for there is little merit in looks that belong to neither sex […] are you a girl to be bedded or are you a man enough to do the bedding?' (102). Beau's father presents the traditional, heteronormative social thinking around gender whereas Beau is used to demonstrate a metamodern exploration of gender and sexual identity, piecing together his identity from elements of social expectation and newer aspects that would not traditionally be approved of.

The first examination of Beau's appearance comes from the sorceress when she first sees him as an adult:

> [h]is hair raven black, thick his eyelashes of the same colour framing golden eyes. His lips sensuous, full, made for pleasure, he possesses a natural allure that shines in him, a charm, she would call it, that bewilders even her. He is both male and female, united in one body. (66)

Where Randa does not inherit her mother's looks, Beau's features illustrate his supernatural lineage from his mother, emphasised by the curse. The weight placed on his looks is a description usually reserved for female characters, but the supernatural gift of beauty allows Beau's visage to break this rule. By ensuring Beau's beauty, the sorceress interrupts the completion of a male performance in the novel, defying the anticipated cultural expectations of masculinity, as defined by Butler. Throughout his childhood, Beau's face was hidden from him and so he has no concept of beauty or the effect his appearance has on the characters around him. He questions his father's comments on his visage, asking himself '[w]hat did he mean when he talked of beauty? What beauty and why did he doubt my sex?' (102). Having never seen his own appearance and kept away from society, Beau cannot establish the link between sex and external gender performance, and so he fails to realise why his father despises his inability to assimilate cultural expectations of the male sex.

[29] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007) p.190

Once Beau sees his reflection for the first time, he understands that there is something socially wrong with his visage, noting that he appears 'unreal, my face a mask. What freak of nature stands before me? No man was given this unearthly appearance. What some might call beauty, I find monstrous' (104). A subversion of the myth of Narcissus, Beau is immediately repulsed by his non-conforming appearance, aware that he is socially unacceptable and that his identity is fractured. As he studies his reflection, he questions who is the 'androgynous beast that stares back at me? It does not reflect in any small way the perception I have of myself' (105). Beau's identity was previously built on the conceptions given to him by society, performing them without knowledge of his androgynous appearance. In finding his face does not abide by societal expectations, Beau cannot produce the expected performance knowing that his physical appearance does not match his social identity.

Beau's anger at his mismatched identity is manifested when he breaks the mirror, stating that '[t]here was more honesty to the mirror when I broke it for then I was reflected in many sizes, many parts and many shapes, and not one could claim the whole truth of me' (110). Beau's understanding of himself reflects the metamodern approach of twenty-first-century Gothic literature to individual identity. Rather than remaining the product of a collectively agreed set of social norms, Delaney's protagonist is given the chance to discover and rebuild his identity as an individual. Beau declares 'it mattered not if I had a cock – that did not make me who I was. The man, though, recognised the woman within' (110), reconciling the femininity of his features with the masculinity of his body, finding unity in it instead of disruption as other characters do.

Delaney reinforces the performative nature of gender in her novel through the character of Gally. When Beau meets the young, black actor, he is intrigued by his presentation as a woman. Gally 'undressed and what had appeared to be a young girl was in truth a boy […] He had his cock and balls held tight between his legs so that he might be assumed to be of an indeterminate sex' (149), shattering the immediate expectations the reader has of a female character. Gally allows Beau

to see how one individual can inhabit two polar gender roles as he sees fit, performing which version is most useful to him in a particular context.

Gally's lesson transfers onto Beau when he journeys to London and becomes an actor, able to fulfil the roles of leading ladies due to his androgyny. Beau takes Butler's concept of performativity to the extreme, purposefully creating a contrasting act to his prescribed gender norm. Butler states that

> [a]cts, gestures, and desire produce this *on the surface* of the body […] such acts, gestures, enactments […] are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.[30]

In playing the part of a woman, Beau is able to compensate for his androgynous looks that stop him from fulfilling his masculine stereotypes to the fullest. Just as Miranda attempts to escape the expectations of her family by studying at Cambridge and entering into a relationship with Ore in Oyeyemi's novel, so too does Beau endeavour to separate himself from familial and societal expectations through fleeing to London. By being an actor, Beau also lives on the outskirts of society and so can escape the rigid definitions of cultural expectations more so than when he was a nobleman's son.

According to Kathy Justice Gentile, Gothic and 'drag' have been closely entwined since *The Castle of Otranto*. In terms of gender performance, it was the 'grossly inflated supernatural imagery, hyperbolic passions of the characters, fantastical plot turns, and excessive accretions of terror-evoking details in *Otranto*' that began the link between Gothic and performativity.[31] In his use of drag, Beau is able to realise the full extent of his androgyny, not only in his appearance but the creation of his individual identity, removed from society. As Butler claims, the 'performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed'.[32] Butler notes the disruption drag causes to the heteronormative view of sex and gender, and its potential

[30] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.185
[31] Kathy Justice Gentile, 'Sublime Drag: Supernatural Masculinity in Gothic Fiction', *Gothic Studies*, 11.1 (2009) pp.16-31 [p.18]
[32] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.187

subversion thereof. When imprisoned in Randa's castle, she provides Beau with a dress. Beau realises

> [t]here is no more need to hide in women's clothes, to play a part upon the stage and pretend […] Determinedly I pretend I belong to the world of man, that I am my father's son and with that fantasy comes the chains that bind me. (248)

By playing the role of a woman on the stage, Beau has become aware of the performative nature of gender and the limitations it gives an individual so as to bind them to a specific social role.

Although Beau despises his beauty, as his androgyny keeps him from fully joining society as man, he utilises it as a means of escape from cultural expectations when he wishes to. Despite his strange visage, he is enamoured by the strangeness of Randa. Half-woman, half-beast, Beau understands that '[i]t is not she that repulses me. It is myself, hidden in all this vile beauty, the truth of who I am concealed from the human eye by the glamour of a charmed man' (257). Randa's truth is worn externally, unable to conform to societal expectations of femininity and so she is simultaneously ostracised and freed from heteronormative stereotypes. Beau recognises the mask his visage forms from the moment he sees it, leading him to appreciate Randa as no other character can.

There are many parallels created by Delaney between her novel and the various retellings of *Beauty and the Beast*. In an article concerning Disney's 1991 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, Susan Z. Swan contends that, although there is a cultural paradox that fictional women are often depicted in, 'Gothics, thus, would seem to offer an ameliorative for such a paradox, serving as adult fairy tales that offer images of competence and meaningfulness to females in late adolescence'.[33] The cultural paradox of the 1991 version of *Beauty and the Beast* and indeed many other Disney fairy tales, depicts a strong, intelligent heroine who must still participate in social conventions by playing the damsel in distress and marrying the

[33] Susan Z. Swan, 'Gothic Drama in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*: Subverting Traditional Romance by Transcending the Animal-Human Paradox', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 16.3 (1999) pp.350-369 [p.353]

prince, caught between, as Swan puts it, 'femininity and competence'.[34] The Gothic however, provides a space in which such characters do not have to conform to feminine ideals or abandon non-normative aspects of their identity. This statement remains true in the twenty-first century, with many adult Gothic novels using subverted fairy tale motifs to redefine gender norms and, particularly in *The Beauty of the Wolf*, allowing not just female but also male characters to explore their gender representation.

Whilst Randa's gender performance is confused – 'a woman, not a woman, a beast, not a beast. A confusion of two made one' (128) – her physical body contains female parts, creating a figure of the monstrous feminine. Barbara Creed's term denotes that '[a]s with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she [the monstrous-feminine] is defined in terms of her sexuality'.[35] Abject sexuality is a prominent motif with Gothic female characters, the displaying of female sexual liberation being a commonplace reason for the removal of a female figure from a Gothic narrative – Randa demonstrates that this is still the case in the twenty-first century. Where the description of Beau highlights the beauty and androgyny of his face, Randa's appearance demonstrates the harpy-like paradox of her body:

> [g]reen eyes – human eyes – look straight at me through the red feathers that hide her face. Her nose is the beak of an owl. There is no doubting her sex – her breasts emerge from feathers and her cunny from the fur of a panther. Her mouth is the mouth of a woman but her talons are powerful enough to strip a man of his skin. (243)

Despite her animalistic features, Beau finds beauty in the amalgamation of her beastly qualities in equal measure to her human parts. Beau is enamoured of Randa and her ability to cast off the issue of gender performativity – '[s]he is glorious in her unfathomable being. Who created such a magnificent creature, half of woman, half of beast, the whole more glorious than any puny man?' (250) – and encompass the liberations of a monstrous female.

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[34] Swan, 'Gothic Drama in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*', p.353

[35] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2007) p.3

Whilst Beau enjoys Randa's monstrous appearance, the Beast herself continually wishes to take on a truly human form throughout the novel in order to achieve her social position as a woman, not just a female beast. Creed writes '[a]ll human societies have a conception of […] woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject'.[36] The monstrous-feminine embodies all these aspects alongside her gender to disturb conventional cultural identities. As a fairy tale, *The Beauty of the Wolf* should traditionally remind the reader that Randa will never be an acceptable member of heteronormative society, as the sorceress reminds her, '[w]hat made you think that a one such as Beau could ever love one such as you? You are a beast and always will be' (321). However, Delaney embraces metamodern attitudes to individualism both within and separate from society. This is acknowledged when Gally tells Beau of Randa locked in a cage in London: '[t]here was something so unworldly about her. And I thought, that is how I have felt all my days: half-woman, half-man, all beast' (344), demonstrating that they are not the only anomalies in their heteronormative culture.

Where the wolf-men of Cottam's *The Magdalena Curse* are designed to disturb the reader, owing to their unnatural combination of the bestial and the human, Randa is a figure of sympathy due to her desire to become fully human. In Delaney's version of the fairy tale, Beau's beauty is something to be feared, unexpected in that it belongs to a man rather than a woman. This is emphasised when Randa – who traditionally should be the beautiful heroine and not the monster – asks '[w]hy am I not beautiful, Mother?' (90). Randa does not understand why she has not been allowed to conform to cultural expectations of female appearance and therefore cannot be accepted by society. When Randa sees Beau for the first time, she questions if '*this man* [could] *turn me into gold? If he loved me would I be transformed?*' (119). Here the reader sees the element drawn from the original story – that the Beast can and will be transformed into a human by the love of a human. Rather than being as precious as gold, she was a misshapen monster, immediately abhorred by her father for his creation of something so abnormal. However, elements of the original fairy tale are kept, with Randa

[36] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, p.1

remembering her mother's words, '[l]ove will transform you' (90), promising her daughter a conversion into a socially acceptable form of beauty through the stereotypical suggestion that a woman requires heterosexual love to transform.

Where Beau is, in a subversive manner, the beautiful protagonist who must free himself from the confinements of his patriarch's power, Randa is the 'feathered creature […] eyes glinting; a halo of light outlines its shape, talons scrape at the glass. The image is disjointed by the round panes so there appears more than one and behind all a shadow of wings looms great' (48). In his essay on early horror cinema created by the American film studio, Universal, Brian Jarvis writes that '[e]ach stage in the evolution of paganism, organised religion, folklore and mythology has been accompanied by an iconography of fearful creatures and objects, places and times'.[37] The use of such creatures as Randa in fairy tales and folklore traditionally allow the author to emphasise, through the monstrous or fearful icons, all that goes wrong when characters attempt to break out of their cultural roles and subvert heteronormative society. However, through her appearance and actions throughout the novel, Randa represents the twenty-first-century ideal of Gothic fiction; an individual who can choose which social elements they perform, with no limitations between choosing masculine or feminine aspects.

In a similar fashion to Beau, Randa demonstrates the conflicting performances of heteronormative culture forced onto a body that does not fit societal norms. As discussed in Chapter One, the relationships between fathers and daughters in Gothic literature is often convoluted. Born a bastard and so already predestined to be ostracised by society, Randa's monstrous body is created as a result of her father saving her life through alchemy. In *Gothic Pathologies*, David Punter discusses the use of alchemy in Shelley's *Frankenstein* as it is used to create the Creature, affecting the laws of society: the 'substitution of alchemy for science, an investigative realm which does not obey the law […] threatens us with inner and outer changes which are too powerful, too threatening to be represented direct'.[38]

[37] Brian Jarvis, 'Universal Horror' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (2020) pp.1018-1041 [p.1018]
[38] David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998) p.53

Randa's second birth – much like the Creature's re-birth in *Frankenstein* – causes the sins of the father to be played out on the body of the child, and in her father's eyes she becomes nothing more than a '[m]onster! Yes, monster, a monster of my own making' (84). Although born as a combination of woman and animal by her father's alchemy, Randa is dehumanised in her maker's eyes due to her beastly form. The Beast fits Punter's argument in a literal manner, unable to abide by societal laws due to her external changes and therefore a threat to her father's social status, emphasised by her father's treatment of her as nothing more than her monstrous surface and not the woman she knows lies beneath.

Mary S. Pollock notes that it is ingrained into Western culture that 'it is man who decides the relative value of other animals and doles out rights to them from a position of self-conferred power and authority', and so women are nothing more than animals to be given controlled freedom by the patriarchy.[39] Although he is confused by her physical traits, Beau views Randa as some new form of evolution where genders are more freely able to combine. Thinking of Randa, as she haunts him in her invisible form, Beau wonders if they are 'two parts of the same body […] who is to say how much woman is mixed in with man? Or how much man is mixed in with woman' (127). Through his metamodern outlook on the blurring of gender boundaries, Beau negates Pollock's claim as he renders man and woman equal through their shared elements, nullifying the need for segregated gender roles.

Delaney's subversion of the assumed gender roles found in the traditional narrative of *Beauty and the Beast* allows for a metamodern consideration of the significance of gender. According to Karen Coats, '[t]raditional adult Gothic has tended to give a sinister inflection to fairy tale tropes and motifs, combining elements of horror and the supernatural'.[40] Whilst many modern Gothic novels are more gender fluid, they utilise the monstrosity of figures such as Randa to demonstrate the outdated societal expectations and the damaging effect they can

[39] Mary S. Pollock, 'Angela Carter's Animal Tales: Constructing the Non-Human', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 11.1 (2000) pp.35-57 [p.36]
[40] Karen Coats, 'Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic' in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, ed. by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats, and Roderick McGillis (New York: Routledge, 2008) pp.77-92 [p.78]

have on more contemporary characters. Randa becomes monstrous, not just through her appearance but through her mixing of specific gender roles. As she is part woman, there are feminine elements to her, namely the fact that she menstruates. She tells the reader that in her garden, '[*b*]*lood from the depths of my womb makes the rose red. I am not ashamed. I am the beast, the truth, the beauty within*' (233). Here, Randa seems to accept her beastliness alongside her femininity, content in the knowledge that she is more than the socially unacceptable external appearance. However, more than once, the reader learns of her lamentations over her monstrosity.

Throughout the novel, Randa laments that she is monstrous, believing her beastly aspects to be unacceptable to human society and therefore unlovable: '[o]nce […] I believed that if you could love me for who I am […] that perhaps your loving would transform me, that there might be inside me […] a woman waiting to be unwrapped' (254). The 'unwrappinng' of Randa relies on a similar precedent to the layering of Miranda in *White is for Witching*: that there is an internalised body hidden beneath layers of external performance. Randa's hope for transformation is matched by Beau, who tells the reader '[w]e made love and I hoped, as much as she hoped, that I might be transformed into a beast or she into a woman, that we would meet in the same shape' (283). Beau's wish is reminiscent of Carter's subversive rewrite of *Beauty and the Beast*, 'The Tiger's Bride', from *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Rather than the transformation of beast into man, Carter's female protagonist is freed from the constraints of society into the form of a tiger.

Where Carter allows instant gratification to her central character in 'The Tiger's Bride' – the female protagonist immediately transforms into a tiger once she has accepted her male counterpart and resolves their story in a happy conclusion – Delaney does not allow the same for her characters. More so than Beau's permanent transformation into a beast, Randa fears that she can never become a woman, lamenting that '[s]till I am more beast than woman. Why did love not change me?' (299). If traditional fairy tale tropes had been followed, Randa's transformation to a heteronormative woman should have been complete with

Beau's declaration of love or intercourse: signs of conformity to heterosexual relationships and gender expectations. However, due to the masculine aspects of herself that Randa uses to her advantage, her statement rings true: '[i]t can never be, I say, for he is the beauty and I the beast' (239). *The Beauty of the Wolf* exemplifies the metamodern Gothic through its upholding of the subverted fairy tale stereotypes, maintaining and accepting the bestial elements of Randa as well as the beautiful aspects of Beau.

Despite the case made for Randa's liberation and monstrous beauty, *The Beauty of the Wolf* still maintains a traditional fairy tale ending. Upon saving her from the London theatre, 'Beau is cradling Randa in his arms. Around her lie fallen feathers. She is neither beast nor yet woman, but a transformation has begun' (374), demonstrating a heteronormative ending and fulfilling the early Gothic tradition of resolved narratives. Whilst this may appear as a reversion back to heteronormative standards, the reader is aware that, although Randa was able to accept her monstrous body, it was her desire throughout the novel to be fully human, and therefore her transformation is a fulfilment of individual desires rather societal ones. At the end of the novel, the animal elements of the novel's Beast fade away, leaving her as 'Randa, no shadow of the beast, just myself as I am. Flame-red hair, white skin, green eyes' (383). Following Creed's notion, Randa represented the terrifying concept of a woman beyond control of society. However, rather than being destroyed as the monstrous feminine usually is in Gothic – for instance, Matilda in *The Monk* and the vampiric Lucy in *Dracula* – Randa is given the chance to join society, bringing Beau with her, due to her desire to be a part of heteronormative culture.

All the Murmuring Bones

Built upon the fantastical world of her short story collection that utilises Gaelic folklore, Australian writer A. G. Slatter's novel, *All the Murmuring Bones*, tells the story of the O'Malleys: an ancient family who gained their power from a pact with the sea. Raised by her grandparents, Óisín and Aoife, Miren is the last daughter of the house. She must decide whether to save her family from ruin by marrying her cousin, Aidan Fitzpatrick, or to free herself from his control. Simultaneously, she

must solve the mystery of her grandmother's murder and the reason behind her mother's disappearance when she was a child, alongside the supernatural secrets of the family. Where *The Beauty of the Wolf* subverts *Beauty and the Beast*, and Oyeyemi rewrites the legend of the soucouyant in *White is for Witching*, Slatter uses subverted fairy tales such as *The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Anderson, and Gothic poetry, namely Anne Bannerman's 'The Mermaid' (1800), employing maritime folklore related to the O'Malley family and their abuse of power over the sea for material profit. Through this combination, *All the Murmuring Bones* demonstrates the position of women as they attempt to redefine the morality of their family in relation to the sacrificing of children for fortune, and their power whilst relearning and reinventing their roles as women.

The narrative of *All the Murmuring Bones* depicts various fairy tales and folklore, stories from both land and sea meant to teach children how to behave and warn them of the dangers in their world. The protagonist notes how she grew up with tales from the housekeeper of 'children taken away to hidden places; of women turned into birds and bugs; of soul clocks and dark magic; of boys who changed their faces […] of brides stolen by robbers and heroes laid low by a woman's curse', knowing that there was a certain amount of truth to each one.[41] Carina Hart notes that, traditionally, 'Gothic and folk or fairy tale narratives are peopled by similar stock characters, driven by clear-cut good or evil impulses and subject to resolutions either absolutely just or absolutely unjust'.[42] Slatter explores the metamodern perspective that such stock characters are an inaccurate representation of life, and so evolves her own fairy tale narrative beyond the classic structure and character format, as seen with the monstrous figures of the soucouyant and Randa in the previous two sections.

The rewriting of what Hart refers to as 'stock characters' is mostly seen in the female figures of the novel. Similarly to the Silver family of *White is for Witching*, Slatter notes at the beginning of *All the Murmuring Bones* that the

[41] A. G. Slatter, *All the Murmuring Bones* (London: Titan Books, 2021) p.33. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[42] Carina Hart, 'Gothic Folklore and Fairy Tale: Negative Nostalgia', *Gothic Studies*, 22.1 (2020) pp.1-13 [p.2]

O'Malleys were traditionally a matriarchal family – 'there was a time when females held the O'Malley family reins' (11) – setting them apart from the stereotypical heteronormative family dynamic. Miren considers her grandmother, Aoife, to be the last remnant of that era, describing her as a 'rare creature, a force of nature, elemental, my grandmother, utterly uninterested in others telling her what to do' (20). Rather than presenting the reader with a frail old woman or evil witch, as would be expected in a fairy tale, Slatter expresses the strength of women who have carried the weight of their family in a society that does not regard them as strong enough to do so. Although their relationship is turbulent, Miren admires her grandmother, grateful for the lessons she gave her on surviving in a patriarchal culture. Miren laments that the 'days of the O'Malley women's power being unquestioned are long gone, and more's the pity' (20), believing that their family's fortunes were stronger under matriarchal rule.

Where Aoife utilises her position as a woman to gain what she wants, Miren fears the gender norms forced upon her, fighting societal expectations. After her grandmother dresses her up for the theatre, Miren realises that, although 'I've been told I'm lovely […] with others watching me, all these gazes, male and female, glued to me? I know at last that "lovely" means "visible", no matter how much I might wish not to be' (58). Aware of the performative nature of the female body, just as Randa and Beau are in *The Beauty of the Wolf*, Miren is not driven by the 'clear-cut good or evil impulses' that Hart considers in her article, aware that the context in which she finds herself is not so black and white as a fairy tale. Instead of subscribing to the role of the obedient woman from fairy tales, Miren refuses to be objectified and wishes to remove the façade, to 'have no more eyes upon me, trying to pierce me, divine me, to know me, to take a piece of me for themselves' (58), ensuring she remains an individual separated from a society that would consume her.

Hart also states that 'an important dynamic within the Gothic is its oscillation between subverting the fixed structures of folklore and fairy tale for more progressive (or disruptive) ends, and nostalgically preserving the

conservatism of such structures'.[43] This oscillation in the Gothic, reminiscent of the metamodern oscillation between modernity and postmodernity, is illustrated in *All the Murmuring Bones* which upholds Hart's claim, particularly in its consideration of the protagonist's marriage. Promised by her grandmother to her cousin, Aidan Fitzpatrick, Miren does not wish to fulfil her expected role as the dutiful and quiet wife, there to continue on the family line whilst her husband takes control of her inheritance – the family estate, Hob's Hallow. The feeling of entrapment by the house in *White is for Witching* is also seen in Miren's family home. Despite knowing she could save her home from ruin, Miren realises 'I love this house but it's not worth the cost of my freedom. It's not worth the cost of marrying Aidan Fitzpatrick, whatever soul I might have, O'Malley though I might be, it is mine and I'll not sell it at any price' (128). Completely subverting her traditional fairy tale purpose, Miren refuses to enter into her prescribed heteronormative role, demonstrating the beginnings of a metamodern understanding of the fragmentation of her identity between social and personal expectations.

As the narrative progresses and Miren discovers further freedom in her separation from her family and the obligations that come with the family name, she becomes more and more aware of herself as an individual. She concludes that, '[i]f I had stayed there, I'd have been entombed. By the house, by marriage to Aidan […] It would never have been a *life*, but a kind of embalming in wealth and position and expectations. No true existence at all' (280). By running from the expectations placed upon her by the society in Breakwater, Miren escapes the classic structure of a fairy tale life; the heteronormative women awaiting rescue and marriage to the hero, and a promised happily ever after if she abides by the cultural instructions given to her. Where early Gothic works by writers such as Radcliffe, demonstrate freedom for female characters through a choice of whom to marry, the contemporary Gothic is able to remove the entrapment of marriage from the narrative formula. As this is an adult Gothic fairy tale, in keeping with Hart's definition, Miren is given a progressive form of a happy ending, pregnant with her own child – 'it's a girl, I know it, a daughter I hope I can do better by than was done

[43] Hart, 'Gothic Folklore and Fairy Tale: Negative Nostalgia', p.3

for me' (363) – and free to live how she chooses, without a husband to control her actions.

Whilst there are many fairy tales told as stories throughout *All the Murmuring Bones*, the world Slatter created for this narrative contains an element of the fantastical, making the maritime folklore a reality for her characters. Through a book of tales, the history of the O'Malleys is recorded, detailing their past as if they are stories as well as fact. As Aoife tells Miren, '[s]tories are history, whether they're true or not' (41), demonstrating the postmodern concept of history as a text and the multiplicity of truth. According to Maxim Fomin, memorates are defined as 'personal accounts of supernatural happenings […] centred around various phenomena of human life and constitute an extremely popular and productive folklore category'.[44] Although originally an oral narrative told from an individual's memory, often a precursor to a legend, memorates later evolved to be written recollections. A form of memorate, the O'Malleys kept a record of their family stories in a book 'wherein generations of our kind have scribbled tales that might be lies, might be true […] all ones that, as a child, I took as gospel' (33), ensuring that all family members played their roles as prescribed by the tales ingrained in them throughout their lives.

Although Miren grew with these tales from her family, she is torn between how much she should believe them to be true and whether she should continue to treat them as gospel. According to one of the tales, the O'Malleys are expected to birth three children into each generation: '*the firstborn, a girl to inherit; the middle a boy for the Church; and the last another girl, and a grief it would be to her mother if she fulfilled her purpose*' (34) as a human sacrifice. Throughout the novel, Miren considers the stories in the book, 'lies and truths and tales all mixed together so no one could tell them apart' (319) and the impact they have had on her identity. Miren slowly becomes aware that she has been shaped by the folklore of her

[44] Maxim Fomin, 'Maritime Memorates and Contemporary Legends of Storm Apparitions and Storm Making in Folklore Traditions of Ireland and Scotland', *Armenian Folia Anglistika*, 7.2 (2011) pp.154-162 [p.154]

family, readying her to continue the family custom of sacrificing children to the sea for the sake of their fortune and status.

Despite her awareness of her family's history, Miren continues to deny her connection to the tales and horrors of her ancestry, having convinced herself that she would be free of this obligation. She laments '[o]ther families might have stories of curses, cold lads and white ladies, but we have old gods, merfolk and monsters' (33). Her fear for her future children is only fuelled by her engagement to Aidan, her grandmother constantly reminding her she must have three children as soon as possible. Miren summarises her belief that Aidan wishes to rebuild the O'Malley name, that he will 'get children on me. He'll start the sacrifices once again: a child to inherit, a child for the Church, a child for the sea so she gives her bounty to us once again' (68). The tales in the O'Malley memorate, particularly the one regarding the three siblings, are designed to enforce familial tradition and obligation onto each member: in the case of the female characters, to produce children for disposal at the family's satisfaction – a particularly Gothic theme that has continued to be present in twenty-first century novels, although subverted for a modern audience.

As the only child in her generation, it is with this growing awareness of the dangers awaiting any potential children she may have that Miren begins to accept her mother's actions in abandoning her to Óisín and Aoife's care. Miren reflects on her mother, Isolde, questioning

> [d]id Isolde flee so she might save any other children who came after? She sacrificed me as surely as those who'd gone before her had sacrificed their own children. And I cannot say that I don't understand, but also I cannot say that there isn't an agonising pain in the pit of me. (320)

Miren is torn between blaming her mother for the position she is in – saving or ruining the only family she has ever known – and forgiving her as Miren follows in her footsteps, running from Hob's Hallow in order to save herself and her future children from being used in the same manner.

As Miren continues on her search for her mother, she decides that 'when I am settled I will begin a new book. I'll write down all I can remember so at least some version of them remains' (221). By doing so, Miren can ensure that her family's legacy is preserved, both as a form of nostalgia and as a warning to future generations. She acknowledges the unreliability of her narration of a new memorate, stating that '[t]hey will be changed, there will be things my memory lets go, but they will still *be*. And a trace of a tale is all that's needed to find your way in the world' (221). Miren acknowledges that there will be elements missing from the original versions of her family's tales, just as fairy tales and folklore are rewritten through the ages to suit the context of the new audience. She is aware of the limitations of her own knowledge, that 'there is so much I will never know. There are only tales of things that might once have been, and I write them in the book of stories Isolde had begun. I write the old from memory and the new when I can bear the pain of them' (362), demonstrating Hart's claim of Gothic literature simultaneously subverting and preserving stereotypical fairy tale tropes.

As previously discussed, the power of the O'Malley family was originally in the hands of its female descendants, though there is no clarification for when or why this ended. However, the link between the O'Malleys and the sea is ingrained into its female family members. As Fomin notes on memorate recollections of women's control over the sea and storms,

> [t]he negative connotations implied in relation to the females […] can be linked with the prohibition associated with the fishermen's profession […] And, yet, there was an exception when the fishermen would enter into dealings with female witches by procuring favourable winds from them.[45]

Slatter continues this tradition of the sea as a feminine power. Miren recalls that, when Óisín died, there was no storm at the moment of his death, 'that only happened when the women go; no one knows why, or if they do no one's saying' (27). Despite Miren's uncertainty at the beginning of the novel, the truth of her lineage and the reason for her connection to the sea is eventually resolved. Upon

[45] Fomin, 'Maritime Memorates and Contemporary Legends of Storm Apparitions', p.157

meeting a kelpie – a water spirit that is both human and horse – Miren learns that she is a 'salt daughter' (188), and therefore not entirely human.

Despite the confusion at the kelpie's inference that she is only part-human, Miren is able to accept this story as truth. Questioning her mother's absence from her home in Blackwater, it is confirmed a storm occurred on the night Isolde was murdered. Miren realises that '[e]ven away from the sea, Isolde was an O'Malley, there was salt in her veins just as there is in mine. The sea mourns when we die, we female O'Malleys, for whatever reason' (299). She continues to question the purpose behind the storms, whether it is a matter of their blood lineage from mermaids or 'because we produce the children, the tithe we feed to the waters' (299), continuing the bargain struck centuries before and keeping the O'Malley women beholden to the sea.

Aidan Fitzpatrick desires to keep Miren controlled through her relationship with the sea, as well as using her to increase his own status. Although he is only part O'Malley, Aidan believes he is worthy of the family name, and will be even more so with Miren as his wife. He tells her that there is power in her blood, that 'there's will and determination, Miren. There's your blood and your belly and the children I'll plant there. We need offspring from you, we need to reconsecrate the covenant with the sea. Only you can do that, you and I' (336-7). Where Miren has been able to throw off the yoke of her family's cultural expectations, Aidan has become enthralled by them, convinced he can become a true O'Malley by returning the name to its former glory. However, Miren acknowledges that, although the power of the O'Malleys used to reside in the maternal line, 'Aidan did not want a wife with a mind of her own […] I would not have made a satisfactory wife, nor he a decent husband' (246). Rather than remaining an object at the disposal of her family, Miren embraces her personal identity, acknowledging that she is able to maintain the femininity expected of her by society but also accept the non-normative aspects of herself in the form of her independence and competence as an individual.

At the end of the novel, the secret of the O'Malley family is revealed – that their ancestor enslaved a mer-queen, offering one child from each generation in

exchange for the silver scales from her tail. The concept of the family bargain, also seen in *In The Night Wood* above in Chapter One, is of great interest to contemporary Gothic works as representations of the entrapment of familial inheritance, keeping the present enthralled to the past as the mermaids are enthralled to the O'Malleys in Slatter's novel. Upon discovering her in the well in Isolde's house, Miren promises to free the sea-queen if the bargain between the O'Malleys and the sea is ended. Miren swears to the sea-queen that 'I am... not like my kind' (356). A careful choice of phrasing, Miren is promising that, not only she is unlike the other O'Malleys, but that she is also unlike other women. She does not share the same lust for power or wealth as the females in her family or that she has met on her journey. She seeks a simple life, removed from the expectations that come with the family name and hopes that, in freeing the sea-queen, she frees herself.

The use of mermaids as the central figures of the O'Malley folklore allows Slatter to explore the representations of the maritime demons as more than simply monstrous, introducing an element of the eco-Gothic as was explored in Chapter Three. Emily Alder writes that sea monsters in Gothic literature 'speak to the unknowableness of the deep ocean, its capacity to generate unthinkable, inhuman horrors, which, beyond the comprehension of human mind or knowledge, challenge notions of anthropocentricity'.[46] Miren, despite having been raised with tales of mermaids and the belief that they do exist, almost cannot comprehend what she sees in Breakwater Harbour: 'I seem to sense two other bodies beside me, keeping pace: pale and fast, sinuous, hair streaming, no legs but tails' (74). Only when her life is endangered does the protagonist begin to understand that the concept of anthropocentricity is misplaced, and that the foundation of her identity is rooted in false stories of her family's supremacy.

When Miren visits the village of Blackwater – created by her mother, Isolde – she notices the statue of a mermaid in the village square. She remarks that it is 'an idealised version to be sure, pretty and sweet, nothing like the creatures who

[46] Emily Alder, 'Through Oceans Darkly: Sea Literature and the Nautical Gothic', G*othic Studies*, 19.2 (2017) pp.1-15 [p.13]

pulled me into Breakwater Harbour, with their teeth and talons, sharp fins on lashing tails, gashes of gills and scaly skin' (248). Miren cannot understand why the figure of the mermaid has been romanticised when her mother would know the truth of the creatures. Slatter then provides a passage describing the imprisoned sea-queen for comparison:

> ill though she looks, exhausted and old, [she] is still the most terrifying thing I've ever seen. Twice the size of the mer who pulled me into Breakwater Harbour; her hair like a tangle of silver-green seaweed that moves of its own accord; her eyes so very dark, dark as a storm or the deepest sea depths. (351)

Slatter offers the reader a romanticised, fairy tale styled description of a mermaid before reconfirming the Gothicised "reality" of the monstrous creatures.

However, *All the Murmuring Bones* does not conform to the traditional fairy tale or folklore structure that presents the inhuman as nothing more than monstrous or evil. As Mariaconcetta Constanini remarks, supernatural sea creatures 'give flesh to a wide range of spiritual, socio-political, ethical and ecological anxieties'.[47] This is clearly seen in Slatter's novel, where the deal between the merfolk and the O'Malleys provides the infrastructure for the family fortune based upon supernatural dealings – the sacrifice of children – not unlike the bargain between the Hollows and the Horned King examined in Bailey's *In The Night Wood* in Chapter One. From the opening page of the text, the reader is made aware that the O'Malley family is not morally just. In the well in the centre of Hob's Hallow is the 'silver crisscross of a grid to keep things out or in. It's always been off-limits to the children of the house, no matter that its wall is high, far higher than a child could accidentally tip over' (7). Again, the structure of the well (just like the memorate book of tales) represents the enforcement of familial obligation through the production and disposal of children.

Mermaids, although not common in Gothic fiction, have been used to exemplify the villainy of women and the dangers of *femme fatale* figures in literature. Anne Bannerman, an early nineteenth-century Scottish poet, produced a

[47] Mariaconcetta Constantini, 'Reinterpreting Leviathan Today: Monstrosity, Eco-Criticism and Socio-Political Anxieties in Two Sea Narratives', *Gothic Studies*, 19.2 (2017) pp.98-111 [p.98]

Gothic ballad titled 'The Mermaid' (1800). Bannerman's protagonist, a grieving woman, 'transforms herself into a mermaid in order to destroy', acting as a celebration of female power rather than a submission to the loss of her male counterpart.[48] Adriana Craciun, one of Bannerman's main critics, notes that the poet often wrote femme fatales who are 'not a preoccupation of misogynist fantasy, a symptom of men's fear; but neither is she simply a reaction to women's exclusion from literary history, a symptom of women's anger'.[49] Slatter takes on this perspective of the mermaid, depicting the creatures as physically monstrous but entrapped by human villainy. Miren notes that all the firstborn children in each generation of O'Malleys wears 'a silver necklace with the ship's bell pendant engraved with what might be scalloping or fish scales' (21). The purpose of marking out the eldest child is twofold: they are protected from being sacrificed and also shown to be the one to whom power over the sea-queen will transfer. However, when Miren is pulled in the harbour by mermaids, she hears them sing '[*w*]*hen you are gone then we will be free*' (75). This phrase confirms for both the protagonist and the reader that the merfolk are no more monstrous than the human who enslaved them, seeking liberation through any means necessary just as the O'Malleys seek fortune in the same way, as well as demonstrating the contemporary blurring of the line between monster and human.

As *All the Murmuring Bones* continually subverts the usual format of fairy tales and folklore, it demonstrates several stereotypical tropes in order to provide the protagonist various chances at a heteronormative ending. As Hart observes, it is common for 'traditional narratives of folklore and fairy tale to offer the Gothic the possibility of a social and moral order, and a happy ending'.[50] As explored in Chapter One, the metamodern, twenty-first-century Gothic novel does not tend to allow a clear resolution of the narrative, relying on the ambiguity of the genre to leave the concept of the 'happy ending' subjective. Miren, although aware of her own abilities and strength to outwit the patriarchal figures in the novel,

[48] Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.176
[49] Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, p.159
[50] Hart, 'Gothic Folklore and Fairy Tale: Negative Nostalgia', p.3

encompasses certain traits of female fairy tale figures and Gothic heroines. To begin with, she is an orphan, raised by her grandparents before being promised to a man who will save her from ruin. Despite the supposed safety of marriage, Miren disagrees with being 'a bought bride' (67). Running away, Miren becomes the traumatised heroine, in a similar fashion to early Gothic heroines such as Julia from *A Sicilian Romance* by Radcliffe, running from the villainous male who would defile her. Again, she refuses to accept her fate as expected, becoming a murderer three times in order to defeat the men who would control her. This reminds the reader that, from a metamodern perspective, there are no clear-cut heroic figures with a clear line between justice and villainy.

When Miren discovers that the man posing as her uncle – who encompasses the common Gothic role of the evil patriarchal figure – is responsible for the murders of her mother, father, and sister, she goads him, saying '[c]ome along, Uncle, do it properly. Once upon a time...' (328). Through this phrasing, Miren mocks not only the tales her "Uncle" has spun to keep her in Blackwater, but also the memorates kept by her O'Malley family. She is also mocking the narrative of her own story, told in a fairy tale fashion but with none of the stereotypical happy endings. As she noted early in the novel, '[n]one of the tales in this book end with the words "happily ever after"' (39), demonstrating that socially and morally acceptable endings are not always achievable and the fair, happy endings depicted in fairy tales are simply that: fairy tales.

Conclusion

All three texts examined in this chapter examine the roles of women and gender performance in twenty-first-century Gothic literature. Just as Chapter Three utilises eco-Gothic to investigate the constantly changing social understanding of male identity, this chapter demonstrate the ever-changing representation of women and the continual progression and regression of female identity in Western culture as illustrated by twenty-first-century Gothic. Through the revisitation and reinvention of various folklore and fairy tales, each novel provides a metamodern consideration of gender and its effect on contemporary culture. The use of the vampiric soucouyant in Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* allows for the exploration of familial

and sexual relationships between women of different ethnicities. Delaney's *The Beauty of the Wolf* discusses the reversal and subversion of gender roles through androgynous and monstrous characters. Finally, *All the Murmuring Bones* by Slatter considers the position of women caught in a moral paradox, torn between fulfilling their obligations to society or correcting said society's immoral culture. Where Chapter Four has explored the issues surrounding depictions of gender and identity in the contemporary Gothic, Chapter Five will examine the effect of religion on identity, investigating the depiction of religion in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel and the influence of western Christianity on the individual both as part of society and separate from it.

Chapter Five

Challenging the Faith: Western Theology in Contemporary Gothic

Following on from the discussion of fairy tales and folklore in Chapter Four, this chapter looks at another system of beliefs: religion. Chapter Five will analyse the various depictions of religion in the twenty-first-century Gothic novel as they reflect on its impact in contemporary culture and its depiction as an element of the past. Whether an individual devoutly follows a particular doctrine or denies the existence of the divine, the numerous cultures around the world can often be associated with a particular religious or spiritual system. Religion has been a key element of the Gothic since the 1760s, dealing with anti-Catholic sentiment as it illustrated the socio-political war between the two main Christian factions in Europe at the time: Protestantism and Catholicism. Perhaps the most prevalent example of this is Lewis' *The Monk*, in which a villainous monk commits rape, murder and practices witchcraft. Diane Long Hoeveler states that Lewis' narrative demonstrates how a 'reactionary, demonised and feudal Catholicism is created in order to stand in opposition to the modern Protestant individual'.[1] Hoeveler also notes the politicisation of religion as 'Rome continued to function as the chief enemy of the Whig establishment because it had been such a convenient and widely recognized target since the Reformation period'.[2] Whilst there is still a cause for debate in many cultures, secularisation has decreased the authority of religion in twenty-first-century Western civilisation. Rather than an enforcer of the "correct" religion, twenty-first-century Gothic utilises the freedom of its metanarrative structure to question religious authority, employing narratives which place religious structures in positions of power in order to undermine them.

Despite their diminished cultural significance, although still politicised for war and other conflicts, religious ideologies are still in common usage as a source of disruption and discontent in contemporary Gothic literature, particularly in historical Gothic novels. As part of the foundation of Western society, religious

[1] Diane Long Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014) p.3
[2] Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, p.7

ideology continues to play a part in the shifting socio-political climate, particularly in issues of identity where the communal comes into conflict with the individual. As previously illustrated in this thesis, metamodernism allows for the exploration of multiple truths and identities through grand narratives and the application of the abstract in twenty-first-century Gothic. In his discussion of Adam Nevill's novels, Simon Marsden states that the author's contemporary Gothic narratives 'invoke the redemptive trajectory of Christian metanarrative to emphasise the impossibility of a genuinely redemptive return in a world for which the only transcendence is a nightmare vision of chaos'.[3] Marsden's idea that there is no feasible return to the strict Christian ideology from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is reflected in various pieces of metamodern Gothic literature. As Mark Canuel writes of religious representation in the genre, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic 'functions within the realm of ritual, wherein the novel represents and reinforces a set of common beliefs, and conveniently (albeit suspiciously) sounds an alarm against a host of social outcasts'.[4] Twenty-first-century Gothic subverts this function and utilises the contemporary notion that the 'teleological continuity of history is revealed to be a fiction, the illusion of realism which conceals the fantastic discontinuities and multiplicities of temporality', as observed by George Aichele Jr.[5] The consideration of theology, as depicted in the Gothic novel of the twenty-first century, is more focused on the individual and the communal in terms of small groups rather than at a national or global level – as is commonly seen in metamodern literature. It examines the discovery of new histories by removing the veil of enforced religious doctrine and by exploring the effect of socially controlled faith through the perspective of previously disregarded social minorities.

This chapter will explore how *The Daylight Gate* (2012) by Jeanette Winterson depicts the invasive and tyrannical nature of Protestantism during the August Assizes of 1612, by examining the treatment of Catholics and pagans by

[3] Simon Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction: Holy Ghosts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p.63
[4] Mark Canuel, '"Holy Hypocrisy" and the Government of Belief: Religion and Nationalism in the Gothic', *Studies in Romanticism*, 34.4 (1995) pp.507-530 [p.508]
[5] George Aichele Jr., 'Literary Fantasy and Postmodern Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 59.2 (1991) pp.323-337 [p.329]

Protestants. The vilification of Catholicism and paganism alike, sees the two faiths interchanged in order to achieve the same result: the removal of any non-conforming minorities and individuals. Caroline Lea's *The Glass Woman* (2019), in a similar manner to Winterson's text, looks at the battle between paganism and early Christianity, against the backdrop of seventeenth-century Iceland. However, where *The Daylight Gate* explores both the individual and the politics of religion in the Jacobean era, the protagonist in Lea's novel focuses further on the internalised struggle caught between the warring faiths that contribute different aspects of her identity. *The Daylight Gate* and *The Glass Woman* use retrospection to consider the negative impact of Christianity on Western culture, depicting history and events from the perspective of traditional minorities – women, queers, and pagans. *The Loney* (2014) by Andrew Michael Hurley, which is predominantly set in Lancashire in the 1970s, offers a shorter time gap from the present day than the previous two novels and presents the internal collapse of faith as religion's social construct falls down around its believers. Hurley depicts the fragility of religion in twenty-first-century culture, as the development a multiplicity of truths conflicts with the directness of Christianity. When the lines between opposing faiths blur, the post- and metamodern problem makes itself known: how can one choose one particular faith when the truths of it are multiple and increasingly varied? This chapter will consider these three Gothic texts in the face of this contemporary theological question.

The Daylight Gate

Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate*, set four hundred years earlier than its publication, concerns itself with the retelling of historical events, reinterpreting these incidents in order to reflect on the concepts of theology and communal identity in seventeenth-century England and their influence on the depictions of Western religion in the twenty-first century. The changing of historical perspectives is central to Winterson's Gothic novel and the representation of the faiths depicted. Just as John Harwood provides contextual material at the beginning of *The Séance* (see Chapter Two), the introduction to *The Daylight Gate* affords Winterson's readers with both some necessary information for the interpretation of historical

facts as well as a disclaimer for the depiction of true events. Winterson forewarns her readers of the historiographic metafictional nature of the text and the expectation of historical inaccuracies – or rather the inaccuracy of history. She writes that the 'story that I have told follows the historical account of the witch trials and the religious background – but with necessary speculations and inventions'.[6] Winterson uses the introduction to set out the historical context of Thomas Potts and the witch trials as well as providing clarification of potential historical inaccuracies that she has introduced – namely the presence of Shakespeare in the North of England prior to the August Assizes in 1612. There is little evidence supporting the claim, a fact which Winterson makes clear but chose to include in spite of this, as it 'pleases me though, that there might have been a connection with […] Shakespeare himself' (ix). The use of historiographic metafiction is apparent in the introduction of the text through Winterson's use of Shakespeare as her contemporary voice of reason alongside the protagonist, Alice Nutter, providing Winterson with an authorial voice in her writing.

The August Assizes of 1612 were officially documented by the lawyer Thomas Potts, a devout Protestant and member of James I's court. As such, Potts epitomises the manner in which official history is recorded by selection and distortion in order to fit a pre-ordained social narrative. However, Winterson's Potts does not become just the recorder of what is one version of history in *The Daylight Gate*, but also a catalyst for the events shown from Alice Nutter's – one of the accused – perspective. Winterson highlights the historiographic metafictional nature of twenty-first-century Gothic in her novel through the recreation of a well-known historical event from the perspective of the "other"; those people of faiths and identities marginalised by the Protestant majority in the Jacobean era. It is through the eyes of pagan women, queers, and Catholics that these events are depicted in the novel. Winterson uses an infamous episode of English history to express the effects of warring religions on small communities and individuals.

[6] Jeanette Winterson, *The Daylight Gate* (London: Arrow Books, 2012) p.viii. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

Potts published a first-hand account of the Lancashire witch trials of August 1612 – *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancashire*. From Potts' perspective, witchcraft and the papacy went hand in hand, equating the Black Mass to High Mass, therefore both witches and papists should be treated the same: tortured for information regarding other practitioners of either belief, and then burned at the stake. Felicity Stoetzel notes that, as well as the pagan practice of witchcraft, the 'supernatural and magical elements of the Bible and the ritual practises of the Catholic faith also speak outside the realms of the Protestant's "power of man"'.[7] Protestantism persecuted those communities that carried out different practices and had different experiences, despite the close links between each Christian faction that place their origins in the same theological roots.

In Winterson's novel, Potts exclaims to others, 'you would hardly believe the witchery popery popery witchery I have uncovered' (100). The strength of the Protestant faith in Jacobean England is highlighted by the intertwining of paganism and Catholicism. Potts and the other lawmen of the novel are depicted as uncaring of proper legal procedures – '[b]ribery and intimidation – but all legal because the Law is doing it' (173) – as they uphold ecclesiastical law and the correct religious practices above legal justice. Those characters, however, possess a scepticism and rationality – namely Alice and Shakespeare – that mock Potts' constant suspicion of the Lancashire citizens and the abuse of Biblical canon to justify the crimes of the Protestants. Alice jokes at Potts' expense, 'I wonder you dare venture out of doors in Lancashire for fear of meeting a witch or a priest' (112), highlighting the hypocrisy and ignorance of the witch trials in the early modern era.

When applied to Anglo-American Christianity, theology in postmodern and metamodern culture is mainly concerned with communal practices of faith and how readings of the Bible are interpreted in both a literal and figurative sense. Nancey Murphy and Brad J. Kallenberg note that, in many Christian factions, 'canon shapes the community. Faithfulness to the cruciform pattern established by the story of

[7] Felicity Stoetzel, 'Politics of the Witch Hunt in Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate*' <https://www.academia.edu/10474559/Politics_of_the_witch_hunt_in_Jeanette_Winterson_s_The_Daylight_Gate> [accessed 22nd February 2020]

Jesus is the chief aim of those for whom the biblical texts are taken to be Scripture'.[8] Those who practice Christianity through a direct and unquestioning faithfulness uphold the teleological argument: that God's existence is evident in the intelligent design of life and therefore needs no further explanation and cannot be argued against. Murphy and Kellenberg's understanding of the implementation and dissemination of the Scripture to the wider community by the individual demonstrates that truth is often shaped by a single being before being spread through a community. Winterson combines this postmodern concern in *The Daylight Gate* with the traditional Gothic representation of conflicting religious communities disseminating various doctrines – Protestants, Catholics, and pagans.

Winterson uses the figure of Roger Nowell as a tool throughout this text to communicate the belief of the Protestant masses of England in the early seventeenth century, as well as the law of James I's rule in terms of witchcraft and Catholicism. This is most prominently seen when Nowell and his men accuse those gathered at Malkin Tower of meeting illegally; '[y]ou are thirteen in number. Thirteen is a witch number and the number of a coven to defy the twelve and one that was Christ and his Disciples' (40). Nowell judges them immediately to be in defiance of God's Law, citing the Bible as a legal text. Winterson's novel reflects a simplified version of the upholding of ecclesiastical law in the seventeenth century which allowed the Protestant faith to villainise those who did not conform to the expectations of hegemonic culture. As Brian P. Levack notes, 'witchcraft was one of the means by which the early modern state disciplined and Christianized the masses, suppressed rebellion', resulting in the removal of heterodox minorities from mainstream society in order to control the historical narrative.[9]

Nowell condemns the gathered pagans of treason in two forms – as non-Protestants and as witches – ensuring their arrest and execution. It was common practice in the early modern period to alternate accusations of witchcraft and

[8] Nancey Murphy & Brad J. Kallenberg, 'Anglo-American Postmodernity: a theology of communal practice' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.26-41 [p.38]
[9] Brian P. Levack, 'Possession, Witchcraft, and the Law in Jacobean England', *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 52.5 (1996) pp.1613-1640 [p.1617]

Catholicism to ensure a guilty verdict. This is shown in Winterson's application of Elizabethan policy that 'tended to proceed firmly against the heterodoxies of witchcraft and Catholic superstition together, as a twin effort to impose conformity'.[10] Marsden comments on the issue of subjectivity when it comes to religious interpretation, which contemporary Gothic literature demonstrates through its questioning of religion's role in modern culture. Marsden states that it is

> not that meaningful representation of evil is impossible but rather that our representations are always prone to bias, misunderstandings, self-justification and partiality. This bias is inherent to language as well as to the people who speak or write it. Words are freighted with the echoes and legacies of the histories in which they participate.[11]

Alice Nutter exemplifies this point when she mocks Nowell's accusations: '[a] witch with a crucifix. Am I accused of the Black Mass or the High Mass?' (176). Just as earlier Gothic works, such as *The Monk*, propagandised pro-Protestant beliefs by likening Catholicism to Satanic worship, Alice is able to express Winterson's view that community is shaped by the state-controlled interpretations of the Bible, and Scripture is used to the advantage of those implementing its reading as both ideology and law, becoming the invasive and hegemonic faith.

The combining of Catholicism with witchcraft is continued throughout *The Daylight Gate* as Winterson often marries magick and religion (namely Catholicism) together into an abstract reflection of James I's persecution of both as the same. This further emphasises Murphy and Kallenberg's statement that canon shapes community and its practices. Edward Kelley, Alice's former lover, leaves her instructions regarding his Familiar: '[*a*]*nd if thou callest to him, like unto an angel of the north wearing a dark costume, he will hear thee and come to thee. Yet meet him where he may be met – at the Daylight Gate*' (163). Winterson applies a particular style of phrasing in these specific lines, mirroring the Bible. In doing so, the idea that the Christian canon shapes community is seen in the pagan community as well,

[10] Stephen Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics: James I *Daemonologie* and *The wonderful Discoverie of Witches*' in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) pp.22-41 [p.31]
[11] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.53

the instructions for spells following the same structure as prayers. By using a similar style of writing, Winterson emphasises the parallels between the opposing faiths, comparing the mysticism of witchcraft to that of Catholicism. In doing so, the author heightens the metamodern idea of multiple truths and the bias of history when it is read through one perspective.

When the communal practice of religion is considered, the individual becomes subjected to and shaped by the practices, as much as the community is shaped by the religious canon. Murphy notes that 'religion is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities'.[12] Twenty-first-century Gothic utilises the notion that Christianity, as it was practiced in previous centuries, was not about the individual itself but rather the individual taking its place within the community and submitting to a particular ideology. This is then further expanded into the conflict between individual communities which are expected to be united under one universal theology. However, as previously stated, the dissemination of a religious text to society is dependent upon the reading and as more than one exists, disputes arise. As Roger Nowell attempts to accuse Alice of treason, he highlights her family's religious history: '[y]our family is Catholic' (55), in an attempt to call Alice out as a papist. However, Winterson uses Alice to demonstrate a certain level of clarity when she states that 'every family in England till King Henry left the Church of Rome [was Catholic]. The Church of England is not yet a hundred years old and you wonder that many still follow the old religion?' (55). Winterson uses the historiographic element of twenty-first-century Gothic to emphasise the impact of Protestantism upon England, particularly on the villainisation of Catholicism. The reflective nature of Gothic metanarratives in the current day allows for the exploration of such issues as the politicisation of religion questioned by Alice in the quote above. This in turn provides the reader with an understanding of the evolution of religious ideology in Western culture, with a particular focus on its diminished influence within wider society.

[12] Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018) p.115

The pagan practice of witchcraft runs alongside the Catholic community as both minorities were persecuted by the Protestants. In the opening chapter of *The Daylight Gate* and once more towards the end of the novel, Winterson reminds the reader of the superstitious beliefs of the early modern period which drive the text: '[*s*]*tand on the flat top of Pendle Hill* […] *Some say you can see other things too. This is a haunted place. The living and the dead come together on the hill*' (182). By consistently citing these non-Christian seventeenth-century beliefs through the Gothic motif of haunted spaces, Winterson relays the significance of witchcraft and magick to the early modern period as a vital part of its culture. Although Alice is a learned character, it is often the modern perspective that witchcraft and superstitious practices are commonly considered to be believed in by the uneducated or ignorant. However, Winterson provides physical examples of witchcraft and magick to emphasise the position of paganism as a non-hegemonic religious community. As Shakespeare warns Alice, practitioners of the lesser-followed faiths had to be careful to 'not be seen to stray too far from the real that is clear to others, or you may stand accused of the real that is clear to you' (106), as witchcraft does not submit to the widely accepted practices of Christian faith and therefore separates the individual from the expected social norm. *The Daylight Gate* achieves this through its depiction of established events from the perspective of social minorities. As postmodern Gothic in the twenty-first century shows us, the narrative created by hegemonic religion is often fractured and ambiguous, meaning history is no longer a controllable event and instead splits into multiple, conflicting versions.

Alice and the other condemned witches in the novel represent a different community from both the Protestants and Catholics. Accused of witchcraft and devil worship, they defy expectations of the seventeenth century by being self-sufficient women and, in Alice's case, highly educated and in possession of a self-made fortune. By creating a clothing dye and selling it herself, Alice has become a self-reliant woman, not dependent on a patriarchal figure for money or status. In their defiance of the patriarchal system, these women are also in opposition to the socially acceptable religious community. Despite the differences in class between

Alice and the female witches, every woman is meant for the same fate due to their shared religious beliefs. At the very beginning of the novel, the reader is told that 'a girl-child born in Pendle Forest should be twice baptised; once in church and once in a black pool at the foot of the hill' (2). All women of Lancashire appeared to be tarred with the same fate, destined to be tainted by witchcraft, whether they are practitioners or not – born into a conflict of religious communal identities beyond the individual's control.

Even as other characters attempt to defend Alice – 'Mistress Nutter is skilled in the alchemical arts and knows her plants and powders but she is no witch and I will swear to it' (131) – they are unable to save her from the opinions already formed due to her abnormal behaviours and appearance. Although Alice has wealth, land, and connections to figures of renown – Elizabeth I and Dr. John Dee – she remains outside society due to her unnatural visage and defiance of the religious community she is expected to live in. Winterson employs several techniques regarding historical re-conceptualisation throughout the novel to demonstrate and undermine the authority of historical facts. Winterson uses the postmodern concept of the historiographic metafictional novel, alongside the Gothic, in *The Daylight Gate* to narrate another version of history, reminding the reader of the inaccuracies when any single version of the truth takes precedence.

As Murphy and Kallenberg recognise in their chapter on Anglo-American postmodernity and theology, the importance of the communal practice of religion is closely linked to the disruption caused by conflicting religious communities and the abuses that come with this. Murphy and Kallenberg state that '[w]hat counts as "religious" experience can only be so identified and described once the communal gift of language is already largely in place', meaning that those who interpret the language of Scripture have control over its practical application.[13] Issues then arise when the communal practice of a faith is abused in order to suit the needs of the leading interpretation of the canon. For instance, the ecclesiastical laws of hegemonic faith are applied as and when needed by those in power in order to

[13] Murphy & Kallenberg, 'Anglo-American Postmodernity', p.35

achieve the persecution of minor faiths without proper evidence of a crime. Alice encompasses the purpose of *The Daylight Gate* in depicting the events of the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 when she is warned of the witchcraft accusations against her and rebukes them, asserting that '[t]his is not about witchery' (140). Throughout the text, Alice sums up the extremist treatment of both Catholics and witches in her discussion with Roger Nowell: '[i]f you cannot try me as a witch perhaps you will charge me as a papist' (55). Winterson uses characters such as Roger Nowell and Thomas Potts to demonstrate the precedent for the persecution and prosecution of witches with the intention of discovering heretics.

Despite the belief in the early modern period in the reality of witchcraft, many witch-hunts were used to root out Catholics and – after 1605 – Gunpowder Plotters and their sympathisers. Winterson uses the character of Christopher Southworth (a devout Catholic and Jesuit who took part in the Gunpowder Plot) to represent the position and maltreatment of papists in Jacobean England. Southworth's introduction to the reader also introduces the tortures he has faced at the hands of Protestants: '[w]hen he had been captured after the Gunpowder Plot his torturers had cut his face with a hot iron. They had blinded him by dripping wax into his pinned-back eyeballs. The curious blue of his eyes was due to the elixir that had saved his sight' (61). Winterson is able to create empathy for Southworth through the vivid description of his persecution, despite that fact that he committed treason. She strengthens the parallel of the injustices that both papists and witches faced when the reader learns of further tortures Southworth faced. Pagans and papists are not distinguished between in this manner as James I's torturers

> *turned him* [Southworth] *over and buggered him. They turned him back* […] *while one of the men held his penis the other cut it off. Then they cut off his balls* […] *They burned his testicles in the small tin. He couldn't see anything but he could smell himself. The stench of himself. Burning alive*. (84)

The castration of Southworth causes a physical emasculation and causes Southworth's already tarnished status to drop even further in the early modern period. The social desire to maintain cultural expectations of masculinity, having

been the centre of discussion in Chapter Three, is also seen reflected in the religious expectations of masculine roles. *The Daylight Gate* is Winterson's metamodern Gothic novel through which she highlights the religious contradictions of the Jacobean era, emphasising the variation of truths surrounding this particular period in time, and noting the ongoing postmodern problem of discovering the truth of history, as discussed throughout this thesis and the various eras depicted in the texts.

Poetic licence is taken with the character of Jane Southworth to depict the extreme discriminations used by Protestants in the form of witch trials to discover hidden Catholics in Lancashire. The historical event Winterson has combined with the trial of Alice Nutter and the Device witches, is the Salmesbury witch trials of the same year. Jane Southworth was the widow of John Southworth who, despite his family's staunch Catholic beliefs, converted to the Church of England. Although a Protestant, Jane was accused of witchcraft and imprisoned in Lancaster gaol before being found not guilty of witchcraft as the accusations against her were found to be falsified by her deceased husband's uncle, Christopher Southworth.[14] Winterson alters the story of the Salmesbury witches, in particular by making Jane and Christopher siblings. She uses their familial connection to emphasise the harm that religious intolerance in the early modern period caused and the lengths the witch-hunts went to, imprisoning members of their own Church in order to discover any known practitioners of Catholicism. When imprisoned with the Device and Chattox witches in *The Daylight Gate*, 'Jane Southworth keeps herself apart. She recites the Bible and that enrages the others' (93), in an attempt to distance herself from witchcraft and avoid being branded with the same crimes as the other women.

Winterson utilises the metamodern Gothic novel to recreate an established historical event through the eyes of those that history has previously cast aside – namely women and those who uphold non-dominant faiths. Although contemporary studies of theology understand religion as a communal practice that establishes identities and beliefs into a single ideology, there is also an awareness

[14] Christine Goodier, 'The Samlesbury Witches' <https://www.lancastercastle.com/history-heritage/further-articles/the-samlesbury-witches/> [Accessed 1st February 2022]

of faith as it relates to the individual. The individual is often brought into conflict with the community, also seen in *The Glass Woman* later in this chapter. In her examination of anti-Catholicism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic works, Hoeveler notes that a 'reactionary, demonized and feudal Catholicism is created in order to stand in opposition to the modern Protestant individual'.[15] However, twenty-first-century Gothic has subverted this stereotype, and in Winterson's text, the individual is pitted against the political tyranny of Protestantism. Contemporary Gothic demonstrates the many ways in which the narrative is controlled by the dominant religious community and its leaders, forcing the individual, whatever their faith, to be subjected to invasive dominant hegemonies.

Winterson offers a metafictional presence in the form of Shakespeare, using him to provide the contemporary voice that acts outside the community. Winterson uses Shakespeare to play on the hypocrisy of both religion and history as he is fully aware that 'it suits the times to degrade the *hoc est corpus* of the Catholic Mass into satanic hocus pocus' (111). When discussing the philosophy of witchcraft and religion with Alice, he remarks that 'I have written about other worlds often enough. I have said what I can say. There are many kinds of reality. This is but one kind' (105-6). The playwright warns Alice of the ignorance of the Protestants who rule seventeenth-century England and that her learned nature is obscured to those who hold with superstition. Winterson uses Shakespeare to uphold the argument on the inaccuracy of history and that one community's account of events is one of many and that the '"almost infinite corruptibility of religious discourse" leaves religious talk of evil and sin always at risk of becoming narrow judgementalism and moralistic oppression', as noted by Marsden.[16]

In her autobiography, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011), Winterson discusses the influence faith has had in her life, as well as the impact it has on the surrounding culture: the 'Western world has done away with religion but not with our religious impulses […] We shall have to find new ways of finding

[15] Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, p.3
[16] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.53

meaning – it is not yet clear how this will happen'.[17] Similarly to *The Loney* and the search for faith as examined in the last section of this chapter, Winterson notes that it is a basic human desire to find belief in something beyond the material and visible, and to do so in a communal fashion, that all societies are bound by shared practices that are rooted in past religious influences. However, in a postmodern world where multiplicity divides religious definitions and practices even further, the twenty-first-century Gothic novel allows for exploration of the development of new truths and the diminishing possibility of a jointly agreed upon practice. Whilst this illustrates a loss of the communal identity such as Western Christianity, it permits the contemporary Gothic to better expresses the socio-educative issue of contemporary Western religious cultures and question how a collective faith be practiced by gathered individuals.

The Daylight Gate offers, not a solution, but a point of consideration from the Catholic figure of Christopher Southworth. Much like the cyclical Ouroboros imagery used in Dale Bailey's *In The Night Wood* in Chapter One, as Winterson's novel reaches its conclusion, the Jesuit understands that '[a]ll the history, all the facts, what were they but chances? […] He could not change the fact of his birth or, by very much, the fact of his death. This was his time. He had an image of an hourglass' (169). The image of the hourglass, spinning back and forth as the Ouroboros must, illustrates the inevitably of the past's effect on the present, and in the particular case of Winterson's text, the religious past that influences the cultural expectations of the current day. Through the depiction of invasive and oppressive Protestantism in seventeenth-century England, *The Daylight Gate* examines the treatment of non-conforming minorities and individuals. By using Gothic historiographic metafiction, Winterson draw attention to the negative effects of socio-religious conformity on cultures made up of minorities – in the case of this novel, heterodox and female characters.

The Glass Woman

[17] Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Normal?* (London: Vintage, 2012) p.68

Set in late seventeenth-century Iceland, Caroline Lea's *The Glass Woman* centres on the character of Rósa as she marries the chief of another village, Jón, in order to provide for her ailing mother. Lea uses 1680s Iceland to depict the clashing of religious practices – the old ways of paganism and witchcraft are expected to give way to the rising Christian church. In a similar fashion to Winterson, Lea predominantly represents paganism through the female characters and Christianity through the male figures. Rósa finds herself caught between the two, her past pagan beliefs as taught by her mother, Sigridúr, and the new Christian values her father instructed her in before his passing, which match her new husband's views. As Marsden states in his discussion of religious heresy in Gothic fiction, '[d]octrine […] seeks to articulate the core beliefs of the church, and therefore to define its theological identity and […] maintain that there are limits to what one can or cannot believe if one is to be a member of the church'.[18] Where *The Daylight Gate* focused more on the political elements of warring communal practices and the negative effects of heterodoxy on certain religious communities, *The Glass Woman* examines the choice faced by individuals as they choose between communities and faiths of differing practices. Lea's twenty-first-century approach to the individualisation of faith is similar to that of Hurley's in *The Loney*, the separation between an individual's faith and their religious community examined in the last section of this chapter. Influenced by the folktale of *Bluebeard* (1697) by Charles Perrault and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Lea also utilises the haunting aspect of the Gothic genre in this internalised religious conflict as the protagonist attempts to escape the confinements of each belief system, focusing on the issue of identity raised when an individual is internally torn between two conflicting beliefs.

There is often a connection between religious identity and gender identity, particularly in Gothic representations, due to the influence of religious ideology on social constructs. As seen in Chapters Three and Four, gender and gender identity are still key concepts in the Gothic novel and postmodernism in the twenty-first century, as is religion. In her examination of feminist theology, Mary McClintock Fulkerson notes that what separates the postmodern model from those that had

[18] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.22

gone before is that postmodern feminist theologies 'call into question the unified natural woman subject'.[19] That is to say, the Western cultural construct of femininity stems from religion's – particularly Christianity's – influence on the role of women in society and should be and is open to debate. New ways of thinking, incited by the development of postmodernity, lead to the consideration of the individual both inside and beyond the confines of their societies. This is particularly relevant when the individual is either ostracised from society – as Randa is in *The Beauty of the Wolf*, discussed in the previous chapter – or interrogates the discrepancies in their socio-religiously constructed identities. Rósa encapsulates this issue as she is conflicted throughout the novel by her two religious identities – '[i]n the right pocket […] a wooden cross […] in the left was a stone', on which her mother had drawn the rune for 'courage in battle' – both of which offer incompatible representations of Rósa's identity.[20]

This view of women is strengthened by the practices of the Christian church and is shown in the villages of Skáholt and Stykkishólmur, where they attempt to punish or shun Rósa for her pagan values, though she tries to hide them. Whilst Sigridúr taught her the old ways in secret, Rósa's father, Magnús, was the Bishop of Skáholt and raised Rósa in the Church, teaching her the correct Christian values. However, Magnús displayed slightly different values from the tradition as though he 'had despised anything associated with the old ways', he also 'had scoffed at the belief that writing stories or poems could be a form of witchcraft' (20). Magnús taught Rósa to read and write, skills rarely allowed to women in the seventeenth century unless they were of high-born status. Where early Gothic novels would be more explicit in the depiction of a conflict between differing religious faiths – for instance, the monk Ambrosio of Lewis' *The Monk* who struggles against the seduction of pagan witchcraft and devil worship – Lea adapts this to the quiet, personal struggle of Rósa which we also see mirrored in the protagonist of *The Loney* later in this chapter. Throughout the novel, the conflict of Rósa's religious

[19] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'Feminist theology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed.by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.109-125 [p. 114]

[20] Caroline Lea, *The Glass Woman* (London: Michael Joseph, 2019) p.34. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

identity is maintained and emphasises that, whilst there is a clear division between the old and new religions she has been taught, there are also divisions in the new faith and its construction of female identity.

In terms of religion, women in early Gothic are often illustrated in two extremes: they are either obedient, becoming nuns or wives and fulfilling their expected religious roles, or they are depicted as rebellious, renouncing Christianity and expected social roles through the Devil or witchcraft. Rósa, although obedient to the Church and its teaching, pushes the boundaries of societal expectations due to the freedoms her father, as head of the Church, granted her. However, this attitude towards a woman's position was not shared across the community. The villagers of Skáholt dismiss his more modern thinking on the learning of women, telling Rósa 'you won't be staying in the church now, with your pabbi gone – a good thing. Women reading – pah!' (14). The idea of language as control, as seen in *The Daylight Gate*, is also represented in Lea's novel through female education. This disdain for the schooling of women emulates traditional Christian teachings which clash with Magnús' personal teachings. The treatment Rósa suffers at the hand of the Christian villagers – 'you've been allowed to tread your own path for too long […] Shall I tell people that they should search your croft for runes and other writing?' (27) – further fuels her identity crisis. Where the women of Winterson's novel are treated with brutality for their differences, it is the threat of violence and punishment that hinders Rósa's individualism.

Rósa understands the expectations placed on her by the Christian-influenced construction of her new society but also rebels against it where she can. When discussing her ability to bear children with the women in Stykkishólmur, Rósa emphasises her higher status due to her literary skills: 'I am lucky to be able to read, I know […] God grants children when He wills it […] You would know that, if you read your Bible' (124). Rósa utilises her father's teachings to both confirm her Christian beliefs and avoid accusations of witchcraft but also to assert her position as a woman outside the constraints of social expectations. Whilst Rósa knows that the Bible teaches women to honour their husbands and bear children, she uses her Christian knowledge to protect herself and her supposed inability to carry Jón's

child. Simultaneously, her ability to read allows Rósa to challenge the stereotypical Christian ideal of what a woman is expected to be as her higher learning grants her the begrudging respect of the more uneducated villagers.

Like the lord of the castle in works such as *The Castle of Otranto* and *A Sicilian Romance*, as the village *goði* or chief, Jón upholds the values of the Christian church throughout the novel, both to maintain his status in the village and because he seemingly appears to believe it to be true. This is depicted most obviously when Rósa visits Anna's – Jón's first wife's – grave and finds it marked with a cross onto which '*Proverbs 12:4*' has been carved. When she returns to the croft, she looks for the verse in Jón's Bible and, as she supposed it was, finds it is a passage on wives: '[*a*]*n excellent wife is the crown of her husband […] but she who brings shame is like rot in his bones*' (111). This verse demonstrates the concept of the 'unified natural woman subject' – the obedient, God- and husband-fearing woman expected by Christian practitioners – which Fulkerson examines in terms of feminist theology, providing a harsh moment of conflict in the novel. Rósa is aware of the heteronormative social expectations of women in her culture and attempts to uphold the beliefs she was taught by her father – '[s]he forced herself not to reply. Women should be quiet and biddable' (30) – and therefore it forms the basis of one half of her socio-religious identity. However, in spite of the fact that her father raised her in the Christian Church, her mother's teachings still hold sway against the newer faith.

Rósa's mother, although married to a Christian man, instilled pagan beliefs into her daughter, which had shaped Icelandic communities before the arrival of Christianity. Over the course of the novel, the reader watches Rósa battle between the pagan faith of her mother and the Christian faith of her father and husband. For the duration of the text, she remembers Sigridúr's teachings but dismisses them with Christian principles: '[s]he knows what Mamma would say: "Ullr, the snow god, is having a tantrum." Rósa shakes her head to dispel the thought. Only God controls the weather' (194). This constant battle of faith leads to her identity crisis as she is torn between two opposing ideals of womanhood and faith she is meant to uphold. In her examination of religious hysteria and early Gothic literature,

Hoeveler states that 'Gothic literature can best be understood as part of the Western secularization process, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that it is cultural work that reveals the drive towards secularization on the part of the elites and middle classes throughout Europe'.[21] The secularisation of the state is understood in the twenty-first-century where religious and political ideologies are kept separate in Western culture, encouraging the reader to sympathise with the religious minority that has been suppressed. When the Gothic and the metamodern are combined, it becomes a comment on the traditional use of the genre and how its application has evolved over the years. In the case of religion, the Gothic is no longer about the importance of religious and political secularisation but rather the damaging effects such a concept has on an individual.

In response to Jón's proposal, Sigridúr tells Rósa '[y]ou are not a cow that he can offer a trade for you […] a woman listens to wisdom if she wants to live to old age' (19), highlighting the independence a woman should have and challenging the religious patriarchal system that affords women no protection. However, although she remembers her mother's advice, Jón becomes the voice of Rósa's conscience after their marriage, reminding her that '[y]our life is important, now you are my wife' (69). Demonstrating the evolution of female roles in society alongside the secularisation of religion, illustrated in several of the twenty-first-century Gothic novels in this thesis, Rósa's worth as a woman in the eyes of a Christian culture is summarised in this one statement, her value dependent on being a wife and on being the wife of a high-status male. Jón is forceful in his role as Rósa's conscience, keeping her in line with social expectations through religious warnings: 'God rewards obedience. I have always thought it fitting that respect is rewarded, while defiance is punished' (66). Rósa's identity is split between the Christian hegemony and the pagan "otherness". As Jón R. Hjálmarsson asserts, seventeenth-century Iceland was full of 'religious controversies and wars. Fanaticism and superstition of all kinds were part of daily life, along with intolerance and terrible persecution of everybody who deviated' from the hegemonic Protestant culture.[22] Although Alice

[21] Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, p.3
[22] Jón R. Hjálmarsson, *History of Iceland: From the Settlement to the Present Day* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review, 1993) p.77

is slightly more reserved in displaying a religious affiliation in *The Daylight Gate*, Rósa conforms to societal expectations and outwardly projects her Christian faith. Nevertheless, she is unable to stop her internalised belief in the old – and supposedly barbaric – ways, representing both the manner in which Icelandic culture is ingrained with pagan traditions and the repression of women by the Church.

Early Gothic novels often depict their female characters as constructed by the socio-religious expectations imposed on the female body. In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud coined the Madonna-whore complex to explain that 'where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they have no love'.[23] According to Freud, the virtuous and chaste female figure is placed upon a pedestal by the patriarchy, to be admired from afar but not to be touched. However, if the Madonna expresses the ability to be a sexual being, or is physically sexualised by a masculine figure, the woman becomes the whore and is no longer praised but shunned from society, whether the loss of her chastity is through her own choice or another's. Gothic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as *Justine* (1791) by Marquis de Sade, *The Monk*, and *Dracula*, often juxtapose their female characters in the forms similar to Freud's concept of the Madonna and the whore, where one woman's chastity makes her the object of a man's desires, and the "other" female's ability to express or act upon her own desires means she is the repulsive whore. The figure of the whore is often utilised to emphasise the Madonna's virtues and act as an opposing example of societal expectations. Freud's idea of the Madonna is founded in the Catholic practice of worshipping the Virgin Mary, providing a religious model for Freud's psychoanalytical argument. The designation of the status of the Madonna or the whore is assigned by patriarchal social expectations. However, contemporary writers such as Lea and those explored in Chapters Four and Six which deal with gender performance, take on these religious forms of the feminine in order to challenge and subvert Gothic depictions

[23] Sigmund Freud, 'The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life', *Journal for Psychoanalytic and Psychopathological Research*, 4.0 (1912) pp.40-50

in a postmodern light, allowing their female characters to question societal expectations through modern thinking and action.

In *The Glass Woman*, Lea repurposes Freud's psychoanalytical analysis in a postmodern manner through Jón's wedding present to Rósa:

> [a]round her neck was a leather cord, on which dangled a tiny glass figurine […] It was cold, like frozen water, and shaped into the perfect form of a woman: tiny hands clasped in introspection, gaze meekly lowered […] A woman made of glass and stillness: perfect but easily shattered. (36)

Where the Madonna-whore complex is usually projected onto female characters within a Gothic text, Lea uses the figurine to encompass the contemporary concerns surrounding socially and religiously constructed female identities. Jón presents Rósa with the Christian ideal of a woman, a concept she is expected to hold herself to in order to fulfil the expectations of her society. The significance of the ornament as a necklace hangs around Rósa's neck like a yoke, bringing the reader back to the earlier image of the cow Sigridúr used. It also emphasises the religious iconography of the age, reminiscent of rosaries and the prayers and lessons each bead would represent. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts notes of the objectification of the female body in eighteenth-century Gothic literature: 'female powerlessness is epitomised by ways in which the property and inheritance rights of the Gothic heroine could be seized by control of her body, whether through marriage, domestic violence or imprisonment'.[24] The significance of female fragility in the Gothic is still being emphasised in the twenty-first century, by combining the historical setting with modern writing, and so Lea is able to reflect back on the various representations of the female body in the Gothic. The glass woman summarises both the early Gothic depictions of ideal female characters as well as the prayers and lessons a Christian woman is supposed to embody; submissive, transparent, and dependent on the male owner.

[24] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body' in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) pp.106-119 [p.108]

Although the glass figurine of the submissive woman is given as a reminder to Rósa to obey her husband and uphold his Christian values, she finds comfort in the ornament as the novel progresses. When she finds herself lost in a blizzard with Jón's right-hand man, Pétur, Rósa holds onto the woman in her pocket and finds that '[i]t is calming, like placing her feet on the rock, which, long ago, must have been melted to make this perfect form. It has been shaped and transformed by fire, and has travelled over land and sea unbroken. And as fragile as it looks, it remains whole' (264). Rósa repurposes the glass woman in her mind to represent the strength and resilience of women in the face of the Church and the socio-religious discrimination to which they are expected to submit. Seeing herself in the wedding present, Rósa mourns its loss in the storm as it represented her fate and 'though it appeared no more substantial than ice, the glass woman had survived' (282). However, with the figure swallowed by the snow, Rósa equates this to her religious and culturally constructed identity being lost and does not see her survival without the figure.

As Rósa had tied her fate to that of the glass woman, when she finds it again after the blizzard, she rediscovers herself and is able once more to see her identity in socio-religious terms. As she examines it, she finds that '[o]ne arm has broken off, and, when she peers more closely, Rósa can see a deep crack running through the very centre […] It is ruined and useless now' (326). The cracked figurine, which when whole represented the Christian ideal Rósa was attempting to imitate, now truly represents her split identity as she is caught between the old and new faiths of her culture. Like the fractured mirror that represents the multiplicity of Beau's postmodern identity in *The Beauty of the Wolf*, as examined in Chapter Four, Rósa sees the glass model as a reflection, believing she has been broken by the religious expectations placed upon her and is no longer a functionable part of her society. Although she keeps the broken figurine at first, the 'fragile thing she had so treasured for being unbreakable' (326), Rósa drops it into the ocean when she realises there is no way to salvage herself in the eyes of the Christian Church and therefore that part of her identity is lost to her. The imagery of the figure dropped into the ocean symbolises the non-conforming minority lost in the dominant

hegemonic religion. Without the figurine, Rósa is left in a state of alienation from religion, separated from Christianity as well as unreconciled with paganism, mirroring the sinking ornament.

Lea uses *The Glass Woman* and the constant identity crisis Rósa faces in terms of her faith to discuss the position of Gothic female characters and feminist theory in postmodern theology. It is through the postmodern understanding of the multiplicity of truths that the reader sees Rósa coming to terms with her religions and therefore her identity, able to control the conflict even if she cannot unite the two halves of herself. Rósa's perspective in the novel ends with the understanding that 'gradually, the tales she tells will become truth. In this way, she will live with who she has become. She is a woman capable of violence. She is a woman who did what was necessary [breaking the laws of Christianity and defying her husband]. She is a woman who has survived' (368), shattering the traditional values forced on her by Jón and the Christian villagers in order to create a position for herself but still exist within the religiously constructed walls of her society.

Eventually, in her final chapter, Rósa is able to replace the glass figurine with another. She buys this one herself, finding it better represents the ideal of a woman in her newfound identity:

> [i]t is a piece of glass, roughly shaped into the form of a woman […] A tiny piece of wood, lovingly carved into the shape of a baby […] the hollow glass shielding the wood from the damp and rot of the world. If the figurine shatters, the wood inside will decay, but as long as the glass woman remains intact, she will keep the wooden baby safe. (372)

The glass mother, as opposed to the woman given to her by Jón, represents an ideal held in both pagan and Christian beliefs. Despite her rejection of the usual female conventions placed upon her by society, it is through the concept of motherhood that Rósa is able to marry together the two opposing religious and Gothic identities she has struggled with for the duration of the novel. Her hidden, pagan desire that threatened to depict her as the whore is negated by the act of motherhood, which the Madonna also represents as the mother of Christ. Whilst the act of childbearing is typically used to embed a woman in her expected societal role, Rósa sees her

impending motherhood as a possibility of escaping those expectations. As a metamodern Gothic character, Rósa creates a new identity that allows her to be an individual accepted within the already constructed boundaries of her society and grants her the freedom of knowledge about the multiplicity of truths, and as such the freedom with which she can raise her child.

Whilst the Madonna-whore complex traditionally only applies to women, Jón is also subjected to its discriminations due to his homosexuality – the representation of queer characters in the contemporary Gothic novel being the focus of the next chapter. Where Rósa wears the figure of the glass woman, Jón's opposing necklace, is the perfect form of the male figure – '[a]round his neck is a leather cord, holding a tiny ornament made of glass. It is similar to the glass woman he gave her, but is one of the saints, she thinks, like people of the Catholic faith used to wear' (93) – and is acts as a reminder to uphold his own religious ideals and keeps his personal desires at bay. Jón understands his own sins as they are viewed in the eyes of the Church and is ashamed of them, never acting upon them and holding his wives to such high standards. He believes they are supposed to be reflections of himself as they are in the eyes of the faith and should represent his perfect image, just as the twin models mirror each other. However, the figurine betrays Jón's belief that he is already a sinner and cannot be redeemed in the eyes of the church: 'St Jude […] the Catholic patron of lost causes' (384). Lea utilises metamodernism to reflect on homosexuality in terms of religious ideology, illustrating that Jón has always been aware of his sins and even though he has not acted upon it, he has loved and desired Pétur for a long time, meaning that he can never achieve that religious ideal he is held to. As such, like the sinking of Rósa's broken ornament, the novel ends with Jón's suicide by drowning, illustrating both his condemnation by the hegemonic faith (suicide being a sin in the eyes of Christianity) and the washing clean of his sins.

One of the major issues in postmodern feminist theologies is the place – or rather displacement – of the "other" and its position as an invisible, "unsayable" element of religiously constructed societies. McClintock Fulkerson states that that 'other or outside is not only excluded, but threatens always to "disrupt" the unity

that conceals it […] particularly when the force of the unconscious and its desires come into play'.[25] Unlike early nineteenth-century Gothic literature, which was often used for 'waging something of a propaganda war' as termed by Hoeveler, for the hegemonic culture, twenty-first-century Gothic novels use the same motif of using a past setting as a contrast in order to present the negative effects of the dominating traditional form of religion taking control of a society. In Rósa's case, she is forced to conceal the pagan teachings of the old society that she still holds to for comfort and understanding, even as she attempts to reconcile herself with the hegemonic Christian doctrine. As seen in some of the pagan characters of *The Daylight Gate*, the reader sees Rósa hiding her paganism beneath her Christian teachings, but they disrupt not only her identity but also the social system she is in, because they are always there: '[s]he found a large, flat stone and used a stick with charcoal from the fire to draw out the protective *vegvísir* symbol […] The rune was only truly effective if drawn in blood on the forehead but, mindful of whispers, she hid the stone' (20-1). At the beginning of the novel, Rósa willingly practices witchcraft, though she is warned against it several times, but remains ever cautious of the social exclusion it will cause her. She believes she is able to control and unite the two conflicting religions of her identity by keeping the private side hidden from the socially acceptable element.

Although Christian doctrine becomes further ingrained into Rósa's identity by force and fear, nonetheless, where in the past she had physically practiced witchcraft, after her marriage to Jón, the practices remain in her mind only, creating a haunting effect not unlike *In The Night Wood* and the use pagan figure of Cernunnos in Chapter One. Despite the removal of paganism from mainstream society in the twenty-first century, it continues to reoccur in modern Gothic texts, often as a haunting representation of those minorities dominated by Christianity. Rósa recalls 'an old belief that each mountain contains a spirit, and perhaps this accounts for the itch between Rósa's shoulder blades' but she keeps this belief hidden and 'incants the warding verses in her head, then mutters the Lord's Prayer under her breath' (51). Although Rósa does not openly articulate her pagan desires,

[25] McClintock Fulkerson, 'Feminist theology', p.118

similarly to Alice Nutter in Winterson's novel, privately she still clings to them, which in turn poses a constant threat of disruption to the Christian identity that has carefully been constructed around her. In turn, Rósa utilises the protection her external Christian identity affords her to shield her private faith from those who seek both to destroy and punish her for it.

Nevertheless, she is not always able to stop her unconscious from breaking free and the disruption is brought into the reality of society. This is most noticeable when, as she attempts to help Anna (Jón's first wife) in childbirth, she takes Anna's runestone and 'whispers the words of protection, lines from the Sagas, phrases from the Lord's Prayer, all jumbled together' (283). No longer able to separate the hegemonic from the heterodox, Rósa's two faiths and two identities coexist in a moment outside the control of any social or religious constructs as she attempts to save the lives of Anna and her child. Rósa's position as an outsider is cemented when she helps Jón and Pétur drop the bodies of Anna and her child in the ocean and remarks that 'by burying the truth, I was stepping into the shadows, walking away from God' (298). Not only is she burying the truth of what happened to Anna, but Rósa is also burying her faiths, both pagan and Christian, and without belief, she becomes a new form of the "other", unable to belong to any religiously constructed society.

Traditional Gothic literature commonly presents two archetypes of the witch figure: 'the cursing witch is pictured as an ancient crone, the other incarnation of malefic witchcraft is an alluring young woman, the temptress or "*belle dame sans merci*"', both of which appear in Winterson's novel in the forms of the Chattox crone and the beautiful Alice Nutter.[26] However, Lea's approach in *The Glass Woman* comes from a contemporary view, guided by a postmodern and feminist perspective. The witches of her novel are more passive than their traditional Gothic counterparts, using spells for protection and courage to exist within an anti-pagan and anti-female society. Lea uses Iceland, parliament and law council, The Althing, to summarise the aggression and violence directed towards

[26] Faye Ringel, 'Witches and Witchcraft' in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) pp.254-6 [p.255]

pagan practices: 'the place, then, where laws are passed, and where men and women have been tried and burned or beheaded for casting spells or reading runes or spreading sickness' (45). The fear of being burned for witchcraft, drives the split in Rósa's religious identity as she strives to hide her pagan beliefs. Her fear of this is driven internally, manifesting in dreams in which 'she opens her mouth, no sound emerges and then, when she chokes, she vomits up stone after stone, each one inscribed with a runic symbol' (91). Rósa's hidden identity spills out into her dreams but her pagan fears are mirrored by Jón's Christian ones. He tells the reader '[s]ometimes I wonder if God hears my grief. Prayers fall like pebbles from my lips, and still the Lord is silent' (139), Lea recreating the image of Rósa vomiting runestones in a less violent manner. This mirroring of faiths allows Lea to demonstrate the limitations placed upon the individual by any system of belief, as the expectations of the community restrict singular identities to certain conformities. Both Rósa and Jón are controlled by their hidden desires as they attempt to assimilate Christian teachings, but neither is able to stop the disruption to their identities.

The issues of faith in *The Glass Woman* are best summarised by Pétur, the most mysterious character in terms of faith. He tells Rósa 'I believe what any Icelander believes […] Some answers are given in the Bible. Others are not' (40), summarising the issue of the seventeenth century and Icelandic culture: Lea's characters are caught between the past and the present, unable to recognise the unfixed nature of religious tradition that must evolve with the ever-changing construct of society. As a twenty-first-century Gothic novel, *The Glass Woman* upholds postmodern considerations of theology, by considering the individual's faith over the invasive Protestant communal. Lea also provides a multiplicity of history through the exploration of paganism in a predominantly Christian culture and the effects of both doctrines on the female and queer characters. Much like Winterson's use of storytelling in *The Daylight Gate*, Lea allows Rósa to express herself in her own way at the end of the novel: 'truth isn't solid, like the earth; she knows that now. The truth is like water, or steam; the truth is ice. The same tale

might shift and melt and reshape at any time' (368), encapsulating metamodern Gothic's historiographic metafictional understanding of theology.

The Loney

Both Winterson and Lea have utilised the Gothic and its depiction of theology in their twenty-first-century novels, to consider the purpose and presence of religion in communities and its effects on the individual. Examining Catholicism as *The Daylight Gate* does, *The Loney* by Andrew Michael Hurley is a novel caught between the modern and the postmodern, demonstrating metamodernism as the characters seeking refuge from progress and help in their attempts to search for God. Looking back to the recent past of an individual character, rather than revisiting historical settings, Hurley's novel demonstrates not just conflicting faiths, as seen in the previous two texts, but the loss of faith. The narrator, Smith, takes part in various Catholic rituals – the faith of his family and congregation – as well as acts of paganism. As the novel progresses, Smith questions the authenticity and authority of God, and the purpose of religion in his life. Hurley establishes the issue at the centre of religious practice in the modern world: the 'Nietzschean […] death of God', as termed by Marsden.[27] For the extreme Catholic characters in the novel, their desperate desire to prove the existence of God illustrates the dominant nature of communal worship, with Smith illustrating the same restrictions of exploring his own beliefs as Rósa does in *The Glass Woman*. *The Loney* portrays the internal collapse of belief as the external social construct of an individual fails. Hurley uses the Gothic novel to represent the fragility of religion in twenty-first-century culture, as metamodernism employs the multiplicity of truth in religion to demonstrate the continuous absence of God.

The priests of *The Loney* – Father Wilfred and Father Bernard – epitomise the struggle of religion in defending the proof that God still exists in a metamodern culture as they aim to rediscover not only their congregation's faith but also their own. The narrator, Smith, considers the life of a priest and finds it 'unfair that a priest should have to be holy all the time […] Perhaps being a priest was like being a

[27] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.95

fish. Immersion for life'.[28] As a young boy still establishing his faith, Smith is caught between the social culture he is being raised in and the zealous nature that his religious figures exhibit. According to Marsden, when depicted in contemporary Gothic fiction, the 'church is both a relic of the past […] and an oppressive spectre that haunts the present with its ancient warnings of judgment'.[29] For Smith, faith is an abstract concept: he sees it being practiced by priests and his family but does not understand the need to continually express and practice it, finding little reassurance in the empty gestures of prayer and ritual. This lack of reassurance that surrounds faith in the modern era is utilised by twenty-first-century Gothic writers to demonstrate the haunting effect that religion has on Western culture as it is still embedded in social structures and expectations. However, Father Wilfred and Smith's mother are in constant search of their faith and its physical proof, appearing to be the most dedicated members of their religious community.

Father Wilfred is a key representative of faith throughout *The Loney*. Like the absent Christian God, the priest haunts the narrative, despite his death prior to the beginning of the novel. He encompasses the concept of remembering – 'God was already everywhere. People only needed to notice Him' (322) – and fighting the progress of society as it moves away from God. Alongside this, he is also one of the key representations of the internalised breakdown of belief as he witnesses the failure of religion's place in modern culture. As Alison Millbank notes, the Gothic is often used to depict how 'God's presence wanes as routinised, rational, and bureaucratic procedures replace sacred rituals'.[30] Father Wilfred understands the concept of the absence of God within society as the 'sinful no longer worried that they would be punished by God […] how could they be punished by an absence?' (327) but contradicts his practice of radical orthodoxy in his continual search for Hanny's (the narrator's brother) cure. Despite Father Wilfred's stout belief in the omnipresence of God, his desire to find proof of God is shown in his hope of curing Hanny's muteness during the congregation's annual trip to the Loney. Although he

[28] Andrew Michael Hurley, *The Loney* (London: John Murray, 2016) p.21. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.
[29] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.189
[30] Alison Millbank, *God and the Gothic: Religion, Romance, and Reality in the English Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p.3

sees Hanny as a symbol of the intelligent design of the world, sent 'as both a test and guide of your soul' to Mummer, he still seeks proof of his absent God: 'when at last he is able to speak, you will be able to speak, and ask of the Lord what you will' (22). Father Wilfred seeks an end to the modern-day rejection of one shared faith, renouncing the multiplicity of religious truths and the cultural evolution that takes away from the divinity of God and the power of his faith.

Whilst early Gothic works demonstrate a rift between the human and divine, such as Lewis' *The Monk*, in which the protagonist is separated from his Christian God through witchcraft and the Devil, twenty-first-century Gothic illustrates the disconnection between man and religion through the disappearance of God. Throughout Hurley's text, the reader and the congregation are led to believe that Father Wilfred was an uncompromising figure in terms of his faith. It is only at the end of the novel that Smith reveals the contents of Father Wilfred's diary and the events that caused him to lose his faith at the Loney years prior to the narrative. Upon finding the dead body of the tramp, Billy Tapper – a minor character who serves as a warning to Smith for the vices of the modern world – Father Wilfred finally understands the effects of cultural progress on the fragile structure of his faith: '[h]e felt alone […] It was a kind of nakedness, an instant disrobing. Feelings that he thought he had left behind in childhood […] overwhelmed him' (334), demonstrating the slow erosion of God's presence from mainstream culture. Marsden recognises that contemporary Gothic novels often depict that the 'God of Christian orthodoxy […] had too often been used to legitimise unjust power structures; too many of the Christian churches […] had aligned themselves with the powerful rather than the marginalised', just as the reader sees with disregarded women, pagans, and Catholics of Winterson and Lea's novels.[31] The discovery of the body leads Father Wilfred to the discovery of society's nihilistic philosophy: there is an absence of God because God *is* absent. Twenty-first-century Gothic employs the absence of God as a haunting throughout the narrative, demonstrating various attempts to either supplement God within another element or rediscover Him. Despite his attempts, through extreme

[31] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.95

religious rituals to rediscover God in the roots of society by expecting a miracle for Hanny, Father Wilfred gives up his faith when he sees that 'God was missing. He had never been here. And if He had never been here, in this their special place, then He was nowhere at all' (334). By recognising the absence of God at the Loney rather than in London, Father Wilfred further emphasises the injustice of Christianity as it relates to the marginalised minorities who had previously been outcast by the hegemonic faith. Hoeveler notes that, continuing from the Gothic chapbooks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the 'lower-class Gothic imaginary has remained consistently familiar, with an intense fear of a secularized devil-figure'.[32] However, the use of the Gothic in the twenty-first century has seen a change from the fear of such figures – although the use of religion as terrifying can still be seen in Gothic works such as *The Year of the Witching* (2020) by Alexis Henderson – to pity for those whose faith collapses in the face of contemporary culture where Christianity is no longer a dominant, political force as depicted in *The Daylight Gate*. Now that religion has, to an extent, become a minority in the modern day, there is no space for an omnipresent God in a metamodern society.

In contrast to Father Wilfred and his desperate need to find proof for his devotion to God, Father Bernard brings a level of scepticism to his position as pastor from the moment of his arrival, though this is only shown to Smith. Father Bernard mocks his faith and profession, telling Smith '[w]e'll make sure you work hard. Otherwise you might end up with a career in the priesthood' (58). This self-deprecation, seen multiple times throughout the novel, juxtaposes Father Bernard's purpose of encouraging members of the congregation to keep and uphold the faith but rather, he appears to encourage Smith not to be controlled by his religion, but to move beyond its limitations. Father Bernard upholds a more modern approach to the role of theology in society – that an individual is able to connect to God subjectively, without the limitations and forced conformity of communal orthodoxy. This provides a point of conflict with the memories of Father Wilfred and his teachings which Mummer continues to practice. Father Bernard confronts Mummer on the practices of their congregation, explaining that she must face the

[32] Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, p.4

fact that 'He isn't coming back. There's nothing to hold onto anymore' (250). Hurley leaves it up to the reader to decide if Father Bernard is speaking of Father Wilfred or God. This novel utilises its position as a Gothic text and considers its social response, begging the question as to whether faith can exist in a metamodern society and try to find space within the newer, more evolved cultural constructs, or has civilization and its various truths become too convoluted for the singularity of Christianity.

The personal struggles of the priests are ironically mirrored in their stations as pastors of Saint Jude's church. Much in the same manner as Lea uses Jón's necklace in *The Glass Woman*, Saint Jude is the Catholic patron saint of lost causes and souls: emphasising the struggle of these religious figures as they attempt to find proof of their faith to cling onto. Mummer, one of the more radically orthodox figures of the novel, tells Father Bernard, '[w]e all need a rock to cling to in the storm' (249), refusing to give up her search for Hanny's miracle cure that will, in turn, prove God's existence. Mummer, further than Father Wilfred is able to, represents the strength of radical orthodoxy, and does not allow her internal faith to collapse in the face of a society that has evolved to encompass the multiplicity of truth and religion.

As mentioned above, the 'death of God' is depicted in metamodern Gothic novels as a representation of the evolution of Western culture. Marsden argues that, for religion and contemporary culture to exist in harmony, 'Christianity must abandon its commitment to an eternal, transcendent God and rediscover a divine Word incarnate in humanity and history'.[33] Twenty-first-century Gothic writers demonstrate both sides of the conflict, with radical characters fighting this aspect of metamodernism and clinging to the need to return cultural thinking on religion back to a hegemonic point when religion was still central to Western culture. Mummer, as a leading example of the most zealous Christians in *The Loney*, ensures that these practices are upheld and the traditions passed to her sons: 'even though hardly any of them were upheld any more, even by the most ardent at Saint Jude's,

[33] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.95

Mummer remembered every one and all the various accompanying rituals, which she insisted on performing at home' (25). Mummer clings to her faith and the rituals it entails with an almost violent passion, in the hopes that the harder she believes, the more chance she has of being rewarded for her devotion, much like the overtly religious characters depicted in *The Daylight Gate* and *The Glass Woman*. Through Smith's perspective we see that 'if one thing gave way, if one ritual was missed or a method abridged for convenience, then her faith would collapse and shatter' (179). Mummer encompasses the aim of fanatical faith but also the flaw in its construction: it becomes reliant on the physical when the transcendent becomes inadequate and so enters a more precarious stage when it demands physical proof of God and leads to a break down in theology.

In the same fashion as the other twenty-first-century Gothic novels in this chapter, Hurley employs the trope of the supernatural as a further means of breaking down the hegemony of Christianity in metamodern culture which allows for the multiplicity of religion. Throughout *The Loney*, there is a continuing conflict over whether the various supernatural events are proof of the existence of God or another form of divine power. For all the rituals practiced by Mummer, she is still yet to be rewarded by her absent God. However, the locals who permanently live in the Gothic space of the Loney, appear to achieve their own miracles, though there is no name given to their faith. A place in which time does not seem to run in a straight course, and the aging process of the locals appears suspended, the Loney possesses many elements of Gothic spatiality, emphasising the haunting effect of religion in contemporary society. A practice of paganism mixed into the Christian elements left behind highlights the two sides of the balance. Smith witnesses a miracle when he sees the pregnant Else fix an injured gull's 'damaged wing [which was] open like a fan […] The girl stroked its neck and touched its feathers. The bird regarded her for a moment and then lifted off silently, rising, joining the others turning in a wheel under the clouds' (90). Smith's faith is unsure as to whether he is witnessing a Christian miracle or a pagan act of magick, both of which he deems impossible to exist. Either faith is proven and labelled with whichever form is acceptable and convenient – in the case of Hurley's novel, Christianity – or it utterly

destroys an individual's personal faith, illustrating the true absence of any form of the divine from society. For Smith and the congregation, place is a significant element of faith, reflecting the importance of setting in the Gothic novel. For Hurley's characters, London is a place of postmodernity and forgetting God, and the Loney is meant to be a place for rediscovering their faith and its place in society by seeking a miracle for Hanny. But when that miracle looks like witchcraft or is fuelled by the supernatural, Smith is forced to question whether it can be called a Christian miracle or further proof of God's absence.

As the metamodern pendulum, discussed in the introduction, swing towards and beyond postmodernism, the contemporary Gothic novel explores the concept of the multiplicity of truths. This thesis has considered multiplicity in terms of gender identity, and throughout this chapter it has considered religious identities, both communal and individual. Twenty-first-century Gothic writers have utilised the trope of past settings in order to explore the conflicting change in individuals as they recognise the limitations of communal faith. Where strict Western hegemony determined that there is only one true religion and therefore only one God to worship, metamodern society is less restricted on the manner in which religion is practiced. Contemporary culture, for the most part, now understands that there can never be one form of faith when faith is an interpretation, subject to each individual and each community, as was previously discussed with reference to *The Daylight Gate*. As stated by Marsden, the genre

> registers the return of the religious in other ways: in struggles with human failure, transgression and guilt; in images of redemptive hope, sometimes located in refracted and reimagined Christ figures; in otherworldly and, at times, infernal beings who embody and make visible the flaws of human power structures.[34]

Twenty-first-century Gothic novels often debate from multiple perspectives, depicting radical orthodoxy in its fight against modern multi-religious culture. As the Protestants dominate Lancastrian England in Winterson's text and Christianity overrides the old pagan beliefs of Lea's novel, so too does *The Loney* explore this

[34] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.191

concept when the Catholic practices of Mummer and the congregation from London come into conflict with those from the Loney.

The strict practices of Mummer and the rituals for Hanny's miracle emphasise the need for a radically orthodox version of Catholic idolatry to demonstrate the work of God. Nevertheless, this contradicts the characters' desire to fully entrust themselves to God's existence and the belief that the world as it is stands is proof of God. Mummer tells Father Bernard of the ritual and '[h]ow they would get Hanny to drink the water. How the power of Jesus would cleanse his body and drive out the sickness that had kept him silent since the day he was born' (64). There are several similarities between the novels analysed in Chapter Two of this thesis, their depictions of life and death and the obsessive desire for proof of an afterlife, and the characters of *The Loney*. The desire to witness the miracle as a sign of God's existence is fuelled by Mummer's belief in the absoluteness of God. In her eyes and the eyes of the other radically orthodox practitioners, 'God is still here […] Despite what it looks like' (258). She will not allow disruptions to the ritual, the decay of the shrine or the scepticism of the other characters to fill the space in society that is reserved for theology, and she will not allow her truth to be varied as it is in a metamodern society.

The locals of the Loney, though seeming to be mostly Christians, also practice pagan rituals and magick, such as in seen in *The Glass Woman*, unsettling the devout Christian visitors. The discovery of a mock effigy of Christ causes the shaking of the personal beliefs of several characters, particularly Miss Bunce, Smith, and Father Bernard:

> [f]rom inside a dark cowl, a sheep's skull rubbed with boot polish lolled against the pull of the rope by which it had been strung to the bough, its snooker ball eyes knocking against the bone […] the twisted band of barbed wire that had been hammered into the skull. (156)

This monstrous, Gothicised depiction of the figure of Christ shows the locals to be mocking the radical Catholic practices of their visitors and their obsessive need to ignore cultural progress in favour of remembering past ritual and tradition without deviation.

The figure also serves to make Smith question his faith and the absolutism of Christianity. Having been raised in the faith, he is eager to see whether it is possible to find proof of God, becoming confused and frightened when this happens. This is most prominent when Smith is offered a miracle cure for Hanny, in the form of pagan magick. However, when Smith witnesses proof of its workings, he denies it, fearing the truth due to his comfort in the absence of God. A local man of the Loney, Parkinson, mocks him for his fear, noting that '[i]t's funny, int it? […] How you church people can have more faith in something that can't be proved than something that's standing right in front of you? I suppose it comes down to seeing what you want to see, dunt it?' (298). Parkinson points out that, often, hegemonic faiths are ignorant of other religions, and primitive in their own ways for refusing to accept what can be found and seen, instead favouring blind faith.

The house in which the London congregation stays during their visits to the shrine at the Loney, Moorings, represents the clash of faiths. This classically Gothic house, filled with historical artefacts, furniture and rooms that have been neglected and abandoned over time, unsettles Smith: 'I often thought there was too much time there. That the place was sick with it. Haunted by it. Time didn't leak away as it should. There was nowhere for it to go and no modernity to hurry it along' (41). Smith acknowledges the timelessness of the setting, and the presence of a history that he does not recognise as his own. Moorings presents a paradox for both Smith and the reader due to its lack of modernity. A timeless building, it accepts the changes brought on by change but, due to the conservation of the building, it has also preserved other practices in its walls, namely paganism. After opening the quarantine room in the study, Farther discovers a jar containing '[a] few small bones. A piece of leather cut into a crude heart shape. Iron nails pickled with rust. And there was the missing Christ from the nativity set […] In the puddle of urine there floated what looked like strands of human hair and nail clippings' (221). Moorings encompasses the idea of Gothic spatiality, becoming the embodiment of a site that understood the practice of private faith which modernity encouraged alongside the variation of religion that Catholicism fought against. Smith's religion is

violated and jeopardised by the clashing of times and faiths in this one setting, undoing the years of practice that have constructed his socio-religious identity.

The biggest challenge postmodernity and metamodernism cause for Christian tradition is the 'continuing possibility of any biblical authority as well as the continuing legitimacy of the very distinction between "text" and "commentary." Are biblical texts ever self-contained repositories of meaning, or do interpretative communities make what they find?'[35] This poses a major problem for those characters such as Mummer and Farther, who rely upon on the absolute ideal of God's power to seek out and uphold their Catholic traditions. Father Bernard encourages Mrs Belderboss in her belief, quoting 'Joshua, verse one. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God, will be with you wherever you go"' (71). However, the issue that arises in metamodern discussion of religion is proving biblical authority when the text is open to a variety of interpretations. In twenty-first-century Western society, filled with the multiplicity of truths, metamodern Gothic provides the reader with an insight to concerns of singular factions of faith that cannot accept anything but the beliefs they practice.

Whilst Father Bernard is attempting to sustain both the communal and personal faith of Mrs Belderboss, the reader is aware of the priest's scepticism towards his own religion. Much as the Bible is continuously re-interpreted, Father Bernard and *The Loney* must also be interpreted by the reader as to whether they uphold the traditions of the Catholic faith or actually advocate the metamodern perspective of individual interpretation. Father Bernard struggles with the practice of his faith throughout Hurley's novel, though he never fully abandons it as Father Wilfred did. Rather than giving up his belief without one clear sign of God's presence, he tells Smith 'not all miracles are instantaneous. I've never seen one like that anyway. I think it takes a while for them to ripen' (256) and that seeking smaller, multiple forms of evidence is better suited to true belief in the divine.

[35] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Scripture and tradition' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed.by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.149-169 [p.158]

Biblical authority in postmodern culture is further undermined due to the understanding of historical inaccuracies and the multiplicity of religion, particularly when it comes to the theological roots of society. Hegemonic faiths are frequently depicted as denying the metamodern idea of multiplicity, demonstrated by the Catholic characters of *The Loney*, it rejects other faiths and Christian factions that make up the foundation of Western culture and its traditions. Throughout the novel, the yew tree appears as a symbol of faith. It was common practice to use the boughs of yew trees during Easter celebrations, as they stood as a symbol for death and resurrection. However, the tree and its symbolism predate Christianity, having been sacred to the Druids of Celtic culture due to its ability to regenerate. Like the eternal forest of *In The Night Wood* in Chapter One and the private space of the forest in *The Deathless Girls* in Chapter Six, there is an eco-Gothic element to *The Loney*. The setting of the novel mirrors the longevity of the yew trees it depicts, with spring seeming to arrive earlier here than what is considered normal. Biblical authority, with particular regard to the traditions of Easter and the resurrection of Christ, is overhauled in this place by the locals' knowledge of pagan rites and their sacred connection to nature that Christianity repurposed to its own effect. *The Loney* goes further to destabilise biblical authority when, after the Church of the Sacred Heart is vandalised, the Easter Mass is performed outside where the priest 'gathered us in front of one of the yew trees and began' (215). This performance of Christian tradition within a pagan setting emphasises the fault at the centre of enforced hegemonic worship: it seeks to prove itself as the foundation of Western culture without remembering the true roots of its own theology. As 'Gothic narratives continue to "make strange" the Christian story', the twenty-first-century format of the novel is able to acknowledge the haunting effect of Christianity on Western culture and, despite the forgetting of God, its continued impact on social constructs and expectations.[36]

Throughout *The Loney*, Hurley calls into question the practice and traditions of Catholicism and hegemonic Western religion as a form of invasive communal worship. By seeking out the theological roots of culture in order to re-establish

[36] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.191

Christian tradition, characters such as Father Wilfred and Mummer display an almost violent faith in the absolute nature of God. However, as the characters find themselves caught in the evolution of society to a more contemporary understanding of religion, the reader witnesses the disintegrating faith in each individual as society stages the death of God throughout their culture. By seeking a miracle for Hanny that they do not believe can or should be seen, they seek to find God – thus creating the endless paradox of Catholicism. In the historiographic metafictional manner of the twenty-first-century Gothic, Father Bernard tells Smith 'truth is never set in stone. In fact it never is. There are just versions of it' (312), echoing the position of many of the novels in this thesis. The metamodern theological perspective of multiplicity allows for belief in God without absolutism. However this negates the authoritative power of the Christian faith, leading to an identity crisis in characters such as Smith, Mummer, and Father Wilfred.

Conclusion

In Gothic novels of the twenty-first century such as those discussed in this chapter, the dominant cultural ideology is often depicted as an invasive force, attacking, and demonising any form of belief that opposes it, whether it be a spiritual form such as paganism or an older, outdated version of the same Christian-based faith. It is also illustrated as a fading power, post-secularisation as seen in *The Loney*, which fights against the progress of culture and multiplicity. As Marsden summarises at the end of his text: '[f]or all its familiarity as an aspect of Gothic aesthetics and imagery […] the religious continues to surprise with its strangeness and otherness […] The spectral return of religion may invoke unwelcome images of religious violence, dogmatic belief and regressive politics'.[37] Twenty-first-century Gothic depicts religion in this way due to its aggressive manipulation and denial of the individual, maintaining the need for socially constructed communal identities. By questioning the multiplicity of religious truths, metamodern theology in contemporary Gothic literature illustrates the progression of thought through its ability to destabilise religion's control over the individual characters and allow them the freedom to

[37] Marsden, *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, p.190

question the social and religious norms forced upon the individual. The evolution from postmodern satire to metamodern post-irony is done by the careful depiction of the abstract; the God of Christianity cannot be depicted because there are multiple versions and so the multiplicity of religious truth and identity is represented by the absence and questioning of the divine figure. Chapter Six, which examines the representation of queer characters and queer spaces, will continue this chapter's exploration of the presentation of non-hegemonic minorities in the contemporary Gothic novel.

Chapter Six

Exploring the Space: Depicting Contemporary Gothic LGBTQ+ Protagonists

Throughout the centuries, Gothic literature has been closely linked with the representation of characters and sexual acts identified as being queer. In his article, 'Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis' (1986), George E. Haggerty discusses the use of Gothic fiction by these three writers as a means of discussing and exploring their repressed sexualities. However, the unifying point in their works is the destruction – both socially and wholly – of those characters who dare to transgress the boundaries of sexual norms. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature, once a character has expressed a homoerotic desire or acted outside of expected sexual codes, they will inevitably be removed from and destroyed by the culture they challenged due to their presentation of private passion in a shared space. Haggerty summarises his point simply as '[s]exuality in the Gothic novel is harrowing in its "aberrant" nature'.[1] Homoeroticism was depicted as a transgressive form of sexual desire in much the same way as incest or necrophilia, and so most Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presented the acts in the same morally and socially corrupt manner.

This chapter will examine how twenty-first-century Gothic literature treats LGBTQ+ characters – not as incomparably villainous or monstrous but rather as misunderstood and under-represented minorities. Steven Bruhm notes, the 'Gothic novel, at least prior to the Stonewall Resistance Riot of 1969, and at least in its male characters, is profoundly reticent about the spectacle of direct homophobia, as reticent as it is about the spectacle of homosexuality'.[2] To avoid graphic depictions of such acts, earlier Gothic approaches homophobia implicitly, through the social removal or destruction of those who commit transgressive sexual acts. Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is one such example: among the title character's many

[1] George E. Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis', *Studies in the Novel*, 18.4 (1986) pp.341-352 [p.343]
[2] Steven Bruhm, 'The Gothic Novel and the Negotiation of Homophobia' in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp.272-287 [p.274]

transgressions is the indirect romance with Basil, reinforcing his inevitable demise. Like many forms of the socially unacceptable in Gothic literature, an element of the supernatural is at play in the form of Dorian's portrait, adding to the "otherness" surrounding LGBTQ+ characters. The use of the supernatural is one particular aspect that the twenty-first-century Gothic texts in this chapter have adopted. However, the contemporary form of the novel often subverts the negative effects to provide liberation for queer characters. Written in a post-Stonewall era, where legal – if not social – acceptance is given in Western culture, twenty-first-century Gothic literature shows how the depiction of homosexuality has evolved since the eighteenth century. Queer literature is one of the best demonstrations of the use of metamodernism and the progression of thought: positively depicting homosexual characters and relationships as well as returning to the grand narrative format in order to demonstrate the large-scale consideration of cultural concerns surrounding queer representation.

As previously noted by Bruhm, male-to-male desire is more often depicted than female-to-female desire in traditional Gothic literature. Whilst the depiction of female homosexuality can be found in such works – the mostly predominantly cited text is 'Carmilla' (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu – it is commonly shown as a fetishization of male desire, as this chapter will discuss later on. As is traditional in Gothic literature, female sexual desire – whether hetero- or homosexual – is inevitably doomed to fail as part of a stereotypical heteronormative culture, unless it is granted space in which to exist by a patriarchal figure. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novels, isolated spaces such as underground places, crypts, and attics were used for the containment of queerness, allowing heteronormative society to control the movement of LGBTQ+ characters and keep homosexuality separate from the rest of society. However, twenty-first-century Gothic utilises those private spaces, not as points of containment, but places of sanctuary, providing a private area in which queer characters are liberated. This chapter focuses on depictions of female homosexuality and queer space in contemporary Gothic literature using *The Deathless Girls* (2019) by Kiran Millwood Hargrave, *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* (2020) by Jane Healey, and Kirsty

Logan's collection of short stories *Things We Say in the Dark* (2019). By taking these three twenty-first-century texts, the chapter will illustrate the subversion of the literary tradition surrounding homosexual depictions in Gothic novels and the metamodern depiction of individual identities as social constructs are shattered and reassembled into new versions, seeking stability in Western culture.

The Deathless Girls

The Deathless Girls, Kiran Millwood Hargrave's YA debut novel, provides an origin story for two of the 'brides of Dracula'. In a common approach to postmodern adaptation, for example Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Hargrave invents a history and a voice for the minor female characters of Stoker's *Dracula*, the establishing novel of vampire fiction. The narrative tells the story of twin sisters Lillai and Kisaiya – known as Lil and Kizzy throughout the novel – Travellers captured as slaves and eventually brought to the warlord and prince, Vlad Tepes (on whom Bram Stoker built his infamous character, Dracula), and their immortal fates. Lil, more so than her sister, is considered "other" in Gothic fiction: she is female, a Traveller and therefore foreign wherever she goes, dark-skinned, but also queer. Kizzy, although "other" through her race, demonstrates heteronormative expectations through her heterosexual relationship with Fen – a fellow Traveller – and later, Vlad Tepes. This chapter will focus on Lil's "otherness" as a lesbian, and how Hargrave attempts to reinvent the representation of queer Gothic characters by making a lesbian the protagonist, rarely seen in earlier Gothic works. As noted by Gina Wisker, female Gothic writers of the late twentieth century, such as Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite, are known for using their works to

> problematize and disturb what we might consider as "normal" […] The crossing of boundaries and the upsetting of rules and taboos controlling everyday life […] are fundamental Gothic practices and vehicles to defamiliarize and disturb deeply held complacencies and certainties.[3]

Although Hargrave continues this tradition, LGBTQ+ culture is still not fully integrated into twenty-first-century society, which Hargrave depicts through Lil's

[3] Gina Wisker, 'Contemporary Women's Gothic: From *Lost Souls* to *Twilight*' in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014) pp.433-466 [p.435]

romance with Mira – another slave. Through their relationship, Hargrave explores the representation of LGBTQ+ identities via the characters themselves and the heterosexual characters who shape the society they are in. Lil represents the mutation of an already established, heteronormative identity into one that is 'queer' as she discovers her sexuality and explores whether her place is in or outside of society.

Suzanna Danuta Walters notes that in a postmodern context, the term 'queer' causes a contradiction in identity when the standard heteronormative relationships between gender, sex, and sexual desire are torn apart. Walters observes that 'this presents a paradox as queers […] are not defined by their sexual choice but, rather, by what? Some vague identification with perversion? Some feeling of nonnormalcy? A political affiliation?'[4] In earlier Gothic works, this inability to associate with any established heteronormative notions emphasises the fragility and instability of the anachronistically termed LGBTQ+ identities, as well as their reliance on other queer characters and private spaces in order to become an established queer individual. This is reflected in Hargrave's protagonist Lil, who struggles with her identity throughout the novel. From the beginning of *The Deathless Girls*, Lil establishes her unstable identity: 'I was uneasy with everything, the world too blunt and jagged all at once'.[5] Lil knows that the identity she has been given by the heteronormative culture she lives in is not her own, finding herself at odds with society she is in and seeking beyond the constraints into which she was born.

Lil often compares herself and her role in her society to that of her twin, Kizzy. As twins born to Travellers – who believe in and practice magick in the form of Seeing – there is a consideration of the two sisters truly being one soul (or one identity) split between two bodies. Lil notes that she and her sister

> were born under a blood moon, and whilst the Settled saw it as a bad omen, for us it was thought to be lucky […] perhaps it could be a

[4] Suzanna Danuta Walters, 'From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)', *Signs*, 21.4 (1996) pp.830-869 [p.835]
[5] Kiran Millwood Hargrave, *The Deathless Girls* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2019) p.10. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

> curse or a blessing. I often wondered if that meant one of us was cursed, and another blessed. (4)

The idea of the blessing and the curse being split between the twin sisters is reminiscent of the split identity shared by Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel. Often explored in conjunction to queer theory, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* offers an insight to the traditional Gothic's approach to queer identities in heteronormative societies. Donald E. Hall writes on the use of queer readings of Stevenson's novel and that 'it is a text that critics have returned to often for its intriguing implications and contextual imbrications, as it unsettles thoroughly any facile notion that any of us is any one thing, solely and forever'.[6] Queer readings of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* understand the identity crisis of many LGBTQ+ individuals and the struggle to balance the socially acceptable, heteronormatively-constructed personality alongside that which represents the innate sexual desires of the personal identity. Hargrave adopts this formula in *The Deathless Girls* with her use of the twin sisters and their supernatural connection.

Much like Dr Jekyll and his socially unacceptable alter-ego, Lil and Kizzy are treated as two halves of a whole being. However, where Dr. Jekyll fears his other self and tries to sequester it, Lil is the voice of Hargrave's novel, narrating the events from the perspective of the minority. Rather than Kizzy being the narrator who is fighting to hide the unacceptable element of herself, Lil is attempting to break free from society's constraint of her as the 'lesser half' of her sister. Lil realises that Kizzy 'was used to knowing everything I thought or felt' (116) but as the novel progresses, their link appears to splinter. This is caused by Lil's identity becoming more unstable as the narrative progresses. As she pulls away from the pre-formed identity imposed upon her by the heteronormative society she lives in, Lil also – subconsciously – begins to pull away from her sister. The separation from Kizzy brings Lil closer to another slave, Mira.

Lil has relied upon Kizzy's presence and status in heteronormative culture to grant her a place in their society as they cannot be one without the other. This changes however, once they are enslaved and Lil meets Mira, the only other queer

[6] Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (London: Palgrave 2003) p.133

character in the novel and Lil's love interest. Lil's formation of her identity shifts from her sister and the heteronormative expectations of Western culture to Mira and the inexplicable queer culture she represents; Lil 'thought instead of Mira, and how she seemed able to speak to me even without words, how I had not felt such recognition in a person apart from Kizzy, who shared the same body, had the same blood rushing through her veins' (117). In Mira, Lil finds a secondary self, one that lacks form and structure as it is not yet recognised by the society in which she was shaped, and yet she finds more comfort in it than her original identity. Hargrave plays on the concerns surrounding queer identities by destabilising Lil's throughout *The Deathless Girls*. When her identity is attached to her twin's, it is overrun by heteronormative expectations and belongs to her society rather than herself. However, even as she appears to grow into her new one as her relationship with Mira is explored, Lil is still denied a defined queer identity. At no point in the text is Lil or Mira's queerness directly identified, it is only discussed from Lil's personal perspective. Due to the past setting where homosexuality is not openly discussed or expressed, and as she has not experienced her homosexuality before meeting Mira, Lil is unable to name it and therefore unable to provide any stability to her own identity or fully release herself from the constraints of her heteronormative upbringing.

In her discussion of early Gothic novels, Ellis Hanson states that 'Gothic literature is not so much exploiting our perversity and pathology as helping us to produce it'.[7] In its modern form, the Gothic allows both its writers and its readers to explore those previously ostracised aspects of queer identities that have previously been overruled by the dominating heteronormativity of Western culture. Lil demonstrates this to the reader as they discover her sexuality at the same time as she does, tracking the breaking down and attempted rebuilding of her identity through the narrative. Mira is the trigger for Lil realising her own sexuality, causing her personal identity to fight the heteronormative one constructed for her. Due to the other slave's attention Lil was 'suddenly aware of my body in a way I never had

[7] Ellis Hanson, 'Queer Gothic' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007) pp.174-182 [p.180]

been before […] I found I wanted Mira to look at me' (132). In discovering her sexual desire for Mira, Lil is discovering herself and her sexual preferences for the first time. This revelation shatters the expectations set for her by the Traveller society she was raised in.

This realisation of the limitations placed on her by society is seen to evolve further as Lil's relationship to Mira grows, particularly in a physical manner. During the journey to rescue Kizzy from Vlad Tepes, Lil observes how Mira's 'hand often found mine in the night, and that comforted me. I wondered how I had ever slept without it there before, and felt its absence as soon as I woke' (206-7). What in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic would be considered a homosocial or perverse action is, in the twenty-first century, an exploration of repressed sexual desire and queer identity. Nevertheless, this is an aspect of Lil's identity that she is only safe to explore privately, away from society's knowledge. She remarks on the positive feelings Mira brings out in her, the security of her new identity that is forming, but only under the cover of darkness and wilderness: '[m]y skin tingled beneath her fingers […] I wanted to exist only in this moment, with this woman, in this forest, beneath the endless, starlit sky' (226). Seen in eco-Gothic, natural and wild spaces often depict freedom for characters, with Hargrave utilising this trope through the use of the forest as an area for exploring Lil's sexuality. In her discussion of lesbian pulp fiction, Laura Westengard considers the use of crypts and subterranean spaces as 'containers for both identity and community formation rather than as the disgusting and desperate realm of perverts'.[8] Hargrave deploys the forest setting in a similar manner in *The Deathless Girls* as the only space in which Lil and Mira are free to engage in their sexual desires and queer identities. The fifteenth-century setting of this twenty-first-century novel intensifies the fact that they are protected from heteronormative expectations in the wilderness, but it equally prevents their heterosexual culture from having to witness their supposed perversion.

[8] Laura Westengard, *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalised Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019) p.90

Just as Rósa from *The Glass Woman*, discussed in Chapter Five above, is torn between two religious identities, so is Lil caught between two sexual ones. Despite the reservations her heteronormative upbringing has instilled in her, Lil is unavoidably drawn to Mira and the stability she provides to her queer identity. She has turned from her joint identity with Kizzy to a joint one with Mira – '[w]e kissed as though we were born to fit together like this, as though my body was made for hers' (227)– however, there is an element of Lil being consumed by Mira. The vampiric element of Hargrave's novel is not confined only to the supernatural creatures but spreads to the relationship between characters. As Lil's relationship with Mira becomes physical, she notes she 'was smoke, or wind, held human only by the places our bodies touched. I had never kissed someone before and couldn't imagine ever wanting to kiss anyone else' (226-7). Through the allegory of such intangible objects, Lil's identity becomes entirely reliant upon Mira, only establishing itself when they physically interact away from society. Although she is the protagonist of the novel, Lil's identity is unstable and unreliable due to its queerness. Regardless of this being a twenty-first-century Gothic novel, in a society more accepting of queer representation, Hargrave portrays the reality of LGBTQ+ identities as only able to exist safely in spaces separated from heteronormative society, allowing them to form communities so long as they are contained. The reader infers both the evolution of the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community by heteronormative culture but also the limitations that still exist in modern Western society.

Whilst she recognises the space that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic provides for the exploration of sexuality, Hanson also notes that 'Gothic often reproduces the conventional paranoid structure of homophobia and other moral panics over sex'.[9] Despite the exploration of sexuality, early Gothic still returns to the implication of sin and immorality that surrounds homosexuality, keeping heteronormative control of the narrative and therefore any explorations of queer sexuality. This tradition is subverted, though not completely lost in twenty-first-century Gothic. Rather than homophobia coming from or agreed upon by the

[9] Hanson, 'Queer Gothic', p.176

protagonist, the homosexual protagonist is the target of such social anxieties and holds up a mirror to those outdated cultural beliefs. This chapter discusses this in consideration of spaces outside of heteronormative society, where it is safe for LGBTQ+ characters to explore their queer identities. Alongside setting, Hargrave also uses heterosexual characters to examine prejudices against those who are labelled queer and the varying issues they cause in Lil's attempts to establish her identity. As twins, Lil and Kizzy have previously been treated as one soul separated into two bodies, with Lil often referring to their mental and spiritual connection throughout the novel. When Kizzy notices her interest in Mira, she questions Lil about it, although '[h]er voice wasn't kind or accusing. She sounded puzzled, which I knew she would not be enjoying' (116). Kizzy is unsure of how to respond to her sister's evolving sexuality as it goes against her own heterosexual understanding of desire, as well as their society's expectations of female sexuality.

Although she never directly displays her homophobia, Kizzy is confused by Lil's interest in Mira. She warns Lil about '[m]aking doe eyes at that Settled girl […] you need to stop. It would be bad enough if it was a boy' (136), under the guise of protecting her in the castle into which they have been enslaved. The fact that it would be 'bad enough if it was a boy' seeks to imply that it can only be worse that Lil is showing sexual interest in another female. Although the reader can infer that the novel is set in the fifteenth century due to the use of the historical figure of Vlad Tepes, there is no specific mention of time or chronology throughout Hargrave's text. By leaving the precise time period of the events undisclosed, the depictions of the characters and their identities become timeless, enforcing the idea that they can be read as belonging to both their historical setting as well as the contemporary era in which they have been written. This is the clearest way in which Hargrave is able to remark upon the enduring effects of homophobia, however implicit, on the formation and stabilisation of queer identities – a cultural concern still relevant to the modern day. Nevertheless, the bond between the twins – depicted as containing an element of the supernatural in the text – transcends the boundaries of heteronormative culture, allowing Kizzy to accept her sister's queer identity.

The allusion to the fetishization of lesbianism in *The Deathless Girls* recalls the depiction of the female homosexual figure in traditional Gothic literature. Hargrave uses *The Deathless Girls* to address this issue when the physically romantic connection between Lil and Mira is witnessed by the heterosexual characters of the Settled soldier and Fen, a fellow enslaved Traveller. The soldier in the church watches Lil and Mira embrace, 'an unpleasant mix of disgust and intrigue of his face' (252-3). Hargrave echoes the argument made of early lesbian Gothic fiction, 'Carmilla' by Le Fanu being a prime example, which is split between two camps. According to Ardel Haefele-Thomas, 'Laura's musing about Carmilla […] demonstrates Le Fanu's uncertainty toward the homoeroticism at the heart of his tale'.[10] On the one hand, as the lesbian vampire, Carmilla is the embodiment of sexual liberation and homosexual freedom, feeding her lesbian desires just as she feeds her vampiric ones. However, she can also be read as, rather than embodying female homosexual desire and freedom, representing the masculine fantasy of lesbianism and that her homosexuality is a platform on which Le Fanu places larger Victorian anxieties about Darwinism, which negates the superiority of man over animal, and the drive to civilise and humanise through imperialist evolution – epitomised by the destruction of Carmilla at the end of the text.

In contrast to the disgusted yet intrigued response of the soldier is the milder reaction of Fen, a fellow Traveller. Lil realises that the 'look on his face told me he'd known about me and Mira for a while, perhaps since the beginning. There was nothing in his face but love, and sadness' (253). Fen represents the twenty-first-century liberal thinking on homosexuality in a still predominantly heteronormative culture. Haefele-Thomas remarks on the lasting impact of *Carmilla*: '[i]n many ways, it no longer matters what Le Fanu's intentions might have been […] it has become part of queer culture and we recognize the story from our past as something certainly more positive and sensuous than, say, anything Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis wrote'.[11] The Gothic mode in the modern day has allowed for further exploration of the concept of queerness in a more open

[10] Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) p.105
[11] Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*, p.107

manner. Where the traditional formula of the literature explored homosexuality as a perversion of sexual desire, twenty-first-century writers such as Hargrave subvert this idea to help the reader sympathise with the minority. Hargrave utilises this ambiguous fetishization of lesbianism to consider the placement of homosexuality within society. The soldier represents the heteronormative expectations and negativity towards displays of homosexuality whilst also fighting his own sexual desires due to his fetishization of lesbianism. As the position of female homosexuality is caught in the balance between being acceptable and rebuked by the heterosexual society, so does the queer identity of the female characters.

Although there is a more widespread view of acceptance in a post-Stonewall Western society, there are still limitations, legal and social, implemented on queers in many cultures around the world. *The Deathless Girls* reminds the reader of these constraints on queer identities as Lil considers her relationship with Mira if they return to civilisation. Whilst traveling through the forest to rescue Kizzy from Vlad Tepes, Lil 'prayed to the *Iele* [spirits of the forest] to keep her safe, to keep us together, in this world where there was no place for us' (227). Even as she comes to accept her queer identity, Lil is also forced to acknowledge that she has no place in the heteronormative society that raised her. To give stability to her queer identity is to destabilise her position in society, a consequence that Lil is aware of, even if she has yet to decide which identity is the one that she will live by. Within the safety of the contained space of the forest, Lil is more willing to accept her LGBTQ+ identity, noting that the life in the forest is watching her and Mira, that she 'felt it was full of eyes, of judgement. But I couldn't feel ashamed […] we were woven together and could never be parted' (227). At this point in the novel, Lil appears to have chosen her queer identity, in full understanding of the heteronormative expectation she is defying and the judgement she will face from all societies she encounters. Her choice reflects that which many members of the LGBTQ+ community have had to make, both past and present, an issue Hargrave is acknowledging through Lil.

From the beginning to the end of *The Deathless Girls*, Lil battles with choosing and accepting her LGBTQ+ identity over the heteronormative, socially

acceptable identity instilled in her by her culture. Walters states the issues surrounding the establishment of queerness in Gothic literature:

> [q]ueer […] tears apart the seemingly obvious relationships between sex and gender, sexual desire and object choice, sexual practices and political identities, and renders subjectivities infinitely indeterminant.[12]

Despite her internal struggle throughout the novel, Lil's choice of identity and acceptance into a heteronormative or queer community is rendered moot when Kizzy turns her into a '*vampyre*' (296). By becoming *vampyre* Lil's identity is forced into a permanent state of limbo. She is no longer heteronormative, but neither is she allowed herself to fully be immersed in her queer identity. As the fortune-teller told Lil, 'I can find no death for you […] I cannot find your life's end' (97), meaning she cannot belong to one form so she belongs to neither, becoming the supernatural "other" to completely disassociate from culture.

By first turning Kizzy into a *vampyre*, Hargrave creates another form of the "other" in *The Deathless Girls* which, through its supernatural immortality, overpowers the "otherness" of homosexuality. The changing of herself into a *vampyre* has a detrimental effect on Lil's relationship with Mira and therefore on the tenuous grip of her queer identity. As Lil makes her choice between staying human with Mira or becoming a *vampyre* with her sister, she is also making a choice between her two identities. Despite the momentous decision, Lil is quick to choose Kizzy, the counterpart of her heteronormative identity, over Mira, her queer identity's reflection. This demonstrates Lil's fear of being fully outcast from her heteronormative culture which, although it does not accept the "othered" *vampyre*, means she can maintain her familial relationship with her sister. Lil considers turning Mira once she has completed the transition, speaking to the reader of her desires: 'I wanted to tell her to stay. I wanted to tell her I wished I could give her all my endless days, that I longed to take what she was offering: to take her life and tie it to mine for eternity' (300). However, Lil is unable to fulfil this

[12] Walters, 'From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace', p.835

desire out of loyalty to her sister; a stronger desire to stay and protect her, fulfilling her societal role as Kizzy's other half, takes control.

In their last moment of physical intimacy and Lil fulfilling her homosexual desires, she comments that '[i]t was a bliss I had no words for, reaching for every part of her, bringing it as close as I could […] it was like she was calling me into true existence for the first, and last, time' (301). Here, Lil directly admits that her queer identity is the true version of herself, the one she wished to choose. However, her loyalty to her sister and the ingrained heteronormative expectations, keep her from continuing to uphold this identity. Lil not only acknowledges her true identity as queer but also that she is choosing to deny it for the sake of Kizzy. Instead of being remembered as a queer figure, Lil cements her place in heterosexual culture as one of 'Dracula's brides', simplifying her identity down to a single label. Although Lil chooses Kizzy instead of Mira, and by association appears to choose acceptance into heteronormative society, by transitioning into a *vampyre*, Lil embodies Walters' concept of becoming 'infinitely indeterminant'.

Lil's immortality and consequent freezing of her status in time means her identity no longer truly belongs to any one ideal or community. The timeless nature of the *vampyre* removes them from the laws of society, interfering with any previously established hetero- or homosexual identities. In the final chapter, Lil recalls that she 'tried to remember [Mira], but as the years turned to decades, and the decades turned into centuries, she faded just as I had done in that mirror' (303). This is a clear juxtaposition of her thoughts a few passages before, when she tells the reader that '[s]ome loves are built slowly, brick by brick. But Mira's and mine was forged as a blade […] She was a wound I felt I would never heal from, a scar I would carry on my heart' (302). The precarious nature of Lil's position is shown when, despite her fully formed queer identity, she resolves to leave Mira as a human and, through Kizzy's persuasion, become a *vampyre*. Hargrave raises the issue of the continue fragility of many queer identities once again, and the ease with which they can be destabilised by heteronormative pressures to abide by the stereotypical rules of non-queer culture.

The Deathless Girls, despite its historical setting, provides a relevant commentary on the position of queer identities in twenty-first-century culture and the potential of Gothic literature in the modern day to comment on this issue. By giving Lil a voice as the protagonist of the novel, Hargrave is able to provide a voice to a minority and an opportunity for a Gothic LGBTQ+ figure to be viewed in a positive fashion. Lil makes significant progress in exploring and accepting her queer identity, though she is still unable fully to embrace it, restrained by the heteronormative expectations her twin sister embodies. Lil's role as the "other" is reinforced at the end of the novel when she becomes *vampyre* alongside her sister, but the reader is left to question why this is her fate. To displace her newly established queer identity and to accept the heteronormative identity, Lil is required to become a supernatural being, far removed from the idea of the social norm. *The Deathless Girls* is a depiction of twenty-first-century pressures on non-heterosexual representation, where queerness may exist, but the writer recognises that queer identities are still often forced to exist in a limited state as it is still not considered the norm.

The Animals at Lockwood Manor

Jane Healey's debut novel, *The Animals at Lockwood Manor*, tells the story of Hetty Cartwright as she moves to the Lockwood estate in Gloucestershire with the mammal exhibition of the British Museum in the early years of World War II. The narrative explores her position in multiple societies – academic, social, and queer – through her interactions with the Lockwood family and their servants. Healey examines the way in which views of female homosexuality have changed from pre-twentieth-century perspectives, as depicted in *The Deathless Girls*, but are still restricted in a more modern era. In the context of upper-class society in 1939 England, the homosexual characters of Hetty and Lucy Lockwood are only made "other" in their stereotypical white, British social circles due to their LGBTQ+ characteristics. Healey presents this in the standard Gothic trope of madness: for a woman to outwardly exhibit not only sexual desire but homosexual desire, she must be ill and treated as such. In order for Hetty fully to explore her desires for Lucy, the novel takes place in a space removed from society – London is shut down

due to the bombings, and so remote rural locations become an escape from society and its heteronormative expectations, as seen in Hargrave's texts. However, the lesbian figures of Hetty and Lucy are haunted by a spectre from traditional Trinidadian folklore, *la diablesse*, a beautiful woman who made a deal with the Devil and hides her disfigured form beneath a traditionally white dress.[13] In this contemporary Gothic text, Healey has taken a traditional piece of folklore and adapted it to her narrative, in order to explore the evolution of LGBTQ+ representation in Gothic literature and Western culture.

According to Hanson, queer theorists have 'taken the Gothic as a paradigm for modern moral panics about sexuality […] It has further offered a richly historical and political language for valorising those disreputable sexualities that the Gothic has traditionally rendered monstrous'.[14] As seen in *The Deathless Girls*, contemporary writers utilise the extreme depictions of identity in the Gothic, alongside historical settings, to subvert early Gothic queer representations from the villainised to the misunderstood. *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* is also one such example of this concept as a contemporary, postmodern novel dealing with modern cultural depictions and considerations of queer representation. These 'modern moral panics', as Hanson refers to them, about homosexuality are clearly seen in Hetty as she finds her sexual desires towards women are awakened upon meeting Lucy and becoming more involved with her throughout the novel. From the very beginning Hetty is drawn to Lucy, noting that '[s]he was one of those women made all the more lovely by her flaws […] I did not know why I felt this strange resonation'.[15] Due to prejudices of the era in which Healey's novel is set, there would have been little common knowledge about female homosexuality, and it was not something to be spoken of within the bounds of society. As Allan Bérubé notes, during the 1930s and 1940s, 'young men and women who grew up feeling homosexual desires had little help coming out. They were likely to lead isolated lives, not knowing anyone else like themselves, […] no discussions of homosexuality

[13] Maica Gugolati, 'La Djablesse: Between Martinique, Trinidad (and Tobago), and its Pan-Caribbean Dimension', *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*, 6.2 (2014) pp.151-180
[14] Hanson, 'Queer Gothic', p.176
[15] Jane Healey, *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* (London: Mantle, 2020) p.19. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

on the radio, and only a few tragic novels with characters who were called "sexual inverts"'.[16] This cultural setting provides an accurate representation for the discovery of Hetty's sexuality as she navigates her sexual desires alone and with no frame of reference.

Hetty's confusion and panic over her developing desires towards Lucy are intensified with the introduction of physical contact to their relationship. When Lucy helps her to choose a gown for a ball at Lockwood Manor, Hetty is startled: the 'touch of the back of her hands against my hips almost made me jump. I could not remember the last time I had been touched by someone else' (73). Physical contact between women would not usually be considered unnatural in Western culture, but as Hetty has already inwardly expressed a desire for Lucy that goes beyond societal norms, her reaction to the physical contact informs the reader further of her latent homosexuality. Although she does not fully understand her queerness, Hetty is aware that, under the social constructs she was raised in, her feelings towards Lucy should be considered abnormal. This is seen when, after trying on dresses, she quickly withdraws from connecting physically with Lucy and instead 'turned around and redressed quickly, feeling hot and embarrassed' (75). In a similar manner to *The Deathless Girls*, the twenty-first-century reader is more aware of the character's queer representation than the character themselves, due to the historical setting in which queerness in individuals is suppressed in order to remain in heteronormative society, emphasising the continued fracturing of identity of the protagonist as she is torn between her socially given, heteronormative identity and an individualised queer one.

Beyond her own relationship with Lucy, Hetty shows further signs of the heteronormative social values that previously constructed her, when at the Lockwood's party she notices 'two men, kissing like lovers. I was no ingénue – I knew of the Greeks, of Oscar Wilde and his ilk, that there were men who loved other men – but to see two men like this now, here, was shocking' (101). Hetty displays an understanding suitable to her era that homosexuality is not a new and

[16] Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) p.6

startling concept – it has existed across time just as heterosexuality has – but she does represent the heteronormative reaction of her historical era. She is astonished to encounter a hidden act, one that she would have been taught to recoil from. However, despite her shock at the sight, she shows no signs of disgust or following heteronormative morality. As Hanson says, queer theory validates 'disreputable sexualities', an element contemporary Gothic has surely adopted as it re-invents itself in a modern, more accepting society.

After this discovery of a separate culture from the heteronormative one she has always existed in, Hetty gains a stronger understanding of her sexuality, at least in terms of her attraction to Lucy. This is strengthened by Lucy's reciprocation, although Hetty struggles to recognise another's sexual desires. Upon accidently seeing Lucy's underwear, Hetty is extremely embarrassed, although Lucy does not seem to mind and is in fact, pleased at the intimate discovery. Hetty thinks on this afterward and wonders '[h]ad there been an inflection on that word, that *good*, or was I just imagining things?' (165). It is only when the physical elements progress that Hetty is able to accept that she is not the only one experiencing homosexual desires. When Lucy 'reached a shaking finger to brush against my chin, to find my mouth in the dim light […] I was holding my breath, I felt hot and my stomach trembled' (204). Hetty is able to strengthen her queer identity within herself, though only in relation to Lucy as she does not express sexual desire for another woman during the novel. Despite this, Hetty is only able to communicate her sexuality physically. Hetty attempts to verbally express her desires to Lucy several times in the text – '"I want – " I bit my lip and swallowed the words I could not say' (213) – but forces herself to stop, demonstrating the Gothic function of the "unspeakable". To utter the words aloud would be to openly defy the cultural constructs that allow Hetty her independent life within the safety of society.

Due to this inability to articulate sexuality and non-heteronormative desires, space and setting gains more importance in *The Animals at Lockwood Manor*. As Hetty notes, when she and Lucy are alone, '[i]t felt as if, when we had closed the door, we had shut out the world and all its horrors and it was just the two of us left; that all that existed was this room' (202), creating the same effect as the forest

does for Lil and Mira in *The Deathless Girls*. As Westengard comments in her discussion of subterranean space and lesbian pulp fiction, contained settings became a form of 'communication and survival in reaction to the insidious trauma of marginalisation'.[17] Twenty-first-century Gothic texts utilise this element to provide a space in which characters can express sexual desires without societal pressures. However, Healey expresses a danger to identity in this separation between the individual and society. In her happiness with Lucy and their blossoming relationship, Hetty realises that '[l]ately, the only time I felt solid, real, was when I was with Lucy' (215). Hetty has inextricably tied her identity to the Lockwood heir – just as Lil binds herself to Mira in Hargrave's novel – and the emotions and desires that link them as non-heteronormative individuals. In doing so, she has removed herself from not only the limitations of her previous social constructs but also the benefits of existing within society, being ostracised by her heteronormative social circles in the museum and the countryside. This makes her more reliant upon Lucy and her social status, in turn further endangering their place in this society.

In this chapter's discussion of *The Deathless Girls*, comparisons were made with Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' and the vampiric lesbians depicted in both novels. Le Fanu's novella has informed many contemporary Gothic LGBTQ+ novels with its depictions of female homosexuality. There is evidence of Le Fanu's influence in *The Animals at Lockwood Manor*, particularly in the masculinised figure of Lucy. This is seen clearly in Hetty's first impression of Lucy. Although she notes the feminine characteristics – '[s]he smelled of a perfume so light I knew it was expensive' – she is also quick to mention her hairstyle – 'remarkably short black hair, only a few inches long. It was shorter than a boy's but brushed and pinned carefully as if to hide its length' (18). Le Fanu demonstrates an element of gender confusion in the character of Carmilla, causing the protagonist, Laura, to question her sexuality:

> her desires that are strong enough for her to wonder, for that brief moment, if this is a male suitor dressed up as a woman, because for

[17] Westengard, *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalised Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*, p.69

> her that seems like the only socially acceptable answer to her own erotic longings and physical responses to Carmilla.[18]

Whilst Carmilla is unquestionably female in her human appearance, she employs masculine mannerisms throughout the short story. The boyish look of Lucy in Healey's text exemplifies Haefele-Thomas' claim that lesbian characters in Gothic literature usually contain masculine elements in their appearance to make the companion female's sexual desire a reasonable response. Lucy's hairstyle offers two sides of gender confusion as Haefele-Thomas considers it; where Lucy has tried to hide her boyish haircut by styling it as woman would, Hetty is quick to notice this characteristic, marrying the masculine hairstyle with the feminine woman wearing it, confusing the lines of gender.

This distorting of genders within a heteronormative society continues throughout the novel, particularly in relation to Lucy as Hetty admits an enjoyment of her more masculine qualities: 'I admired Lucy's good humour, and her laugh, which was deep and almost mannish' (60). Hetty clings to the male attributes she finds in Lucy, holding onto any socially acceptable elements she can find in their relationship. Hetty constantly struggles to reconcile her developing queerness with the heteronormative stereotypes that had previously controlled her position in society. She questions what she knows of female homosexual relationships, but again, only in line with the confusion of gender performances:

> [t]hat women could be with women was something I knew very vaguely, hypothetically – but surely in those cases one or both of the women were mannish, with queer habits and manners of dress, not ordinary like Lucy and me? (211)

Whilst Hetty views Lucy's appearance as partially masculine at the beginning of the novel, she is unable to reconcile the Lockwood heir's feminine aspects with the stereotypical lesbian image that heteronormative society expects of such figures. Healey reflects on the cultural issues surrounding female homosexuality in mid-1900s by keeping Hetty questioning her queer identity as she does not fit the

[18] Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*, p.105

stereotype of lesbianism that society has taught her to believe are supposed of queer women.

Not only is Hetty's desire to fulfil social expectations found in her gender confusion, it is also located in her experimentation with her sexuality. Due to the cultural constructs that would have shaped her heteronormative identity, Hetty admits to the reader that she had engaged in a relationship with a man prior to the start of the narrative. She recalls the event and speaks of it in a rational manner: 'I think I only decided on my last night that I was going to sleep with him […] I was tired of being a spinster and resentful that other women had experienced something that I still had not, since I was untouched in every pitiful sense of the word' (87). In this explanation of her sexual encounter with a man, Hetty is clinical about wanting to understand sexual intercourse rather than expressing desire towards the man. She shows an understanding and an awareness of her homosexuality, confirmed when she remarks that she 'had felt more desire from Lucy's hand on my waist, from her breath across my mouth, than I did having sex with him' (211). As Haefele-Thomas observes, 'same-sex desire often gets mapped back onto the heterosexual paradigm', often through the masculinised appearance of lesbian characters, in traditional Gothic literature, in an attempt to return the character to heteronormative standards.[19] Hetty however, is able to see beyond this and recognise the feminine aspects of Lucy alongside the masculine, reconciling the two gendered elements of the Lockwood heir.

Just as setting is important in granting a safe space in which LGBTQ+ characters can explore their identities and desires, it also keeps them contained and isolated from heteronormative society. At the end of the novel, Hetty remarks on her relationship with Lucy, considering not only the new place they have moved to, but also the new, non-heteronormative society they are slowly discovering as a space:

> this was a new world and I did not know its rules, the way things were done – what did other women like us do to hide their relationship, to keep it safe? *Were* there other women exactly like

[19] Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*, p.105

> us? It did not feel as though there could be; we seemed to be in our own singular world apart, discovering a new-found land together. (216)

She is aware of the freedoms and limitations she has formed for herself throughout the novel by accepting her desire for Lucy and therefore her queer identity. But in doing so, Hetty has relinquished her position in society, moving away from those who would know them and creating a space of isolation inside the boundaries of heteronormative culture. In the final chapter of the novel the couple have moved to Scotland, where Lucy remarks that '[*w*]*e tried to find a bar or a club for women like us, to dance there together, but our search was futile, for we did not know who to ask or where to look*' (335), a comment on not only the limited space but the limited number of people with whom they can share a contained, safe space away from traditional society. The couple's queerness is confined to their shared house which '*has two bedrooms with large windows, one which we keep dressed for appearance's sake, and the other where we sleep in one double bed, our limbs tangled together*' (336), confirming that, although they have accepted their queer identities and found a space in which they can freely express them, that space is limited by the surrounding heterosexually dominated society.

Despite her acceptance of Lucy's gender and the queerness of their individual identities, Hetty still expresses a desire for heteronormativity in their relationship. Hetty compares herself and Lucy to other wartime couples: 'we had the added complication of our shared sex, of it being quite impossible to marry or buy a house together or do any of the things ordinary couples might aspire to do' (220). Similar to the way in which she took note of Lucy's masculine qualities, Hetty desires to fulfil the male gender role herself in order to live a life deemed normal by a culture ruled by heteronormativity. She notes that, '[n]ot for the first time, I thought that all this would be easier if I were only a man. I could marry her then, and she would be under my protection' (246). Hetty's desire to protect Lucy as a husband would a wife, demonstrates how the heterosexual model for relationships is plotted onto those of same-sex pairings, although they can never truly be replicated. At the end of *The Animals at Lockwood Manor*, Lucy mentions the difference between themselves and heterosexual couples as they are constantly

'*trying to remember we couldn't hold each other's hand as we walked along the streets, but that we might take each other's arm and pretend we were just good friends*' (334). But Lucy accepts these limitations to the public aspect of their relationship, knowing that they are able to express themselves in the isolation their house provides.

Although the protagonist of the novel is a representative of the LGBTQ+ culture, Healey includes characters to represent the traditional, heteronormative, and homophobic society of wartime Britain. The main conveyor of this mindset is Major Lockwood, Lucy's father, whom Healey employs as a representative of the heteronormative, patriarchal system. Throughout the novel, he ensures Hetty is aware of his disdain for her and her ability to flout the expectations of his social circles due to her employment by the museum. Major Lockwood often verbally attacks her with the common connection between lesbianism and sterility. Without the male counterpart, women cannot reproduce and therefore traditional heteronormative values of society cannot be continued.

Major Lockwood is sure to emphasise Hetty's abnormal social status, highlighting her title and assumed masculine qualities - 'I knew from the very first day you arrived; your beady eyes, your greedy looks. Curiosity can be dangerous, *Miss* Cartwright, digging into secrets, opening locked doors' (174) – as well as her attention to Lucy, and so he has attempted to constrain her queerness, not unlike the patriarchal figures of *Carmilla* who remove female desire from their society. Major Lockwood draws attention to Hetty's work, a woman in a male profession, rather than in the home as she should be: 'it's admirable how dedicated you are to your animals, although one might caution against becoming *obsessive*, at the cost of other, more important, things in life. A husband, perhaps, children, that kind of thing' (196). Major Lockwood subverts the Gothic reticence of direct homophobia, as stated by Bruhm above, by voicing his hostility towards Hetty and her inability to conform. Although Healey celebrates the progress of the modern era in accepting LGBTQ+ individuals and the culture they have created for themselves, she also illustrates the outspokenness of homophobia as well by explicitly emphasising the homosexuality of the main characters.

The homophobia of Major Lockwood is also found in the mysterious figure of *la diablesse*, or the woman in white, a folktale and figure that haunts the inhabitants of Lockwood Manor. A figure seen in earlier Gothic works, most notably in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859), in which the figure is portrayed as a victim, Healey brings this traditional Trinidadian folklore to her British setting via Lucy's mother. Lucy remembers the stories her mother told her:

> [*the*] *woman in white, my nurse called her. She was human once but became a demon. She puts spells on men; she used to wait for them in the forest and then run away and let her beasts eat them. She wore a large white dress with many petticoats that hid her single cloven foot, and a hat or a veil to cover her monstrous face*. (304-5)

According to Giselle Liza Anatol, much like the soucouyant examined in *White is for Witching* in Chapter Four of this thesis, the legend of *la diablesse* provides 'foundational concepts for how female mobility and sexuality are to be viewed in mainstream society'.[20] The sensual appearance of the woman in white hides the monstrous figure underneath, just as the societal expectations of a heteronormative woman should hide the sexual desires beneath.

After living at Lockwood Manor for some time, Hetty finds herself dreaming of *la diablesse*, unaware of who the figure is and the story of the monstrous woman. She describes what she sees in one of her nightmares: the 'beast was larger than a hound […] and sometimes it was not a beast at all, but a woman with the claws of an animal and crazed eyes smeared with soot, who crawled out of a mirror dressed in white and trailed pale petals in her wake' (56). The manifestation of *la diablesse* in Hetty's dream depicts the two states in which she fears her own identity and the burgeoning queerness. Firstly, the beast, analogous of her primitive sexual desires that she cannot control nor understand. Following this, the woman in white crawls from the mirror, as if Hetty's own queer, sexual reflection has escaped and come to take her place in society.

Hetty's nightmare highlights her fear of giving in to her queer identity and the social repercussions of doing so. *La diablesse* epitomises the heteronormative

[20] Giselle Liza Anatol, 'A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Skin Folk*', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 37.3 (2004) pp.33-50 [p.44]

view of sexual women, no matter their orientation, as Anatol notes that the figure is '[c]ondemned for behaviour that focuses on liberation and sensuality rather than domesticity and reproduction'.[21] Hetty's fears are not only reflected in her dream of *la diablesse*, but also in Lucy and her experiences with the woman in white. Having been told the tale by her mother as a child, Lucy is more affected by *la diablesse's* presence in the manor. Where Hetty sees the reflection of the monstrous woman replacing her heteronormatively accepted self with a queer version, Lucy imagines she is slowly becoming *la diablesse* herself. She questions her sleepwalking: '[*w*]*as I hoping to find the woman in white on my nightly wanderings, or to become her, in my pale dressing gown? Was I already, always, her; had I done all those things?*' (265). Lucy has progressed further in her acceptance of her queer identity than Hetty, however, she is unable to associate positively with it. Due to the madness of her mother and the haunting of *la diablesse* throughout her childhood, Lucy correlates queerness with madness – a common traditional Gothic literary trope designed to caution against exploring and acting upon sexual desires by women. Twenty-first-century Gothic writers utilise these outdated considerations of homosexuality to demonstrate both the progress of society as well as the still-existing limitations placed on queer identities in some parts of Western culture.

Although elements of the traditional representation of *la diablesse* are used in *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* in order to further the discovery and establishing of Hetty and Lucy's queer identities, Healey subverts folklore and adapts it to a contemporary audience, as Anatol states, 'feminist interpretations can recuperate these legends as paradigms of female agency'.[22] When Hetty discovers Major Lockwood's abuse of the women who have come and gone in the house – the female servants and friends of Lucy, particularly the younger ones – she realises 'he's the ghost' (310) that has been haunting Lockwood Manor at night. The demonic figure of a sexually liberal woman is displaced by the perverted and monstrous patriarchal character. In becoming the monster of the narrative, Major Lockwood personifies the repugnant aspects of heteronormative culture. With this

[21] Anatol, 'A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants', p.44
[22] Anatol, 'A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants', p.49

knowledge, Hetty watches the burning of Lockwood Manor with its lord and master trapped inside: '[t]here was a woman in there too, I imagined […] she strolled down corridors, sparks like petals flung from her hands, burning beasts at her heel' (327). *La diablesse* becomes a righteous figure in her final appearance in the text, ensuring that the horrors of Lockwood Manor are turned to ash, much like the entrapped figure of Mrs Rochester burning Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*, and the antagonist is punished for his hypocritical social transgressions.

The Animals at Lockwood Manor utilises its historical setting to consider the relevance of space and setting in relation to the development of queer identities. By combining the World War II era with experimental characters in the forms of Hetty and Lucy, the novel is able to explore the position of queer identities across multiple public spaces – academic, social, and queer – as they attempt to establish a private space within which they can exist. Healey subverts the folklore of *la diablesse* and the displacement of the traditional Gothic trope of punishing sexually liberal women to create a narrative specifically for positive LGBTQ+ representation. The protagonists are able to succeed in accepting their identities and homosexual desires. For Lucy, the burning down of Lockwood Manor '*gave me my freedom; it gave me a path to somewhere, to a future where my happiness would outweigh my sadness and anxiety*' (337), freeing her enough to make her own identity as a queer woman and the chance to realise it in her relationship with Hetty. As seen in the burning of the family home in *The Silent Companions*, discussed in Chapter One, the destruction of certain spaces provides freedom for constrained characters: in this case, Lucy, who had been sequestered in the manor by her father. However, there are still limitations in place at the end of the novel, their queerness confined to private spaces, though with the chance for further exploration as they search for women like them.

Things We Say in the Dark

Things We Say in the Dark is a collection of short stories by Kirsty Logan – an LGBTQ+ author – that explores many different areas of LGBTQ+ representation. Whilst this thesis has primarily focused on long Gothic novels, it is instructive to include the short story format as Gothic short stories were often popular in the

nineteenth century – consider the Gothic tales of Elizabeth Gaskell, Sheridan Le Fanu and the printing of penny dreadfuls. This popularity has continued into the twenty-first century with the publication of such collections as *Cursed* (2020), edited by Marie O'Regan and Paul Kane, and *Unspeakable: A Gothic Anthology* (2020), edited by Celine Frohn. Where the female protagonists of *The Deathless Girls* and *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* are confined in their depictions of homosexual desire, due their historical settings, Logan's stories use a modern landscape, allowing the queer characters to explore and display their sexualities without historical pressures. However, Logan is still aware of contemporary social constraints surrounding queer representation. Like the privacy of the forest at night in *The Deathless Girls* and the locked rooms of the manor after sunset in Healey's novel, Logan recognises the importance of darkness in contemporary queer Gothic works. The title of the collection demonstrates an understanding of 'the dark' as a place of safety for homosexual figures, who seek refuge from the hegemonic heterosexual society. Despite the progress made in modern times, prejudices towards those who do not conform to heteronormative expectations can still be found in everyday society, with social and legal limitations existing in many countries around the world. The various Gothic narratives in this collection demonstrate the paradigms that those who represent themselves with a queer identity live within in the twenty-first century. This section will focus on four stories from Logan's text, which consider the freedoms and restrictions of female queer characters. Logan uses the contemporary setting of her stories to comment on the ramifications of past prejudices towards homosexuality: despite limitations being legally removed, there is still a social stigma attached to the identification of an LGBTQ+ individual and the manner in which they explore and share their sexuality with society.

In her exploration of queer theory and contemporary Gothic, Paulina Palmer found that twenty-first-century writers often use 'uncanny imagery and perceptions to evoke the feelings of alienation and fear, as well as the sensation of jouissance,

that queer existence can involve in heteronormative society'.[23] This perspective is found in the first story this chapter will look at by Kirsty Logan. 'Things My Wife and I Found Hidden in Our Home' tells the story of Rain and Alice, a married homosexual couple who move into the home of Alice's grandmother after her passing. The narrative begins with the narrator, Rain, finding a ring, which she views as a 'message of hope left for me and Alice, a blessing for our life together'.[24] But she is quickly reminded of their limited social acceptance into heteronormative culture, even by family, as Alice's grandmother 'called me Alice's friend, and I could hear the way she put inverted commas around it, even after Al and I had lived together for years' (17). Despite the general consensus in Western culture of the existence of queer identities, there are still many limitations and constraints in smaller social circles, isolating queer identities just as they had been in previous eras.

The kelpie – 'a horse and also a beautiful woman. If it doesn't like you, it drags you into the water and drowns you' (19) – becomes Logan's uncanny image in this story that evokes alienation and fear. Whilst the thesis has seen the depiction of kelpies in Chapter Four, in *All the Murmuring Bones*, the legend features more prominently in Logan's story. It haunts Alice and Rain as it did Alice's grandmother in order to punish them for their transgressions. It appears to see no difference between the heterosexual transgressions of the grandmother – '[s]he stole my grandad from another woman' (19-20) – and the homosexual ones of the descendant; any woman who expresses sexual desire beyond their social confinements must pay the price. When Alice pulls Rain free of the bathtub in which she is drowning, they notice that Rain's fist 'was wrapped all around with layers of hair. Long black hair, black as a winter night, and as long as a horse's mane' (22), illustrating their belief that they are being attacked by the kelpie supposedly killed by Alice's grandmother.

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[23] Paulina Palmer, *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) p.29

[24] Kirsty Logan, 'Things My Wife and I Found Hidden in Our Home' in *Things We Say in the Dark* (London: Harvill Secker, 2019) pp.17-23 [p.17]. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

Alongside the fear and alienation that the kelpie represents, Rain and Alice are also forced to confront the past repression of their desires when they attempt to conform to their heteronormative society. As Palmer writes, '[r]epressed desires and anxieties are, of course, central to the lesbian subject who, lacking a history and a language to articulate her sexual orientation, may feel haunted by emotions which she cannot or dare not articulate'.[25] The tale of the kelpie and the grandmother is an abstract representation of the unspeakable haunted lesbian – similar to Hetty and *la diablesse* in Healey's novel, as well as Miranda and the soucouyant of *White is for Witching* in Chapter Four – found in Rain and Alice. In clearing out the house, the couple find all the items linking their lives to the lives of the grandmother and the murdered creature. Alice and Rain collected all the items involved in the story before driving to the seaside town where the events of the grandmother's past took place. There, they 'climbed to the highest cliff and we threw all the things into the sea' (23) in an attempt to disassociate their homosexual relationship from the heteronormative transgressions of the past by destroying the monster. They believe that the house is no longer haunted, 'that we had cleansed the house and ourselves, that we had proven women's love was stronger than women's hate' (23). In displacing the kelpie and her curse from their home, Rain believes that they have displaced the hold heteronormative society holds over her and Alice's queer identity. By expelling it from the house, they have created their own, safe space in which they can explore the 'jouissance' of their identities and relationship.

However, they find that the 'doorknob was wrapped all around with layers of long black hair' (23) upon their return to the house. In not being able to fully remove the ghostly presence of the kelpie from their home, Logan depicts the twenty-first-century problem of the LGBTQ+ figure. The kelpie, although female, represents the dominating, haunting effect of heteronormativity in queer culture. Whilst the home is meant to be a safe space in which the couple can freely express their lesbianism, Rain and Alice must live with the intrusion of the heteronormative

[25] Paulina Palmer, 'Lesbian Gothic: Genre, Transformation, Transgression', *Gothic Studies*, 6.1 (2004) pp.118-130 [p.119]

culture they have surrounded themselves with and that has shaped parts of their identities. In the twenty-first century, heteronormativity and homosexuality exist in a precarious balance, as shown in *Things We Say in the Dark* through various forms of uncanny imagery.

In 'Sleep, You Black-Eyed Pig, Fall into a Deep Pit of Ghosts', Ellen, the protagonist who believes that her friend Jenette is also a lesbian, is a representation of the still suppressed homosexuality in those who choose social acceptance over their queer identity due to fear of alienation and rejection. As Sarah Parker states, Gothic literature traditionally 'grants the reader a safe encounter with fear, titillating them with repressed desires that are distorted through the medium of fantastic or supernatural fiction'.[26] The contemporary reader experiences this 'titillating fear' through the progression of Ellen's relationship with Jenette during the narrative. In this isolated setting with only Jenette and one other individual for company, Ellen feels able to express her homosexual desires – '[s]he thought about tilting her head up and kissing her, but she didn't, not yet […] The thing between her and Jenette had been building for so long, and now they were here, playing house', utilising the notion of a private space in which she and Jenette can establish a queer relationship and Ellen can strengthen her lesbian identity.[27] However, Ellen is aware of the lingering presence of heteronormativity in the male character of Ash, Jenette's lover.

The space in which female homosexuality is allowed is depicted as something fantastical in 'Sleep, You Black-Eyed Pig', distorted through the concept of the supernatural as Parker demonstrates. Ellen thinks 'she wouldn't kiss Jenette in front of Ash. She'd wait for the right time […] Somewhere epic and foreign and mythical' (42). In a modern setting, homosexuality is supposedly more accepted in heteronormative culture, and Ellen has romanticised the notion of kissing Jenette and liberating her queer identity. However, Logan uses this short story as a

[26] Sarah Parker, '"The Darkness in the Closet in Which Your Lover Roosts Her Heart": Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9.2 (2008) pp.4-19 [p.8]
[27] Kirsty Logan, 'Sleep, You Black-Eyed Pig, Fall into a Deep Pit of Ghosts' in *Things We Say in the Dark* (London: Harvill Secker, 2019) pp.39-47 [p.41]. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

reminder that there is a limit to heteronormative society's acceptance of queerness, so long as it does not directly impact on a heterosexual individual; in the end 'order is restored and the repressed is once again laid to rest'.[28] After revealing her relationship with Ash, Jenette warns '[c]ome on, Ellen. This is getting silly. Let's stop pretending' (46), separating herself from Ellen and her queer identity.

Traditionally, 'lesbian panic is founded primarily in women's fear of losing their identity and value as exchange commodities', however, it has altered in the twenty-first century.[29] Whilst in earlier Gothic works, lesbian panic is specifically related to the role of women as objects in heteronormative society, in the case of Logan's short stories, lesbian panic is founded in the fear of rejection by other homosexual women as well as heteronormative society, leaving the lesbian protagonist isolated and destabilised. Reacting to Jenette's revelation of her heterosexuality, Ellen spirals with the knowledge of rejection: 'she smiled, down there in the dark, in the belly of the earth, and her face shattered with the force of it […] "I was just kidding"' (46). Rather than being rebuked by a patriarchal figure for refusing to conform to the heteronormative expectations, she is alienated by another woman – one she had hoped and expected to mirror her queerness. Ellen's value has been rebuilt in her queer identity but her misjudgement of Jenette's heteronormative manipulation – '[f]lirting with me in front of Ash […] You must have known what that did to him' (46) – has created a new form of lesbian panic in her exclusion from the small society in their cabin that was meant to be a safe, private space for her homosexual liberation.

In the final passages of the text, Ellen opens the window of the cabin and looks for the spirits she saw on the first night: '[s]he stayed at the window for a long time […] She wasn't disappointed exactly. It would be silly to wish for danger. It would be silly to want to be taken' (47). In a similar fashion to the forest and the *Iele* spirits in *The Deathless Girls*, Ellen seeks refuge in the natural space and among the supernatural "other". The supernatural entity in 'Sleep, You Black-Eyed Pig' are

[28] Parker, '"The Darkness in the Closet in Which Your Lover Roosts Her Heart": Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre', p.8
[29] Parker, '"The Darkness in the Closet in Which Your Lover Roosts Her Heart": Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre', p.8

spoken of in stories: 'there are things hidden out there, and you don't seem them until you're ready' (42). Ellen is able to hear and eventually see the spirits due to her desire to be forcibly removed from the society from which she has been alienated reflects the lesbian panic and identity destabilisation she is now suffering. In a similar fashion to Rain and Alice in 'Things My Wife and I Found in Our Home', Ellen believed she had firmly established her queer identity within heteronormative culture. Nevertheless, what appeared as acceptance was in fact the traditional format of allowance given for female homosexuality at the price of heterosexual fetishization of the concept.

Where 'Things My Wife and I Found in Our Home' and 'Sleep, You Black-Eyed Pig' deal with the issues of continued isolation and constrained space within heteronormative society, Logan takes a different approach to the homosexual relationship in 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter'. Hanson remarks on the fact that Gothic literature 'can also be a raucous site of sexual transgression and excess that undermines its own narrative efforts at erotic containment'.[30] The twenty-first-century Gothic texts in this chapter have demonstrated that the modern form of the genre is less about containing homosexuality but rather, providing a place of safety in which it is safe to express such identities. Sarah and Juno, a homosexual couple, deal with their secret lives in this narrative, attempting to understand in each other's need to seek pleasure beyond their relationship and the individually privatised spaces as well as the private space of their relationship. Sarah asks Juno what her favourite childhood story was, to which Juno responds that it was *Hansel and Gretel*. Sarah thinks of the fairy tale and its plot of family, evil stepmothers and 'the threat of being eaten, of wanting to eat things you shouldn't eat', reminiscent of Miranda's *pica* examined in Chapter Four.[31] The imagery she conjures speaks of the excessive nature of greed and the desire for more. Sarah and Juno's tale speaks very little of the heteronormative society surrounding their relationship and so the reader can assume they are safely involved in the external culture without it

[30] Hanson, 'Queer Gothic', p.176

[31] Kirsty Logan, 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter' in *Things We Say in the Dark* (London: Harvill Secker, 2019) pp.109-115 [p.112]. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

encroaching in their private, queer space. The threat for these two figures comes from within.

According to Palmer, there is an 'excess that queer sexuality and gender signify in heteronormative culture'.[32] Sarah takes on this reflection of homosexuality in Gothic literature as she fulfils an abstract, cannibalistic version of the tale of *Hansel and Gretel*. When Sarah learns that Juno uses underground fighting as a form of further physical excess beyond their relationship – 'flesh slaps and bodies thud and it's red and black and red and black and red' (114) – she is reminded of her own, even greater monstrosity. The reader learns, only vaguely of Sarah's form of excess – 'Sarah will never tell […] that her own favourite story was always Hansel and Gretel. When she first heard it, it made her want to eat. It still does' (112) – as if it is too horrific an indulgence to depict explicitly.

Logan utilises this short story to explore the issue of freedom for accepted homosexuality. Where the lesbians of *The Deathless Girls* and *The Animals at Lockwood Manor* overcome the restrictions of heteronormativity and break down the social constraints placed upon them, there is no need for Sarah and Juno to do this. The seeming acceptance of their heteronormative culture provides no friction against which their homosexuality can be built, broken, and re-built as with previous characters discussed in this chapter. In this manner, they are denied the sense of liberation and sexual freedom found in Hargrave and Healey's novels, and the other stories from *Things We Say in the Dark*, and so must seek it elsewhere. Sarah does not clarify her choice of liberation beyond the fact that she secretly goes 'out into the shadows and she finds the things she wants. She fights it. And she fucks it. And she eats it' (115). She demonstrates that there can be no such thing as containment of the private identity, which must now become absurd and monstrous to provide a sense of liberation.

The use of excess in the twenty-first century offers Gothic writers the ability to explore the both the issues faced by LGBTQ+ characters in the past as well as examine the differences in identity in the modern day. Despite the absurdity of the

[32] Palmer, *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*, p.154

excess in this narrative, Logan is still able to consider contemporary concerns facing LGBTQ+ representation in twenty-first-century Gothic literature. Although he is writing on eighteenth-century Gothic, Haggerty's statement rings true of the contemporary form: '[f]or all their dark and brooding sensuality, however, these works are liberating […] they were able to bring such issues - if not *the* issue - out into the open'.[33] Twenty-first-century stories such as 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter' are able to explore the unthinkable and transgressive aspects of queer identity in a culture much more accepting and inclusive of the non-heteronormative. Sarah fears facing the concerns over her and Juno's queer identities: '[s]he should ask, she knows she should, but she's scared to hear the answer […] a terrible thing, a darkness that Juno hints at but never explains' (110). She is aware of some hidden monstrosity in her partner, and whilst she seeks internal disruption through her own monstrous acts, she relies upon Juno to stabilise her queer identity externally. In spite of this, Logan still uses Sarah to provide LGBTQ+ representation with a positive illustration of a functional queer relationship – '[w]hatever the darkness, Sarah tells herself, it doesn't make them love each other any less' (110) – and allows the possibility for their private excesses to be safely contained.

'Exquisite Corpse' is an exploration of female homosexuality at a young age, rather than with the older, more established identities as in some of the previous stories this section has examined. Phyllis M. Betz states that the

> paradox of fantasy literature lies in its balance of attraction and revulsion […] its acceptance of difference while attempting to annihilate it. Within the contradictions lesbian authors and their readers have the ability to play out the meanings of Otherness and reconcile the fear that accompanies it.[34]

Logan reins in the excessive and monstrous explosion of queer identities shown in 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter' and instead returns to the delicate questioning and exploration of sexuality and identity. Illustrating the contemporary teenager as they explore their personal identities, there is a degree of acceptance within the narrative for the protagonist, Stokeley, and her friend Delilah's unspoken queer

[33] Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century', p.350
[34] Phyllis M. Betz, *The Lesbian Fantastic: A Critical Study of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Paranormal and Gothic Writings* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011) p.4

desire for each other. The reader learns that Stokeley 'wants to mouth the verses to her [Delilah], the parts the boy sings before the girl'.[35] The desire Stokeley feels towards Delilah is presented as a simple fact; Stokeley does not need to embrace masculine aspects as seen in *The Animals of Lockwood Manor*, nor is there interference from the supernatural as used in Hargrave's novel and Logan's other stories. However, the element of annihilation that Betz discusses comes in the form of Stokeley's father. The elder patriarchal figure is reliant on the teenager rather than the reverse, forcing her to assume a heteronormative position in society rather than being fully free to explore her identity. Stokeley's father remarks '[y]ou're a good girl and you deserve a good man. Daughters marry men like their fathers and you'll make a man like me very happy one day, so very happy' (200), impressing the ideology of a heteronormative female upon her. Although these twenty-first-century Gothic narratives demonstrate the evolution of queer representation, they still often contain the dominating patriarchal figure of eighteenth-century Gothic novels, illustrating the lingering limitations for homosexuality in heteronormative Western culture.

It is the representation of heteronormative culture provided by her father that pushes Stokeley to explore her queerness. However, she limits her interactions with Delilah out of fear of rejection and alienation: 'Stokeley wanted to do Delilah's make-up in return – to be so close her breath would stir Delilah's eyelashes […] to have a good reason to look at her face, and not have the burning scrutiny of her looking back' (193). While on the school trip, she explores it further with the corpses in the Victorian museum which give the story its title. The bodies, cast in wax for use by Victorian medical research and anatomy studies, grant Stokeley unfettered access to another female body and therefore a chance to consider her sexual desires beyond Delilah. She notes that '[t]hey are as beautiful as women in paintings. More beautiful, even, because they look so solid, so real, like proper dead girls' (201). By her description of the figures, Stokeley is clearly aware of her queer identity, although in the private space of her own consciousness, not ready to share

[35] Kirsty Logan, 'Exquisite Corpse' in *Things We Say in the Dark* (London: Harvill Secker, 2019) pp.191-206 [p.192]. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in this chapter.

it in a public space. Her desire towards the female bodies she has seen becomes entwined with her desire for Delilah as she thinks to herself '*you're so beautiful, the most beautiful one, they'd take your hair and put it on the models, I'd take your hair, I'd climb inside you, I'd put your skin on and walk around, let me, let me*' (194). Here, the reader notes a similarity of Gothic excess absurdity in Stokeley's desire, just as Sarah is depicted in 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter', although Logan has Stokeley exhibit more control and contain the excess to herself.

As the girls play make-believe as vampires – an homage to the stereotypical use of the vampire figure in lesbian gothic and horror narratives – Stokeley protests at being cast as the vampire though 'she prefers to be the vampire and doesn't understand why the others don't want to be' (201). As the game continues, Stokeley "bites" her friends, using lipstick as blood: the 'vampire's kiss comes to them all, in the shape of two lipsticked dots at their throats. As each girl feels the dap of the lipstick, they let out an exaggerated, fake-sexy moan' (202). Betz writes of lesbian gothic and the use of vampire figures, noting that the 'descriptions of scenes of intimacy can sometimes verge on the pornographic', a stereotype which Logan chooses to emulate with the teenagers' fantasy game as a means for her characters to explore their sexuality further without social consequences.[36]

Although Logan celebrates the representation of queer identities in her short stories, 'Exquisite Corpse' still ends in death for the object of queer desire: Stokeley. In her consideration of contemporary writers of lesbian Gothic horror, Gina Wisker states that '[v]ersions of lesbian and queer sexuality and relations can be seen as open to change, as becoming and celebratory rather than condemned'.[37] The final pages of 'Exquisite Corpse' are written as Delilah's stream-of-consciousness, no full stops are used as the exploration of female homosexuality blends into death:

> because she was so close her tongue touched Stokeley's lip, and she turned her head to the side […] she closed that final millimetre […] Stokeley's lips were soft and her breath stopped […] *Delilah what the*

[36] Phyllis M. Betz, *The Lesbian Fantastic*, p.22

[37] Gina Wisker, 'Devouring desires: lesbian Gothic horror' in *Queering the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes and Andrew Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) pp.123-141 [p.127]

> *fuck*, Marybeth's voice half laughing and half angry, not sure whether an accusation was needed. (204)

Logan does not allow the physical exploration of Delilah and Stokeley's sexuality to be a celebratory event as, seen in *The Deathless Girls* and *The Animals at Lockwood Manor*. In the final line of the story, Stokeley's dead body is described in detail: '[h]er back is caught in a slight arch. Her skin is ivory, poreless. Her eyes are tilted half open. Her mouth is caught in a smile. And she is so, so beautiful' (206). This mirrors the beginning of the short story – '[s]he reclines, lascivious, motionless, on velvet and satin cushions […] She wears nothing, clothed only in her own post-orgasmic bliss' (191) – the body the reader assumes to be Stokeley or Delilah, described in terms of its sexual appearance. Stokeley becomes one of the anatomical corpses she desired throughout the narrative, a punishment from heteronormative society for becoming too transgressive in her identity and sexual desires. Without the external stabilisation of a homosexual partner – that which Sarah and Juno provide for each other in 'Stranger Blood is Sweeter' – she must be condemned rather than celebrated.

Through the stories collected in *Things We Say in the Dark*, Logan is able to explore the multiple ways in which LGBTQ+ identities are represented in twenty-first-century Gothic literature. A comment on the liberations and limitations of contemporary culture, these short stories – via the use of abstract and uncanny imagery – are able to address many questions and concerns facing individuals who identify with the term 'queer' and its position in a still predominantly heteronormative society. By representing LGBTQ+ characters as protagonists, Logan demonstrates that, despite the lifting of legal limitations, social stigmas still abound, continuing the stereotypical "closeting" effect on individuals who desire to identify as LGBTQ+ but fear the cultural ramifications and potential alienation.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the metamodern evolution of twenty-first-century Gothic literature's use of LGBTQ+ characters as principally positive representations of queer culture. That which Haggerty said of eighteenth-century Gothic literature – '[t]o explore the nature of passion in these novels is to confront at once the most

deeply personal and the most vividly literary concerns' – still rings true in the twenty-first century.[38] Twenty-first-century Gothic writers continue this tradition by utilising metamodernism for the exploration of continued social issues surrounding LGBTQ+ culture and its depiction in literature, as well as investigating the discovery and creation of queer identities among individual characters. The evolution from the depiction monstrous and abstract queer characters as entertainment elements and negative representation is clear in the post-ironic literature discussed in this chapter. In texts such as these, metamodernism demonstrates the use of the abstract and absurd as a means of emphasising the socio-political climate and the cultural concerns surrounding the depiction of LGBTQ+ characters. Hargrave, Healey, and Logan utilise their female queer protagonists to question and explore the position of homosexual women throughout different time periods, noting the parallels and variations in the self-discoveries of their queerness and society's treatment of them. The connecting factor of these LGBTQ+ representatives is that, although to varying degrees, they are all successful in discovering their queer identities, each has some form of limitation – either in terms of time, space, or presentation – placed upon them. These novels are social commentaries on the status of those who identify as queer in twenty-first-century society, fulfilling the function of the Gothic novel in contemporary culture.

[38] Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century', p.342

Conclusion

A Gothic Revival

By analysing a range of Anglophonic literature published in the last twenty years, this thesis has demonstrated that there has been a revival of the Gothic novel and its continuing importance in providing social commentary. Where current research into Gothic of the twenty-first century mainly focuses on the genre's resurgence in a variety of media – its appearance and use in film, television, fashion, and music to name a few areas – this thesis considers the renewal of the Gothic specifically in the novel. This thesis demonstrates that, as stated by Catherine Spooner, the 'Gothic is mutable and can fulfil the cultural needs of the time', as well as appealing to a twenty-first-century audience by performing the 'contemporary lust for spectacle and sensation'.[274] The consideration of metamodernism and postmodern historiographic metafiction has illustrated the developments of the Gothic in the twenty-first century, exemplifying that, although the genre has often been hybridised with science-fiction, magical realism, crime and many other genres, there is still a place for it as its own clear category of literature. This thesis has covered a range of elements that are found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic, and has demonstrated the evolution of such motifs in the twenty-first-century format of the Gothic mode.

Through the exploration of central repeated themes, this thesis has demonstrated the return of the Gothic novel to the twenty-first century. The notion of history as text, began in the eighteenth-century with Walpole's Gothic "manuscript", has continued to be central to the Gothic novel in contemporary times. The categorisation of history as fake allows for modern Gothic writers to question authenticity and authority through the use of historical setting. This is often achieved through the representation of minorities. By utilising experimental narratives and manipulating the construct of time, twenty-first-century Gothic offers an alternative perspective on history than the hegemony. This also allows for the investigation of resolution as it is presented in the Gothic novel. Another common element of early Gothic texts, narratives of this genre are usually brought to an orderly conclusion, all issues resolved. The application of metamodernism to the contemporary Gothic novel demonstrates a revision of the genre and this particular motif. Twenty-first-century Gothic

[274] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.156

writers understand the ambiguity of resolution and that not all elements of a narrative can be definitively resolved.

Alongside history, twenty-first-century Gothic considers larger social issues, such as cultural concerns around the topics of science, religion, and nature. Science has long been associated with the Gothic, particularly in the nineteenth century when advancements caused many social anxieties. Contemporary Gothic reflects on this and considers the impact of science on Western culture. Some modern Gothic texts depict the conflict between science and human as it interferes with both the natural world and religious belief. The relationship between humanity and the natural world is often repeated throughout the genre, particularly in eco-Gothic works. Conflicts between nature and the human need to dominate their surroundings is demonstrated in many ways, often through the supernatural which represents the natural space and provides it with a voice. The supernatural is a common occurrence in contemporary Gothic, providing a representation for abstract concepts. It is also employed in discussions of religion and the issue of multiplicity. Religion in early Gothic texts was often politicised for propaganda purposes but given the secularisation of the state, twenty-first-century Gothic utilises the concept as a haunting relic of the past. Contemporary Gothic depicts Western religion as an outdated "other" that is continually aggressive to the non-conforming individual and the opposing religious group, maintaining the need for socially constructed communal identities. By questioning the multiplicity of religion, metamodern Gothic literature is able to destabilise religion's control over the individual characters and allow them the freedom to question the social and religious norms forced upon the individual.

Identity and the individual are motifs of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic that have taken precedent in the contemporary form of the novel. Issues of identity were seen as entrapment in earlier Gothic works, whilst inheritance allowed for freedom, particularly in upper-class characters. However, modern Gothic writers have subverted this notion and depict inheritance as a form on entrapment, keeping individuals connected to the past. Identity has now become the foremost concept of contemporary Gothic, particularly in terms of gender. The multi-faceted social issue of gender identity is often represented in extremes via Gothic literature, employing the monstrous and the abstract to emphasise the absurdity of forced social gender constructs. The ideals of human and monster, "self" and "other", have become blurred in modern times, with the boundaries between them appearing less

distinguished. Via metamodernism, the twenty-first century Gothic novel depicts a wide range of gender identities, allowing characters to discover different aspects of their public and private identities in order to explore their own individuality. Where earlier Gothic studies focused on the representation of women and non-normative identities, modern Gothic writers, consider masculine figures as well. Instead of the standard portrayals of dominating, patriarchal males, Gothic novels in the modern era illustrate the damage the outdated patriarchal system has on male identities and the performance of masculinities. These contemporary novels also continue to focus on female identities, exploring the evolution of Gothic female figures and their changing roles in society.

The depiction of identities extends beyond masculinity and femininity to include positive, exploratory representations of LGBTQ+ characters as well. This has been achieved through an investigation of space in the modern Gothic novel, particularly as it pertains to queer representation, is seen as a return to nineteenth-century Gothic motifs. However, this has been revised to suit the shifting LGBTQ+ stance of most Western cultures, evolving from the consideration of homosexuality as a perversion seen in earlier Gothic works. Focusing specifically on female homosexuality, this thesis establishes that the private spaces in the twenty-first century Gothic novel are less a societal boundary meant to restrict the queer character's position and freedom, but rather a sanctuary, designed to provide a place of protection and liberation for their sexuality. Female queer protagonists in twenty-first-century Gothic allow for the questioning and exploration of the position of homosexual women throughout different time periods, noting the parallels and variations in the self-discoveries of their queerness and society's treatment of them. The connecting factor of these LGBTQ+ representatives is that, although to varying degrees, they are all successful in discovering their queer identities, each receives some form of limitation, and each deals with question of presenting queerness in public and private spaces in contemporary Western culture.

The evolution from postmodernism to metamodernism demonstrates not just a progression in thought and cultural concerns, but also a return to and revision of past literary formats. The revitalisation to the grand narrative allows for contemporary Gothic writers to consider subjects that have a global resonance – environmental crises, radical political changes, racial and class issues, as well as gender and sexuality concerns. But the application of metamodernism demonstrates a post-irony advancement, leaving behind postmodern

satire to discuss and explore such topics with a commitment to the *gravitas* they carry. This thesis has illustrated the shifting socio-political climate and the manner in which the Gothic now utilises the abstract and the monstrous, by means of the supernatural, to investigate truth and identity as it is shaped by the changing cultural landscape of the twenty-first century.

This thesis demonstrates a revival of the Gothic novel in the twenty-first century. Whilst research could be conducted into the area of Gothic's globalisation and the return of the genre across the globe, this thesis takes twenty-first-century Anglophonic Gothic novels as its primary concern. Based on the research and analysis in the six chapters, it can be concluded that the Gothic novel has indeed become a revitalised form of popular fiction, combining motifs of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century format with the metamodern model of the novel. A form known for its use of social response, the genre has been transmogrified to suit the current century, particularly in terms of its depiction of identity. In metamodern studies, developing cultural concerns and identity are key aspects, as individual characters demonstrate the fragility of social constructs and the ability to recreate identities separate from the past and as expressions of individuality. There are a great many Gothic novels to be found on the market in the modern era, some upholding the more traditional atmosphere as illustrated by *The Silent Companions* by Laura Purcell and Harwood's *The Séance*. There is also evidence of a more experimental approach to the Gothic, combining those common elements with science-fiction, magical realism, and other hybridised forms of literature – this is seen in Karen Thompson Walker's *The Dreamers* and *The Loney* by Andrew Michael Hurley. Through past settings, the use of the supernatural, hauntings, and other key Gothic elements discussed above, the twenty-first-century format of the mode is able to comment on Western society and its ideological views.

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